Lace & Garters!



1.

Misha Waverley adjusted his beret as he made his way along Lyndhurst Road. It was late in the season and the wind carried a promise of snow. The breeze was particularly brisk down here in the middle of town, where the office blocks cast their long morning shadows. Misha glanced at his watch; his appointment was for half-ten, which left him five minutes to find the place he was looking for. He hastened his pace a little, his tangled blond hair whisking out in the Autumn mistral.

He saw the sign as he crossed the intersection at Mansfield Avenue: a large orange marquee reading LACE & GARTERS in brilliant mauve letters. Setting off from the sidewalk, he scanned both sides of the crossing, anxiety stamped on his features. If anyone from school saw him sneaking into a dancewear store he'd spend the rest of his life eating lunch with the geek brigade.

Maybe *worse.*

Having ascertained that the street *wasn't* crawling with informants from the nerd squad, Misha strolled across the intersection and made his way to the store's front entrance. It was essential to

look calm, relaxed – the least sign of guilt would expose him in a second. It had taken all of his courage to come this far, and even now he wondered if he'd have the nerve to go through with his plan.

He paused outside the shopfront's display window, struggling to control his galloping heartbeat. The window bore a fifties-style illustration of a young woman twirling in a ballroom dress, skirts flying up around her waist. The logo read: LACE & GARTERS!! SPECIALISTS IN COUNTRY, LINE AND BALLROOM DANCEWEAR. Beneath that, in smaller lettering; *Custom fittings available on request.*

Gazing in through the plate glass, Misha made out rack upon rack of glittering costumes; gowns, leggings, tutus, leotards – and petticoats. *Hundreds* of them by the look of things. The sight did little to sooth his racing pulse, although it managed to steel his resolve somewhat. Here he was, wavering on the footpath while the object of his desire was virtually within arm's reach. All he had to do was open the door and step inside.

A small silver bell rang over Misha's head as he walked into the store. He hesitated two paces in, staring around in awed silence. A gust of warm air caressed his face with insubstantial fingers; he felt as if he'd slipped into some glittering fantasyland. The store was literally dripping with satin; dresses and skirts hung in rows stretching off to infinity. Sequins sparkled like tiny clustered diamonds, black velvet rippled in luxuriant folds everywhere he looked. His face was literally glowing with child-like wonder.

"May I help you?"

Misha glanced around with a start. For a moment he couldn't locate the owner of the voice; then he saw a tallish woman looking over a rack of body stockings. She had dark blue eyes and curly brown hair tied back in a short ponytail. Misha estimated her age to be maybe forty. She stood regarding him with a sharp, business-like expression.

"Oh, hi ..." the boy replied, a little hesitantly, "I'm Michelle Waverley, I called you last Wednesday. I – I have an appointment at ten-thirty."

He cast a nervous eye around the shop, noticing for the first time there were close to a dozen customers wandering between the rows. Most of them were female, and all of them seemed to be looking at him. An identical pair of Mariah Careys were standing in the hosiery section, diligently comparing stockings whilst casting him suspicious glances. Misha tried to ignore them, focusing on what the tall woman was saying.

"Appointment?" she repeated, stepping out from behind the clothes rack. She was wearing black slacks and a loose yellow t-shirt. Her name tag read HI, I'M JUDY. A tape measure hung carelessly about her neck. She folded her arms neatly over her ample breasts, her face engraved with scepticism (or so he imagined).

"Yes – an appointment," Misha answered uncomfortably, "for a costume fitting."

The woman's features visibly softened.

"Oh – right," she said brightly, "you're the girl who called a few days ago. You're in a musical ... *Calamity Jane* or something?"

Misha began to relax.

"Yes, that's right. I'm in the chorus."

That was his story, his rationale for visiting a costumier specializing in girls' dance wear. He had grappled with the problem for weeks, ever since his latest transvestic obsession had emerged. *"Obsession"* being the operative word in this case; an inexplicable desire to own a ballroom crinoline had seized him over a month ago. Irresistible as well as inexplicable, to be precise. It had tortured his evenings, invading his dreams and robbing him of sleep for nights on end until a solution had finally occurred to him. It seemed to make perfect sense at the time, and appeared to be working now.

"In the chorus?" Judy asked, "well, let's see what we can do for you." Indicating the direction with a wave of her hand, she led him through an aisle of spandex tights, then called out to the back of the show room: "Donna! That girl's here, the one from Chamberlain Musical Society. The one we talked about."

"Who?!" A peppery, somewhat crusty voice, tinged with mild annoyance.

"The one who's playing the dance hall girl. She's come in for a fitting."

"Oh, right."

Misha followed quietly, almost squirming with embarrassment. *The one who's playing the dance hall girl.* She'd virtually shouted it at the top of her lungs. Everyone in the store was staring at him now, he could feel their eyes drilling into his shoulder-blades. He kept his face to the floor, hoping to conceal the rosy flush invading his cheeks.

Still, he really had no reason to hide his face in shame. His charade was going according to plan. No one in the store suspected he was actually male.

At just thirteen, Misha Waverley had the face and figure of an adolescent girl, his natural beauty enhanced by a cascade of thick golden hair. As a child, he'd wondered if he'd somehow been born in the wrong body, sometimes believing that there was a pretty young girl locked deep inside him. In recent weeks, this female persona seemed to have taken on a life of her own, almost compelling him to undertake this risky little enterprise.

Amazingly enough, the masquerade was working fine, despite his earlier misgivings. All he'd needed was a dab of make-up and a pair of low-hipped jeans.

"Over here," Judy said, taking him through to a traditional oaken counter at the back of the show room. A thin, bird-like woman sat behind the cash register, her face marked with the lines of perpetual irritation. She was reading a *Silhouette* romance, and like Judy, she carried a measuring tape around her neck.



All similarity ended there, however. Her tag read MRS D. ADDLER. No customer-friendly *'Hi, I'm Donna'* for this blue-rinse matriarch: call me Missus, or get the heck out of my shop. She looked up as Misha approached the counter, scrutinizing him through a pair of expensive, gold-rimmed glasses.

"So, you're playing a saloon girl in *Calamity Jane,* then?" she asked rather sourly, adopting the tone of a woman who expected the worse of everyone she met.

"Yes, Ma'am," Misha replied automatically. His parents had always taught him to respect his elders, regardless of how they approached him ('courtesy costs you nothing', was one of his mother's favourite sayings, although he frequently doubted the veracity of this particular quotation). Mrs D. Addler shot her partner a sidelong glance, eyebrows raised.

"You hear that? 'Yes, Ma'am'. Pretty *and* polite. I'm impressed."

"Sign of good breeding," Judy remarked airily.

"Yes, I'm sure," Donna replied, narrowing her eyes to a razor-edged squint. Leaning over the counter-top, she studied the boy's slim waist; his small, pouty mouth; his innocent, doll-like features. Misha shifted nervously beneath that protracted, unblinking gaze. What was she staring at? Had she penetrated his disguise? He fought down a tide of rising panic, knowing that a clear head was essential to maintaining his cover.

"How *old* are you?" the older woman finally asked.

"Thir – thirteen, ma'am."

"A little young to be dressed like *that,* aren't you?" she demanded testily.

Misha almost fainted with relief. The old biddy was referring to his choice of clothing: a skimpy purple tank top that barely reached past his ribs; a pair of faded blue Levis with the top button undone and the zipper split open to reveal his lacy pink underpants. His pert young belly-button was clearly visible, poking out above the denim rim of his jeans.

"Oh, this is just the Brittany Spears look," Misha explained in his high sing-song voice, striking an unconscious pose. "Everybody's dressing like this." *Even the boys,* he added silently. Mrs D. Addler remained singularly unimpressed by this disclosure.

"Yeah? Well, any daughter of mine who went out dressed like *that* wouldn't sit down for a week." End of conversation. Pushing her glasses back up her nose, Mrs A went back to her *Silhouette,* dismissing Misha from her thoughts. He bit his lip, wondering if he'd made the mistake of a lifetime, coming down here dressed as a girl.

"Don't mind her," Judy said, placing a light hand on Misha's shoulder, "she's just angry because somebody dropped a house on her sister. Come on, let's get you started. I think we've got what you're looking for over here. We supplied costumes for the Chamberlain Arts Festival, did I tell you that? Anyway, there was a wild west routine in that one: *Okalahoma,* if I remember correctly ...."

She ushered him away from the counter, prattling on like a country housewife deprived of company. Misha remembered to breath again, realizing that neither of these women were questioning his motives. They'd swallowed his story, accepted him as a girl. His secret was safe. All the same, his complexion continued to darken. At the end of the day, he was still a teenaged boy, no matter how feminine he may have looked. He was taking an enormous chance. If anyone here discovered he *wasn't* actually female, he'd be –

".... with your underwear."

(ohuh?)

Judy's words sliced through Misha's reveries like a pizza knife through mozzarella. What did she just say? Something about taking off his jeans and t-shirt? No, that couldn't have been right. He'd only come in to have his measurements taken, he didn't need to undress for that. Granted, he wanted to buy some of those petticoats he'd seen through the window, but he didn't need to –

Misha suddenly noticed where his guide was leading him.

(wha –?)

A prickling of goose-flesh thrilled down Misha's naked arms as they approached the accessories display. His warm pink blush suddenly flared a torrid crimson; a tremor ran through his thighs. Excitement filled his tummy like some hot, sweet liqueur. All thought of being discovered was driven instantly from his mind. He had something else to fixate on now, something which froze the breath in his lungs.

She was taking him to the Lingerie Stand.

Misha almost paused in mid-step, his eyes snapping forward in a classic double take. A long display marked ACCESSORIES took up an entire wall to the left of the counter. Most of it was tawdry window-dressing: feather boas, tiaras, sequined gloves, plastic derbies and similar paraphernalia. Cheap, gaudy trinkets that harkened back to the glory days of vaudeville.

Next to this was a plain, white sign containing a single word: LINGERIE.

Misha halted before the stand, surveying the merchandise in gape-mouthed astonishment. Mounted in pride of place was a flurry of shining, satin panties. Sleek, gossamer g-strings with floral insets; outrageously ruffled sissypants; skimpy red thongs with naughty black trimmings around the waistband. Pants of every size, description and colour: fresh white cottontails, pale blue bikinis, glistening lycra full briefs. This was something totally unexpected, a delicious shock which raised his temperature to feverish heights. He hadn't realized they stocked underwear.

No, he immediately corrected himself, *not underwear. Lingerie.*

Yes, Lingerie: demure, lacy underthings that clung to the body like a second skin. Exotic, lavish foundation garments that teased the flesh with a silken, feather-light touch. Wickedly seductive garter belts with adjustable suspenders, chic black stockings with seams running down the back. Magical, figure-hugging corsets with a thousand tiny hooks. Basques, brassieres and torsolettes so complicated they took half a day to strap yourself into.

Half-mesmerized, Misha barely felt Judy's fingers on his elbow.

"Michelle? *Michelle?"*

"Yes ...?"

"You'll be dancing the *can-can,* won't you?"

Misha fell speechless with embarrassment. He hadn't counted on this, hadn't stopped to consider the kind of questions he'd be asked. He'd never actually seen *Calamity Jane,* had no idea what it was about, beyond being set in the Old West. Why was this so goddamned complicated? He'd come in for a fitting, not a lecture in theatrical history. What was he going to say now?

"Uhm ... yes, there's a musical number I have to ...." he stammered after an agonizing five second delay. He tried to finish the sentence but discovered the words had fled into some endless, grey limbo.

"Well, then," Judy said brightly, "the first thing we have to think about are your *panties."*

Misha opened his mouth to say something, but nothing came to mind. Everything was happening too fast, he didn't have enough time to think. Worse still, their conversation was attracting a great

deal of undue interest. Over by the hosiery display, the Mariah Carey clones were offering him their undivided attention. At least four other customers were drifting in his general direction, necks craning for a better view of the proceedings. Several more had started creeping out of the woodwork, attracted by some obscure form of magnetism unknown to science (or maybe by the words 'can-can' and 'panties'). He had to put an end to this discussion. Immediately.

"Well, I don't really think – "

Unfortunately for Misha, Judy Ryan could talk through a mouthful of wet concrete once she had a sale in her sights. She steam-rollered over the boy's objections without missing a beat:

"Now – you'll need something sassy and saucy, like they used to wear in those old westerns. You know; long dresses with hoop skirts and about a thousand petticoats underneath? Every movie back in those days had a bar room scene, and the girls always wore long black gloves and orange feathers in their hair. We've got some of those too, over in the accessories department. Anyway, you'll also need some garters and stockings – can't dance the can-can without stockings – but right now, we'd better start with *these."*

Misha's eyes bulged with surprise.

Judy held up a pair of white satin panties. Sheer, gossamer full-briefs, they were adorned with flimsy lace ruffles along the sides and bottom. The front was embroidered with delicate floral patterns and edged with a dainty pink frill. They were breathtakingly feminine, as fragile and insubstantial as a dream. Misha shook his head slowly, covering his mouth in amazement. He'd never known such things existed, even in the Victoria's Secret catalogue.

"Well? What do you think?" Judy asked.

"They're beautiful." Misha replied in hushed tones.

"Yes, they are rather pretty, aren't they? Original design too, did you know that? One of a kind, like most of the stuff we sell here. Mind you, I can't take the credit for these – Donna takes care of all the lingerie orders, lingerie's her specialty; she's had work in the *Pret a Porter,* would you believe it? All that was years ago, of course, but she's never quite lost the touch. Anyhow, time is money, and we haven't got all morning, so if you'd like to strip down to your *bra* and *pants,* we'll get started –"

(?????)

"What? I'm sorry –?" Misha interrupted, her eyes widening in surprise.

"Your fitting," Judy answered conversationally, "climb out of those things and I'll take your measurements". Laying the panties down on the display shelf, she reached out and unzipped Misha's Levis. Too stunned to react, he could only stare in disbelief as Judy lowered the faded denim over his hips. Shimmering nylon panties were revealed, inch by teasing inch.

(WHAT IS SHE DOING??!!)

Voicing a little shriek, Misha stepped away from the Mad Seamstress, snatching at his jeans with both hands. He tottered back in shock, hi-cut pink briefs on full view. A small group of spectators had gravitated to the Lingerie stand, chattering softly amongst themselves and commenting on Misha's choice of underwear. The two Mariahs stood together, trading backhand comments in low, whispering tones. Even Old Mrs Addler had abandoned her novel and sat watching from behind the cash register, scowling like a barn-owl.

"What's the matter?" Judy asked, genuinely bewildered.

"I ... you ... I can't ..." Misha sputtered, cheeks burning like passionfire roses, "why ... why do I have to get *undressed?"*

"So I can take your measurements, of course."

"But –" the boy hesitated, completely lost for words. What was going on here? Is this what a fitting actually involved? Abject humiliation before a crowd of total strangers?

"Oh, what are you worried about?" Judith laughed, zeroing in like a barracuda,"we're all girls here."

Misha shrank back in alarm, raising his hands as if to ward off a blow. His mind was groping for an escape route, some excuse, anything to avoid this public shaming. Everybody in the store had converged to witness the morning's entertainment; there must have been close to twenty people gathered 'round him now.

"Wait!" Misha cried out desperately, "I – I don't *WANT* to take my clothes off out here!! I ... I'm *shy."*

A ripple of laughter followed this breathless admission. The tension went out of the room; the Mariah clones started giggling behind small, lacquered fingertips. Misha almost collapsed with relief. Disaster had been averted by microseconds – at least for the time being. He glanced longingly towards the door, calculating his chances of making it onto the street before Barracuda Judy could tear his clothes off.

"Shy?" Judy chortled, bubbling with condescension "Why didn't you say so? We have changing booths right over there. Look – tell you what. Take these (she handed Misha the frilled pants and an underwire bustier) and put them on in that little room. When you've gotten changed, we'll finish taking your measurements out here".

"Out here? In front of all these people?" Misha gasped, seeing himself parading around half-naked with the entire room looking on. "Couldn't we – couldn't we do the fitting in there?"

"No, the changing booths are too small for that – we'll be bumping around like two elephants in a Volkswagen. Not saying you look like an elephant, of course; no, far from it, you have a lovely figure for your age, but you know what I mean. Look, you might have trouble with the bustier, you'd need to be a contortionist to do up all those clips at the back, so maybe I'd better come in and give you a hand –"

That was enough for Misha.

"NO!!" He exclaimed in a shrill, piping voice, "no, I'll be fine, honestly. I'll call you if I need any help." Hugging the lingerie to his chest, he spun on his heel and bolted for the change rooms. His firm, ripe bottom turned in tight little circles as he scampered past the two Mariahs. The crowd parted with a smattering of good-natured applause. This was one show nobody was going to miss.

"What a *strange* girl," Judy said to no one in particular, adding as an after-thought: "cute butt, though."

The resulting burst of humour chased Misha into the cubicle.

3.



Closing the pinewood door behind him, Misha took off his beret and scrutinized his image in the mirror. Under normal circumstances, he would have found his reflection quite pleasing. Even without the make-up, his high cheekbones and sensuous lips gave Misha a youthful, girlish appearance. His supple physique was both lush and slender, poised at the very cusp of adolescence. In many respects, it had been a blessing, allowing him to live out his deepest fantasies (at least in private). But right now, trapped in a changing booth with The Mad Seamstress patrolling the show-room, Misha couldn't conceive of a worse nightmare.

What had he gotten himself into? This was the worst mistake of his life!! What had he been thinking, waltzing in here like Jennifer Lopez on a buying spree? He must've been crazy, delusional, totally off the rails. How had everything gotten out of hand so quickly? All he'd wanted to do was buy a couple of crinolines. Now he had to go back into the showroom wearing

nothing but his underwear (no: *lingerie,* he reminded himself again, he didn't come here to buy underwear), while half the female population of Chamberlain stood by laughing up their sleeves.

Except they wouldn't be doing that, would they? Not exactly.

Sure, they might chuckle to one another behind their palms, but it would all be in the spirit of good, clean fun. Because as far as they were concerned, Misha was a girl. None of them knew any differently, none of them suspected Michelle Waverley was anything other than a thirteen year old dance student (which was close to the truth anyway; Misha had been treading the boards since his seventh birthday).

He looked down at the flimsy white remnants in his hands. He really had no other choice: if he tried to back out now, they'd almost certainly start asking questions. And that could land him in a world of trouble (forget lunch with the geek brigade; there were probably laws against what he was doing, although he hadn't considered that until now). No, there was only one way out of this cross-gendered labyrinth.

Misha took a long, calming breath, clearing his mind for the task ahead. He had to complete the performance. No, that was wrong. He couldn't simply *act* like a woman. He had to BE a woman, every word, every gesture, every thought. If there really was a Michelle hidden within his subconscious (as he'd imagined since his sixth birthday) – he had to allow her to take over. Completely.

Laying the lingerie aside (there was a hook with a clothes hanger set into the door), he began to disrobe, peeling off his top in a single lithe movement. His hair spilled over his shoulders in a blond waterfall, cascading down to the small of his back. His pulse lurched into overdrive; a gentle, carmine radiance permeated his neck and shoulders. Cool air whickered around him like the breath of winter. A delicious shiver swept the length of his spine.

Dropping the spandex tube to the floor, he lent down to unbutton his jeans. They were blue stretch Levis, wide-hipped and thin-waisted (the only kind he could wear, considering his womanly shape), a birthday present from his mother. He worked them slowly down his tapering thighs, enjoying the way his lace-edged panties came into view.

There was a sequence to removing his clothing, a protocol he had to follow. It made his periodic, ritual stripteases a thousand times more sensual (though he couldn't have explained why). Perhaps it was the gradual exposing of the panties, the knowledge that his dainty nylon secrets were being revealed. His belly was clenching with anticipation, his breathing shallowed. Wriggling his bottom from side to side, he slid the Levis over his knees, dropping them to the floor.

And as Misha stepped out of his jeans, everything changed.

Michelle Waverley straightened up, flicking her golden tresses away from her forehead, and appraised herself in the mirror. Misha was gone, overwhelmed by a rising flood of shame, guilt and sensual delight. Trembling with arousal, she ran her palms over her nude, ivory torso, caressing her waist and belly. Her mouth parted in a gasping, rapturous sigh.

(yessssssssssssssssss)

Turning sideways, she studied the lean columns of her legs, the luscious arabesque of her thighs. Her sleek pink underpants glistened like liquid silver. The sight of them sent a wave of pleasure surging through her bloodstream. They were plain, high-cut briefs, but she'd always loved the smooth touch of nylon against her skin.

Of course, she had something far more exotic near at hand, something she'd been sent in to try on. Something that made her weak at the knees and brought a rosy flush to her cheeks. Her head swum with embarrassment. In a few minutes, she'd be called out to model her flimsies in the showroom – and yet she couldn't wait to show them off. Keeping her legs completely straight, Michelle took her pants down to her ankles.

Flicking the remnant aside with a careless gesture, she stood up, gleaming like an alabaster figurine. Sweet, liquid heat flowed through her tummy. Her entire sensory system shuddered at the brink of overload. Critical mass had been achieved, ecstasy was only inches away. The transition was finally upon her.

What am I doing? she thought as she took the frilly satin panties down from the hanger. She felt immersed in a sea of humiliation. Because cross-dressing was a kind of torture; a sultry, inescapable torment that always left her breathless with joy, agony and bliss. It was both surrender and betrayal, triumph and defeat. No matter how much she enjoyed this, there would also be that sense of inner conflict, the legacy of her divided personality.

She hesitated no more than a second. The allure, the compulsion was too powerful to resist, even if she'd wanted to. Misha's voice was a tiny, remote pleading in the back of her mind, a petty distraction to be ignored and forgotten. This was her true nature, and she had no intention of denying it.

Bending double from the hips, Michelle stepped carefully into the sissy-pants and drew them slowly up her calves, luxuriating in the torrent of emotions they released. Her eyelids fluttered as the glossy satin brushed her inner-thighs; her moist, pink tongue flickered across her full, red lips. The tension was unbearable. Every nerve in her body was screaming with hair-trigger passion.

(oh GOD!)

She slipped the panties into place and looked back into the mirror. Placing her weight on one leg, she smoothed out the fabric with infinite patience. Posing in her sheer, platinum underpants, she was a stunningly beautiful girl, hovering at the threshold of womanhood. Her tawny limbs

gleamed with the freshness of youth, the crimson petals of her mouth sulked like a spoilt child's.

Having concluded the panty adjustment ceremony to her satisfaction (the wide frills exaggerated her natural curvature, give her a rounded, classical outline), Michelle took the bustier off the hanger and inspected it at close range. Heartbreakingly lovely, it was a complex web of French lace and diaphanous lycra. Detachable shoulder-straps gave it an exotic, decadent appearance; wispy floral trimmings suggested innocence and purity. The underwire cups were tiny, but that didn't matter – her breasts were little more than token buds on a blossoming adolescent flower.

Smiling impishly, Michelle slipped her arms through the shoulder-straps and reached around to fasten the restraints. Easier said than done, of course. As Ms Judy had warned her, there were at least two dozen hooks lining the back of the corset-like garment. She managed to clip the first three or four through blind luck, but the remaining twenty evaded her best efforts. Well, that shouldn't be a problem, Michelle told herself. Help was close to hand, after all.

Almost precisely on cue, the Mad Seamstress rapped on the door.

"Michelle? Michelle, are you all right in there?"

"Yes, I'm OK," she answered, facing the mirror, "I'm having a little trouble with the bra."

"Yes, I thought so," Judy hollered, as if she thought her customer had gone deaf for no apparent reason, "would you like me to come in and give you a hand?"

"Yes, could you please?" Michelle replied without hesitation. A mischievous smile played across her features. She could hear her Otherself wailing at the back of her mind, groaning in protest over this violation of his masculine dignity. This deliberate violation! Misha didn't want Barracuda Judy strapping him into a corset; the very idea had him quivering in outrage. Well, they'd gone too far to stop now. The die was cast, so to speak.

Sorry, Misha, she thought to her Otherself, *but this is what you wanted.*

The door opened. Judy stepped inside, hands fluttering around like a pair of frightened doves. Outside, a cluster of inquisitive faces craned forward, eager for a peek inside the cubicle. Must have been close to thirty by now, Michelle could see them parroting about in the mirror. She felt Judy's fingertips spidering up her back, hooking the bustier faster than she could have pulled a zipper.

"You'll look utterly *ravishing* in this," Judy gushed, slotting the last clip into place, "once we get you into some stockings and a cinch-belt, you'll be the prettiest dancer on the stage. They'll be lining *up* to see your underwear!!"

A naughty giggle escaped Michelle's lips.

I sure hope so.

5.

"Mommy, why is that girl standing there in her *underpants?"*

Sally Rainford was six years old. She lived in Chamberlain Heights with her Mommy (Gwen) and her older sister (Andrea). Like most girls her age, Sally liked Barbie dolls, Pokemon cards, Gummy Bears and dancing. In fact, she liked dancing so much that she had recently started lessons at the Spencer District Academy, where her teacher, Ms Evelyn Deane, taught her the Bunny Hop, the Butterfly, The Seven Steps, and lots of other neat and interesting things. That was why her Mommy had brought her to Lace & Garters Dancewear Shop ("What are *garters?"* Sally had asked, but Gwen Rainford had only smiled), so they could pick out a tutu for the dance recital next month.

Being somewhat bright for her age, Sally understood there was a time and place for everything, and knew that women didn't take their clothes off in the middle of a busy store. Which was why she'd been so surprised when The Big Girl had emerged from the changing booth wearing nothing but her bra and panties. It was OK to walk around the house in your undies (she and Andrea had plenty of experience doing that), but Big Girls weren't supposed to show off their knickers in public. *Everyone* knew that.

A good-natured burst of laughter followed Sally's ingenuous inquiry; even The Big Girl seemed amused by the question (although her face darkened to the colour of a wild strawberry). Sally looked round, wondering if she'd said THE WRONG THING again, as she so often did these days. Mommy usually gave her The Frown when she said THE WRONG THING (which was how she thought of it: in capitals and italics). Sally had been trying extra hard to watch her P's and Q's, but sometimes she just couldn't help herself: the words just blurted out with a life of their own.

Fortunately, Mommy didn't seem too upset with her this time.

"She's a dancer, sweet-heart, just like you. She's come in for a fitting."

"A what?"

"A fitting. She's being measured up for a costume."

"She's really pretty," the little girl commented artlessly.

"Yes, she is," Mommy agreed.

The object of Sally's attention was standing on a small platform in the centre of the showroom, blushing to the hairline. Hands on hips, right foot slightly extended, Michelle modelled her panties before an audience of close to fifty. Her impromptu striptease was drawing people in off the sidewalk, the steady trickle of shoppers was building into a stream. Word was spreading

quickly up Lyndhurst Road; Lace & Garters Dancewear was putting on a demonstration, a beautiful teenaged girl was being measured in her underwear.

Hot flushes were coursing through Michelle's bloodstream, her belly was knotting with excitement. The display window had been cleared of merchandise to allow a clear view from the street, and she felt like the star attraction in a lingerie parade. Waves of helpless embarrassment washed over her like a rising deluge. And why not? She was wearing nothing but a halter bra and a pair of frilly white panties.

"Raise your arms," Mrs Addler instructed in gravel tones. She was taking the girl's measurements and had no time for airs, graces or social niceties. Michelle lifted her hands obediently, grinning playfully down at the crowd. With her slim legs on display and a mischievous twinkle in her eye, she looked like a 1940s pin-up queen. Several older gentlemen whistled in mock lechery, prompting another round of light-hearted chuckles.

Mrs Addler impaled them with a single, penetrating glare. Instantaneous silence descended over the room.

Muttering something through a mouthful of pins, Donna looped the tape around Michelle's flat stomach. The old woman clicked her tongue like a disapproving grandmother, then turned to the Mad Seamstress: "She'll take a size eight garter belt with nine inch suspenders. Make allowances for the crinoline."

"Check," Judy replied, who was kneeling down on the platform, measuring the girl's inside leg. "Midnight talls, 32 denier. Seamed." She looked up at Michelle, dropping her a conspiratorial wink "Legs all the way up to your throat, kiddo. Dunno if we've got anything in stock that'll fit you. Make do with what we have, I guess. Still, good thing you've overcome your jitters, or you'd still be locked in the dressing room."

Michelle tittered in spite of herself. She hadn't overcome her jitters; that was the whole point. She was nearly swooning with guilty exhilaration. Her pulse was thundering in her ears, gooseflesh buzzed across her torso like a static charge. Her heartbeat had quickened to a frenzied gallop. She'd never imagined revealing her underthings would be so ... electrifying.

"OK, hold still, Missy," Judy told her, "time for the cincher."

Michelle glanced down and gasped with delight.

The 'cincher' was a gorgeous, ribbed garter-belt, the kind with adjustable suspenders and little white bows on the clasps. Transparent lace roses decorated the central waist-strap; the sides were reinforced with taut lycra panels. Unlike the slimline versions Michelle was familiar with, this was a genuine garter-belt, designed to flatten the tummy and contain the figure.

"All right, breath in – this is going to *pinch* a bit," Judy warned her.

Michelle held her breath as the cincher was clipped around her waist. The merest touch of lace was enough to blow her circuits. Huge, bluish stars detonated in front of her – for one infinite second, Michelle feared she was going to explode with desire. The room spun around her momentarily, morphing into a vortex of neon lights and colours.

Can't take much more of this, she thought, knowing that her yearnings could never be fully gratified.

"Yep – a perfect size eight," Judy remarked, nodding with satisfaction. The spectators murmured in admiration, whispering amongst themselves. Even the Mariah clones were suitably impressed with what they saw. The girl on the platform smiled modestly and placed a coy hand over her panties (although her palm was too small to really hide anything). The garter-belt was stretched tight about her middle, sinking into the soft pad of her abdomen. Her waist seemed impossibly tiny. Michelle looked achingly feminine.

"Works for me," Donna remarked neutrally (and coming as close to a compliment as she ever got), "but we ain't finished yet. You got those stockings, Judith?"

"Right here."

There are very few things as fascinating as the sight of a young woman slipping into a pair of black, seamed stockings. An expectant hush fell over the store as Michelle drew the sheer ebony hose up her tapering thigh. The effect was enthralling, spellbinding. Men stared in slack-jawed amazement, women stood motionless, their features inscribed with mute reverence.

Michelle sighed as she attached the stockings to her straining white garters. Exuding a light, fragrant perspiration, she bent over to adjust the straps, tuning them like the strings of some implausible musical instrument. Her pliant, dimpled bottom was thrust out towards the crowd, gossamer frills fluttering with her every move. She tinkered with the garters for a remarkably long time, coaxing them gently into position while the audience looked on, hypnotized. The suspense was insufferable.

Two agonizing minutes later, Michelle stood up, tossed her hair back off her shoulders, and allowed the audience a heart stopping view of her underwear. *Yes, underwear,* she smiled to herself, recalling Misha's obsessive, hair-splitting distinctions. No point in denying the obvious, was there? The spectators were cheering loud enough to shake the windows, and many of the younger women were extolling her virtues. They weren't applauding her lingerie, whatever Misha may have thought.

They were applauding her *underwear.*

Michelle accepted their acclaim with a graceful, heartfelt curtsy. Dipping her head and spreading her arms wide, she bowed before her congregation, a trim, nubile blond in pert white underpants and black suspender stockings. The gesture was totally unaffected, a spontaneous display of gratitude. This was the consummation of all her nighted fantasies. She felt transfigured,

transported. Brushed by divine wings. The applause thundered on and on.

Of course, not everyone present was swept up in the jubilant atmosphere. Wearing a face that could have tamed a Texas bull, Mrs Donna Addler summed up the situation in six terse words:

Girl needs a damned good spanking!

7.

Fifteen minutes later, Michelle had been irrevocably transformed. Judy tied her hair back in a French braid while Donna squeezed her into her costume. The two Mariahs volunteered to retouch her make-up, glossing her lips the most impertinent shade of red they could come up with. Violet mascara was applied to Michelle's eyelids and a subtle rouge to her cheeks. They worked with an indefatigable purpose, painting and strapping and primping and grooming. Vermillion feathers plumed her hair, silver ornaments ringed her lobes.

The dress itself was quite breathtaking. Consisting of a full-circle skirt and a halter top, it rippled electric blue beneath the showroom's harsh industrial lights. Wide black stripes ran from bust to waistline, while the bodice was fringed with racy yellow ruffles. The skirt was belled out by roughly eight pounds of petticoats, their flimsy polyester frills peeping out from beneath the cobalt hemline. Shoulder length gloves sheathed her arms in scarlet lace, tall black pumps added inches to her height.

"Mommy, LOOK at her NOW!" Sally Rainford cried as they unveiled the Vision Splendid.

Michelle stood on the platform with her crinoline hitched up her calves. Her brilliant smile brightened the darkest corners of the room, her crystal green eyes flashed with cheek and impudence. She looked unspeakably naughty, with her petticoats raised and her come-hither glances tempting the crowd.

Several cameras popped simultaneously, lenses zoomed and whirred. Word had finally reached the local press, evidently. Michelle raised her right hand in coquettish salute, knowing her image would probably grace the pages of The Chamberlain Messenger next Monday.

"Is she going to DANCE, Mommy?" Sally asked hopefully.

"I don't know darling," Sally's mother answered, "maybe if you ask her nicely ...."
Hearing this exchange (and thinking this would be the perfect end to a perfect morning), Judy stepped up behind Michelle, cupping a hand over her mouth.

"Well, how about it, kiddo?" she crooned in the girl's ear, "I think you owe it to them."

Michelle looked over towards Mrs A, sensing she had to get the old harridan's approval, regardless of what Judy said. She was right, needless to say. Still wearing that same bull-taming

expression, Donna shrugged her shoulders and nodded her assent.

"Yeah, all right, go on," she said in a tone of grudging surrender, "you've drummed up more business in one morning than we've had in a month of Sundays." She peered across at her partner, eyes narrowed to slits; "we still got that Offenbach CD, Jude?"

"Sure do." Judy replied, and made for the cash counter. She gave Michelle an affectionate slap on the fanny as she walked past. "Just wait here, it'll only take a minute."

Michelle acknowledged the smack with a barely audible laugh. She enjoyed being the focus of attention, even when it involved a hot, stinging bottom. Misha would have considered it a blatant attack on his manhood, an insult bordering on contempt – but Misha wasn't here now. Misha had fled into the darkened catacombs of Michelle's unconscious mind, and she had no use for his fragile male ego. She was free: free for the first time in her existence, and she planned to make the most of her new-found liberty. However long as it lasted.

Meantime, Mrs A was addressing the crowd, pulling herself up to her full height and breathing fire from her nostrils:

"Well, what're you waiting for? Y'all deaf or something? Get out of the way, the kid's gonna dance for you."

Babbling with excited gibberish, sixty-odd free-loaders cleared a space in the centre of the store, pushing back against racks and shelves and mannequins. Husbands stumbled over each other in a frantic scramble for the best seat in the house. Girls tripped up their boyfriends and issued snarls of warning. Yowling children were hoisted onto shoulders or lifted onto bench tops. More photographs were taken, several digicams were smuggled in below the tinkling doorbell, and one old man was heard to ask what all the commotion was about. Chaos ensued for precisely sixty-three seconds, and then –

The opening strains of *Gaite Parisienne* rang out over the sound system.

Michelle raised her skirts to her chin. An avalanche of glaring white petticoats spilled down either side of her legs, framing her sheer black stockings in stark contrast. Virginal satin knickers leapt into plain view, as clean and fresh as the driven snow. Long, white suspenders descended from her underwear, stretching and shortening with every move she made.

An exultant roar went up from the mob, drowning out the Overture in its intensity.

Michelle Waverley gazed out across the dance floor, her face beaming with pure happiness. An indescribable rush of pleasure coursed through her veins. This morning she'd been a clumsy, effeminate boy trying to scam a couple of old women; now she was a beautiful young girl, a talented, self-assured dancer poised to take the stage. She surveyed her audience with a sultry blend of warmth and embarrassment: they'd come in droves, swarming in off the streets just to see her underwear. Her pristine white panties; her lavish lace garters and frivolous midnight

hose.

They'd come to see *her*.

Could she deny their expectations?

It's can-can time! Michelle thought as she stepped down off the platform.

8.



The speakers crackled to life, the room fell silent. The sprightly notes of *Gaîté Parisienne* twirled into the air like bubbles in a champagne glass.

Michelle stood at the edge of the makeshift dance floor, heart pounding with excitement. The crowd watched her in wide-eyed curiosity. Most had wandered in from the street, drawn by the music and the energy inside the dancewear shop. Others had been there from the beginning — Judy, Donna, even the Rainfords — tacit witnesses to a quiet miracle. This wasn't a performance. Not really. This was something else. A declaration? A promise? A...*letting go?*

She stepped forward, crinoline raised to reveal her panties, thighs and stockings. Her breath steadied. Her heartbeat synced to the rhythm of the orchestra. The tempo changed, and Michelle swung into action — a swift, bright pirouette that flared with color and shadow. And with that, the dance began.

She spun recklessly about the room, hemline flying over her waist. The spangles on her costume glittered with every movement, petticoats blooming like a flower in the spring wind. She didn't know how she looked, but for perhaps the first time in her life, she honestly *didn't* care.

The whistles and cat-calls started almost immediately, climbing in gradual intensity as Michelle cantered across the floor in a storm of pleated lace. Judy leaned on the counter, grinning as wide as a Cheshire Cat; Donna cracked something akin to a smile (though she covered it by adjusting her glasses). Every eye in the house was locked on the stunning young *danseuse* with the black floral hose and the radiant smile. This was one show they'd *never* forget.

Michelle tossed a kick over her right shoulder, drawing gasps of delight. Frilly white knickers

flashed in the noonday light; tight black garters whipped into view. With every step, she felt herself shedding old layers — fear, confusion, the shame that had clung to her like smoke. Gone were the questions that haunted Misha: *Do I belong here? Am I pretending? Will they* ever *see me as I see myself?*

The answer was simple.

Yes, she belonged. She *was* Michelle.

Swirling around on her stiletto heels, she doubled over from the waist and tossed her flocked petticoats over her head. A raucous cheer went up from the mob as her pump, pantied *bottom* was revealed. She danced with her whole body and her whole being, flowing from classical lines into something freer, wilder, her own style taking shape before the crowd's eyes.

From the corner, little Sally Rainford gasped with wonder. "Mommy," she whispered, "she looks like a princess!"

Gwen smiled, brushing her daughter's hair. "She certainly *does."*

The final swell of music surged, and Michelle lifted her dress in a wide, joyful arc, bringing the dance to its conclusion. The shop lights shimmered off her costume, but it was her face — so sweet, so young, so *utterly* feminine — that held everybody captive. She landed in a final pose, left leg thrust saucily forward, skirts raised to her chin, wild roses burning on her cheeks.

And then: silence.

For one eternal second, the world held its breath, then the room exploded into ear-spitting applause. Judy whooped, Donna clapped — briefly, stiffly, but sincerely. Cat-calls echoed through the air. Cameras flashed. Sally clapped as loud as she could, beaming up at the dancer like she was watching a fairy tale come to life.

Michelle stood tall and straight at the center of the room, gleaming white knickers on proud display.

For close on a decade, she'd fought to understand herself, to reconcile the conflicting personas fighting for supremacy within her. Today, that struggle had finally come to an end. She'd *become* the girl she'd always been; now, forever, always. For the rest of her natural life. And all it had taken was showing her *underwear* to a room full of strangers.

Epilogue

As the crowd slowly dispersed, Mrs Donna Addler made her way over, clucking irritably under her breath.

"Kid," she said, eyebrows beetling in mock disapproval, "you are *trouble."*

Michelle's eyes widened.

"Trouble in the best way," Donna added with an ambivalent shrug. "You brought in more people than we've seen since the grand opening. And you danced like the building was on fire." She nodded to herself, measuring the girl with an appraising glance. "You ever think of doing this for real?"

Michelle blinked. "You mean… like… professional?"

Judy sidled up beside them. "Well, why not? You've already landed a part in *Calamity Jane*. Some of the local companies do community shows. Variety performances, fundraisers, that kind of thing. You could audition. You've got something people like to see."

"I'm not even sure what I'd wear," Michelle said softly, only half-joking.

Judy leaned in. "Honey, wear what makes you feel *happy.* You've got *that* part figured out, at least. Most people never do."

Michelle smiled.

A short while later, Michelle Waverley stepped outside, adjusted her beret as she made her way onto Lyndhurst Road. The afternoon sun washed the sidewalk in gold. The air was crisp, early-autumn cool. She paused outside LACE & GARTERS (*Custom fittings available on request*) for a long moment, listening to the breeze, the traffic, the rhythm of her own breathing.

Everything had changed in the space of a single morning.

Misha had arrived at the store wearing borrowed courage and frayed excuses. *Michelle* was leaving with so much more. Not a perfect ending, not by a long shot, but close enough all the same. She gazed at her reflection in the window, realizing that the girl looking back wasn't a stranger this time. *I'm here,* she thought, touching her fingertips to the glass.

And for once, she actually *believed* it.

Lace & Garters, 2003, 2025. Kristy Leigh and Transfemme.
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