

# *Gaby* *The Anime Days*



*Maddy Bell*

# Gaby

Book 1

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## Part 1

### ***Gaby's Entrance***

"Come on, if you don't hurry up we won't get there in time"

My mom was chomping at the bit and I was dragging my heels. I had ridden this charity Christmas event the last two years; both in my normal race kit but this year Mum insisted I ride on the tandem with her and in fancy dress! Well I'm not exactly a big dress up fan but Mum was emphatic and said she knew just the outfits we would wear.

"I look plain stupid in this"

"No you don't, come here let me fix your lipstick"

I submitted to her ministrations and caught a glance of myself in the mirror. Cringe. At least, I thought, I wasn't too obviously myself, and once we got going no one would really be able to tell who was in the costume. Oh the costume, well Mum had come up with a corker, she was decked out as Xena and I got the role of blonde sidekick, Gabrielle!

I decided that I had to bite the bullet so I followed Mom out of the camper and we mounted up and headed for the start area. It felt really weird with 'my' skirt flapping around, 'my' boobs bobbing around and the blonde tresses of 'my' hair swirling behind my head. Although underneath I wore my regular lycra® shorts under the skirt I still felt exposed.

We passed assorted Batmen, doctors, nurses, cowboys, policemen etc, everyone had made an effort to look good. The more serious, un-costumed, competitors would start after us on two laps of a ten mile circuit so that we would just start the second lap as the first serious rider started. We were number seven and we got to the line just in time due to my tardiness. So far no one had got a good look at me.

"Ok miss?" the starter asked

"Er yes thanks"

"Ready Gaby?"

"Yes mum"

I didn't really listen to what either had said and until we were on our way I didn't realise that they both referred to me in a female form. I guessed the

starter wouldn't know different as we were entered as Xena and Gaby, but mum!

Well I started to concentrate on my riding a bit more and soon we were dashing around the Cheshire countryside at a slick twenty-five mph, mum's no slouch and despite my slight build I was quite accomplished myself. We caught the couple who started a minute before us, Mickey and Minnie, then just before we finished lap one we passed the Keystone Cops!

By now I had forgotten about what I was wearing, we were getting cheered by spectators and I was too engrossed in what I was doing to listen to what they called out. We were about a mile into our second lap when the first of the serious teams passed us, I couldn't help but hear the 'keep it up ladies' from their pilot as they slowly drew past.

Although not really a race, the fancy dress competitors still had that urge to go as quick as possible. Some were encumbered by their costumes, Tower Bridge was one example, but our closer fitting costumes allowed us to race along almost unhindered. So it was that by the time we reached the finish, we had caught another three teams and we finished to a great cheer from the gallery of cyclists and locals that lined the finish area.

Mum steered us back to the village hall and our camper but before we reached it one of the officials flagged us down.

"Great ride ladies, I know you will want to shower and change but could you stay in costume until after the presentations?"

Mum answered straight away

"Sure, that's no problem"

"Thanks a lot, great costumes by the way"  
We pedalled off to the van.

"Muuum that means I will have to walk round like this for an hour" I whined

"There are lots of people in costume"

"Yeah but I'm dressed as a girl"

"So, lots of people do that for charity events, look how many guys dress in girls stuff for fun runs and marathons"

"Yeah but..."

"No buts, and anyway you don't look like a boy in girls clothes, you actually look quite cute"

"Mum!"

"You do, everyone round the course thought so, they probably think you're my daughter"

I helped mum stow the tandem and got inside to warm up a bit. Despite the time of year the weather was really mild but an hour racing about the countryside still left your extremities cold. Mum insisted I had a quick wash as we had to delay our showers, we did pong a bit from our efforts! Mum put a pair of high sandals on and donned her track top, then presented me with another lower heeled pair and a fleece, I didn't realise it at first but it was mom's own pink one.

"Lets touch your face up before we go in"

"Muuum"

"Well you don't want anyone to recognise you do you?"

"Guess not"

"Well give over complaining then"

She fussed with my eyes, redid my lippy then before I could argue spritzed me with her atomiser.

"At least you don't smell quite so sweaty now"

I knew arguing would do no good so I donned the sandals and followed mum into the hall. If we had been at home I would have died of embarrassment but fortunately we were only here for the holidays so I didn't really know anyone here although I had ridden in this area a couple of times in the summer.

Keeping close to mum we exchanged our race number for welcome cups of tea and a slice of stollen each. We went over to the result board and to both of our surprise we had been quickest in the costume category, our fifty eight minute ride was close to most of the 'serious' teams that had by now finished. My hopes of anonymity quickly disappeared as other riders came to congratulate us on our ride. Mum, well mum was just herself quickly getting into conversation with several other women competitors; I stood at her shoulder trying to be invisible.

Problem was that dressed as Gaby I was hard to miss, particularly next to mum in her Xena garb. Mum had found our costumes during one of her and dads fair trips, mum had the full Xena with imitation metal bra, the lot, she had donned a nude body stocking for a bit of warmth under the fairly brief

dress. I also got a body stocking with a suede look minidress and a curly blonde wig clipped to my fairly short dark blonde hair. With the sandals, makeup and a sock stuffed bra; I felt more than a bit self-conscious!



"Thank you ladies and gentlemen for coming and supporting us again this year. We've raised almost £600 for this years charity which is The Children's Society"

The crowd of which I was one clapped and whooped a bit.

"As you know we don't run to a prize list as such, that all goes in the charity pot but our sponsors have put up a restricted prize list just to encourage you back"

More chuckles and applause.

"Well we are doubly honoured today, Chris Jones from the CS will present the prizes and the Argos (the local rag) will take pictures and will be doing a spread in their Christmas issue."

Another round of applause.

Then they started the presentation, fastest three, fastest over forty, fastest under sixteen, lady and fastest three teams on tandem. Each winners name and time was announced and each received a round of cheering, most of the crowd knew each other after all.

"Now we come to the fun bit, our fancy dress competitors. I have to say that without your efforts this event would be the sadder and donations around the course today have boosted the total considerably due to your great costumes. The costume prizes have been voted on by our spectators both within the sport and general public, so you should all feel proud of yourselves."

Loud cheering. I was getting a bit antsy now.

"As we were looking for costumes rather than speed the prizes reflect that so in reverse order..."

He worked his way through the solo riders, best three costumes, best in each category and just one prize for the quickest. It was obvious that mum and I would have to go up on the platform as quickest but when we were both surprised when,

"Best tandem costume and fastest costume pair goes to Xena and her sidekick Gaby. Come on up ladies"

Well you could have knocked me over with a feather.

Mum had to almost drag me to the stage, we took off our jackets and then we were there in front of the crowd, press and fellow competitors. We accepted our prizes, I was now so embarrassed I didn't even attempt to correct the mc's assumption of my gender. We had the photos done then the photographer wanted a few group pictures outside and then finally we were free to get changed.

Mum decided that we would shower at grandma's so we bade our farewells and left to meet the rest of the family who had gone to Chester for the day it being the last Sunday before Christmas.

## Part 2

### ***Gaby's Surprise***

We had just over a fortnight Christmas break, the first week including Christmas day would be at grandmas near Nantwich, hence me and mums ride earlier today. Then we would go back home to Church Warsop near Mansfield for New Year, that was always a big family do that we all looked forward to.

I still had mums pink fleece and low sandals on when we got to grandma's house, dads Renault was parked in the drive so we parked the Volkswagen Camper on the road. I have to admit that I had almost forgotten how I was dressed until I got out and found myself on the receiving end of a wolf whistle and crude comment from a passing local kid who I had in the past played footie with on other visits to grandma.

By the time I had gathered my wits and kit bag, mum was nearly at the door, I rushed to catch up and just made it as my sister Juliette opened the front door for us. Up till now only mum had seen me in costume and I had hoped to keep it that way but too late now!

"Hi mum, did you win? oh wow" she turned her attention to me, "you look just brill Drew or is it Gabs now?"

I just turned pink.

"Leave your brother alone Julie, and yes we did win, fastest and best costume!"

Mum almost visually grew as she told my sister the result.

"Erm, can I get in please, I need the toilet and shower and get out of this stuff."

"Juliette, help drew get his makeup and wig off before he showers"

"Yes mum"

I followed my sister up to the bathroom.

"You know Drew, you really do look like a girl"

"Too much like, everyone at the race thought I really was a girl, and mum didn't help either, she kept calling me Gaby!"

"You should be happy, think about it for a minute. No one will know it's you and by New Year they will have all forgotten about it."

"No they wont"

"Why not?"

"The paper was there, they are doing a spread on the event and they took loads of pictures. We won so who do you think will definitely be in that article, me and mum, Xena and Gaby! Someone is bound to make the connection"

"I doubt it, we don't live local and you really looked like a girl, especially with those sandals and tights on, no boy is going to walk round like that"

"I did"

"Yes but no one's seen you"

"Wrong, Paul saw me outside just now, he might make the connection"

"Well don't fret it"

Juliette left me to undress and shower and half an hour later I was back to Drew.

"At least I won't have to do that again" I commented to everyone when I returned to the lounge.

Dad chuckled, Juliette snorted and both mum and grandma just smiled.

"What?"

"Nothing" mum replied then resumed telling the rest of the family about the race before they told us about the Christmas market at Chester.

The surprise came on Monday when mums mobile went off.

"Hello Jenny Bond...yes...presentation tomorrow...yes...in costume...no problem...what time? Two...ok we'll see you there."

She turned to me with a guilty look on her face.

"Er Drew, I think I've just dropped a clanger"

"Why?"

"I just agreed that we would present the cheque to the Children's Society at the newspaper offices tomorrow."

"Ok"

"In our costumes"

Well you could hear a pin drop then all hell let loose.

"Great"

"I get to see Gaby again"

"Aargh!"

"We can all go"

"I won't do it"

"Oh yes you will"

Well you get the drift, everyone but me was thrilled. Finally peace was restored and my dad laid it down for me.

"Drew you will do this, and ok you don't like it but it's quite an honour and a good thing to do, even if"

"When"

"If anyone realises you're a boy, no one will think bad of you as they will all know it's just a costume and your doing it for charity"

"But dad" I was whining again

"No buts, you're doing it"

Well that was that, my fate was sealed.

Juliette drew me to one side.

"You know we could make you safer, you know less likely to be found out"

"How?" I wasn't sure I trusted big sis.

"We make you more like a girl."

I wasn't sure I liked where this was going.

"Go on, I'm listening"



"Well you can't very well wear your shorts or that body stocking, no girl would, they would get people asking why. You already keep your legs hair free for racing so some ten deniers will look great and you can borrow one of my bodies. You'll have those sandals on so that should look great. We can do a more thorough makeup job on you, perhaps paint your nails and borrow one of my padded bras, you'll look just pukka!"

"Ok, you get my vote"

"Mum"

"Yes Juliette"

"I'll sort Gaby out, but we need to go into town to get some bits"

"Ok guys, take care and don't be late back"

On the way out mum stopped me.

"I know you hate this, but thanks for doing it, here" she pressed a couple of notes into my hand, "get yourself something and get lunch out of this"

"Ok mum, see you later"

Once outside I looked at the paper in my hand and counted fifty pounds. Wow that was five weeks pocket money!

"What's that?"

"Mum gave me some spending money"

"How much?"

"Twenty" I lied as was sure Juliette would want a cut and mum *had* given it *me!*

"Excellent, I've got about thirty, do you have any other?"

"Only a couple of pounds, I didn't expect to need any"

We waited for the bus and after twenty minutes it picked us up.

"Ok we need a plan of what we need"

"Like what?"

"Well we need to get you some tights and some bits of makeup"

"Can't we use yours?"

"I've only brought one decent pair of tights and I need those myself and my makeup is not right for your tanned complexion."

"Ok. Fair enough, I see the need"

Boots, the chemists was our first stop and shopping with Juliette allowed me to feel a bit happier looking through the cosmetics department. We left lighter in pocket by over ten pounds but with foundation, lipstick and a nail kit. I've never been happy shopping with mum or Juliette but today was a bit different. We found a lingerie store where my sister selected a new bra, pink and padded, that I felt sure would give me quite a bust when I wore it tomorrow. At the same time she selected a pair of tights, ten denier, sandal toe in a sort of dark nude colour.

Then we hit BK and the last of my twenty went on lunch. We trawled the shops for a bit longer before catching the bus back to grandmas.

To be fair, the rest of the family didn't bring the subject of my dressing up tomorrow at all that evening.

That night in bed, I thought of little else! I worried about discovery; I worried that I might like it! To say Sunday was my first time in a frock would be wrong of course. Having an older sister meant that I had been used as a doll when I was younger and when I was about ten I did go to a fancy dress party

in drag. But I'm thirteen in the New Year and I was still mortified by the whole thing, especially my being acceptable as a girl.

## Part 3

### ***Gaby's Presentation***

Straight after breakfast Juliette dragged me up to grandmas room so we could use her dressing table. I was presented with my undergarments, bikini pants, tights, a peach body and the pink bra! I used the bathroom to put the bikini's on then Juliette rolled the hose up my legs, they were slightly glossy which I hadn't noticed before, my legs really did look girlie. The body was a light control job and when combined with the other bits of lycra® my manhood was almost completely hidden.

My sister then put the bra on me and this time used some thick tights to fill the cups out, before pulling the body the rest of the way up. I admired my feminine body for a minute before getting freaked by how I looked. Mum came up to put the wig on for us, Juliette didn't know how, why would a fourteen-year-old girl know that? What she did know was make up!

Well half an hour later and I didn't recognise myself. I got a bit upset when she tweezed a few eyebrow hairs out but I had to admit I looked much like Juliette herself now, if a little darker complexioned. Then, we decamped to the kitchen, as mum needed grandma's vanity herself.

The other thing Juliette did know was nails! I sat impatiently as she carefully applied the false nails, trimmed them and painted them a muted pink. Then I saw a light go on in her head and I was soon stripped of my hose and my toenails were being painted, I didn't dare comment, I was after all in her hands. Soon however I was re dressed and my Gaby costume was in place.

We went into the lounge where everyone else was now waiting.

"Ta da! Xena here's Gabrielle!"

"I've just got to have a picture of this"

My father went for his camera, grandma already had hers ready. I went through a humiliating session of posing with mum, before it was time for everyone to get in their coats to go to the presentation.



It was only as I was sat there between grandma and Juliette that I wondered why no one had thought of getting Juliette to 'stand in' for this. At this stage I realised it wasn't even worth bringing the idea up.

On the way my sister gave me some pointers in girl manners which only made me more nervous. My barely concealed panic eroded when we arrived at the newspaper when I realised that this was not really much more than a photo opportunity but I still felt happier in my improved disguise.

Well the presentation of the huge cheque and ensuing photo session took about half an hour in all then we were ready to leave.

"I know," said dad, "lets go eat"

This had to be pre planned, no where has space on Christmas Eve at three o'clock. And mum had another outfit with her! But not for me!

So here I was, a passable girl in a fancy dress costume on my way to a restaurant with my family, this really was getting me nervous, as I would be well and truly out in public this time.

We drove into town then had to walk to the eatery, I had on mums pink fleece again and never felt as nervous as this in my life before. We made the

ten-minute walk and were soon seated in a booth armed with menus. I really wanted to pee but didn't know what to do.

"Gaby" for this girl I was masquerading as seemed to be her, "is something wrong"

"I need to, you know, go to the gents"

"Juliette, I think you had better go with your 'sister' to the toilets, you need to wash up anyway"

I followed my sister to the ladies, and with barely any hesitation I strode into a ladies toilet for what I hoped would be a first and last time. It was thankfully empty and I was ushered into a cubicle. I found out why women take so long, it took me ten minutes to strip down, pee then redress, Juliette was waiting when I got out.

"We need to touch you up a bit" which she promptly did then we were back out in the restaurant.

"Ok now girls?"

"Yes thanks mom"

"Gaby?"

"Yes mum"

"Right time to order"

Well to cut an extremely boring and humiliating story short we had a really nice meal. The waitress was keen to make sure that both of us 'girls' were looked after and a couple of times I saw my parents smiling at her ministrations. Needless to say I was not discovered and only suffered embarrassment.

As we were in public my family referred to me in my female persona exclusively. As we were eating our dessert dad threw me another curve ball.

"We've decided that for New Year we are going to have fancy dress, your mum and you Gaby already have costumes, I can wear my trekkie stuff and I'm sure Julie can find something easily. We'll tell the rest of the family when we talk tomorrow."

"But I don't want to do this again, I can do something else, can't I?"

"You could but you do this pretty good you know. Once more and that's it ok"

I drew a deep breath

"I guess, but that really will be the last time"

"Ok Gaby, keep your hair on"

Well I have to admit that even broke me up; all five of us were almost in hysterics.

The rest of Christmas went a bit more normally, I got some new bike parts and clothing, Julie got her usual skirts, dresses, makeup and stuff and for now I was back to being drew and a return to Gaby was still a week away.

We left grandmas on Sunday, but Saturday's paper had the spread on the charity race and the cheque presentation. The Argus had devoted a full page to it (I guess they were short of news, I know Chad back home often used the same idea), mum and me were in several pictures beside the presentation. Mum was listed as Mrs Jenny Bond and I was down as her daughter Gaby Bond. Well mum just had to take a couple of copies home with us to show her friends, I just hoped she would be discreet. (I needn't have worried, she told everyone that it was Juliette and the paper got the name wrong.)

Well things didn't go quite as planned for New Year. But I was saved from the embarrassment of greeting all my aunts, uncles and cousins as Gaby. It wasn't my fault, honest. I went out on my bike into Clumber Park on the Monday and I slipped on some black ice. I ended up in Bassetlaw hospital with a broken collarbone and a few nasty bruises, it hurt like hell but I was saved.

I was pretty sure then that I would never be dressing as a girl again, I never liked it and had no desire to do it again. I caught mum looking at the pictures of Gaby a few times but nothing was ever said and I was sure not gonna bring it up.

As winter waned, my birthday was approaching and I would soon be a teen! My whole life was gonna be turned upside down and I was wishing it to happen, I think.

## Part 4

### ***Gaby Reappears***

My birthday at the end of February came and went, I had a 'party' with a few friends and family but all in all my ascent into a teenager was an anti climax. My injury from the Christmas accident healed nicely and I was soon back to riding my bike. Now lets get this into perspective, in a land where the kicking of a ball round a field reigns supreme, I rode a bike! I was passionate about bike riding, the whole family rode but I was fanatical.

This dedication to a minority pastime did little for my popularity, I was always the last to be picked for teams, the only thing I could do with any conviction was run. As a student I pottered along as part of the intelligency, my grades were always in the top five in the class. As at this stage of my school career we were kept together as a group, you can see how we would develop as a separate social group to the rest of our peers.

I had never had many friends, I guess most people don't really but I generally could be found with Clive and Paul, although we had known each other all through school it was only this last year that we formed a clique. I, unlike some lads my age, was quite happy to mix with the girls. In fact I was sort of in another clique which included me Ally, Bernie, Mad and Rhod. I don't think any of us had anything in common except a willingness to hang together.

Like most secondary schools, we had a limited social calendar, Christmas party and disco, Easter disco and end of year party. And living in a fairly rural area there was very little else going on without travelling to either Worksop or Mansfield or even Sheffield about twenty miles away. At thirteen parents don't tend to like their kids going off on their own so these trips were rare. So we made our own entertainment, I know that sounds a bit old fashioned but we did. Bike rides and walks into Clumber Park and Sherwood Forest, the girls would practice little dance routines, us guys would play with our RC cars and well even we fell back to abuse of games consoles.

Easter was late this year, nearly the end of April so the school dance was still six weeks away but of course the girls were already plotting what they would wear. Clive and Paul never attended these functions, I avoided most of them but Rhod generally went along. The three girls, as a result, usually bolstered the sea of girls and the vastly outnumbered guys were never short of attention. Perhaps that's why Rhod went.

My fancy dress escapade at Christmas had never reached my friends much to my relief and I had pretty well expunged the episode from my memory. So back to the present and half term break.

"Drew"

"Yeah"

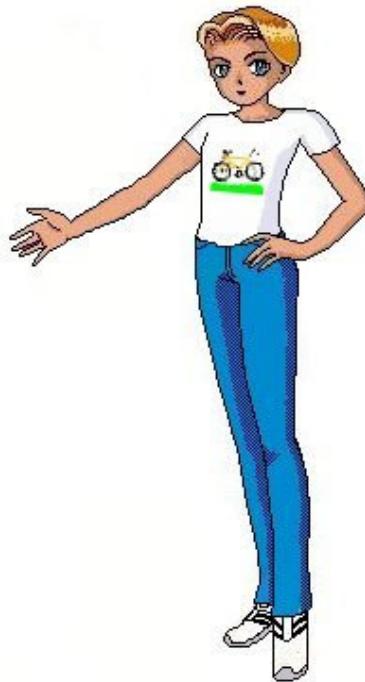
"The guys have got an idea that requires you and Rhod"

"So"

"Come over to Maddies after lunch and we'll explain"

"Sure, see you later"

"Later"



Maddie lives out on the new estate in a detached mansion, well that's what we call it, so I set out on my bike for short ride or otherwise half-hour walk. I arrived at the same time as Rhod and we locked our bikes up and knocked.

"Hi Mrs Peters"

"Hello boys, the girls are in the dining room, go on through"

"Great your both here"

"Hi guys"

"Anyone want a drink" Mrs Peters poked her head round the door.

A chorus of “yes please” had us all in hysterics. We’re thirteen! The tray of drinks and hot cross buns distracted us for a few minutes then Rhod asked the question I was ready to ask.

“What’s the secret?”

“Well we’ve got an idea, shut the door Ally”

“And”

“And you probably won’t like it, but we think it would be a real buzz”

“Spill it”

“Ok, you know the Easter disco”

“Yeah”

“Well we want you two to go with us”

“That’s no big deal, I was going anyway” opined Rhod

“And I guess I can fit it into my social calendar too”

“There’s a catch” Maddie was showing a bit of nervousness.

Bernie took up the reins, “We want to go in costume, there’s prizes and stuff”

“Still with you so far” I sarcastically put in

“Well the point is we want to go as Manga girls, you know like Sailor Blue and that”

“What will us guys go as?

“Erm that’s just it, you’ll be Manga girls too”

“What, no way”

“Come on guys, your kidding right”

“No we’re deadly serious, we’ve even sort of sorted some costumes”

“You are serious aren’t you”

“Of course we are”

Memories of Christmas came back and I blushed a little.

"Look guys, it will be fun, once you're dressed up no one will know"

"Like you can make us disappear! Everyone will know who we are straight off"

"No they won't!"

"I'm not saying I'm in" Rhod started, "but what's in it for us?"

The girls looked at each other.

"Fun, and our gratitude"

Well the innuendo was there but passed straight over our heads. Personally I was in no rush to repeat my time as Gaby but I could tell Rhod was intrigued.

"One condition" I started

"You'll do it?"

"Hang on, I didn't say yes yet"

"What condition?"

"If you can't make us pass as girls by next weekend we're out"

"Agreed!"

Rhod looked a bit unsure but nodded his ascent.

"Ok, we'll go to Meadowhall on Saturday, if anyone guesses you are boys we'll call it off for the dance"

"What now?"

"Us girls will get everything together and we'll start tomorrow"

"We need to choose costumes now though, I've brought my Manga"

Well we started to look through the Japanese comics and after a couple of hours the girls had picked out everyone's costumes. If anyone saw through these costumes we were in trouble! Bernie was to be Sailor Blue, Maddie Prince, Rhod got Yellow, Ally would be Pink and I drew Sakur! What had we let ourselves in for!

We all stayed for tea then a session of PS2 before we headed home agreeing to meet at Ally's at ten next morning.

I have to admit that I wasn't really up for this, but the girls were set on it and Rhod was willing to give it throw so I had gotten myself into a corner. I spent some time that night in front of the mirror trying to convince myself that the girls would fail but after Christmas I knew that it was possible that I would lose my bluff.

After my morning ride I showered and walked over to ally's house with a heavy heart. I really, really didn't want to do this but I had agreed and I kept my promises. Ally's mum let me in and I was escorted up to her room, I guess with five of us there she trusted us to not get up to mischief! Bernie was last to arrive toting a couple of plastic carriers.

"I'm going out in a few minutes, so behave. If there's any trouble I'm holding you responsible Alison. You have been warned. I'll bring lunch back, Maccy D's ok?"

"Great"

"Brill"

"No gherkins for me"

"Remember Rhod's a veggie"

"Ok guys, see you about one o'clock"

"Bye mum"

"Bye Mrs Lacey"

"Right fellas time to get started"

Bernie emptied her bags on the bed, and whilst both Rhod and I had sisters we both blushed deeply at the stuff the girls pulled out.

"Ok guys, strip!"

Well I was mortified even though I was expecting it.

"Come on we've seen you in your Speedo's so don't be bashful"

"I guess"

We both stripped down to our pants and stood squirming while the girls giggled and checked us out. Although all the girls were just starting to develop a bit us lads had yet to start on the testosterone roller coaster that is teenage life.

"Bernie you take Rhod and we'll do Drew, you can use my parents room"

"Ok"

Bernie grabbed an armful of stuff and half dragged my fellow conscript next door.

"Right Drew, let's get you dressed"

Ally and Maddie worked like a well-oiled machine as they selected and dressed me in female attire. Lacy vest, white knee socks, slip then one of Ally's pink summer uniforms, I always thought the girls looked cute in them, I was sure I didn't!

"Hmm, well you're the same size as me and Maddie, but we need to do some work on your face and hair"

"Hey, no plucking or stuff"

"Course not just some makeup"

"I brought the wig"

Maddie produced the hairpiece, looked like I was gonna be a blonde again.

"I got this after that episode with the chewing gum"

I looked blank

"You remember, it was just before we changed schools"

I must be dim or I had missed something major.

"Remember I used to have really long hair"

"Yeah, I thought you just got it cut that summer"

"Well I did but not through choice"

"What do you mean?"

"Perhaps you just didn't get it, you remember Perry, short kid who got expelled?"

"Yeah"

"Well do you know why?"

"No, I just thought he'd done something bad to some girl, hit her or something"

"Well I was the girl but he didn't hit me"

"Something with the chewing gum?" it was starting to connect upstairs

"Yeah something with chewing gum. We were in the playground as usual and he was showing off blowing bubbly. Bernie and I were sat talking then I heard a pop and someone massing with my hair, Perry in fact. He popped his bubbly on my hair and then when he mussed it up, it really got stuck. It was so bad the only way to get it out was to cut it out, by the time mum had done I looked like the chainsaw massacre. That's when mum went and got dads clippers, gave me a number one and took me still sobbing to get this" she indicated the wig.

"I guess most of the girls knew but it probably didn't make it to the boys. Perry got binned and I got a wig. I'm still trying to grow it long but I guess I'm used to shorter hair now"

I have to admit that I was shocked, partly at the assault and partly that I had never heard about the details until almost two years later. The girls were hugging and I didn't know what to do.

"Come on Drew, let's get on"

I sat on the stool in front of the vanity unit and watched Maddies expert fitting. The wig was nearly shoulder length and styled into the pageboy I always associated (I know knew why) with Maddie.

"Okay Ally, your turn"

My other tormentor turned me round and spent twenty minutes doing 'my' makeup.

"Stand up and let's get a look at you"

"Sheesh, he looks cute Maddie"

"Hang, something missing. Shoes!"

"You take fives right?"

"Yeah"

"Same as me" Ally gave me her school shoes, "put these on"



They were a pair of chunky soled Kickers with a sling back and two inch heel, right on the edge of school reg's.

"Excellent, where's Rhod?"

"Hey are you guys ready yet?"

"Just coming"

Bernie came in followed by I guess Rhod. My fellow conscript being a bit bigger than me needed Bernie's best attention but a bit of slap works wonders. He had a girls cropped t-shirt and a knee length denim skirt on with a pair of trainers. As he wore his hair a bit longer than me, Bernie had managed to put his nearly black hair into small bunches like I'd seen some of the seniors wearing. I guess we both were looking at each other in shock.

"Well I reckon we're going to win this one girls"

"Yeah, come on lets get some pictures"

"Noo" we both cried

"Yes, you don't think we did this to let the moment just go do you"

"I guess"

So we spent time having our pictures taken, group and solo shots, then Ally set the self-timer and we all posed together.

"I still think there's something wrong" Maddie stated

"Panties!" Bernie opined

"You're right, their y fronts really show under those clothes"

Ally dived into a draw and reappeared with a couple of pairs of ultimate humiliation, pink, nylon, lacy panties.

"Put these on, you can slip yours off without anyone seeing"

"Do we have to?"

"Yes, otherwise we can't see how you look"

Well we both blushed through our makeup as we changed underwear and rearranged ourselves.

"Excellent, you two look really cute, I think this might work"

"We can't call them Drew and Rhod dressed like this"

"Well girls what shall we call you?"

Not liking it one bit I thought for a minute

"How about Gaby, like from Xena? She's blonde and I think pretty cute"

"I cant be Xena can I, I mean that would be too obvious"

"Well I reckon Drew's right, he even looks a bit like Gaby so that's settled, but it should really be Gabrielle"

"How about Phillipa, my middle names Phillip"

"Yay! Girls meet Pippa and Gaby"

"Oh heck, mums due back at one"

All eyes went to the clock

"Quick lets get you two changed, Pippa go get dressed while we clean up Gaby then we can swap"

The next ten minutes were a flurry of activity as Rhod and Drew once more replaced Pippa and Gaby.

"Hi kids, hope you didn't get into mischief"

"No Mrs Lacey"

"No mum"

"Ok, come and get your lunch"

We descended to the kitchen for our Ronald specials, all through the food Maddie kept calling me Gaby, which was winding me up.

"What's with calling Drew Gaby?"

"Oh nothing Mrs Lacey, we were talking about Xena and Drew said that he'd prefer to be Gabrielle than Xena"

"I see, what are you all doing this afternoon"

"Going for a walk mum"

"Ok, make sure one of you has a phone and take care"

"We will" we all echoed

We were out in the woods before our forthcoming humiliation was brought up again.

"Gaby, Pippa we need to do some practice before Saturday"

"Drop the names huh?"

"No if we are in the mall and someone speaks to you it will look odd if you don't reply, so whenever we're alone we will call you by your girlie names"

"Yes Herr Fuhrer!" Rhod snapped off a salute

"That's just what we don't want. If you act like boys, even if you look like girls people will look twice and you could be found out"

"I never thought of that"

"Well do. So between now and Saturday you are both taking girl lessons."

So each day we met and mostly went for walks, Gaby and Pippa receiving the perceived wisdom of girlhood from the real thing in buckets. By Friday they

were satisfied that we would pass and everything was set for the five of us to go to Sheffield on Saturday morning. We were meeting at Bernie's house to get ready then catch the bus first to Worksop then on to Meadowhall. Time would be short, Bernie's parents were taking her brother to Nottingham and were leaving just after eight, our bus left at five past nine. To speed things along the girls presented each of us with our undergarments and informed us that we *would* shower, hair wash at home and be wearing our frillies when we got to Bernie's.

I had to put Juliette off joining us, by saying we might go to Doncaster instead so she headed off for the earlier bus as I headed for my reluctant rendezvous with girlhood. I had been surprised to find a different set of undergarments to our initial dressing up. I had a pair of trainer socks with a pink frill and little pom poms, a pair of white panties with lace edges and a matching cami top. I put them on and decided I would wear a set of Baggies to avoid any chance of discovery.

The girls were all ready when I got there and Rhod/Pippa was getting changed. Ally and Mad quickly had me stripped and I was soon wearing Ally's floor length denim skirt, a lace edged t-shirt and Maddie's pink Reeboks.



Wig fixed, make up on, Ally's denim jacket and Maddies old rucksack and I was ushered with a demure looking Pippa (knee length pink t shirt dress, sandals and Bernie's pink denim jacket), along to the bus stop just in time for the bus.

On the first bus my finger nails had the first coat of pink and were finished on the ride to Sheffield, I didn't get any say in the matter. We left the bus and started the walk across the river to the Mall itself. I'm sure Rhod felt the same, I certainly felt that everyone was looking at me as I tried to put into practice the weeks 'training'. In retrospect I guess we looked just like a rabble of teen girls, noisy, taking up all the walkways, in short like every other group of girls they saw.

I was never one for doing the shopping thing and I don't think Rhod was either but the girls even at thirteen were experts. We trolled first one direction then upstairs, along to the other end, stopping in various 'girl' shops for checking out the latest fashions and spontaneous tryouts, which Pippa and I managed to keep clear of. We were dragged into lingerie shops, shoe emporiums and frock chains until we were fit to drop.

We decided to hit the food hall and while three of us grabbed a table, Bernie and Pippa fetched us pizza and drinks. I was idly playing with my cup when Maddie gave a surprised squeal.

"Look guys, it's us"

"Cool"

I looked where Ally pointed to see our little group up on the huge TV screen; we were on the in mall TV station that slowly scanned the seating area. The girls and both guys all gave a wave before the camera panned away.

"Let's see a film"

"Ok, what's on"

"Don't know, let's look"

We went upstairs to check the options and bought tickets for Lord of the Rings. We had a bit of time to kill so we headed down to the arcade of little shops adjacent to the food hall.

"I thought it was you guys"

I nearly jumped out of my skin it was Paul and right there with him was Clive and my sister!

"Clive reckoned I was wrong and Juliette thought Drew and Rhod would have been with you"

Maddie was thinking on her feet,

"No they came on the bus with us but decided to go on the tram into the centre to look at some book shop"

"Oh yeah, we thought of doing that but the lure of the big screen caught us, we just met Juliette when I saw you"

"Oh right you don' know my cousin Gaby and her friend Pippa, they live in Worksop. Gaby, Pippa these are Clive and Paul, Drew's friends and his sister Juliette."

"Hi" was all I could manage in I hoped a voice unlike my own. Juliette gave me a funny look but addressed the group in general.

"You guys all going to the same film?"

"LOTR for us"

"Snap"

"Mind if I join you, we can all go back home together afterwards"

"Sure, Julie"

"Ok I'll go get a ticket, meet you in the foyer in ten"

"We'll come too" Paul stated. I knew he had a thing for Juliette, he could dream!

"Shit" I whispered when they were out of earshot, "me and Rhod are done now"

"Don't worry, if these guys haven't rumbled you yet, no one else will unless you give yourselves away. Look I know come with me a minute."

Maddie dragged me into the ladies and a vacant cubicle.

"Sit down and hold still."

I was not going to disobey sat in the ladies toilet of the countries biggest mall. She dug something from her bag then fussed around my ear.

"This might sting"

"Ow! what are you doing?"

"Sit still!"

"Ow! What have you done?"

"Flush and I'll show you"

I had a sinking feeling that I knew but I followed her to the mirrors.

"Da-da! Two pretty studs, Drew would never get pierced ears so therefore you can't be Drew!"

Staring me in the mirror was a girl I recognised as Gaby/Drew now with a pair of sparkly blue crystal studs in her ears.

"Look, we'll take them out later, they heal pretty quick if you don't keep them open"

"Shit"

"Come on we need to meet the others"

You've all seen the film right, so I don't need to take you through it. We all had sore bums and I had sore ears by the time we left screen 1. All eight of us headed for the bus station and made it with barely a minute before our bus left. We commandeered the rear seats and even Pippa and myself participated in the discussion of Tolkien's epic. We were nearly back to Worksop when it occurred to me that our cover was that Pippa and I lived in Worksop and would have to leave everyone there and catch a later bus. That meant just the two of us alone, in drag for an hour. I was scared at the prospect I can tell you.

"You guys still coming back home with me Gaby?"

"Sure" I replied adlibbing, "mum said she'd pick us up about nine if that's ok?" I looked imploringly at Maddie for confirmation.

"Great"

I breathed a sigh of relief and by the look on Pippa's face so did Rhod.

We made it back to the village just before six, Paul and Clive said they would walk Juliette home and the rest of us headed towards maddie's, before doubling back to get to Bernie's and our boy clothes. Bernie's olds were still out thankfully, so we were able to do a quick change including shower.

"Whoops Drew, unless you want to keep them, we better take those studs out"

I had forgotten them but as soon as Ally mentioned them they started to itch.

"Yeah, I still don't know why you did that Maddie?"

"It worked didn't it?"

"Yeah, but still" I let it hang as Maddie moved in to retrieve her studs and Bernie cleaned each lobe with an antiseptic wipe. What I didn't realise was that Maddie had unintentionally (I think) left the plastic keeper sleeves in my slightly swollen lobes.

"Ok guys – you win, no one not even my own sister spotted us so we'll do the dance thing with you"

"Ok with you too Rhod?"

"Yeah we agreed"

"What now?"

"We'll meet Monday after school to start on our costumes. We have most of the stuff already but we need to make the actual dresses."

I winced, I really didn't want to do this, I hated the idea of dressing as a girl but I had promised and at least Rhod was with me too.

I walked into flak from mum when I got home at seven thirty, but she accepted the story that I had been at Rhod's house since we got back earlier than the girls and my sister.

## Part 5

### ***Gaby Revelation***

Sunday was much as usual this time of year, Mum and I set off about nine o'clock bundled against the weather and headed for, this week, Bakewell across in the Peak District. Dad and Juliette would take the camper a bit later and meet us there for lunch. Afterwards mum and I would either ride back or hitch a lift with the others depending on the weather and what we felt like.

I really enjoyed this time of year, there was no pressure from competing, and the roads were a little less busy than in summer. I won't bore you with a blow by blow account but we used the lanes to get across to Bolsover, then followed the main road to Chesterfield. I'd seen it before but mum insisted we have a look at the parish church with its crooked spire. (One of the guys at school reckoned he knew why it was like that and here's his explanation.

"Back when, the spirit of the church lived in the spire. Everyday it watched the citizens going about their business, going to market etc. one day however it noticed that everyone below was watching a young woman on her way to the church to be married. Nothing strange you might think, but she was wearing white, a white wedding was unheard of in the town (virgins were rare!) and so everyone looked at the girl.

The spirit was so taken with the idea of a virgin that it watched her all the way to the door. Alas it had twisted so far that it couldn't turn back and remained as you see it today. Legend has it that the only way it could return to normal was if it saw another virgin bride leaving the church. That is very unlikely to happen as virgin brides are even rarer in Chesterfield now than back in the middle ages!"

(Well I didn't tell that to mum but I thought you'd like it.) We then took to the lanes again as we climbed into the Peak District. By the time we got to the top we were both huffing a bit, but it was worth it as we then sped down to Chatsworth and through the park. It was nearly eleven thirty as we climbed out of the park for the last leg to Bakewell.

The ride had been exhilarating; mum kept up an almost incessant chatter about school, what we would do later in the year and so on. Mostly I just grunted, I was using all my energy just getting there. It did at least keep my mind off of yesterday and the forthcoming Easter fancy dress party.

We met the others and enjoyed a good meal, then we all had a walk around the newly redeveloped shopping area. Mom decided to ride home while I elected to return with Dad and Juliette.

We were home by three and as mum would be at least another hour, Juliette and I were volunteered by dad to prepare the tea. My sister waited until I had showered and changed then we both went into the kitchen. Dad was in the garage working on one of his projects so we were left alone in the house.

"Ok then, what did you really do yesterday?" Juliette was quickly to the point.

"We all went to Meadowhall" I tried desperately to remember the exact story the girls had spun.

"We met Maddies Cousin and her friend at Worksop then went to Sheffield. Me and Rhod were bored so we went into the city centre to go in the Anime shop."

"That's what the girls told us, did you buy anything?"

"No, they were waiting for new stock so we caught the bus back home, we figured the girls would hit the multiplex"

"Yeah they did, that's where we all met"

By now I thought I had convinced my sister of my tale.

"Did you enjoy LOTR?"

"How did you know that's what we saw?"

Damn!

"The girls said that that was what they were planning on seeing if they went"

I could see by the look on her face that she thought she knew something.

"Maddies cousin was pretty"

I desperately tried not to blush or stammer

"Er yeah, I guess"

"She was like so cute"

"If you say so" I couldn't see where this was going

"Chop that onion up"

I concentrated on the job in hand

"Did it hurt?"

"What?" I had been thrown a curve ball and wasn't quite sure what to do.

"Did it hurt when Maddie put the studs in?"

I obviously misunderstood the question.

"What studs?" I tried to not think about what was coming next.

"The blue crystal studs you 'acquired' between the food court and the cinema"

Not much gets past Julie, and it looked like I was rumbled. I was determined to try the bluff though.

"I didn't go to the cinema!"

"I know Drew didn't, but Gaby did"

"So?"

"I really am going to have to drag it out of you aren't I?"

"Drag what?"

"Ooh! Look Drew, I guessed it was you and Rhod nearly straight away"

"Shit, how?"

She knew and I was dead meat!

"Well neither of you were acting quite like teenage girls"

"Clive and Paul, they must know too"

"No they don't, I pumped them about what they thought of Maddies cousin and her friend when they walked me home. If anything they're both a bit smitten."

"Noo"

"So, are you going to tell me what it's all about?"

"It's a long story"

"The best ones usually are"

By the time we had finished preparing tea, my sister had the bare bones of what I had gotten myself into.

"... so all five of you are going as girl anime characters?"

"Yeah"

"That is just like so precious!"

"Humph"

"Oh and put some antiseptic on your ears, you don't want those holes going manky"

"Maddie said they might be a bit scabby as they close back up"

"Close up? They won't close up with those sleepers in"

"What sleepers?"

Juliette obviously made a decision.

"Oh nothing, it's just that if you want to keep them open you need to keep something in them"

"But I don't"

"Well that's alright then"

I didn't see her smirk as she carried the plates through to the table.

We didn't get a chance to talk more that evening as we both had homework to finish, and I didn't want to talk about it anyway although Juliette obviously did.

"I can't do it"

"You promised"

"Yeah but that was before anyone knew"

"But nobody does know"

"Juliette does"

"Does not!"

"Does, she told me yesterday"

"Hey Maddie when's your cousin coming again?" Clive interrupted

"Er not sure Clive. Why?"

"She was just such a fox! Purrrr"

My best mate now thought I made a good-looking girl, it was getting worse.

"I'll be sure to let her know you said hi"

"Thanks Mad, you coming Drew?"

"In a minute, catch you up"

"Well its obvious the guys didn't catch on, or anyone else all day yesterday. Is she going to say anything?"

"I dunno, she didn't say she was"

"In that case, unless she does it's still on"

"But Mad" I whined

"No buts, we'll meet tonight as planned, gotta go there's Bernie and Ally"  
With that she was gone.

## Part 6

### Cosplay

I have to admit that I was a bit withdrawn most of the day and my mind kept wandering. A couple of times I found myself reliving the events of Saturday and by the time we kicked out for the day I was pretty wound up. I didn't see much of Rhod but I could guess that he was going through similar turmoil.

Back home and I was seriously contemplating how I could get out of going through with this evening. If Julie had not been in doors I wouldn't have gone, when Bernie knocked on the door, it was sort of the lesser of two evils to go with her.

"Come on Drew, cheer up"

"About what?"

"What's the prob?"

"Maddy tell you about Julie?"

"Course"

"Well I'm just a bit worried whether she'll say anything to anyone, especially mum and dad"

"She won't do that"

"Why not?"

"Well, she sort of told us she wouldn't"

"What! She's talked to you about it?"

"Er yeah, she wanted to chat at lunchtime and she told us about yesterday and what she knew"

"I'm dead"

"Don't be so melodramatic!"

"She's being too nice"

"I thought you guys got on?"

"We do but like this is way off court"

"Anyway, she's coming over later"

"Nooo! I thought this was just going to be us five?"

"Well it is but she said she wants to help"

"It's a plot"

"No it's not"

We were now at Maddy's door and Bernie rang the bell. The others, Ally and Rhod were already there playing on Maddies PS2.

"Hi guys"

"Hi"

"Cheer up Drew I might never happen"

"It already has"

"Come on guys, get with it. Mum says it's ok to go online for a bit and I want to show you some neat stuff"

"I thought we were doing costume stuff?"

"We are" Maddy was really up for this.

Perhaps I should explain a bit here. All five of us like Manga and anime but Maddie is, how can I put it, a fanatic! While the rest of us read the books, watched the videos and horsed about re-enacting our favourite episodes, Maddie really was as deep into it as I was with my bike. Her parents had even taken her to one of those convention things last year, you know where all the weirdo's dress up and stuff. She was obviously at the root of this whole thing, Ally and Bernie were always game for a laugh and so the plot was hatched!

Maddie's PC was in the dining room, so we all went through and while she booted up we dragged chairs round so we could all see the screen. The machine was soon dialling up and as soon as the connection was made Maddie went into favourites and clicked a link.

"This is one of my favourite sites"

"What is it?"

"It's a site devoted to cosplay"

(In case you don't know, cosplay is what the Americans call dressing up, usually for conventions)

The site opened up and greeted us with some Manga illustrations.

"Ok guys, there's links to all kinds of stuff but they've got some great picture galleries from the various conventions"

She clicked on a link and another page came up, a directory of the galleries.

"I thought we could look through the galleries and get some ideas how to do our costumes"

"Cool"

"Could we change costumes do you think?"

"

Well I guess if anyone see's one they really like. As long as it still meets our requirements"

"How about we vote on any changes?"

"Ok, but let's start looking, mum said we could have until seven"

Maddie clicked a link and the first gallery popped up. We worked our way through pages of convention pictures; some of the costumes were really excellent. On the other hand some of the wearers perhaps should have thought a bit more about how they looked! If a costume excited anyone of us, Maddie saved the picture so we could look at them later.

Sheesh! There were a lot of pictures.

We were disturbed just before seven by the doorbell

"I'll get it mum"

"That'll be your sister Drew"

"I guess"

"What's the problem Drew?" Rhod asked

"She knows about Saturday"

"Oh"

It was Rhod's turn to go pale

"Come on guys its not that bad"

Just then Juliette came in with Maddie.

"Hi girls"

"Hi Julie"

"Hi Jules"

"What you doing?"

"Maddie's been showing us some costumes on the web"

"I thought you guys said you'd picked costumes already?"

"We did but there's some well cool ones we've seen"

"I know," Ally opined, "Jules can look at the pictures and pick say ten out, then we can make a final choice"

"That's a good idea"

"I know, to stop arguments from these two, we can then draw lots for the costumes"

"Sounds fair I 'spose" Rhod offered

"Ok," I agreed, "but only if big sis agrees to dress up too"

"Yeah"

"Great"

"Say yes Jules"

I knew Juliette wasn't the greatest fan of Manga in the world but I thought that I had got her now.

"I was going with Charlie and Anna as Charlie's Angels"

"Oh come on Julie, I'm sure they can find someone else"

"Hang on, I'll ring Anna for you"

Maddie rushed off to the phone and we could hear a muffled conversation then "yes". She came back into the dining room.

"Anna said you hadn't decided yet" she accused Juliette

I thought to myself "yes, got her this time". Juliette's face was a picture; she had backed herself into a corner.

"Ok I'll do it, but we all have equal choice"

"Fair enough, lets show you the pictures"

It was clear after about two minutes that this was never going to, even Rhod and myself reluctantly had favourites and we were each trying to influence my sister in her choice.

"Look guys, I can't do this with you all here. Why don't you go and watch TV or something so I can concentrate. Maddy have you got a pen and paper please?"

"Sure Jules, papers on the sides there, pen by the keyboard. You lot next door"

We left big sis to make her selections and Maddy left the rest of us in the lounge while she procured drinks and biscuits. The girls spent the time waiting discussing their favourites while Rhod and I discussed our *least* favourite options from what for us was a complete set of bad options. Juliette, to be fair, didn't really take long to make her selections and called us back to the computer after about twenty minutes.

"Ok people quiet down," we did as bid, "I'm not going to show you my choices, we all pick blind. Can you get a dish please Maddy?"

We waited while Maddy fetched a mixing bowl.

"Right, I've got ten bits of paper," she indicated a handful of paper balls, "they all go in the bowl and then we each pick one. There's a number on each one which refers to a picture, I know which numbers refer to which but if Drew picks for me I can't cheat at all"

"Sheesh you thought of everything there"

"Sounds good"

"You guys ok with this?"

"I guess so sis"

"Rhod?"

"Suppose so Julie"

"Ok then, everyone reach in and take a ball!"

We each in turn put a hand in and retrieved a paper ball until only Jules was left.

"Ok Drew pick me one out and give it to me"

I reached in again and took one of the remaining options and passed it to my sister.

"Right then, every one gets a chance to swap their choice now but this is your last chance. After this you are stuck with what you've drawn. Maddy stick or swap?"

"Stick"

"Bernie?"

"Stick"

"Rhod?"

"Er swap I think"

"Ok then pick another ball then drop the other one in the bowl."  
Rhod selected another bit of paper, then Juliette continued.

"Drew?

"Stick I guess"

"Ally?"

"I'll stick too"

"Well I'm going to swap but I want Rhod to pick for me"

"Ok"

Finally our selections were made

"Lets see what everyone's got, open your papers"

Juliette went back to the PC and got ready to open the pictures

"What are your numbers?"

I replied first

"Six"

"Three" was Bernie's draw

"Four" that was Ally

"I got nine" Rhod told us

"Number one for me, what's yours Jules?"

"Eight"

She clicked the mouse on each picture and our choices sprang up on the screen.

## Part 7

What?

The images that greeted us represented quite a cross section of anime characters, but Jules had also selected costumes that she thought we would actually be able to make.

"Ok, Drew you've got Chi Light"

"Nooo" I groaned, it was a very girlie costume with all sorts of flounces and lace.

"Bernie you've got cat girl Merle"

"Great, that's dead easy!"

"Nina for you Ally"

"Should be a cinch"

"Rhod you will be the lovely Nuriko"

"At least it's not as bad as Drew's"

"Oh good, Maddy you've got Chi Dark, your costume is nearly the same as Drew's but in black"

"I really like Chi, this is great Drew!"

"No it's not, I don't know how you fixed it Julie but I'm sure you did"

"Did not, how could I?"

"Well I dunno but..."

"She didn't fix it Drew, anyway Jules what's yours?"

"I've got Yubi in her wedding dress"

"Cool"



**Drew and Maddy would be Chi light and dark respectively**

"I think yours and mine will be the most difficult Drew"

"You're not kidding, how did I get talked into this? I'll never get away with it"

"Well even if someone spots that it's you, it is a costume party!"

"Yeah and I'll be dressed in lace and stuff!"

"Quite griping Drew, Rhod's costume is really feminine too"

"But not as revealing"



**Bernie would be Merle**



**Ally would be Nina**



**Rhod had landed Nuriko**

"Well at least mines easy, I've got an old beach dress that's the right colour"

"I know the one, that'll be great, mines not difficult either and I don't think yours will be too bad Rhod, we might even be able to borrow a costume for you"

"How come?"

"Well it's pretty much like what they wore in the Gilbert & Sullivan just before Christmas"

"I guess"



**Juliette had Yubi**

"And I can adapt that bridesmaid dress from Auntie Junes wedding, it's pink but it'll do"

"Time for you lot to go home"  
Maddy's mum broke the discussion up just before eight.

"Whatever your plotting will wait till tomorrow"

"Yes mum"

"I'm sure you fixed it"

"Come on Drew, how could I fix it? I even tried to even the odds a bit for you"

"How?"

"Well there were two male characters in the pick list, but no one picked them"

"Well.."

"Look, there could be fall out for me too so I guess we'd all better make sure we do a good job"

"I suppose, what about mum and dad?"

"What about them?"

"Well do we tell them or what"

"Nah, lets keep it between us and your mates unless we really have to tell"

"Ok then. I guess I'll manage"

We didn't get a chance to meet up again until Friday when the girls decided to go shopping in Mansfield for costume material and stuff next day. Rhod had to go visit rel's for the weekend and Saturday I went out with mum for

our regular, (well most weeks anyway) training ride. So it was Monday when we met up again as a group, this time at Ally's house.

I was amazed by what they had already accomplished. Both Bernie and Ally's costumes were nearly finished and Jules' was a good way along. Ally had asked Mr Benson if we could borrow a costume for Rhod and he'd agreed that they could see if there was something suitable on Wednesday lunch break.

Maddy and my costumes were going to take the most work and so far there was just a bag of bits of lace and taffeta. The girls had got the material on the market and had even found a pattern for a skating costume that they could use as a guide. My input was so far was £10 towards materials and frankly I doubted whether I could do much more.

"Look Drew, we've done everything so far, you and Rhod are going to do something towards this"

"Like what? I can't sew" I stated

"Neither can I"

"We know that but we are putting you in charge of accessories"

"Eh?"

"You know, shoes, hats, gloves and stuff"

"We've even made you a list, here Rhod..." Bernie gave him a slip of paper

"You do Ally's staff, my tail and everyone's hair stuff, basically every thing above the waist"

"You Drew get the rest, shoes, tights and stuff" my list was thrust in my hand

"everyone's sizes are on there. You should be able borrow a lot of it but you will have to buy some of it, here's £20, you should be able to get most of it for that"

I looked at the list; it was split by costume and detailed what I had to obtain

'Bernie      flat sandals 4  
                thick tan tights

Ally      blue sandals 6  
                thick black tights

Rhod      flattish shoes or sandals 5  
                white socks or tights

Juliette      white knee boots 6  
tan tights

Drew      white sandals or shoes 5  
white stockings or hold-ups

Maddy      black sandals or shoes 4½  
black stockings or hold-ups'

All the info was there and whilst I thought I knew where I could get some of the footwear, I was going to have to buy most of the hosiery. The look on Julie's face told me not to expect any help from that quarter. It was going to be embarrassing but not too difficult.

"We need the shoes next week but the other stuff isn't essential yet"

"Why do we need the shoes so quick?"

"We need to make sure at least your sister and Rhod's dresses are the right length so you might as well get the rest but I guess they're not so essential as long as we have the boots and flats."

"Now we've got that sorted we need your measurements Drew, so strip"

"Oh no!"

Jules came to my rescue.

"Come on guys, let me take him in the bathroom to do the measuring"

"Ok"

It looked like the next week was going to be interesting.

## **Part 8**

### **Boots and Shoes**

After the humiliation of my sister watching while I stripped to my undies then measuring me, I was ready to call it a day but everyone else thought that Gaby and Pippa could do with some girl lessons.

Well have you ever heard of such tummy rot! Well the girls thought we needed schooling in sitting, standing even eating and drinking so we had our first crash course. (Well strictly speaking second, but our Meadowhall efforts were apparently only just passable in a crowd. We were going to a school dance, which would mean closer scrutiny by our peers.)

So we spent another hour learning how to do it properly.

"Well I think you need to practice"

"A lot!"

"Cheers, thanks for the vote of confidence"

"Well you want us to be honest"

"And you don't want the rest of the school clocking you!"

"I guess"

"Well both of you need to practice as much as possible"

We both chorused "yes miss" which got us each a whack with a cushion.

"Ow that hurt!"

"Sorry"

I grabbed my left ear

"That really hurt," I felt something hard in the lobe, "what's this?"

Maddy leant in to take a look.

"Erm, hang on"

"Ouch!"

"Let's look at your other ear"

"Why?"

"Just do it"

Maddy squeezed the right lobe and it felt like a spot bursting.

"What is it?"

Jules and Maddy shared a smug grin.

"Well?"

"You remember I put those studs in at Meadowhall?"

"Yes" I could feel bad news coming.

"Well I must have left the plastic keepers in when I took them out"

"My ears are pierced!"

"Er sorry Drew"

"Mum will go ballistic"

"Did she notice up to now?"

"No"

"Well she probably won't now then"

"But they will heal over wont they?"

"Not now, they've healed"

"You'll look so cute"

"I don't want to look cute!"

What was even worse was that Mum wouldn't let Juliette have her ears pierced yet and of the others only Maddy had hers done.

In a way I thought it was cool to have pierced ears, a lot of the older guys wore earrings, and if anyone noticed at school I might gain a bit of sadly lacking street cred. Mum was the real problem but Ally was probably right, if she hadn't noticed yet she likely wouldn't soon.

We left for home soon after and I mooched along beside my sister.

"You knew didn't you?"

"What?"

"The sleepers"

"Did not"

"Come on, fess up, you cleaned them up the other Sunday, you must have known"

"Ok I knew"

"Well?"

"Well what?"

"Why didn't you take them out?"

"I don't know, I thought you'd work it out yourself and then I just forgot"

"I bet"

"I did, honest"

I sulked the rest of the way home.

I'm sure someone had said something at school next day, I kept getting funny looks from some of the other girls in our year. Whatever.

I decided to get a head start on the shoe thing after school.

I pulled out the list

'Bernie	flat sandals 4 thick tan tights
Ally	blue sandals 6 thick black tights
Rhod	flattish shoes or sandals 5 white socks or tights
Juliette	white knee boots 6 tan tights
Drew	white sandals or shoes 5 white stockings or hold-ups
Maddy	black sandals or shoes 4½ black stockings or hold-ups'

I was sure that the girls already had some of this stuff but it was going to be up to me to pull it all together. A test I suppose.

I mentally went through what I had seen people wearing, I had some sandals that Bernie could wear and I was certain that either Rhod or myself could borrow something from Jules. The hosiery was another matter. Jules I knew did have some tan tights but as I had only seen the girls wearing socks, I thought that I would need to buy the rest. I decided to ring round to see if anyone had anything on my list and my list soon didn't look so daunting.

'Bernie	<del>flat sandals 4</del> my sandals thick tan tights
Ally	blue sandals 6 <del>thick black tights</del> Ally's
Rhod	<del>flattish shoes or sandals 5</del> Jules white socks or tights
Juliette	white knee boots 6 <del>tan tights</del> Jules
Drew	white sandals or shoes 5 white stockings or hold-ups
Maddy	<del>black sandals or shoes 4½</del> Bernies mum black stockings or hold-ups'

So I had cut the list to three pairs of shoes and four pairs of hosiery – and so far I hadn't had to go to a shop. There was a Baker day (Staff training, after

the politician who introduced them) at our School on Friday so I planned to go to Mansfield and get it over and done with.

Each night, my sister chided me to practice ‘my moves’, which I ungraciously did when the olds weren’t about. Friday was not going to be quite as planned, the others all wanted to meet up so instead of all day I would just have a couple of hours in the morning before we met at BK. I got the eight fifty bus armed with the girls twenty pounds and another thirty of my own (you never know what you might see) and sat in a daydream until we pulled into the bus station.

(For those not up on their UK geography, Mansfield is a small town on the edge of what remains of Sherwood Forest, like home to Robin Hood! Where I live is on the edge of the forest too. Mansfield is famous, at least locally, for beer and more widely leather, the Oak Forest providing essential tanning ingredients. So it’s not surprising that there are more than a couple of shoe shops in town including a couple of discount stores.)

I decided on a strategy, I would only buy one pair of shoes per shop, it would be easier to say they were a present, particularly if I needed to change any. The hosiery I would try to get in one of the bigger stores where I would be less conspicuous.

There was a flaw in my plan, I hadn’t allowed for shop assistants. I went into the first shop and rather self-consciously went to the girls department.

“Can I help you”

“Wh..!”

“Are you looking in the right place?”

“Oh right, yes I’m looking for a pair of shoes for my sister. For a present” my nervousness was clear to anyone watching the exchange.

“That’s a nice idea young man, do you know what style and size you are looking for?”

She’d bought my story. I decided to go for Ally’s blue sandals first.

“Well she takes a six, I checked this morning and I know she really wants some blue sandals”

“Hmm, we might have something up in the ladies department, follow me” I followed, what else with a command like that.

“Here we go, size six”

She shuffled along the shelf and returned brandishing a couple of shoes.

"You're in luck, these are both in the sale"

She showed me the footwear; the first pair was going to be a no-no, a high heel and sky blue. I quite liked them but the reality was they'd look good on mum but Ally was thirteen and I just knew they would be wrong. The others, by default would have to do; I didn't intend going back and forth like a girl to get just the right pair. The second pair was a pair of slip ons with a chunky sole and were a darker blue, much closer to Ally's costume. Even better they were really cheap, just four pounds.

"Mum won't let her wear heels so it will have to be these"

"Ok luv, let's pay for them"

She escorted me to the cash point and I was soon relieved of the cash but up one pair of shoes.

"Hope she likes them luv"

"Yeah so do I"

Once outside I drew a sigh of relief. I figured I would try the big discount store next, they had fewer staff and I could browse easier. I made my way to the store, on the edge of the main shopping area and entered 'The World of Shoes'.

I had to get my shoes and Juliette's boots, both white and looking round not this season's colour! But my luck was holding I found some off white knee boots with a chunky sole and I guess about a two-inch heel. After a bit of a scrabble through the stock I found a pair in the required size six and I would only have to pay nine ninety-nine as they were an end of line. I should have just got the boots but I decided to see if they had any shoes, after all I could get them on another visit.

The only white shoes well strictly cream, were wedding shoes, well that's what the header board said. I was probably lingering a little too long because in a store devoid of sales assistants, one was suddenly at my shoulder uttering that great starter.

"Can I help?"

If I ran I would have to abandon the boots, I was sure I could bluff my way out.

"Er I'm not sure"

"Are you looking for anything in particular"

I'm sure that they all go on the same course or something. Before I realised what I was saying it was out,

"I need to get some shoes for a dance"

"What colour is your dress"

What?

"Eh?"

"What colour dress are you going to wear miss?"

Then it clicked, despite my combats sweatshirt and short haircut she thought I was a girl. Mixed emotions roiled around my head

"I'm not.." she cut me off

"Not sure yet?"

I decided to roll with it.

"No, I mean yes, it's sort of off white"

"Heels?"

Not getting her meaning I just nodded.

"I'm Sarah,"

"Gaby" I mumbled, deciding to play along for now.

"Just sit over there, I'll bring some over for you to try."

Slightly stunned at this turn of events I just followed her instruction. She was kneeling in front of me just a minute later.

"Shoes off please," seeing my socks she hardly broke stride, "hang on I'll get some footies so you can try them properly"

She disappeared for a minute and I was left sat bare foot in the ladies shoe department, help! What if anyone from school sees me? Well she reappeared and slipped a pair of thin sockettes on my feet.

"Now then Gaby, how about these?"

Well to cut a long story short, for nearly three quarters of an hour I tried on shoe after shoe, Sarah seemed to take me as just another awkward (as in clumsy) teen girl and she was some sales woman. I think I managed quite well, putting my girl lessons to use and I left the store thirty pounds lighter, but that did include Jules boots and a pair of very fine pearl coloured stockings, besides my shoes. I settled on a closed toe sandal, they have a pointy toe, open vamp and thin ankle straps perching on a three-inch heel. Sarah insisted I would be ok on them and they were essential if it was a formal dance. (Well that's what she told me and who am I to argue?)

"Bye Gaby, have a nice time"

"Thanks Sarah, bye"

Had I really spent best part of an hour as a convincing girl, well tomboy anyway? If this kept up I'd be thinking I could pull this escapade off!



**Jules boots**

**My 'dancing' shoes**

Well I can tell you, I was glad to get out of there alive. I hurried back into the centre and had to grab a coke at Maccy D's to settle my nerves. Surely I didn't look that much like a girl? But Sarah seemed to think so; perhaps it was just the setting? After all I was holding a pair of ladies boots, stood looking at ladies shoes. I was well shaken up.

With resources dwindling, I hit an ATM and withdrew another twenty before starting to look for the remainder of my list, thick tan tights for Bernie, white for Rhod and black stockings for Maddy. Walking along I was drawn to a costume shops window, all gaudy wigs and false noses. I decided to take a look inside and to my delight discovered they had a bargain bin that I delved into with gusto. I left the store with the two pairs of tights I needed, a false nose and on impulse, a pair of long pink hair braids.

That only left the black stockings and I reckoned I could get those in Woolworth's before meeting the others. I was right, and they were cheap, emboldened by my time in the shoe store I got a bag of pick'n'mix and waited

to pay. I was slightly annoyed when the bored cashier didn't even glance up as she rang my purchases through the till.

"There he is"

"Drew, over here"

The others had already got a table and food before I got to BK; I dumped my bags and went to fetch a bacon double cheese and coke.

"What you got Drew?"

"The last things on my list"

"You've got everything?" Bernie asked

"Let's see then"

So to my embarrassment I had to do a show and tell sat in Burger King.

"Ally's sandals, Jules boots, my shoes"

"Cute shoes Drew"

"Let him be"

"What else?"

I flourished the hosiery, braids and false nose.

"You got stockings?"

"Yeah?"

"I think he's getting to like the idea of being a girl"

"What?"

"Well those braids and the stockings, they're sooo sexy"

"Did you get suspender belts?"

"Eh"

"Well like duh, you need something to hold the stockings up, garters or suspenders"

"I thought they had elastic or something"

"That's hold ups silly"

"I don't think he knew the difference"

"I guess we'll have to get some suspenders then"

I had mucked up big style. The girls almost had to drag Rhod and I to the lingerie shop, but they failed to get us inside! However they managed to keep the embarrassment level up by bringing various bits of female underwear to the door to show us. I don't know why I stayed there, why I was doing this whole thing, I suppose I was sort of enjoying it all and I guess Rhod was too. After all how many of our peers got to hang out with some of the nicest girls and do stuff with them?

Eventually the three girls (Jules was hanging with her own mate's back in the village) made their selections and joined us outside. Rhod suggested we went bowling and everyone agreed, so we hit the Superbowl for a couple of hours. Boy's v girls, I have to admit I was glad when Paul turned up as Rhod and I were losing badly. We just about pulled it even for a draw by the end of the session, then gladly accepted a lift in Paul's mum's Toyota Previa. I managed to get Maddy to claim my shopping when we got back to Church Warsop and Paul, Rhod and I went round to Clive's bungalow to play on his X-Box.

Saturday followed it's usual pattern, a ride up to Tickhill with mum, tea and hot buttered teacakes at Oldcotes and then back home. An afternoon catching up with my homework then off to Worksop for dinner at the Beefeater restaurant. Sunday had me out with Mum again, meeting the others at Lincoln for lunch. We had a walk round before we all piled into the camper to go home, there was a really strong wind and neither mum nor I relished crossing the flat Trent plain into the gale. I might be fanatical but I'm not stupid!

## **Part 9**

### **First Fitting**

I was not looking forward to Monday night at all. Friday's shopping trip hadn't been so bad although I was still a little piqued that the girl in the shoe shop thought that *I* was a girl! My male ego was still taking a bashing over that and my tormentors when I told them thought it was a hoot! School was a drag, not that I'm exactly Einstein, but I do usually get good grades, maybe it was my distraction with the dress (ing).

Of course all of our parents knew that we were going to the dance in costumes, they just didn't know what Rhod and I were dressing as. Just as well I guess. As mum was going to a meeting in Clowne, she volunteered to chauffeur Jules and myself to Bernie's house in Meden Vale and she would pick us up on the way back.

"So what are you two going to the disco as?"

"It's not a disco mum"

"Well *dance* then"

"We're all going as characters from different Manga stories" Jules explained.

"What's that?"

"Well it's like Japanese comics and cartoons"

"Like those videos Drew and his friends are always watching"

"Yes, but we're not always watching them!"

"So you're helping with the costumes, Juliette?"

"Well I said I would, as I can use a sewing machine quite well, it would take forever if this lot were doing it" she pointed a thumb at me over her shoulder.

"Here we are, tell Mrs Rose that I'll pick you up about nine as long as the meeting doesn't run over. Have fun"

We got out of the camper with our bags of material etc and waited while mum turned it round at the end of the cul-de-sac before we went to knock on Bernie's door. Mum waited until the door was open before she pipped the horn and drove off.

"Hi Bernie"

"Hi Drew, ah great Jules you brought the material. Rhod's just trying his costume on and Ally's helping mum with the drinks."

"I need to speak to your mum" Jules put in.

"They're in the kitchen" which she indicated to my sis.

"Where's Mad?"

"Oh she rang to say she'd be a bit late. Come on we've got the conservatory to ourselves, when is your mum collecting you?"

"About nine she said"

"Great we should get most of it done then"

"I thought there was loads to do?"

"Well Rhod's got his costume, mine just needs a couple of bits adding, and Ally only needs to make her cape."

"That still leaves three costumes"

"True but your sister's dress only needs a little bit of work, it's you and Maddy that we need to work on tonight"

Just then Ally and Juliette came in with the refreshments.

"Hi Ally"

"Hi Drew, Bernie you're mum want's you"

Bernie went to find her mum and Jules took control.

"Rhod will be out in a minute," (he was getting changed in the downstairs bathroom) "we'll check out what needs doing to his costume then we'll start on you and Maddy Drew"

We heard the doorbell go and we could hear Maddy and Bernie exchanging greetings before coming into the conservatory.

"Hi guys"

"Hi Mad"

"Hi Maddy"

"Where's Rhod?"

"Here"

We all looked to the doorway where the sight of Rhod sort of wearing his costume greeted us.

"Get in here and shut the door" Bernie motioned him in.

"I think you need some help Rhod"

"No kidding"

He had the kimono on but the sash and overjacket were in a mess and the Adidas trainers didn't really go either. The girls fussed around him and soon had the clothing in order; I located the shoes in one of many carrier bags and in short order the costume was looking pretty good.

Juliette, as senior seamstress, took control and quickly pinned the hem and a couple of other bits to make it fit better then sent Rhod to change again admonishing him to not dislodge any pins.

"Ally can you do Rhod's alterations when he gets back?"

"Ok"

"Maddy did you cut out the patterns for you and Drew?"

"Yeah, mum helped me"

"In that case can you and Bernie do the cutting and pinning on yours and Drew can help me with his"

"Ok"

"Come on then"

The next half an hour or so saw frenetic activity from everyone. Rhod returned and whilst Ally made the alterations he set about sorting out everyone's 'accessories' into separate piles, shoes, hosiery, hairpieces where appropriate as well as Ally's staff and Bernie's tail.

"When you guys have finished tacking that I'll machine it up here then you can do the fitting during the week. I'll do Drew's first it won't take long, as it's quite simple really."

"What about this Jules, I've nearly finished" Ally proffered Rhod's costume.

"Rhod you need to try it on again to make sure it's ok then Ally, you could finish your cape off"

"Ok"

"Come on Drew, I need your help with this"

Rhod returned in costume again and Jules gave it the ok so he quickly departed to change back again. So we all set too again and as good as her word, Jules soon had my costume machined up just in time to start on Maddy's now ready more complicated affair.

"Right Drew, go and put it on, I'll send Rhod in to help you zip up in about five minutes ok?"

With heavy heart I replied "ok"

I took the proffered garment and went out to the Rose's downstairs loo to change. I wasn't happy about this but I was stuck with it I guess. I stripped to my y-fronts and socks and then tried to work out how to put this alien garment on. I had just got it up to my waist when there was a knock followed by.

"Drew, its me"

Rhod. I unlocked the door and made sure it was locked again after he was in.

"Nice colour Drew"

"Whatever"

I was not happy about the colour, it was if anything a pinky cream and seemed even more girlie than white would. I managed to get my arms into the frilly sleeves and Rhod zipped me up.

"Whoa dude, that dress is short!"

No kidding. I knew it would be shortish but this was ridiculous. If I so much as moved from the vertical my underwear would be on display!

"I can't wear this, it's far too short!"

"Maddy's will be the same"

"I know but she's a girl"

"So?"

"Well, she doesn't have my bits. Everyone will see me. This is ridiculous."

"Ok but we have to show the others"

"I guess"

"I'll make sure Bernie's parents aren't about then you make a dash for the back room"

Rhod undid the door and checked that the coast was clear, the last thing I wanted was to be caught in a dress, especially this one, by Bernie's parents.

"Come on, it's clear"

I launched myself across the corridor to the conservatory leaving Rhod to bring my boys clothing and turn off the lights. I arrived just in time to see Maddy finishing putting on her own costume.

"Wow Drew, that is just so excellent!"

"I can't wear it Jules, it's too short"

"No shorter than mine" Maddy interjected.

It was true. Although the skirt of Maddy's costume was less full than mine it was the same length and her outfit threatened to show even more than mine did.

"Yeah but you're a girl"

"What's that s'posed to mean?"

"Well," I had to admit I was floundering on this a bit, "you're used to it". I knew as I said it that that was rubbish. I had never seen any of the girls in anything shorter than above the knee except shorts and both our costumes were well above that level.

"Look Drew, it's a costume. It's a sort of parody of what the characters would wear if they were real. It's sort of an idealised version."

"Come on Drew be a sport"

I was starting; well that's not strictly true, I was getting an even more uncomfortable feeling about this whole thing. Dressing up with mum at Christmas was one thing; this was taking me to places I'd rather not visit.

"Look Drew, no ones going to see anything, I've got some frilly tennis panties you can wear and no one will know that you've got more than the average girl" Bernie ended her statement in her Yogi bear voice!

Well that had even me laughing.

"Drew you promised you'd do it"

"That was before I got the costume"

"But it's only a costume, we all see more of you when we have swimming"

She had me there but I had to try anyway.

"But that's different"

"How so?" asked Ally.

"Well.."

"Drew, the dress covers far more of you than your trunks and with Bernie's tennis briefs no one will ever see your bits"

"I guess"

"Anyway you look really cute"

"I do not look cute!"

"If you say so brother mine, but with the wig and everything no ones going to think you look anything but like a cute girl."

"If you look cute Drew, no one will guess it's you"

I guess there was some twisted logic there.

"Damn, mum'll be here in a few minutes. Drew go and change, I can do the alterations at home. Are you alright doing yours Maddy?"

"Yeah fine, mum will help if I need it"

"Our place next week ok?"

"Fine, same time?"

"Yeah, the olds are going out so we won't be disturbed. Everyone bring your costumes so we can do any final changes in good time. Rhod can you give everyone their bag of stuff?"

Rhod sorted through the bags and gave everyone their stuff.

"I'll bring the other bits on Monday, it's not all finished yet"

Did I mention that Rhod is a perfectionist? Or that he got the wig job because his mum runs a hair salon in the village.

Timing is everything. I had literally just finished doing up my shoes when mum pipped her horn outside.

"Anyone want a lift back?" Jules was asking as I got back to the conservatory. I should explain, Meden Vale is next door to Church Warsop but it's quite a walk from my house, well over a mile. All the others lived somewhere between the Bond and Rose household's so it wasn't usually a problem as we most often met at Maddy or Ally's home.

"Please" Maddy replied

"Dad will be here for me in a few minutes and he'll give Rhod a lift" Ally stated.

"Ok, see you tomorrow"

Mrs Rose came out to see us out and used it as an excuse for five minutes gossip with mum.

We dropped Maddy and her bags off and drove on home.

"When do I get to see your costumes?"

I started to panic.

"They're not ready yet mum" Juliette replied

"Yeah and we want to surprise everyone at the dance so we don't want anyone to see them before then." I didn't want anyone to see mine anyway!

"Ok, ok, I'm sure they will be really good, are you entering the competition?"

"What competition?"

"The fancy dress silly"

Oh no, not more chance of embarrassment.

"We thought we'd enter as a group mum" my sister was full of surprises.

"That's a good idea"

"Well I know a few others that are going to do the same, I think Paul and Clive, Drew's mates, are entering as Batman and Robin"

It was news to me and it would no doubt be news to them, they weren't exactly party people!

The conversation moved onto other things and once home I headed straight off to my room and bed.

I couldn't sleep. All I could think of was the brevity of my costume and the fact that I would have to wear it out in public in less than three weeks. It was all right for Rhod, his costume covered nearly all of him and although it was obviously a girls costume it was at least more 'normal'. Mine on the other hand would stand out if one of the girls were wearing it let alone a conscript girl like me!

You might think I skip a lot of the week in my narratives, but do you really want to hear about double geography, religious education and maths? For five days! Thought not, I certainly don't want to relive them! And I suppose you want to know why we don't do much the rest of the week after school? Homework! We all get tons and Monday is the only night we don't get at least two hours worth. It's not just me and my mates, but most of the kids in school do the same.

Anyway, for a change, the rest of the week seemed to go quickly and the weekend was upon us once more. Saturday would be my racing debut for this year and I guess the excitement of that helped speed the week along. A new season for any sportsman usually means at least some new kit and I was not to be denied! As I often rode the tandem with mum it meant that mum had to have new too, so we both had new skinsuits in our club's white, red and yellow strip and I had also wangled a new pair of yellow track mitts.

As we were racing in the afternoon, there was no Saturday morning ride, instead I was instructed to do that most hateful of jobs – cleaning my bike. Mum and dad for that matter always maintained that there was no excuse for a dirty race bike. It was they claimed physiological too, if your bike was all shiny and bright, it lifted you and got to those who were less well prepared. I don't know whether it worked on that level but it did mean I found the glass in my back tyre in time for dad to change it for me.

Although dad wasn't a hard case cyclist like me and mum, he maintains all the family bikes and I reckon he could get a job doing it if he wanted to. Even Juliette took an interest in watching the races, although I'm sure it was partly to ogle all the Lycra clad bodies taking part rather than the sport itself! Today I was doing a schoolboy circuit race near Lincoln, mum was going to ride the senior event. I better explain that at Christmas, it was actually a time trial

against the clock rather than your Tour de France, whereas today it man, or rather boy against boy in earnest combat!



I was really proud of my new skinsuit but my helmet is looking a bit sorry for itself.

You don't want a blow by blow account do you? The highlights were that it was a nice afternoon but as the race was on an exposed airfield perimeter road, the wind was a problem. But the good news for me was that I won my age group and finished 5<sup>th</sup> overall, which meant a prize of enough record tokens to buy the new 'Avril Levine' CD.

Mum did even better. Much to the men's chagrin, she managed to win the sprint for second place after the favourite had made his escape a couple of laps before. Did I mention that mum has ridden for Britain? I guess she intends to again if today was anything to go by!

## **Part 10**

### **Dress Rehearsal**

After yesterdays exertions mum decided that we would have a 'family' day. In parent speak that means we were going on a family outing whether we liked it or not, usually to somewhere we weren't keen to go. But surprise, this time it wasn't so bad. Dad drove us up to York but only after mum and I had done an hour's training ride around some of the north Nottinghamshire lanes.

I like York. It only took a little over an hour from home and the olds had decided we would 'do' the Jorvik experience so we headed straight there. For anyone who doesn't know, Jorvik is history brought to life with animatronics and you ride round in little carts. Everywhere seems to have one these days, Robin Hood in Nottingham is much the same. The other thing is that you usually queue for ages but we timed it just right getting there just before the coach load of scouts and the WI outing!

I won't describe it in any detail – if you want that look it up on the web or visit yourself! We all really enjoyed it, even historyphobic Juliette. Afterwards we visited Clifford's tower, I was getting vertigo just climbing up to the gate but it was worth the effort. A late lunch was next on the agenda; we found a café near The Shambles, which supplied a reasonable meal without breaking the bank. (At least I presume the latter, mum and dad didn't argue over what we could eat anyway.)

After eating, dad suggested we walk round part of the city walls, which was fun although by the time we climbed back down to ground level it was getting to be a chore stopping to let parties of obnoxious French students past. Mum then insisted that we go to the Minster to see the famous stained glass windows. Our family although nominally Church of England is not religious, I guess most of my visits to ecclesiastic buildings are like this one. That's to say short.

Anyway afterwards we had a walk through the shops and back to the car to head home.

All the activity over the weekend hadn't given me much opportunity to fret over costumes and stuff; it was Juliette later that evening who brought the subject up.

"Drew we need to finish your costume tonight"

"I guess"

"Bring your stuff to my room and you can change so I can see what needs doing"

I was resigned to it but an excellent weekend meant it couldn't dampen my spirits too much. I fetched the bag that Rhod had given me and crossed the landing to Juliette's room.

"Good. Bernie gave me the tennis panties on Friday so you can put them on and you'll see how much you show"

"Are you gonna stand there watching me?"

"Sorry, I'll just go get us a sandwich, corned beef ok?"

"With pickle?"

"Ok, won't be long."

I waited until she had shut the door then shucked my jeans and t-shirt. I found Bernie's tennis pants and pulled them up over my own underwear. This was just so gross! I took my Chii costume off the hanger that my sister had it on and shrugged it into place. I tried the zip but couldn't get it more than an inch up. Jules chose that moment to return, making me jump when she pushed the door open.

"Jeez Jules, you could have warned me, I thought it was mum"

"Sorry but my hands are full"

She proffered a plate of sandwiches to me that I took and put on her dresser.

"Grab these drinks and I'll lock the door"

The drinks followed the food to the dresser.

"Ok, let's zip you up, turn around"

I did and she did.

"This is really pretty good for fit" she tugged and pulled a bit, "I don't think we really need to do much"

"Can I take it off yet?" I hadn't had it on for ten minutes yet and I was feeling exposed and uncomfortable, that is uncomfortable to be wearing it, it was actually a nice fit.

"Not yet, I want you to put your shoes on and have a practice walking in it."

"Must I?"

"Yes, last time you were worried about people seeing your bits so lets have a look."

Embarrassed doesn't come into it. I lifted the skirt so she could see my underwear.

"Let go then spin round"

I followed my sister's direction.

"Those knickers do a good job but you won't be able to wear your y-fronts underneath at the dance"

"Why not"

"Well I can see them, that means other people will and secondly girls don't wear y-fronts!"

"I can't just wear these" I indicated the frilly pants.

"I agree. I know, those panties we got you at Christmas are still in the cupboard you can wear them underneath"

"I suppose so"

"No suppose, you will"

She sounded just like mum when she said that.

"Ok put your shoes on and walk up and down a bit, you'll need these"

She gave me a pair of sheer knee-highs. I recalled my experience at the shoe shop, pulling the thin hose on I felt a strange sort of excitement. The shoes slipped on easily and I did the delicate buckle up on each ankle strap. When I looked up Juliette had put her costume on and was just fastening the zip.

"Can you finish the zip for me?"

"Ok"

The last time I had seen her in the dress was at Auntie Madge's wedding last year when she was a bridesmaid. It was subtly different now, the cowl neck was gone and the front was sort of ruched up so you could see her legs. She fetched the boots I had bought for her and suddenly there was Yubi.

"Now walk"

It felt a lot different walking around in this outfit to the costume at Christmas. That at least came nearly to my knees, now I had flounces tickling the top of my thighs as I walked back and forth. The heels made me walk differently too, smaller steps and slower too. Jules was walking about too, she wasn't used to the clumpy soles on the boots and mum didn't let her wear heels very often either.

"That's enough for now, I'll just finish putting the bows on then your costumes done"

"Hooray" I muttered under my breath. My feelings regarding this whole thing were still pretty negative; at least it would be over in a couple of weeks.

Monday was as bad as usual. I asked Clive if he and Paul were going to the dance and was surprised at the answer.

"Yeah we most certainly are"

"S'not like you two"

"Yeah well, Maddy said that her cousin was coming"

Mad hadn't said anything about anyone else joining us. Seeing my questioning look Clive went on.

"You know, that one I told you about the other week at Meadowhall, Gaby and I think her mate Pippa's coming too"

My heart sank. Here was Clive one of my best mates just about telling me that he had a crush on Gaby! I tried to change the subject.

"What are you two going as then?"

"Dana, nana nana nana Batman! And Paul's gonna be Robin"

So it was true and apparently Rhod and I were being set up by the girls. Just then the bell for assembly went halting any further enquiry. Our school has a full assembly on Monday's but the rest of the week it alternated between upper and lower school. So Monday's were always a crush as 1200 students tried to each claim their own patch of floor.

As usual the deputy head, Mrs Johnson, read the notices before the choir entertained us for five minutes. Then, as usual, Mr Wood our Headmaster took over to give us his wisdom on this weeks pressing issue litter. Finally came the traditional sports results, the success or otherwise of the various football, hockey and netball teams. After the main teams were covered, the 'minority' sports got a mention, the chess tournament and the schools new basketball team. Then much to my surprise I heard my name mentioned.

Apparently someone had leaked my Saturday success to the Head. Of course everyone turned to look at me and I found myself turning a nice bright crimson.

This Monday was going to be different to usual. During the day I even had one or two kids congratulate me on my riding, weird. Clive's revelation kept coming up as I stumbled through the days itinerary. I was going to have to cancel now, there was no way I was going to be Gaby ever again!

The others got our house together just after six, mum had ordered us pizza and that was obviously the first order of business.

"I'm not doing it and I don't think Rhod should either"

"What?"

"Why"

"Well I was talking to Clive this morning and I think he fancies me. And from what he said Paul seems to like Rhod too."

"Whoa, you mean they're both Homo's?"

"You'd never know"

I realised I had missed a bit out here.

"No not me and Rhod, Gaby and Pippa"

"Well that's ok then"

"No it's not Ally. I do not want my mates fancying me"

"Hey it's a real compliment, I mean they must have both liked what they saw week"

"That's regardless. And Maddy, you told them to go to the dance to see us" I accused.

"Well I did sort of let slip that Pippa and Gaby would be there. And I thought that it would help with your cover"

"How so?" Rhod asked

"Well you suddenly appear and people ask about you, a lot. You appear and people already know you and suddenly you have camouflage, no one asks the wrong questions."

"She's right you know" Juliette put in.

Thinking about it I could see some logic, but I was still not happy.

"Well I'll still do it" Rhod opined.

"We knew you would Rhod, its scaredy pants Drew"

"Look I never wanted to do this, you all hounded me into it" I knew I had really talked myself into the situation.

"Did not!"

"Well, I don't like doing it but I suppose I'll go along with it"

"Now we've got that sorted, " Juliette took control, "lets get these costumes on. Drew, you and Rhod use your room and we'll use my room. Meet down here in half an hour."

We trooped off to get changed.

As it was a full dress rehearsal so to speak, that meant we had to put everything on, in my case that meant the stockings and suspender belt as well as girls panties. I managed to get it all on but I couldn't work out how the suspenders worked.

When I got to the lounge, Ally was already there, so I got my stockings sorted out after re routing the suspenders under my panties. Boy did I feel stupid! However when the rest of the girls arrived they all commented on how good I looked.



I still looked like me, but me in a very short dress! And I had to admit that I did look a little cute. Yeagh!

"Drew, you forgot to put your wig on"

"I'll do it for you" Mad volunteered, "come on into the kitchen and sit down."

Using her own experience with the hairpiece, she soon had it in place covering my dirty blonde hair with the lighter long hair. Then she added the hairband and earpieces.



"God, with some makeup you'll look really hot!"

"Thanks, I really need to look hot, I've already got Clive drooling over me!"

We reassembled in the front room and my sister took over again.

"Let's check that everyone has everything"

We all looked our friends over to discover any obvious omissions from our costumes.

"Bernie, you need some stripes"

"I know, Ally's going to paint some on next week, I didn't think it worth it for tonight"

"You need a money pouch Rhod"

"I've got one he can use" Ally offered

"I guess we're all set then"

"Do you know how much like twins you and Maddy look Drew?"

That's all I needed to hear!

"Cool"

"Perhaps they really are, separated at birth!"

"Give over" I was blushing for the second time today.

"The guys need to practice dancing, especially Drew in those shoes"

"Yeah great idea, remember last time"

That brought chuckles from the girls and embarrassed looks from Rhod and i.

I was doomed. Jules selected a few Cd's while the rest of us moved furniture for a makeshift dance floor. We spent until eight o'clock practising our dance moves, including to my chagrin that peculiar girls thing of group moves, you know, sort of like line dancing but really just short set pieces. Aargh!

We got changed back into civvies before my olds got back and the guys left for home. What a day, I was whacked.

## **Part 11**

### **Dance Away**

At least with the costumes all but sorted I could turn my thoughts back to the rest of my life. With the longer evenings came the opportunity to go out my bike for a couple of short rides before hitting the books. My next race was coming up on Sunday all the way down in Surrey! So we were going to be away all weekend, mum had a race on Saturday as well as one on Sunday so it was going to be a full weekend.

The run up to the weekend was uneventful, I hung with Clive and Paul mostly, but whenever I saw the girls they were whispering about the dance.

We left for the south coast as soon as Jules and I got home; we would eat on the way down. The trip was a bore! Heavy traffic and nothing but other traffic to look at. Dad decided to go via Oxford and on down to Southampton where we finally left the motorways for the short run to the campsite on the edge of the New Forest. It was almost ten when we finally parked up and all four of us were pooped and ready for bed.

Saturday turned out to be one of those sharp but bright spring days with hardly a cloud in sight. We all had our bikes so the plan was that dad would take us kids for a ride round before going to the circuit to watch mum's race. Mum would take the camper to the race HQ where we would all meet up afterwards. I just knew it was going to be a good day!

The race was sixty miles on a circuit based at Brockenhurst, in a week's time there would be so many tourists about it would be impossible to run the event. By riding against the race and cutting across the circuit we would see mum six times before the finish. Each time we saw the race pass, mum was mixing it at the front, our team strip easily identifying her from the local riders. We cheered her enthusiastically and as she is fairly well known we heard some other spectators cheering her too.

We got the finish area with just enough time to lock our bikes up and get to the barriers. I would be lying if I said there was a big crowd but there were plenty more than you ever see at minor league football matches. The commentator was giving us the low down on who was leading and so on and mum was up there!

The lead car caromed around the last corner and as it pulled off the road we could see the flurry of bright jerseys and shiny bikes hurtling down the road towards us. Know I know from personal experience that you are concentrating too much at this stage to really hear the cheering but we screamed ourselves hoarse for mum.

And then suddenly there she was on the opposite side, pedalling like a demon as she came past the slower riders. The local favourite thought she'd got the win but mum timed it to perfection to edge her by half a wheel! We heard the expected mutterings of the local supporters and a few comments that were a bit friendlier, "she's making a comeback", "first time Tina's been beaten in nearly a year!" (Tina was the local favourite).

To say mum was elated would be something of an understatement. When it came to the prize presentation Jules and I proudly flanked mum as she waited to be called. Although we knew that in the past mum was a world class rider, this was the first time we had seen her actually win in the flesh rather than on video. Despite their own ace having lost out, the crowd were generous in their applause and cheering and mum was pretty made up, so much her winners speech lasted just about ten seconds!

It was still fairly early and rather than watch the following men's race we elected to visit the National Motor Museum at Beaulieu just a few miles away. Our trip south was turning out to be rather good. We marvelled at the old cars, the prototypes, even old bikes, mum enjoyed the gardens and Jules and I had a go on the quad bikes that were a 'visiting' attraction. We had dinner in a restaurant in Lymington and afterwards watched the Isle of Wight ferry arrive and depart before returning to the campsite.

Our races on Sunday were on the famous Goodwood circuit on the edge of the downs and as they started at ten we had to make a reasonably early start. As this was a closed circuit there was no 'circuit riding' allowed so while mum and I variously prepared for our events, dad and Jules went for a walk to find a good vantage point. The day was bright but the wind off the sea was quite brisk up on top of the hill.

My event was first and I was surprised how hard the circuit was. I managed to stay with the main group but when it came to the final gallop for the line I lost out to local knowledge and finished an exhausted twelfth.

For mum's race, most of yesterday's riders lined up with a few more from further afield, but mum was the only rider from north of London. I found the rest of the family and we cheered mum every lap and there were thirty of them! We made our way to the finish a couple of laps before the end and watched the now denuded field rush up the tarmac. There was a clash of bikes and several riders crashed out, but there was mum safe from harm just behind Tina who was determined not to be beaten again.

Mum had other thoughts and her experience again showed as the two battled to the line, this time mum's final lunge getting the win by just a tyre, so close that the photo finish was needed. Mum really was back.

Mum was a bit more composed on the podium today and just like mum, her greatest adversary this weekend Tina got a hug. This weekend was sure to

get mum noticed, but quite what impact it would have we could never have foreseen.

As we had a long drive home and it was school tomorrow, we left almost straight off for the drive back to Nottinghamshire, which at least in daylight, was a bit more interesting.

Monday and the Easter dance was just a few days off on Friday, which was also the last day of term. The change in atmosphere at school was palpable. It was Maddy's turn to be hostess again this week; Rhod had to duck his duties due to some parental thing. At least tonight could be more like our usual sessions, no Jules, no costumes, no Gaby or Pippa! How wrong can you get?

Mrs Peters supplied us with a bag of doughnuts and a selection of soft drinks then left us to it. Remember what I said earlier? Well I guess in the words of Meatloaf, two out of three ain't bad. However three was a return for Gaby and Pippa much to both Rhod's dismay and mine.

"What are we doing tonight Mad?" I asked in all innocence.

The girls exchanged looks and I just knew I wasn't going to like the answer.

"We're giving you two makeovers so we're ready for Friday"

"Can't we do that *on* Friday?" Rhod suggested

"Don't be daft, there won't be time, we've got to get ready too you know"

I had to admit there was some logic in there but,

"Erm, what do these makeovers entail? We can hardly go to school all week with makeup on"

"Well der. We need to practice on you for makeup but we'll do it on Friday. No tonight is sorting out other stuff like your nails"

"Ok then, I guess. As long as you promise not to leave any makeup on us"

"Guides honour"

"Fair enough" Rhod agreed.

Despite their tender years, the girls were already experts at this stuff and before we knew what had hit us we were getting the full treatment. Full manicure and pedicure including nail polish, a bit of eyebrow shaping then makeup from the skin out. When Maddy hit us with the mirror we really did look like the girls we were going to impersonate (if that's the right word?)

even without our wigs. That was a bit worrying, and as we sat there afterwards, anyone walking in would not have guessed that there were only actually three girls in the room.

"Can we take this all off now?"

"Sure"

So we then suffered the removal process.

"Right now go and wash your faces to get any stray bits off"

"Fine, we can spot for each other"

We went to the guest bathroom and first Rhod inspected my face for makeup, then I returned the favour, it was as I was drying up I realised that our nails were still painted.

"Rhod, nails!"

"Oh bugger!"

We almost ran back to the girls.

"You left the nail varnish on, we can't wear it home"

"Or to school" I added

"Oh silly us" Bernie was giggling

"Come on Drew, I'll take yours off, Mad can do Rhod"

"Thanks Al"

It didn't take long before our fingernails were clean of paint

"What are you guys up to" Mrs Peters poked her head round the door.

"Oh just talking about Fridays party"

"Well keep the noise down, your dads working next door"

"Ok mum"

"Ok Mrs Peters" the rest of us echoed.

Phew that was close.

I don't know when Rhod realised but I was getting dressed next morning when I rediscovered my painted toe nails. Shit! why did I agree to all this? I had games this afternoon; every one would see my pink toenails.

"Jules" I hissed at her door, "Jules"

"What?"

"Can I come in?"

"Ok I'm dressed"

Once inside Jules took up the questioning

"What do you want?"

"Well you know last night at Maddy's?"

"What about it?"

"Well the girls practised our makeup for Friday"

"I know, they told me that's what they planned. So?"

"Well they painted our nails too"

"Cute"

"Look this is serious, they forgot to take it back off out toes"

Jules could barely contain herself as I pulled my socks off to show her.

"They are just so cute Drew"

"They are not cute! And I have PE today, everyone will see them, I'll be a laughing stock. Can I borrow your remover?"

"No way"

"Oh please Jules"

"There won't be time to redo them on Friday"

"I don't care, no one will see with my shoes"

"But what if you take them off, a pretty girl like Gaby would have painted toenails, it's expected"

"But Jules" I whined

"Ok, ok. A compromise. I'll clean your nails now, but on Thursday night after your training I'll redo your toes and you can do mine"

"Anything, just so long as I don't have to go in the gym with nail varnish on"

"Come on then, sit on the bed and put your foot on the stool"

Well my nails were cleaned in double quick time, but I had just agreed to have them done again in a couple of days. What was I doing?

Thankfully the rest of the week up to Thursday night was uneventful other than the giggling fits the girls had over our toenails. Rhod had discovered his the same night and as his mother kept her remover in the bathroom, he'd removed his paint some time before me. Unlike me however the girls let him off a reapplication, as he would be wearing opaque knee-highs unlike my sheer stockings.

So Thursday night, after my training ride, I was once more allowed into Juliette's inner sanctum for a nail painting session.

"Ok Drew I'll do yours first, then you can do mine so watch how I do it. Then in future you can do your own"

"And why would I want to?"

She just shrugged her shoulders and smirked.

It took forever this time, Jules was really picky, but I had to admit that the finished article looked good, only bad thing was that ten of the baby pink nails were mine!

"Now your hands"

"Get awf!"

"Come on, there won't be much time tomorrow. If I put on some clear for you tonight, no one will know at school but it will be a lot quicker when we get ready. We are still meeting at Maddy's?"

"As far as I know and I guess I can cope with clear varnish" I reluctantly finished.

Half an hour later my nails were finished; the clear varnish however had a slight cast to it, but what the heck it was done now.

I have to admit with it being the last day of term and the dance, the last thing on my mind were my vaguely pink nails. I did get a couple of comments from girls about my "pretty nails Drew" but no one seemed to want to make an issue of it, least of all me! Most people were after all just wishing the day away so we could start the two-week break.

School let out an hour early at three thirty and I joined mass exodus with mixed feelings, glad that the holiday was starting and dreading that evening's social event. I guess I could even at this stage have got out of going, but that would leave Rhod on his own. I couldn't do that and I knew he would feel the same, so I guess my conscience was the problem.

By the time I got home, Jules already had our stuff together and mum was going to drop us off at Maddy's.

"You must take some photo's kids, I haven't even seen your costumes"

"Sure mum, Drew's camera will fit in my bag and I've a spare film"

I didn't know she had purloined that from my room.

"Okay then, enjoy yourselves and remember to ring when you want to be picked up, it ends at 11 doesn't it?"

"Yes but Mrs Peters says she doesn't mind if we come back here after, she's doing pizza and stuff"

"Well okay, but ring and let me and your dad know what you're doing"

"Yes mum" we both chorused.

"Well bye then" she offered a cheek that we both dutifully kissed.

We finally entered the Peters house of chaos. Mrs Peters had made herself scarce by going to a neighbour while we got ready so mine and Rhod's transformation might get overlooked, if we were lucky!

"There you are! Ok we've got a production line going. Jules can you take him to the upstairs bathroom and do his legs then Bernie will do his face while Ally does his nails, then I'll do his hair. He can dress himself and then we can do the finishing touches"

I just gaped at the organisation as Jules led me upstairs.

Then it dawned on me.

"What are you doing to my legs?"

"Shaving them of course"

"What! You are not!"

"Don't be such a sissy. All us girls do it and even your little bits of hair will show through those stockings. And anyway all your big cycling heroes shave their legs."

I knew that, they kept smooth legs mum said, so that if they crashed it was easier to clean the wounds and she confided most of them probably liked the way it looked too. I had to agree, smooth, oiled and tanned, their legs looked really boss and I sort of aspired to have a pair just like them. Weird. I guess shaving them today could be excused from a sporting point of view, and the hair would grow back anyway.

"Ok then"

I stripped to my pants and sat on the toilet seat while my sister expertly de-haired my legs, somehow managing to avoid cutting me.

"Ok, you best have a quick shower to get all the soap off, and use this" she handed me a tube of shower gel, "It'll make you smell a bit more ladylike. Go back down stairs when your done, and clean the shower after you" she admonished.

Although it was quick, my shower was thorough and the gel certainly left me smelling girlie, in fact you couldn't avoid smelling me! By the time I got downstairs, Rhod was well on his way to becoming Phillipa as he had avoided the leg shaving due to his floor length costume. Mad finished my costume off with a pair of pink crystal studs in my newly pierced lobes. Both Bernie and Ally's costumes were donned in double quick time and when Mad's mum came back just after five we were all ready.

"I thought Rhod and Drew were coming?"

"No they're meeting us there. This is Gaby and this is Pippa, they're in our registration group. They live in Cuckney so I said they could get ready with us"

"Hello girls" you could see her brow furrow quizzically.

"Hello Mrs Peters" I used my best girl voice

"Well as the boys aren't here you can join the others, I've booked a limo to take you, my treat "

Well the girls all went potty and Gaby and Pippa were swept up with the euphoria too.

"Ooh thank you Mrs Peters"

"Yes thanks Mrs Peters"

"Thanks mum"

"Now calm down or you'll ruin your costumes, they really are very good you obviously spent a lot of time on them. I'm not sure I approve of the stockings on young girls though and I don't suppose your mother knows what your wearing does she Gaby?"

"No Mrs Peters"

"Well it is fancy dress. Lets see now, Maddy and Gaby you must be Chii right?"

"Yes mum"

"Juliette must be Yubi and I know Bernie's Merle. I'm not sure who you two are though"

I did tell you that Maddy's parents were into Manga too didn't I?

"Pippa's Nuriko and I'm Nina" said Ally

"Well you all look splendid, as good as any I've seen at cons. Lets get some pictures before you go, I've got the digital camera next door, and I'll do you all prints for when you get back."

"Great mum! Come on everyone we can take them in the garden."



So we spent twenty minutes, with Mrs Peters taking pictures, with her digital camera and both my and Bernie's compact cameras. We were stopped by a car honking out front.

"That will be the limo, get you bags and go and have fun, and tell Drew and Rhod they are welcome back later"

"Yes mum"

The limo was one of those big American ones, very long with dark windows and a plush interior. And enough seats for all six of us plus a couple of spares. I was well impressed. So it was that we arrived in splendid style to the schools Easter fancy dress dance. We made quite an entrance, the chauffeur held the door for us as we exited his vehicle and I heard him tell Jules that he would be collecting us too. Now that's what I call style.

On the way in we stopped at a table manned by a couple of prefects to register for the competitions and then our flock of girls joined the female dominated gathering in the main hall. I felt really exposed in the short dress and Maddy and I drew comments about our stockings. However there were several other girls wearing stockings with their costumes so we weren't unduly picked on.

Rhod and I were introduced to everyone as Maddy's cousin and friend from Worksop, just far enough away to be foreign! When I saw Batman trailed by a gawky Robin I knew that my mates were here and spotting us they came over to say hi. How embarrassing can you get? The only good thing was that almost instantly any frostiness from our peers disappeared, we were obviously kosher.

The music started up soon after we arrived and soon the occupants of the room were split between dancers and watchers. I, as Drew, was usually one of the latter but this time the girls made sure I was a dancer. I was sort of enjoying the proceedings until Clive asked me to dance with him. I was prodded into doing it, and thankfully Clive was a worse dancer than Drew was.

As the boys were outnumbered nearly two to one, any girl who snagged one for even one dance, suddenly became both envied and hated at the same time. So I became the target of catty remarks and green-eyed looks, much to my discomfort. On one hand, it proved that I was doing well as a girl, on the other hand I felt that everyone was watching me. Here I was after all pretending to be a girl wearing a costume, confusing!

A couple of times my group of friends gathered for their silly little dance routines which I had to be part of too. Rhod didn't seem on very good form, so was sitting out most of the dancing. Just before ten Mrs Johnston took over the mike to announce the competition winners.

There were five categories, boy, girl, couple, group and best overall. Looking around the hall, most people had made a real effort and there were no obvious winners. One of the year eleven boys won with his John Travolta in Grease costume. A cute year ten Alice in Wonderland took the girls' prize, then to my horror I heard Mrs Johnston call Maddy and myself out as best couple. Maddy had to drag me to the stage and we suffered a lot of catcalls amongst the cheering.

Much to the other girl's delight, they were then called up as group winners, apparently Maddy had entered us separately. Then the big prize of the night, best costume. I didn't know whether to run or scream when the announcement was made, I had won.

I just stood bemused as I was presented with my prize but the biggest shock came as I left the stage and passed Mr Wood.

"Well done *Miss Bond*, I wasn't sure at first but that look just now on the stage, I knew it was you. Don't worry I won't tell anyone"

He had obviously read my mind.

"Your costume really is excellent if a bit risqué. Now go and enjoy the rest of the dance with your friends"

"Yes Sir, thank you Sir"

"What did he say?"

"Oh he just congratulated me on my win"

I didn't want to panic anyone else.

"Come on lets get a drink and a couple more dances"

"Okay Mad"

"What was your prize anyway?"

"I don't know, I haven't looked"

I fished the envelope from its current stocking top position and opened it.

"Wow, it's a cheque for £100!"

"Kewl, what with the Alton Towers tickets we all got for the other prizes, that's quite a haul!"

"Damn, they've made the cheque out to Gaby Thomas"

"That's the name I entered you as"

"So how do I cash it huh?"

"Well I suppose you'll have to open an account at the bank as Gaby"

Things just took a downward turn.

"Come on cheer up, we've still got my 'after' party and another limo ride"

Maddy was trying hard to lift my slowly descending depression"

"Yeah ok"

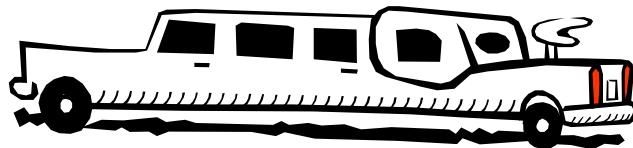
It looked like Gaby was going to be around a bit longer, and my headmaster knew that I made a convincing girl, convincing enough to fool everyone else at the dance. Shit creek and lack of paddle came to mind.

The rest of night was going to get even weirder!

## **Part 12**

### **After Party**

Well things spiralled down a bit until the limo turned up to collect us. I was getting myself into a fugue, Rhod was still feeling queasy, and even the girls were feeling the pace a bit!



True to her word, when we got back to the Peters' there was pizza and drinks and stuff waiting for us.

"How did it go girls?"

"Great mum, it was so cool. Me and Gabs got the prize for best paired costumes, the guys got best group and you'll never guess what"

"There's more than that?"

"Oh yes Mrs Peters"

"Yeah mum, Gaby won best costume out of the whole dance!"

"Gaby you must be really pleased"

"Yes Mrs Peters"

"Come on then dig in, there's plenty here and there's more pizza if you want. Are Drew and Rhod coming?"

"They said they might come but we didn't see them when we left school"

"Ok, we'll leave you to it then."

"Thanks mum"

"Yeah thanks Mrs Peters"

Mad's mum left us to the food and drink and a recovering Rhod and a less paranoid Drew joined the others.

"I'm glad that's over Drew, I just never, ever want to wear a dress again!"

"It's alright for you, I'm going to have to"

"What do you mean?"

"Well Mad entered me as 'Gaby Thomas'"

"So?"

"Well the cheque for best costume is made out to 'Gaby Thomas'"

"Can't one of the girls get it cashed for you?"

"I don't think so, I'm going to have to be Gaby to get the cash"

"Sorry Drew but I didn't think anything like this would happen"

"That's alright Mad"

"I'll try to help bro"

"Thanks Jules, it would be a shame to lose £100"

"No kidding"

"Heck how are me and Rhod going to get changed with your parents here Mad?"

"Oh, I hadn't thought of that"

I started to panic a bit.

"Well I reckon if I just change into my jeans and stuff I can get the makeup and stuff off at home no problem. If mum sees me I can just say it was for the party." Rhod told us.

"Can't you do the same Drew?" Ally asked

"Mum will want to pick us up from here and your mum will be around, I'm sunk"

"Look I know," Bernie put in. "if you and Jules come over to mine, you could change and get picked up from there"

"But we shouldn't be walking around this time of night"

"We don't have to, we can get a taxi, mum gave me the money, we can drop Rhod off on the way and your mum can collect you from my house. We can tell Mrs Peters that you're both staying over with me before going home to Cuckney tomorrow"

"What about Ally?"

"I'm staying over with Mad, dads picking me up in the morning"

"Sounds like a good plan to me" Jules agreed, "you can put your jeans and sweatshirt on here like Rhod and we can clean you up at Bernie's"

"Ok then let's do it"

Us two guys changed into our boy's stuff, but with our made up faces and hairpieces we still looked like a couple of girls. If Mrs Peters noticed anything odd when she saw us out to the taxi she didn't let on.

Bernie had a key so we didn't need to wake her parents, which was just as well. We had about fifteen minutes before mum fetched us, so while Bernie cleaned my nails, Jules removed my makeup and wig. It was a relief to once again look in a mirror to see Drew rather than Gaby. Mum turned up and we left Bernie at the door and got in the car.

Mum gave me a couple of funny looks as we set off but I ignored them.

"You all have a good time?"

"Yeah, me and the girls one a prize" Jules told her

"What about you Drew?"

"No I guess my costume wasn't that good" I lied

"This really cute friend of Maddy won best costume"

"Did you take pictures?"

"Yes, but I think I might have messed up the one of Drew"

"That'll be a pity. Well I guess if you all had a good time that fine, you can tell me more tomorrow"

We got home and I went straight up to bed, stripped and got under the duvet, I was asleep in minutes.

When I went to the bathroom next morning, I realised what mum had been looking at last night, I still had the crystal studs in my ears. I quickly took them out and hoped I'd get away with it. My toenails were still painted too so I repeated Tuesday's episode with Jules and this time she didn't hesitate in helping out.

At long last it was the Easter break!

## **Part 13**

### **Easter Break**

Two whole weeks off school! It was all planned to the nth detail, bike rides, bowling, cinema, the Easter weekend away racing, a visit to Nan and lots of chilling with the gang!

The only black cloud on the horizon was the potential problem of cashing my prize cheque from last night. After a short training ride, I got dressed in jeans and t shirt ready for today's main attraction – bowling.



We were all going, that is Bernie, Ally, Rhod, Clive, Paul, Maddy, Jules and her mates Charlie and Anna and me. We had an alley booked for two so we were meeting at the bus stop at twelve thirty.

That left me with some time to kill so I thought I would bug my sister for a bit.

"Jules?"

"You know about the cheque right?"

"Yes"

"How am I gonna cash it? I mean it's made out to an imaginary person"

"You could go and see if the school secretary can get it changed"

"But that would mean letting people know it was me!"

"I see your point"

"Could you like pretend to be Gaby and get it cashed, you can have a share"

"Everyone at the bank knows me so I don't think that would work, what about one the girls, they could do it"

"I'll ask later. Changing the subject, I forgot to take the studs out before mum picked us up"

"Do you think she noticed?"

"I'm not sure, she kept giving me funny looks on the way home though"

"She hasn't said anything this morning though?"

"No"

"Well quit worrying, what's done is done, you can't undo it now although the exact circumstances will take a bit of explaining"

"No kidding!"

"Lets get a sandwich then we can walk over to meet Charlie and go for the bus"

"Ok"

"Come on, cheer up. Two whole weeks off, no uniforms and not much homework for a change"

"I guess"

We made sandwiches for dad and ourselves, mum was out shopping. After polishing the food off, we donned our coats and set off to collect Charlie and make our way to the bus stop. Charlie was waiting for us and soon she and Jules were deep into a post party discussion while I trailed along behind.

Everyone bar Clive was already at the stop and soon there was a lively nine-way conversation in the bus shelter. Obviously the previous night was the main topic of conversation, both Rhod and I had to feign interest as though we were absent from the festivities, there were three people who didn't know about Gaby and Pippa and we wanted to keep it that way. Paul, bless him, actually helped by telling Jules' friends 'all' about Maddy's cousin and friend, backed up by Clive when he arrived a couple of minutes before the bus.

The bus was pretty full but we managed to commandeer enough seats upstairs and our little party were soon attracting the attention of the tutting brigade, they must have been kids once, mustn't they?

We split into two teams, Paul, myself, Maddy, Charlie and Ally against Bernie, Jules, Clive, Anna and Rhod. We were fairly evenly matched and the final score was even – no winners, no losers. We hit Maccy D's afterwards for the usual teenagers fill of burger and chips. The restaurant was packed so we took our food outside and found some seats in the precinct.

On the way back to the bus station I managed to get Maddy alone.

"Mad, you weren't serious last night about the cheque were you?"

"Don't be daft, I talked to Ally and she said she'll do the business for you"

"Phew, thank heavens, you really had me going there"

"Look a deal a deal Drew. You and Rhod were really fantastic, I mean most guys would have run a mile. We all thought that you would chicken out and we wouldn't have held it against you guys. We owe you one so sorting the money is our job"

"You mean we could have ducked out?"

"Of course"

"Sheesh"

"Quick, there's the bus!"

Well that effectively ended that conversation and I felt happier on the bus back home. We split up back in Church Warsop, each to their own homes; we would be seeing plenty of each other the rest of the hol's anyway.

Along with mum, I had another of the airfield races on Sunday so you can guess how the day panned out. Mum did well again, finishing in the front group, the only lady to manage that. I was concentrating more this week and it showed. I made all the moves and although I was only eighth overall, I won my age category, which bolstered my prize fund by ten pounds.

Mum had the same holidays as us; so on Monday she herded the junior Bond's into the car to go visit Grandma at Nantwich. I always looked forward to visiting grandma and the two-hour drive across the Peak District was remarkably pleasant. We were coming this week as the traffic Easter week would be heavy with lots of grockles clogging the lanes, if you visit the Peak District avoid Easter!

Grandma had lunch waiting when we arrived, a bit early really, but we were going to visit Jodrell Bank in the afternoon. It was really interesting and those dishes are really huge! I recognised the roads we used as the same as the ones we raced on at Christmas, how I missed seeing the observation centre I don't know. Well I guess I do, I was too busy worrying about wearing a dress!

Memories of Christmas flooded back. I tried to recall how it had all come about, oh yes that was it. Mum had seen the Xena and Gaby costumes at a Fantasy convention she went to with dad and on impulse had bought them both. The original idea was that my sister would ride the event with mum and I would ride on my own. However fate stepped in.

Two days before the closing date, jules got injured playing hockey and the doctor advised several weeks of rest for her badly bruised leg. That's when mum had the brainstorm, she rang the organiser and swapped my entry to the tandem event and withdrew my sis. Then she told me I would be in costume, not the one I planned on, Michael Schumacher, and I even had a red boiler suit. No I was going to go in Jules costume, as Gaby.

I kicked up a right fuss, threatening to refuse to go, to give up riding; well I got quite vociferous. In the end with the assistance of a bit of bribery, I was convinced to do the deed. I didn't really want to relive that episode so I didn't mention it; I didn't need to as grandma did!

"I wondered whether I would have two granddaughters today"

"Grandma, you know it was only really for the race"

"Well I know that's how it started, but you seemed to enjoy it when we went to the restaurant"

"Well I had to eat and I didn't get too much choice did I? If I never have to wear a dress again it will be too soon", I said with some vehemence.

"Now, now young man, calm down. I was only kidding you. Now then when did you have your ears pierced?"

If it wasn't one thing it was another!

"I haven't!"

"Come on Drew, I know what pierced ears look like and yours are definitely pierced."

So I had to come clean, well sort of, to Grandma.

"I didn't mean to get them done" well that was no lie anyway. "Me and the guys were joshing a bit and Maddy bet that I wouldn't do it. Well I said that I would if she'd wear her hair in pigtails for a week, she hates braids! But I lost the bet so I let her do my ears, I mean they would heal up afterwards wouldn't they?"

"But they didn't or you didn't want them to?"

"I did want them to but" here I reverted to the truth, "Maddy managed to leave keepers in when she took the studs out. I just thought my ears were sore. When I found out it was too late, they were healed, but not closed. Please Gran, mum doesn't know, she'd kill me, she won't even let Jules have hers done yet!"

"Don't worry I won't tell her"

"Thanks Gran"

"But if she asks I'll have to tell her. I'm sure even your mother isn't that blind!"

"You mean she just hasn't said anything?"

"Knowing your mum she's waiting for you to tell her"

"I guess, I suppose I'd better tell her then"

"Well come on, lets you and me get tea ready so you can get home before it's too late"

I decided not to say anything to mum just yet, if she was really upset I'd soon know about it so why rush the wrath?

Tuesday the guys and me were going biking. I've got three bikes; one for training, one for racing and what mum calls my street bike. My street bike is actually a fairly nice mountain bike, 24 gears, front suspension and a really gross lime and pink colour scheme. Well a friend of my mum who races professionally gave it to me. Caroline didn't use it anymore, it was her old training bike and it fit me great.

I got to be leader of our little group for bike rides, as I was the 'expert', well you know what I mean. We were going to the Sherwood Forest visitor centre at Edwinstowe today, not a long way but the girls didn't ride much and Clive never rode if he could help it. There were six of us today as Paul couldn't come and Jules and her friends were doing more 'adult' things.

We met at Ally's place and after a session of tyre pumping and brake checking, we set off for the day. A short ride along the road soon had us at

the bridleway; we were not going to use the roads much if we could help it. In these situations it's always a temptation to show off a bit to those less adept and Rhod and even Clive didn't help, insisting on impromptu races. However after one such episode had dumped the three of us on the track, the appeal passed and we rode along at a more sedate pace.

I was dying to ask Ally if she'd got the cheque paid in but she pre-empted my question.

"Drew, I couldn't get to the bank yesterday, mum insisted on going to Nottingham. I'll go tomorrow before we meet up ok"

"Sure" I couldn't help but let a slight edge of disappointment into my voice.

We eventually arrived at the visitor centre and whilst we had all been before we did the tourist bit before finding a table to eat our sandwiches at. However the tempting smells of hot dogs and burgers issuing from the café soon changed our plans. Assorted junk food later, we set off to look at the famous Major Oak, supposedly one time home to Robin Hood. After having marvelled at the old tree and the props holding up some of the branches, we set off for home.

It would be too boring to go back the same way so I picked another trail for us to follow. Disaster struck after a few minutes when Maddy's front tyre exploded depositing her in a heap on the trail. Luckily personal damage was confined to pride but the tyre was ruined, even my puncture repairing skills would not mend the ripped tyre.

"We're not far from the centre, we could ring someone to fetch you"

"But that could take ages"

"Yeah but it's sensible"

"How about we just all walk"

"It's miles" Bernie complained

"How about this then. Two of us ride back and raise the alarm while the rest keep walking. I reckon by the time they got to the village the rest will be at the Meden road."

"Who's gonna go, you can't go Drew, we don't know the way"

"How about me and Rhod?" Clive asked

"Yeah we can go back the way we came, it's shorter too, we just go back to the centre and follow the signs"

"Ok then, we'll see you later"

The guys set off back up the trail and me and the girls started pushing our bikes in the other direction. I swapped bikes with Mad and we chatted as we went. The subject of Friday obviously came up and I had to tell them about my chat with grandma the previous day. On a couple of descents the girls rode down leaving me to catch up as best I could. We must have been walking for an hour and a half before we heard some traffic on the road ahead. Before we got there however we were greeted by Rhod and my sister.

"Hi guys"

"What are you doing here?"

"I saw Rhod and Clive and they told me what happened"

"Where's Clive?"

"He was too knackered to ride back out here so he went home"

"Is someone coming to pick me up?" asked Maddy

"No, I thought we'd sort it ourselves. I've brought a spare tyre and tube so we can fix your bike then we can all ride back"

"Ok"

"We can eat our sandwiches, anyone got a drink?"

"Come on Rhod, you can help"

That's one thing, in a house full of bikes, there's always spare bits around. It didn't really take long to fit the new tyre and tube, my parents made sure long ago that I could do the basics of get you home bike maintenance. Jules had some hand wipes, which were much needed after the tyre change, and after Rhod and I had a sandwich we all headed back toward home.

"See you guys tomorrow"

"Ok"

"I'll go to the bank in the morning Drew"

"Thanks Ally, see you tomorrow then"

Things were looking good, the money would soon be banked and I could forget the whole Gaby thing. As usual fate would play its hand and once again the press influenced things. I didn't even see the report on the dance in that evening's *Chad* (our local paper). If I had, I would have known that it was all going to go pear shaped again.

## **Part 14**

### **Easter Break 2**

"Drew I'm sorry but there was a problem at the bank"

My heart sank, I had really thought that Ally would sort the problem out this morning.

"Wouldn't they let you open an account?"

"Worse than that"

"What could be worse?"

Ally was obviously in a bit of a state, but I couldn't imagine why.

"Well I don't have the cheque either, they kept hold of it"

"Why?" I was a bit panicked now, I mean a hundred pounds is not a fortune but it's still worth having and to lose it, well I didn't want to lose it.

"I'd best tell you the whole story I guess. I went to the bank this morning and asked if I could cash the cheque. They asked a bunch of questions and I thought I had it sorted when another woman came in. Any way she saw the name on the cheque then disappeared and came back with the paper."

Ally was nearly in tears now and I wasn't sure what to do.

"The woman said I had to have stolen the cheque, I clearly wasn't 'Gaby Thomas', because her picture was in the paper."

"Did they get the police or anything, what happened Ally?" I was getting hyper.

"Well I managed to convince them that I was your friend and that I said I would get the cheque cashed. Well I guess they sort of believed me, I mean I was getting really scared. Anyway they said that they wouldn't take it any further and they would give you the money if you went in with me yourself. Drew they kept the cheque and the only way we can get the money is if you dress up again!"

"I'm sorry you had to go through that Ally, I guess we'll have to meet with the others and discuss this."

"I told Mrs Jenkins, the lady at the bank that it might be a few days as you were going away for some of Easter break so we have a bit of time to get organised."

"Not much I guess, it's Wednesday today and I *do* go away on Thursday night."

"When do you get back?"

"Monday night I think"

"Well I guess we just plan on say next Tuesday or Wednesday"

"We're going to Meadowhall Wednesday, it'll have to be Tuesday I guess"

"Come on lets meet the rest of the guys"

Today we were going to hang at Rhod's place and I had a score to settle on his PS2. Well Rhod did have a copy of *Chad* so the first topic was again the Easter party. I looked at the picture that had caught Ally earlier, it was not particularly flattering, I mean what newspaper picture is, but I could see why it was obvious to the woman at the bank that Ally wasn't me. I didn't look like me as Drew (phew!) but Ally didn't look like me either. There were several pictures of the dance; I was even named as was Maddy. I don't even remember seeing a photographer!

Ally filled the rest in on the mornings adventure and I saw Rhod give me a look of sympathy. After all he wouldn't have to dress up again would he? As we had done it before, there wasn't so much planning to do and I even managed a go on the playstation before it was time to go home.

I don't want to bore you all with my usually normal life so I'll skip to the interesting bits.

We were going down to the Isle of Wight for the Easter racing weekend, by travelling down Thursday night dad hoped to miss most of the good Friday traffic and anyway the first races were on Friday afternoon. Well it sort of worked; we caught the last ferry out of Southampton and eventually got parked up just outside Cowes shortly after midnight.

Friday morning it was a bit foggy and instead of Dads planned drive to the Needles we settled on a trip to Carisbrooke Castle in the middle of the island. I like castles and this one was no less exciting, I was intrigued by the donkey mill and by the end of our visit the weather was clearing up. Today's races were to be on a short circuit in Shanklin so we headed down to the coast to get ready.

Well I have to admit that the racing was hard and fast and at the end of things I was glad just to still be on two wheels! Mum mixed it with the best, gave as good as she got and was rewarded with third place in the mixed sex event. We all stayed to watch the category one event, I imagined myself cornering like those guys, sprinting out of the bends, hunching low over the bars on the descents. Well like I said before, some kids dream of being Beckham, me its another David, Millar.

On Saturday the racing moved to Ryde seafront where everyone got to race about three times during the day, boy was I whacked. However the flatter circuit suited me better and I got third in one race, sixth in another and fourteenth in the third, but not in that order. Mum was still impressive and in her two events she finished top six both times.

Sunday saw the main event, the Tour de Wight, a nearly eighty mile event around the island. It was all senior categories but by invitation only, mum had an invite after the New Forest weekend I told you about. There was only mum and Tina, the girl she beat that weekend in the lady category; the rest were nearly all category one and two men.

We watched the start but because of the course we decided not to try and watch out on the road and anyway I had another seafront race before the main event finished. I got fourth today in a hairy sprint, one of my fellow competitors crashed badly in the sprint after running into my back wheel. It shook me up I have to say but I was pretty made up getting in the prizes again.

Mum was expecting to get blown out by the men today, it would at worst make a good training run! So when the big race swept through the town before the finish, it wasn't just our family that were jumping up and down seeing mum with the main pack of twenty riders. A few minutes later and the mass of riders hurtled towards the line and although we didn't really expect to see mum at the front, it was deflating when we couldn't see her.

We quickly found her afterwards and it seemed everyone, the other riders included wanted to congratulate her on her ride. I recognised some of them from their pictures in *Cycling Weekly*; this was my mum *they* were congratulating! It took a while to get the full result and the full story. Mum placed tenth, a huge achievement at this level for anyone, after instigating the decisive breakaway and while not taking all her turns on the front, she did enough to earn respect. Enough that when she did get dropped on the climb out of Cowes just a few miles from the finish a couple of guys dropped back to get her back on the group.

The race really had taken its toll however and as soon as she could mum hit the sack. There was free entertainment at a local holiday camp that evening so me, dad and Jules went along and left mum to sleep it off.

There was no racing on Monday so dad finally took us sightseeing around the island, the Needles, Black Gang Chine, we looked at the bizarre coloured sands in the cliffs and whilst we didn't stop we saw Queen Victoria's house the hovercraft that runs across to Portsmouth. Our ferry left just after two and we had a fairly hold up free ride back up to Nottinghamshire.

"What are you kids doing today?"

"I'm going out with Charlie and Anna"

"You going out with your friends Drew?"

"Yes mum, we're meeting at Maddy's"

"Well don't forget, you riding the ten over at Cuckney tonight, seven o'clock"

"Aren't you going mum?"

"I would love to but the Federation (Cycling Federation) have asked me to go over to Manchester today and I don't know what time I'll be back"

"If I take my kit, I can go straight from Maddy's as she lives closer"

"Is her mum okay with that?"

"Yeah we were all staying for tea any way"

"Well don't eat anything too greasy, you don't want cramps later"

"Come on mum, Mrs Peters hardly ever does burgers or stuff, its usually pasta or salad"

"Oh, don't forget this" she handed me a piece of printed paper, "you need the parental consent form to ride"

"Yes mum"

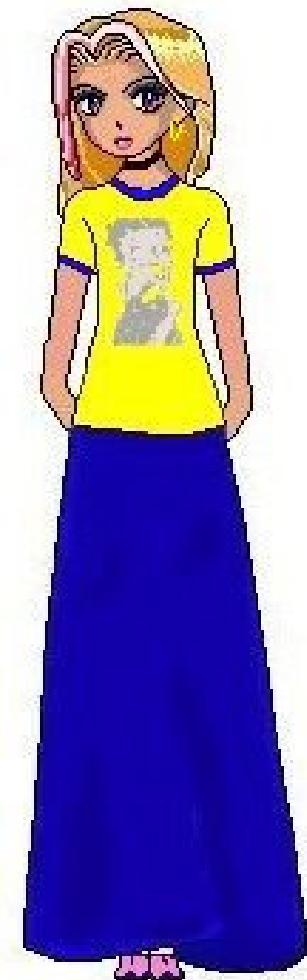
"And come straight home afterwards, it'll be dark about nine"

"Yes mum"

"Right then have a good day"

The excitement of the weekend had allowed me to quit thinking about today but now as I ride over to Maddy's house I got to thinking about it again. I was at least philosophical this time, it was positively my last time of dressing up, and we would be £100 better off!

Mrs Peters had a few errands to run, so my transformation into Gaby could take place unhindered. Well the girls in my absence had come up with a convincingly girlie outfit for the trip as Gaby Thomas to the bank. Maddy insisted that I practised signing 'my' name and after several attempts I got a passable signature complete with loops and bits – very girlie!



I once again had the long denim skirt I wore to Sheffield the other week but this time it was teamed with a yellow Betty Boo t-shirt. Bernie produced a black choker, the same as I had seen several girls wearing recently and Maddy supplied and fitted a pair of gold hoop earrings. With the long wig and makeup, I was once again Gaby. More confusingly I didn't seem to mind it so much this time, perhaps it was not showing any leg!

The girls all wore pretty casual stuff too and by ten thirty we were ready to leave for the bank.

**Part 15**

**Easter Break 3**

Didn't I mention that the other guys were all wearing jeans! Well I guess my skirt did mean that I looked pretty girlie, even with my flat chest! I have to admit that I did feel reasonably confident that no one would pick me out dressed like this, most of the kids at school had seen me at the dance so although Drew was missing, 'my' appearance with the others shouldn't appear strange.

Well even though we walked through our own neighbourhood, we managed not to meet anyone we knew. It wasn't a long way into Warsop and the bank and we were there just before eleven. We went in and had to wait while another customer was served before the group of us approached the teller.

"And what can we do for you young ladies today?"

"I'm Gaby Thomas and I need to see Mrs Jenkins?"

"Ok, I'll just get her from the back"

It is a small branch with usually only a couple of staff and the manager. I saw the women come out and she beamed as she looked at us.

"Hello Gaby, ally and these must be your friends"

Ally introduced the others.

"Yes Mrs Jenkins, this is Maddy, Rhod and Bernie"

"Oops, sorry Rhod, I didn't realise you were a boy"

Rhod blushed deeply "no sweat"

"Ok then Gaby, lets get this cheque sorted out for you."

"Thanks Mrs Jenkins, we're sorry about last week"



Well things didn't go quite as we planned. By the time we left, Gaby had a new bank account, a new Discman and after Mrs Jenkins expressed the cheque, fifty of the hundred pounds.

"Phew I thought we were never going to get out of there"

"I'm not sure I've still got all my fingers"

"Yeah but now I've got an account in the name of Gaby Thomas, I'm sure that's not really legal" I said flourishing my copy of the withdrawal slip with my 'new' signature on it.



"Who's going to find out Gaby?"

"No one I guess, unless your mum gets to the post before you"

"Well I'll just tell her they got the wrong address somehow"

"Hmm" I wasn't convinced. The others were keeping their own council and I know Rhod was still embarrassed about being mistaken for a girl even dressed in his jeans and stuff.

"What about an ice cream?" I asked everyone

"Ok"

"Great"

"Just what I need"

"And it's my treat" I added, "after all I wouldn't have the money at all if it wasn't for you guys"

"Thanks drew"

"If you insist"

So we stopped off at a paper shop and Gaby bought an assortment of Mivvi's and King Cones and we all sat in the churchyard to eat them. I have to admit that today I really felt quite comfortable as Gaby, I didn't mind the long skirt too much and it was only after we had finished the ice cream and Maddy wanted to touch up my lipstick I even remembered I was wearing make up.

By the time we got back to the Peters' house it was getting on toward one o'clock and it was clouding up some.

"What are we going to do this afternoon guys?"

"We could do a bit of surfing on the net"

"I guess that would be okay"

"We can look at some of the con pictures, mum posted some on Yahoo last week that you guys haven't seen"

"Yeah well the first thing I want to do is get back into my clothes"

"Ok Drew, you get changed while we get organised"

So off I went and I was soon back downstairs in my 'normal' gear. What I had forgotten about were the earrings and eye makeup, although I had wiped the lipstick off.



"Come on Drew, there's a can of orange on the table if you want"

"Cheers"

"Oh boy, I didn't know she'd put these on here"

"What?"

"Look guys we're famous!"

Mrs Peters had posted shots of the group of us in our costumes taken before the dance.

"Someone's bound to recognise me and Rhod"

"Like who?"

"Well"

"Look guys, most of the people looking at this are in America, they will see what they want to see, six cute kids dressed up in Anime costumes for a party"

"I guess your right"

"Of course she is Drew" Rhod put in, "one minute you're opening bank accounts as Gaby, next your paranoid someone's going to recognise you thousands of miles away"

"I know it's just..."

"Plain stupid" Ally finished for me.

Well we surfed for a bit then Maddy showed us the new game that her dad had bought, The Sims. We pretty much all thought it was way cool! So cool in fact that we didn't hear Maddy's mum come home or her efforts in the kitchen. I guess she thought we were being pretty well behaved, why interrupt? So next thing we knew she was calling for us to set the table for tea.

My guess was right, she brought a huge tureen of spaghetti and two dishes of sauce, a veggie carbonara and bolognese. These meals were legend amongst those who were privy to them; Mrs Peters is a great cook! I had to restrain myself a bit as I was racing later which I thought was why Mrs Peters kept looking at me, I normally have seconds and thirds!

We all helped clear things up and then we resumed our Sims session.

"Is that the time?"

"Yeah six fifteen, why?"

"I'm racing tonight over at Cuckney, I better change and go, I can just make it"

I grabbed my bag and rushed off to the bathroom to change. By six thirty I was ready to leave.

"See you guys in the morning, nine o'clock bus right?"

"Yeah, and good luck tonight Drew"

"Yeah good luck Drew"

"Thanks guys" I clipped my foot onto the pedal and set off for the short ride up to Cuckney.

"Maddy?"

"Yes Mum"

"Why was Drew wearing makeup and earrings?"

"Oops! We were practising make up on him earlier, I guess he forgot he had it on"

"Hmm" she wasn't sure she believed that and she had a nagging feeling of recognition. She shook her head; 'no I just can't place it'.

I got up to the temporary roadside HQ with ten minutes to spare; it was only a couple of miles after all. I didn't know anyone else there but I located the starter and the signing sheet. I filled the sheet in and handed over my consent form and pound entry fee, collected my number, 17, and went to get ready.

I should explain here what sort of event this is. Like the tandem event at Christmas this is a time trial, but what's called a club event. That means a club promotes it for its own members and allows 'guests' like me to ride to bolster club funds. They are pretty informal and provide useful practice for 'proper' open events.

As we start at minute intervals I still had nearly twenty minutes to go before my start so I rode up and down a side road, practising starts and generally warming up as mum had taught me. Soon however it was my turn.

"Number seventeen!"

"Here"

"Drew Bond?"

"Yes"

"You've ridden here before?"

"Yes, last season"

"Well just watch the turn then, 30 seconds"

The pusher held me up as I clipped my left foot in"

"Fifteen, good luck young lady"

My mind was on the start now I wasn't really listening

"Thanks"

"5,4,3,2,1,go!"

I pushed down on the pedal and was soon chasing down the hill. To avoid describing the whole ride (boring for you!) I'll cut to the finish. I rounded the

last bend and could see the timekeeper. I thought I was doing really well, only two older riders had passed me and I was riding pretty well.

"Seventeen" I wheezed as I crossed the line.

"Well done young Bond, twenty six forty five", one of the club officials addressed me

I was quite elated, only April and I was less than a minute off my best.

"Any relation to Jenny Bond?"

"She's my Mum" I stated proudly

"Obviously a chip off the old block then, it looks like you're following in your mums wheelworks"

"Thanks"

I looked over the result sheet; I was tenth quickest, however the winner had only taken a shade under twenty-three minutes to cover the ten miles. (The course is not that great, I heard him say he did a twenty at the weekend). I pulled my cycling tights on over my shorts and I was ready for home.



I got back in good time and after parking my bike made straight for the downstairs shower. Dad put it in so we can change without dripping mud or wet all over the house. I showered and it was only when I was drying my hair that I felt the earrings still in my ears. So that was why I got a few odd looks, I still didn't know that I had raced wearing eye shadow, liner and mascara! I quickly worked out how to open the hoops and slipped them out and put them in my wallet.

I was just getting dressed when I heard mum come home.

"How did you get on Drew"

I told her all about my ride and answered her questions but it was clear that she had something else on her mind.

"Ok, where's Juliette?"

"Coming mum" my sister sang out

"I've got something to tell you kids and you Dave (my dad)"

We all made ourselves comfortable in the living room and dad turned off the telly.

"You know I went over to the Federation HQ in Manchester today?"

"Yes mum"

"Well they have been asked by a team in Germany if I could ride for them"

"Wow"

"That's great love"

"That's not all. The Federation also want me on the international roster again"

"That's what you wanted isn't it mum?"

"It is Drew"

"What have you said about Germany?" dad asked

"I said I had to ask you all before I made a decision. It would mean I would be travelling a lot and be based near Bonn. I get bikes and all expenses as well as a salary"

"What about your job here mum?" jules asked what we were all thinking.

"I only have to give a weeks notice as it's a temporary contract. The guys at HQ think it's a great opportunity, and I know it's unlikely I'll get another chance like this."

"You've already made your mind up then Jen?"

"I want to go but I won't if any of you don't think I should"

"How long will you be gone for?"

"Initially four weeks, then we travel all round Europe and they hope to spend a couple of weeks in America too. I'll get home for important domestic races and I get a couple of weeks off while the Tour de France is on"

We could all tell that mum was really excited and even though I didn't want her to go I joined dad and jules in our urging her to accept the offer.

"When do you go mum?"

"Well I'll give the Director a call tomorrow and I guess I'll go over in about a week Saturday"

I had a lot to think about that night, 'my' new bank account; my good ride in the ten and mostly mums new 'job'. Things were moving incredibly quickly for me and things certainly wouldn't be the same again soon.

## **Part 16**

### **Easter Break 4**

Wednesday morning. What a night! I barely slept thinking about yesterday's events.

"Morning Drew, where are you off to today"

"The guys are going to Sheffield"

"Aren't you?"

"Well I was but I don't want to as you're going away soon"

"That's really sweet Drew, but you go with your friends, we can go for a ride and talk later when you get back yeah?"

"I guess"

"Look, you can out to see me in a few weeks and I'll be back every few weeks anyway. So go on and enjoy your holiday"

Mum was quite persuasive when she wanted to be. I was quickly ushered out and I was a bit breathless by the time I got to the bus stop.

"Hi Drew"

"Hi Maddy"

"How'd you get on last night?"

"Pretty good Ally, I came tenth"

"What's up?" Rhod had noticed my slight reticence.

"My mums got a contract to race professionally"

"Kewl Drew"

"Yeah, how cool is that, your mum a professional racer"

"I guess it is pretty cool but she'll be away in Germany most of the summer"

"That means you'll be going to see her then, wow that's so neat"

"I guess"

"Yeah well like you'll get to see some neat places huh? We only ever go to Fuengerola!"

"Ooh I do feel sorry for you" I answered back.

"Come on the bus is here"



Well I had to tell them all that I knew on the way across to Sheffield.

"And I've got a bone to pick with you guys too"

"What have we done?"

"These!" I gave Maddy her earrings, "you didn't tell me I still had them in when I left last night"

"Oh sorry Drew" Maddy was a bit too quick replying and Bernie gave her a look.

"Drew didn't you notice anything else?"

"No. Like what?"

"Eyes?"

"What about eyes?"

"Well you still had your eye make up on when you left"

"Noo! I thought I got some funny looks last night"

"Didn't you notice the mascara at least"

"Well I thought my face was very garmed up with sweat and dirt but I never looked in the mirror. Your mother notice Mad?""

"Yeah she saw but I told her we used you to practice on during the day and forgot, which we did in a way"

"Shit (I rarely swear), they all thought I was a girl at the race! I'll never live it down"

"Well don't worry about that now, we've got a mall to maul!"

That bad pun at least broke my mood and we all started coming out with a series of diabolical puns, far too bad to repeat.

It was nearly two months since we last all came to Meadowhall and under somewhat different circumstances. At least this time I wasn't pretending to be a girl, I could enjoy myself! The plan however was much the same, trawl the shops for a while, get some lunch then see a film before Bernie's mum picked us all up. She was going to Leeds and would collect us on the way back, so we had until five o'clock.

This time at least Rhod and I got out of going into all the girl shops; we managed to linger outside watching the traffic. Church Warsop, where we live, is not exactly a throbbing metropolis but neither is it Hicksville, I mean we get buses and allsorts! Come to the 'big' city and you see a different level of living.

It being Easter break, the Mall was packed with kids just like us, what did kids do before Mall's? I guess when we've been here before I've had other things to think about but today I found myself checking out the mall bunnies. While we waited for the girls, the two of us were discussing what the crowd was wearing in a way we certainly would not have a few weeks ago!

Some of the girls must have spent ages getting dressed and stuff, just to walk around the shops. I mean it's not like there were many lads around. It wasn't all hanging round for Maddy and co. We did get to spend time in the games and music stores and just like our last visit we ate in the 'Oasis' before going for a film. Unlike last time Rhod and I could enjoy the film! What film? We got a showing of Starwars number 1, which everyone enjoyed even though we had seen it before, the big screen makes a big difference.

We had some time to kill after the film before the Bernie-mobile arrived so the girls dragged us round more shops including Disney and Warner Bros., again! We met up with Bernie's mum and we got a surprise treat on the way home, we got fed at the Little Chuff! If you've never had the pleasure (?) of eating in one of these places, the one thing you can say is that you get fed well even if you do wait forever! Dad never tires of telling everyone about going in a Chuff with mum for a coffee. I mean like two cups of coffee, go in,

order, get coffee, drink coffee, pay leave, 20 minutes max. Oh no in a Chuff you are looking at twice that and Dad reckons it took a full hour as they had two cups each! He might be exaggerating but we were there for an hour and a half tonight!

Thus I didn't get that ride with mum today, maybe tomorrow.

"Up young man!"

"Whaa?"

"Come on get up, it's dry and we're going for a ride"

"It's twerly"

"It's eight o'clock, now come on, breakfast is on the table"

"Okay mum"

In truth I wasn't reluctant, just tired. When I got home last night the house was in uproar, mum was packing! It's the same every holiday, mum packing is like preparing for D-day and then some. This time it was different, mum was taking a lot of stuff; it was like she was leaving forever. Her wardrobe was nearly empty and there seemed to be tons of bike stuff piled in the hall too.

"You okay with this Drew?" Mum came straight to the point as soon as we were heading towards Thoresby.

"I guess so. But helping you pack last night, it seems sort of final, like it won't be the same again"

"I know, it feels strange to me as well. Leaving you and Juliette is hard and well you know what I'm like when dad's not around"

"Edgy?"

"That at least. But you know why I have to go?"

"I know you really want to race with the pro's"

"There's that but it's more than just that."

We crossed over the A1 road and toward Retford.

Mum continued, "before I had you kids, I used to race at the top level but there was no way I could ride against the foreign teams, there was just no support at home. Then you kids arrived and it was moot anyway."

"You still raced though!"

"I know, but with you two I couldn't afford the time or money to pursue things. And before you blame yourself for my lack of career, don't! I wouldn't change a thing, especially you kids."

"So now we're older and you can afford it you want to go for it"

"I guess so. I know it's a bit selfish but this sort of chance comes up about never so I have to do it. So I know I at least tried, at my age (she's thirty four in June) I won't get a second chance, forgive me?"

"I'll still miss you"

"Of course you will, but your dad will ring every night, so we can talk."

"It won't be the same"

"Course not but chances are it will only be till the autumn and then it's back to normal!"

We negotiated Retford and took the lanes towards Gainsborough.

"Now then young man, while we are on our own, watch that pothole, we need a talk"

"What about?"

"About you"

"Like what?"

"Your Gran told me about your pierced ears"

"She said she wouldn't!"

"I asked her. Now don't get a strop on. I don't know why you had it done and you know my thoughts on the subject. But what's done is done. All I'm going to say is, in future talk to me before doing something like that"

I have to say it wasn't the conversation I expected.

"I'm sorry mum. It was sort of spur of the moment, I was with the girls and.."

"I don't think I want to know all the details do I?"

I sighed as I wasn't going to have to come up with a lie.

"No mum"

We pulled up at Beckingham Café, the first time I had been on a weekday. At weekends it's always crowded with cyclists and bikers but today it was truck and van drivers so we got some strange looks in our cycling kit as we went up to the counter.

"Usual Drew?"

"Yes please mum"

"Go get a seat and take my stuff"

Mum ordered and soon joined me with two-pint mugs of tea. We sat talking about mum's new job while we waited for our food, she was infectiously enthusiastic and it really did sound like a cycling fairy tale. We were interrupted by the delivery of the food.

"Here we go girls, that should keep you going"

"Thanks Bill"

I was turning bright pink and spluttering while mum was starting to giggle.

"He, he, he..."

"I know, perhaps you're really Drewella"

Mum was struggling to control herself.

"But mum"

"I know Drew, don't worry about it and eat your food"

"Yes mum"

I was a bit miffed though. It wasn't like it was the first time it had happened; the shoe shop was bad enough but here with mum and the other night at the ten too. I really will have to get a hair cut!

After the café we crossed into Gainsborough and turned towards Lincoln. We took it steady and mum kept up a one sided dialog about what she would be doing this summer.

"Short way back?"

"I guess so"

So we turned onto the A57 to cross Dunham Bridge, then mum started pressing the pace a bit. All the way through Tuxford she had me pushed close to my limits before easing back to a steady 15mph as we dropped down to Ollerton. We were back to talking, although I was hurting a bit from the effort and the last few miles went swiftly by. We got home just after twelve; plenty of time to get to Clive's to play some video games.

I felt better about mum going and as mum knew about my ears I didn't need to fret over that either, perhaps I should get some earrings. What am I thinking!

Friday, the last day of the holiday really. We all, that's the girls, me, Rhod, Clive and Paul with Jules and her mates, are going skating in Nottingham. We caught the bus into Mansfield, then the connection on to Nottingham. As you can imagine, ten of us made a bit of a din but we managed not to get thrown off the bus!

We arrived before the morning session started so we watched the ice hockey practice before getting on the ice ourselves. None of us are great skaters and Clive and Juliette are appalling! But we all had a great time and too soon it was over. It was only lunchtime so we did the Burger King thing before joining the throngs of shoppers in the shopping area. We found some really cool shops selling Goth stuff and Maddy just had to look in the dancewear shop, so we all did.

That was the scene of another Drew the girl episode. I ended up on my own for some reason and I was stood absentmindedly looking at the displays.

"Can I help you miss?"

Not again! I mean I was wearing baggy jeans and a hoody, how un girl like is that!



"Er no thanks, I'm just waiting for my friends, I think they went upstairs" I used my deepest voice in an attempt to ignore the miss bit.

"Ok if you're sure. I'm just over here if you want me, you might want to look at the new leotards on the rail over there, there's some really pretty ones in your size"

Drat didn't work!

"Thanks"

The assistant smiled back and returned to her station, for want of anything better to do I made my way to the rail of leotards which is where Maddy found me.

"Gaby there you are"

"I was just"

"Are you going to get one" Maddy was smirking at me

"No, come on and less of the Gaby!"

I started towards the exit but had to pass the salesgirl.

"Nothing you liked?"

"Er no"

"She's just looking today, her mums getting her some stuff in a couple of weeks. That pink one with the flowers is really nice."

"I like that one too, well we might see you in a couple of weeks then"

"Er yes"

"Well have a nice day girls, bye"

"Bye" we both echoed.

"What was with the Gaby stuff in there Mad?" I fumed

"Well I heard her calling you miss when I came looking for you so I thought I'd go along with it, more to the point why was she calling you miss?"

"I wish I knew, when I was out with mum yesterday the guy at the café did too."

"We have just so got to tell the others"

"Not with Clive and Paul around we don't! it's embarrassing enough as it is and they might make the connection. Anyway where are the rest of them?"

"Waiting in the square, we're going for the bus now"

I was sure things were starting to get even more weird but I didn't dwell on it.

Mum's last weekend at home was going to be busy. I was due to be riding with mum on the tandem this afternoon, a twenty five mile time trial, then tomorrow was mums last proper race before going to Germany, seventy five miles near Market Harborough.

We all piled into the camper with the tandem and drove the twenty miles up to Blyth. News of mum's contract got there before us, everyone wanted to congratulate her and we nearly missed our start because mum was talking so much! We were soon into a rhythm and unlike Christmas this time it was a straight out and back course. I was pedalling for all my worth and we made good time to the turn, just under thirty minutes.

We actually passed a couple of other tandems on the way back but the scratch team caught and passed us for four minutes with just two miles to go. If mum did the same calculation I did it would account for her sudden spurt and my attempt to help out as best I could. After all the scratch pair had a slowest time this year of fifty-one minutes so we were doing pretty well!

We made the last turn still within a couple of hundred metres of the scratch team and seeing this the small gallery became as vocal as I've ever heard at a time trial, I pushed my last and we sailed over the line. We turned in the village and we were both still panting away like mad.

"Brilliant ride ladies, thought we'd never catch you"

"Thanks" mum gasped "what have you done?"

"49.50, our best this year, see you at the tea tent" and with that the two burly tandemists left us to almost crawl up the hill back to the HQ.

"If they've done a 49 mum we must get a 54 at the worst!" I was exhausted but jumping with adrenaline at the same time.

As we pulled to a halt at the tea tent we were greeted by a mixture of "well done"s, "great ride"s and clapping. Dad and jules found us, dad taking charge of the tandem after we dismounted.

"53.59 mum!"

Jules was almost doing a jig in excitement

"You're second so far but there's no one left to finish who's that quick"

By this time I was collapsed on the grass sipping the tea dad had appropriated for me. Mum sat next to me and gave me a hug.

"Still life in your old mum yet eh?"

"That was fantastic, I'm really gonna miss doing this"

"Me too Drew, me too. But I promise that if I get a chance I'll ride the memorial weekend with you in September."

"That'd be great!"

## **Part 17**

### **Back to School**

After the euphoria of the previous evening, Sunday was a bit flat and melancholy. We all travelled down to mum's race south of Leicester, unusually in dad's car as we only had the one bike. Mum herself was a little pent up and most of the journey was in silence, even us kids weren't bickering.

I'm not sure whether it was the after effects of Saturday evening but mum's ride was a bit lacklustre, uninspired. We drove across the course to cheer her on and she gave us a grin as she passed but her mind was obviously elsewhere. Not elsewhere enough to miss the break when it went though!

As the laps disappeared, so the break reduced until with only ten miles left there were only six women left. The last time we saw them, they all looked tired; it was a matter of attrition and determination. We rushed back to the finish and just got to the straight as the little group hove into sight. It seemed an eternity before they reached us, only four riders, the other two having lost the pace. We cheered mum on and the tired sprint passed us with three riders in contention. At the line however mum lost by a wheel, I instantly blamed the '25', well mum *always* wins!

After the presentation, we were soon off, mum was philosophical and the rest of us had mixed emotions.

"Ok guys, snap out of it"

"Yes mum"

"Ok mum"

"Look, we won't have time later in the week what with school and everything so we'll go out for a meal tonight. Ok everyone?"

"Sure mum"

Well we knew it would be our last family 'occasion' for a while with mum off to Germany in less than a week.

As I don't want to bring you all down to how I feel, I won't relive the evening for you but the food was good, we went to the Val Paradiso Italian restaurant and we all like pasta!

"Come on Drew, up for school!"

"Ugh?"

"Come on, I forgot it's school photo's today."

"Oh no"

"Oh yes, now up and get ready, I've pressed your uniform so come on"

I really will miss mum. I guess every school has a photo day so you all know the score, wait for ages, then two snaps and back to lessons. Well we were getting form photos too so with the whole school involved; there were no lessons scheduled, just 'study' periods.

I met the rest of the gang at school, everyone was in freshly laundered uniforms, not unusual of course, but the pressed skirts and trousers were!



I suppose we all looked smart enough, Jules didn't have too much tidying with our little group anyway (she had been assigned to help tidy dishevelled pupils!). with all the activity and a lack of full supervision the day was actually quite fun.

Our little group met as usual in the evening and with no dance to prepare for we settled on a few video games and listening to cd's.

"Can I tell Drew?" Maddy started

"Tell what?"

"You know, the dance shop"

"What about the dance shop Drew?" Bernie queried

I'd just about forgotten the incident, but Maddy obviously hadn't.

"Oh that. Do we have to Mad?"

"Yes. Drew had another Gaby moment in Nottingham"

"Scary" Rhod put in.

"No kidding" I replied "it's not like I was trying or anything"

"Come on then tell us" Ally was getting impatient.

"You tell 'em Mad, I'm too embarrassed"

"Ok Drew. Well you remember we lost Drew when we went upstairs?"

"Yeah"

"Well he was in the main shop and the assistant thought he was a girl"

"You didn't help!" I accused

"Come on Mad, spill 'em"

"Well when I found him, he was checking out some leotards"

"Pretending to!" I shouted as I flushed crimson

"Ok pretending to. Anyway the assistant was doing her damnedest to sell him one so I told her that she, that is Drew was just looking for now."

"Tell them the rest"

"Well I sort of said that we'd be back to buy one in a couple of weeks"

"Yeah well, like that's gonna happen" Bernie stated.

"Oh come on Drew how's about it?"

"No way!"

"Pretty please"

"Give over girls, why would Drew want to do that?"

"Cos he's a sport?"

"Look I just want to forget it" I stated.

"Ok spoilsport" Ally mock pouted.

Well at least we had that settled, hadn't we?

Tuesday was back to normal and I looked forward to the ten in the evening. After school I got myself ready and this time had a more leisurely ride up to Cuckney. The weather was fair and I followed a similar routine to the

previous week. I drew number thirteen this week and it was obviously going to bring me doom.

"Go, number thirteen!"

I moved up to the line.

"Ah young Miss Bond" the timekeeper stated

I was not sure which would be worse, just going with the flow or trying to explain that I was not Miss Bond but Mr.

"Thirty seconds"

My mind was sort of made for me by the stopwatch.

"Fifteen seconds, take care at the crossroads, ten"

Ah well, afterwards then.

"5, 4, 3, 2, 1, go!"

And I was away again.

I tried to concentrate on what I was doing, but my mind kept going back to the assumption that I was a girl. Clearly no one had noticed the (small) bulge in my shorts and I guess they were using the previous week as a lead in. I really should have spoken out then.

All too soon it seemed, I was approaching the finish. I was out of the saddle sprinting for the line then gasping "thirteen!" I was done. Well I was a bit faster but only seven seconds, twenty six thirty eight, at least I was consistent.

I got dressed and set off home quickly as the temperature was dropping quickly and I hadn't brought any tights with me, my exposed legs already had goose pimples! Damn, I had left without saying anything again. Well next week...

From then on in the week I became more depressed as mums departure got closer. I got through school on autopilot; the guys were all sympathetic, knowing the reason. Even the teachers seemed to be taking it easy on me, I know mum had been into school on Tuesday, so perhaps they knew why I was distracted.

All too soon it was Saturday and departure day for mum. Us kids weren't going to the airport with her, mum thought it best we say our goodbyes at home, then dad was driving her down to Stansted. Well there's no denying it

was a tearful session, Jules, me and mum were all sobbing like mad and in the end dad almost had to drag mum into the car.

"Take care kids"

"We will mum" Jules replied

"I'll miss you both"

"Go on mum"

"I'll see you in a few weeks yeah?"

"We'll be there!"

"Ok, well behave for your dad, jules look after your brother and Drew"

"Yes mum?"

"You be careful on that bike"

"Yes mum"

"Time to go guys" dad stated

We both gave mum a hug through the car window and then waved until the car was out of sight. I felt really down, I'm sure Juliette did too, but we didn't have time to get maudlin as the gang arrived not ten minutes later.

## **Part 18**

### **Gaby rides again!**

"Come on you two, we're all going to Retford market with Bernie's mum"

"And your both coming, mum said!"

Well how could we argue with that sort of determination? We both got our stuff and met the others at the corner where Bernie's mum was waiting in her Previa. We all piled in and we were on our way to Retford.

The market we were headed for is much like the town, quite small and old fashioned, but it was a real outdoor market in the streets. It's not far away, I could have ridden my bike there in under an hour, and in the SUV it took about forty minutes even going via Worksop!

"Ok kids"

"Muuum!"

"Sorry, okay it's nearly one thirty now, meet me at the cross at three thirty"

"Alright Mrs Rose"

"And no moping you two" that comment was to me and Jules.

"No Mrs Rose"

"Okay, have fun and I'll see you later, bye"

"Bye" we all echoed.

Mrs Rose headed off towards the top of the market, while the six of us went the other way. It never ceases to amaze me what you can find at these markets, fruit and veg of course, shoes, clothing of all types, carpets, watches, Hoovers – well pretty much anything really.

We moved through the stalls slowly avoiding prams and shopping trolleys, extolling the virtues of this and that, buying an apple each and generally just taking it easy. It sure did take my mind off mums' departure. I got engrossed in a 'previously owned' book stall and ended up buying four Discworld books for ten pounds which I thought was a good deal.

Jules bought some fancy candles, as did Maddy who bought some joss sticks from the same stall as well. Bernie bought a new purse from this guy making all sorts of leather stuff there on the market! Kewl! Ally wasn't going to leave

empty handed, she found a neat sort of spiderweb top on this stall selling all sorts of Goth stuff. Only Rhod didn't succumb to the charms of the market, instead Smith's took his cash for a gaming magazine!

It was amazing how the time went, in fact we were a bit late meeting Mrs Rose at the market cross.

"Everyone happy?"

"Yes thanks"

"Juliette, Drew? You alright?"

"Fine thanks Mrs Rose" Jules answered for both of us. I'm sure mum had set this trip up before she went, to keep us occupied.

"Right then, back to the car, we'll stop at the Maccy D's at Markham Moor on the way back."

The general consensus was that that was an OK plan, so we trotted after Bernie's mum to the Toyota and piled in. the car was full of chatter, three conversations going up and down the vehicle and we were quickly at the food emporium.

Our boisterous party fell on the restaurant with glee; the other customers sat quietly eating were bemused by the sudden influx of noise.

"We flew round the island last week on the tandem"

"You never told us about last week Drew" Maddy stated

To be fair, my buds were polite enough to listen to my ramblings about me and mums racing and (I think to shut me up) usually enquired how I got on. With everything going off this last week, they hadn't had the latest instalment of Drew Bond – cycling superstar!

So between mouthfuls of French Fries and Burger I had to relate how we swept nearly all before us as mum and I heroically took second place! I don't think anyone except Jules dropped off from boredom! We finished eating and Mrs Rose ushered us back to the car. Back at Warsop, our taxi dropped everyone off, Jules and I were the last.

"You two going to be ok?" Mrs Rose asked

"Yes thanks, Dad should be back about seven"

"Well you know where we are if you need anything"

"Thanks Mrs Rose"

"Yeah thanks"

"Bye Jules, bye Drew" Bernie called from the car

"Bye Bernie" I waved back

"Thanks again Mrs Rose, bye" Jules added.

Well dad got back and brought pizza with him, all in all today wasn't as bad as I thought it would be.

Sunday was odd to say the least. I went for a ride on my own then dad and I drove down to Nottingham track to watch the racing in the afternoon, jules went round to her mates. Dad was doing his best to keep me occupied and I guess it was sort of working.

Monday started off much as usual until mid morning break when I was summoned to the Heads office.

"Ah young Mr Bond, come in and sit down"

As you don't argue with Mr Wood I took the proffered chair.

"Don't look so worried Drew, you're not in trouble."

I started breathing again.

"In fact I'm rather hoping that you can do me a favour"

"If I can Mr Wood" I offered

"Well wait to see what I want first"

"Ok"

"You were quite amazing at the dance, your costume was really excellent and from what I hear no one except your friends knows it was you that won"

"I don't think so, no ones said anything"

"Well that does have something to do with what I want to ask you"

"How Sir?"

"Well Drew, we have to produce a school brochure for new and prospective parents and students. We obviously need to take some photos of students in

the school but it seems everyone thinks they are a comic and we never get good pictures. That's where I hope you can help out. I or rather the school would like you to dress up for us, in school uniform, and we will feature you in the brochure. I ran the idea past your mother when she came in last week and she has left it to you to decide."

"I don't get it sir, I just have to wear my uniform for some pictures?"

"Sorry Drew I didn't make myself clear did I? We want you to be your alter ego, Gaby is it? That is you will be, as far as anyone else is concerned a girl."

I'm sure my jaw hit the floor. Here was my headmaster suggesting I should become a girl for his brochure photo's, did he think I liked it or something. I guess he could tell by my expression that I was shocked by this 'offer'.

"Before you decide, I'm not suggesting there's anything wrong with you or that you're a 'sissy'. I just think that you and your friends pulled off a very good stunt faultlessly and if you decide to do it we'll do it properly, I've already had a 'modelling' fee authorised by the governors, and no they won't know it's you either. What do you say?"

I was still in shock at his proposal.

"I don't know sir"

"Tell you what, think about today and tonight, let me know in the morning okay?"

"Yes sir"

"Well, you best get along, lessons start in two minutes and you don't want to be late now"

"No sir, thank you sir"

I hurriedly made my exit and headed to double maths.

Well as you might guess my thoughts rarely strayed from the proposal for the rest of the day. I didn't even mention it when I met the gang later on, I knew what their reaction would be and I really didn't want to dress up again (although I knew I would have to for the bank).

So I surprised myself next morning when I went to Mr Wood's office.

"Come in Drew"

"Thank you Sir"

"Made a decision?"

"Yes sir"

"And?"

"Oh sorry sir. I guess I'll do it, but like no one else gets to know?"

"I'm not going to broadcast it Drew"

"In that case, yes I'll do it."

"Great stuff lad."

"When do we er I start?"

"I hoped you'd agree so I've already got you excused lessons today. Mrs Johnson will look after you and take you to get a girls uniform in Mansfield, but I guess you need a makeover first, do you need any of friends to help out?"

"Er please sir Maddy Philips, it was her wig that I wore at the dance and she did my makeup too"

"Ok then, take this note and you are both excused for the day, go and get 'changed and I will get Mrs Johnson to pick you both up from your house at lets say eleven thirty. That ok?"

"Yes sir"

"Ok Drew off you go and thank you for doing this"

Why the heck was I doing this? It must have been the promise of a 'modelling' fee; I certainly didn't want to dress as a schoolgirl really. I found Maddy and after showing her Mr Wood's letter spent the walk to her house explaining everything.

"So Mrs Johnson is going to take us to buy you a girls uniform?"

"Yeah that's the plan"

"This is just so strange!"

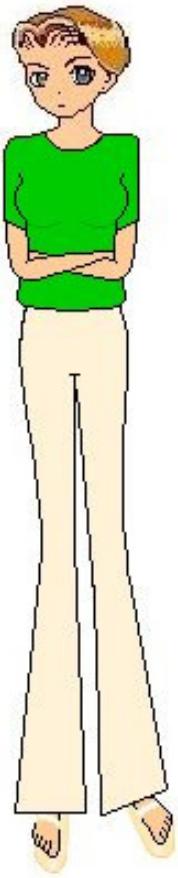
"No kidding, I can't believe I agreed to do it"

"Well at least you'll get paid"

"I guess"

"Come on, we haven't got long to get you ready"

Well Maddy excelled herself and by the time Mrs Johnson arrived to pick us up I was dressed quite casually in a green t shirt, off white trousers and a pair of Juliette's sandals.



Mrs Johnson did a double take when she knocked at the door!

"We don't want anyone to find out your not a girl, what do I call you?"

"We christened her Gaby Mrs Johnson"

"Ok Gaby it is then. Right let's get on then"

So it was that one of my teachers took me, Drew, to the school outfitters, dressed as a girl to buy a girls school uniform! Yes I'm confused. Maddy wasn't helping either, even in the car she was calling me Gaby!

"Right young lady, we've got your tie, skirt and blouse, we need to get you shoes, socks and underwear too. That's how I ended up back in the shoe store being served by Sarah again.

"Did the dance go ok?"

"Er yes thanks, the shoes were really comfortable"

"Well what can we do for you today Gaby"

"I er have to get some school shoes?"

"Size five wasn't it?"

"Er yes"

"Right then over here"

Sarah soon had me kitted out with a pair of what she called 'Mary Jane' Kickers much like those worn by lots of my female schoolmates.

"Bye Gaby"

"Bye Sarah"

Time was getting on by the time we got back to Warsop so Mrs Johnson dropped me, Maddy and my new uniform straight off at home.

"Now don't forget Drew, I'll pick you up here in the morning and take you to the studio in Worksop. They're expecting us and will do your makeup for the shoot, just be ready in the uniform at eight thirty ok?"

"Yes miss"

"Ok then I'll see you in the morning."

"Lets see you with it all on then Drew" Maddy dictated

"Okay then, I best try it all together"

I was quickly dressed in the uniform and presented myself before Maddy.

"Kewl, I got something for you in Mansfield, here" she gave me a small paper packet.

"What is it?"

"A pair of gold hoops, here let me put them in for you"

"Ok I guess"

She soon had the tiny gold 'sleepers' in my ears then stood back.

"You know, if I didn't know I'd think you were a girl!"



"Gee that really helps my ego" I replied sarcastically

"Golly, is that the time?"

"Yeah, oh blast I need to get ready for the ten!"

"Okay then, I'll see you tomorrow perhaps"

"Well you might see Gaby I 'spose"

"Bye"

"Bye Mad, and thanks for helping today"

"No sweat Drew, bye" and with that she was gone.

Jules was at Charlie's for tea and Dad was late so I grabbed a sandwich, quickly changed into my skin suit and dived out to the ten. I was signing on before I remembered the makeup and earrings! I was cooked again, I could hardly claim to be a guy wearing eyeliner and earrings could I?

So Gaby rides again!

## **Part 19**

### **Gaby at School**

Well I rode that ten like a boy (girl?) possessed! The timekeeper hove into view and I was finished and freewheeling down into Cuckney village. I couldn't tell you much about the ride; I had put all my concentration into it, blocking out my appearance and any thoughts of my soon 'official' time as Gaby.

"Excellent ride young Bond, your mother will be proud"

"Er what did I do?" I asked the timekeeper.

"26.04"

"Wow, that's only ten seconds off my personal"

"Well done, everyone else is slower this week."

I was really chuffed at this insight; I could only put it down to concentrating more.

"See you next week then?"

"I expect so, bye"

"Bye lass"

I could see that a revelation about my sex was getting to be less of an option at the ten, I could only hope that the 'Life of Gaby' at school remained the secret it was supposed to be. I had sworn Maddy to secrecy earlier, but would she, indeed could she resist the temptation to tell the guy's? I was hoping so but I knew she was itching to tell someone.

I got home and as I used the outside shower, I was free of makeup when I got indoors where Jules was watching telly.

"Hi sis"

"Hi Drew"

"What you watching?"

"MTV"

"Any good?"

She turned to look at me,

"Ok I guess, you've got earrings in!" it was a statement. I had of course forgotten all about the little gold loops Maddy had put in earlier.

"Er yes. Erm I guess I better tell you what's happening"

That got her attention.

"What's up Drew, come on spill!"

"Well Mr Wood has asked me to be the featured 'pupil' in the new school brochure"

"Great Drew but what's with the ears?"

"Um, well it's not that straight forward. I'm not the model, Gaby is."

"What?"

"Well Mr Wood knew it was me at the dance and he wanted an anonymous pupil for the pictures so he asked me yesterday if I'd mind dressing up as Gaby to do the photo's."

"What will dad and mum say?"

"He already spoke to mum and she told him I could if I wanted"

"But I didn't think you liked dressing in girls stuff?"

"I don't but he's gonna pay me and I get out of school lessons for a few days!"

"This is like so strange. I mean my little brother is going to be in school dressed as a girl! Because the Head wants him to, this is just so weird."

"Tell me about it. Anyway we went to get the uniform and stuff today and Mad got the earrings for me, she said it would be more convincing"

"Mad knows?"

"Yeah, but she's the only one except now you. She helped out today but that's all."

"Weirder and weirder"

"Anyway, Mrs Johnston is picking me up in the morning and I have to wear the uniform."

"Ooh let's see?"

"Not now, you can help me get ready in the morning"

"Oh! What about dad?"

"I've got a letter for him from Mr Wood"

"The Head really thought of everything eh?"

"I guess so, I mean it wouldn't look good on him if I was found out would it?"

"Guess not. Anyway those earrings look good on you, I wish mum would let me get mine done."

"I bet if you asked she'd let you, especially now as mine are done."

"I'll ask when she rings tomorrow then"

"Go for it. Anyway I'm pooped; I'm off to bed. See you in the morning, night!"

"Night Drew"

Well morning came around all too quickly and Gaby was about to return with a vengeance. While I dressed myself in the uniform I rationalised that I was doing this for the money, I mean I really didn't enjoy dressing as a girl. Although dad knew about the heads deception plan he was gone before Gaby made an appearance.

"Strewth Drew, even without the wig and makeup you look like Maddy's sister!"

"Thanks I think. I'm not sure why I've got to wear this bra though, after all I've not got anything to put in it."

"I always used to use balled up socks you should try that"

"Perhaps, is there any milk in that carton?"

"Yeah, here" Jules passed the milk over, "I'll get you some 'stuffing' while you have breakfast"

"Ok thanks"

By the time I had finished my corn flakes Jules was back.

"Undo your blouse"

I followed her instruction and after a bit of prodding and 'moulding' I had passable breasts. With the blouse done back up and my tie on even I was reasonably confident I could pull the deception off.

Mrs Johnston picked me up and we drove the few miles to Worksop and the photographer's studio.

"I thought the pictures would be in school Mrs Johnston?"

"They will be 'Gaby', but we need to finish getting you ready first and it was easier to bring you here than get Sally to come to the school, after all she has other customers too."

"Who's Sally?"

"Sorry dear, Sally's the make up artist that John our photographer uses, she knows what's going on and with her help no one will know about your alter ego. Ah here we are"

The studio was housed in a converted shop unit on Chesterfield Road. I was ushered in and we were greeted by a woman of about thirty.

"Hi Mary and I take it this is Drew?"

"Gaby Sally"

"Fine well hi Gaby, come on through lets make you beautiful for your public!"

This woman was scary!

"Ok lets see what we've got" she seated me at a table and started turning my face this way and that. "Well you are much better than I envisioned when John told me about all this. What are you using for boobs?"

"Socks"

"Socks?"

"Yeah my sisters idea, she said she used to use them for a bit extra"

"Well I think I can do better than that for you and your face doesn't really need any more than most schoolgirls wear, a bit of lippy, liner and we'll tidy those brows a bit"

"You're not gonna pluck them are you?"

"Just a few unruly ones, don't worry you'll still look like a boy afterwards. Mary do you want to go and get a coffee while I sort young Gaby out?"

"If you don't mind I'll pop out as I've got another couple of errands to run while I'm in town. How long do you need?"

"Oh I reckon we'll be done here by ten"

"Fine. See you about ten then"

Mrs Johnston left leaving me in Sally's clutches.

"How did you end up volunteering for this then Drew?"

Well you don't need me to repeat the story so far do you? Sally worked on my face as I told the tale in abbreviated form.

"There we are, that's your face done. Pop off your blouse and bra and we'll sort you out a better pair of boobs eh?"

I guessed she meant some sort of false breasts but I wasn't sure why I had to take the bra off. Surely you put the falsies in the bra didn't you? Well I complied while Sally slipped out for a few minutes.

"Ok Drew sit back, I won't be a minute"

I sat back down and closed my eyes as I went through events in my head. I felt Sally wipe my chest with something then one and a second cold something landed on my chest. She fussed around for a bit then announced,

"How's that feel Drew?"

"Er, a bit odd actually"

"Well you'll soon get used to it

I could feel two something's pulling on my chest that seemed to sway a bit as I sat back up. When I looked down two very real looking breasts confronted me. When I say real I mean that I couldn't even see a join, and I couldn't resist cupping them in my hands.

"32B"

"What?"

"Well you'll need to know, I think you're about 32B every girl knows what bra size they are."

"Oh right. They're so real"

"Great aren't they" she replied proudly. "With those on your chest no one will ever guess you're not a girl. The glue will last until the weekend; I'll give you some solvent to take them off then. Now young lady you'd better get dressed before Mary, Mrs Johnston gets back"

"Oh right. You mean I'm stuck with these until the weekend?"

"Of course silly, John will be taking pictures of you today, tomorrow and Friday so this will save a lot of time. Mrs Johnston will do your make up the rest of the week."

Just then Mrs J returned.

"All ready I see. You ok Gaby?"



"Yes miss"

"Ok then, thanks Sally"

"No problem Mary, see you soon. And Gaby"

"Yes Sally?"

"Take care and good luck"

"Thanks, bye Sally"

"Bye"

"Come on young lady, let's get you back to school"

"Yes miss"

We got back to Warsop as morning break was starting. Mr Wood was really impressed with my appearance.

"Well Gaby, what we are going to do is this. Today you'll sit in on your normal classes; John will sit in as well and will take general classroom shots. Tomorrow we'll do the classroom close ups and Friday it's the fillers, the canteen, arriving at school, sports."

"Sports sir?"

"Don't worry about it today. Come on I'll 'introduce' you to your classmates"

"Yes sir"

We met John the photographer on the way to double English.

"Before Mr Cartwright starts the lesson I want to introduce a couple of people to you. This" he urged me forward, "is Gaby Thomas, Madeline Peters cousin. She will be sitting in on your lessons this week as she has kindly agreed to be a model for us. Mr Dover you will probably recognise as the school photographer. He will be joining you too. John"

"Thanks headmaster, I'll be quick so Mr Cartwright can get on with his lesson. Ignore me, I might pop up next to you brandishing a camera, just forget I'm here. Tomorrow I will be taking lots of pictures of Gaby here so I don't need any more starlets!"

That received a chortle through the room and effectively pre-empted several prima donna performances.

"Ok, that's all from me, Mr Wood?"

"Thank you Mr Dover, I trust 2B are adult enough to do as they are asked?"

"Yes Sir Mr Wood" the class replied in unison.

"Right then Mr Cartwright they are all yours"

"Thank you headmaster. Gaby, as Drew Bond is off today you can take his seat next to Paul Jones there." He indicated my usual seat next to Paul.

"Ok today we are going to start looking at contemporary poetry"

You don't really need me to go through the lesson blow by blow. Paul kept giving me looks, but he had met Gaby before. I caught several girls checking me out and most of the boys found some excuse to look my direction. From time to time John popped up amongst the desks snapped a few frames and then slunk back off to the rear of the class.

The tone was set for my first day at school as Gaby; physics and maths completed the day. Of course at lunch I got the third, fourth and fifth degree from my classmates and peers. Maddy rescued me; she had by now filled in the rest of the gang and seeing that I knew a few people my classmates let me be. It didn't stop the looks, particularly from the lads, but the gang plus Clive and Paul was enough to keep contact with the general hoi poloi to a minimum.

Four o'clock couldn't come quick enough! We had decided that I would go home with Maddy then Jules would 'collect' me later. I certainly didn't want people picking up that I was going home to the Bond house and as I was supposed to be Maddy's cousin this arrangement was at least logical.

## **Part 20**

### **Model**

"You look wrecked"

"Oh thank you 'cousin'"

"Oh come on Drew it's not that bad!"

"It's alright for you, you didn't get boobs in one day"

"True enough, I was gonna ask how you managed to get such great tits, I thought you'd just stuff the bra with tights or something"

"That's how I started this morning, but Sally, the makeup lady had these and stuck them on "

"Stuck them on?"

"Yeah, I'm sort of stuck with them"

"This I have to see"

I was getting a bit embarrassed, even if it was Maddy. Here I was a boy and a girl is asking to see my boobs! Seeing my expression Mad went on,

"Oh come on Drew, you can just take your blouse off and I can see"

"I guess. Oh no, dad's gonna see them when I get home, I can't hide these can I?"

"I'll lend you a baggy top if you want, but why not just tell him? I mean he knows your doing the photo's and dressing up doesn't he?"

"Yeah I guess so, I just feel so conspicuous"

"Well apart from 'new girl' syndrome no one at school has a clue"

"How do you know?"

"Something like 'there's a boy in a skirt' would be round the school in a flash and I would certainly know as your supposed to be my cousin, it would get back mark my words'

"I guess your right"

"You know I am. When we get to my place, just remember you're not Drew in front of mum, after tea I'll do your nails."

"Do my nails? Why?"

"Trust me, it's a girl thing"

"But you're not allowed to wear nail varnish"

"Coloured varnish no but clears ok and your nails need it"

I had to check my nails, and I guess they weren't exactly ladylike, broken, uneven, even a little chewed. I realised they could be a give away, I mean a girl looking like I do would look after her nails.

We reached Maddy Towers and Mrs Peters greeted us.

"Hi Maddy"

"Hi mum, you remember Gaby from the dance?"

"Of course I do, hello Gaby, you staying for tea?"

"Yes please Mrs Peters"

"It'll be about half an hour then girls"

"Thanks mum"

"Thanks Mrs Peters"

"Come on Gab, I'll show you that dress"

Maddy led the way up to her room.

Mrs Peters frowned as she watched her daughter and her new friend going up the stairs. There was something familiar about that girl, something not quite right. She looked and acted every bit as she appeared, if a little shy but no that wasn't it. 'Perhaps I know her mother?' she shook her head and put the tagliatelle in the pan.

"Come on Gabs, let's see your boobs!"

A little devil crept in to my mind at this point.

"I'll show you mine if you show me yours"

Gaby wasn't expecting that he could tell by her expression. She seemed to think that through carefully before answering.

"Well I guess I strip in front of the other girls and you're another girl now right"

"Er yes"

"Ok then but I'm keeping my bra on and I 'spose you should too in case mum comes up"

"Suits me, come on then"

As if there was a hidden cue we both turned away from the other and we removed our blouses. We turned around to face each other again.



We looked at each other, me with lust and Maddy with amazement.

"Wow Gabs they are just so awesome"

"Well yours are pretty nice too"

"Yeah but if I didn't know I would just never guess they weren't real, can I look closer"

"I guess so"

She moved to look better, to be truthful I didn't mind as I got a better view of her real boobs.

"They are just so good, even up close I can't see the join"

There was a knock at the door and without thinking Maddy answered.

"Come in"

Mrs Peters came in to the room.

"Tea's nearly ready girls, get some clothes on and wash up"

"Ok mum"

Mrs Peters was even more confused now, Gaby certainly looked to be all girl stood there in her bra, but there was definitely something about her.

After her mum had gone Maddy went across to the wardrobe and emerged a minute later brandishing some clothing.

"Here put this on" she thrust a bundle in to my hands.

Inhibitions forgotten, she turned and removed her skirt and started dressing; I decided I had best follow suit.

We were both soon dressed, Maddy in jeans and T and I wasn't pleased to find I had a yellow spandex minidress.

"Roll your socks down Drew"

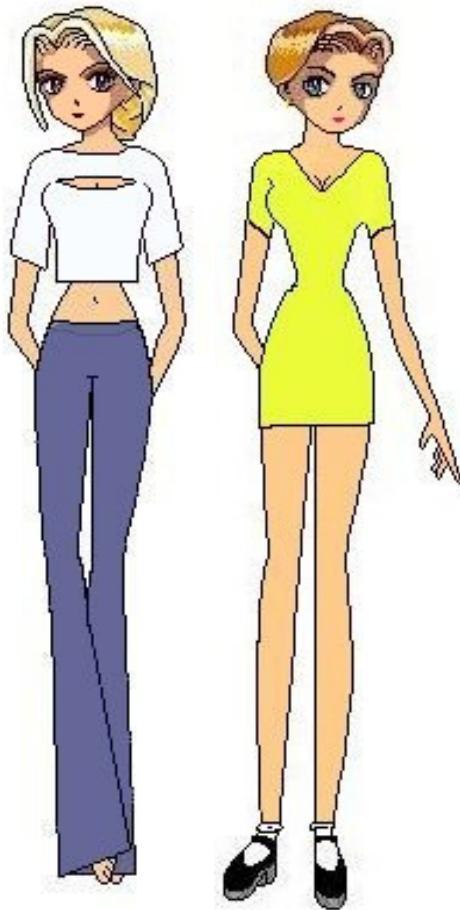
"Why?"

"Just do it"

Sighing I did as requested.

"Come on lets eat"

Maddy led the way via the bathroom to the dining room.



"That dress suits you Gaby"

"Er thanks Mrs Peters"

"Come on sit down and tuck in"

Mrs Peters watched the two girls eating and then something in Gaby's mannerisms made a connection and it all clicked. Looking more closely, yes she was sure now, it was Drew Bond sat at her table! She was in a quandary now, did she ignore this new development or do something, this would take some thinking about. The pretty girl sitting at her table certainly looked the model of a teenager on the brink of driving the boys wild!

## **Part 21**

### **Gaby Exposed**

Mrs Peters was now unsure as to how to proceed. Accuse 'Gaby' of being Drew? Ignore it and see what develops? The two youngsters were certainly not acting 'strangely', Maddy obviously knew the truth or did she? And Jenny in Europe too! By the end of the meal she had made her decision for better or worse.

"Right girls, I think you have something you need to tell me?"

"We do?" Maddy asked in all innocence.

"I'm not stupid Madeline, now I would appreciate the truth"

"About what Mum?" Mad was really playing this while I had got an inkling that she knew.

"If I have to spell it out. Why is Drew Bond sat at my table wearing your dress?"

Well the cards were on the table sure enough. I just sat there trying to sink into the solid dining chair. Maddy was not ready to give up yet though.

"He's not, this is Gaby!"

"Look girls, I'm not angry and I'm not going to argue. I will keep up the pretence but please tell me what's going on"

"Sorry Mrs Peters"

"No Gaby" Mad butted in.

"Its alright Mad, we better come clean. Yes it is me, Drew, but how did you know?"

"Well Drew it was the way you eat that really gave you away. You always eat my tagliatelle with such enjoyment and gusto; you did the same just now. I've never seen anyone enjoy it like you except for 'Gaby'."

At least I hadn't been spotted as such. Sheesh there is just so much to watch when you're a girl!

"Are you going to tell me what's going on, I'm not really happy that you were both half naked in Maddy's bedroom"

"Mum!"

"Oh I think I can trust you both but I think I deserve that explanation and start at the beginning please?"

"Ok Mrs Peters, but can you call me Gaby while I'm dressed like this please?"

"Alright Gaby, now hit me with it"

Between us we gave her the full story much as I told Sally this morning.

"I'm not sure I can believe all this but I guess the evidence is in front of me. Who else knows?"

"Just the gang Mum"

"And Mr Wood, Mrs Johnston, Sally and John the photographer"

"Oh and Juliette"

"Is that everyone?"

"Yes Mrs Peters"

"What about your parents Gaby?"

"Well they sort of know about this week, I don't know what Mr Wood told mum though"

"Ok then, it seems you kids know what you are doing so I won't pull the plug but there are conditions"

"Conditions?" Maddy asked

"Yes conditions, number

1. You Gaby are staying here till the weekend, in the spare room. We can't have Maddy's cousin staying at the Bond's can we. Number
2. I won't have you two alone in a bedroom, if the other girls are here fine but otherwise it's a no no. And lastly number
3. I'm taking you to Mrs Morgan for a quick makeover. Ok guys?"

I breathed a sigh of relief; things had gone better than I thought possible. I heard Maddy relax too.

"Yes mum"

"That will be great Mrs Peters"

"Not Mrs Peters Gaby, Aunt Carol right"

"Yes Auntie"

"Fine that's settled then. What time is your sister coming over?"

"About seven?"

"Ok, I'll ring Sylvia and arrange your makeover and we can all go together."

'Aunt Carol' got up and went to the hall phone.

"What a turn up Gab!"

"I guess your mums right with the conditions, it does make sense"

"Lets do the washing up"

"Sure"

We collected the plates and dishes and carried them through to the kitchen. I caught a bit of the phone conversation as we crossed the hall.

"...my niece Gaby, I must have told you about her Sylv...yes till the weekend, thought I'd pamper the girls a bit if you don't mind.....no eight o'clock's fine, see you then...bye"

"Well that's sorted then. Eight o'clock so we don't need to rush. When you've finished the dishes we'll get you dressed a bit more modestly eh Gaby?"

"Yes Mrs.. I mean aunt"

Maddy stifled a laugh at my discomfort.

Well I was grateful in the end for Mrs Peters intervention. Maddy changed out of her jeans into pedal pushers and I got the use of Maddy's knee length shorts teamed with a t. (it might have been a t shirt but it was cropped and emphasised my chest quite a lot!) I was just about dressed when Jules arrived a bit late.

"Hi Mrs Peters"

"Hello Juliette, Maddy and my niece will be down in a minute"

"Your niece?"

"Yes you know Gaby don't you? She's staying for a few days"

Juliette was a bit confused by this statement.

Hearing me and Maddy on the stairs, Aunt Carol continued

"Here they are, I'm treating everyone to a beauty session at '*Sylvia's*', I thought you'd all enjoy a girlie night!"

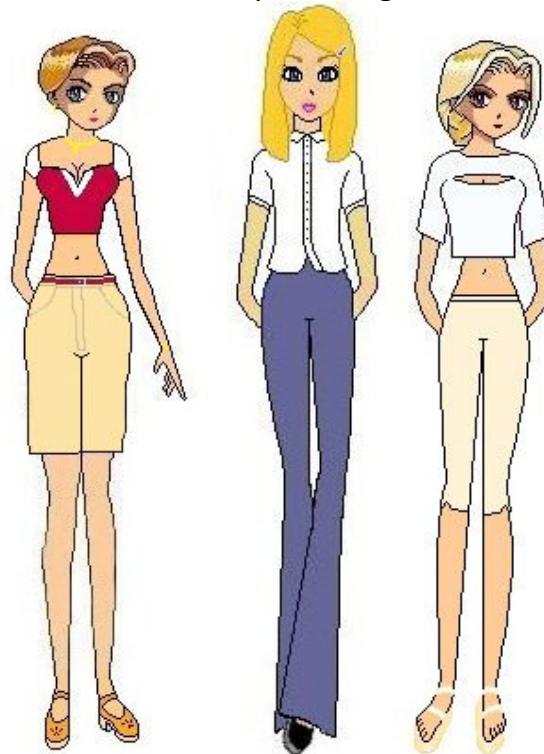
"Hello Juliette, you are coming aren't you?"

"Er yes Mad, that's a great idea Mrs Peters, thanks"

All the while she was looking at me stood next to my 'cousin'.

"Erm, could someone tell me what's happening please?"

"Alright Jules..." And so between us we filled my sister in on the plan. She'd tell dad I was staying with Rhod, which we would square tonight with his mum.



"Ok now we have that sorted, are you girls ready?"

"Yes mum"

"Yes Auntie Carol"

"Yes Mrs Peters"

"Come on then"

The drive to '*Sylvia's*', Mrs Morgan's salon cum boutique only took a few minutes and we were inside a few minutes before Sylvia, Rhod's mum finished her previous clients nails and came to talk.

"Hi Carol, Maddy, Juliette" this was the classier of three local ladies salons so all the girls came here, "and this shy thing must be Gaby"

"Yes my niece is a bit quiet isn't she"

"Muuum" Maddy glowered

"Ok ladies, what are we doing tonight?"

"Oh I think faces and nails for this pair" Aunt Carol indicated my sister and 'cousin', "and I leave Gaby to you, her mums never done the salon thing with her"

"What about you Carol?"

"I'm in tomorrow anyway so I'll just have a coffee and chat"

"Well I think you could give me a hand, you do Juliette and Madeline and I'll concentrate on Gaby here. I'll do their nails if you like"

"No I don't mind, come on you two over here"

"Sit down then Gaby, what's it short for?"

"Gabrielle Mrs Morgan"

"Oh call me Sylvia, everyone else does. Ok lets have a look at you"

I was inspected close enough that I thought I must be uncovered but after a minute Sylv made her pronouncement.

"Right young lady, facial, arm and leg wax, pedicure and manicure"

"Is like the waxing really necessary Sylv?"

To be truthful it wasn't the result that bothered me but the girls always went on about how much it hurt and I'm a wimp!

"I bet the others have been laying it on haven't they?"

I nodded

"It's not that bad really and I know you will love the results. You'll never want to 'just' shave again."

"Uh ok then"

Well for the next hour I was treated to all sorts of stuff, I quickly relaxed when Sylv put the face pack on and I dropped off, I was so relaxed.

"Gaby, Gaby, wakey, wakey"

"Uh"

"Well I think you enjoyed that. It's the first time anyone has ever slept through a waxing!"

"You looked so sweet Gab, we didn't want to wake you" Maddy added.

I tried to glower back but it was more of a sneer.

"Come on girls, and thanks again Sylv"

"No problem Carol and Gaby I expect to see you again soon eh"

"Thanks Sylv, I will" it just seemed polite to reply in the affirmative.

"Bye" the others chorused and we were on our way back to Maddy's.

"I'll drop you home Juliette ok"

"Fine thanks Mrs Peters, and thank you for tonight"

"That's all right, I told your mum I'd keep an eye out for you two"

"Yes thanks 'Auntie', I think I enjoyed it"

The others had a fit of giggles at that. We dropped my sister off and we were soon back at 'Castle Peters'.

"Ok you two, bed at ten thirty, you've both got school tomorrow. Gaby I'll sort you out some night clothes, I'll leave them in your room."

"Thanks Mrs Peters"

"Right you two, I'm off to bed, I'll see you in the morning, goodnight"

"Night mum"

"Night Mrs Peters"

After she went upstairs Maddy and I went into the lounge.

"Where's your Dad?"

"Oh he's in America for some business thing, he's not back till Sunday"

"My legs feel really weird after that waxing"

"Cool eh, we were sure you'd wake up, especially when she did your pits"

I immediately felt under my arms and sure enough they were hairless.

"I must have been really tired I guess"

"How do you like your nails"

I inspected my now even fingernails, a little longer than I remembered and now sporting a French polish.

"Well they do look a lot better"

"I had mine done the same look." She showed me her hands; "This is like really cool. Oh you haven't seen your hair yet either"

"What?"

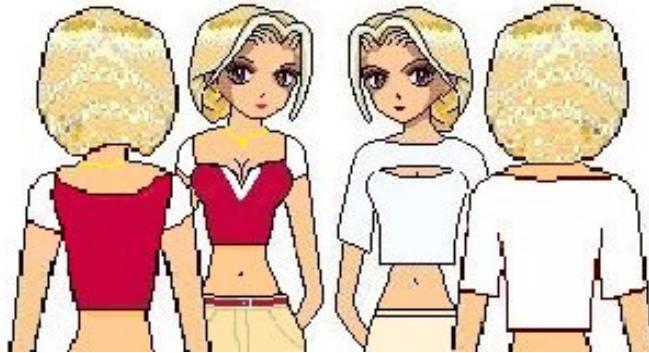
"Don't worry, it's just a few highlights"

That didn't reassure me.

"Come on you can look in the downstairs loo, there's a big mirror"

She led me to the downstairs bathroom and stood me in front of the mirror. Staring back at me was Maddy's twin sister! The 'few' highlights really made me look girlier and my eyebrows had received their second working over of the day. I was gob smacked. My hair was somehow fuller at the back and I now had bangs the same as Maddy.

"Whoa!"



Who's who? Well I, that's Gaby, am on the left!

"I think Drew, you need to sit down"

She took me back to the lounge and we sat together on the sofa.

"Don't worry, we can disguise your eyebrows next week and we can get your hair put back but lets face it, no one is gonna think you're a boy tomorrow"

"I guess that's the idea. I was just a bit surprised that's all."

We sat and talked for a bit, then Maddy made us some Horlicks® and we went up to bed.

"G'night Gaby"

"Night Mad, see you in the morning"

Well my nightclothes were I guess what you'd expect for a thirteen year old girl, pink satin pj's! I suppose I had at least escaped a nightdress! I undressed and realised that I had missed my pedicure as well while I slept at the salon. My toenails were now All painted with cherry red polish.

I can tell you, I didn't get to sleep easily. My dreams were bizarre and mostly on the lines of me being discovered as a boy in a dress. One thing though, I was sure that although I had come into it voluntarily this time, I didn't enjoy dressing as a girl. It was all right I guess, the buzz was in fooling my schoolmates. Even Sylv, Mrs Morgan, didn't guess! But eventually slumber came.

## **Part 22**

### **New Girl**

"Wake up girls!"

"Urgh" my mind just about registered the voice.

"Come on Maddy"

My mind couldn't make sense of the words. I heard a door nearby open.

"Come on Gaby, time to get up for school"

I was still struggling to make sense. Who was Gaby? Who was the female telling Gaby to get up for school?

"Come on Gaby, your breakfast is waiting"

"Ugh" I was really articulate, "who? What?"

"Come on young lady, up and at 'em!"

I sort of recognised the instruction was aimed at me through the fuzz of morning and started to get up. I rolled over and something was in the way, something that was a bit of me, something on my chest.

"Whaa!"

The door banged open to admit a dishevelled Maddy.

"What's the matter Drew?"

Even as the words left her mouth she realised what was up, I was sat bolt upright staring down in fear at my chest and my breasts. My breasts.

"Oh right, I guess they would be a shock if you just woke up with them"

I looked over at my friend with a look of horror on my face.

"Come on Drew or should I say Gaby, you must remember yesterday? School? Photos?"

Something finally registered then.

"Er sorry Mad, I just, well I, I'm not used to having boobs"

"Well you've only got them until Saturday so make the most of them! Now get up and come down for breakfast."

"Be with you in a minute"

It was only after she'd gone that I realised that I was wearing a pair of Mad's satin pj's. Yesterday came flooding back and despite reservations I put on the fuzzy slippers that were by the bed and made my way down to the kitchen.

"There you are Gaby, juice and cereal on the table, do you want tea?"

"Er tea please Mrs Peters"

"Aunt Carol" she replied automatically.

"Er Aunt Carol"

"Maddy you can help Gaby get ready after breakfast, I'll drop you both off today so you've got an extra twenty minutes"

"Ok mum"

We finished eating and then Mad took me to get ready.

"Well don't you two look nice this morning! Come on or you'll be late"

"Here Drew you better take a bag today or people will be suspicious"

Maddy handed me a well-used backpack with assorted girly bits written and attached to it.

"Er thanks"

"There's a pencil case in there and the other stuff you'll need today"

"Come on you two, stop dawdling"

"Gaby nearly forgot her bag"

"You got everything now Gaby?"

"Yes auntie"

"Well get in then"

The journey to school only took ten minutes by car, I was thankful for the ride; a walk to school dressed as a girl was *not* on my list of favourite things to do!

If you want a blow by blow account of a day in a secondary school, you're in the wrong place! I followed my usual timetable as far as classes went with John snapping away and occasionally organising a set piece. My classmates soon had me pegged as a cheerful but quiet girl and they all treated me just as I appeared, a thirteen year old girl. I spent break and lunch with my 'cousin' and her friends. Clive was attentive which didn't go unnoticed by the rest of the class much to his (and my) chagrin.

In the last period John let me in on Fridays programme.

"Tomorrow you'll join this class for gym and after lunch you'll join the other third years for swimming"

"Swimming!"

"What's the problem?"

"Er John, you do remember I'm a bit over equipped?"

"Don't worry, Sally will sort you out at lunchtime tomorrow, it'll be fine ok?"

"Well if you say so I guess"

"Right, I'll see you tomorrow then and by the way the hair and nails are great, bye Gab"

"Yeah bye John"

I helped Mad with her homework after dinner and after the previous evening's excitement we spent a quiet time watching telly. 'Aunt Carol' treated me entirely as though I was her niece, I *was* Gaby! I told Maddy about Friday's arrangements as we sat drinking cocoa.

"How I get away with a swimsuit I don't know?"

"Well I guess we'll find out tomorrow"

"But what about gym? I can hardly get changed with the girls can I?"

"Well most of us wear our gym kit under our uniform"

"Great but what about afterwards? You know showers and stuff?"

"If you take your time tidying up everyone else will have gone, and the showers are not communal like the boys are so you should be ok."

"Hmm" I wasn't convinced.

Well as it turned out Maddy's advice was sound and I got through gym without any problems, even I can manage to play badminton. I had barely finished my lunch when Sally found me and carted me off to an out of use office on the second floor.

"I see you've added to my work, you look really good Drew"

"Gaby please, Sally, just in case you know?"

"Fair enough"

"Maddy's mum worked it all out and insisted a bit of help wouldn't go amiss."

"The boobs holding up ok?"

"Yeah, I've even sort of got used to them"

"Well for this afternoon you have a real treat. Ta da!"

"What is that?"

Sally was brandishing a skin tone something at me.

"This young lady, will keep your secret safe this afternoon, it's called a gaff and this is a professional one"

"How?"

"Well this will hide your bits and make you look just like a girl"

"Why didn't I have it for gym this morning, I was certain I would be found out"

"Well it's not exactly comfortable if you're not used to it so we thought we'd not use it until we had to. Come on, I'll let you put it on yourself, I'll wait outside"

She handed me the garment and left the room. I examined it and worked out what I needed to do, if you think about it I'm sure you can work it out too. I slipped 'my' panties off and pulled on the gaff, after a bit of fiddling with my bits to get them comfortable I was done. I pulled my panties back on and called Sally back in.

"What do you think?"

"Well I guess my bits are well hidden, I don't have a bulge at all"

"That's the idea, you can even use the toilet with it on. Now don't be bashful I need to just finish you off with this tape, so pants down, skirt up!"

Well I was covered wasn't i. I complied and Sally applied what looked like surgical tape around the gaff, when she'd done you couldn't see the join of skin and gaff.

"Ok young lady, you could pass all but a very close inspection, you even have a reasonably realistic pussy"

Well I sort of knew what a pussy was, I mean like all the guys claimed to have seen one but I actually had one of my own. Even if it was only temporary thankfully.

"Ok Gaby, showtime. Tidy yourself up, Mrs Johnston has given me a costume for you, here"

She gave me a piece of blue Lycra that didn't look like it would cover very much. I shook it out to find a school regulation one piece cossy, blue with the school crest on the left hip.

"Er thanks I think"

"Don't worry, it'll be ok. Now off with you"

"Er, thanks Sally"

"No problem now go!"

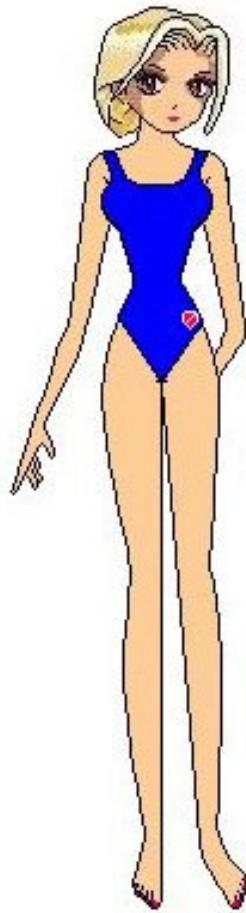
I stuffed the costume into my backpack where I already had one of Mrs Peter's towels stowed. Everyone was rushing around after registration to get to fifth period; I headed to the entrance and spotted Ally and Maddy who also had swimming this afternoon.

"Ah here she is, come on Gaby we haven't got all day" Miss Burton intoned.

"Sorry miss"

"Right everyone, out to the minibus"

I should explain here that our school had never deemed a pool essential so the school minibus took swim classes down to the pool in Mansfield. No one complained, we got out of lessons alternate Friday afternoons this year and most of the session wasn't formal. We arrived and Miss Burton joined us girls in the changing rooms. I managed to snag a corner cubicle and after a fight with my bra I emerged wearing 'my' costume.



I joined everyone else at poolside to some astonished looks from Maddy and Ally and appraisal from the rest.

"Ok class quiet down. You've all seen Mr Dover around school taking photo's, he'll be here in about half an hour to take a few shots at the pool. So" she looked at one of the boys, Gavin I think, "I don't want any horsing around"

"No miss" we all replied almost in unison.

"Right, swimmers over in the main pool, non swimmers wait here. Oh Gaby can you stay here too please"

I was a bit annoyed; Drew is a fairly good swimmer after all. So I spent the first part of the 'lesson' and Johns photo session in the kiddie pool with the bricks (non-swimmers). Admittedly swimming with boobs and a one piece cossy was a new experience but by the time the formal lesson was over I had adapted to my new buoyancy devices!

"Over here Gab!"

"Hi Ally, I'm glad that's over"

"You look really, erm, like a girl Gaby"

"Well I wouldn't want to be exposed would I"

Maddy arrived at our little coven.

"You look fab Gabs, how'd you manage it?"

After making sure no one else was within earshot I whispered to my mates.

"It's called a gaff, it's a bit uncomfortable but I think it looks like the real thing" (I'd no point of reference!) "Least ways Sally said it did"

"Well it looks real enough from here and how come your costume fits better than everyone else's?"

I shrugged

"Well I guess it is new"

A voice broke into our conversation.

"Come on you three, you're supposed to be swimming"

"Yes Miss"

When we got back to school Mr Wood was waiting.

"Gaby can I see you in my office please"

"Yes sir"

The others gave me a knowing look.

"We'll wait for you by the gate Gab"

"Ok, see you in a bit"

I followed Mr Wood to his office where he bade me sit.

"Well Drew, Mr Dover tells me things went really well and he's got all the pictures for the brochure. I have to thank you for doing this for us"

"Thank you sir" I meekly replied

"Did you enjoy this week?"

I had to think carefully before I replied.

"Well sort of. I mean it was sort of cool fooling everyone into thinking I was a girl, but it was a bit of a drag (no pun intended) wearing the girls uniform and specially the swimming costume, that was just so weird!"

Mr Wood just nodded occasionally while I talked.



"Well I guess we won't be seeing Gaby back on Monday then?" he sort of half joked.

"Definitely not, I'll be back in my own uniform!" I replied with some vehemence.

He leant forward to his desk and removed an envelope from his drawer.

"Well, young man, I managed to get you the going rate for the job, don't spend it all at once" he joked as he handed me my pay for the week.

"Thank you sir"

"Ok Drew, off you go and thanks again"

"Oh and Drew, John gave me this for you from his assistant"

I took the proffered package and left the Head's office.

I didn't think it was polite to look in the envelope while I was in the office so I waited until I was crossing the car park to meet the others.

"Wow!"

"What's up Gab?"

"I just got paid and it's like a lot"

"How much Drew?" Bernie asked

"Four hundred and fifty pounds!" I still couldn't believe it.

"But Drew it's made out to Gaby"

I silently cussed Mr Wood again. This was the second time he had done this to me!

"I suppose I'll have to go to the bank as Gaby again," I said resigned to the idea.

"You got your bank book?"

"No it's at home in my room, why?"

"Well you could stay as Gaby tonight and we could go to the bank in the morning, it's open 'till twelve"

"I 'spose, but I've got a race tomorrow afternoon"

"We'll go down early then" Bernie proposed

"You can get Juliette to bring your bank book round to Maddy's" Ally added

"We could have a sleepover! " Maddy enthused

"I guess we could do the bank in the morning then"

"What about your mum Mad?"

"She'll agree, she really likes Gab, she is family after all!" even I joined in with the ensuing laughter.

## **Part 23**

### **Sleepover**

When we got to Maddy's I rang home and got my sister in on the plan and told her where the bank pass was. She agreed to square things with dad too, she was a more convincing liar than I was!

Maddy meanwhile had got her mother to agree to the plan and I'm sure I saw a twinkle in Mrs Peter's eye when she looked at me. Ally and Bernie went home promising to return about seven with their nightwear. So here I was, reluctant participant in a girl's PJ party. Other guys would fight to be here but other guys are not dressed so they look more like a girl than some of the girls!

To be truthful I didn't know what to expect. When Ally and Bernie got back, 'Aunt Carol' as she insisted I call her, put a pizza in the oven, Jules must have smelt it as she arrived just as it came out. Afterwards Aunt Carol laid out the rules for the evening.

"Right girls, you're all old enough to know how to behave. I don't want to see naked bodies, the music will be at a reasonable volume and any mess you clear up ok?"

We nodded our ascent.

"Are you staying over Juliette?"

"No, I told dad I'd be home about eleven."

"Ok I'll drop you home then. In the meantime I'm relying on you to keep your sister and her friends in check"

"Yes Mrs Peter's"

"Ok, I'm going round to number seven for a while, I'll be back to take Juliette home ok?"

"Yes mum" Maddy offered

"Now have fun and *behave!*" she left leaving the five of us alone.

I'm not going to relive the entire evening for you. Do you really need to know who won the Pontoon school (me) or who had to kiss four legs during spin the bottle (Maddy!). after Mrs Peter's took Jules home the rest of us put on our night wear and we settled down for a horror story session. (Is this obligatory at any teen overnight event?) We talked late into the night but we eventually all ended up asleep in Maddy's room.

Saturday dawned nice and bright and after breakfast we all got ready for our trip to the bank with my big pay cheque.

Not having any clothes of my own, Maddy supplied my wardrobe, jeans, T and a wrap top. I think Bernie has got one like it too. With the gaff still on, in truth I had gotten used to it, I really looked like a girl even in jeans.



We walked into town and headed straight to 'Gaby's' bank.

"Hello girls, Gaby"

"Hello Mrs Jenkins"

"Call me Janet girls. What can we do for you today?"

"I've got another cheque to pay in Janet"

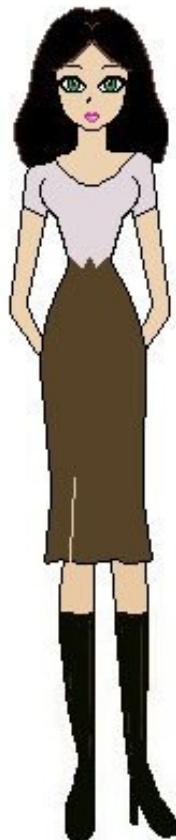
I handed her my passbook and the cheque

"Golly Gaby, what did you do? Rob a bank!"

We all politely laughed at her attempt at humour.

"I did a bit of modelling and this is my pay"

"Well I reckon I'm in the wrong job then"



In truth Janet was a bit of a looker, every time I've seen her she's been wearing trendy stuff and today was no exception. She was certainly not the usual stereotypical bank worker. She quickly put the cheque through the system as she talked.

"Do you want any money out?"

"Er not just now. How long before I can get this money?"

"It should be clear by Wednesday, I hope you're not planning on frittering it away young lady"

"Course not Janet, I was just wondering thanks"

"Well I'll see you all soon then"

"Bye Janet"

"Bye girls"

Our little posse departed the bank and gathered outside.

"What now?"

"Well I need to be home as Drew by one"

"It won't take long to get you sorted, if we get back to Maddy's for eleven we should have time"

"What are we doing then?" I asked

"We'll stop at the baker's and get some buns, we can chill in the park for a while"

What the heck, at least I was wearing jeans and didn't feel quite so exposed.

"Sure why not"

So that's what we did, armed with a bag of assorted doughnuts we spent best part of an hour larking about in the playground before returning to Chez Peter's.

"Drew how are gonna get your boobs off?"

I had already checked out the packet from Sally so knew I had what I needed. I thought I'd wind them up a bit first though.

"Oh no, Sally said I needed a special solvent to get them off" I feigned shock

"Oh my god Drew, you'll be stuck with boobs!"

"I can't go home like this, what can I do?"

"Can we get hold of Sally? Do you know where the studio is?"

"She gave me her number I'll try that"

I dialled a random number and held a quiet conversation with myself.

"Well?"

"It's alright, she said I should use the stuff in this bottle" I flourished the bottle at my friends, "it'll do the job"

Ally made a grab for the bottle and claiming it read the label.

"You fraud Gaby Thomas, you had this all the time" then she playfully lit into me.

"Stop, stop, I give in"

"Getting us all worried for you like that"

"Sorry, I couldn't resist it"

Well I was de-boobed, un-gaffed and through the shower in time for a light lunch. Apart from my highlighted hair and thinned brows, I looked like me again, after half a week as Gaby I never wanted a repeat.

"I'll collect the uniform tomorrow Mad so Jules can wash it"

"That's alright I'll do it with my stuff later and bring it to school Monday"

"Thanks Mad"

"You off Drew?"

"Yes Mrs Peters"

"Well I suggest you take your earrings out before you get home and we'll see you soon"

"Bye everyone"

"Bye Drew" they all answered in kind.

"I thought you'd left home"

"Sorry dad"

"Well you're home now, your mum rang earlier, she sends her love"

I was a bit pissed at missing her call.

"We need to leave in twenty minutes if we're going to get there on time so get your arse in gear young man"

"Yes dad"

## **Part 24**

### **Return to Normal**

It was a miracle that I was ready on time! The event I was riding was up in Yorkshire near Goole, only just over an hour away but dad liked to allow plenty of time and who was I to argue. Jules was out with Anna and Charlie so it was just me and dad making the trip.

"You're quiet Drew"

"Er sorry dad, just thinking"

"Penny for 'em"

What I was thinking I could hardly share with dad. The last few days had not really been that bad, I sort of enjoyed the deception and I certainly appreciated the money it had generated! It was sort of weird to be sat in the car without boobs, even if they were falsies, I mean I had gotten used to the weight and movement even if I didn't really want them in the first place. I didn't need to be 'Gaby' anymore; I had an ATM card to get to my little nest egg, so there really would be no need.

"Drew, are you with us?"

I snapped back to the present.

"Just a bit annoyed at missing mum's call"

"She asked how your job went"

"Er, ok I guess, Mr Wood seemed happy anyway"

"Good"

"How's mum getting on?"

"Oh she's fine, her first race is tomorrow, the Ardennes Speziale in Belgium. She's got all her kit and as Mercedes are a co sponsor they are lending her a car."

"Wow a Mercedes, what sort?"

"I think she said one of those A something's."

"Clive's parents have got one of those, I guess it's still pretty cool"

"Well look we're here, where are we to park?"

"The sheet says at the village hall"

"That must be it over there"

It seemed a bit strange being at a race without mum but I suppose I would get used to it. Dad sorted out my bike and I was warmed up and on the line before my mind could wander again.



The course today was flatter than I'm used to so my expectations were high as I listened to the timekeeper counting down to my start.

"Go!"

I concentrated on following all the advice mum had given me previously as I headed out to the turn. I turned in thirteen minutes; pretty good as it was over half way round the ten-mile course. I realised why as I started the second leg, there was actually a stiff breeze blowing across the course and I was now riding into it.

The finish hove into sight and I pushed just that little bit harder and barely had the energy to call my number as I crossed the line. By the time I got back to the HQ dad was waiting for me.

"Well done Drew, 25.47 that's a personal best isn't it!"

"Yes" I panted

"Come on, let's get you changed" he pushed me along back to the car where I dismounted and collapsed into the seat.

"Give me your number and I'll get you a drink, what do you want?"

I unpinned my number and replied

"Tea please dad" mum always said it was better than squash, I tended to agree.

"Back in a minute, finish changing"

I did the usual TT challenge, or how to change in the back of a car with people walking past all the time! I had just got out to stow my kit bag when dad got back.

"Look's like you're third, that big lad from Hull has done a long '22 though"

"He is nearly sixteen and he did a '21 last year"

"Well anyway, you've done really well, you might get best improvement too"

"It's only a few seconds"

"Yes but it looks like you being small is an advantage with this wind on the course, everyone else is slower"

I finished my tea while dad put my bike away, then we walked to the result board. There it was 'third under sixteen, A Bond' then lower down 'best improvement A Bond 7 sec's', being a time trial the prizes were hardly phenomenal but even so I was pretty chuffed.

We stopped at a Little Chuff on the way home, a treat for me, as I love their cherry pancakes. Once home I showered then joined a now returned Jules in front of the idiot box for the Saturday film.

Sunday morning was overcast and I hoped the weather was better where mum was. I went out for my usual Sunday ride and got home as Paul and Clive turned up.

"Hi Drew"

"Hi guys"

"You okay now?"

I had to think about that.

"Er yeah"

"I had a dose of flu last year and it was dire"

Flu, right, that was my cover for not being at school this last week.

"Well it wasn't too bad, it was more of a precaution really"

"You never guess Drew?"

"Guess what Clive?"

"Clive's been drooling over Gaby while you've been off"

"Have not!"

"Have, you remember Gaby Drew? Maddy's cousin?"

"Oh right" I tried to act dumb.

"Well she's been at our school this week as a model"

"You mean in art or something?" I dumbed.

"No, they've been taking pictures for some school book or something" Clive chimed.

"Right"

"Yeah and Clive has had his tongue hanging out all the time, he fancies her something rotten!"

"I do not!"

"Who ended up in a rubbish bin coz he was watching her?"

"I was distracted" Clive tried to bluster.

"Drew, this individual here was heard with witnesses to declare unending love for Gaby Thomas!"

Clive was colouring up now. I was having a hard time not making a run for it but was saved by dad.

"Morning lads"

"Good morning Mr Bond"

"Hi Mr Bond"

"What are you three up to today?"

"Thought we'd play with the RC's" Paul replied

"Get yourself showered and changed first Drew"

"Yes dad"

"Well see you later"

Dad went back inside leaving me with my mates, one of which had declared his love for my alter ego! Sheesh!

I showered, changed then got out my RC Mini, spare battery packs and stuff and we went round to Paul's bungalow where we spent the rest of the day tearing the lawn up.

"Here you are Drew" Maddy handed me a bag, "your uniforms in there and the other bits you left at our house"

I looked stupidly at her.

"You know" she mimed grabbing her breasts

"Oh right, thanks Mad"

"How'd the race go?"

"I came third and best improvement"

"Great, you coming to mine tonight?"

"Isn't it Ally's turn?

"Yeah but her mum's out tonight so we swapped"

"Right"

"See ya later Drew"

I thought I'd best give Mrs Johnston the uniform and stuff as soon as possible so I wasn't walking around with a bag of girls clothing. So I went to the staff room before registration and managed to find her.

"I've brought the uniform and stuff, Mrs Johnston, it's all washed and Sally's stuff is in there too"

"Oh Drew, didn't Mr Wood tell you on Friday, they are all yours, we're sure you will need them again some time!"

"I don't think so Mrs Johnston"

"Well you never know Drew. Anyway, leave them here for now and pick them up later"

"Er ok then, thanks"

Was this some sort of conspiracy to get me into girl's clothes? First it's my friends and now it's my teachers! I mean what the hell use is a girls school uniform to me? It's not like I'm going to attend school as a girl (again!) any time soon or ever. Well I guess I could always 'forget' to pick them up from the staff room.

I got through the rest of the day without incident, which surprised me a bit, I was sure someone would make the connection but I guess no one looked at me too closely. After all people usually only see what they expect.

I met Rhod after school and we walked round to the Peters house together.

"I wasn't sure who I'd see this morning, you or Gaby"

"Not you as well! Everyone seems to want to see me in skirts and stuff lately"

"Well you do it pretty well you know, I mean I got away with the dance but no way could I have pulled last week off."

"Jeez, I do not want to dress as a girl!"

"Okay, okay!"

We dropped the subject and we talked about mum's new car until we arrived at Maddy's.

"Hi guys"

"Hi Mad"

"Hello Rhod, hello Drew"

"Hi Mrs Peters"

We went through to our usual haunt, the dining room where Ally and Bernie were already sat.

"Hiya"

"Hi"

"Tea in five minutes" Mrs Peters advised, "get the table laid"

"Hmm that smells good"

"Steak and kidney pudding for us and veggie burger for Rhod"

I could see Rhod look longingly at our meal, he was not vegetarian by choice, the doctor had put him on a meat free diet last year as he had developed a bad reaction to meat.

We ate with minimal interruption; it seems that everyone liked the suet pudding as much as Mrs Peters pasta! We cleared up afterwards and then regrouped.

Maddy was just bursting to tell us all something.

"I've something to tell you"

"What Mad?"

"Spit it out" Ally added.

"Well you know dad was in the States last week?"

"Yeah" I replied for everyone.

"Well while he was there one of his clients said that his daughters school was running an exchange programme and did he know of anyone who might be interested at home!"

"Cool" Bernie exclaimed

"Neat" Rhod concluded

"Anyway, dad said he thought we might be interested, so he's brought all the details back, it has to be done through school so mum's going to see Mr Wood tomorrow"

"What happens then?"

"Well dad said that if Mr Wood agrees, the American kids come over at the end of August and stay for six weeks, then we go to them next spring."

"Where is it?" Rhod asked

"Well Mr Dobson, dads client, lives just outside of the Shenandoah National Park"

"Where?" I'd never heard of it, Yellowstone yes but this Shenoah?

"It's in Virginia sort of between New England and Florida"

"Is that the East Coast then?" Bernie asked, she wasn't much good at geography.

"Yes" the rest of us chorused.

"I hope Mr Wood says it's okay"

"Yeah it would be a bummer if he said no" I intoned.

Well as you can guess we spent the evening talking about America and the exchange scheme. There was usually an exchange visit for the fourth year language students, a bus load of German kid's came before Christmas and some French kids were coming in May, Jules friend Anna was having one stay with her.

We all went home abuzz with excitement.

I got home just after nine and I was barely in the door when the phone went. Dad answered the phone and announced,

"It's your mum, you can talk to her in a minute"

Great! I guess I hadn't missed her quite as much as I thought I would but it would be good to talk to her. I got a drink while dad talked to her then he passed me the phone.

"Hi mum"

"Hi Drew, you alright?"

"Great, how did it go on Sunday?"

"Ok I suppose, we won the team prize but I was only thirty third"

She didn't seem too keen to talk about it so I changed the subject.

"When do you get your car?"

"It's not mine really but I get to use it to get to races and stuff, I pick it up on Thursday. What's happening with you?"

Where to start?

"I did a PB on Saturday, 25.47 and I got best improvement"

"Your dad said you'd had a good ride"

I spent a couple of minutes talking about the race.

"What else have you been doing?"

"Maddy's dad was in America and he thinks we can do an exchange thing, she's just told us tonight!"

"That sounds exciting Drew"

So I spent another five minutes telling mum all I knew.

"Well Drew, your mother needs her beauty sleep so put your dad back on "

"Ok"

"Bye Drew, talk to you soon"

"Bye mum"

I passed the phone back to dad and went to wash my cup. By the time I got back dad had finished the call.

"Your mother is sorting out some accommodation so we can go visit at Whitsun while you're off school"

"Wow, that's brill"

"Now what's this about an exchange student?"

So I had to tell dad everything too!

"Well your mother reckons it would be good for you, so it's a provisional yes, but I want to know more before I agree"

"Thanks dad"

"Time for bed now"

"Ok, g'night"

"Night Drew"

I went up to my room and hadn't got the door shut when Jules came in.

"You left this at school"

She was brandishing a bag that looked all too familiar.

"Mrs Johnston caught me as I was leaving, she said you'd left it with her for safekeeping"

"Well sort of"

"Gaby, you can't just leave your uniform laying around!"

"Shush, dad'll hear and cut it out with the Gaby stuff!"

"Ok but you'd best hang it at the back of your wardrobe."

"Why can't you keep it in your room?"

"My wardrobes full and anyway with mum away who's gonna look in you cupboards"

Lets face it all mums are nosy and poke around your stuff!

"No one I guess, but I really don't want it, I mean I have no intention of dressing up again, ever"

"Hmm! Well it won't be a hardship to store this stuff then will it"

I'm sure there was some sort of twisted logic to Jules argument but I couldn't see it or beat it.

"Okay then but not a word to anyone. Now get out, I'm going to bed"

"Goodnight then"

"Yeah night Jules"

She left my room leaving me with far too much to think about. America, going to see mum and a girls school uniform and stuff in my closet! Life was certainly getting interesting. Instead of all this I ended up dreaming about my brilliant career as a pro cyclist, well it was a dream!

## **Part 25**

### **News Travels Fast**

Tuesday and time for another ten. School was uneventful, Mrs Peters had her meeting with the Head but we wouldn't know the outcome till later on. At least this week I wouldn't go to the race wearing makeup and earrings! Well I suppose they were just props, I mean everyone treated me the same as when I was wearing them. I was slower this week but the weather was cooler and the weekends wind was still making it's presence felt. I didn't hang around but rode home as soon as I got my time.

"Can you ring Maddy, Drew?" Juliette greeted me

"Did she say what about?"

"Some exchange thing"

There was an element of expectation as I dialled the number.

"Hi Mrs Peters"

"Hi Drew, Maddy is just here"

"Hi Drew"

"Hi Mad, is it on then?" I asked

"Mum said Mr Wood wasn't too keen but she talked him round"

"Cool!"

"He want's to see us in the morning before assembly" I seemed to end up in his office far too often lately.

"What for?"

"I think he want's to sort of keep it quiet"

"Ok"

"Well I thought I'd let you know as soon as I could, anyway got to go. See you in the morning"

"Yeah bye"

"Night Drew"

Yes! A trip to the US.

"What was that all about" Jules asked

"Mr Peters is organising a student exchange to America, Mr Wood wants to see some of us in the morning."

I could see that my potential trip had already sparked a spot of jealousy.

"Nothings settled yet, it might not happen"

Jules didn't say anything so I left it there.

"Okay you lot" Mr Wood was speaking to our small gathering the following morning.

"Madeline's mother has convinced me, against my better judgement, that a cultural exchange visit to America would be good for you lot."

He paused as though waiting for a reply.

"I agreed on the following conditions

1. You don't go round rubbing it in everyone else's face.
2. You all pass the year end exams with at least a B and number
3. You write me an essay on why I should let you go to America.

Any questions?"

What could we say, it all seemed reasonable, even the B grade, a little bit of work on our part and we would spend six weeks in Virginia!

"No Mr Wood" we replied in unison.

"Okay then. I'll contact the school in America and when I've got more details I'll let you and your parents know alright?"

We nodded in reply

"Right then, off to assembly and remember what I said about telling other pupils"

"Yes sir"

We filed out and led by Bernie we had a group hug and general happy couple of minutes.

"Come on guy's we don't want to be late, we'll talk at break" I suggested

"Okay" Mad answered for the others.

It was difficult to not tell Paul in double history but I managed to get to break without letting the cat out of the bag. I met my other co conspirators at break and we found a quiet corner where we could talk without the world listening in.

"Mad tell your mum and dad thanks" I started

"Yeah, we really owe them one on this" Ally added

"Six weeks in America! This is just so cool" Rhod put in

"I know, it's pretty cool" Bernie agreed

"I'm going to Germany at half term too, my passport's gonna be worn out" I continued

"Cool Drew, you going to see your mum?" Maddy asked

"Yeah, I hope the exchange stuff is here by then"

"What do you think it will be like?" Rhod queried

"Dad said it was just a small place a bit like an American Warsop"

"No malls or anything?" Bernie put in

"Don't think so but we can find out on the internet I suppose"

"Yeah great idea"

"What is this place called anyway?"

"Grottoes"

"You're kidding right?" Ally suggested

"No seriously, that's what dad said it was called"

"And I thought we had some strange place names" Rhod added

"Well I hope they're not a load of pixies or something" Bernie giggled

*[I must state here that while Grottoes, Virginia will be the geographical location for the 'American Episode', it is purely a convenient geographical location and any similarity to that town or its burgher's is entirely coincidental.]* **Maddy Bell**

The bell for third period rang and we split up to go to our various classes.

"Hey Drew" Clive started, "are you going to America with the girls?"

Well I hadn't said anything so I decided to play dumb, something I was getting adept at around Clive.

"What? Who's going to America?"

"Your girlfriend Maddy and the others, whoops, perhaps your not supposed to know!"

"I don't know anything about anyone going to America and she's not my girlfriend" I stated.

"Whatever, I think it's some sort of secret, but Karen told us at break. Some sort of exchange thing"

Sheesh, news sure does travel fast round here. Karen must have overheard us I suppose.

"I'll have to ask them at lunch then, they sure kept that quiet"

My ability to act affronted was sorely stretched but I think I pulled it off. Our teacher then attracted our attention and the subject was at least temporarily dropped.

Fate kept the five of us apart for the rest of the day but in last period, metalwork, the school secretary brought an envelope to class for both Rhod and I, addressed to our parents. I walked home with Jules to find dad home before us.

"Hi kids"

"Hi dad"

"I've spoken to mum and she's got some accommodation for us and I've booked tickets for us on the train."

"We're not flying?" Jules whined

"No it's too expensive and anyway the train doesn't take much longer over all"

I remembered the envelope.

"I got this for you dad" I passed him the white manila.

"I'll have a look while you two do tea"

"Aw dad" my sister was about to argue.

"You only have to cook the pasta and heat the sauce through" dad informed us

"Humph ok then, come on Drew you're not getting out of it" I was instructed.

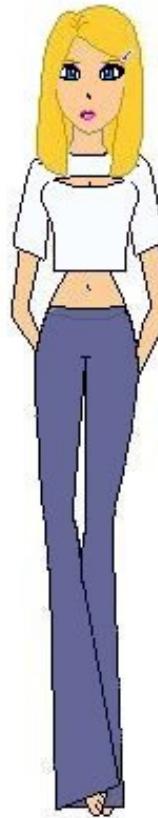
We made the meal and as is usual in the land of the Bond's, we each grabbed our plate and ate from our laps.

"I suppose you guessed that the letter was about this exchange thing Drew"

"Yeah"

"Well Mr Wood has spoken to the principal of the school over there and it's definitely on"

"Way to go!"



"Alright for some" Jules mumbled

"Less of that young lady"

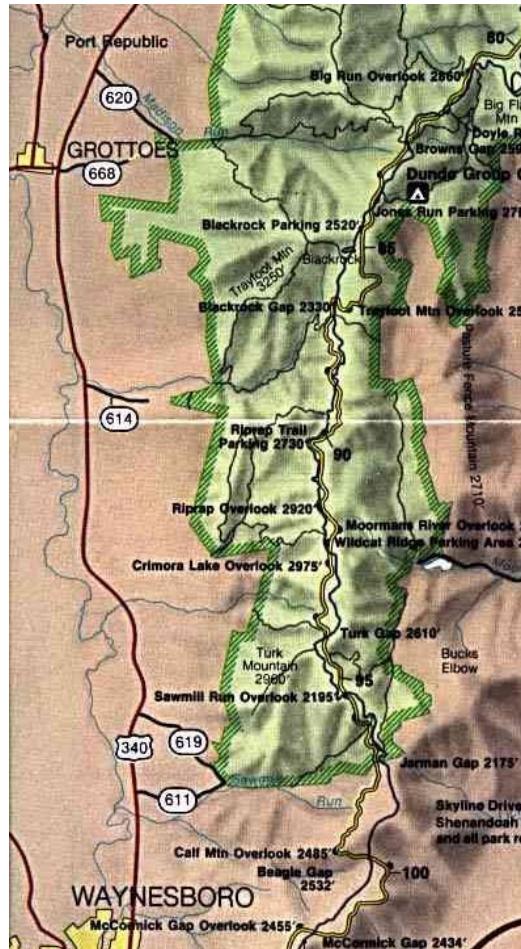
"Yes dad" she sulked

"Anyway Drew, the Americans are sending some forms over but it looks like they won't have any trouble finding 'partners' for you all. And Jules Mr Wood has suggested that some fifth formers might like to apply too."

Well my sister's face lit up and I felt a bit less guilty too. I suppose the other affected households spent the evening much like us, talking about Mr Wood's letter and its implications. Of course our household also had the trip to Germany to occupy us, I'm just glad that I didn't have much homework!

"Dad showed us where it is, on the internet there's maps and all sorts" Maddy enthused.

We all dutifully looked at the printout she was brandishing.



"Wow, it's only about a hundred miles from Washington DC" Ally exclaimed

"Maybe we'll get to go" Rhod enthused

"It's only a small place according to the website," Mad added

"I wonder if they're trying to find out about us too?" Bernie asked no one in particular.

"Course they are!" I stated, "I mean if they're anything like us they will be"

The bell for registration brought us back to reality.

By the end of school on Friday I think most of the school had found out and although it was still a valid topic, the upcoming weekend had taken over in peoples priorities.

## **Part 26**

### **Drew Time**

Saturday and no race today so I went for my training ride early so I would be ready to meet the rest of the gang at the bus stop at nine thirty. We were making a return trip to Nottingham at Bernie's insistence; she is a certified shopaholic!

I decided to dress in jeans and t-shirt, as the day was warm and bright. At least I naively thought no one would think I was a girl, how wrong can you get!



Of course the main topic of conversation on the hour-long bus ride was the student exchange programme. We knew no more than on Thursday but it was our happening news!

Once in our county seat, we walked through the Victoria Centre, part of Bernie's paradise, before emerging into the city centre proper. The plan was to catch a film later after doing the shops in our usual thorough way. As usual Rhod and I spent a good deal of time waiting for the girls, no way were we going into girls clothes shops, especially not with my record!

It was during one of these interludes that I found myself checking out the phones in the grandly named 'Carphone Warehouse'. A lot of the kids at school had phones but I had never been bothered enough to even look at

them. However I'm a sucker for a good deal and the 'pay as you go' deal on the Nokia was too good to pass up. I mean, it was *the* phone at school and I could own one for just £89.95! With my, or rather Gaby's bulging bank balance I could afford it easily.

"What do you reckon Rhod?"

"Cool phone Drew, that's the next model up to the phone that flash kid in the fourth years got"

Well I wasn't flash but the chance to bring Justin Morris down a peg or two was just too tempting.

"I'm gonna get one, wait here in case the girls come out and I'll get some money out."

So I left Rhod and used the ATM a couple of doors down to recover the necessary readies. The girls were still in Top Shop, so I slipped into the store and emerged ten minutes later the proud owner of a mobile phone. The girls had eventually emerged from their clothes fest and were waiting with Rhod when I exited the shop.

"You got a phone Drew?"

"Yeah"

"Getting a bit flash aren't we?" Ally intoned

"You've got one" I accused

"Just kidding Drew, what have you got?"

I showed the guys my flashy communicator and we ended up in Maccy D's still checking it out.

"The film doesn't start for another hour, we can get a few more shops in" Bernie suggested

"Ok then"

At least I had my phone to amuse me while they shopped.

"Come on lets have a look in here again" Maddy enthused

I just followed the others and only realised where we were when Maddy asked my opinion on a swimsuit.

"Er ok I suppose, I'm gonna wait outside"

Too late.

"Hi girls, back to get your leotards?"

Maddy was quick to reply

"Yes, Gabs has decided to get that one we looked at last time"

The salesgirl was good, I couldn't remember what I had been forced to look at but she could. My chance of escape gone and compromised by my friend I would have to brazen it out.

"Here we are" she held the garment up to me

"That looks really good Gaby"

"Er yeah I suppose so" I was trying to sound enthusiastic really!

"We've got some new designs just in this week, you'd really look cute in one of the 'Danceteam' ones"

Cute! Sheesh how could anyone think I was a girl dressed like this. And cute too.

"Come on Gabs, some of these are really neat"

"I don't want a leotard!" I hissed through clenched teeth "and cut the Gaby out"

"Oh this one matches your eyes"

I gave up in exasperation.

"If I get one can we go?"

"Course"

"You pick one then"

Maddy, flushed with perverse success grinned back.

We left shortly afterwards, me clutching a bag containing a pale blue leotard and matching tights and Maddy got herself a similar outfit in pale green. I hate shopping!

"What was that all about Mad?" I turned angrily on her once in the street.

"It was just a bit of fun Drew, she didn't catch on at all"

"So why did I have to buy these?" I shook the bag at her

"Guilt?"

I was still pretty unchuffed.

"Well you'd better have them then" I thrust the bag into her arms and stormed off toward the cinema where the others were waiting for us.

"Drew, Drew" I could hear Maddy following me

"Drew, look I'm really sorry"

I ignored her apology

"Come on Drew, I didn't mean anything by it, I was just trying to wind up the shop girl"

"And me too, which you succeeded with" I stormed

"Oh please Drew. I'll take these back and explain to the salesgirl"

I wasn't sure what was worse, being mistaken for a girl or rubbing people's nose in their misapprehension by pointing it out.

"Maddy what's done is done just promise me you won't pull that stunt again?"

"Ok Drew I promise. What about these though?"

"Keep them as a present for helping last week" I couldn't stay angry with her for long. We had now reached the others and we all joined the short queue for the ticket office.

The film was a bit girly, 'Ten Things I Hate About You', but we all enjoyed it at least enough not to talk through it! When I tried, vainly, to shush some girls sat in front of us all I got was abuse,

"Who do you think you are little miss prissy?"

As you might guess I was more than a little affronted by this. I mean the cinema *was* dark and I was sat between Bernie and Ally who had to hold me down! Well they were tarts anyway!

Anyway after the film we hit a few more shops before trying to rush Bernie back through the Victoria Centre on the way to the bus station. Our attempts

were in vain and we nearly missed our bus due to a pair of tangerine hotpants! Say no more.

The others were going back to Rhod's but I elected to go straight home, as I needed to get ready for my race in the morning.

The new day dawned fresh and bright and this week it was circuit racing out in Lincolnshire again. I'm sure Jules fancied someone who was racing, she never missed a mass start but time trials, no go Juliette! We took the Veedub instead of dad's car and we were out at Metheringham with plenty of time to spare.

The day was turning pretty warm which brought out a lot of spectators to watch the various events. My race was the first on the card, forty laps at just over half a mile each with a field of thirty two under sixteen's including five girls.

I might have had pretensions to my ability but lets face it some of the others were three years older than me and included the previous week's ten-mile winner. Realistically I had no chance"!

Well the older kids soon made it difficult for the girls and another couple of guys my age; it's amazing what difference a year makes. Our little group was dropped after a frenetic couple of laps and we settled down into a half-organised bunch. I say half-organised, most of us knew the concept of working together but a couple of the girls hadn't grasped the idea of taking their turn at the front. Although I knew if it came to a sprint finish I had the beating of most of the group, I hate lazy riders, mums influence I suppose.

We had done fifteen laps when I decided that I'd had enough, so on the wind assisted back straight I made my 'Pantaniesque' effort to break the group. It worked a dream, two girls and the three lads were soon in pursuit and a lap later I let them catch me, mission accomplished, lazy riders gone! The six of us worked well together and the main race had still not managed to gain more than three quarters of a lap on us when one of lads had a puncture on lap thirty.

I suppose the writing was on the wall, within two laps the front group caught us and we gratefully slid back through the group until we slotted in at the back. After getting our breath, we joined in the rotation, it seemed like the older kids were content to have a sprint finish. However with a couple of laps to go they raised the pace enough that our little group unanimously decided to let them go.

So it was that we saw the front of the race cross the line from the last corner. I had a quick look at my fellows and decided to make an effort at least. I slipped down a gear then made my move down the outside. The others decided I wasn't going to have my way and joined in a pursuit to the line.

Lucky for me I watched mum and followed her advice, I eased slightly with about a hundred metres to go then as the others thought they had me I accelerated again catching all bar one out!

"Well done lass"

"Nice move"

"Must have been watching Jenny Bond"

I might not have been the event winner, but I had won the sprint that gave me the win for my age category. Even if some shortsighted spectators thought I was a girl! My family both thought I had ridden well and sensibly and a couple of seniors commented that they would try my move in their races.

As the weather was fine we stayed to watch the rest of the programme and much to my annoyance I overheard several people talking about 'that girl who won the sprint', it didn't register the first time but when Jules pointed it out to me I was mortified. It seemed that whichever way I went people thought I was a girl. Why? I guess if I could find the answer to that I could do something about it.

## **Part 27**

### **Moving Swiftly Along**

Well after the weekend Monday almost came as relaxation. In fact most of the week was without notable incident. Monday evening we all met at Ally's and played video games and then on Tuesday I rode the Cuckney ten. I made a good effort and once again recorded a time within seconds of my new best. Even with no makeup, earrings or dolled up hair to confuse them, everyone referred to me as Miss Bond or even Dee Bond! (I guess that was because I usually told people I was D Bond, as in Drew rather than A for Andrew and they assumed I meant Dee!) Life is getting complicated! In fact the timekeeper put me on the sheet this week as Dee Bond, I now had another alias.

Wednesday was the first of May, which in the UK means next Monday is a public holiday. The rest of the week was as normal as a school week goes, get up, go to school, come home, do homework, go to bed. Ecoute et repeteé! (My poor French!).

The real highlight was another letter from Mr Wood about the student exchange, which we were given on Friday. This was not just a letter but all the forms and stuff that we needed to fill out to take part. So of course when we all met Saturday morning that was the main topic of conversation.

"Why do they need so much information?" Rhod asked the group in general

"Who knows? Perhaps they got wind we're from bandit country and think that we might start a crime wave"

"Don't be daft Drew, even the Americans know Robin Hood is just a legend"

"Bet they don't, bet they think it's all real, all that Sheriff stuff"

"Well I prefer 'Maid Marion and her Merry Men' anyway" Ally suggested

"They couldn't even get the locations right in 'Prince of Thieves'" Maddy added

"My favourite's 'Men in Tights', that is just so funny" Rhod stated

"Well there is a real Little Johns grave" I put in

"There's not!" Bernie disagreed

"There is, it's in Hathersage over in the Peak District"

"That's miles away!" Rhod declared

"So, it's still there. And there really is a Loxley, it's in Sheffield" I added for good measure.

"What happened to it all being in Sherwood Forest then?" Maddy queried

"Dunno, guess it was bigger back then and I suppose there weren't counties and stuff the same, even Conisbrough Castle's in Yorkshire!"

This was all getting a little surreal!

"Anyway it still doesn't explain why they want my Gran's name and address does it?"

"Spose not" Maddy answered.

We decided to go bowling in the afternoon down in Mansfield, we asked Jules and her mates to make up the numbers and arranged to meet at the bus stop at one.

Charlotte was waiting for us, leaning against the wall when we, Jules and I, got to the stop.



"Where's Anna, Charlie?"

"She said she'd see us here, if she doesn't hurry up she'll miss the bus"

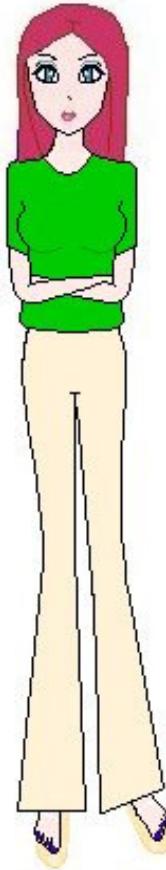
"I'll call her house to see if she's left if you like" I offered, brandishing my new phone.

"Hi guys!"

"Huh!" Jules gasped

"Anna what happened to your hair?"

I turned to see what was wrong and I joined the others in my gasp. To say Anna looked different would be an understatement! Her usually mousy brown hair was a sort of pink! I mean like lipstick pink.



Anna looked quite pissed (excuse the French!)

"My little sister!" she stated with vehemence.

Jules and Charlie both rolled their eyes as if this meant something.

"What did she do Anna?" Maddy queried

"Well I thought I'd, you know use one of those tint things, brighten my hair up a bit" she paused

"Go on" Jules urged

"Well I bought it last week and left it in the bathroom cabinet and that little \*£\$/@! doctored it."

"It's, er, different!" Rhod stated, "can't you wash it out?"

"I found the container and it's a permanent colour, I'm stuck with it at least for a few weeks"

"What did your mum say?" Charlie asked

"She blew her top, first at me, then when I told her what had happened she grounded Joanne for a month. Serves her right!"

"Bus is here!" Bernie mentioned.

We paid our fares and the conversation resumed

"At least you don't need a wig for Cosplay!" Ally joked

"It's not funny Ally, you try walking round with pink hair, everyone keeps staring at me like I'm some sort of freak!"

"What about school? Mr Wood will go ballistic!" Bernie suggested

"Mum said she'll ring on Tuesday morning to sort it out"

"Uh! What about your passport?" Charlie exclaimed

"Oh no, I've got to get a new passport photo this week, I'll have pink hair in my passport for ten years!"

"That will be like just so embarrassing" Maddy stated

"I'll never live it down"

"Of course you will" Jules soothed, "a couple of weeks time and you can get Sylv to dye it back, and everyone at school will think you're pretty cool"

"I doubt it"

"Yeah you can say it's a statement of individuality or something" I suggested

"I suppose that would be less embarrassing than the truth, at least Joanne is still in junior school."

The bus pulled in to the interchange and five minutes later we were waiting for a free lane over the road at the Superbowl. Me, Mad, Anna and Charlie made one team, Jules, Rhod, Bernie and Ally the other. I think I've said before, I'm no great shakes at bowling and neither are any of the others but we always have a good time.

Well for the first time I can remember I was on the winning side! We won convincingly too, a clear twelve points. It was still only three thirty when we finished so we decided on a walk through the precinct. This did not exactly fill me with enthusiasm, the last couple of times I'd been round these shops I was either dressed as a girl or buying girls shoes and stuff. Still, there was no reason to believe I would be mistaken again, after all I was with a bunch of good looking (don't tell 'em I said that) girls and I'm no picture really. Besides I'm hardly dressed like a girl am I?

We queued in Maccy D's for 'flurries', then like many other groups of teens; we drifted along the precinct. Rhod and I managed to stay away from the boutiques and I thought I had cracked it when I realised we were in Sarah's shoe store. I glanced around and couldn't see her; perhaps I could still escape!

"Hiya"

Luck was not on my side!

"Hi Sarah"

"Are you guys looking for anything this week, Gaby?"

"Er no, we're just killing time 'till our bus is due, we've been bowling"

"Who's the lad? Your boyfriend?"

She was only kidding about but I flushed pink anyway.

"Rhod, we all go to school together"

The others had left me when I hesitated inside the door and only just realised I was missing.

"Who are the others then?"

I pointed each out

"Maddy, my sister Jules, Bernie, Ally, Charlie and Anna's the one with pink hair"

"Is that for a bet or something?"

"No her little sister's to blame"

Maddy was waving me over so with Sarah in tow I joined the others.



"Hey guys, this is Sarah, I told you about her helping me get my shoes for the dance," I was making frantic eye signals, "remember?" I was laying it on thick.

"Hi girls, Gaby was just saying you've been bowling"

Several eyebrows shot up at that and I continued to make various 'don't drop me in it' signals.

Maddy cottoned on first and came to my 'rescue'.

"Yeah, Gaby, me, Charlie and Anna beat this lot by an end" she indicated the losers.

The others clicked then, it was a close run thing whether someone would actually burst into laughter, but they all just about kept their mirth to themselves.

"Well nice meeting you all, have to go, I've got someone waiting, bye Gaby,  
see you soon!"

"Bye Sarah"

"Bye"

She left us alone and Jules could contain herself no longer.

"Well 'sis', I don't know how you manage it"

"Give over Jules"

"Told you didn't I?" Maddy suggested

"This is just so weird Drew, I guess everyone else sees something that we  
don't"

"Let's just get out of here eh!"

"Spoilsport!"

"Give him a break" Rhod put in

"Ok then, come on 'girls'"

We waved to Sarah as we left the store; she returned a quick wave.

"I see what you mean now Mad," Bernie said

"He doesn't even need to try does he?"

"I'm here guys, you know"

"Yes but is it Drew or Gaby that's here?" Anna queried

"Oh give over will you!"

"Come on Gabs, walk with me" Mad suggested grabbing my arm. As a result I found myself walking along, arm linked with Mad's like so many other girls. What am I saying? 'Other girls', I'm 100% man, well boy! I think. The others trailed along behind and my 'friends' played it until it was well past it's best and I was getting pretty annoyed. Maddy at least, managed to stop me blowing up and Rhod was doing his best to help as well but one guy against five girls – well no contest!

## **Part 28**

### **Bank Holiday Blues**

I pretty much sulked all the way home. Did no one think I was a boy?

"You coming to Clumber tomorrow Drew?"

I was in a world of my own staring out of the bus window.

"Drew!"

"Sorry Mad I was thinking"

"Yeah well don't do too much, it'll sap your strength!"

I batted at her, but she easily dodged my half-hearted slap.

"Are you coming with us tomorrow?"

"I guess so, we riding or what?"

"Yeah, mum and dad are gonna meet us there with a picnic"

I bucked up at that, Mrs Peters culinary skills are legend as I may have mentioned before!

"Who else is coming?"

"Are you all coming tomorrow?" Maddy asked the rest who were having an animated discussion.

"Where?"

"On our bikes? To Clumber? Remember?"

"Not us Mad, we're going to Anna's Grandma" Jules answered for the older girls.

"Mum's got me painting my room tomorrow" Rhod complained

"I'm coming" Ally stated

"Can't miss your mums picnic!" Bernie agreed

"Meet at Drew's about half nine then"

"Ok"

The bus reached our stop and we all piled off.

"See you tomorrow then" Mad called as she skipped off toward home.

"See ya girls" Rhod called

"Bye Rhod"

We all went our separate ways; Jules and co walked with me as they were eating with us tonight.

"Drew, I didn't realise this girl thing was getting so out of hand"

"It's getting worse sis" I moaned

"It takes a bit of imagination!" Charlie suggested

"I suppose you look a bit like Jules but not like a sister" Anna added

"Can I tell them about you know what Drew?" Jules asked, "they won't tell anyone else"

"Promise?"

"Whatever it is Drew we *can* keep a secret!" Charlie replied

"Okay then I guess."

We were nearly home now.

"Well remember the other week when Drew was off school?"

"Yeah, you said he had flu"

"Well he was at school all week!"

"Where was he then, we never saw him and he always hangs around with the girls."

"There was only Maddy's cousin with them..." Anna stopped mid sentence

The penny dropped!

"You mean that cute girl was Drew don't you?"

"And her name was Gaby?"

"You got it!" Jules beamed while I tried to disappear into the ground.

"Now I get it, you were the girl at the dance weren't you?" Charlie asked me

"Er yeah, that was me"

"Wow, that costume! You're a natural!"

"My brother, the perfect girlfriend!" Jules stated

"Give over!"

We reached home and went inside.

After dinner the girls disappeared to Juliette's room and I settled down to watch James Bond with Dad. It had barely got through the opening chase before Jules called me out.

"The girls want to see you dressed up"

"No way!"

"Oh come on Drew just this once then never again"

"No!"

"What are you two arguing about, I'm watching the film" Dad's voice reached us.

"Just asking Drew for a favour" Jules replied

"Do it for your sister Drew"

He didn't even know what it was!

"But.."

He cut me off.

"Do it Drew"

"Well it looks like you're gonna do it then"

"I guess so, but this is the last time!"

"Fine, ok agreed. Do you need any help? What are you gonna put on?"

"I think I can manage thanks, the school uniform is all the girls stuff I have as well you know" I almost spat.

"Hang on I'll get you some stuff"

She disappeared into her room then emerged thrusting some stuff into my hands.

"Okay, come over to my room when you're ready"

Just what I wanted! Not!

I looked at what she'd given me, just a skirt and top, at least it wasn't a dress like Mad kept dressing me in!

I went to my closet and retrieved the bag of stuff Mrs Johnson had given me, then emptied the contents on the bed. Panties, bra's and in the bottom, now in a box, the gaff and breast forms. Well in for a penny!

I stripped and then pulled the gaff on and got myself comfortable; it really did look realistic! Next I pulled on a bra and slid the breast forms in; I was not sticking them on! Panties then Jules t-shirt and skirt followed then finally the pair of sandals that were in the bag. I found my earrings and put them in, brushed my hair out and ta-da, there was a boy in a skirt!



I listened for dad, then knocked on Jules door.

"S'open!"

I went inside, closing the door behind me.

"Oh wow, that's amazing Drew"

"You could be Maddy's twin!"

"Not you too, that's what her mum said"

"Her mum?"



Well I had to explain the whole thing to them then.

"That is just so amazing!"

"I would never have believed it"

"Well this is the last time I'm wearing girls stuff"

"And so cute too"

"I am not cute!"

"You are too!"

I sighed in resignation.

"Is that the right time Jules?"

"Just about"

"We'd better scoot"

"I'll get dad to take you home"

"Won't he mind?"

"Course not"

"I'll go get changed, see you guys"

"Bye Drew"

"Bye"

The girls went downstairs and I went back to my room to lay Gaby finally to rest. I pulled off Jules t-shirt and with a bit of a struggle got the bra off. Aargh! The breast forms stayed put! Damn! There must have been some adhesive left from last week. I tugged a bit and while I got an edge up they were once again stuck to my chest! I searched through the stuff on my bed; I found the adhesive but no solvent. Damn, it must still be at the Peters. I heard Jules come back upstairs so I pulled the t-shirt back on and returned to her room.

"Er Jules"

"I thought you were getting changed?"

"I was but..." I pulled the shirt up to expose my breasts, "...these have got stuck on and I left the solvent at Maddy's last week"

Jules just started to laugh.

"Come on Jules this is serious, I need to get them off"

"Sorry Drew but you just look so much like a girl stood there holding your breasts"

I quickly let go of my lumps and pulled the shirt back into place, I barely noticed that I still had on the skirt and sandals.

"What am I going to do?"

"Well, first ring Maddy, make sure she's got the solvent."

"But dad will be back in a few minutes"

"Use your mobile up here stupid"

"Oh right, good thinking Batman"

I dashed to my room and found my phone and pressed the speed dial for Maddy.

"Hi Mrs Peters, sorry it's late but can I speak to Maddy?"

"Sure Drew, just a minute" the phone went dead for a few seconds then Maddy came on.

"Hi Drew, what's up?"

"Well I'm sort of Gaby at the minute"

"I thought you weren't doing that?"

"I wasn't." I gave her the quick version of the evening

"... And I haven't got the solvent, I left it at yours"

"That's what that bottle is. It's in the bathroom"

"Can you bring it over?"

"Not tonight Drew, I'll bring it in the morning, I'll come early right?"

It was as good as I could hope for.

"Okay, thanks Mad, see you in the morning"

"G'night Gabs"

"Night"

"What did she say?" Jules asked

"Well she's got the solvent but she can't bring it tonight"

"Course not"

"So she's gonna bring it in the morning"

"That's not so bad"

The front door closed.

"Dad's back, you stay here, it's nearly time for bed anyway"

"Okay"

Jules went down stairs and came back a few minutes later.

"Here, wear this" she threw a wisp of something at me

"What for?"

"Well it will support your breasts, you'll be more comfortable in bed"

"If you say so" I was not convinced

"Take it from me"

"Okay already!"

"Now scoot, I'll see you in the morning"

"Yeah, g'night"

"Night Drew"

I returned to my room and looked at what she had given me. It was pink and see through with a sort of nylon t-shirt at the top and matching panties. Well in for a penny, in for a pound, I stripped off the skirt and T and was soon dressed in Jules night-dress. She was right – it did a pretty good job of holding my 'breasts' still, better than Mad's Pj's last week anyway.



I could see why there were matching panties too, from the chest down was totally see through, the panties were needed for modesty. I left the gaff on, it wasn't uncomfortable, and pulled the bikini panties up into place. Looking in the mirror I got an inkling of what other people saw. Certainly wearing this outfit I looked like a girl, an ugly girl, but a girl, not a boy!

I got into bed and had to immediately readjust my nightwear as it bunched up as I slid under the duvet. The Pj's last week felt different but this night-dress affair was something else! I had to stop myself from feeling myself up, weird but nice.

I'd like to say I fell immediately into a deep slumber, but instead I lay thinking about the day's events for at least an hour before sleep took me. Surely tomorrow could only get better.

## **Part 29**

### **Sunday, Sunday**

I woke early to the sound of birds and bright sunshine streaming into the room from a chink in the curtains. I rolled over and didn't! Well you know what it's like with breasts, it takes more effort and I wasn't expecting it. I sat up and after a quick check of what I was wearing; the previous evening's events came back to me!

It really was early, only six thirty but if I wanted to get a training ride in *and* miss dad, I needed to go soon. After stripping off and a quick bathroom visit, I pulled on my three-quarters and a long sleeved top over 'my' bra; it was really odd seeing it stretched over my temporary bosom! No one else was up yet, so I made good my escape and was out on the road before seven.



There wasn't much traffic around yet as I made my way up to Worksop. I was vaguely aware of the mounds attached to my chest but I could ignore them until I got to the climb at the Half Moon. They jiggled around a fair bit despite the restrictive clothing and bra, well weird! Still I was soon at the top, then across to Clowne and the third side of the triangular circuit. I was just on the rise out of Creswell when I spotted a group of riders heading toward me. I would just have to brazen it out I guess.

As we converged I recognised them as the club that runs the Tuesday tens, I guess they recognised me too.

"Morning Dee"

"Morning youngster"

"Your keen this morning!"

I just waved a greeting with a mumbled

"Morning"

Boy things didn't get any better did they? Now they had seen me out riding with boobs! Nothing to do about it I guess. Except get home quickly, I stepped on the pedals with a bit more urgency.

There was still no one up when I got home, so I grabbed a shower downstairs after first getting my 'street bike' out. The battered Klein really did look out of place amongst all the shiny Campag in the garage! I tried the boobs again in the shower but no go; they were still firmly attached!

I crept back to my room and changed into my stuff for the day's ride to Clumber and tried to hide my chest with a baggy jumper. I was halfway through my proper breakfast (as opposed to my pre training slice of toast) before I heard dad coming downstairs.

"Morning Dad"

"You're up early"

"We're riding out to Clumber for a picnic"

"What time are you going?"

"The guys are meeting here at nine thirty, but Mad's got a problem with her gears, I said I'd try and fix them so she's coming early"

"You taking sandwiches?"

"No, Mrs Peters, Maddy's mum is meeting us there, she's taking food"

"Well take that new phone of yours along just in case"

"Yes dad" well in truth it had become a fixture in my kit already.

"What's with the jumper?"

"It's kind cold in the garage"

Talk about twenty questions. I finished my breakfast and rinsed my dish then went through to the garage to wait for Mad, all the while trying to hide my breasts from dad.

I busied myself cleaning the Klein a bit, pumping tyres and making sure I had spare tubes and stuff.

"Hi Drew" Maddy greeted me

"Hi Mad, am I glad you're here!"

She shucked her rucksack and dug into its contents.

"Here we are" she passed the container to me

"Thanks Maddy, can you give me a hand?"

"Sure"

We slipped into the shower room and I removed my jumper and t-shirt. It was easier for Maddy to work the solvent around the forms than it would have been for me, and certainly quicker.

"Thanks, Mad. That's a weight off my chest"

Mad cracked up at that.

"Come on Drew, take these upstairs, the others will be here in a minute"

I quickly put my t-shirt back on and took both the breastforms and the solvent up to my room. When I got back downstairs, Bernie and Ally had arrived.

"We're off now Dad"

"Okay, what time are you back?"

"About five I think"

"Okay, ring if you're going to be later"

"Yes dad, bye"

"Bye"

" You guys ready?"

"When you are Drew" Bernie supplied

"Right then lets go"

I set off in front and Ally joined me, the others following behind.

"So what happened last night Drew?" Ally asked

"Last night?"

"Yeah, Maddy said you rang her late last night"

"Oh that," I'd been hoping to not keep repeating the tale, "nothing really"

"I bet" Bernie chimed from behind

"Okay, I'll tell you"

"Knew you would!" Ally stated

"Humph"

"Oh come on Drew"

"I don't suppose I'll have any peace until I do will I?"

"No!" they all chorused

"Well you know Anna and Charlie came back to my house for dinner?"

"Yeah"

"Well they kept on about Sarah yesterday so Jules suggested I tell them about last week!"

"Did you?"

"Yes but I don't think they believed me at first"

"Well I guess it does take some believing" Bernie put in

"Anyway after dinner, jules asked me to dress as Gaby to show them"

"I thought you weren't gonna do that again?"

"I wasn't, but I sort of got forced into it by dad"

"He knows?" Ally asked

"No, well I don't think so anyway. No he told me to do whatever it was Jules was asking me to do, so it was like dress up or get in trouble. It seemed easier to do it than argue, I mean I'd have to tell him then!"

"Go on" Maddy urged

"Well Jules got me a top and skirt, and I had the underwear from last week so I got dressed up. I thought I might as well use the breast forms and stuff and I guess I sort of looked ok"

"And?" Ally pressed

"Well I showed them and they were er, gobsmacked"

"Well you do look cute when you're dressed up"

"I don't look cute!"

"Do!"

"Tell them the rest Drew" Maddy suggested

"Well after they left I went to get changed and the breast forms had stuck on. I guess I should have cleaned the glue off last week. Anyway I couldn't get them off, Maddy had the solvent still."

"Oh poor Drew" Bernie half mocked

"You may laugh, I had to wear one of Jules night-dresses and this morning I had to hide them from Dad 'till Mad got to my place."

"We wear night dresses all the time, what's the problem?" Mad mentioned

"I'm sure Jules didn't have to give me a see through one though!"

"Perhaps not, why didn't you just wear Pj's?" asked Ally

"Jules said the night-dress would be more comfortable"

"Was it?" Ally pursued

"I guess it was ok. Can we leave it now?"

"Okay Drew"

We had reached what dad said used to be called Fanny's Grove and we now left the road for a bridleway into Clumber Park. We bounced along the track through the forest, stopping to watch a herd of deer at one point and to untangle a branch from Ally's gears a bit further on.

We emerged on to one of the roadways and then followed the tarmac for a bit before reaching the busy area around the café.

"There's your mum" I pointed towards a green a short way off.

We rode over to the Peters car.

"Hi kid's you alright?"

"Yes thanks Mrs Peters"

"Fine mum"

"You want a drink?"

"Yes please" Bernie and Ally echoed

"Drew?"

"Yes please"

She poured us each a glass of squash and we sat around on the grass next to the car.

"Where's Dad?"

"Toilet, he'll be back in a minute"

And as if by magic, to paraphrase Mr Ben, he appeared brandishing half a dozen ice cream cones.

"Quick kids get these before I drop any"

We rushed to relieve him of the ices and just managed it. They were soft whip '99's, my favourite and by the lack of conversation over the next ten minutes, everyone else's too!

"Thanks Mr Peters"

"That's alright Drew"

The senior Peters had brought their bikes on the car.

"I thought we could have a ride round for a bit before lunch" Mad's mum told us

"You girls okay with that?"

"Yeah, it's not far here and we took our time"

"Come on then"

So we mounted up again and joined the many other trippers riding around the park. We eventually returned to the car about one for lunch, us 'kid's' making use of the facilities while Mrs Peters organised the food.

"How's your mum doing Drew?"

"Ok I think. She's done a couple of races and she's got a team car too"

"What sort?" Mr Peters asked, his ears picking up on car!

"It's a Mercedes, one of those small people carriers"

"A class?"

"That's it"

"Very nice. Madeline says you're off to visit in a couple of weeks"

"At half term, we're going on the train"

"Leave the boy alone"

"Sorry Drew, didn't mean to be the Spanish Inquisition!"

"S alright Mr Peters"

"You all filled your forms for the exchange programme?"

"It took forever" opined Ally

"Dad's doing mine today" I offered

"Well I spoke to Mr Bahlsen in Grottoes last night and he said that they are all looking forward to it. It's only a little place"

"We looked on the web dad, small's an understatement!"

"Yes well Warsop is hardly the hub of civilisation either." he continued, "they've had to run a lottery to see who comes, seems the whole school wanted to come!"

"Cool!" I offered

"And I've got more good news, my company is sponsoring the scheme so your parents will not have to pay out on airfares"

"That's' brill Mr Peters, I know Rhod was worried about that" Bernie stated

"You all finished?" Mrs Peters asked

"Yes thanks, that was great Mrs Peters" Ally replied

"Yeah thanks" I added

"You kids riding straight back now?"

"Sort of, Drew says he knows a new way we can go"

"Well take care, we'll see you at home Maddy"

"Ok mum"

We gathered our steeds and directed the girls along the trails to the exit.

"That's cool about the flights eh?" Bernie offered

"Yeah, specially as dad would be paying for me and Jules"

"Jules has been picked?" Ally asked

"Yeah we got the letter with the forms"

"Kewl!"

"Who else, do you know?"

"I can't remember the others apart from Anna"

"She never said!" Maddy accused

"She was a bit preoccupied yesterday what with her hair and all that" I suggested

"I guess so"

"I think the other two were boys"

"I suppose with both of you going that means you get two students to stay too?"

"Dunno, it'll be a bit crowded" I answered, "watch out for the ditch"

We eventually arrived on the Meden road and me and three tired girls were soon back at my house.

"Drinks everyone?"

"Yes please Drew"

I fetched soft drinks from the fridge and found the girls collapsed on the old sofa in the garage.

"I never realised you had so many bikes Drew?" Bernie exclaimed

I passed round the drinks.

"They're not all mine"

"Yeah well there's still loads"

I had to mentally tick them off, my three, Jules and Dads, the tandem and mums, well mum had loads, training hack, race bike, time trial and a track bike, oh and she had an ATB too. So that's eleven!

"Eleven" I informed them

"You've got more bikes than Halfords!" Ally stated

"Well I suppose there are quite a few, but there are four of us"

"I guess" Mad allowed

"I know people with more, there's one guy mum knows in Sheffield who has about eight on his own"

"Now that's serious weird" Bernie suggested

"What are we doing tomorrow?"

"I'm racing in Sheffield" I offered

"We've got nothing planned"

"Hey why don't you guys come to the race?"

"Well" Ally hesitated

"It'd be fun, we can go in the camper"

"I dunno, Drew"

"Go on, none of you have seen me race have you?"

"No, I guess not" Maddy replied

"And you already said you've nothing planned"

The girls looked at each other and seemed to make a collective decision.

"Okay"

"Great, I'll find dad and sort it out!" I was pretty happy about the prospect of having my own cheerleader squad for the day.

I quickly located dad and he agreed to the plan readily. I returned to the garage and the girls.

"It's in the afternoon, dad says we can pick you up on the way about eleven thirty."

"Okay Drew, we'll see you tomorrow then."

The girls then left together.

At least the day had ended better and tomorrow was looking good too!  
Perhaps I could now forget Gaby.

## **Part 30**

### **Cheering Drew**

Mum rang Sunday evening, she was over the moon, she's been named for the Tour Feminin, which runs on part of the Tour de France course! And she got tenth in Saturdays race in Switzerland, she was a lot happier this week. I guess even Mum has her ups and downs. I told her all about what was happening with the exchange scheme and she suggested that we could take our exchangees to Germany for a few days! Now that would be cool.

I rang Rhod too and invited him to join the supporters club but he was still painting so had to decline.

All in all Sunday had been pretty good after a rocky start. A nice day out with my mates, Mr Peters news and mums upbeat phone call. For a change I slept well!

The Bank Holiday arrived unusually fine (it's a standing joke in Britain that Bank Holiday weather is always bad. It's not true but it sometimes seems like it!). Mum had suggested I go for a ride this morning, steady, just to loosen up so that's what I did, just up to Fanny's Grove, along to Cuckney and back home. Not far but I did feel better for it.

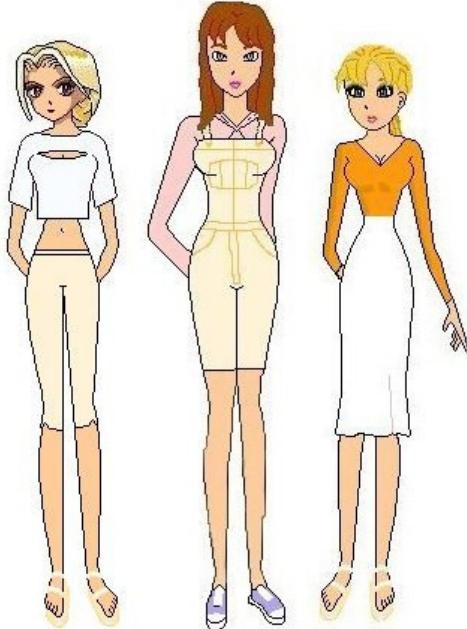
We collected the girls as planned; Jules elected to stay home as she had homework to finish. The drive to Sheffield didn't take long and we found our way to Norfolk Park where the racing was to take place quite easily. The car parking was a hive of activity and there were hundreds of riders and spectators all round the park. The races would be on the park perimeter road which being Sheffield means down one side and up the other and I mean up! Mum always thought it was strange that the hilliest city in the UK should have the most cycling clubs, nearly twenty.

The girls went for a walk while I got my bike checked and changed. I watched a couple of races before mine, some of the seniors had two forty lappers this afternoon, I was glad mine was only 20 laps and that was going to be hard going.

The girls found me just before I went to the start and to my surprise (and delight) I got a kiss from each of them. Well I was certainly gonna put up a good performance for them now! Unlike most schoolboy races where everyone is in the same race, this time there were sufficient riders for smaller age categories, 12-13, 14-15 and a separate event for the 16-year-olds. I had a realistic chance for a change!

The flag dropped and our race was off. The descent was way fast, our restricted gearing meant we were spinning out by halfway down and relying on gravity and technique to gain any further speed. Being one of the 'older' kids meant I had a bit more experience and from lap one it told. The climb back to the top was steep and twisty but we climbed it easily, a small group of us leaving the younger kids behind.

The girls cheered me through and I saw some of the other spectators giving them funny looks!



The next few laps were much the same, our small group gaining a little every lap. I watched my fellow riders as mum had taught me and decided that I might just be strong enough to make a go of it. The next couple of laps I put only enough effort in to stay with the group, which served two purposes, it conserved energy and the others would think I was struggling. Thanks mum! The ploy worked a treat; on the climb section of lap ten I made my effort and opened a small gap by the top. The girls were bouncing up and down with excitement as I crossed the line with my scant lead.

I could make best use of the circuit on the descent this time, not having to worry about the others in the group. I kept the pressure up a second time up the climb and when I checked over my shoulder near the top I had a good couple of hundred metres lead, enough to disappear from sight at some point of the circuit. I smiled at the girls as I passed them amid a cheering crowd. Well I guess the others must have given up as next time I checked, I couldn't see them at all, rather I was coming up to lap back markers.

I won't deny I was starting to tire, but I had sufficient lead to take the climb easier now. Seemingly too soon the bell went as I crossed the line so I dug into my reserves for a last time and just about caught a bunch of about ten backmarkers. This caused me a slight dilemma; lapped riders had to pull out so if I passed them they wouldn't have to do another lap. On the other hand, I knew from personal experience that they would prefer to go the distance. So I held off the back of the group up the climb and let them drop me a bit before the finish area.

I thrust an arm in the air as I crossed the line, the biggest grin on my face! Well dad didn't get a look in; the girls mobbed me big style. I could get used to this! The

presentations took place before the start of the next race, so I didn't have long to wait.

"...And in first place after a very mature ride, Drew Bond, Notts. Velo!"



I climbed the podium and I don't know for sure but I think it was the Mayor of Sheffield presented the prizes. I saw dad taking some photos and the local paper too. I was made up I can tell you, my first win! All too soon though it was back to the showers and packing up.

"You were great Drew" Maddy enthused

"I didn't know you were that good" Ally allowed

"Well it is the first time I've ever won"

"He's too modest girls" dad put in, "he's won his category a few times now"

"Yeah but this is my first proper win Dad"

"And your mother will be proud of you when I call her later"

"What are we doing now?"

"Well girls do you fancy watching some more sweaty racers for a while?"

"If Drew wants to" Bernie agreed

"Well perhaps just for a while then"

"Ok, then we'll go for a meal, how's that sound?"

"Brill dad"

"Great Mr Bond"

So the four of us set off around the circuit, I always find that the best way to see the racing, you get to see the riders more often if you walk toward the race too. As we walked I had to relive my own race, I wasn't exactly reticent and for once my audience was genuinely interested!

By the time we got back to the top of the circuit I'd had enough, I was knackered! So we sought out dad and we departed the park. Dad then surprised us by taking us around some back roads that eventually brought us to the Sheffield Arena and our destination. Mama's Italian restaurant was my favourite place to eat after Maddy's and my favourite was the tagliatelle!

"Ok kids, we'll eat and then catch a film okay?"

More than ok!

"Yes please Mr bond"

So we ate, (I had the tagliatelle) then got to watch American Pie 2 in the Full Monty screen which is the biggest permanent screen in Europe. It was awesome! And the film was good too!

What a day. We dropped the girls off and finally arrived home at nearly nine o'clock. After I made tea, dad rang mum to tell her the news.

"Hi Jen, I've got someone here itching to speak to you"

"Hi mum"

"Hi Drew, what's up?"

"You know I was racing in Sheffield today?"

"Yes"

"Well I won!"

"Oh well done Drew! I knew you had it in you. Tell me all about it"

So that's what I did for twenty minutes. I'm sure she didn't really want to listen in such detail but she did, making all the right noises and generally boosting me. Eventually my race was run and I said my goodbyes. It still wasn't easy having a long distance mum, but at least it was getting less traumatic.

"Time for bed Drew" dad pronounced, "school in the morning, and take those earrings out!"

I blushed deeply, I had forgotten all about them Saturday night and no one had said anything for two days!

"Yes dad, goodnight"

"Night Drew"

What a weekend! I guess more ups than downs overall but I could have done without the downs altogether!

## **Part 31**

### **Mr Bond, Drew Bond**

Tuesday morning and I was still running on adrenaline after Monday's race. I think I mentioned a while back that Mr Wood made a point of congratulating any pupils competitive success. I guess therefore I shouldn't have been surprised when my previous day's performance was mentioned. I admit it, I squirmed. I mean everyone in the assembly hall had to turn and look at me didn't they?

After that, the day and indeed the week, settled back to 'normal', whatever that is? At the ten that evening things started to get real complicated, to them I was Dee Bond, *daughter* of Jenny Bond. However several of them had been at yesterdays race meet and seen her *son* Drew win the under 14's race. As a result they now thought I was my own sister, help! I was going to have to sort this out, and soon, but how? I mean to say, I am gonna look stupid, they are all gonna be embarrassed, it's a mess!

Well at least there wasn't any spectre of 'Gaby' reappearing, well not intentionally, and if anyone thought I was a girl I'd put him or her right straight away! Right?

On Thursday Mr Wood called a meeting of all the 'exchange' students after school, so I guess things weren't quite normal!

"Ok people, quiet down!"

Our little group stopped our chatter at Mr Woods' request.

"Right then, I've called this meeting for several reasons. Number one is that I feel that you should all be involved in the planning for the exchange visitors. They will be here for six weeks, which means a lot of free time, which we would like to make enjoyable and educational for them. I'm sure they will be doing the same for you next year."

There was a collective groan from the students present.

Mr Wood continued,

"Secondly, I've got the details of who will be hosting who"

This obviously started several small discussions.

"Quiet! I'll give you all a folder with pictures and stuff after our meeting, I guess they will be having a similar meeting this week to discuss you lot!"

This was greeted by more murmuring.

"Settle down. Now before we meet again I want you all to come up with some activities and excursions that our visitors will find stimulating. We are planning on two trips per week as a group, you lot will go on one of them each week..."

"Cool" someone quipped

"...Which will be educationally stimulating! So I don't want a list of amusement parks!"

Groans all-round.

"Okay everyone?"

"Yes sir" we all replied in unison.

"Fair enough, we'll meet here the same time next week to discuss your ideas. That's all for now, collect your folders on the way out"

Well guess what we would all be doing instead of our homework!

"Who you got Mad?"

"Sabrina Jones" she replied looking through the folder, "oh wow, it's got her email and stuff too"

"I've got Amy Plokowitz" Bernie offered "how 'bout you Rhod?"

"Dan Martin"

"My ones called Darla, that is just so American!" Ally offered

"What about you Drew, who've you got?"

"I don't believe it! There must be a mistake, they've given me a girl!"

"What's her name then?"

"Britney Walters. I don't believe this! I bet they got me and Jules mixed up"

"Yeah that'll be it Drew, just change folders when you get home" Maddy suggested.

"I guess"

"Come on, we'll go to my place and send them all emails!" Mad was really enthusing by now.

"Great idea" Ally replied

"I'm in" Rhod agreed

"Math's can wait for one night" Bernie echoed the sentiment

"Drew?" Mad questioned

"Yeah, ok I guess I don't have to send one to 'Britney' though"

We walked back to Maddie's 'ranch' where her mum greeted us.

"I wasn't expecting you lot tonight"

"Sorry mum, but we want to send some emails to our exchange partners in America"

"You don't want feeding then"

Four of us looked at our feet in embarrassment.

"Please mum" Maddy ploughed on

"Veggie lasagne ok guys?"

"Er thanks Mrs Peters"

"That'd be great Mrs Peters"

The other two made thank you noises of agreement.

"Ok then, you've got about forty five minutes before we eat. Ring your parents first though"

"Yes Mrs Peters" Bernie answered for us all

"I'll get the computer on while you all phone home, meet me in the dining room" Maddy suggested

Well we were all sat around the computer in under five minutes and Maddy's Yahoo was ready for mail.

"What are we gonna say?"

"Hi?" I offered

"Well der!"

"How about ask for pictures and stuff, we can send some of us with the emails" Ally proposed

"Great idea"

"I'll get the camera"

"What do you want the camera for?" Mrs Peters asked her daughter

"We want to send them pictures of us"

"Well you can get some easier than that, look in the 'my pictures' folder and the folder marked 'kids' has a load of you lot in it"

"Great mum, that'll be quicker"

"Well you can wash up and lay the table first, dinners in ten minutes"

"Ok mum"

"Yes Mrs Peters" the rest of us murmured.

Well I'm sure I mentioned Mrs Peters cooking before but just in case you missed it, she is brill. The lasagne was homemade and cooked just right, I'm sure she could have a restaurant, but then I guess we'd have to pay to eat this well! We finished up with blackberry and apple pie with ice cream – I could live here forever.

We quickly did the clear up and with 'Auntie Carol' safely in front of the telly next door we returned to the job in hand.

"How's this sound" Maddy started, "dear whoever, my name is Maddy, or whoever, and I'm your exchange partner in England."

"It's a bit formal isn't it?" Bernie suggested

"I suppose so, any better ideas?"

"How's about 'hi whoever, I'm x from England. I just found out you're my exchange partner and I thought we could get to know each other before you come in August."

"Whoa Drew, you got verbal diarrhoea?" Ally interjected

"That's great Drew, what next though?"

"How about, 'here's a picture of me, can you send one back?'" Rhod suggested.

"That's good, then what?" Mad asked

Well you don't want me to go through sentence by sentence do you? We eventually ended up with this message which we sent to everyone's partner including mine, 'Britney'.

'From           Drew Bond  
To              [Britneycheer@alo.com](mailto:Britneycheer@alo.com)  
Subject        Exchange trip

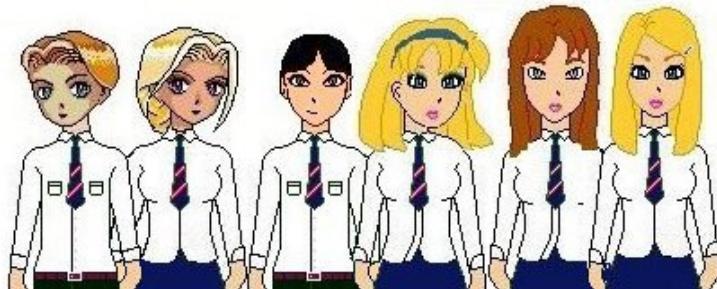
Hi Britney,

I'm Drew Bond from England, your exchange partner (I think). I'd like to get to know you a bit before you come over. I've attached a picture of me with my friends, (I'm on the left), can you send a picture of you back?

All my friends are in the programme too, that's Madeline, Rhod, Ally, Bernie and my sister Juliette too! We are all looking forward to getting to know you all.

Bye for now

Drew'



I attached this picture, the others all found pictures they liked; Mrs Peters didn't have many of me as myself!

I was amazed when only a few minutes later I got a reply from Britney.

'Hi Drew,

Thanx for the picture, we are all looking forward to the trip, this place is like Drearyville most of the time. The only picture I've got scanned is attached, hope you like!

Guess everyone calls you 007 eh?

Have to go as my next class is just about to start.



Bfn Britney'

The picture wasn't the best quality but Britney looked quite cute wearing what I think was a cheerleader's outfit.

"Mr Bond, Drew Bond, licensed to race!" I quipped

"Wow Drew that was a quick reply" Ally suggested

"Must be my animal attraction, she can't keep away!"

"Sure 'Gaby', that must be it"

"Come on Rhod, that was a bit low" Ally suggested

"Sorry Drew, jealous I suppose, she looks a fox!"

"Oh look there's two more replies"

"Who from?" I asked

"Er Amy, that's you Bernie and Sabrina who's staying here with me"

"Lets see then" Bernie enthused

Well the replies were much the same as mine and each had a picture attached.



On the left is Amy and on the right is Sabrina.

Well I guess we'd have to wait to find out what Darla and Dan look like.

"Come on kids, school night! I'll drop you all home" Mrs Peters broke our discussion up.

When I got home Jules was in her room so I knocked and waited.

"Come in, oh hi Drew"

"Er sis I think I got the wrong folder earlier"

"Why?"

"Well I seem to be paired with a girl"

"Oh and you thought I had got a boy?"

"Well yeah"

"Sorry to disappoint you Drew but I'm paired with a girl too, Debbie Walters"

"Oh no!"

"What's yours called?"

"Britney, Britney Walters"

"Do you think they are related, sisters or something?"

"I suppose they might be" I agreed

"Well that might explain it then"

"I guess so"

Well it looks like I'm gonna have a new girl friend come the summer. At least Rhod would have Dan who we'll be able to do stuff with.

## **Part 32**

### **Ride in the Hills**

Friday. Of course the only subject of conversation amongst those involved was exchange students. But there *was* more to this Friday, well I thought so anyway! It's only two weeks 'till half term and Germany and... well I can't think of anything else right now.

The day passed without any drama and as I have a race Saturday, I agreed to meet up with the others on Sunday for a bit of surfing and emailing.

"Come on Drew, shake a leg!"

"Coming Dad"

I pulled the door shut and got into the camper.

"I know the race isn't till tea time but I would prefer not to have to race up the road"

"Yes dad"

Today's event is a ten at Tadcaster just outside York, about an hour and a half away. Before she left, mum found time to plan the first half of my season and as you might have noticed she was making sure I got some variety which in turn often means travelling further afield than a lot of people do.

We were going the more 'scenic' way north, avoiding the motorways so dad took us past Doncaster and headed us towards Selby. The roads in this area are straight and flat so dad was relaxed as we drove along.

"How are you doing Drew?"

"Dad?"

Dad is not exactly Mr Sensitivity although he's a thoroughly nice bloke so his question threw me a bit.

"Well you know, with your mum away I thought I ought to ask"

"Er fine dad"

"Well you know you can talk to me if you want"

"Thanks"

"Anyway, I thought I'd just mention it. How did your 'modelling' go the other week? Juliette has been a bit cagey when I asked her"

Nightmare, nightmare!

"Er fine"

"Come on now, what did you have to do?"

Well I didn't really want to tell him the total truth so I settled on a slightly abridged and non-committal answer.

"Well I had to pretend to be a new pupil"

"I know that much, your mum told me. So what did you do?"

"Well I just went to a few classes and the photographer sort of followed me around."

I'm sure dad knew I wasn't coming clean.

"Did you enjoy doing it?"

"I guess it was ok"

"Do it again?"

"Erm I'm not sure"

Then he dropped the bombshell!

"Look Drew I know you had to dress as a girl so stop hedging round it"

My face must have been a picture!

"Look son, whilst I was a bit shocked when your mum told me, and wasn't real happy about it, the fact that you agreed to do it says a lot. I meant what I said, you can talk to me anytime"

So here was dad telling me he knew about Gaby and not making a fuss over it.

"Now you can tell me the truth, did you enjoy doing it? Jules said you were excellent"

No dodging this time!

"Well I guess it was fun fooling the rest of the school"

"And Maddy's mum? you stayed over after all"

"How did you know?"

"I got it from Carol, Mrs Peters. She rang me to let me know what was happening."

So I had been 'betrayed' twice! Sheesh! Well I guess it was only to dad.

"Well yeah it started out with me and Mad trying to pass me off as a girl but Aunt Carol saw through it"

"Aunt Carol?"

"Yeah well, that's what she told me to call her when I was dressed up."

"I look forward to seeing some of the pictures of my youngest daughter"

Dad was starting to freak me.

"Look dad, it was fun for a couple of days but that's it. I'm not doing it anymore. I am a boy and I intend to keep it that way!"

"Whoa, whoa. Calm down. I wasn't implying anything. I don't want another daughter either, I couldn't afford it!"

He finished the sentence jokingly.

"Come on lighten up, we're nearly at Tadcaster"

I hadn't noticed much of the drive, pre-occupied by dad's words.

Well I have to admit to being a bit distracted as I warmed up. Dad had opened a whole can of worms, would I do it again? Nah! Even for money? Well it would depend... get a grip, no regardless!

"Fourteen!"

My reverie was broken as I was called to the line.

"Drew Bond?"

"Yeah"

"I'll give you thirty then fifteen seconds then countdown"

"Ok"

The pusher gripped my seat post and I eased onto the saddle and clipped my left foot in.

"Ok" the pusher asked

"Yeah"

"Thirty!"

I concentrated on my breathing as mum had taught me.

"Fifteen!"

I started my computer running.

"Five, four" the pusher rocked me back and forth,

"Three, two, one, go!"

And I was off, sprinting away to get momentum then quickly into my tuck. The course was a gradual climb over the first four miles then after a loop over the carriageways a long downhill run in. downhill in this case means not uphill as it is mostly nearer to flat than any real gradient! I concentrated hard and kept a steady cadence over the outward leg. Wow! Just over twelve minutes to the turn.

I tried to up the pace for the return, but number fifteen still passed me! My legs were spinning like windmills as I tried to take advantage of the passing traffic. I could see the start area, just under a mile to go all on a long left-hand bend! Finally as my legs were really starting to complain, the finish hove into site. I glanced at the computer, 24.50, wow! The last quarter mile seemed to take forever as the lactic acid started to take hold but eventually I reached the line and slapped the stop button. 25.59! With the fifteen seconds off that gave me 25.44, a new personal by three seconds.

As there was over a mile to ride back to the HQ I took up my thoughts of Gaby again as I warmed down. If the inducement was right could I really turn it down? I mean it's not as though I really liked dressing as a girl, it was a mercenary thing. Christmas was just a costume event, the whole Easter dance thing was a lost bet and the modelling, well that was for money. So there you are, good reasons for each dressing episode!

"Well done son, 25.43!"

"Wow that's better than I made it!"

"Your mum will be chuffed"

"Can we ring her later"

"Afraid not, she's in Spain this week but she said she'd try to call"

By his tone it was clear that dad was both disappointed for me and sad himself. Mum's absence was affecting him too, something I hadn't thought about before.

No prize this week except my PB, if I keep chipping away at this rate I might get a 24 by the end of the year! We stopped at a Little Chuff for tea where dad dropped his second bomb shell of the day.

"We're going to Ladybower tomorrow with the bikes"

"But dad, I was going to meet the guys" I almost whined

"They can come too" he offered

"I guess I can ask them"

"We'll ride round the reservoirs and have lunch at Slippery Stones ok?"

"Sure"

When we got home, right after my shower I rang the guys to tell them of the change of plan. To my surprise it was Rhod who cried off, the three girls were quite keen on the idea.

For those of you who don't know (I guess there might be one or two of you!), Ladybower and the Derwent Dams is where they practised for the Dambuster raids in the Second World War. These days it's a popular spot for walkers and mountain bikers, sitting as it does in the south Pennine hills just outside Sheffield. I really enjoy the circuit and we often swim in the river at the top of the Howden reservoir, at Slippery Stones.

Sunday arrived with uncharacteristic blue skies prompting Jules to grab our swimsuits just before we left. We collected the others and their mounts soon after nine and headed for Sheffield. Being Sunday the traffic was pretty light and we talked about the student exchange and stuff. The Veedub wheezed a bit as we climbed out of Sheffield then barely ten miles later we dropped down to the Ladybower. Dad decided to park at Fairholmes, there's toilets and stuff there and it potentially shortens the circuit by a few miles. By the time we left the camper it was getting on toward eleven.

We joined the throng of day-trippers but our little group soon outstripped the walkers and a lot of the bike riders would clearly not get to the top of the dams. I wasn't trying to race along but on the first climb I pulled away from the others. I didn't realise this until I heard Maddy shouting to me.

"Drew! Wait up!"

I pulled up to wait for her.

"Sorry I just got carried away"

"That's alright, your dad said for us to keep going, we'll meet up at the top"

"Ok"

I got my old Klein back into motion and adjusted my pace to match Mad.

"It's pretty cool out here huh?" Mad suggested

"Yeah, it's one of my favourite places"

"Pity it's so far"

"Well it's only thirty miles"

"Yeah but you can't exactly ride here can you?"

"I have done with mum, but I know what you mean"

We cut the conversation as we made the next climb; Maddy was well out of breath at the top.

"Mad can I ask you something?"

"Huh, huh, what?" she wheezed

"Well I guess it's about Gaby"

"What about her?"

I wasn't sure where this was going but I ploughed on.

"Well what do you think of her?" the syntax (big word!) didn't seem right.

"Like?"

"You know..."

"Well I guess I like her"

"More than Drew?"

"No! well differently. It's like, well, you're my friend, we do stuff, have fun but you're a boy, there's stuff we can't talk about or share."

"Uh huh" I nodded

"Well Gaby is like a girlfriend. You know like Ally and Bernie. We can talk about clothes and stuff and have loads of fun, there's no barriers you know?"

"I think I get it. Even though you know she's me, you can relate to her better"

"That's it Drew. But why the sudden interest? I thought you said you wouldn't get dressed up again"

"I did, and I still mean it but you acted different toward me when I had the boobs and I needed to know why."

"Well don't get me wrong Drew and I know it's a bit odd but I'm going to miss her"

"I guess I will too"

So there it was. I have just admitted to my best friend that I will miss dressing up as a girl! And I didn't even intend having this conversation, this is just too weird!

We reached the bridge at Slippery Stones and sat on the riverbank to wait for the others. They weren't far behind us and soon we were camped a bit further upstream by the swimming hole.

The open moors and the bleating of sheep always seem to act as a relaxant and the six of us ate lunch each lost in their own thoughts.

Jules broke the spell.

"come on guys, get your suits on, last one in's a wuss!"

She chucked my kit at me and I found a nook to change in. But shite! This wasn't my trunks, it's, oh no.

"Jules you didn't get my trunks"

"Did"

"No you didn't, look"

I hoisted Gaby's regulation school costume for all to see.

"I'm not wearing this!"

"Who's to know?"

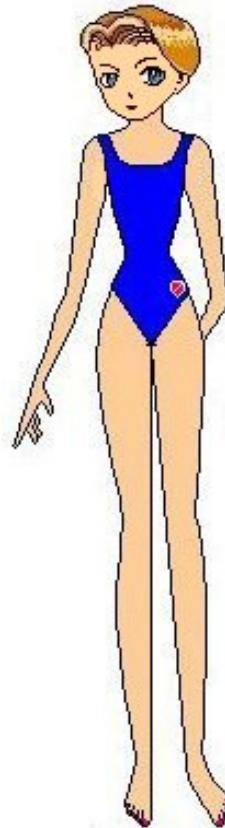
"No one but I'm not wearing it!"

"Oh come on, it is yours after all"

"Come on Drew" Bernie shouted

Well I guess no one's gonna see me up here. I pulled the suit on, gathered my clothes and went to join the others.

"Drew?"



"Yes Dad"

"Did you wear that for the photo's?"

"Er yeah, I had like all the bits and stuff to fill it out"

"Yes well, er, um take care in the water"

He was obviously taken aback at my appearance. I just beat Ally to the pool and I joined the others in the icy mountain waters. Well we larked around in the water for over an hour, I soon forgot what I was wearing, after all the others were all wearing one-piece suits too.

"Come on kids, time to go" dads voice carried from where he had lain asleep for most of the afternoon.

The ride back to Fairholmes is mostly down hill without the undulations of the road. The nearer to the centre we got, the more people were evident and we were soon dodging pedestrians, dogs and day hire bike riders. What a brill day!

## **Part 33**

### **Ouch!**

I was unaware until I stepped into the shower later of my sunburn! Ouch did that hurt!

"Jules have you got any sunburn lotion?"

"Yes"

"Er can you put some on my back please?"

Jules came into my room armed with her cream.

"Lets have a look then"

I turned round so she could see my poor back. I was not prepared for her response a barely contained snort of laughter.

"What's so damn funny?"

"Well you might not want to show this off"

"What?"

"Well it's sort of obvious what you've been wearing"

"What do you mean?"

"Your swimming cozzie?"

"No! It's not? It has?"

"Yep you've got a lovely stencil of a regulation cozzie!"

"Bugger!"

"It could be worse, you could have had a bikini on"

"No I couldn't, this is bad enough!"

Some days are just not meant to be fun. I guess I would just have to try to keep covered in PE at least until my 'stencil' faded! And on top of that I was not going to get a very good nights sleep either.

I managed to get through Monday's school day without alerting any of my peers to my sunburn; I had suffered the deliberate back slapping before! For various reasons our regular Monday meeting was at the Peters' again so we all walked there straight from school.

"Jules says you got sunburn Drew?" Ally enquired

"Yeah, a bit"

"You should really take more care Drew" Maddy offered

"I take it none of you got burnt then"

"We put sun block on before we left just in case" Bernie advised

"Well that's not the worst of it"

"Why?" Rhod queried

"Well you can see what I was wearing"

"So?"

Rhod wasn't there was he.

"It's a long story, but I ended up wearing a girls cozzie"

"Get off!"

"It's true Rhod, Jules picked up the wrong bag" Maddy told him

"So you've got..."

I cut him off

"Yes the outline of a girls swimsuit"

"Oh boy Drew, you don't make your life easy do you" Ally put in.

"Can we leave it now?" I pleaded

"Ok but what else can we talk about?" Maddy asked

"Hey have any more emails come back?" Bernie asked

"They hadn't last night but we can check after tea" Maddy replied

We reached Castle Peters and Mrs Peters already had our tea well under way, baked potatoes with salad; I was disappointed that she wasn't doing Italian! After eating we decamped to the computer desk and waited whilst the machine booted.

"Come on Maddy"

"Patience Rhod"

Maddy's mailbox certainly had some new messages and we waited impatiently as she flipped through the list.

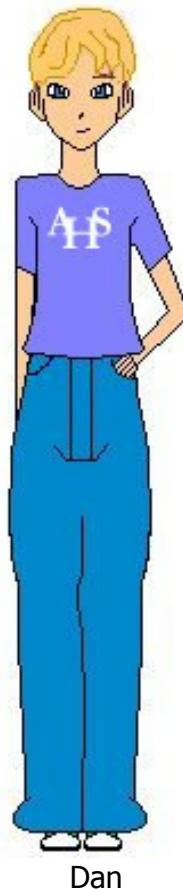
"Here's one, it's for Rhod"

She clicked it open and Rhod scanned the content.

"Well it's from Dan, he says he had to wait to use the school computer as he's no online at home"

"Has he sent a picture?" Bernie asked

"Yeah" Rhod opened the attachment.



"He looks a bit of alright" Ally offered

"Bagsy first dibs!" Bernie demanded

"Give over guys" Rhod requested

"Oh come on, Rhod, don't go all jealous on us" Bernie replied

"I'm not!"

"Coulda fooled me"

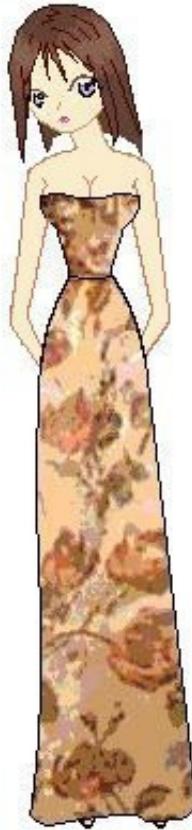
"Is there one from Darla Mad? " Ally asked

"Let me check"

Maddy reclaimed the mouse and perused the rest of the list.

"I think this ones from her" she opened a mail and relinquished the controls.

We read over Ally's shoulder as she worked through a long missive from Darla. Like Dan she had had to wait to use the school equipment and similarly she had attached a picture.



Darla

"Looks like she's going to be a bundle of fun" Bernie mentioned

"Yeah like she's gonna bore us to death" Rhod suggested

"Give her a chance guys" Ally flew to the girls defence.

"Yeah you go on a bit sometimes Bernie" I had to duck to avoid a cushion.

We decided to reply to our respective 'partners' mails and that kept us occupied until it was time to leave.

I told Britney about the weekends events, thanked her for the picture and like the others, asked her what sort of stuff she'd like to do when she came over. We thought that if we knew what they wanted to do we could suggest the right sort of stuff to Mr Wood.

Only nine schooldays before I go to Germany!

I got home in time to catch mum ringing from Spain.

"Hi Drew"

"Hi mum"

"Your dad said you'd done another personal"

"Yeah just three seconds"

"It's better than nothing, you just need to keep chipping away"

"Yeah. How's your race going?"

"The team's in second place and I'm in tenth place overall"

"Cool"

"Well it's not too shabby I guess"

"When does it finish?"

"Tomorrow in Seville"

"Will you ring?"

"I'll try but no promises ok?"

"Kay"

"Your dad said you had a chat at the weekend?" she was hinting at me to enlarge on dad's comments.

"Yeah"

"What about?"

"You know school and stuff" I was being particularly evasive

"Look Drew, I know about the modelling, I had to agree to it before Mr Wood asked you"

"Everything?"

"Yep, what I don't know is why you did it and if I should have allowed it."

"I guess it was mostly the money"

"Mostly?"

"Well the idea of fooling everyone at school seemed pretty cool too"

"You said you hated dressing up at Christmas" she stated

"Well I guess things have changed a bit since then"

"Anything to do with the earrings? On second thoughts I don't want to know!"

"I'll tell you next week right?"

"Ok, you're off the hook till then. Put your father back on."

"Okay, bye mum"

"Guten nacht Drew"

I passed the handset to Dad and retired to my room. Things were just getting real weird, as if they weren't already! My dreams were going to be weird as well, I just knew it.

I wasn't disappointed on that score, I dreamt that I was riding in mum's team, as a girl! Aargh! Less of that Drew, I cautioned myself.

Well Tuesday dawned bright and clear and my back was feeling better if a bit itchy. I didn't see much of the girls instead Clive and Paul occupied any spare moments interrogating me about Britney. There wasn't much to tell so I soon tired of this although they didn't.

Tuesday is usually ten night but this week it was replaced by a fifteen-mile circuit. I wasn't sure I wanted to do it but in the end I decided what the heck it would be good training for next weekends race. I made sure I looked as much like me as possible to try and convince them I was not a girl, but as my skinsuit tends to hide rather than promote my manhood, I was on a hiding to nothing. I was Dee Bond and that was that!

I don't want to bore you with another blow by blow account, suffice to say the circuit was pretty hard especially the second 'leg' toward Sheffield. I was well done by the finish but my forty-one was on a par with everyone else so I was quite chuffed still.

I missed mums call; she finished sixth today which took her to eighth overall. Pretty cool huh. I dreamt bizarre things again about racing with mum, not for me the Tour de France; no I had to dream of the ladies races! Sheesh.

## **Part 34**

### **Gaby's Invite**

"Brrrrr. Brrrrr. Brrrrr."

"Uh!"

"Brrrrr. Brrrrr. Brrrrr."

I grabbed what I now recognised as my phone from the bedstand and clicked it on.

"Hello?"

"Oh you are there"

"What?"

The voice was familiar but I couldn't place it.

"Wake up Drew! You're gonna be late!"

Blast! Maddy! I was supposed to meet the others before school this morning.

"Drew are you there?"

"Er sorry Mad, I had a bad night"

"Well get yourself over here and you can tell us about it"

"Sure, fifteen minutes?"

"Ok you can have breakfast here. Now go!"

"Bye"

I shut the phone off and dragged myself out of the mess of my bedclothes.

Twenty minutes later I parked my bike in the Peters garage and was ushered into the dining room by Maddy.

"Hi guys, sorry I'm late"

"Morning Drew" Rhod offered

"Someone's not a morning person eh Mad?"

"Well he was up early enough when he stayed over!"

I tried to disappear into the hard wooden chair.

"Let him alone" Ally instructed

"Toast Drew?"

"Yes please"

Mad went to put some bread on to toast while I helped myself to some juice.

"Okay then, who's got any ideas then?"

"Ideas?" I had to ask

"Der, that's why we're here dummy" Rhod intoned

"Right, just testing"

"Well I have" offered Bernie, "how about the Armouries at Leeds"

"That'd be cool, they have jousting and stuff don't they?" Ally queried

"Yeah, we went last year, they do sword fights and other demo's too" Maddy filled in

"Sounds good" I put in.

"Oops your toast Drew!" Maddy leapt up and returned with some slightly charred bread.

"Sorry Drew, shall I do some more?"

"No, mum says a bit of burnt is good for you"

"Anyone else got any ideas?" Rhod asked

"Well how about Jodrell Bank?"

"What's that Drew?" Ally queried

"It's a big radio telescope near my Gran's, you remember they went there in The Grimleys \*"

"Sounds a bit dull to me" Maddy suggested

"You got anything better then?" I quipped

"How about York, it's always full of Americans"

"I still think Jodrell would be good" I pouted

"You got any ideas Rhod?"

"Howz about Lincoln then?"

"It's like York on a hill isn't it?" Maddy queried

"Nah, it's much quieter and there's a proper castle" I advised, "we often go after I've been racing near there."

"Time to go kids!" Mrs Peters called through.

"Well I guess we've got a few ideas anyhow" Ally offered

"Yeah, bye Mum!"

We followed Maddy out and chorused

"Bye Mrs Peters!" as Mad pulled the door shut

We chatted as we walked to school and being Wednesday the girls didn't share any classes with me or Rhod hence our early morning meeting.

I was between classes when I heard

"Hey Drew! Wait up"

I turned to see who was calling and spotted Jules mate Anna, you can't miss that shock of pink hair!



"Oh high Anna, still pink I see" I had to duck her swipe at my head

"Well der, I told you it was a permanent dye, it takes time to grow out any you know"

"Oh yeah, so what's up?"

"Well I know it's a bit odd..."

"What is?"

"I'm having a pyjama party next week and well, Charlie said that as Jules was coming I should invite you, I mean Gaby along too. There I've said it"

"What you mean you want me to come to your pyjama party?" I queried

"Well..."

"Oh you want Gaby to go to the party? Like no way! You have got to be just so kidding!"

"Is that a no then?"

"Yes that is a no. I am never going to be Gaby again! Whatever gave you that idea?"

Pinkie looked crestfallen and a little taken aback by my vehemence.

"Well Jules said you wore a girls swimming cozzi at the weekend."

That sister of mine has a big mouth.

"That was different, I didn't have my trunks thanks to big sis. I never want to dress in girls stuff ever again."

"Okay, okay. Well if you change your mind"

"I won't"

"Well if you do, the offers open"

Sheesh, I just seem to attract weirdo's who want to see me in a frock! Just why would I, Drew Bond, want to go to a girl's party dressed as a *girl*? I just hope no one else heard that conversation, it would be all round the school in minutes! Just wait till I see you later Sis.

After that incident the rest of the day went quietly and luckily for Jules eardrums I had too much homework to do to harangue her that evening.

Thursday arrived all too soon but at least I didn't dream of being a girl cyclist! School was it's usual boring and un-instructive self but finally it was time for Mr Woods exchange meeting.

"Everyone here?" the Head asked sweeping into the room

"Yes sir" we all mumbled in reply

"Well I assume most if not all of you have made contact with your exchanges, Drew?"

"Er yes sir" I was surprised by his picking on me

"Anyone got any problems?"

Silence greeted his question

"I'll take that as a no then. Good. Okay we'll move onto the subject of visits" he moved over to the blackboard and assumed ready position.

"Okay where are we going to take our visitors? Charlotte?"

"Er London Sir?"

"Good" he scribbled that on the board

"Anyone else? Yes Madeline"

"York sir"

"Excellent, keep them coming" he wrote York down

"Lincoln" Rhod offered

"The Armouries in Leeds" Bernie added

"Skegvegas \*\*" one of the older kids jokingly suggested

"Serious suggestions please Hargreaves" Mr Wood instructed

"Jodrell Bank sir" I put forward my idea and it was added to the list.

"Any more?"

"Stonehenge?" Jules put in

"Is that it?" getting no more suggestions he continued, "well I see most of you" he looked pointedly at Paul Hargreaves "have given this some thought and I'm sure that we can include some of these suggestions in the programme. Okay unless anyone has any questions? No? Right then same time and place next week then."

"Goodnight sir" Jules offered and everyone else felt obliged to fall in line.

"You coming to the party next week Drew" Charlie asked outside

"Anna's?"

"How many more are there?" she asked jovially

"I told Anna yesterday no"

"Oh go on, it'll be fun"

"Look I said no and I mean it, Jules can you tell Charlie I'm not going she won't listen to me"

"Well I think you should go Drew"

Sisters! We spent the rest of the walk home arguing back and forth and I seemed to be losing the argument! I managed to extricate myself before supper but once in bed I had a chance to go over all the arguments Jules had put forward.

- It would be fun – ok
- I would enjoy myself – nada, it would be hell

- I had done plenty of Gaby stuff for everyone else why not for me – fair point
- I looked cute as Gaby – no way
- I'd get to spend the night with a bunch of good looking babes !– well that's a plus point I suppose

I fell asleep with Gaby on my mind. Screwy huh?

- \* Cult UK TV show about schooldays in the 1970's made @ 1999/2000 with the lovely Amanda Holden and '70's group Slade's lead singer Noddy Holder.
- \*\* Local comedic name for Skegness on the Lincolnshire coast which couldn't be less like Las Vegas if it tried! The only similarity is the sand.

## **Part 35**

### **Cheer Again**

I awoke after a restless night just as confused as before, on one level the whole idea of Gaby petrifies me. I mean I'm a boy, why do so many people think I'm a girl even when I haven't been conned into dressing as one? That alone is scary, but what is more scary is that when I'm dressed up I sort of quite enjoy it! That is really starting to spook me out.

On another plane Gaby seems to get involved in some fun situations, I mean take this party of Pinkies. There is just no way that me, that's Drew, would be invited but cute little Gaby gets an invite to spend the night with the girls. It's not as though it's the first time either, remember my 'makeover'? Sheesh. What's worse is that I'm even considering going! I really have got to get a grip.

I got to school on autopilot and I couldn't tell you what went on all morning.

"Hey Drew"

"Oh hi Mad"

"Your bike's still in our garage"

I really was losing it.

"I'll get it tonight Mad"

"You all right Drew?"

"Yeah I guess, just a bit pre-occupied"

"What're you doing tomorrow?"

"I've got a race tomorrow, why?"

"Well we were thinking of going to Meadowhall"

"Oh"

"Hey cheer up, it might never happen"

"Sorry Mad. Hey why don't you guys come to the race with us?"

"I'll ask the others Drew"

I brightened up a bit.

"We'll be going into Lincoln afterwards" I tried to make it sound more appealing

"Okay, you've convinced me, I'll try to get the others to come"

"Great Mad, I'll see you after school"

"Later"

"Bye"

The afternoon went better and it was soon time to go home.

"There you are Drew"

"Yeah, no one else coming?"

"No I said I'd call them later"

We started walking.

"Are they going to come tomorrow?"

"The girls are but Rhod's cried off again"

"That's not like him, do you think there's something wrong?"

"Could be, I'll ask mum to ask Sylv."

"Good idea"

"Are you in a better mood now?"

"Oh, yeah"

"You seemed really out of it earlier"

"Yeah, well I've been thinking"

"Now that's dangerous! What about?"

"Well Pinkie..."

She cut me off.

"Who?"

"Pinkie, you know, Anna"

"Does she know you call her that?"

"Don't think so"

"I suggest you keep it that way"

"Yeah okay. Well anyway she invited me to a party next week"

"You are honoured"

"Yeah but like there's a catch"

"Go on then"

"Well she wants Gaby to go not me"

"That is well screwy"

"That's what I thought, but I still wouldn't mind going"

"You're actually considering going?" she exclaimed

"Well I did sort of think about it"

"I didn't think you were going to dress up again (worse luck!)"

"What?"

"Nothing, you coming in?"

We had reached the Peters mansion.

"Er ok then"

"Hi Drew"

"Hi Mrs Peters"

"You staying for tea?"

I didn't have an exactly full diary.

"Yes please"

"Okay then"

"Come on Drew, we'll check the email"

Maddy booted the machine up.

"Well what did you decide?"

"About what?"

"The party dummy"

"I'm not going" I tried to make a joke of it, "after all I haven't got a thing to wear!"

I should have known better.

"Well if that's the only reason we can soon sort that out"

"I don't want it sorting!"

"I was just saying, oh look there's one from Britney"

"Lets have a look then"

I scanned the email

'Hi Drew,

We didn't realize that me and Debs would both be staying with you, it will be real fun with all four of us girls together. (What?) We are so looking forward to coming. What do you guys do out of school? I guess you saw from the picture that I cheer for our school, besides that I enjoy hiking and I work part time in a hiking store.

Mail back soon

We are counting the weeks until we fly over,

Hugs

Britney'

"Where did she get the idea that I'm a girl?"

"Perhaps she just assumed, after all Drew is sometimes a girls name"

"Yeah but we sent that picture of us in our uniforms, I'm wearing trousers and everything" I was getting a bit paranoid now

"I guess she thinks you were the end girl, or perhaps she thinks you look like a girl"

"That's all I need!"

"Hey calm down"

"Sorry Mad"

"That's what you were thinking about earlier wasn't it?"

"Yeah, it just bugs me when this sort of thing happens" I motioned toward the email.

"Well..." Mad gave me a shrewd look; "...you could play it back on them"

"What are you on about?"

"Well give them what they want"

"You mean let Britney think I am a girl?"

"Yeah, you don't say anything one way or the other, neither confirm or deny"

I thought about that for a minute

"It's not very honest is it?"

"Perhaps not entirely, but they're the ones making the assumptions"

"What about you, do you think I look like a girl?"

By the look on her face I must have asked the \$64,000 question!

"Erm, well I know you *can* look like a girl, a very pretty one"

I felt a blush rush up my face. She went on

"I *know* you're a boy but sometimes you're just like one of the girls. There, I said it"

"Sheesh"

"And I reckon you should call Anna's bluff and go to her party too. I mean why miss out on the fun"

The conversation was brought to a halt by Mad's mum

"What are you two plotting?" she asked leaning over to read the email like parents do

"Nothing mum"

"Looks like someone has a problem to me" she offered, "well anyway, get ready tea's nearly ready"

"Mum?"

"Yes"

"Could you ask Sylv if everything is ok with Rhod? He's cried off doing stuff the last couple of weeks and he's usually up for anything"

"Ok, I'll call her later"

We ate a classic 'Aunt Carol' meal, spag bol; I could eat Mrs Peters cooking all the time! Us kids cleared up and retired once more to the dining room.

"You gonna mail Britney back?"

"I guess so"

"I know, we can send her another picture"

"You mean dressed up?"

"No silly, just you in jeans and stuff, you know give her a chance to spot her mistake"

I breathed a sigh of relief. That didn't sound such a bad idea, I wouldn't have to make any real decision yet. Mad started to type the reply; she's quicker than me.

'Dear Britney

Good to hear from you again. We are all excited too; we're already planning some cool things to do when you come over.

I don't do any school sports but I race bicycles, my mum is a pro racer in Europe. My mates and me often go riding; we also play a lot of PS2 and go shopping lots!

I've attached a better picture my mate Maddy took a couple of weeks ago.

Bye

Drew'



I didn't think I looked anything like a girl in the picture, which was good. Maddy pressed the send button and the mission was accomplished.

"That's one job done, now what about Anna?"

"What about Anna?"

"Well are you gonna go to her party or not?"

"I guess it could be good fun"

"Is that a yes then?" her eyes lit up. When she had that look I just melted (oops).

"I guess so"

"Great! Come on lets find something for you to wear"

Dressing up, I hate dressing up! I managed to escape trying anything on, I mean we knew what it would look like and that it would fit, after all I had worn Maddy's stuff before and I knew what most of her stuff looked like on her. Mrs Peters once more interrupted us.

"There you are" she scanned the pile of clothes, "you gonna be Gaby again?"

I tried to hide my embarrassment

"Er, yes Mrs Peters"

"What's the occasion or is it just for fun?"

"Drew or rather Gaby has been invited to Anna's party next week" Maddy rescued me.

"Well you know my stance on all this. You'd best get ready here before you go"

"Thanks Mrs Peters"

"I think you'd better call me Aunt Carol don't you Gaby **Peters?**" she emphasised the Peters bit.

"I guess so"

"Right you two, time for Drew to go home, and take your bike!"

I laid in bed thinking about what had gone off today. Maddy had sorted it all out for me in the end, I felt like a huge weight was off my shoulders. For the first time in days I slept soundly.

"What time are we picking the girls up Drew?" dad asked at breakfast

"They're coming here for nine"

"That's ok then. You've got yourself a regular supporters club there" he stated

"I guess"

"Let's hope they can inspire you like last time eh"

"Maybe"

*Later*

"Come on Drew" Bernie shouted

I could see Ally and Mad jumping up and down next to dad as I came up the finish straight with a lap to go. The race was going well for me, I managed to hang on as the older lads upped the pace and now with just a mile to go I was still hanging in there.

I concentrated on the job in hand; the others in the group had eased off to prepare for a sprint finish, which gave me a chance to get my breath. I had seen mum in similar situations so I based my strategy on hers. I couldn't hope to get anywhere in a straight sprint, the others were much bigger and more powerful so plan B swung into action.

As we got to the half mile to go point the others were watching each other and the pace had dropped to less than twenty mph. Biding my time, I selected the right gear, keeping an eye on the others. It was getting close now, spotting the moment (I hoped), I made my move. I sprinted across to the other side of the tarmac and changed up the gears. On the face of it I had made a beginners mistake, going too early and the others assumed that was what I had done so they didn't give immediate chase. Whata mistaka to makea!

Through the chicane and I could see the red sprint flag that marks 200 metres to go. Again I angled across the circuit; they would probably follow behind which actually gave me more distance. I could only vaguely see and hear the crowd; I was well into race mode concentrating hard on crossing the last few metres first.

I really turned the screws down resisting the temptation to look behind. My vision was becoming a red tinged haze as I put my all in and then I was over

the line and surrounded by other riders. I freewheeled to the grass and collapsed off of my bike, taking huge lung fulls of air. I saw my supporters club running up to me concern on their faces.

"You ok Drew?" dad asked

"Uuhh, uuhh, uuhh" I wheezed

Maddy knelt beside me and rubbed my back, which did seem to calm my breathing down a bit.

"Did, uuhh, I, uuhh, get, uuhh, it?" I eventually got out

"They caught you on the line" Ally informed me

"It's a photo finish" Bernie further advised, "but that big redhead thinks he's won"

My breathing was nearly back to normal now.

"Well I, uuhh, at least gave, uuhh, it a go"

"Sure did son, I can tell you've been watching your mum"

Mad was still rubbing my back and I was enjoying her ministrations.

"Come on you two love birds, lets get Drew to the showers" Dad instructed

I blushed, and the three girls giggled as I started to formulate a denial.

"Come on Drew" Mad beat me to it.

As we approached the pits, the big red headed lad was throwing his dummy, when he saw us approaching he shot me a venomous look and I wasn't the only one who heard his "little twat" comment. However the spontaneous round of applause had me looking round to see who was behind me.

"Congratulations lad"

"Great ride"

"Just like his mother"

I dawned on me that the comments were directed towards me. Dad reappeared.

"You got it Drew" even dad was quite animated.

The girls started jiggling about and Maddy grabbed me in a hug.

"It was just a tyre width, another yard and you would have been out of it!"

I was still graciously accepting hugs now from all three girls. I could get to like this. A camera flash went off but I was too taken up to take any notice.

## **Part 36**

### **Lincoln**

It was still only two thirty and I was still floating on air after the race. I now knew why my new enemy was so upset, not only was he beaten by a squirt like me but the prize list was impressive today too! Besides a small cup, I received fifty pounds in cash and most valuable, a new frame! Way cool!

Dad agreed to let the girls and I go round the shops for a while whilst he slinked off to the second hand bookshops.

"Five o'clock at the front of the cathedral"

"Yes dad"

"Okay, see you kids later"

"Bye Mr Bond"

"Bye dad"

Dad set off up the street towards the castle leaving us to our own devices. We made our way through the backwicks from the bus station (the car was in the multi storey above it) we emerged into the shopping streets of 'lower' Lincoln. The girls hadn't been to the city before so I had to act as guide as we ricocheted around the shops. We started to move towards the 'upper' town, across the river, the others were fascinated by the shops on the bridge, reminiscent of medieval London.

"My legs ache!" I complained to no one in particular

"Let's get some ice cream and sit down by the river" Bernie suggested

"Great idea, there's a cart over there" Ally pointed a little up the street

"You two go get a bench" Bernie instructed Maddy and I, "and we'll get the ice cream." she said dragging Ally off.

"Come on Drew" Maddy led me over to the steps down to the river.

I winced as we made our way through the other shoppers and as luck would have it we claimed a bench just vacated by an elderly couple.

"Ah! I'm cramping" I exclaimed as I stretched my legs out to ease the cramps

"Come here, let me rub your legs" Maddy instructed.

With the pain I was in I didn't hesitate but swung round so that my legs were across her knees. She started to massage my tortured calves and gradually the tenseness started to ease.

"Huh! Leave you two alone for two minutes and your all over each other" Ally joked

"Grab one of these Drew" Bernie proffered a double 99 in my direction.

"Thanks Bern, Mad was just easing my cramp"

"Sure" Ally suggested, her tone indicating she wasn't believing that for one minute.

"Was too!" Maddy finally defended herself under Ally's onslaught.

"Hey stop arguing and eat your ice cream kiddies" Bernie put in

Ally pretended to pout and Mad stuck her tongue out. I swung my legs back to the floor and the others joined Mad and me on the bench.

"Hey Drew, you gonna spend some of your winnings then?" Bernie asked between mouthfuls.

"Dunno, not seen anything I fancy"

"Well finish up, let's shop!" Mad implored

"Coming already" I replied getting up gingerly.

Ally and Mad each took hold of an arm and I was steered back to the shopping concourse.

"I know Drew" Maddy suggested, " you should get some of those three quarter trousers"

I had to admit I did quite like the style and I needed some new kecks to go to Germany.

"Okay"

"Great a quest!" Bernie exclaimed

"They've got some in *Top Shop* over there" Ally pronounced

I was steered toward the store and pulled inside. This is one shop I always find a bit strange to go in, I mean they have a men's bit but it's mostly girls

stuff. My mates oohed and aahed over various tops, skirts and stuff then Maddy homed in on what we were looking for.

"What about these?" she asked offering a black pair

"I prefer the lighter ones" I offered

"Me too" Ally confirmed

"There's more over here" Bernie called and our gaggle relocated.

"These are only a tenner Drew" Ally exclaimed

"What do you reckon guys?" I held the trets up to me

"They look brill" Bernie offered

"Hey what about these too" Maddy was waving some denim at me.

"Jeans?" I queried

"Yeah but these are seriously cool" she replied, "and they've got your size"

"How do you know what size he needs?" Ally questioned

"Well der, who's stuff do you think he wears?"

"Keep it down!" I hissed

"Oh, right" Ally finished

"Hey Drew you so need this t shirt" Bernie called from yet another rack

I looked over at the t, the strap line read 'I'm Great Babe', seemed cool.

"Enough guys, I only got fifty and I don't want to spend it all"

"Spoilsport!"

"Yeah we were just getting started" Maddy added to Ally's rejoinder. Sheesh girls!

I paid for the stuff and felt relieved to escape the shop still clutching just over half of my winnings. Thank heaven for summer sales promotions! Time was starting to get on a bit so I led the way through the gate that demarcates the 'upper' town. We ambled up the ever steepening street, past the bookstores dad had headed for and finally we reached the castle and cathedral precinct.

The girls hit a couple more shops while I collapsed against a wall to wait for Dad.

The girls reappeared seconds before dad.

"You kids look like you've bought the town up" dad offered

"Drew got some new clothes and we've just got a few trinkets" Mad offered by way of reply.

"Well I know somewhere to eat just around the corner, you all up for it?" dad asked

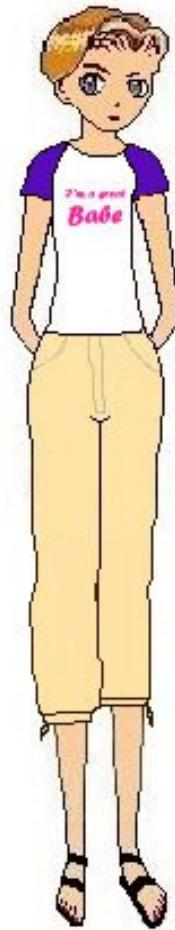
"I'm starved" Bernie exclaimed

"Me too" Maddy added

"I just want to sit down" I suggested

Well I know these blow by blow accounts get tiresome so I'll cut straight through all that! After a look around the cathedral inside and out, Dad led the way to a Chinese Restaurant a couple of streets away where we were treated to a long and delicious meal. It was after nine when we got home, we dropped my 'cheerleaders' off but only after agreeing to meet up after my Sunday ride.

After a pleasant ride the following morning during which I continually relived Saturday's race I got ready to meet the others. As it was quite warm I decided on my new three-quarters and t-shirt. Jules gave me a funny look as I left but that's sisters for you eh!



Well I wished I had looked in the mirror! I must have looked a right sight. Somehow I had managed to misread what it said on the t-shirt, I thought it said '**I'm great Babe**'; I didn't see the '**a**' before '**great**'! No wonder Jules gave me a funny look. The girls had duped me good and proper this time, I mean it wasn't until Bernie pointed it out that I discovered my error, much to my embarrassment.

"I can't wear this!"

"Why not?" Ally asked

"Well duh! It's a girls shirt!"

"So?" Bernie questioned

"Well like I'm not a girl!"

"Sometimes" Ally mumbled

"What?"

"Nothing"

Maddy offered a way out.

"Drew if anyone says anything, you can just say it's Jules' that you picked up by mistake"

"I guess"

"Well come on then, lets get going"

Going was a walk to our favourite spot by the river about an hour's walk away. With some reluctance I hoisted my rucksack on to my shoulder and followed the others off of the estate and onto the footpath across the fields. I soon forgot about my embarrassing t-shirt and we chatted as we walked, you know normal kid's stuff.

"Has your mum found out why Rhod's not been around?" I asked Mad.

"I don't think so, least she hasn't said anything"

"I miss having him around" Ally put in

"Me too" Bernie agreed

"Do you think he's fallen out with us?" Maddy queried

"I don't see why, I mean we always invite him along" I stated

"Yeah, it's like he just he just doesn't want to hang around with us anymore" Ally observed

By this time we were nearly at the river. The day was turning into a regular scorcher, almost cloudless blue sky and unless you strained, no traffic noises either. The wheat in the fields was still only knee high and green, insects buzzed, birds chirped and we walked along enjoying the day. The path reached the beck where we crossed via the stepping stones and turned along the bank. We followed the waters upstream for ten minutes before reaching 'our' pool.

Maddy and Ally produced a blanket and we all settled down to catch our breath and drink some squash. The sun danced through the trees overhead and a gentle breeze off the beck cooled the suns influence. We lay there in silence, each thinking their own thoughts.

Bernie broke our reverie.

"Come on guys lets have a swim"

"I didn't bring a cozzie" I started

"No matter Drew" Ally suggested

"Yeah let's just get in the water" Mad burbled

The girls were pulling tops and shorts off, obviously prepared for this they each had on swimsuits of one type or other.

"Come on drew, you can wear your underpants" Maddy suggested

"I guess"

I reluctantly removed my trousers and top exposing my boxers to my friend's view.

"Hey cool shorts" Ally ducked my swing

"Last one in's a girl!" Bernie shouted leaping into the deep pool as she did so.

Inevitably it was me that hit the water last and we were soon happily splashing about in the cool waters. We played for a half-hour or so then returned to the bank where Bernie distributed bananas and we sat soggily eating. Although it was warm, it did little to dry our clothing and I for one was starting to feel a bit chill in the river breeze.

"Better get dressed I guess" Ally observed

"Bugger" I exclaimed, "I'm gonna have to keep these wet shorts on"

"You can't do that Drew, it'll ruin your new trousers" Maddy voiced her concern.

"Well I'll have to go commando then"

"Urgh, the thought!" Bernie exclaimed

"Hang on I've got some spare pants" Ally offered

"I can't wear them!"

"Why not, you've worn girls pants before" Maddy stated

"Yeah, but..."

"But you need dry underwear and these are them" Ally said brandishing the offending garments.

"Come on Drew, they won't bite" Mad instructed

I took the proffered garment, white cotton bikini pants.

"Ok then, be back in a mo" I grabbed my other clothes and found a little screened area just upstream and dressed in the dry pants, trousers and t-shirt.

"Better huh?" Ally queried

"Yeah I guess"

The girls had all changed in my absence and were ready for the off.

"Comfy?" Mad asked

Well I have to admit that the panties were more comfortable than my boxers.

"Ok I guess"

"Oh come on Drew, no one can see so quite worrying" Bernie stated.

It was teatime by the time we got back to Ally's place and that bane of the English summer was about to take place, **The Barbecue!** Mr Lacey was upholding the ritual by trying to light the coals and Ally's mum was busy preparing salad.

"You kids all staying?" Ally's dad asked

Well there was nothing else doing was there?

## **Part 37**

### **End of Term**

Well the barby was great; Mr Lacey actually managed to produce eatable food without choking us all in the process! Baked potatoes, sausages, not just your standard ones either we had a selection including tomato, Lincoln and turkey with ginger, home made burgers, well it was a veritable feast! We all made pigs of ourselves, forcing down strawberry *Viennetta®* ice cream to finish off.

Between eating a game of *Twister* was in progress and we were having a whale of a time in the evening sunshine. The evening just disappeared and the light was starting to fade when Mrs Lacey called.

"Kids, its half past nine, time to go home"

"Aw mum!" Ally exclaimed

"Come on, its school tomorrow. Pack that away and your dad will drop everyone off."

We reluctantly did as we were bid and barely five minutes later we were saying our farewells while Mr Lacey got his car out of the garage.

"See you tomorrow Al"

"Bye Mad"

"Bye Al"

"Night Drew"

"Ciao" Bernie added

"Bye Bern, oh Drew, hang on a minute"

"Why?" I asked but she was already back in the house. The girls were headed to the car and I hovered unsure of what to do. Ally was soon back though.

"Here, you don't want to leave these, and I would have a job explaining them too!"

She handed me a bag; a quick peek confirmed the contents as my boxers.

"Er thanks"

"I rinsed them out and dried them for you"

"I'll get yours washed tomorrow, I'll bring them over tomorrow"

"Oh don't bother bringing them back Drew, you can keep them"

I was flummoxed.

"I er, thanks I think"

"Come on Drew, get a move on" Maddy shouted from the car.

"Coming, night Ally"

"See you tomorrow Drew"

I joined the others in the car and we were soon all dropped home.

Well it was back to boring old school again; the only light spot for a Monday morning was that the warm weather had encouraged some of the girls into their summer uniforms. I was however not looking forward to assembly.

Mr Wood was in full flow

"...it seems that nearly all of our sportsmen decided to not bother to compete this weekend."

A round of sniggers hissed around the hall.

"Our cricket teams all lost and the swimming team did no better at Sheffield. However", he cast a look around the room, "one young man did make an effort. Not only did he compete against boys much older than him, he actually beat them. Stand up please Mr Bond"

Don't you just hate that; I was to be today's lesson! I dragged myself to my feet, my classmates and the rest of the hall whispering all the while. As I turned beet red I could hear my friends cheering with "go Drew", "neat one", it did little to calm me!



Wood continued his sermon.

"This ladies and gentleman is an example to you all, Mr Bond here had to use not just brute strength but his head too to take victory."

How on earth did he know all this?

"In fact he showed the finest attributes of a sportsman, dedication, application and thoughtfulness. Most of you know that Drew's mother is a professional cyclist, but his success is his due to his own determination."

If it was possible I blushed even deeper. Mr Wood motioned me to sit and finished his little speech.

"I hope you all will join me in congratulating Drew and take on board what I have said, especially you cricketers"

More laughter echoed round before the Head started a round of applause much to my further embarrassment. I tried to sink into the floor, but to no avail, I hate this!

Well, after assembly I was the butt of a few nasty comments from the school Neanderthal's but the recipient of congratulations too, mostly from girls. I just hoped that this wouldn't happen every time I had some success.

The rest of the day was thankfully pretty normal. One thing wasn't though, Rhod was off sick, which for someone who never got a cold was pretty unusual. I met the girls after school finished to walk to Bernie's for tea.

"Any one know what's up with Rhod?" I asked

"Mum spoke to Mrs Morgan yesterday but she didn't mention him being ill or anything" Maddy stated

"But Rhod's never sick" Ally mentioned

"I hope it's not too serious" Bernie added, "we should ring to find out"

"Or we could go round" Mad suggested

"We should ring first, Mad. I mean what if it's something catching?" I put in

"I guess" she agreed

"We can ring when we get to my place" Bernie stated.

"That was a great barby Al" I changed the subject

"Yeah those burgers were just ace" Mad added

"My dad just burns stuff," Bernie said

"Mum won't let dad near the barbecue" Maddy told us.

"Mine neither" I added

"Yeah but dad insists on cooking every time the sun comes out" Ally moaned.

"Kewl" Maddy suggested.

"Not! You can get fed up of barbecue you know" Ally told us.

"I guess if it's all the time" Mad allowed.

We arrived at the Rose household and we moshed into the living room.

"Lets ring Rhod" Bernie suggested picking up the handset.

She dialled the number and we waited to hear the conversation.

"Hello Mrs Morgan, Its Bernie.... Er the guys and me were wondering if Rhod is OK as he was off school...that's all right.... uh huh...uh huh...right...ok...give him our love... yeah we'll ring tomorrow... bye"

"Well?" Ally queried

"She said it's nothing too serious but Rhod's not well enough for school. She said he was asleep and that we should call again tomorrow."

"Looks like the hols have started early for Rhod then" Ally suggested

"Didn't she say what it was?" I asked Bernie.

"No, but it sounded like a virus of some sort"

"You lot eating with us?" Mrs Rose asked

"Yes mum" Bernie replied

"Wash your hands first"

Mrs Rose is not the Chef that Maddy's mum is but our chicken and pasta was still pretty good! The highlight however was some *Ben & Jerry's Phishfood®*, a rare treat.

We spent the rest of the evening listening to music and stuff and all too soon it was time for home.

"Just in time Drew, mums on" Jules greeted me as I got indoors.

"Dad, Drew's here!"

I hurried through to the front room and dad passed me the phone.

"Hi mum"

"Hi Drew, you ready for the weekend?"

"I think so"

"You all packed?"

"Well, er not quite"

"Just like your dad, don't leave it till the last minute."

"No mum"

"Bring your cycling kit, we can go for a ride or two"

"Cool"

"Your dad said you won again"

"Yeah well"

"Your dad says you really used your head"

"Well I remembered that you did something similar and thought it was worth a try"

"I'm really proud of you, the other girls can't believe you ride so well, they're dying to meet you!"

"Muuum!"

"Oh come on Drew"

"What did you do at the weekend" I asked her

"Another top ten placing and our team looks set to be included in the Tour Feminin"

"Wow, that is just so cool"

"Well there's no guarantee I'll make the team"

"They'd be daft to miss you out mum"

"Well we'll see"

Dad waved at me.

"Dad want's you again mum, bye for now"

"See you Saturday Drew"

I gave dad the phone and went to get ready for bed.

Jules cornered me outside my room

"Drew Bond, what have you been up to?"

"What now?"

"Anything you'd care to tell me?"

"Such as?" I really didn't know where she was going.

"Well for starters why there was a pair of girls knickers in your clothes hamper"

"Oh that"

"*Oh that.* What do you mean oh that?"

"Well we went swimming up the river yesterday and I forgot my cozzie."

"Again!"

"Well anyway I wore my boxers and afterwards the girls said I should put some thing dry on, and Ally had a spare pair of pants..."

"...so you borrowed her knickers" she finished for me.

"Yeah"

She gave me an appraising look.

"Well if you're gonna wear panties, don't leave them where dad's gonna see them."

"I'm not making a habit of it Jules" I protested

"Yeah" she didn't sound very convinced.

Well in truth, when I thought about it, they were comfy! Thankfully she left it there and I went to bed with mums conversation and panties going through my head!

Tuesday at school was uneventful, well at least I wasn't the school show and tell in assembly! After school I went straight home to get ready for the ten, a quick round of beans on toast and I was ready. The weather was cooler today and a stiff little breeze was blowing in my face as I made my way out to the event.

Word of Saturdays event had gotten round and it was odd listening to peoples comments about 'me' whilst inadvertently (on my part!) they thought I was my sister. Having already given up trying to explain several times before I just nodded and smiled as seemed appropriate.

Even with the downhill start it was hard work on the outward leg but I felt good and I kept my cadence nice and steady rather than flog myself. My patience held out and I reaped the benefit on the return leg as I found myself spinning my top gear round quite comfortably with the wind assist.

I was more than a little surprised when I got to the last bend to see two thirds of my cheer squad waiting to cheer me on. Well I had to make it look good didn't I? I settled into my best 'style' and assumed a look of concentration or so I thought as I passed my now shouting mates.

"Come on Drew!"

"Nearly there Drew!"

I could see the timekeeper now and I really did dig that bit deeper, just managing to gasp out my number. By the time I'd turned round and got back to the 'HQ', Maddy and Bernie were waiting for me.

"What (gulp) are you two doing here?" I managed before taking a long draught from my bottle.

"We thought we'd support the school hero" Bernie advised

"Thanks, but this is only like a training event"

"Yeah we know but we were curios and some of these guys look mighty serious to me" Maddy replied

"Well I guess so, their club uses these for their competitions"

We were interrupted then by the timekeeper.

"Ah there you are Dee, not a best this week I'm afraid, 26.30."

Then addressing Bernie and Mad he continued,

"Quite the little star your friend here girls, look forward to seeing you out again"

"Oh I'm sure we will be" Bernie replied

"Er thanks, see you in a couple of weeks, I'm off to see mum next week"

"Ok then and give your mum our best"

"I will"

He left us to talk to someone else and Maddy couldn't contain herself.

"They think you're a girl here?" she whispered

"Not here Mad, come on I'll tell you on the way back"

I finished getting dressed and we departed. Once we were out of earshot Bernie spoke up.

"Well?"

"It's complicated alright. It all started..."

So I explained how come the misunderstanding regarding my name and gender had occurred at the evening races and how they all thought I was my sister.

"So you see it's not my fault, it's just easier to play along for now"

"Wow Drew, you really know how to get in a fix don't you. I mean you have more aliases than you can shake a stick at." Bernie stated

"How will we know who we are talking to?" Maddy joshed

"Give over girls! I don't like this one bit; I just want to be Drew Bond! Not Gaby Thomas, not Dee Bond, just good ole Drew. Remember him?" I was a bit fed up to say the least.

"Hey calm down Drew" Maddy tried placating me, "you have to admit it can get a bit complicated"

"Look I'm me Drew Bond fullstop. If I need to for the bank or something I'll be Gaby Thomas and Dee really is a misunderstanding"

"Ok Drew" Bernie finished

"Look sorry guys, I didn't mean to go off like that. Fancy some chips? My treat"

"Well if you insist" Bernie agreed

"Why not. Race you there" Maddy pushed off leaving Bernie and I in her wake.

At least I can tell you that Wednesday was *really* uneventful. No fuss, no race, no mistaken identity and still no Rhod. Thursday was more eventful in as much as Mr Wood called another meeting for the exchange students.

"Ok people, let's keep it quick tonight." He started

We settled down and he resumed speaking.

"Just to keep you all advised, I've agreed a programme with our American friends."

He passed us each a photocopied sheet then continued,

"As you will see we've taken on board your suggestions, the Americans wanted to add some specifics and I added a couple of more 'mutually' beneficial trips. Dates are not set yet but to help with planning can you all let me know when we start next term which you'd each like to go on. Any questions?"

Ally put her hand up.

"Yes Allison?"

"You said before that we could only go on one or two trips a week, how do we know what week anything will be on?"

"Don't worry about that, we can be quite flexible, if you can just decide which you'd like to go on we'll worry about how it works out later. Anyone else?"

There was not a rush to raise hands!

"Ok then, I'll see you for another meeting two weeks today. Now go home!"

We didn't need any second urging. As Jules and I needed to pack tonight we dived straight off after the shortest exchange of farewells.

Friday inevitably dragged. I was just about counting the hours till our departure tomorrow morning. Eventually the final bell went and school was out for a whole week. I walked with the girls most of the way home then after promising to send cards to everyone I ran the last bit home.

## **Part 38**

### **Euro Drew**

I awoke to the incessant drone of my clock alarm.

"Come on Drew, up and at 'em!" Dad shouted into my room

"Jules you up yet?" I heard him go on

I jumped out of bed and got dressed ready for the trip. When I got downstairs dad already had the car packed and even Jules was ready. We ate a quick breakfast and by seven thirty we were ready to depart. It was early enough that our drive down to Nottingham was uneventful and it was only a little after eight when we were parked at the station.

The wait for our train seemed interminable but it was on time and just before eight thirty we were on our way to London. You really don't want me to recount the journey in full suffice to say that we pulled into St Pancras only a couple of minutes late. Dad hustled us to the taxi rank and we were soon in a black cab to cross the capital to Waterloo. Our train was due to leave at 11.35 so we enjoyed the ride past Oxford Street and Trafalgar Square and we were soon at check-in, Waterloo International.

We queued to get through security and then we were into the terminal proper. We just had time for a drink before our train was called and we dragged our bags up onto the platform, our carriage was toward the front of the train so we had quite a walk. We got ourselves settled into the air-conditioned splendour; we had table seats so we had a bit more space to spread out. While we waited for departure I sent a text to Mad, she'd just got a mobile, and then we were off.

Now being a child of the nineties, trains don't often feature in my travel plans, we usually take the camper, so I was fascinated by the views over south London as we started our journey. Dad was reading, Jules had her Discman® going so I sat munching crisps watching the Kent countryside slip past.

A quick stop at Ashford and then on toward the tunnel. I just about spotted the sea before we descended toward the tunnel and our crossing of the Channel. I joined dad in a walk to the refreshment carriage; I mean what's to see in a long black tunnel? We got some Panini, American muffins and drinks and rejoined Jules in our seats.

The noise of the tunnel suddenly abated and we were flashing through French countryside. I watched fascinated as we slipped north toward Lille through featureless countryside broken occasionally by the flash of a train going the other direction. I was surprised how many people got off, and on at

Lille, I mean I'd only heard of it as a place bike races visited or started at. Dad told us that it was an industrial place but from what I saw it looked really gross, all concrete in bizarre shapes and blocks of flats.

The countryside between Lille and Brussels was a bit more visually inspiring, not much mind, and we were soon passing the huge railway yards on the approach to Brussels Midi. We had a through ticket on the Thalys (dad says you say talis) service through to Köln in Germany and we could see it at the platform as we drew into the terminal. We were glad of our front carriage position at this end, we were near the front of the queue for immigration and despite arriving a few minutes late we were through the station and onto the next platform with a minute or two to spare.

We didn't have booked seats this time but despite a fairly full train we again found a table seat for the couple of hours to Köln. Strewnth, Brussels has got a lot of stations and tracks! It was nearly one continuous platform until we left the city and then we started travelling a bit quicker.

At least the countryside was getting a bit more interesting, a few hills and trees breaking the monotony. Jules dropped off and dad was still reading his book when we descended into Liége. When a refreshment trolley came along we got some drinks and the poorest excuse for crisps I've ever had, paprika flavour! Yuck!

The line seemed to get more rural as we went towards Germany although there was a lot of work being done, new stations and stuff. I couldn't believe how many bikes were parked at each station, literally hundreds, I mean at home we might get half a dozen! We stopped at Aachen briefly and now we were in Germany the train seemed to pick up speed. I was still glued to the window as we sped toward Köln, dad pointed out the distant Eifel Mountains and all too soon we were travelling over the city before pulling into the huge station.

"Come on kids, if we are quick we can get the connection, mum says it's platform 8/9"

So we jostled ourselves down the stairs to the concourse and after a quick check on the board we rushed up onto the platform just in time to clamber onto our last train of the day. This was a come down, the crowded carriages were spartan in the least but at least we managed to find seats amongst the shoppers that made up most of the passengers. We clanked along between stops and we were soon in Bonn. We had about another twenty miles on the train and they were at least quite interesting as we joined the River Rhine, so we all spent the time spotting ships and stuff.

"Next stop for us, get your bags kids"

Well here we were but where was mum? The plan was that mum would meet us outside the station here in Remagen (ray-mar-gun apparently!) to take us to the hotel. Dad had rung her last night to confirm the times; we were to ring if we missed a connection so it was worrying that the ever-punctual mum was not there to meet us.

"Herr Bond?" a small guy called from across the road.

"Er yes" dad replied

"Sehr gut! Jenny sent me to pick you up" he replied in heavily accented English as he joined us on the station steps. "She is sorry but the director called a meeting at short notice. Oh sorry, I am Michael Thurau the team mechanic, call me Mike the mechanic" he laughed at some apparently secret joke.

"Nice to meet you Mike, I'm Dave"

"Ok Dave come on round, the van is around the corner"

He grabbed Jules and my cases and led us across the square to where the team minibus was parked. He put our bags in the back and motioned for us to get in, dad in front us kids behind. Within a couple of minutes we were leaving Remagen at some speed, Michael driving with familiar contempt of the other traffic.

"You girls miss your mum eh?" he asked over his shoulder

Before I could say anything Jules beat me to it

"Very much Mike, we both miss her being around"

"Eh and you too Dave" he continued in a suggestive tone, verbally nudging dad.

"Er well yes. Of course"

Mike chuckled to himself as he changed direction yet again. I turned my attention to the scenery as we turned away from the river Rhine. Everything was fascinating! Were they vineyards just back there?, what's an 'ausfahrt'? Mike pointed across to a small town on our left.

"That's Bat Noonar where we are based"

I guessed the signs for Bad Neunahr meant the same place.

"Aren't we staying there?" Jules asked

"Neh, neh, neh that is for how do you say, tourist. You are staying a few kilo's up the valley at Altenahr. Quieter you know, smaller, friendlier hotels yes?"

"Er fine" dad replied

Mike continued to point things out as we drove up an increasingly twisty road.

"Romischer haus" he indicated a wooden building that didn't look very Roman to me. There were vineyards all over the hillsides and the villages were decorated with huge barrels. There wasn't a lot of traffic about but there were quite a few cyclists, roadies out for a spin, families on the cycle track which wove about the valley. There were ruins and castles, pretty villages and lots and lots of vineyards! The road twisted sharply round under a viaduct then through a short tunnel and we were in Altenahr.

"Nearly there now" Mike advised us, and we were soon pulling off the road into a parking lot.

"Here we are, Hotel Krone!" Mike pronounced as he put the brake on and turned the engine off. "I have to get back now, get booked in Jenny should be here in about an hour."

He busied himself getting our cases out and left them by the door.

"You ok now girls, mum will soon be here eh"

Again Jules beat me to it.

"Thanks Mike"

"Yes thanks Mike" dad added

"No trouble, see you tomorrow"

"Tomorrow?"

"Yes at the race, Jenny will tell you" he was back in the bus and gunning the engine, "wiedersehen!"

"Bye" we all echoed as he turned back down the valley.

"Well kids, looks like we're here"

"I guess so" Jules commented eyeing up the 'Krone'

"Come on lets get inside"

Jules and I found a sofa in the reception and collapsed into it while dad booked us in. there was a bit of arm waving, the girl at the desk kept looking over at us and gesticulating then dad came over.

"Ok guys, your mum booked three rooms for us but they've managed to overbook this weekend."

"What do we do then dad?" I asked

"Well they can do two double rooms, the girl on reception thought you two could share and I'd take the other"

"Why would she think that?" Jules asked

"Well she kept saying 'zwei tocta' and pointing at you both, my German's not up to much, I guess she thought I'd prefer not to be sleeping with either of you. Drew you and I will share and your sister can have the other room"

"Ok dad" I agreed

Dad returned to the desk and tried to explain in pidgin German our agreed arrangement.

"Neh, neh, die madchen in eine zimmer, varter im autra!" the receptionist seemed to be laying down the law loudly before the conversation returned to quieter levels.

"Come on kids" dad called. We got up and pulled our cases along as the receptionist led us through the building.

"I'm afraid you two will have to share, she won't let Drew share with me"

"Daaad" Jules whined

"Look we can swap about when we're in" dad advised

"Hier die madchen" the girl opened a door and Jules and I filed past into the room.

"TV, alarm, dusche, toiletten" she reeled off as she opened doors to show us.

"See you in a bit kids" dad suggested as he was led away to the other room.

I collapsed onto one of the two single beds in the room.

"I'm whacked!" I stated to no one in particular

"Don't get too comfortable"

"What was all that with Mike in the van, he kept calling us 'girls'?"

"Well I am" she replied

"Yeah but I'm not... oh shit (sorry!) He thinks I'm a girl as well!" the realisation suddenly hit home.

Jules gasped before making another leap of logic.

"I've just sort of worked out what the receptionist was saying"

"What?"

"You're not gonna like it Drew"

"Like what, spit it out!"

"Well I think she thinks you're a girl too," I groaned as she continued, "no wonder she said you couldn't share with dad, there's probably laws and stuff about young girls sleeping with older men"

"Joooooool that is disgusting"

"Well we'll get mum to sort it out when she gets here, I bet her German is quite good now"

"I hope so"

"So do I, I don't intend sharing a room with my brother for a week!"

"Feelings mutual"

Well I must have been more tired than I thought as the next thing I remember was the door opening.

"Hi kids!"



**Mum was looking really buff!**

"Mum!" Jules exclaimed

I woke with a start and joined my sister and mum in a hug.

"Whoa, take it easy kids" she exclaimed

Mum looked really good, she was tanned and looking really fit (in an athletic way! Although she looked pretty hot in that miniskirt!)

"Where's your dad?"

"Here, I heard a commotion and guessed it was you"

My parents hugged each other and did embarrassing things with their tongues before breaking for air. They parted grinning from ear to ear.

"That's gross" Jules stated.

"How was your journey?" mum asked

Well I wont repeat it all again but we managed to convey the high points of the trip to mum in only fifteen minutes.

"... and then the receptionist thinks Drew's a girl," Jules concluded

A sudden look of comprehension lit dad's face.

"So that's why she was so insistent"

"Damn!" mum was a bit put out, I could tell by experience.

"We get it sorted out, Drew can come in with me so Juliette is on her own" dad soothed.

"I was hoping to get some time alone with you Dave" mum pouted.

"Oh" he replied

"Look mum, Drew can stay with me as long as he behaves himself, then you two can do your luvvy doveystuff" Jules offered.

"You sure luv? What about you Drew?"

This was one scenario I wasn't expecting, jules replied first.

"I wouldn't have said if I didn't mean it would I"

"Drew?"

"Yes mum?"

"This alright with you?" I could see the hope in her eyes, I couldn't deny her and dad some time now could I?

"I guess so"

"Thanks, I'll make it up to you both"

"I'm starving" dad suggested

"You haven't eaten?" mum asked

"Just sandwiches on the train" I replied

"Men!" she rolled her eyes, "ok then, get yourselves organised and meet me in reception in " she checked her watch, "say half an hour?"

"Ok" Jules agreed

Mum left with dad and I closed the door behind them.

"What did you suggest that for?" I asked

"You agreed!" my sister accused

"Well I could hardly complain after you offered could I, and I guess the olds deserve a break too"

"Erm, you know what this means though"

"What" I could hear trouble approaching

"Well you'll have to be my sister around the hotel"

"It's a conspiracy, it has to be!"

"Sorry Drew, I only just thought about that. Look you don't have to wear a dress or anything"

"No, everyone thinks I'm a girl already!" I huffed

"Calm down, look did you bring your sleepers?"

"They're in my wallet"

"Well put them in, I'll do your hair a bit, a bit of lippy, wear one of my tops and you'll pass almost anywhere."

"I only want to pass here not anywhere else" I stated

"Okay, but everyone will expect to see you looking more girly after you've freshened up" she commented

"You win, but nothing too girly"

"Fair enough"

So that's how, on my first night in Germany I went to meet my parents wearing Jules trousers and tie-dye top with my face made up and my hair brushed out. Sheesh!



**We joined our parents in reception.**

Mum took a double take when the pair of us appeared in reception. Dad however gathered his senses first.

"Ah there you are girls"

"Hi dad, mum" I replied

"You two ready to eat" he continued

Jules made gagging noises "food, food!"

"Come on you two" mum finally found her voice, "the car's outside"

We left reception and mum led us to her car, a smart Mercedes A class with the team logo on the bonnet and doors.

"Ta da! Ladies and gentlemen, your carriage awaits!" mum made a big show of it.

"Cool" I stated

"Come on get in, I know a good place to eat but its a few k's away" mum instructed.

"We got in and mum pulled onto the road and started heading higher up the valley.

"So you two, are you going to tell me why Drew is wearing your clothes Juliette?"

"Well" I started

"It's my fault mum, we thought it best, for appearances at the hotel if Drew acted like my sister, if they thought a boy and girl were sharing they might kick us out"

"I see your logic" mum agreed "but don't you think you've gone a bit overboard?"

"Huh?" Jules queried

"Well" mum continued, "they are going to expect Drew to look like this all week now aren't they?"

"I guess so" my sister offered

"Drew you ok with that?" mum asked

"I guess it's done now" I replied

"Okay then. How do you guys like schnitzel?"

Of course mum then had to explain what schnitzel was and after she pointed out the Nurburgring as we crossed under the track, we were soon parked at the restaurant in the village of Nurburg.

"Told you" mum stated smugly, as we looked bewildered at the menu with thirty different varieties listed.

"You win" dad told her, "I can't even pronounce half of them"

"I'll order a platter so you can try some different ones okay?"

We all agreed that that was a good idea and half an hour later we were getting stuck into our meal. I don't know what they were all called but I enjoyed most of the varieties. We finished with ice cream and coffee and left to return to the hotel just after nine.

"What's this race tomorrow Jen?" dad asked as we threaded our way through the lanes.

"It's the regional championships"

"Do you qualify? I thought you could only ride if you had a local licence"

"It works different here, I can ride the event as long as I have the right regional permit much like I would at home and my team is registered here too. No foreigner has ever won a championship so I don't know what would happen then."

"Well we'll find out tomorrow eh mum?" I suggested

"Maybe" she replied.

We were soon back at the 'Krone' and us kids were soon in bed and asleep. My mind was in turmoil! How do I continually end up in these situations? Hopefully tomorrow would be more normal?

## **Part 39**

### **Jenny's Day**

I was woken next morning by the sound of Jules showering and suddenly my world popped back into focus. The shower cut off and shortly my sister emerged wrapped in a towel and humming an Eminem track.

"Oh you're awake then"

"What's the time" I yawned

"Seven thirty, mum'll be back in an hour to pick us up"

"Where's she gone?"

"Back to her flat to pick up her kit. You better get a shower, we have to get breakfast before mum gets back"

I dived into the bathroom and had a quick shower; Jules was ready by the time I emerged.

"Come on, you can wear what you had on last night for now"

"Jules" I moaned

"Come on, we've only got just over half an hour"

It was useless to argue so I pulled the tie dye top on along with the trousers and I was about ready to go.

"I guess you'll do, come on"

Breakfast was 'continental' - bread, ham, cheese, fruit and yoghurt, juice and coffee. I actually enjoyed it. Mum found us as we finished up.

"Snap to it guys"

"I just need to get my bag" Jules advised

"Me too" I added

As we walked back to our room I quizzed sis.

"Can I put my stuff on to go out?"

"We haven't got time. Grab a change of stuff and you can put it on in the car"

Suitably mollified I grabbed a T and shorts, chucked them in my bag with my camera and we left for the day.

"Can you drive please Dave"

"Sure" dad replied, "where to?"

"The start is at Wittlich, so we go up to the autobahn and head toward Trier"

"Just tell me which way" dad stated.

It was best part of an hour's drive to the start, once there we dropped mum off and went off to find somewhere to park. There was a fair sized crowd; there were races for each licence category plus oldies and the women's event, six in total. The course was based on a long hundred-kilometre circuit, the senior men do two circuits and were already on their way, the other races would start at thirty-minute intervals and extra distance made up with a start loop of twenty kilometres.

We went to find mum, in the excitement I hadn't changed yet, but with the promise of a warm day I intended to put my shorts on as soon as was practical.

"Jen!" dad called

"Hi, you get parked ok?"

"Yeah, this is quite a set up!"

We were at the Apollinaris Damen Rennfahrad team van, that's who mum rode for (its some local spa water or something). Mike, the mechanic, was busy checking bikes, one of mums team mates was on a table getting a pre race massage, a couple of girls were warming up on rollers and various other bogs were doing preparation things.

"Jen, this your family?"

"Oh hi Maria, yes"

"Hi everyone I'm Maria Pinger nice to meet you"

"Sorry, this is Dave, Juliette and Drew" mum introduced us.

"I can see why you didn't come to the dinner" Maria stated

"It's been a few weeks"

"Well we can talk later, George wants a chat Jen"

"Ok I'm coming, guys I have to go see you later"

"Good luck mum" I gave her a hug

"Luck luv" dad added

"Go for it mum" Jules supplied

"Bye" mum waved as she followed Maria off.

We went to find a good vantage point to watch the start. Eventually mums race rolled out, there were about a hundred riders setting out on the 120 km event.

"Ah Dave und die kind" the accented tones of Mike found us

"Hi Mike" dad replied

"You guys fancy helping out at the feed?"

"Can we dad?" I asked enthusiastically

"Sure" dad answered

"Come on then, Katia is waiting at the van"

He led us through the crowd back to the van that was now on a side road; a pretty young girl was sat inside.

"In, in" Mike urged, "Kat, das ist die familie auf Jenny"

"Hello everyone"

Mike already had us moving.

"We see them pass at Oorzig (Ürzig) then we drive to the feed at Daun" he returned to his driving.

"Sorry Katia, this is Juliette," dad started the intro's

"Jules" my sister offered

"And the other one is Drew, I'm Dave" he finished

"Like Drew Barimore?" Kat asked me across the van.

I realised I was still in Jules stuff and had my earrings in, I could see why she said that.

"Er no, not really" I replied, Kat looked interested

"It's short for And." Jules cut me off

.. Rea." she finished

"Ah yes, you should call me Kat. I like your top Drew."

I shot my sister a look; dad was busy talking to Mike, should I come clean? I decided I should, Kat seemed pretty nice, I didn't think she'd go off the wall.

"Look Kat I'm actually a boy, my name is Andrew but everyone calls me Drew"

She looked puzzled, first at me then at a bemused Juliette.

"It cannot be so, you are so pretty"

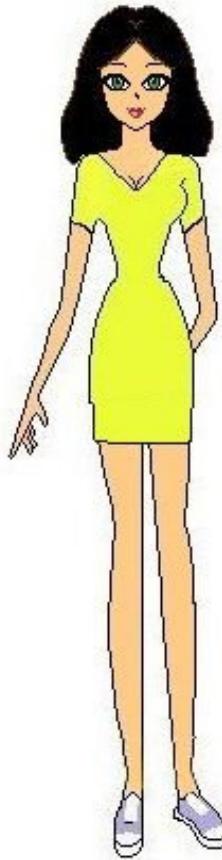
"Jules!" I implored

"Oh alright. Kat he really is a boy, it's a long story but here goes"

Just then Mike pulled the van up

"Here we are, we can watch them pass here" he advised us

We left the van and Jules tried to explain yesterday's events to Kat.



**Kat was intrigued by me.**

"Here they come" dad shouted

The huge field swept into sight and we could see the Apollinaris girls' cream strip dominating the front of the field. We all cheered and clapped 'our' team through, we spotted both mum and Kat's mum Maria sat comfortably in the bunch.

"Come on if we are quick we can get a coffee before the feed" Mike urged

"But he has, how you say, ear holes?" Kat was saying to Jules

"Well that's another story, Drew?" Jules queried

"Why not" I slumped into my seat.

So as we drove up to Daun, Kat got the short version of how and why I ended up as Gaby.

"So Drew, you like being a madchen?" Kat asked

"It's not my first choice, I was going to change out of this today but Mike got to us first"

"Well I think it's cool, can we fool the girls?"

"Girls?" I queried

"Yes you know the *rennfahrer*"

"Oh go on Drew, it'll be fun"

"Yes please Drew" Kat asked

"Ok I guess seeing as I'm already dressed for it"

"You guys ok back there?" Dad asked

"Fine dad"

"Okay, Mike says we'll be there in ten minutes"

The day was warming up as forecast

"I wish I'd got my shorts" I moaned

"I have some you can borrow Drew" Kat offered

She rummaged in her bag and produced a pair of cargo shorts, although girls they were sort of unisex, not too girlie anyhow.

"Thanks, I'll change when we stop"

At least I would be a bit cooler, after all the girls both had skirts on and even Dad and Mike had shorts on. The feed station was based at a café so Mike's promise of a drink was easily fulfilled. There were eight riders in our team, so Mike sorted the musettes so that he dad and Jules had two riders, Kat and I one each. I changed into Kat's shorts and emerged to find the others wearing team t-shirts.

"Here Drew, you can change inside" dad passed me one of the shirts.

"Okay dad" I found the toilet and swapped tops before rejoining the others.

Mike gave us our instructions and we joined the throng of other helpers at the roadside. An Audi with flashing lights sped up the road and slowed while some unintelligible information was passed on, then it sped on.

"The front group is at the bottom of the climb" Mike told us

We could hear car horns and cheering then the lights of the race directors car came into view.

"Ready everyone?" dad asked

"Yep" I replied

Then the cars were past and we could see the riders. There were several cream jerseys in evidence and we positioned ourselves ready. Then all hell let loose as the riders reached us, bikes, bags, runners, a cacophony of sound and then it was over, at least the first wave. Both mum and Maria Pinger were well up there. Jules and Mike still had a bag each; the riders further down the field. The rest of us were able to watch as the next group came through and then we saw the last of our riders through. The field was now fairly strung out and we were packed up and ready to move by the time the last riders went through.

Mike gunned the big Mercedes down the motorway back to Wittlich he estimated we had about twenty minutes before the finish so we had time to get parked and walk across to the crowded finish area. There was a party atmosphere, beer tents, wurst stalls etc., all very German! Kat and I found a spot on the rail; the others stopped nearer the line.

The Audi hurtled up the road lights flashing and tannoy garbling something in German.

"There's a small group in the front, just twenty seconds in advance Drew"

"I hope we've got riders there" I had assumed proprietary rights to the team.

"That's the director, George Müller over there" Kat pointed to a guy stood on the opposite rail, seeing her he waved back.

The other cars swept through, lights ablaze, they were close now! I could see George starting to shout, he could see further down the road from his side. Then I caught sight of the riders, about eight of them strung across the road and three were in 'our' squad! Kat recognised her mum and started shouting like mad.

"Pinger! Pinger!"

I couldn't see my mum in the group but the other two team members were on the far side hidden from view. I shouted anyway then as they closed, one of the cream jerseys shot forward, it was mum! Well I went ballistic; everything seemed to go into slow motion. Kats mum was starting to fade just as mine starting easing forward. There was barely a wheel between all of them as they passed us, we were about twenty metres from the line, as I turned to follow the action I could see Mike leaping up and down, mum was

now hidden from view. Then it was all over, George was making his way to the line, Mike was still jumping up and down and the commentator was going berserk, I could just make out a jumble of what sounded like names

"Bond, Orthen, Pascali, Pinger, Braun, Friel, Wattens, Talen! Blah blah blah!

The main bunch swept in almost unnoticed by me and then we joined the crush toward the line. I saw dad, then I saw mum, then I saw dad pick mum up and hug her! George was joining in Mike was hugging Jules and I could see the other team officials hugging and stuff with the other squad members.

Kat went off in search of her mother and I was swept up by Mike when I reached the group containing my mum.

"She won! She won!" Jules was shouting

Mum and Dad were both crying, as was George!



**Mum was still a bit bewildered at the presentation!**

"... und ersten platz – Jenny Bond auf Apollinaris!" a terrific cheer went up. It was true, mum took the title by half a wheel, the team got third as well with Anja Pascali, Maria came in fourth. With Tina Porsche (no relation!) in fifteenth place, the team prize was theirs as well!

Mum was duly crowned regional champion, they weren't sure what music to play but no one was too upset with the usual German anthem. Afterwards mum gave a couple of interviews with George's help and then finally she got to the showers!

George came and found us while the riders were changing.

"Herr Bond?"

"Dave please" dad requested

"Dave, we will have a big celebration in Bad Neunahr tonight, you and your daughters will come?"

"We will be honoured Herr Muller"

"Please to call me George eh?"

"Where and when?" dad asked

"The Bad Kursaal, Jenny knows where from seben heure, how do you say it, seven o'clock, it will be a big party!"

"We'll be there"

Mum emerged from the showers with Maria Pinger.

"Mum there's a party tonight!" Jules was still a bit hyper.

"I know, see you later Maria?"

"Of course Jen, I wouldn't miss George throwing a party for anything" there was that tinge of disappointment in her voice but she was trying to be upbeat.

"Auf wiedersehen!"

"Teuss!" Maria Replied

I waved to Kat as she joined her mum

"See you later Kat"

"Sure Drew" she called back.

We walked mum back to the car; she was stopped several times for handshakes and even autographs before we made it.

"You drive again Dave?"

"Of course luv"

Dad managed to navigate back to the motorway.

"We'll go back via the apartment, I need to pick up a dress for tonight, are you ok Jules?"

"I've brought my long white dress"

"That should be fine, Drew?"

"Uh?"

"Have you got something to wear?"

"Jeans?"

"Drew! I think I've got something that will fit you"

"Why don't I like the way this is going?"

"I told mum about Kat, Drew" Jules informed me.

"And I thought it would be good fun to play up to the others. Go on Drew, pretty please!"

How can you deny your mother when she puts it like that? Mum directed dad to the apartment.

"It would save time if me and Drew get ready here and you and Jules go up to the hotel. You can pick us up about seven ok?"

"Okay luv, but go easy on the lad eh?"

"You know me"

"That's what I'm afraid of!"

So dad and Jules drove back up to the Krone and I joined mum in the small apartment she currently called home.

"Get yourself a shower while I get ready then we'll sort you out"

"Yes mum" I replied

An hour later and mum was just putting the finishing touches to my costume.

"... I won't ask why you were wearing Katia's shorts."

"It was hot and she offered" I stated

"Ok sit still a minute, you don't want mascara everywhere do you?"

A car horn hooted outside.

"That'll be your dad, come on!"

We joined the others for the short drive to the 'Kursaal' and the three 'Bond girls' made their entrance!



**I was not impressed with wearing a dress tonight!**

I have to say that despite how I was dressed I really enjoyed the party. We had a meal first, and then George made a speech, mum replied in remarkably good German then the celebration started in earnest! The wine and beer started flowing; even Kat, Jules and I were allowed some! Everyone was happy and no one clocked me. The others I hadn't met accepted me as 'Drew as in Barrimore', only my family and Kat knew the truth and she was in on the deceit anyway.

It was late when the party ended, George arranged taxi's for everyone, mum went back to the apartment, the rest of the Bond clan returned to the Krone.

Once in bed I had a chance to go over the day. How in hell did I end up being dressed as girl? By my mother! Still what a day eh? Mum winning the championship, meeting Kat, helping Mike and the party to cap it all off. I could almost ignore the fact that neither mum nor dad had been particularly bothered by me wearing girl's clothes. And everyone took me for what they saw, a teenage girl.

Tomorrow will be different I promised myself. Tomorrow I'll be me, Drew, male child of the Bond family!

With that thought I passed into dreamland.

## **Part 40**

### **Back Home**

Even Jules was late getting up on Monday morning!

We met dad in the breakfast room at quarter to nine, I had managed to dress more like a boy today, well at least the clothes were mine!

"Come on you two, your mum will be here soon"

"How's she getting here? " Jules asked

"She's got the car remember" I offered

"Oh yeah" she allowed

"We'd better get something to eat then" I nudged Jules

You don't really want a full travelogue do you? Mondays are mums only regular day off as she is either racing, training or doing PR the rest of the week. We drove up to the Effelsburg radio telescope and then dropped down to Bad Münstereifel. Mum explained that Bad was like putting pool on a place name and usually meant there was a spring or such there. We did the tourist thing and watched the glass blowers, which was fascinating; dad was more concerned that we didn't break anything in the shop!

After lunch took us up to the Nurburgring where we went into the sort of visitor centre. Although it was nearly all in German we enjoyed ourselves, especially where they had loads of PS2's to play on. Then mum drove us on a convoluted route back to the hotel.

"We'll walk down to Dernau for dinner, then we can catch the train back, I'll stay here tonight" mum advised us

"How far's that?" I asked

"Only a few kilometres, we'll get the train back"

"That doesn't sound so bad" dad agreed

"It's a nice walk too" mum placated

So that's what we did, the footpath followed the railway for some of the way, the river in other places and boy did we have an appetite when we got there! We ended up with pizza eaten outside watching life go on in the village; we were well relaxed when we were done. The train arrived on time and we were

quickly back at Altenahr. Before bed I texted Mad with news of mums win and promised to send a postcard.

Mum popped her head in the door last thing.

"Did you bring your bike kit Drew"

"You said to"

"Ok then, you can come with me tomorrow, Jules and Dad can go to Bonn shopping"

"Oh great!" Jules stated

"What are we doing then mum?"

"Training with the squad of course"

"Cool"

"Good night then"

"Night mum" we both echoed

Tuesday arrived with a mixed forecast, showers and bright spells from what I could make out from the TV. We all got an earlyish breakfast before dad and jules dropped me and mum at the flat.

"Get changed Drew, we've got a bit of time yet, Mike will be by to collect us in about half an hour"

"I thought we were going training?"

"We are, Mike drives us out then we ride back"

"Where are we going?"

"Oh George will pick a route based on this weeks racing. Sometimes it's up and down the river or last week we started down at Trier"

"What am I going to ride then?"

"Mike will have something, some ones spare bike most likely"

A horn tooted outside.

"Come on that's the bus"

We went down to find Mike and the rest of the squad waiting for us. The bikes were on the roof and spare wheels were racked on the back. George was waiting with the masseuse in his car, as soon as mum and I got in the bus he pulled away, Mike in hot pursuit.

"Guten tag" mum greeted everyone

I was getting some funny looks

"Hier ist mein sonne Drew"

Maria got in first what the others were clearly struggling with

"But Drew is your daughter no?"

"No this is the lad I've been telling you about"

"But Sonntag? Drew she was wearing a dress"

"Sorry everyone, it was Kats idea"

"My Kat?" Maria asked

So mum had to explain to everyone why I ended up at the party dressed as a girl.

"But he looks so good as a girl!"

"Time to get to work ladies" Mike urged

We set about getting ready, shoes, gloves, glasses, helmets while Mike, George and the masseuse who was called Petra, got the bikes ready.



**I was ready to join the Apollinaris squad**

"Drew, over here please" George called

"Good morning Herr Müller"

"Call me George please. Your mother says you are quite a racer eh?"

"Well ok I guess, I've won a couple of times this year"

"Well today you see what your mother does. Mike has Tina's spare bike for you, he will set you up."

"Thanks George"

"Now it's a long ride, we will be going steady, you know *piano*?"

"Yes sir"

"Well we ride piano for maybe fifty kilometres, then I will go through some drills, then after the girls usually race back to the Café Adler, last one in buys the coffee eh?"

"Sounds great"

"Now I promised to look after you, so if you are getting tired tell someone and you can ride the bus ok?"

"Yes sir, thank you George"

"Now go see Mike"

I found Mike checking the brakes on a small machine with 'Tina Porsche' on the top tube.

"Two Tina's today" he chuckled, "ok hop on lets get you set up"

He quickly had me comfortable on the gorgeous Campagnolo equipped Cannondale. I was in heaven, Record 10 speed Ergo gears, Mavic wheels, my machine at home was like a barge by comparison!

I lined up with the girls, my Notts. Velo strip contrasting with their Apollinaris strip. George had a quick chat with Maria, who I found out was team leader then we set off, nine of us followed by George's car and the team bus. I've no idea where we were, there were lots of trees and not too much traffic, our route was fairly flat and we rode piano for almost an hour, everyone chatting, mostly about Sunday's race and mum took a lot of joshing over her win.

Then Maria dropped back to talk with George.

"You ok Drew?"

"Great mum"

"Remember to listen to Maria and if you want to drop off do"

"Okay mum"

Maria rejoined the bunch and the exercises started. We spread out up the road about twenty five metres apart then had to chase the rider in front, we did that several times and I was getting pretty tired, Mum spotted me panting hard and I was soon watching from the bus. The squad went through several other scenarios for about an hour during which time I had pretty much recovered, with the aid of liberal amounts of energy drink.

Maria came back to the bus.

"Drew, you want to ride the last bit?"

"I think so"

"Mike?"

"She's ok"

Maria had the squad slow down while I got back on the bike and soon I was back in the bunch. We rode fairly steadily and then as a village approached,

Mum and a couple of others took off to sprint for the sign. Mum was a designated sprinter so this was important training for her. Each time we regrouped and returned to a saner speed. We must have repeated this about six times before someone shouted "Adler!"

Well within metres it was a battlefield! Maria tried to get away off the front, Tina chased her down and we were spinning along at over 40k's. Mum came alongside.

"You ok?"

"I think so"

"Well drop off if you want and definitely if it gets a bit boisterous"

"Yes mum"

"It's only about ten kilometres ok?"

I nodded

"See you in a bit then" she moved back up the group

It was every bit as tough as mum suggested, breakaways, chases, a split formed, I was in the back half and was grateful when my companions eased back and the pace dropped. Mum, Maria, Tina and Susan disappeared up the road rapidly, although we kept them in sight.

Our little group arrived at the 'Adler' just as the others were parking their bikes. A waitress was already at the door to get the order and soon everyone was talking at once as they found seats on the veranda.

"Hey Drew, your mum beat me again!" Maria called out

"Can't have you beating the champion can I?"

"You switched me"

"Did not!"

The banter continued until the drinks were served when George called order.

"Okay everyone, good session and well done Drew"

"Yeah" several voices sounded

"You all have your schedules for this week?" everyone was nodding, "well there are no changes, everyone will start the Schwarzwälder Fest ok, Jen, you

will be protected rider with Maria, everyone will be watching you after Sonntag”

(*Note from Maddy:* I should say that George used a lot more German but I want you to follow the plot!)

“Ok, see you all Thursday”

“Bye George”

“Bye bossman”

“Teuss”

George left on his own; everyone else would catch the bus back to Bad Neunahr.

Mum explained on the way back that only herself and Maria were full time riders, the others had part time jobs, organised by the team, to make up their wages. Three worked at the Apollinaris plant, one at the tourist office and the other two at the spa centre.

Mike dropped us off at the flat and mum rustled up some cheese on toast while I showered and changed, then got her own whilst I ate. I was only just after three so mum suggested we catch the bus up to Ahrweiler and go visit the Roman Villa. So that's what we did. The villa has a road going literally right round it. Apparently it was only found when they started building the bypass. So now it's covered by a huge wooden hall, I thought it was pretty neat. What was just as neat was that the girl at the desk recognised mum as the new regional champ. Apparently it was all over the local paper, 'local' rider wins title sort of thing. It seems that a lot of people thought mum was German! Weird or what?



**Silverberg Roman Villa is inside this!**

I got some postcards and wrote them over a coke so I could post them back home. They might just get there before me!

We went back to mums flat to wait for dad and Jules, we were going to eat in the town tonight. Mum took a call while I tried to get a descent channel on the TV; there was a badly dubbed film, some German police drama with a helicopter or news.

"That was Maria, how do you fancy going out with Kat on Thursday?"

"Don't you have anything planned?" I asked

"Only training again, your dad was going to find something, but Maria said that Kat mentioned swimming."

"Well it sounds okay, what about Jules?"

"She's invited too of course, anyway think about it, we're going to the Pinger's for dinner tomorrow night you can tell Kat then."

"Okay"

The others finally got back and we went to a Spanish restaurant, mums favourite. I nearly fell asleep at the table; the day's exertions finally caught up with me! Afterwards we drove back to the Krone and I was asleep before my head hit the pillow.

Wednesday, Mittwoch. Mum had tourist things organised for today, a steam train ride amongst them. We were having a leisurely day and we drove across to catch the 'Vulcan Express' just after ten. The little train took an hour to climb to the top where we had time for an ice cream before returning back down the valley to where the car was.

We then drove to Maria Laach, a real live monastery! We had a walk around the gardens, had a snack and walked down to the lake. It was still early so we drove on to Koblenz where we went to the Deutches Eck where the River Moselle joins the Rhine. Then mum dragged us to the Koblenz Museum where we she showed us the actual painting of the 'Tower of Babel', you know the one, lots of little people building a huge tower thing. Well it's tiny! You'd think it would be huge but it's only about 30cm square if that!

After another ice cream we went back to the car and set off for the Pinger's.

"Don't we need to change?"

"No, it's a barbecue, just a few friends and you both look ok to me"

"If you say so"

We drove alongside the Rhine for some of the way, back past the railway then along some lanes until we stopped outside a house in a small village. There were a couple of other cars outside and the sounds of a party drifted from the back.

Kat had already spotted us and rushed over to the car.

"Welcome to Lohrsdorf! Come on through"

We followed Kat around the house to where the family Pinger were holding court. It's always a bit awkward when you don't really know anyone, worse when you don't know what is being said.

"Everyone" Maria clapped for attention, "you all know Jenny, these are her kinder Juliette and Drew and her husband Dave"

The others present said hi in various ways and then Maria brought a man whom I assumed was Mr Pinger over.

"Hello again Dave, this is Henryck my other half, he'll keep you lubricated. What would you like? Beer, wine?"

"Er beer please" dad replied

"Come on over Dave" Henryck spoke pretty good English too.

Well you know what these things get like. The adults drank, the kids mucked about, we all ate, potato salad, red cabbage, sauerkraut, wurst, schnitzel, in fact a veritable feast. A couple of Kat's friends were round, Lori and Freddii and after some initial reservation, we were all soon chatting away in Gerlish or is that Engman?

"Are you guys coming tomorrow?" Freddii asked

"Mum says we can" Jules replied

"Great" Kat mentioned

"How do we get here?"

"You are staying in Altenahr?" Lori queried

"Yes, at the Krone"

"Well you can get the train of course, we will meet you at the dorf bahn, sorry how you say, halt for trains?"

"Station?" I offered

"Yes station"

We made the arrangements and about nine mum indicated a need to leave.

"Thanks Maria, the kids will come down in the morning and I'll see you for training"

"We hope you enjoyed yourselves?" Henryck asked

"Yes thanks, I'll send that sample to Jen for you Henryck" dad replied

"Safe journey, guten nacht!" Maria offered

"Teuss" mum was into the German

"Wiedersehn" Kat added

"Bye everyone" I replied

Mum hadn't been drinking so she took the wheel to drive back to our accommodation.

"You all enjoying the holiday?" mum asked

"Yeah it's great" Jules replied

"Drew?"

"It's brill so far"

"Well I'm sure you'll enjoy tomorrow too"

The sun streaming through the curtains awaked me; it looked set to be a good day. After breakfast Jules and I walked round to the railway station and only had to wait a short time before it came in. we were soon comfortable in the air-conditioned carriage and speeding down the valley. Mum had told us what to look for so we didn't miss our stop, but it told you on the train where you were.

"Die nachste halt ist Lohrsdorf" came through the speakers

"Our stop jules!"

"I heard"

We got off and Kat greeted us

"Hi guys"

"Hi Kat" I replied

"Come on, Freddii lives just up the road, you'll be borrowing her sisters bikes"

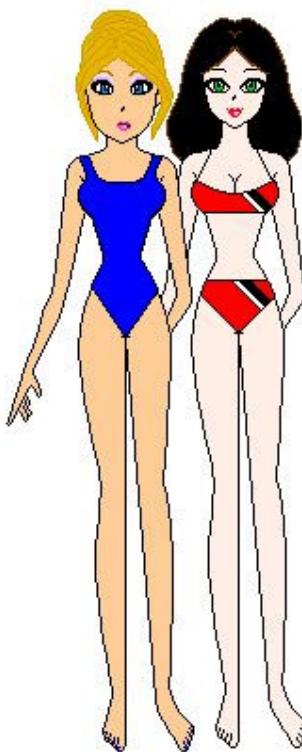
We followed her up the street to a small apartment block where Freddii was waiting with our steeds.

"Hi Drew, hi Juliette" Freddii greeted us

"Guten morgen Freddii" I offered

"Come on, we'll meet Lori on the way"

We mounted our steeds, I was a bit off put by the pink paintwork and loop frame but hey, it wasn't a race. We threaded our way down lanes and tracks collecting Lori en route, it was great. The sun was out and we were having fun. We got to the swimbad and joined the crowd inside. We were quickly changed, the girls commandeered a patch of grass and we were set for the day!



### **Jules and Kat at the pool**

"Hey Drew, it looks like you have been not honest" Kat declared

I cringed; I remembered my strange tan lines.

"It's a long story" I started

"Another one?" Kat exclaimed

So I had to tell them about our trip to Ladybower and the case of the missing swim trunks. We stayed at the pool till after lunch then we rode on to the mini-golf just along the road. We got back to the Pinger's house to find mums car already there.

"Good day kids?"

"Great mum" I replied

Mum decided to cook for us in her tiny flat that night as this was the last night she'd be here, they were travelling down to the Black Forest tomorrow afternoon. We enjoyed the spaghetti just because mum had cooked it; it was pretty good too. Again we drove up to the Krone for the night.

Our last full day in Germany was going to be a bit odd. Mum was leaving just after lunch, which left us without transport from then on. So we decided to

hang out around Altenahr. Mum drove us up to Adenauer in the morning for an hour or so then we said our goodbyes when she dropped us back at the Krone. We did tourist things, a trip up the chairlift, a walk up the river, me and dad climbed the hill to the Altenburg while Jules perused the shops below.

We ate that evening at the Krone, then retired early as we had an early-ish start.

Henryck and Kat joined us for breakfast next morning, Henryck was going to drive us to Köln for our train, which meant we could have a bit of time there before catching the Thalys back to Brussels. So that was what we did. Kat took Jools and me on a whirlwind tour of Köln's main shopping area then a last coffee with the Pinger's before we caught our first train of the day.

Apart from gradually worsening weather, our return home was pretty uneventful. We had plenty of time for our connections and the Eurostar even got into Waterloo a little early. A quick taxi ride across London got us onto an earlier train back to Nottingham so that we were home by nine o'clock. We were all pretty tired, but it had been quite a week!

*And so Book 1 comes to an end! For more of Drew and the gangs adventures read Book 2.*

Maddy Bell ©2003