

# The Mirror



**Maggie Finson**

A "New Woman" Novel



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# THE MIRROR

**By Maggie Finson**

Conrad Larson looked at the huge packing crate now filling a great deal of space in the entryway of his apartment. The delivery people had left it, and the attached envelope right inside the doorway, barely leaving room for movement through the narrow space. Once again, he re-read the note that had come with the thing in puzzled, halfway amused, disbelief:

“Conrad: I found this in a little shop way out in the boondocks and knew it would be just perfect for your place. Call it a peace offering and a parting gift. I’m sorry for being such a bitch last week, and I do hope that you like my little surprise.

Friends? Marcia

On prying the front of the case loose and removing the packing inside, “this” turned out to be a beautifully restored, stand-up, oval mirror standing well over five feet tall and three feet at the widest section. The frame was cherry, carved with reliefs of nymphs, dryads and other mythological female figures. The whole was quite solid, and heavy enough that Conrad had difficulty getting it into the only room in his apartment that had any room for such an object, his own bedroom. It did fit rather well with his small, but carefully selected, collection of antique furnishings though, and despite some misgivings with its source, he did find himself admiring it happily.

He just hoped that she meant what had been said in the note and wasn't attempting to re-start their stormy and wearing relationship.

Marcia Kane was a beautiful, successful, young woman, possessing the physical grace of a professional dancer or athlete. Her keen mind she used to her advantage as a buyer for a large department store chain. With her looks she could have had modeled many of the fashions she purchased for her employers.

She was also insecure about her relationship with Conrad, alternatively miserable with her possessiveness and accusations, or wonderful when trying to win him, in her opinion, back. The good times had been incredible, but the bad ones had caused Conrad to finally re-evaluate what it was he wanted from the relationship. It did not include Marcia's insane jealousy, her demands for a commitment he wasn't prepared to make, nor her constant monitoring of any female acquaintance he had, so he had broken off the relationship.

She hadn't taken that well at all. First, she had tried to convince him she would change her attitude; then had resorted to outrageous threats and predictions of dire consequences for him, his business, and future relationships with any other woman. During her worst spate of name calling, she had promised that if she couldn't have him, then no other woman would either. He hadn't worried too much over that cliched outburst, knowing that Marcia's temper often made her say things she had no intention of following through with.

But then again, her absolute fury had been unnerving and violent enough to have caused him some worry. He had adopted the simplest method of all to avoid potential difficulties involving his ex-girlfriend, he had steered well clear of her when at all possible to avoid unpleasant public spectacles.

Now, only one month after their break-up, she had sent him an obviously very expensive gift and called it a peace offering and friendship gift.

What was she after now?

If she did not want to rekindle their romance, why would she send such an extravagant gift to a man she had recently claimed to hate with all her being?

That worried him. He resolved to return the thing, or reimburse her for its purchase and shipping if nothing else just to avoid obligations.

Meanwhile, it wouldn't hurt to look the piece over and admire it.

It was remarkable in many ways. The glass itself appeared to be original, heavy, smoothly polished, and carefully hand silvered. The frame avoided being gaudy with carefully planned spacing between the figures depicted and the warm, rich glow of beautiful, well-cared-for wood.

It was perfect, fitting well with the other pieces situated around the room and filling the entire area with its presence. Admiring it, he decided that it was there to stay. After only an hour, the thought of getting rid of it for any reason at all filled him with a sense of loss he couldn't readily explain to himself. No matter, once he had applied a fresh coating of lemon oil, it was his. He wouldn't part with it for any amount of money.

Curiously, the thing bore no maker's mark nor any other identifying signs anywhere on its surface. Maybe it was inside the frame itself, or the mirror's maker had been so well known that "signing" his work seemed to be an unnecessary conceit. A bit of investigation would probably turn up any information Conrad wanted about the beautiful object.

For the rest of the day, Conrad found his eyes continuously drawn back to the mirror. His fascination went way beyond his usual interest in a new possession, no matter how lovely or well preserved it might be. But, with all his passion for antiques, he wasn't all that surprised that it had affected him that way.

In contrast to the neat elegance maintained throughout the rest of his spacious apartment, the office he had set up in the second bedroom was a scene of pleasantly comfortable, anarchistic chaos filled with computer equipment and ultra modern fixtures to facilitate his work as a free lance writer and consultant for computer software.

Sitting down at his desk to pick up the thread of his interrupted work on a complex game program he had been fiddling with for weeks on end without really getting where he wanted, he was interrupted again by the insistent buzz of his telephone.

Sighing and swearing at himself for forgetting to turn on the answering machine, he hit the save function on his terminal, then dug through a mountain of printouts and flow charts to find the offending machine before it drove him out of his mind.

"Hello?"

The voice on the other end of the connection surprised him only a little, considering the odd gift he had just received.

“Conrad? This is Marcia.”

“Oh, hi. How are things with you?”

He had been halfway expecting this call, but still didn't really wish to talk with her.

“Fine.” Ignoring his obvious reluctance to speak with her, she rushed onward excitedly, “Well, did you get it?”

“The mirror?”

Conrad was cautious in answering, fearful that this call was leading up to a hoped for reconciliation.

“Yes, it got here a few hours ago.”

“Isn't it beautiful?”

Marcia sounded very pleased with herself, which usually meant she had gotten the better of someone, which under the present circumstances worried Conrad.

“I practically stole it. The dealer was selling out all his stock from a junk shop, believe it or not, and didn't have the slightest idea of what he had. Once I bought it and had it cleaned up and refinished, I just knew it would be perfect for you.”

“It's a very elegant, beautiful piece.”

Conrad had already decided to keep it, so now sought to get out of any obligation to Marcia connected with it.

“I'll be more than happy to reimburse you for anything you put into it.”

“Oh, no, I bought it for you as a parting gift and apology for all the nasty, terrible things I said that last evening we were together. No strings, Conrad, I just wanted you to have it.”

Marcia did have an extravagantly generous side when the mood took her, and Conrad nearly believed this was one such case. He would have if not for the satisfied, anticipatory note in her voice.

As if sensing his hesitation, the woman on the other end of the line urged, “If it makes you feel any better, about two hundred would easily cover my outlay, but I really do wish you wouldn't. I said some perfectly awful things to and about you and this is my way of making amends.”

Her voice hesitated, then she used the zinger which convinced him, almost, of her sincerity.

“Conrad, I’ve found someone else and want you to know that all is forgiven, OK? The mirror is my way of completely purging you from my system. Can you at least accept that?”

“Oh.”

That sounded more like the lady he knew, which relieved him somewhat.

“Well, I’m happy to hear that, Marcia, and hope this one works out for you.”

He actually did mean that in two ways. First, she would be off his case and would possibly stop passing the vicious gossip he had heard during the first few weeks of their separation; and second, that maybe she really had found someone better for her.

“In that case, I’ll accept your gift with deep and very appreciative thanks.”

“Good! Still friends?”

“Oh, sure, why not, Marcia? Did you say you only have two hundred dollars wrapped up in that thing?”

“That’s right, Babe.”

She sounded very, very smug, which was so much in character that he nearly laughed in her ear.

“Then you did steal it! Thanks. I really mean that. It looks like it was specially made to fit in with the rest of the things in my bedroom.”

“I told you it was perfect!”

Someone else on her end of the line said something he couldn’t make out beyond its being a male voice.

“OK. Got to run, Conrad. Enjoy your mirror. ‘Bye, now.”

“Take care of yourself.”

Replacing the receiver, he was still worried that something was not quite right. But, it was a vague, unformed feeling that wouldn’t even qualify as uneasiness. He soon pushed it completely away while becoming involved with the intricacies of the game design he had been working on when interrupted.

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Marcia hung up her telephone receiver then shut off the recorded voice which had served as a timely way to cut the conversation short, leaving her ex-boyfriend with the idea that someone was with her right



now. She was wearing a very satisfied expression on her oval face and her blue eyes glinted with cruel humor.

“Gotcha, Conrad! That, ‘Oh, so wonderful’ mirror is really going to be a pleasure for you to have, at least in my opinion! I do hope you enjoy it while you can.”

Actually, she had gone to a great deal of time, effort and expense to procure that particular mirror and have it delivered to Conrad. Its history was quite interesting and there was recent evidence that many of the tales regarding it were at least based on some sort of factual events. All she needed to do was wait and see, and allow the thing disguised as a full length mirror to work its own brand of enchantment over the man.

Leaning back in her chair and twirling a strand of platinum hair, she grinned savagely. “Nobody dumps me and gets away scot-free free, not even you, Conrad, Darling! Especially not you, Sweetheart.”

Assured by experts that the thing would do as rumored, she could only wait for results to get underway, then judge for herself whether her time and money had been wasted. If so, there were other methods of getting him, except that none of those were nearly so delicious as this possibility. None of them!

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Freshly showered, Conrad checked himself over in his new mirror. His athletically fit, six foot one half inch frame was a mild source of pride for him. He maintained it well, eating healthy foods and exercising regularly, but really didn’t consider himself overly vain about it.

Keeping it in shape, and feeling good as a result of that care, was enough, although it was true that the women liked it, especially the thickly curled mat of dark hair spread across his chest, back, arms and legs. “Virile.” they called it, although he needed to give special care to keeping himself clean to avoid unpleasant odors.

His face was much too to be considered handsome in the classical sense and an unruly shock of dark brown hair consistently defied every effort he put into keeping it combed. As a simple grooming measure, he generally kept it cut fairly short.

Sharp, gray eyes under bushy brows glinted with intelligence and a good natured humor. He would have to spend some time getting that mop into some sort of order, and considerably less getting dressed for his date that evening. He decided that he’d better get moving when a

sudden flash of vertigo hit him, drawing his eyes back to the reflected image in the new mirror.

For one unsettling moment, it hadn't been himself in the mirror at all, but Julie Harrison, his date for the night. At least it seemed to be her form, superimposed over his own still visible but faint outline. The odd experience passed so rapidly, he was laughing it off even as the raised goose bumps on his arms and the back of his neck began to subside.

"Been working way too hard lately, old buddy." he chided himself. "You're beginning to see things that aren't there!"

Certain that the vision had been simply a combination of over active imagination and over-tired eyes, he dismissed it while finishing his preparations for the evening. Just the same, he stole another, furtive glance at his reflection before getting dressed. His familiar shape peered back at him with a nonplused, tolerantly amused expression.

"Okay? Satisfied now?" he sneered, then laughed aloud.

Yes, it was satisfied!

Very much so, in fact, as the mirror, or, rather, the entity within it, analyzed the thoughts and body processes it had read in its prey's mind during the brief probe. It had pulled an image from his mind, then flashed it back for a split second in order to gauge the man's reaction and receptivity along with the potential capacity for resistance. Pleased with its findings, it had fed, only a taste, really, then replaced what it took with something else only a little different in its own perceptions.

Other than that, the entity did nothing but watch.

Satisfied with the flavor of its sampling and the ease of replacement, it was now more than content to wait patiently as its present target fell more under its influence.

Mainly because it wasn't all that hungry, yet..

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Conrad was in shock. Waking up on the morning following his date with Julie, he hadn't needed a shave.

But, that wasn't all. His body was smooth and hairless except for greatly thinned brows, lashes, scalp and a small, neatly inverted triangle at his crotch. It was as though there never had been any more hair on him that there was now.

Neither his face nor body showed the slightest sign of having been shaved or otherwise artificially depilated. His face lacked even the fa-

miliar little dings from the accumulation of morning battles with the razor over the past fifteen years; no shadow, no roughness, not even the slight redness usually present even after he had shaved carefully.

Every bit of skin on him had become satiny smooth, with a soft, healthy sheen like cultured silk. It reminded him of Julie's skin and how he had been admiring the memory of it the day before.

That was the problem, all right.

His skin and the pattern of body hair left to him would have been quite normal on a woman, but not on him.

What had happened to cause this?

Was it an elaborate practical joke played on him while he slept?

Had Marcia or someone she had put up to it, somehow shaved and specially conditioned his entire body?

Well, he'd give things a few days to see if it started to grow back before getting too upset about anything being wrong.

Getting upset about having this done to him by someone as a joke, however, was something to get worked up over. He'd never considered himself overly macho about things like that, but the loss of his body hair infuriated him.

The worse part about the whole thing though, was how absolutely naked he felt. Not "nude" which he was, but embarrassingly naked, bereft of something essential to his sense of well being and personal comfort.

His clothing, when he put it on, felt strange, rough and irritating as it slid unimpeded over flesh that now lacked the cushioning friction of his once thick mat of body hair. The sensations were strange; disturbing even; but not entirely unpleasant, much to his surprise.

To his shame, he found himself idly wondering what it would feel like to wear silk or nylon against his now soft, sensitive flesh. Pushing that idea firmly away, he went into his office and tried calling Marcia.

Grumbling at only reaching her answering machine, he sat back and breathed deeply, then chuckled at how he was reacting to something that had to be a temporary inconvenience. At least he didn't have to go to a job and face co-workers with his denuded anatomy, and it would likely grow back within a matter of days.

At least he hoped it would!

Marcia grinned triumphantly when she heard the sputtering rage behind his voice fade into puzzled questioning.

It really was working, unless one of his current doxies had a very strange sense of humor and enjoyed playing nasty practical jokes.

She preferred, however, to believe that the mirror had started doing its work and glanced once again at the rare, one of a kind, treatise on something called “Ananace’s Looking Glass” that she had unearthed in an occult curio shop which had started her search for the object now securely fastened to Conrad Larsen, and safely ensconced in his bedroom.

This, she thought, was the beginning of her vengeance, and she intended to draw it out, savoring each slight change in the man she had come to hate so much. Later on, once things had really begun to progress, she would become actively involved. Very much so!

The beauty of it that would be that Conrad would very likely solicit that involvement himself, and she would do her best to maintain a concerned, shocked demeanor in his presence.

At least she would for awhile...

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It had been over a week now and Conrad’s body hair stubbornly showed no inclination to grow back at all.

He found this worrisome, but had also easily gotten used to his smooth, satiny soft skin.

He had even started purchasing skin conditioners and moisturizers to maintain it, much to his great surprise.

Still, it required that someone who knew about such things have a good look at him, just in case there was something really wrong that might lead to worse symptoms later on.

Once his regular physician had been convinced by seeing him that Conrad was not just concerned about something as mundane as going bald, he had referred his patient to a skin disorder specialist without hesitation, urging Conrad to see the specialist as soon as he could get in.

Dr. Henry Stein glanced over the patient file on this latest referral, then picked up the telephone and dialed the physician’s number listed on it.

“Hello, this is Harry Stein. Is Dr. Benjamin in? Yes, he knows who I am and no, he isn’t expecting my call.” Stein waited patiently as the switchboard connected him with the desired office and party.

“Charlie, Henry here. About that patient, Conrad Larsen, that you sent over to see me today, are you sure these records are accurate?”

Listening to the other physician speak, he shook his head, then realized the other man couldn’t see him do that. “No, I found nothing obviously wrong with the man, other than having skin that would be the envy of most girls, never having shaved it in his life from what I could see.”

Another spate of information from the other end and Stein sighed, “Well, I couldn’t find even a trace of facial hair and his face has that smoothness that a man loses after a few years of being acquainted with a razor. Plus he just does not have much in the way of hair anywhere except his scalp, brows and pubic area. That does seem strange with his physical and genital development being what it is, but there is nothing I could find really wrong with him physically.

“Yes, maybe the tests will show something I couldn’t see in my examination, but frankly, Charlie, I still suspect you of pulling an elaborate practical joke on me to try to get even for my last caper. This man couldn’t possibly have been as hairy a specimen as he claims he was just one week ago without showing very obvious signs of either shaving it or having used a commercial depilatory, which he doesn’t.

“Sure, I’ll let you know the minute I get the results back,” Stein assured his colleague. “But maybe you ought to send him in for genetic testing too. Any condition I’ve ever heard of relating to hair loss this massive has involved all the patient’s hair. To tell you the truth, Charlie, this one has me stumped completely.”

Stein reread the file on his desk, hoping to see something he had missed previously. He could still find no reason at all for the curious problem of Conrad Larsen. Once a fairly hirsute individual, the man now possessed the unblemished, finely textured skin one would expect to see on a girl or young woman.

Conrad glared at his image in the mirror, then gave that pastime up as useless. It only disturbed him more than he already was to do so, and he didn’t need any extra aggravation just now. Not only had his vanished beard and body hair not come back in after a whole month, he was now losing muscle tone and upper body bulk along with his weight.

It hadn't been all that noticeable at first, but then had become progressively more pronounced over the past few weeks. His arms, shoulders and chest were definitely thinner. None of his shirts would fit quite right any longer and even seemed a little long in the arm when he wore a long sleeved one.

None of the specialists he had visited could find even one thing wrong with him physically. Every test he'd undergone had come back negative and no one had even attempted to speculate beyond what they had already offered.

He had, at Dr. Benjamin's urging, even gone through several sessions with a psychiatrist, but Conrad had considered that a total waste of time and money after only two visits and had cut that avenue off during his third.

What was happening to him was not the result of hysteria, as the well-meaning shrink had suggested.

There had to be a simple explanation underlying the entire situation, something he had recently been exposed to that was out of the ordinary, but not glaringly so.

Nothing easily came to mind, though, except for playing the field as far as dating went and his acquisition of the mirror.

He had connected the beginnings of his present difficulties with that object, but considered it to be merely coincidence. Besides, he just couldn't bear the idea of getting rid of the lovely piece, even if it were the root cause of all that plagued him now.

He couldn't understand his unusual attachment to the thing, but every time he tried to rationalize it to himself, he found his mind wandering along some other track while he stared into the depths of silvered glass in front of him.

Well, at least he didn't feel ill or even a little weak. Not even the difference he could see for himself felt all that different to him. He felt good, energetic and healthy as he'd ever been in his life. Things just didn't make sense, but he supposed that he'd get back to normal in due time.

Besides, he consoled himself, shaving had always been a time consuming hassle and he really didn't miss his twice, sometimes three times, daily ordeal with a razor and didn't look forward to experiencing it again.

He was beginning to take the new-found smoothness and lack of body hair for granted, and as something that was quite natural too. In fact, the thought of having all that pelt he had once been so proud of growing on his body had started to disgust him.

None of the girls he went out with seemed to mind at all, which was fine with him, and he secretly thought his last date had even been a trifle envious of his skin.

His overall attitude about the thing had bothered him at first, especially when he furtively began using the skin cremes and other oils on himself.

But then, who in the world could fault a guy for taking care of himself?

He gave up on that train of thought as useless, allowing his mind to wander over more pleasant things, like petite Ramona, who had finally talked him into going out to dinner.

His image in the mirror flickered out, to be replaced with the fantasized, nude figure of that particular girl. The image flickered again, to be replaced by a disturbing combination of hers and his own.

That image was himself, was male, but it was still shorter by a good foot or so than he had been, with neatly proportioned hands and feet, looking more like a girl's body rather than a man's or boy's.

Then, it flicked back to his own image. The entire sequence had taken up less than a second.

All Conrad was aware of during and immediately after it was a vague feeling of unease that faded into nothing before he was fully conscious of its being there at all.

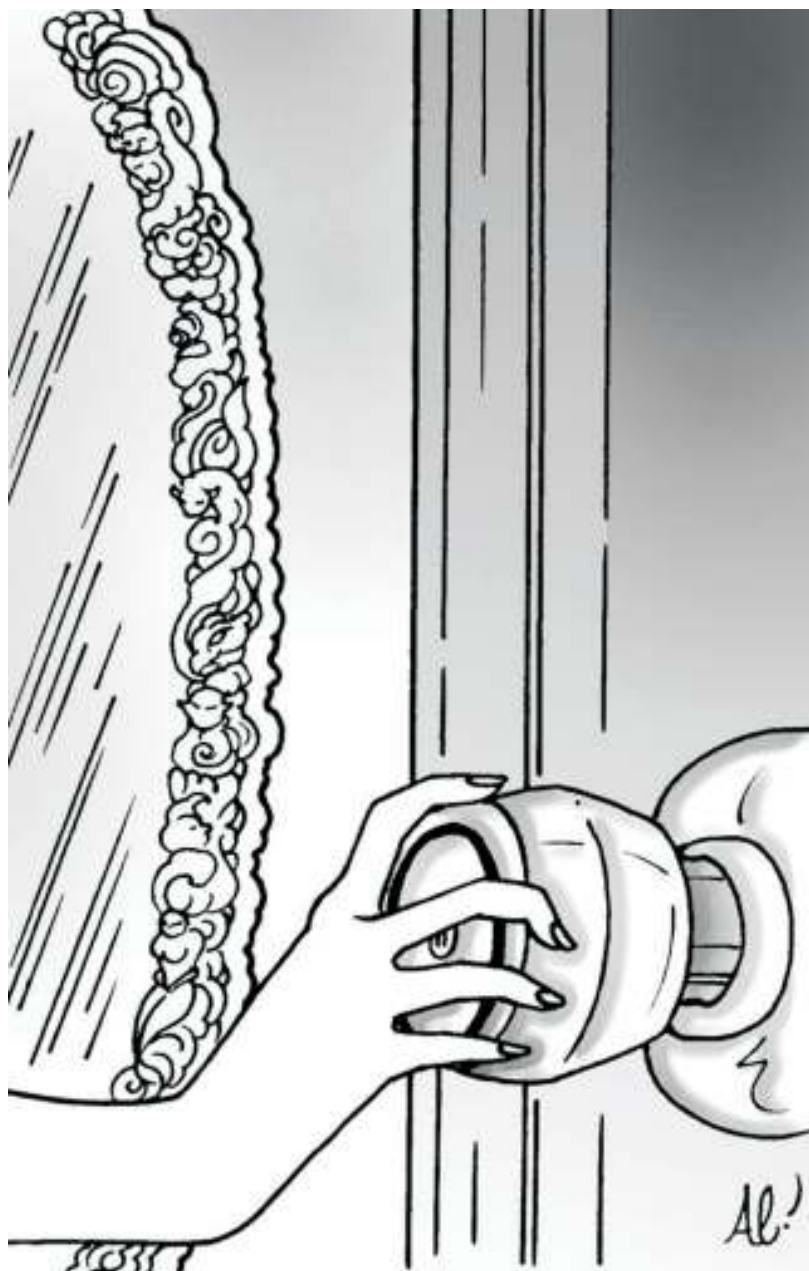
He'd gone ahead with his plans for the evening, made it home with Ramona, then awakened the next day to discover another mind-boggling shock.

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Ramona had arisen halfway through the night, showered, kissed him good night and then left, which had turned out to be a good thing.

Conrad gradually pulled himself up from the depths of one of the soundest sleeps he had experienced in a long time to the disquieting sense that something was not only different, but very, very wrong.

For starters, everything around him, including the bed, seemed to have grown larger, or else he had grown shorter.





“Ridiculous!” he chided himself.

Still fuzzy with sleep, he sat up, swinging his legs over the edge of the bed only to find that his feet hit the carpeted floor a few inches later than he was accustomed to, and he nearly tumbled face first to the floor.

Regaining his balance and still in his sleep induced daze, he walked to the bathroom and reached for the door knob without looking, just as he had been doing for the last three years of living in the place. Only his hand missed the knob and the sudden pain of unexpectedly barked knuckles caused him to swear out loud.

A look showed that his hand was several inches below the door knob and the door itself seemed to be both taller and wider. A look at his smarting hand really woke him up.

It wasn't his hand, at least not the slightly rough knuckled, long-fingered hand he had grown used to seeing and using. It was considerably smaller and smoother than it should be, even delicate with evenly oval nails and rounded cuticles, and was attached to a slim, equally small looking wrist leading to a skinny forearm and upper arm.

That search led further, to other more unpleasant discoveries.

What muscle definition he had retained was pretty well gone through the upper body area while his hips were broader in proportion to the rest of him than they had ever been before. His narrowed waist, much higher than normal, and thinner rib cage may have contributed to the glaring difference, but his lower body was definitely larger in relation to the rest of him than it had been when he had fallen asleep the night before.

And his hips showed a roundness that was not very masculine at all, while curving down to a long sweep of thigh, smooth little knees, gently rounded calves, slim ankles, and feet as delicate and well-shaped as his hands. Very nice hands and feet, if one were a woman, quite feminine in appearance, not at all boyish or mannish, and the rest of his frame seemed to have gone the same way.

A long look in his mirror gave the whole, unhappily clear picture. He lacked the overt curves and softness of a woman, but looked more like a girl just beginning to blossom than either a man or a boy. He was still male, but estimated his height at somewhere around five foot even, if he were lucky.

His Adam's apple, always slight, had vanished entirely and the corresponding reduction in the size of his face had given his features an even fineness bordering on feminine delicacy.

Realizing that his general build was now quite similar to Ramona's, he felt a rising wave of panic and a furious denial of what he was seeing began to engulf him.

The size of everything in relation to himself was daunting by itself, but to be confronted with all the other differences at the same time was too much for his mind to handle and he teetered with nausea.

Conrad opened his mouth to scream in terror...

Then, everything went back into focus and he felt absolutely, wonderfully, normal again. It was as if a switch had been thrown in his head to cut off the flood of alien perceptions.

Breathing a huge sigh of relief, he wiped a sheen of sweat from his face. The only problem remaining was that he had not returned to what he had once considered normal. It was just as if he had always been this way, knew how to maneuver through life at his new height and weight without conscious thought, like he had been doing it for all of his twenty-five years the same way.

Only he very clearly remembered and knew in his mind that he hadn't.

Use of the tape measure fastened hastily to the woodwork frame of the bathroom door confirmed his earlier estimation. He had gone from six foot and one half inch down to exactly five foot in a single night, and with a compensating loss and redistribution of body hair, some of which had passed to his scalp. Still dark brown, his hair was now quite a bit thicker than it had been, and now reached down to tickle his narrowed shoulders in soft, shining waves.

It was as if he and Ramona had traded body characteristics, he thought in sudden horror, reaching for a phone to give her a call and check.

That didn't go far.

Julie hadn't changed at all after he had gone out with her and he had awakened without body hair and with skin as soft and silky smooth as hers. So Ramona was very likely the same as she had ever been. He was the only one who had undergone any alteration.

There was yet another, obvious, problem that hadn't occurred to him until he settled down enough to consider getting dressed. None of

his clothes would even come close to fitting him any longer unless they, too, had been changed.

A quick check in his closet showed no such luck. He didn't even need to hold any of his clothing up to his new body to see that it would now engulf him totally. His clothes were far too large and walk right out of his mammoth shoes!

A further search through the closet turned up some things that would probably fit, but the idea of wearing them didn't exactly thrill him. In their time together, Marcia had left more than a few of her things at his place, and with the bitterness of their breakup, she had never come back to retrieve them nor even asked to have them returned.

To Conrad's credit, he had been meaning to pack them all up and send them to her, but had never seemed to get around to it, what with one thing or another.

They would fit him, probably, but Marcia was a very feminine woman, and her taste in clothing reflected that femininity, even to the extent of her casual clothes and shoes.

Going through the things was unpleasant enough, mainly because of the memories dredged up by many of them, but also because Conrad knew that he would, at least until he was able to get something else, soon be wearing some of them just to avoid being naked in case anyone should come to the door.

In his present state, that possibility was worrisome too, along with just how he was going to manage convincing anyone that he was who he was with the alterations in both size and appearance.

Sighing, he started with a pair of lime green panties, pulling the flimsy garment up his legs and snugging them against his crotch. They were a little large at hips and bottom, but not by very much and the elastic waistband fit his own waist comfortably.

A pair of thin, white cotton socks went onto his much smaller feet to hug his ankles, which was as far up as they went.

Then came a white nylon top, not quite a t-shirt by the way it was cut, that bore the legend, "99% Bitch" in hot pink, cursive script. That was the least feminine one he was able to find and it fit reasonably well although it was a trifle large on his small frame.

None of the pants possessed a front fly, not even the jeans which were in several colors, none of them blue, but some weren't terribly overt in their femininity other than that one detail.

Conrad opted, reluctantly, for the high-waisted, white linen slacks. They were full at the hips and thighs, with narrow cuffs, and had a back zip. The shirt would cover that well enough for the time being.

Shoes were going to be a problem though...

None of the pairs were even remotely masculine, running from a pair of light, high-heeled sandals to hot pink running shoes, which were the only pair that laced up at all. He ended up with a pair of slip-on canvas deck shoes in an off white shade that managed to stay on his feet in reasonable comfort.

It was something of a shock to discover that Marcia's shoes, which he had always considered small before now, were actually too large for his own feet!

A look at himself in the mirror caused him to nearly rip everything off and just go naked until he could get hold of someone to bring him some male clothing that fit. With the hair and the conservatively plain outfit he had chosen, he looked like a girl of about thirteen.

It was acutely embarrassing and he wouldn't be able to show himself in public this way without needing to answer a lot of questions he had no answers for.

His own I.D. would be unusable now, since he was no longer the same height, weight or much of anything else listed on his driver's license and other picture bearing documents.

What he looked like, in truth, was his own little sister, or worse, daughter...

It was very discouraging to notice that!

After worrying over the clothes he was wearing for a few minutes, the same vertiginous click went off in his head that had calmed him when he had first seen how he had looked and the way everything had seemed larger. And, following that, he no longer worried.

In fact, the clothes he had on were not only comfortable but felt about right for him.

Sitting himself down in the kitchen with a pot of wake-up coffee (at least that requirement hadn't changed!), Conrad carefully thought about the events of the past month.

All the physical changes he had experienced happened after getting that mirror.

The first time had been following his date with Julie, and he recalled fantasizing about her soft, smooth skin just before that date.

Next had been tall, slim Angie, and the following morning he had been thinner.

Then along came petite, voluptuous, Ramona, and he woke up a foot shorter and with proportions that were more girlish than anything else.

And, with hair like a woman's to boot!

Each time, prior to the change, he had experienced an uneasiness vague enough to dismiss as a passing chill and could almost swear that his reflection had flickered, being replaced with first the woman he was thinking about, then with a transposition of both, then back to his own.

That perception had just dawned on him and had come more in a sudden flash than from any effort to recall the incidents.

It sounded crazy, even to him, but the damned mirror had to be the cause of his difficulties!

There was no other connecting circumstance.

Except, Marcia...

Who had made a gift of the obviously valuable antique to him without once admitting she had paid anything substantial for it.

A few minutes later, he was phoning Marcia only to get her answering machine again.

Leaving a short, pungent message and a plea for her to get back to him right away, he hoped she wasn't off on one of her weeks long buying trips.

Unable to just sit and wait for an answering call that could be weeks, if ever, in coming, and not feeling like putting the concentration out it would take to work, he moved back into the bedroom to examine the apparent cause of his problems.

Marcia listened to Conrad on the machine without bothering to pick up the phone. The voice was recognizably his, but higher and not so booming as before. A smaller chest and vocal chords might account for such an alteration in the way he sounded. The new pitch was decidedly girlish and she found herself smiling as she listened to his angry de-

mands dissolve into a breathless plea for her to please get back to him as soon as she was able.

In addition to the different timbre of his voice, he sounded very shaken and confused, which was just fine with her. She planned to let him stew in things as they were for another few days at least.

If the mirror were performing as promised, which it sounded like, he likely wasn't anxious to venture forth into public, so would not come by to see if she were home.

Marcia spent a few very pleasant minutes imagining what changes her gift had worked on him so far and if there would be more before she relented and paid him a "spontaneous" visit.

Once she did that, dear Conrad's life was really going to be something different.

Contemplating the upcoming change of lifestyle she planned for him gave her another hour of pure satisfaction.

Yes, he would undergo some quite radical alterations once she came back into his life!

Nothing on the surface, any surface, of the mirror indicated it was anything more than what it appeared to be, an exquisite example of craftsmanship from the early seventeen hundreds.

Conrad had gone meticulously over every square inch of the thing only to find it unmarred, with the seams so well-crafted and fitted together, that it seemed to be all one uninterrupted piece.

Aside from actually taking the thing apart, which he was very reluctant to even think about, there seemed to be no way at all to discover anything other than what he already knew, or suspected, about it.

He even made an abortive attempt to cover it with a sheet.

At first, the sheet absolutely refused to stay in place, sliding off each time he positioned it.

Then, he just couldn't stand the thought of covering such a beautiful creation with anything at all!

Giving up on that idea, he only hoped that Marcia would call soon and would be able to shed some light on its origin when she did, or at least provide him with somewhere to start looking.

Next, he worked at figuring out what exactly had triggered the changes in himself.

Was it that he had gone out with someone besides Marcia?