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Prisoner of Gender

By Darlette Davis

"Do you know why you are here, Martin?" The rather severe looking, heavily made-up, bob-haired lady, probably in her forties, looked at me intently.

"Yes, I'm going to work for you full-time at yard maintenance and anything else you want done around your estate. I'm happy to be here."

"Indeed, I have no doubt you are. And you are correct, you are here to do exactly as I want you to and it will be full-time, seven days every week. To start with, my name is Manuela Granado, and I'm Ramon Granado's sister. You may call me Madam."

"Yes, Madam." I was suddenly fearful. This woman was going to be a rigid taskmistress and I momentarily trembled in a sudden realization that I must do nothing to cross her, even once.

"Secondly, I have you for three reasons. First, I have observed you working in my yard on the days you have been assigned to me and I like the quickness and thoroughness of your work. Next, you are what I would call a pretty young man, not handsome but pretty. Frankly, I'm not attracted to either men or boys, but pretty boys with possibilities interest me. Finally, Ramon feels sorry for you. The men have been picking on you, he tells me, ever since you've been incarcerated. The way you look, I can see why. So when I suggested that I might have uses for you he jumped at a way of getting rid of what he called an 'innocent troublemaker'.

I reflected on her description of the hellish treatment I had been subjected to in prison where I and other young men, particularly Americanos, were systematically "made love to" by the informal leaders of the convict population and those that could pay them handsomely for their referrals.

"I just want to thank you for taking me away from the situation I have been in, Madam, and I want to help you in any way I can."

"That's a good boy, Martin, but you may have some problems adjusting to what I'll be expecting of you now and later. For now, you'll not be doing as much maintenance outside as you will be working inside my villa. Also for now your immediate superior will not be me, but my maid, who you may be shocked to soon find out is also a mistress of mine. Juanita Velez, who shares my sleeping quarters should be addressed as Señorita Velez.

"Mondays and Fridays you will be doing mostly outside work. The other days you will be occupied at cleaning washing, ironing, dusting, making beds, serving meals, and so forth. On Sundays, which is Juanita's day off, you will be my maid, doing Juanita's job in her absence where I will have an opportunity to closely observe your performance."

"That sounds very nice, Madam."

"Incidentally, during your leisure you may go anywhere on my property, which you know is extensive, but you will restrict yourself to within my walls. The little radio choker locked around your neck will activate if you don't, with dire consequences for you.

"When you're not outside during your leisure, you will occupy your bedroom just off the kitchen, which has a small TV. If I'm not here, you may go anywhere downstairs as long as Juanita is with you. With you, she might be able to practice her skill in my billiards room. Also there is the library where you can help yourself to any book, including ones that teach Spanish, which I expect you to use at all times within three months.

"Now, speaking of Juanita, let's call her so you can meet your new supervisor."

Juanita appeared to be a rather spirited, athletic girl in her twenties, about my age, who proudly wore a crisp, starched maid's uniform, complete with a saucy little cap and tiny apron. Like Madam, she was lavishly made-up and had the same ebony hair, only

hers was loose, straight, and long to where it ended in soft curls slightly below her shoulders.

I stood, and as we shook hands, I realized her goodnatured face, although totally a contrast with Madam's rather stern features, was made-up exactly the same. Narrow eyebrows, consisting entirely of arched black pencil lines, iridescent green eye shadow, a circle of rouge on each cheek, and lips, generously painted a bright carmine. Even her long crimson nails exactly matched Madam's.

As we turned back to face her, Manuela remarked, "Please be seated, Juanita. Martin, you might remain standing, as I would like you to do whenever you are in Juanita's or my presence until one of us permits you to sit down. It will help you in being able to make a quick and cheerful response when we ask anything of you. Well, Juanita, what's your first impression of your very own little criada?"

"Oh, I think he, I mean *she*, will be just marvelous, if she can work as beautifully as she will look," Juanita said excitedly. "I can't wait to bring her to a change. It will be like the days when I was dressing my dolls."

She smiled at Manuela, then turned to beam at me.

Apparently I was in for an adjustment I hadn't planned on. Down Mexico way, there seemed to be a continued resolve to ignore what remained of my manhood. But this would be a progression of sorts, I wryly reflected. Now I would actually be made to look



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like what I had become in the imagination of my oppressors in prison, a reasonable facsimile of a female, though the as-yet-unknown reason, the "possibilities" that "pretty boys" had for Manuela, appeared no longer to be brutally sexual, thank goodness.

When the ladies had seated themselves Manuela said, "Now Martin, you can see that Juanita is a very attractive young lady and you will be working very closely with her. So I should remind you, that if you so much as lay a finger on her person, in fact if you ever disobey her, in fact if you ever respond to any suggestion or order she gives you with less than your prettiest smile, the very next day you will be back with Ramon for the rest of your sentence. Is that crystal clear?"

"Yes, Madam, it is crystal clear."

"Now," Manuela continued, "as you have already surmised from Juanita's observation about doll playing, you will live as a young girl with us. Juanita prefers that she be the only person in my villa to wear my maid's uniform, and I agree. Also she would like you to appear as a young criada in training. In other words you might in time be allowed to appear to grow up and earn the right to wear a professional maid's uniform.

"So, with the exception of makeup which you will learn to apply to duplicate that of Juanita and myself, you will be dressed as a pre-teen. All your clothes have been selected and you and Juanita will have them fitted on you tomorrow. "But first thing, before your shopping, you will have some pampered time where you have probably never been," Manuela continued, almost breathlessly, as if conferring a precious gift, "namely a real ladies' beauty salon. Thank goodness, your hair is already long although I will want it to grow much longer. There you will have it dyed a bright blonde.

"After that, it will be cut to give you little girl bangs and you will be instructed how to braid it on each side, which is the way you will henceforth wear it, even when you do yard work. Although, for that, we'll see you have a flowery kerchief and a cute little ribboned hat so that it will stay neat and clean.

"But enough for the details. I will leave the rest to Juanita."

"Thank you, Madam," I spoke up, strangely roused at her plans for me, "but before you send me away, I just want to say that although both you and Señorita Velez are very attractive ladies, I respect you too much to ever attempt to take advantage of you. Also I am not crazy. I would much rather be made to look and work as any kind of woman you want me to be than be regularly humiliated by a bunch of sex-starved convicts. I will be very happy to have blonde hair and learn to wear it in braids."

"All right, I think we'll get along, dear. And maybe someday you'll really be as happy as you profess you will be once you've gotten used to seeing yourself day after day made-up and wearing your little girl dresses. Also, I assure you," she added enigmatically, "you'll have opportunities in the future to test your

positive expectation to prefer being any kind of woman I require you to be.

"Now, you may leave. Juanita will show you your room and get you started on your training and preparations for tomorrow. I won't be seeing you tonight as I have another engagement. But do get a good night's sleep. You have a big day tomorrow when you will be saying goodbye to Martin and meeting your new self, 'Maria Martinez'. See, you keep your name in a slightly different form," she added with a little laugh, to which I responded with what I hoped sounded like an appreciative titter.

After leaving Manuela, Juanita took me to my tiny room between the kitchen and a small bathroom where she showed me the contents of a wall cabinet. It was already stocked with toiletries I would need. Plus lipstick, rouge, eyeliner and other cosmetics I would learn to use to mimic the rich makeup style of the ladies. Juanita singled out the safety razor, suggesting that in addition to my face, I should use it weekly on my arms, legs and underarms.

In my closet I saw a couple of my work uniforms from prison as well as a dress which Juanita removed to lay on the bed.

"Maria, those uniforms will be for you to use outside but the dress is an old one of Madam's that you probably won't wear after tomorrow. It's just for tonight and wearing in town while shopping. You might take off your shirt and pants right now and put it on.

Unfortunately we don't have shoes for you yet so temporarily you can use these pool sandals that have some stretch. Why don't you change right now? Then I think the best thing would be for you to sit on the floor next to this chair, which will be as good a place as any for me to remove your eyebrows."

"Won't I look funny without eyebrows and won't it hurt a lot?" I was suddenly concerned.

"Oh no, silly, I just pluck them out one by one. It might startle you at first, and hurt a little, but I'm quick and it won't take long. Afterwards you won't feel any discomfort. We ladies do it all the time, as you will learn to do.

"Then as for artificial eyebrows, yours will look just like mine. You just have to remember to pencil them in every day and redo them whenever you have to wash your face. I'll draw them on right after I'm through plucking you, then I will show you how we want you to do the rest of your face. After a week or two it will become a habit and you will be doing it like an experienced señorita without even having to think about it."

The next half hour or so passed with Juanita eliminating my eyebrows, then sitting me in front of the mirror so I could watch how she was putting on my new face. During this time, while frequently interrupting me to give me makeup tips, she wanted to hear how I had become imprisoned.

"It was so quick and simple I didn't know what was happening to me, Señorita Velez," I began. "I was

hitch-hiking from Mazatlan after bumming around there for a few weeks when I caught a ride in a car driven by a guy who smiled at me and just said, `No ingles. San Diego mañana'. Then without another word he had me take the driver's seat and we started out. He was fast asleep before we were five minutes out of town, going north up the coastal highway.

"Four or five hours later he had just woken up and we were on the outskirts of Culiacan where we got flagged down for running a stop sign or a red light, I didn't even see which.

"Anyway, my 'passenser' sat bolt upright, and as the Federales pulled ahead to block us, he was out the side door, racing across three lanes of traffic. The cops didn't even bother to chase him. They were interested in the driver.

"As you might guess, the guy's flight wet their appetite and the subsequent search yielded a couple of plastic bags full of white powder and that was it. Despite the best efforts of my family in the States, I was eventually moved from jail to what they called "El Palacio" where the bars clanged behind me and I was looking at twenty years. Later I was told more drugs move through Culiacan than any other city in Mexico. As you can see, some don't."

"Oh, how terrible, Maria, and you just an innocent traveler. But I hear you have not been there too long, less than a year, Madam said. She also told me she had requested you and I can see why. You are a good worker and she liked your looks. You are going to make a lovely criada, Maria, and you should pray that you can learn to enjoy it."

"But in the meantime, how can they trust you? In addition to being homesick, right now you must just hate being turned into a little girl, so you must be thinking about escaping every moment."

"Except for two reasons, Señorita Velez," I explained. "One is the paper I signed in front of Chief Granado that says I requested this assignment of my own free will, there was no coercion of an kind, and that any misbehavior or any objection on my part will mean an immediate return to prison.

"Then there is this permanent fixture locked around my neck. It tells where I am at all times and if I leave the property without Madam's having notified the authorities, I will be picked up in five minutes and be back at `El Palacio'. They know I am afraid of that to take any chance on freedom or crying about being changed into a maid.

"What I couldn't figure out was why the choker. The standard radio attachment is sort of bulky and goes around the ankle."

"Oh, I can tell you about that," offered Juanita. "It is no secret and Madam is rather proud of it. She had asked her brother if a necklace-type alarm was available and he told her it was but it was very expensive.

"However, she wanted it because of her plans to turn you into a criada for two reasons. It wouldn't make it obvious to anyone that you were a convict and she felt we could work around it in dressing you, either covering it with a scarf or high-necked blouse, or blend it in with other neck pieces or beads. Actually it is not unattractive by itself, as it just looks like an over-size copper or brass choker.

"By the way, you heard what Madam said about your learning Spanish as soon as possible. I would love to help you. We can spend an hour or more on it every night if you like."

"There, you're all made up and the reason I'm combing your hair is so it looks like how a young lady would wear it. Now tell me what you see."

"I see Maria Martinez."

"And what do you think of Maria Martinez?"

"I think I would like to ask her on a date. Do you think she will like me?"

Juanita laughed.

"Oh, I think she might as long as you don't tell her you are in the pen for twenty years. But then again you wouldn't be bothering her a lot so she can concentrate on becoming a professional in her new career. Also criada trainees working seven days a week don't have a lot of time for romance. Oh, I'm so sorry, Maria. That doesn't sound funny at all and I meant it to be."

"That's all right, Señorita Velez. If a year ago people had told me being forced to wear dresses would make me feel like I'd gone to Heaven, I would have thought them out of their minds. But now, trying to be a per-

fect criada will be much better than being a boy toy in prison. And although I will have to do a lot of praying to look forward to painting my face and donning a dress every morning, I don't think it will be all that difficult working for you."

"That's nice to hear, Maria. And how easy it's going to be to call you by your new name, the way you look all dolled up! Now let's take a few minutes to go over your maid duties. You know a lot more about what you'll be doing around the yard than I do, so we won't go into that."

"Basically I have all the contact with Madam during the week. I help bathe her, sometimes help dress her, I do all her personal errands and I prepare her lunch and dinner, of course, now with your help. Also because you are here I will be taking courses so that I can become her private secretary and travel companion.

"I won't go into the duties you will perform on your own like making beds and washing until I join you in doing them the first three or four times.

"Except when we're on a break, you will stay with me whenever I'm working and you're not somewhere else doing your chores.

"The only thing I ask you to do for me right now is learn as soon as possible how to make breakfast so I can bring it to Madam in her quarters, then sit down here to eat it with you in the kitchen. You'll get up every morning at six and I will see you around seven when you will have breakfast ready. In a short time I

will show you menus for the week and teach you their preparation.

"Now let's go prepare supper for ourselves and afterwards, if you'd like, I will give you your first lesson en espanol."

* * * *

The next morning I was up at 5:30 so I would be ready to meet Juanita promptly to make breakfast. I showered, shaved, and dressed, then dared to pencil on my eyebrows, I thought adequately, after a couple of tries. My remaining time was occupied trying to style my hair like Juanita had, with barely adequate results.

Following breakfast, Juanita retrieved Madam's tray, then had me do the dishes and mop the kitchen floor. Next she sat me down for my makeup application.

"Now this is the last time I'm going to do this for you, Maria. From now on you will do it yourself, with my supervision of course, until you get the hang of it."

An hour later we were in Juanita's cute little late model car, a gift from Madam. It was not just for personal use, she told me, as she also used it to perform Madam's errands, drive her about town and also do the twice-weekly grocery shopping.

As we entered Culiacan, she reviewed our schedule for the morning.