

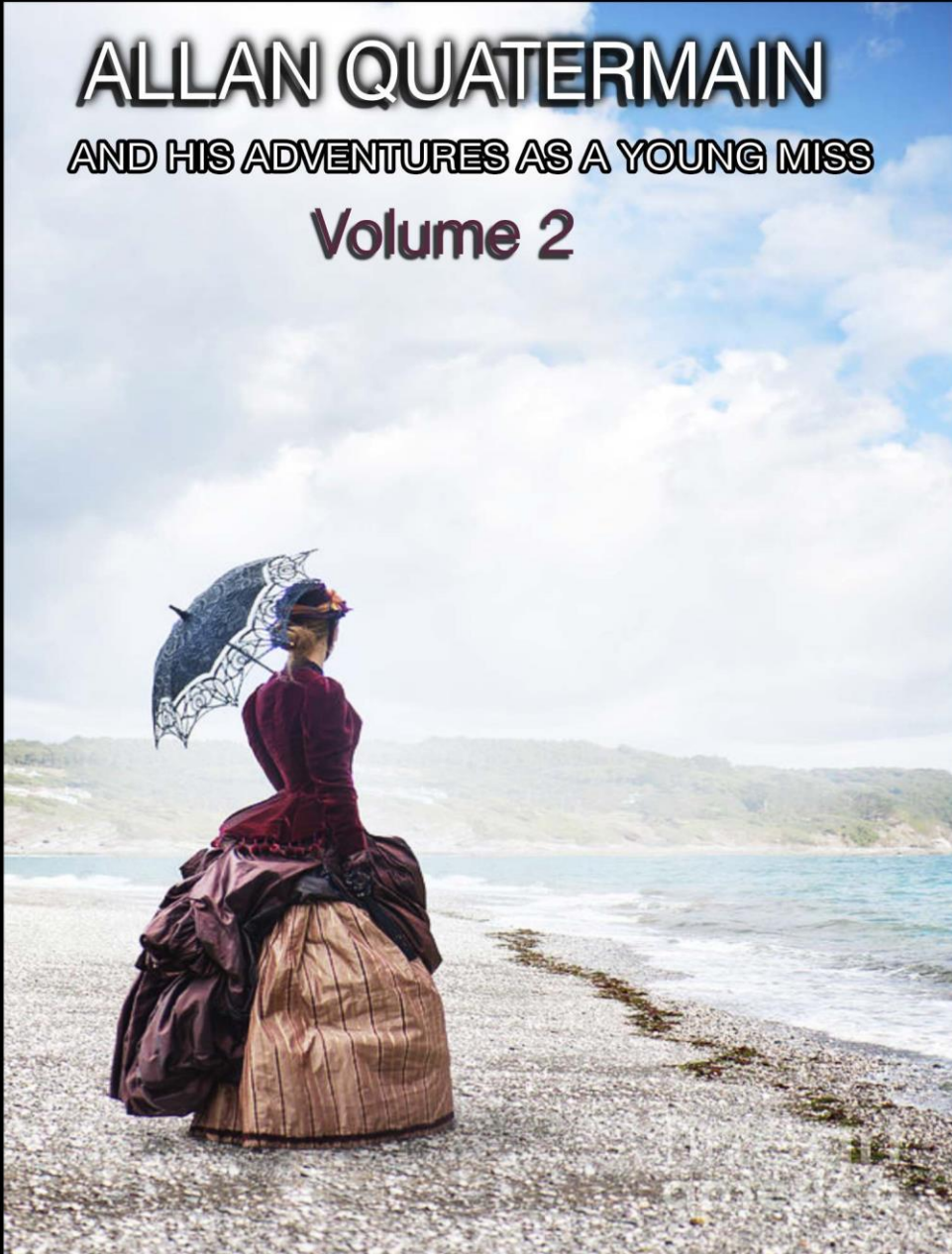
# bare essentials

when you're looking for a quickie

## ALLAN QUATERMAIN

AND HIS ADVENTURES AS A YOUNG MISS

Volume 2



t.g. cooper

The Lost City. It almost seemed to hover in the mists, perched on a plateau of red rock. Allan Quartermain, my longtime friend who had recently found himself reshaped into a young woman, stood close by my side in his dress, adjusting his bonnet so as to shield his fair skin from the harsh sun. We had journeyed some days through tactless jungle, braving many dangers, all in the hopes that the witches who dwelled within this famed city could restore Allan to manhood. And yet, the time I had spent with this young woman, the dangers we'd faced together had warmed my heart, and I now realized I loved him— her.

"Let's go," I said, taking the lead as was natural for a man to do.

"Wait!" Allan said. I turned to see him with his hands to his cheeks, his eyes wide with feminine worry. His dove grey gloves, once pristine, had grown soiled during our journey, as has his dress, despite his best efforts. I even saw a most unladylike gleam of sweat on his smooth face. Yet, I felt my stomach flip, my heart race at the sight of this lovely young lady- dirty. I can't explain it, but it thrilled me to see her in disarray, a pretty smudge of dirt on his cheek, streaking down her slender neck.

"What is it?" I said, resisting the urge to add, *darling*.

"Maybe we should wait until night falls? Sneak in? We do not know how we might be greeted by the natives."

"Oh, Alan," I said, my heart once going out to him. He'd once been the boldest of explorers and hunters, traversing the most dangerous lands without the slightest fear, and to see him burdened with a woman's silly fears made me love him all the more. "I will protect you."

He flushed and looked away at my manly offer of protection. "I — I know you will protect me," he said softly. "But who will protect you?" That feminine worry in his eyes intensified. "I would— I can't bear the thought of losing you."

"I'll be careful," I promised, trying to ease his woman's heart. "But we came to ask for their help, and we can't very well do that if we hide from them, now can we?"

"Oh," Allan said, biting his lip, thinking, then he shrugged prettily and said, "I suppose I am just being a silly goose!"

"Yes, you are," I said, "but you can't be too hard on yourself. You are a woman now, and it is your nature."

“Yes,” Allan agreed, once more fixing his bonnet. “I suppose you are right. Shall we?”

We began to make our way across the wide, grassy plane that divided the jungle from the plateau. As soon as we left the shadowy jungle, the blazing sun beat down on us most horribly, and we both soon found ourselves being quite drained of energy and will by the infernal heat of the African sun. It is said that only mad dogs and Englishmen go out in the noon day sun, and we were proving the old adage true in every way as we struggled along beneath the deadly rays of that great, blazing orb.

“We should have waited for the sun to set,” Allan said.

His voice had taken on that harsh, critical edge females are capable of, and which is do distasteful to a man. “Don’t be ridiculous,” I mumbled, knowing better.

“Ridiculous?” Allan snapped. “We’ll be lucky if we don’t faint from heat exhaustion!” He plucked at the skirt of his dress. “Do you know how many layers of absurd feminine underthings I am wearing beneath this dress?”

“Allan, please, remember you are a lady!”

“I’m NOT a lady,” he shrieked. “That’s the problem!”

*This again?* I rolled my eyes, thinking it safe since he walked behind me, but he had gained that mysterious feminine power to somehow sense my facial contortions without even seeing my face, and he hissed, “Don’t you roll your eyes at me! Don’t you dare!”

“Allan,” I finally snapped, turning to face him. “Enough! You are behaving like a hysterical girl, and I am not going to tolerate your sass, young lady. Now, shut up!”

Allan’s mouth dropped open, and he lifted his skirts, turned and headed off to the right, his nose in the air.

“Oh, come on,” I said. “You know you can’t go off on your own.”

Allan didn’t answer. He just kept marching off, nose in the air. I groaned, as his stubborn fit had just sent my heart flipping once more, and I looked at the curls spilling out of the back of his bonnet, his slender waist, the way his bustle rose above that little waist, and I felt all the glory and pain of love wash over me, somehow mixed with the deepest anger and stubbornness. I knew I should go after him, but my ego got the best of me, and I was determined to win this war of wills, just as I had won our previous skirmish when he had assured me he would never wear a dress.

“Get back here, NOW!” I bellowed.

Allan just kept marching, ignoring me.

“Ha! You’ll come running back to me in no time! You ridiculous woman!”

“Hmmmppp.” I heard Allan snort. He was getting quite far away now, and I started to fear he meant to really test me.

I crossed my arms over my chest. “I won’t come after you!” I shouted. “Turn around right this instant! I’m going to the river!” I started walking toward the river, the plateau beyond. Allan refused to answer or look back, but just kept marching along, getting smaller and smaller. The tall, yellow and pale green grass came all the way up to his hips, and seeing him so small, with those narrow little shoulders, I began to worry, and yet, he had chosen to be a stubborn woman, and maybe he needed to learn a lesson!

At which point, six figures rose from the grass in a circle surrounding Allan. I saw him start, turn, seeing he was surrounded, and then he faced back toward me and screamed, “Help!”

“Quartermain is ours,” a man called out in a Dutch accent. “Hans Grubernotts sends his regards!”

“Stay away!” Allan screamed, turning in a circle as the men began to close in on him. I started to run through the grass. Curse me for letting my ego get the better of me! I never should have let Allan get so far away from me! I felt a pang of terror and pain at the thought that I had failed him. He’d trusted me to protect him, and I had let him walk himself right into danger!

The Dutchmen closed in, closer and closer. I heard them laugh at Allan’s terrified screams, and my rage burned even hotter, as did the sick feeling that I was too late, too slow. I was more than fifty yards away still, while they closed in, getting nearer and nearer my helpless little friend!

One of the men grabbed at Allan, and Allan shrieked and turned to run from him, running right into the arms of another of his assailants, who lifted Allan off his feet and picked him up like a sack of potatoes, throwing Allan over his shoulder. Allan kicked and struggled powerlessly in the big man’s arms, and two of the others turned toward

me, raising their rifles as the group started to move away, carrying Allan away, back toward the jungle.

“Come closer, and you die!” One of the men called, sighting down the barrel of his rifle. Of course, I had no choice. I would have to drop low and move ahead through the grass, hoping for the best but knowing I was likely to die trying to protect Allan. As much as the little female had annoyed me, I was yet the man, and it was my responsibility to protect women and children both from outside threats and from their own weakness. I should never have allowed Allan’s temperamental hissy fit to dictate my actions, and now he and I would both pay dearly.

Then, I heard a sputtering and clanking almost as if from a train, and then a whistle, like a steam whistle. “What the devil?” I thought, looking up and around to see the most astounding thing I have ever laid on; flying though the sky, what looked quite like a steam engine, in fact, but with two whirling propellers affixed to either end. A great plume of white smoke rose from a chimney set in the middle. Scientist had proven that manmade flight was impossible, and so my eyes stared in wonder at this strange contraption, as I thought it must be evidence of the witches’ magic! So, these people did have powers!

The machine moved across the sky, casting a dark shadow across the grass like a floating cloud. The Dutchmen looked up, startled, and I could see them grow unnerved. They began to hurry, running toward the edge of the jungle.

As the Flying Machine moved closer and began to descend, I began to feel a sense of dread myself as I could now see turrets affixed to the bottom to which had been mounted what looked like gatling guns. There was also a man with a spyglass peering out of a window. The guns swiveled and a began to bark, spitting iron at the men farther away from Allan, cutting them down, sending their bodies spinning through the air, streams of blood spiraling around them. The man carrying Allan was getting nearer and nearer the jungle, and the guns turned to him, and I shouted, “No! No!” The guns spat, but this time instead of a hail of bullets, there was a single discharge, and the man carrying Allan dropped, vanishing into the grass along with Allan.

I stared, not breathing, my heart stopped, and then I saw, first his bonnet, and then the rest of Allan rise unsteadily from the swaying grasses. Allan saw me and began to

run toward me, his chest bouncing, one hand on his bonnet, the other out to his side, a look of terror on his pretty face.

I began running toward Allan now, determined to shield him from any bullets that might come spitting out of that terrible machine. We ran through the grass, each of us glancing up at the flying contraption as it dropped lower and lower, came closer and closer, and then Allan reached me, throwing himself into my arms. I hugged him tight, feeling his soft body against mine, and I turned him away from the machine, so my back faced the guns and would absorb their deadly emissions.

“If we are attacked, if I should fall,” I said, meeting Allan’s eyes. “You must run! Run as fast as you can back to the jungle!”

“No! Don’t even say it!” Allan cried, his eyes filling with tears.

“Promise me!” I said, my voice cracking. “Promise you will run!”

“Okay,” Allan said, weeping. “Yes. Oh, Henry, I am so sorry for...”

“Never mind all that,” I said, as a great wind, stirred up by the machine’s propellers, began to wash over us, making the grass around us flow like water. “If this is our last moment together, let me say something I have been longing to say for days now.”

“Yes?” Allan said, batting those long, curly lashes of his.

“I...”

“YOU!” A deep voice bellowed from the flying machine. “Yes, YOU! Stand still!”

I heard rattling and imagined the gatling gun rotating, taking aim. Damn. The moment was lost. I looked down into Allan’s pretty face, knowing there was no more time for words. “Run!” I said. “Fly!”

“Wait,” Allan said, looking past me. “Hold on!”

“Woman!” I shouted, annoyed once more by his infernal, feminine wavering.

“Would you listen to me for once? I am trying to save your life!”

“Look,” Allan said, pointing. “Look!”

I turned and looked. The rattling machinery I had heard was not a gun, but the sound of a metal ladder being lowered toward the ground.

“You want a ride?” The man leaning out of the window shouted into an odd, steam powered megaphone that gave him a voice like thunder. “We’re going to Ergosium.” To my surprise, he spoke with a proper, English accent.

“A ride?”

Looking over the man, I saw he looked quite like an Englishman, with neatly trimmed hair and a short beard, his look matching his accent.

Allan edged out of my arms and marched toward the Flying Machine, his hands on his bonnet to keep it from blowing off in the wind from the machine.

“Allan!” I called.

“I am tired, hot, and these shoes are killing my feet,” Allan called back over his shoulder. “Feel free to walk if you want. I will take my chances!”

*Shoes? He was making decisions based on his shoes? Women!* I had no choice. I hurried along and joined Allan, grabbing the ladder, holding tight as it rose, lifting us up and into the bowels of the machine.

## Chapter 2

“Captain Plantagenet,” a mustached man wearing goggles and a leather cap said, reaching his hand out toward me. I met his strong, manly grip, sizing him up. Once he’d shaken my hand, he turned to Allan, who out of habit reached out his own tiny little hand, expecting to shake. Instead, Plantagenet took his hand and kissed it, making a small bow. “Young lady,” he said. “You are a vision of loveliness.”

Allan’s embarrassment and shock manifested itself in the most alluring, rosy blush in his pale cheeks. He had not grown accustomed to being treated as a woman. He recovered himself, glancing ruefully at me, but seemed at a loss for words, his eyes wide as he tried to figure out how to answer this gentlemanly welcome.

“She’s a bit shy,” I said, “and quite ruffled from our journey.”

“I can imagine!” Plantagenet shouted. I supposed hours spent toiling on this steam powered wonder had left him in the habit of talking loudly at all times. “The jungle is no place for a delicate young woman! It must have been terribly frightful for her!”

“Indeed,” I said, deciding to have a bit of fun. “She was born for the drawing room, tea parties and china painting. “

“Um, pardon.... ?” Allan said, and I delighted in his annoyance.

Plantagenet spoke directly to me, though. Having made his pleasantries with my pretty little friend, he no longer regarded him at all, thinking him just another woman out of her element. “Come,” he said to me. “Let’s have a drink. Scotch?”

“I am a bit parched!”

“Miss Waverly, would you attend to the lady’s needs?” Plantagenet said as he led me to the Captain’s Quarters.

I glanced back at Allan, seeing him quite vexed to be sidelined with the ladies while the men drank and talked business, but I just shrugged and grinned, conveying, “It’s the way of the world, old boy!”

Something in Allan’s eyes told me he meant to make me pay for my callousness, but at the moment I thought only of scotch and a good honest talk with another man. I had suffered quite enough with Allan and his feminine emotional outbursts, and I looked forward to a little break, now that I knew him to be safe and cared for, though not in the



manner he preferred! I rather suspected he was about to be treated to some tea and gossip. Well, it served him right! Perhaps he would start appreciating me a little more once he was subjected to the company of the fairer sex for a time.

Plantagenet poured liberally, handing me a rocks glass filled near to the brim with what turned out to be a very serviceable scotch. "Quite good," I said after taking a sip. "What is this?"

"We make it ourselves right in Ergosium," he said. "Ergosium is an entirely self-supporting city. We grow our own food, make our own whiskey, even produce our own steam power!"

"I thought it was a native city run by witches!" I admitted, confounded.

"Our science is so advanced it looks like witchcraft even to modern man of Europe."

"But how?"

"Professor Killingsworth," Plantagenet said.

"Killingsworth?" I said, barely managing to keep from spitting my whiskey out at the name. "Wasn't there some sort of scandal? People said he was mad."

"I wouldn't know of anything like that," Plantagenet said. "All I know is that he has created a futuristic city of wonder, right here in Ergosium, but do not take my word for it. We will land soon, and you may ask yourself if what you see is the work of a madman, or a genius!"

The two were not, in my experience, mutually exclusive, but I chose to err on the side of discretion and instead took another sip of scotch. "If this scotch is any indication, he is a genius, indeed," I said. "Are those cigars I see in the cabinet?"

Plantagenet grinned. "A man after my own heart. But, we are soon to land. I promise you this. We will find an hour after dinner, and you may sample our leaf."

"I look forward to it."

"To science, and the progress of man," Plantagenet said, reaching his glass toward mine."

"To science and progress," answered, clinking my glass with his.

Once we landed, I made my way back to the lounge area where I found Allan looking, as I expected, quite strained as he struggled to feign interest in the feminine chatter of his companion. "Having fun, ladies?" I said, smirking.

“Ever so much,” Miss Waverly gushed. “Now, I must take this dear girl to get herself refreshed!”

Allan met my eyes, and I could the pleading in them: save me! But, we were both quite in need of refreshing after days in the jungle, so instead I offered a jovial laugh and said, “You’ll be fine, won’t you, my dear? Miss Waverly seems quite a delightful companion.”

Allan frowned at me, then managed to plaster a smile onto his face. “Of course.”

“You will be quite safe,” Plantagenet said, mistaking Allan’s reluctance to be separated from me, or at least not entirely understanding it. In his reduce form, no doubt Allan was a little frightened to be separated from the man he relied on to protect him.

“You girls can talk about the latest fashions or whatever else occupies your pretty little heads!” I shouted.

“We will all gather together for dinner,” Captain Plantagenet said. “In just a few hours.”

“Come,” Miss Waverly said, taking Allan’s arm in her own. “Let’s go.”

Allan went with her, glancing back over his shoulder at me as they moved away. I wasn’t sure what to make of the look he gave me— it seemed resigned and yet annoyed.

The next hour was a blur. The city proved to be a sparkling modern marvel. We stood on a road that moved of its own, whisking us through the city. I noticed many natives there, all of them radiating happiness and joy such as I had never seen in my life in any nation, and the British and other foreign citizens likewise seemed the most pleasant and gregarious people in all the continent. Everyone wore the same clothes. The men wore loose fitting cotton shirts and baggy, cotton pants, with slipper like shoes on their feet. The women wore a variation of an Indian sari, with one shoulder left bare, the dress clinging tightly to their figures, the skirt whipping along the ground.

Both outfits struck me as frightfully casual and almost scandalous, but Plantagenet explained that Killingsworth considered the comfort of his citizens paramount, so that everything from their clothes to their diets to the carefully regulated temperatures in the buildings was managed to make everyone feel happy and at ease at all times.

Soon, I found myself in a marble tub, scrubbing crusty days of dirt from my tired limbs. I couldn't help but let my thoughts drift to Allan, and I imagined him in his own tub, suds clinging to those heavy, round breasts as he lifted a leg and ran his soft hands along his shapely calf, closing his eyes and licking his plump, red lips as—

Blast! Once more, I had to force myself to stop fantasizing over the swellings and shadowy places of my friend's new body! Once those visions had entered my mind, it was a constant battle to keep them away, I must confess I imagined him getting out of the tub, soapy water sluicing down his back, dripping from his firm behind...

After I had toweled myself off, I found clothes in the manner worn by the locals waiting for me. I donned the loose cotton shirt and pants, the shoes, and I found that these clothes were, indeed, remarkably comfortable! Of course, I immediately began to wonder if Allan had been made to wear the sari the other women wore, I felt quite apprehensive of how my body might react to the sight of his bare shoulder!

I did not have to wait long. A servant came and led me to a sumptuous dining room, where I was told we would be dining with Killingsworth himself! Soon enough, I saw a gorgeous woman enter the room wearing a pink and silver sari. I looked over her appreciatively, admiring the way the fabric clung to her full breasts, and flowed so prettily from her wide, swaying hips. It wasn't until she was nearly at my table and spoke that I realized this stunning woman as none other than Alan Quartermain! "Stop staring at me," he whispered.

"Allan!" His hair had been tied off to one side, and his face painted much more dramatically than typical for an English lass. He had paints on his eyelids, his lips and cheeks that had transformed him from a lovely looking girl to an exotic and alluring woman! Diamond earrings sparkled in his tiny ears, and bracelets flashed on his slender wrists.

As I had feared, the sight of his small, round shoulder, and his bare, slender little arm filled me with manly desire of the basest kind, which I immediately concentrated on containing lest I embarrass both of us. "You're... my God, you're gorgeous!" I ejaculated.

"They made me wear this," he said, plucking at his sari. "I have never been more ashamed in all my life! I look like a..." he leaned in and whispered, "I look like a tart!"

“No,” I lied. In fact, back in London the face paints alone would make all who saw this little beauty think she was a lady of the night. The bare skin would have sealed it! And yet, dare I admit that I thought he looked quite perfect dressed like that, primed and painted to delight the eye? “You look quite— proper!”

“I do not,” Allan said, though he seemed pleased at my efforts to make him feel at ease. He wore some sort of perfume that smelled of roses, and it filled my head, intoxicating me, making me dizzy.

“Here,” I said, pulling out a chair for him. “Please sit.”

“Thank you,” he said, and I appreciated the way he sat, so much like a lady, with such grace. I could not help but take a quick glance at his heart shaped rear, which the sari clung to most revealingly.

I sat across from him. Candles flickered on our table, and we looked into each other’s eyes, neither of us sure what to say. Allan’s eyes sparkled so prettily in that candlelight, it took my breath away, and I think we both felt the pull of our mutual and shocking attraction. I looked away. Allan looked away. We each shifted nervously. Allan straightened the silverware next to his plate, and I noticed his fingernails now seemed longer and had been painted pink to match his sari. For some reason the sight of those long nails on my friend’s dainty hands, knowing it was Allan Quartermain who now had such silly and feminine nails, made a lump form in my throat. I think I would have burst for all the strain I felt sitting there in the presence of this perfect female creature, had our host not appeared.

“Good evening,” he said, stepping from behind a curtain, startling both of us, drawing the prettiest little “Oh!” From the crimson lips of my friend, who also instinctively put one tiny hand to his chest.

Professor Killingsworth presented quite a shocking image. One of his eyes was covered with what seemed like a telescopic lens, which was zooming in and out as he regarded us. Further, he wore some sort of contraption over his heart, which pulsed, releasing tiny jets of steam. One of his hands, too, looked like a clockwork contraption, all whirling gears and wires.

Doing my best to hide my surprise, I stood. “Sir Henry Curtis,” I said,

“Professor Killingsworth,” he answered in a gravelly voice that almost sounded like it was produced by rusted gear works. He reached out and took my hand with his mechanical hand. “And who is your lovely friend?”

“This,” I said, deciding to be direct and get right to the business at hand, “Is Miss Allan Quartermain.”

Killingsworth took Allan’s hand and kissed it, bowing slightly. He and I sat. Killingsworth regarded Allan, his mechanical eye zooming in and out. “Miss Quartermain,” Killingsworth said. “So, the rumors are true. You were turned into a woman.”

“Indeed,” Allan said, trying his best to retain his composure. “I am sorry to greet you in this embarrassing shape.”

“This rumor reached you here in Ergosium?” I said. “I am surprised.”

“Indeed. I have eyes and ears everywhere, Allan Quartermain is quite famous, and more, the device which manifested this remarkable change in young Miss Quartermain was stolen from me by that evil little wizard!”

Allan leaned forward, excited. “So, you can change me back? You can restore me to manhood?”

Killingsworth took a drink and then shook his head. “I’m afraid not. You are a woman now, Allan, and you will be for the rest of your life.”

Allan put a hand to his cheek and sat back, his eyes filled with horror at what he’d just heard. “A woman? Forever? But, I don’t understand. If you can change my sex once, why not twice?”

“The science is complex,” Killingsworth said, looking at me. “I am afraid it would be far too difficult for a woman to understand.”

“Of course,” I agreed, shrugging toward Allan who did even have the energy to express his usual annoyance. “Women’s brains are not designed to understand such things. But, perhaps, you could offer some explanation in words and using analogies that a female brain might be able to grasp?”

“Please?” Allan said in a small voice.

“Hmnnnn,” Killingsworth seemed to warm to the challenge, and looked off into the distance as he plumbed the depths of his own powerful brain for a way to make poor

little Allan understand. “Ah!” He said, his eyes sparkling with excitement. “You would agree, would you not, that a female is a reduced and imperfect version of a man?”

Allan hesitated, and almost seemed about to disagree, but then he nodded and answered through clenched teeth. “Of course, this is well known and has been demonstrated over many years and substantiated with a great deal of irrefutable scientific proof.”

“Quite right! You are clever for a girl. So, my machine, when it reduced you from male to female, it operated by a process of subtraction, drawing out of you all the manly essence, as it were, that made you a man, and leaving you in this fragile, inferior shape of woman. All of that manly essence dissipated in the process. It is gone now, and I have no way to restore it to you. Do you understand?”

“Yes,” Allan said, and I thought I saw his eyes clouding with tears.

Despite the fact that Allan had expressed understanding, Killingsworth went on. “Let me try it this way. Perhaps your feminine mind will be able to grasp an illustration from the world of the fine arts, which it has been shown females are able to appreciate, though not create. Imagine Michelangelo starting with a large piece of marble and shaving away the stone until only a beautiful woman remains. Even if he wanted to, my dear, he could never reverse the process, turning the statue back into a slab of marble!”

“I see,” Allan whispered, nodding, and I could see now that he struggled to keep himself from crying. He took a few deep breaths, causing his chest to rise most fetchingly.

“Or, maybe this will be within your ability to grasp...”

“I understand,” Allan snapped. “I understand, even with my *feeble woman’s brain*, I understand.”

“Dear,” Killingsworth said, giving me a glance that clearly conveyed, *women!* “Well, now that’s over with, let’s eat. I believe you will find the food here delightful! Oh, and here comes Miss Waverly, so you will have someone to chat with as well!”

“About fashion and such,” Allan said.

“Yes, and whatever else you women get on about,” Killingsworth said.

I dreaded for a moment that Allan’s emotional nature would get the best of him, and he would make a scene, but he managed to reign himself in and we managed to have a

fairly pleasant meal, that ended with Killingsworth and I, now joined by Plantagenet, going off for whisky and cigars, while Allan went off with the ladies. I smoked and drank, and talked of hunting and the weather, gambling and the wonders of science. I felt myself quite exhausted and longed for rest, and so Plantagenet lead me to my room in the palace. I said my good evenings and closed the door, heading through the small foyer, pulling off my shirt and tossing it on the back of a chair as I headed toward the toilet, only to nearly leap out of my skin as a pair of hands suddenly covered my eyes and a voice shouted, "Surprise!"

### Chapter 3

I spun and crouched, ready to attack, only to face Allan, who stood there giggling, his eyes sparkling with mirth. “Haha! You look quite the fool,” he said.

“Don’t do that!” I said. I noticed his pretty eyes drop to my bare chest, and I sucked in my gut even as I went to the chair and pulled on my shirt. When I turned, Allan was looking at me—strangely. He had a kind of cloudy look in his eyes, and he shrugged that bare shoulder of his, biting his lip.

It looked for all the world like an invitation. “Are you okay?” I said.

“I don’t know,” Allan answered, sitting down on my bed, tossing his hair back. “It seems I am to be a woman for the rest of my life. I don’t know how I should feel about that.”

“It must be a terrible shock.”

“It is,” he said, tugging on one of his earrings. “But, you know, I have always been an explorer.” He smiled, and I felt my whole body ache with need. “You know, climbing mountains, plunging into dark, wet caverns. Come, join me.” He pated the space on the bed next to him.

It was my turn to feel my cheeks flush, and though I knew everything I felt and wanted from him was wrong, I sat down, telling myself I would not allow this to go too far. Allan was a woman now, and he needed to be comforted, that was all, even if he had gotten it all confused in that pretty little head of his. I sat down, his perfume once more filling my head, my whole body tingling. Our shoulders touched, and we looked into each other’s eyes, our faces so close I could feel his sweet breath on my cheeks.

“I’ve always been one to do the most daring thing I can imagine,” Allan said, putting a hand on my arm, squeezing the muscle. “And you, too, are such a man.”

“Yes,” I said, leaning closer, covering his small, soft hand with my own.

“Henry,” Allan whispered. “When you held me today, when you offered to die for me, it— I felt something I have never felt toward another man.”

“I would die for you,” I said, my voice hoarse as I brushed a stray hair from Allan’s cheek, letting my fingertip glide along the smooth skin of his cheek. It was the softest thing I had even felt, and my hand seemed to slide to the back of Allan’s head of its own



accord, pulling him to me, and the next thing I knew our lips met, and Allan pressed his breasts into my chest as we kissed, and I gently lowered him onto his back, and he moaned softly inside the kiss, the kind of moan only a woman can make, and it shook me to the very foundation of my being, and I broke off the kiss and stood.

“Allan,” I said. “I can’t.”

“Why not?” Allan said, frustrated. He pushed himself up on his elbows, but remained sprawled out there on the bed, eager.

“You’re a man!” I said, turning away, not trusting myself to remain in control if I kept looking at him like that, an open invitation, as it were. “And a lady. It would be wrong in so many ways!”

“I am not a man, nor a lady,” Allan said. “I am this! Did you not hear Killingsworth?”

“It isn’t proper!”

“I don’t care what’s proper. Henry! I.... Have.... Needs. Please! If I am to be a woman, then let me be one! Please, Henry!”

“I can’t,” I said, turning back to face Allan, remembering how earlier willingness to indulge his womanly frivolity had ended with him being in such danger. “I owe it to you to protect your virtue, even from your own feminine weakness!”

“Feminine weakness?” Allan screamed, grabbing a pillow from my bed and throwing it at me. “AArrrgghhhhh!” He stood, adjusting his Sari, his long hair. “You are the most impossible, annoying, selfish man I have ever met!”

“Oh yeah? Well, you are the most silly, flighty and absurd giggling girl I have ever know!”

“Giggling girl?” Allan said, stomping one little foot, sending jiggles through his whole body. “Good night!”

“Good night to you!” I shouted back.

Allan stormed past me, and I heard my door slam, and then his door from the room across the hall.

*Women!* I thought again, infuriated, and frustrated with my own unrealized desires. I lay down on my bed, immediately becoming aware of that rose perfume of Allan’s, which made me think of kissing those sweet lips of his, feeling his soft little body

pressed into mine. I tossed and turned, thinking maybe I should go over and... apologize. Or something. I doubted very much I would be able to sleep.

Allan wanted it. Would it really be so wrong?

And yet he wasn't just some fallen girl, but a friend. Wouldn't it be wrong to take advantage of him now in this emotional state? He'd just found out he was cursed to remain female, he was confused and probably scared, what sort of man would take advantage of a man in such a state? Or a woman?

I pictured him naked, those slender white arms stretched out above his head, those long, white legs, the triangular patch between his legs, his nipples hard, pink, his white breasts...

Groaning, I went and poured myself a drink, thinking I might not get any sleep this evening, my fevered brain teeming with images of Allan's naked body.... Which is when I felt the garrot slip over my head and cut into my neck. I dropped my glass, the whiskey spilling across the floor, and grabbed at the carrot, trying to pull it away before it crushed my throat, and even as I struggled with my assailant, I heard a knock on my door and Allan's voice. "Henry?" He said. "I am quite furious with you!"

I saw stars and keeping one hand on the carrot, gasping, trying to breathe, I used the other to elbow the man in the gut.

"I just... I think we should talk about this," Allan said, through the door.

I tried to call "help" but could only moan as my assailant pulled all the tighter on the carrot. Now, in case you have forgotten, I am a very large man— called The Elephant— and so I leaned forward, lifting my assailant off his feet. He now rode on my back, still holding tight to the carrot.

"Henry?" Allan called. "Will you answer? The silent treatment is most childish!"

I carried the man across my room, turning and then slamming him and my back against the door, rattling it in its frame.

"How dare you!" Allan said. "Throw a tantrum, will you?"

I moved to slam my assailant against the door again, only at that very moment Allan pulled it open, and instead I stumbled backward across the hall, passed right through Allan's open door and then fell backwards, slamming my assailant to the ground and hearing him groan as his arms and body went limp.

Allan ran into his room, his hand over his mouth, eyes wide with fright. "Henry! There you go again, having all the fun without me!

"Fun?" I coughed out, pulling the carrot away from my throat. "You impossible girl!"

"Are you okay?" Allan said, coming to me now. He'd changed out of his sari and now wore a woman's night gown, all laces and bows. He'd taken off his make-up and let his hair down, and I must say he was such a natural beauty that he quite took my breath away even without the affectations of a woman's fashions. Allan knelt next to me, and I caught an enticing glimpse of his soft round breasts from the collar of his night gown.

"Yes," I said, getting to my feet. I grabbed Allan's hand and said, "Come on!"

Allan tried to tug his hand away, then just gave in, trotting along behind me as I pulled him over to my room, slammed and locked the door and then began looking for whatever secret entrance my attacker had used to sneak into my room. "Who was that?" Allan said, trailing along behind me as I searched. "Why did he try to kill you?"

"I don't know," I said. "But I aim to find out. Blast." I pushed and pulled on various fixtures.

"Henry, I think you should..."

"Not now," I said. "We can talk about your... predicament later, but right now I am trying to find the secret entrance."

Allan folded his arms under his breasts and threw a hip out to the side, which I knew meant he was angry with me.

"Please," I said, trying to be a little more considerate of my friend's impractical woman's mind, which of course would focus on something silly and frivolous when there was danger that needed to be addressed.

I kept searching, glancing back occasionally to see Allan still in that same posture, tapping his foot, and each time I looked at him the smile on his face grew wider and more amused. Finally, I realized my error and turned to him. "You know where the entrance is?" I said. "That's what you wanted to tell me."

Allan nodded. "I may be a silly giggling girl with an inferior brain, but I am still able to spot a simple concealed door, it seems. Perhaps it is my women's intuition?"

“Perhaps.” I stood, waiting, while Allan continued to regard me with that amused look on his pretty face. “Are you going to show me where it is?”

“If you ask me.”

“Will you show me where the door is?” I said.

“No,” Allan said, tossing his hair and sitting on the bed, his hands in his lap.

“Why not?”

“You did not use the magic word,” Allan said, plucking at his long hair, rolling his eyes.

“Allan!”

“No.”

I sighed. “Would you please show me the concealed door?”

Allan smiled and stood, clapping his little hands. “With pleasure, good sir!” Then, he sassily walked right to a corner I had examined without success, pressed on a tile, and turned, once more throwing one sassy hip out to the side as the door slid open, revealing a dark tunnel beyond. “Giggling girl, indeed!” He said, grabbing a candle from the wall, turning and striding into the tunnel.

“Allan! Wait!” I said, but I knew once an idea had gotten into his impulsive little head, he had little ability to control himself anymore, a fault, of course, common to members of his sex. I hurried to catch up, determined that I would never again let him walk into danger alone.

## Chapter Four

The tunnel was dark and wet, and it descended gradually as we advanced. A hot draft, wet with steam, blew into our faces. We came to several cross tunnels, but Allan scarcely hesitated, marching decisively at each juncture as if he knew where he was going. "Allan," I whispered. "How do you know which path to choose?"

"Women's intuition," he answered, and I could not tell if he meant it in jest or if he had come to trust that strange womanly power he had acquired along with his new shape.

At last, I heard voices ahead, as well as the sputtering sound of that strange new power that had been all the rage of late: electricity, some called, harnessed lightning. Moving more carefully, we came to a point where the path we were on ended at a small outcropping overlooking a large cavern dripping with stalagmites. To the left, a wooden stair led to the floor of the cavern. Metal cones hung along the top of the cavern, and from these cones an odd, yellowish light illuminated the space. Allan doused his candle and moved to the edge of the outcropping, where I joined him. Below, we saw that very electricity arcing between towers, and a large cage in which were—men? Women? It was hard to tell. They wore the clothes of men, but seemed to have small breasts pushing out the fronts of their shirts. They seemed broader of shoulder than women, yet rounder of hip than men.

"Please," one of them called in what was clearly a woman's voice, thick with a Dutch accent. "Let us go! Grubbernotts will pay well for our freedom!"

"Grubbernotts?" I whispered, looking at this manish woman.

"I do not need money," we heard a voice that clearly belonged to Killingsworth answer, and then he emerged from behind some machinery, wearing a lab coat, a clipboard in his hands. "You will serve me better as breeders."

"No!" The woman said, crossing her arms over her small breasts. "You can't mean it! This is monstrous!"

"You can't do this," another of the girls said, charging to the bars. "You cannot make us bare children!"

"We are men! We have wives," still another said, grabbing the bars, shaking them.

“Soon you will be wives and mothers,” Killingsworth laughed. “Once you have finished transitioning, I will apply psychological techniques that will make having a baby your greatest ambition!”

“No! Please! Please!” They begged.

“Shut up!” Killingsworth bellowed. “You ridiculous cows!”

“The Dutchmen!” Allan said. “Killingsworth is turning them all into women!”

“Indeed,” I said. “Perhaps they deserve it.”

“Perhaps I deserved it,” Allan said, his voice getting that harsh edge. “Is that what you think?”

“No,” I said. “Not at all. I misspoke.”

“Henry,” Allan said, his mind drifting rapidly along to a new issue. “We must save them.”

“Save them? They tried to kidnap you.”

“Yes, but now they are to be women, like me, and Killingsworth means to force them to have babies. That isn’t right. Not at all. A woman should choose whom she wishes to have a baby with!”

Perilous, indeed, would be the path I tread should I enter into this conversation with any woman, let alone Allan, and so I just nodded and said, “Of course. But, perhaps we should see to our own escape first? Come back with re-enforcements?”

“Henry,” Allan said. “These are women in danger.”

Blast. Of course, I could not refuse any woman in danger, even if they were only newly women, and so I grunted and said, “Damn, right, Quartermain! What shall we do?”

“Let’s wait for Killingsworth to leave. He can’t mean to stay here all night. Once he leaves, we open their cage and free these ladies, then find our way to the that flying machine and make our escape!”

“How will we fly it?”

“You’ll figure it out,” Allan said, putting a hand on my shoulder and squeezing. “You are a man, after all, and have a mind for such things.”

“Of course,” I agreed, looking once more into his pretty eyes, realizing I was losing the ability to say no to this winsome waif.

The women, cowed by Killingsworth's yelling, had retreated to the back of their cage and huddled together, holding each other, whimpering, their eyes filling with tears. Killingsworth, soon enough, completed whatever diabolical work he'd been engaged in and took his lab coat off. I feared for a moment he would exit where we hid, but he went off behind the machinery, and soon I heard a door whisk shut.

"Let's go!" Allan said, lifting the skirt of his nightie and hurrying down the stairs. I felt it rather unladylike for him to be taking the lead like this, but I supposed he had not fully acclimated to his female body and still exhibited some traits more proper for the man he'd once been. Once we reached the bottom and began to hurry across the cavern floor, the Dutch girls saw us and rose, eagerly pleading for our help. "Quartermain! Sir Henry! You must save us!"

"Quiet! Quiet!" I said, noting in my mind how quickly, as females, they looked to be rescued, rather than to free themselves. "We are here to free you!"

"Where is the key?" Quartermain asked.

"Over on that counter by that infernal machine!"

Looking over I saw what looked like a human-sized test-tube with all manner of strange electric wires attached to it. Allan hurried over, opening a mahogany cabinet and grabbing a large, iron key that dangled there from a hook. He hurried over and unlocked the door to the cell, and soon the girls were all hugging and crying tears of joy in what I found a most embarrassing feminine display. "Girls," I harrumphed, "perhaps we could save the frivolous emotional display for after we have escaped?"

"Hush!" Allan said. "Men!" He rolled his eyes and the newly formed females with him all nodded, slitting their eyes at me in cold fury.

"I'm so sorry I tried to kidnap you!" The Dutchman said. "Can you forgive me?"

"Of course," Allan said, hugging him. "I forgive all of you! Now, let's go!" He took their leader's hand.

"This way!" I said, but Allan ignored me.

"Do you know the fastest way to the dock where they keep the airship?" Allan asked.

"Yes," the girl said. "This way!"

“I think we should go back...”. I started, but the silly little females had all started to run toward the exit suggested by their feminized leader, despite the fact that as a woman he no doubt had lost all sense of direction.

I had little choice but to follow behind, now having not just one but a whole gaggle of giggling, foolish girls to protect, a task made much harder since they seemed determined to ignore my guidance and follow their own hare-brained impulses. Such is the plight of a man, I mused. Always bailing women out of the results of their own foolishness!

We made our way to a metal door, which opened to reveal a square, metal box with a lever. “Killingsworth calls it an elevator,” the Dutch Girl explained. “It will whisk us right up to the top floor!”

“I’m not sure...”. I started to say, but she pushed the level over to the right, and I felt the box shutter and then begin to rise, giving me the opposite sensation in my body as I felt as if my stomach dropped. It was most peculiar!

Soon, the machine came to a stop, and a great metal door slid down to reveal the airship, right there in the dock, just as we had hoped! “Let’s go!” I shouted, running toward the ship, determined to take back my rightful place as a leader of this silly group of girls.

“Wait!” Allan said, obviously trying to retain the initiative he’d so improperly taken from me.

“Come on!” I yelled, and just then I saw Plantagenet emerging from the airship, a rifle in his hands.

“So sorry, chap,” he said, pulling the trigger. The gun whirred, lightning spat from the barrel, and my world went black.



## Chapter Five

The events I am about to convey I did not witness directly, but have been recounted to me by Allan, himself, and take during the time I found myself unconscious after having absorbed the titanic lightning bolts fired by that fiendish weapon.

“Henry!” Allan cried, rushing out into the docking bay, heedless of his own safety. The Dutch girls, meanwhile, bolted. Allan threw himself over my smoking body, and soon found himself surrounded by armed men and staring at Killingsworth’s black, leather jackboots.

“Well, well, Miss Quartermain. Killingsworth said. “I had planned on a private meeting with you tomorrow, but it seems fate has other plans.”

“You fiend!” Allan spat at Killingsworth’s feet. “I will never meet with you again! Free me and my friend!”

“I like your spirit, Miss Quartermain,” Killingsworth said, grating Allan’s arm and jerking him to his feet. “You will make a most suitable mate!”

“Mate? Never!” Allan shrieked, trying to pull away from Killingsworth’s grip. “Unhand me!”

“Oh, sweet girl,” Killingsworth said, pulling Allan in for a hug, and then planting a kiss right on Allan’s lips, a kiss which sent a shock of revulsion through his whole body, and which so shocked and shamed him, that he fainted away, right there in Killingsworth’s arms, just like any damsel.

Quartermain woke with a start to find himself laying on a sumptuously appointed bed, staring up at a scarlet canopy. Sitting up, he found himself wearing a scarlet and gold sari, jewelry once more flashing at his slender wrists. He sat up, disoriented, only to be greeted by the sight of Killingsworth wearing nothing but a loin cloth made from lion skin. “Ah, the damsel awakes to face the dragon!” Killingsworth chuckled. The man’s eyes did rove over Allan’s body in a most forward and unwholesome way. I could throttle him just for that!

Allan, sensing that Killingsworth imagined his naked body, something I have found women could, indeed, sense with great reliability, felt his skin crawl, and then, looking

down at his sari and remembering he'd worn his nightie when he'd been captured, he felt his cheeks grow hot. "You cad!" He said, and he assures me at this point he found one of the pillows from the bed and held it over the swelling of his breasts.

"Miss Quartermain," Killingsworth said, pouring himself a glass of whiskey, "my serving girls dressed you, not I. Would you care for a drink?"

"Not with you! Not ever!" Allan said, though his woman's eyes could not help but recognize Killingsworth hard, muscular frame, his broad shoulders. His eyes, however, found themselves pulled away from the nearly naked man who stood there drinking whiskey and instead to a large portrait on the wall, a portrait of a lovely young woman, a woman who looked just like, "Me?" Allan asked. "Why do you have a portrait of me in your room?" Allan reported to me he found himself quite disturbed to see his likeness there on the man's wall. It made him feel like a possession, object d'art the man had claimed just as he would a Grecian statue or a Rembrandt.

Killingsworth looked at the portrait, then back at Allan, and a feral smile crept across his face and filled his eyes, making them gleam like the eyes of a hungry lion. "Yes. So my secret is out, Anneke, my love."

"I'm not... my name is Allan."

"Anneke," Killingsworth said, walking over to the bed. Allan pulled his knees to his chest, slid back to the headboard, feeling himself shiver the way the man stared at him. "Anneke. I thought I had lost you forever in the accident. But now here you are, as lovely as ever, as alive! Oh, my sweet dear bride, let us now at long last consummate our marriage!"

"Consummate?" Allan nearly choked. Killingsworth climbed onto the bed, put his hand on Allan's leg. "I'm not Anneke! I'm a man! I'm Allan Quartermain!"

Killingsworth had now crawled next to Allan and put his hand to Allan's cheek, caressing my friend's soft skin. "I will cure of this delusion," Killingsworth said. "Tomorrow. I have a machine that will erase these silly thoughts from your head and make you once more my sweet, obedient bride."

"I'm not. No!"

Killingsworth's now fell to Allan's chest and then slid down the top of his sari, cupping his breast! "Stop!" Allan screamed, overcome with a terror only a woman can

know. Killingsworth did not stop, but soon overpowered Allan, pinning his arms over his head, climbing on top of him.

Allan could not explain to me what happened next. Each time he tried to tell me, he would begin weeping, shaking, and I would hold him. Finally, I provided the words for him. "Of course, you convinced him to consummate the marriage later," I said. "You used your feminine wiles to preserve your virtue."

"Yes," Allan whispered, wiping his tears. "Yes, that's exactly what happened! Oh, Sir Henry!"

So, it is at this point that I once more enter the picture, as I woke to find myself trapped inside the very giant test tube I have described to you previously, back in the massive cave where we had found the Dutch men being transformed into young women. "Hey!" I called, striking against the tube with my fists, only to find it made of some kind of tempered glass, much stronger than any glass known to me previously. I pounded, nevertheless, until finally I saw the elevator doors open, and Killingsworth enter holding the hand of and walking along with none other than Allan, who had a glassy, shell-shocked look in his eyes. Nevertheless, he looked a wonder with his hair in that side ponytail common to the women of Ergosium, and wearing an emerald and white sari.

"Sir Henry!" Killingsworth called. "I trust you slept well?"

"Curse you, Professor! You are a madman!"

"Indeed, I have been told so all my life, and yet only a madman would attempt and achieve the things I have done in my life. You know my lovely wife, Anneke, of course."

I looked at Allan, who now smiled brightly. "So good to see you again, Sir Henry" he said, his voice light and musical.

I looked between them, confused. "Anneke? But..."

"Yes, she was suffering under the delusion that she was Allan Quartermain for a time, but she is much better now, aren't you dear?"

"Yes, thanks to my brilliant husband," Allan said, putting a hand on Killingsworth's chest, and I saw it then, a sparkling diamond wedding ring.

"So, this whole adventure was a fool's errand?" I said, deciding to play along. "Well, I do apologize for troubling you. I suppose I should be on my way."

“So sorry,” Killingsworth said. “But I’m afraid I am going to need you to stay, Helene.”

“Helene?” I said, feeling a terror grow within me. Did he mean to turn me into a woman?

“Excuse me, dear,” Killingsworth said, disentangling himself from Allan’s clinging arms. He then walked over and flipped several large switches, and I heard power surge through the coils leading to the tube in which I found myself.

“I asked Killingsworth to spare you,” Allan said, walking up to the tube, placing his palm against the glass. “I would, though, rather enjoy having another girl from the old country to keep me company, and he would like another blonde here to breed.”

Me? To be a woman and bred like a cow? I did not need to be reshaped into female form to share Allan’s earlier outrage at the prospect. I pictured myself with breasts, with a woman’s shape and voice, and I began pounding on the glass, terrified. “Kill me,” I shouted, “but do not reduce me to female!”

“I will make you love it,” Killingsworth said. “You will long for nothing more than motherhood and a man’s strong arms, just like a natural born woman!”

“No, thank you!” I said, then looked at Allan, who now had that infernal smirk on his face, amusement dancing in his eyes. I plainly saw my old friend there now, mocking me, and not at all the darling wife he pretended to be. “Help me!” I said, and then added, “Please!”

Allan smiled, drawing a double-barreled derringer from out of his cleavage, and I can’t say I have ever been more aroused by the sight of a pistol, or a glimpse of a woman’s soft, round breast. Allan stepped away from my chamber and called to Killingsworth, “Husband, dear, love of my life?”

“Just a moment,” Killingsworth said, dismissively, as he pushed buttons and turned knobs. “I want to make sure she turns out just right.”

“Look at me!” Allan shrieked, and both I and Killingsworth cringed at the shrill sound of an angry female.

Killingsworth looked, saw the little pistol in Allan’s hand, and laughed. “Silly girl. Put that gun away! You’re more likely to shoot yourself in the foot than harm me.”

“I’m the best shot in the world,” Allan said, eyes glittering.

“You were, Anneke,” Killingsworth answered, “but when Zikili turned you into a woman, you lost all of your manly qualities, from the ability to think logically, to do math, to...”

Allan pulled the trigger, and the gun popped, a cloud of smoke rising from the barrel as Killingsworth spun, falling to the ground. “Goodness,” Allan said, feigning feminine surprise. “I guess I got lucky, as we ladies sometimes do.”

I felt electric bolts start to surge through my body, and I screamed both in pain and from the fear of what they might do to me. “Allan! Turn off this infernal machine before I join you in dresses!”

“Maybe it would serve you right?” Allan said, and I trembled to think he meant it, but then he went over and threw the switch, turning the machine off.

Killingsworth, meanwhile, had rolled onto his back and was clutching his chest— on the right, away from his heart— where blood blossomed on his shirt. “Your shot missed, little girl,” he said. “You didn’t kill me.”

“I didn’t want to kill you,” Allan said. “You are going to turn me back into a man!”

“I can’t. I told you before.”

Allan aimed the gun at Killingsworth’s head and smiled.

“Okay. Okay. It can be done, but...”

Just then, the elevator doors whooshed open, and several men stepped out, armed with guns. Allan fired, taking the first one out, and the men retreated back into the elevator, not realizing Allan carried only a two-shot pistol. “Get me out of here, Allan!” I shouted. “I will protect you!”

Allan, however, popped open the chambers, fished two new bullets from his ample cleavage and reloaded, firing, the bullet striking a spot above the elevator that caused the door to come crashing down.

“Good man!” I said, then looking over his curvy shape, I said, “Er, good woman!”

Allan made a small bow. “And now, Professor,” he said, turning back to Killingsworth, we were... NO!”

Killingsworth was gone, having escaped in the confusion. “No!” Allan said, stomping a little foot in frustration. “No! No! I can’t be trapped like this! I can’t!”

The door to the elevator groaned as the men inside began to force it open. "We have to go, Allan," I said. "There is no time. We must go. We will find a way to restore you. I promise. I held out my hand."

Allan bit his lip and nodded. "Very well," he said. He placed his soft little hand in mind and looked up at me, his pretty face aglow with feminine gratitude. "Let's go."

## Epilogue

I found myself handcuffed to the posts of my bed, my ankles likewise bound, leaving me naked, spread eagled, feeling quite the fool. Allan entered the room, wearing a lace mask, and a woman's lacy corset and underthings, looking quite stunning. In one hand he held a feather, and in the other a riding crop. He giggled began to torture me with the feather, running it up the inside of my thigh as he crawled onto the bed and said, "You've been a very bad boy!"

"No!" I cried. "Don't punish me!"

"Silence!" Allan barked, slapping me on the chest with the riding crop. "You will speak only when spoken to, understand?"

"Yes, mistress!"

Crack! The whip cut across my belly, even as he drew the feather up into some truly naughty places. "I am a hunter," Allan said, straddling me with his soft thighs, looking down at me, his eyes glittering just as if he'd bagged the fiercest lion in the jungle. He clawed at the hair on my chest with his long, crimson nails and said, "I always capture my prey."

Capture me he had, and I felt quite the fool now at ow easily. He'd challenged me to a chess match, and me, believing that his silly woman's brain would be quite incapable of the spatial thinking required to compete in the game had agreed, looking forward to putting my little female friend in his place. I barely even considered the terms of the bet and agreed, thinking it as unlikely as a woman becoming president of the United States.

And so here I found myself bound and about to be mounted by my friend, just another one of his conquests and quite at the disadvantage despite the fact that he was only a woman now. Damnedest thing of all, though? I found I rather liked it. I guess, after all, I had a taste for the forbidden.