

# ICE STORM

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## Chapter 12 - The Cross Dressers Support Group

I summoned my courage one Sunday afternoon for visiting the Cross Dressers Support Group suggested by the friend of the Jaycees' member. Andrea and Denny were all for my going, but they openly said they hoped that would have me reverting to men's clothes and appearances. I told them their saying that annoyed me, or worse. They said were glad it did.

They should have known better. That just made me more determined than ever. Or maybe they had known that too.

I vacillated between dressing well or dressing in a nondescript and non-threatening way. In the end I did my lips and hair as best as I could, used a bra with inserts, but wore one of the denim shirtdresses. I had bought those for work before drifting into better attire and then going for the best.

Andrea let me borrow her car.

They met in a church. It looked like crap. The paint had taken to peeling, and the window glass caulking had come loose. The front door had been locked, but perseverance found an unlocked door at the far end of a side into a basement. The entryway down there smelled of damp and lack of adequate air and ventilation. Just inside the entrance was a big room needing paint, better lighting, and the linoleum on the floor had cracked.

Even the worst of the crane cabs I had seen were better than this.

Diagonally all the way across the room were two folding table set up with chairs, and several people.

As I drew closer their voices didn't match their clothes just like my mismatched voice and clothes.

The women dressed like men didn't look attractive as men, and the men dressed as women looked weirder, if possible.

I announced myself. "Hi, I'm Sandy."

"Hi, I'm Candy, and I'm a cross dresser."

They all spoke in unison. "Hi, Candy."

Nobody said a thing as I stood there. On my own I pulled a chair out from a table

and sat down using a hand behind my skirt like a real girl. That movement had my skirt keeping my bare legs from touching the cold metal of the folding chair.

“Hi, I’m Sheila, and I’m a transsexual on hormone therapy.”

Again they all spoke in unison. “Hi, Sheila.”

My hair and lipstick were the best there.

A few more people arrived in various stages of gender or clothing conversions. They went around the room with that phrase of “Hi,” their name, and their proclaimed status. At each time everyone said “Hi” in response, so I did that too.

When my turn in turn came in sequence going around the room, I mimicked them. “Hi, I’m Sandy, and I wear dresses full time.”

Somebody had a wicker basket they put on the table. A few one dollar bills went in it, but there were hesitations. *Oh, to hell with this*, I thought. I took my wallet out of the bottom of my shoulder bag and put in a five dollar bill.

The next person paused from picking up the basket. My hunch is I had just disrupted the style of the group.

Someone announced. “Coffee’s ready.”

Most of them sprang to their feet and made a beeline for a restaurant style Bunn coffee maker. I sat with the few remaining. “Any water?”

“Oh sure,” a woman’s voice in a man’s shirt responded. “May I get it for you?”

“Uh, sure, or can I get it myself?”

“C’mon.” I followed her to a sink near the coffee maker where they had throw away cups. We both took one.

“I’m terrible with faces and names. Did you say your name?”

“No. Here call me Bill.”

“OK, Bill.”

By the time everybody had coffee, tea, or plain ole water two more people had arrived both of whom were wearing weird accent scarves over their blouses.

One of them held up a little plastic card. “Since we have a new comer, let’s read step one.”

No one objected.

“We admitted to ourselves that we were powerless over our longings; that our lives had become unmanageable.”

In the course of the hour they told of various hardships trying to be themselves. Most were poverty stricken and dependent on the help of others. I didn’t like some of

what they said.

In a blank place I made a short version. "Hi, I'm Sandy, and I have a full time job as a construction crane operator. You know, one of those things high up in the sky."

The mood of the group fell. That had been the wrong thing to say right then.

The person who did the reading spoke next. "Welcome, Sandy. This is a Twelve Step Program modeled after Alcoholics Anonymous. Here, if you're doing that well, here are the next three steps." She held that card where she could read it. "Two; came to believe that a Power greater than ourselves could restore us and make us whole. Three; made a decision to turn our will and our lives over to God as we understand a Higher Power. Four; made a searching and fearless moral inventory of ourselves. Five; admitted to God, to ourselves, and to another human being the exact nature of our wrongs."

One of them corrected the statement of the next three steps had become the next five steps having been recited.

Finally, someone asked me why I came to this meeting.

"A friend at the Jaycees told me a friend of a friend knew of this as a Cross Dressers Support Group. They knew I did that, and asked if they could call me. Here I am. Does this help you?"

"The Jaycees let you join? Did they induct you as a new member?"

"Uh, yes, they took my application. No, I don't think I have been inducted. No, I do not know if they cashed my employer's check for the dues. They just let me come. Is my application controversial?"

"Very. You must have lucked into a more open minded Chapter."

There was a general murmur of they didn't like the business community including the Jaycees.

"You guys feel depressed to me. Is that a big issue?"

"Oh yes."

"How can I help? Maybe I should wear better dresses."

"How can we help you? We want you to return."

"I always feel like the odd person left out. I always have."

Almost everyone nodded agreement they felt that way too.

Suddenly, the room went alive. They kept to one person speaking at a time, but the tone was distinctly different.

I hadn't been watching the time, but one of them looked at their handheld and said the hour was over.

“Hey, there’s the Pastor.”

A man in woman’s clothes next to me leaned into me. “Once a month she offers communion. Hang around.”

I rarely went to church, and could not remember ever having had communion.

A woman in slacks, a sweater, and hair to die for down over her shoulders dragged a little table to the center of the room. That brought it closer to the group. “I see new faces. May I tell a story?”

Several people nodded. Smiles appeared.

“There is a Native American tradition of starting stories with ‘I don’t know if this happened this way, but I know it is true’. During my teen and a young adult years, communion never made sense to me. Then I heard it isn’t even mentioned in the New Testament, although I now think it is. Communion as we know it came from when the church was illegal in the Roman Empire. Think of people meeting in dark basements with a single candle during the Nazis occupation. In that near dark the communion tradition was to dip a piece of bread torn from a loaf in the common pot of stew. Between dipping and eating they would say a little prayer. What started as a prayer by each person for themselves became a prayer for the troubles of another person in the room.”

My eyes watered.

“Would one of you volunteer?”

I stood up. I realized I had misheard, and thought we were all supposed to stand up. But there I was the only person standing.

“Hi, I’m Lisa, and you are?”

“Sandy. This is my first visit.”

“Perfect, come stand next to me, Sandy. You hold the plate of the bread, and I’ll hold the cup. When they come forward you say ‘the bread of life, my friend’, unless you know and can say their name. I’ll follow.”

I could do that. I went to her at that little table. She handed me a plate of bread squares.

One of the trans-girls came first.

I said. “The bread of life, my friend.”

Lisa followed with “the cup of salvation”.

I played with it as “the bread of love” sprang from my lips before I knew what I would say.

When everyone had come past Lisa tugged at the plate, took it from me, and offered it to me. “The bread of love, Sandy.”

My face scrunched up and my eyes watered. Whether at my name or her permission at what I had said I never figured out. My hand shook as my fingers took a little block of bread.

“The cup of salvation, Sandy.” She whispered. “Say amen.”

“Amen,” which was loud enough to be heard by everyone.

She handed me the plate and the cup.

“The bread of love, Lisa.” She took a piece. “The cup of salvation, Lisa.”

“Amen.”

She took both and set them on the table.

When I turned to the group their eyes were wide open. “Uh, guys, what happened?”

Nobody said a thing, except Pastor Lisa. “Thank you, Sandy. Do you go to church?”

“No ma’am. Almost never. Why do you ask?”

“Because you seem to know what you are doing.”

“Uh, ma’am, all I did was what you told me to do.”

“I never told you to what clothes to wear, how to run your life, which Proverbs of Lady Wisdom or Lady Folly spoke to you. God sent you here. I’m trying to figure out why.”

One of the others interrupted. “Maybe God sent you here in answer to our prayers. Maybe you’ll never come back, and I’ll never have a chance to know you. To know what you think. What do you, Sandy, see as the biggest need here?”

“Self esteem” flew out of my mouth before I knew what I would say. I had borrowed that from Andrea and Denny.

The Pastor moved slightly. “How would you create self esteem? May I make a suggestion?”

“Please do. I have no idea.”

“The three essentials are something to do, someone to love, and something to look forward to.”

A vision flashed through my head. “The first is something to do. Yes? What would you say if I said I knew something any of you could do? All it takes is time. If you’re sitting at home in a deep black funk, this is better than nothing.”

One of the better dressed trans-girls spoke first. “Yes, please. What?”

I said “Deliver lunch to the site where I work. I’m way up that crane for the entire

day, but the site boss and his crew chiefs can't leave."

Lisa touched my arm. "What of the steps did you take right here and now? Admitted something and told another person. Is there a very practical reason for you to wear dresses to hide something? You said you're up that crane all day. Work overtime?"

I blushed. "Yes, ma'am, there is."

"Call me Lisa. I work with people; not boss the help. So, you have more power than anyone else here. Go ahead, what's the reason? You're strong enough for this."

"Uh." I stalled before the truth burst from my lips without my thinking about what I might say. "Diapers. I wear diapers full time." My ears became hot and must have been red to match.

The room went very silent.

I felt better. "You guys are right. This works."

"OK, Sandy, that's not so evil. God loves us even when we reject God's love. What about this lunch idea?"

"I'll put one hundred dollars on the table for the first person or team who will deliver lunch to the boss and crew chiefs where I work. I'll tell them in advance lunch is being delivered on a particular day."

Someone scowled. "The county won't let anyone prepare meals in our homes without an expensive inspection."

I turned on Lisa. "Did I see a kitchen here?"

"Yes." There was a noticeable pause. "One of the volunteers has to supervise. They have the food license."

A line of hot pies marched across my vision. "Pies On The Run."

Several mouths were silently trying that out.

"Remember, you have to do this. I can't come down from that crane."

Lisa eyed on of the t-girls. One of the shabbiest dressed ones. "Tracy. You still have your bar license. Think you could incorporate Sandy's idea. What's the filing fee?"

"Ninety dollars."

I walked straight to my shoulder bag, took out my wallet, and counted out five twenties. "Here. The crew chiefs like to say 'do it' whenever they have something rigged for a lift."

Her lips quivered.

"This isn't one little order. This isn't one work site. This is visits to Jaycee chapters and some kind of flier I can give to the company. It's that explanation that

makes a difference of pegging this to safe on-site operations.”

Lisa glared at them. I'd hated her looking at me that way. “OK, who needs a job.”

As everyone stood up to leave Lisa said something important. “Please remember this church voted to be ‘Open and Affirming’. Whoever you are, and where ever you are on the path of life, you are welcome here.”

My eyes scrunched up with a few tears on my face.

Two meetings later Tracy intercepted me outside before the meeting. “I need to talk with you, but it involves everyone in this Pies idea. But you're the client. May I have your permission to talk in there?”

“Uh,” I stalled. “Sure, Tracy. What about?”

She made a short version with me and a longer version at the meeting. She was strictly a lawyer's problem of who was the corporate stock holder. When it came out that would be much easier for her if that only included me. Everyone agreed. We got fancier later.

Pies On The Run had been launched, and I quickly wore my best outfits to the weekly meeting; not my worst. I became the defacto group leader. Joy begets joy, and the membership of the group, the Jaycee chapter, and the church all grew.

By the next monthly communion I had a question for the group and for Pastor Lisa. “Could the group and the church together sponsor a self defense course?” Yes, we did over several weeks.

By the next monthly communion after that we of Pies on the Run popped an idea on Lisa. Could the church do a weekly lunch for the homeless?

By next spring the homeless had painted that church.