

CATHERINE LAWRENCE

The classic Transgender Romance By

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This is a transgender fantasy and is not accurate in its representation of the technical steps of transition.

Please suspend belief and enjoy the story.

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First published 2004.

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Chapter 1.

I think this was the 575th audition I had attended since I moved to London three and a half years ago. At least it *felt* like it. To say I had been an overwhelming failure in launching my acting career was being kind.

I had always wanted to be an actor ever since I can remember. Of course, I had used the drama studies as a way to escape the constant teasing from the boys at school, the jokes and the terrible stunts they used to pull on me.

Thankfully, I was sent to a co-educational school and I thought the pranks and the teasing would finish but I was wrong. In fact, it became worse. Some of the girls used to egg the boys on and make cruel comments themselves while jokingly offering me lipstick or sneering at my feminine looks.

Like a lot of children, I used comedy and humour to try to make friends. I used to mimic teachers, I could get their voices down perfectly but that soon wore thin and my fellow pupils were soon back at throwing stuff at me, calling me 'Marilyn' which was pretty stupid as I had dark hair but I think you get the point. Every day there would be a move against me, such as suddenly picking me up and dropping me in the garbage bins. God, I hated *that*!

I was a loner right through to university and I tried out for many acting roles there but was rejected for every one I attempted to win.

There was one role I thought I had, though. Jeremy was directing and he encouraged me, asked me to work through the lines with him and then he tried to kiss me. After that, I decided to pack university in, travel down to London and become a *real* actor.

There was no doubt in my mind that I was a capable actor, in fact, in my private moments, I daydreamed I had the potential to be a *great* one. Unfortunately, directors, producers, casting agencies and theatrical agents all disagreed with me.

‘You have excellent skills, my boy,’ Martin Handley, the famous theatrical director said one day when he was in an expansive mood after rejecting me once again. ‘Great skills, of that there is no doubt. Unfortunately,’ he said with a gesture at my appearance, ‘you don’t have *it*, you don’t have a presence.’

I sighed; I had heard it many times before, perhaps not as kindly put as Handley had said it but heard it I had, over and over again. I didn’t have *it*, the indefinable thing that automatically draws the eyes of the audience to the actor. Some call *it* charisma; others just call the mysterious ingredient *it*. Whatever it is, I didn’t have it!

It appeared that no one could see me as leading man material and I also didn’t have enough other qualities to be an outstanding character actor. I used to stare at my face and wondered why did I have to take after my mother and not my father?

I had her eyes, cheekbones and hair as well as her build. My father had wished I had taken more after him; he had the height, build and determination – everything I appeared to lack.

‘Christopher,’ Martin soothed, ‘you have an excellent voice, an extraordinary ear for accents, why not radio plays? You’d be an enormous success.’

I did one or two radio plays but there weren’t enough to keep a person fed and watered in an expensive city like London and, of course, there was the question of working in real theatre. I’m not a snob or I don’t think I am but I wanted to work in real theatre, in the West End or, dare I dream, Broadway?

So, I was a sucker and kept coming back for more. I wasn’t ready to give up on my dream just yet. The audition for *Silken Memories* was being held in a small workshop theatre in south London, hidden away from the hustle and bustle and I lined up with the other actors.

Sarah Wright wrote the play and that guaranteed an instant success but the material was excellent as well and really tore at my heart. The strong lead was the female, a woman who goes from rags to riches while enduring emotional pain along the way. I was auditioning for the role of Tom, the husband who deserts her and then faces his own retribution as she blossoms.

Lucy Richards waved at me, really just wriggled her fingers as she passed and I nodded. I had given up trying to persuade her to represent me, she was the best agent in London but she was very selective.

‘Christopher, I’m sorry,’ she had said after I had bothered her for the tenth time, ‘I can’t represent you, you don’t have the qualities.’ Lucy was a hard woman and spoke

frankly. 'Take a look in the mirror, you will never be a leading man, you're too pretty.'

'Jude Law is pretty,' I said defensively but she just shook his head.

'Jude is masculine and he is a spectacularly handsome male. Chris, *you* are pretty! Why don't you get Mark to teach you and go on the cabaret circuit? I'll represent you if you want to go into his act but you are really too pretty for a man.' She let the words sink in before she squeezed my arm and said, 'I'm sorry,' before walking away. At least she didn't mention my height. I had been rejected many times because I wasn't tall enough.

Another audition! It's a cattle call and we all go through it but I wonder if the directors even care about the feelings of the actors? In my case, I knew they didn't.

The director of *Silken Memories* was Richard Hawkins, a director whose work I admired but personally could not stand. He exhibited all of the bad qualities of a Cambridge graduate and none of the good.

He was talking to Henri Profert, the producer when I sidled onto the stage to read. 'The roles of Tom, David and the others will be easy to fill but I am concerned we haven't got our Simone.'

'We will find her,' Henri soothed. 'It is a difficult role. Ah,' he said with a smile, 'here's Sarah at last.' Sarah Wright stepped onto the stage and sat on the vacant chair next to Richard.

‘Simone has to be perfect,’ was all she said before rifling through the script. Sarah Wright was such a famous playwright; everyone knew she had the power of veto on any actor selection.

I cleared my throat and Richard nodded as his assistant whispered in his ear.

‘Christopher Redden,’ I announced. ‘I’m reading the final scene between Tom and Simone.’ They nodded and I began. I was just getting to the crucial part when Richard waved and said, ‘Thank you, next.’

Sarah watched me as I slowly walked from the stage. A tall handsome man bounded past me. ‘Wade Thompson,’ he announced and began to read the same part I had just attempted to perform.

‘Wait,’ Richard called and I turned around. ‘You,’ he said pointing at me. ‘What’s your name?’

‘Christopher Redden,’ I murmured, brushing my hair from my eyes.

‘Can you read the Simone part so we can get an idea of how Wade would go, get a real feel for the scene?’

I almost told him to get stuffed when Sarah said, ‘You seem to understand what lies behind the words.’ Her voice was quiet and she smiled wryly.

‘Ok,’ I said and waited for Wade to begin.

It was a great part and I loved it.

*Tom: I don't think you understand my difficulties,
Simone.*

Simone (sharply): Don't you Tom? I think I've had enough difficulties of my own, I think I've had experience! Don't you? Don't you Tom?

Tom: Simone, don't...

Simone (anguished): Don't what Tom? Don't embarrass you, or is it you don't want to remind you? Remind you of what you've done, done to me?

'Thank you,' Richard called. 'That was excellent, Wade. Are you still represented by the formidable Lucy Richards?'

Wade nodded with a big grin and I walked slowly off the stage, feeling sick.

'Mr Redden, wait.' I turned around hopefully but saw it was Sarah Wright walking quickly across the stage. Richard was deep in conversation with Henri and Wade was talking to Lucy.

'Yes?' I waited politely.

'I just wanted to tell you that you conveyed so much in those lines, you seem to know the play?' She cocked her head and looked me up and down.

'It's brilliant,' I said simply. 'I think the play is your best and the part of Simone is superb. A real challenge to any actor.'

'Thank you but that is also the problem for us. I'm afraid I'm insisting on an unknown, I want Simone to really speak and not be subdued because of the fame of the performer.'

'I understand completely. Good luck.' I began to turn away but her next words held me.

'This play is important to me,' Sarah said quietly. 'Really important and luck is what we need, I think.' She

laughed a little harshly. ‘I think we have just five weeks to find Simone. Otherwise they,’ she said with a jerk of her head back at Richard and Henri, ‘will insist on Emma Thompson or someone. I’ve nothing against Emma but she’s not Simone.’

‘No,’ I agreed.

‘But *you* were in just those few lines. Thank you, Mr Redden, you’ve given me hope that Simone is out there somewhere, we just have to find her.’

I walked out and bumped into Wade and Lucy in the lane where they were waiting for their taxi. ‘Chris,’ Lucy said with a smile. ‘Thanks for helping out in there, Wade got the part.’

He got the role on ten words? With a sick feeling in my stomach, I realised he got it solely on the way he looked. Granted, he was tall and handsome but I didn’t think he could act that well. To be fair, I hadn’t seen much but it had been enough for Hawkins to pick him.

‘Congratulations, Wade,’ I said woodenly, trying to push past.

‘Thanks, old man,’ he said, slapping me on the back and I half fell to the ground.

Lucy helped me to my feet as Wade walked to the end of the lane to search for the taxi. ‘You were great,’ Lucy said as she helped me up. ‘How do you get so much feeling, so much emotion in those few words?’

‘I’m an actor,’ I said stiffly.

She adjusted my coat. ‘Have you thought about sprucing yourself up a bit, getting a haircut or something?’

‘I’m trying to get rid of my *prettiness!*’

‘You still mad at that? I’m sorry but it’s the truth. Sometimes I think you’d make a better girl than half the female actors around.’

‘Thanks a lot,’ I said grumpily, walking off.

‘You just look scruffy, Chris,’ she called after me. ‘Get a haircut and stop with the beard thing! Three wispy hairs on your chin don’t make a beard!’

‘Get stuffed!’ I muttered walking towards the tube station.

I wandered the streets, my head reeling with the injustice of it all. *It was so unfair, so fucking unfair!*

That’s what I told Mark after another wine. We were in his flat and he had listened patiently to me for over an hour. Mark was, I guess my best friend, if not my *only* friend and we weren’t that close. We attended a method acting class together for a while until he proclaimed *it was boring crap, darling*, and left.

I bumped into him one afternoon and we had a coffee. I found out that Mark was a female impersonator in one of those posh shows that toured the West End and other places. He had even been to Las Vegas and New York and was represented by Lucy Richards.

‘What about real acting?’ I asked self-righteously and his eyes narrowed.

‘Who said this isn’t real? Let me tell you, my dear,’ he said with a smile, ‘the pay cheque is very real, very real indeed.’ I could see that was the truth by his flat.

‘It’s fucking unfair,’ I moaned again.

‘For God’s sake, dear,’ Mark said with rolling eyes, ‘will you leave it alone?’ He poured himself another glass of champagne. ‘It’s not meant to be.’

‘Mark,’ I said miserably, tipping the empty bottle into my glass for the last remaining drops of wine. ‘What am I going to do?’

‘Give up the acting rubbish, dear, and join me,’ he said sipping his champagne again.

‘You?’ I was flustered. ‘As a female imp...’

‘Exactly.’ He winked dramatically. ‘You’d be positively gorgeous with those eyes and cheekbones. You’ll knock them dead.’

‘Lucy told me to work with you but...’

‘But nothing, my boy.’ He pulled me to my feet and to the mirror. ‘Look at your eyes, I’m so jealous.’ He pulled my hair away from my face. ‘You’d be beautiful.’

Irritably, I pulled away. ‘I’m tired of people saying I’m pretty.’

‘You’d be a beautiful woman, Chrissie,’ he said with a smile, calmly sipping his champagne.

‘Stop calling me Chrissie. Pity I’m not a woman,’ I said as I sunk into the sofa. ‘I’d get the part of Simone if I was, I just know it.’

‘So be a woman,’ Mark said with an airy wave.

‘What?’ I looked up and I think we both thought the same thing at the exact same time. ‘You mean go to the audition as a woman? Do the *Tootsie* thing?’

‘I think you’d look a little better than Dustin Hoffman, Chrissie,’ Mark said with a wink. ‘I don’t think he’s got your legs.’

‘Be a woman?’

‘Why not? I do it two shows a night, five nights a week.’

‘But...’

‘But what? I could teach you a few things, help you. Anything,’ he said with a roll of his eyes, ‘to stop you constantly whining about how *unfair* everything is.’

I thought about it, really thought about it and then dismissed it. ‘I’d look ridiculous.’

‘I don’t think so.’

‘It’d be obvious that I was a man.’

‘Oh for heavens sake! Why don’t we see?’ His eyes were twinkling and he poured more champagne.

‘You mean?’

‘Why not, I have all the gear. It’ll be fun. And it’ll stop you wallowing. Are you game?’

I thought for a moment and then shrugged. ‘Ok, let’s try it.’

Looking back, I could see we didn’t put much effort into it or so I thought. Mark made me up, crammed a wig on my head and I stared miserably at the mirror.

‘No,’ Mark said slowly, lips pursed for a moment as he thought. ‘It’s not there. I’m afraid I’m useless at doing some one else’s face and I only do make up for the stage. I know,’ he said pointing at me, ‘we need a stylist!’

‘Mark,’ I said weakly, taking the blonde Monroe wig off and throwing it onto the dressing table, ‘this is not going to work.’

‘Hush! We’re not giving up after one setback!’

‘We?’ *When did it become we, I thought, when did I lose control?*

‘You know Belinda Morrison, don’t you?’

‘Belinda? Yes, of course I know *of* her, I met her once.’

Belinda had been the stylist to several big names and then she wanted to begin her own business. The actors she had worked with for so long had promised to follow her but, of course they didn’t. Last I heard, she had a beauty school at Notting Hill and was a little bitter about actors.

‘She’s a good friend of mine.’ Mark picked the phone up, thumbed through his big address book and punched in a number.

Mark was a big man, over six foot which gave his act an extra element of comedy as he was obviously a man but performing so well as a woman. The exaggerated winks, pouts and wriggles always brought peals of laughter from the audience.

‘Belinda? How are you darling, it’s Mark?’ He listened for a moment and then turned to me. ‘Go into the bathroom and get rid of that face,’ he said with a smile and I took the hint.

When I came back, he was waiting with his coat on, a bag over his shoulder and a grin over his face. ‘It’s off to Notting Hill. A horse, a horse a dildo for a horse,’ he chanted,

bustling out the door. He paused at the doorway. ‘Well, are you coming?’

‘But Mark...’

‘For goodness sake, have a big of *dare* in you, please! It’s a bit of fun, that’s all.’

We bundled out of the taxi at Notting Hill and Mark led the way into the building where Belinda’s school was. It occurred to me he seemed to have this arranged this all so quickly but that was typical of Mark. He had spontaneously decided to get a tattoo after seeing a lead singer of a boy band with one. Nothing wrong with that except he flew to New York to get it from the same tattooist that, the singer that Mark had his current crush on, had used.

Mark and Belinda kissed and then Belinda stepped back, staring at me, eyes running over me.

‘It’s Christopher, isn’t it? I think we’ve met before?’

She was really examining me and I felt as if I was under some sort of professional scrutiny.

Most women never remembered me but I remembered her. Belinda was tall and thin, hair dark and cut short with at least three hoop ear rings in each ear lobe.

‘Yes, that’s right.’

‘So, you want to fool Richard Hawkins? And that little prick Henri Profert?’

I looked at Mark who winked. ‘I guess so,’ I said weakly.

‘You guess?’ Belinda asked sharply.

‘I’m sure, I want to win the audition.’

She nodded, all business like. ‘Ok, this will take a while,’ she said, looking at us both. ‘We have to be serious here to see if it’ll work.’

‘We have all night, o dark one,’ Mark said with an exaggerated bow and a smile.

Belinda rolled her eyes, muttered something about queens and focussed back on me. ‘Last chance Chris, are you committed to this or has our camp friend persuaded you against your better nature?’

I thought back at all the rejections I had endured, the times I had been dismissed without even a word, just a wave and those dreaded words, *Thank you. Next!*

I wanted to do something different; my life was grey and horrible. The only friend I had was Mark, I had no girlfriends, my parents were dead and I had no other living relatives. With a blinding stab of reality, I knew I was lonely and miserable, a failure.

‘He hasn’t persuaded me,’ I said softly and Mark looked at me quietly with a small smile and a nod. ‘I want to do this.’

‘Really? It won’t be easy, you know,’ she added warningly.

‘Let’s do it,’ I said, more bravely than I felt.