

HEN WEEKEND

Gordon Lawrie

(Dedicated to Sue Clayton)

If they'd been trying to board an aeroplane, they'd never have got past the security gate. They'd agreed to meet in Newcastle station armed with enough clothes for a warm Edinburgh summer weekend, a few basic items of make-up, and enough alcohol each to take a bath in. A good deal of which had already disappeared down throats already.

There were a nice round eight of them. It might have been Dorothy's weekend, but the responsibility for organising the hen weekend fell to her two bridesmaids Susan and Tracey. Susan was a school friend; Tracey was Dorothy's pal from where she worked in IKEA. Nicola and Di were IKEA colleagues, too, each a year or so younger than Dorothy and her two bridesmaids. Then there was Lisa from Susan and Dorothy's year at school, and finally Lizzy, Dorothy's younger sister, and their cousin Gillian Clark.

Gillian was the eldest in the entire group, at thirty by almost three full years. She looked around at the others and wondered why she'd been

invited, and wondered even more why she'd not said no to the invitation when asked. She'd mucked about with Dorothy (whom she knew by her full name) and Lizzie (whom she didn't) when she was younger but their interests were different now. Gillian was the academic one, had actually studied medicine at Edinburgh but was now back working in Gateshead as a GP. She remembered Susan from school, a nice but fairly plain girl who seemed to have blossomed into something quite glamorous, and with a glamorous-sounding job, too: a clothes model.

As they made themselves comfortable in the train, Tracey stood up and threw everyone a pink tee-shirt with the words "DOROTHY'S FINAL FLING" emblazoned across the back and two tastelessly-placed purple hearts on the front.

"Right girls," she called out, "time to put these on."

"What – here, now, in the carriage?" Dorothy asked, who herself had been provided with one further item, a bridal veil that Tracey had found in a second-hand shop in Gateshead.

"Of course. Do it quickly and nobody will notice. You're wearing a bra aren't you?"

Gillian was understandably uncomfortable at the idea of stripping off down to her bra, but she didn't have to say so – her look said it all. The carriage was crowded, too. Sitting opposite, Susan, the other bridesmaid, quietly tried to suggest that they could each take turns to change in the toilet, but Tracey was having none of it, and in no time at all the two other IKEA girls, Di and Nicola, were lending her support. Indeed Di had a bit of shock admission to make.

"I'm not bothered, and I'm not wearing a bra at all. The passengers can

see all if they can look quick enough – or at least all of my back. I'm up for it. Let's all change into the tee-shirts on at the same time." Then she asked, "Anyone else not wearing a bra?"

Tracey reached back, wriggled around for a bit, then managed to drag her own bra through her sleeve.

"Me!" She took a large swig from her can of lager to celebrate her achievement.

Nicola followed her, to the rhythmic applause of her IKEA chum. Dorothy gave an embarrassed smile.

"You're not going to ask me to do that, are you?"

"It's your hen weekend, Dorothy-girl," Tracey said. "You've got to." She called across towards her fellow bridesmaid Susan. "Hasn't she, Sue?"

Susan said nothing: she hated anyone calling her 'Sue', and her silence was taken as acquiescence. Tracey gave Dorothy's little sister a giant nudge and Lizzy duly obliged to the sound of more rhythmic clapping. Then it was Dorothy's school friend Lisa turn to wriggle and produce a bra from her left sleeve.

Now there was only Susan, Gillian and Dorothy herself to go. Gillian leant across towards Susan.

"You see that wriggling out of the bra thing? I don't think I can do it. Apart from anything else I'm wearing a long-sleeve shirt here and I'll damage it."

"I'm not sure we can avoid this, Gillian," Susan said, deftly removing her own bra. She got up and whispered something in Tracey's ear. Meantime, Dorothy herself had wriggled out of hers, too, so that Gillian was the only one left. She wanted to be anywhere but in this carriage, right

now, anywhere at all.

Tracey, though, was unmoved by Susan's request for mercy for Gillian.

"Bra problem, Dot? Oh well, you'll just have to take it off at the same time as you take off that nice shirt. As long as you hurry up you'll be fine. Go on, nobody's looking."

Gillian looked back up the carriage. *Everyone* could hear what was going on, and *everyone* was looking.

Suddenly Susan stood up. "Look, Gillian, I'm used to this. I expose myself for a living after all. If you change while I'm doing it, they'll all be watching me instead." She looked across at Tracey. "I think we bridesmaids have to take the lead, don't you?"

Tracey took yet another swig, a very large swig, from her can of lager. Then she stood up and dragged Dorothy onto her feet, too.

"With you there, girl. Ready, steady..."

Seven out of the eight girls had little or no trouble whipping off one tee-shirt and pulling on another, although Susan took her time as far as possible to distract from Gillian's discomfort. But Gillian still found herself struggling with seven buttons, then a bra, and only then did she realise that her tee-shirt had slipped onto the carriage floor under her seat in the meantime. She was just struggling back onto her seat, holding the pink tee-shirt and naked from the waist up, when she became aware that there was now an extra man in their little section of the carriage.

"Tickets please," the conductor said quietly.

"I can explain..." Gillian said, not sure whether to try and quickly put the tee-shirt on, or whether to use it as a curtain for her front. The others were all giggling nervously.

“I don’t think you need to explain, madam.”

“You want to see my ticket?”

“No, madam, I think I’ve seen everything I need to see just now.”

It took the eight of them several minutes to find the correct way out of Waverley Station, which it transpired was the north exit up an escalator towards the east end of Princes Street. Susan’s job had been to arrange travel and accommodation. She’d found them a hostel-style hotel in Thistle Street, just round the corner from Frederick Street, and no more than ten minutes’ walk away. By now, precious little of their alcohol was left, and what remained was in two carrier bags, one of which Gillian volunteered to carry, partly to try to recover some group kudos after her tee-shirt catastrophe. But once everyone remembered that Gillian had once actually lived in Edinburgh, they began to give her a little more respect – albeit Tracey’s version of ‘respect’ came with more than a little sarcasm.

However Susan was relieved to discover that not only did Gillian know exactly where Thistle Street was, she even knew the hotel in question, albeit that she’d never set foot inside the place. Now known as the Thistle and Rose Hotel, it had changed its name since Gillian’s time, but it seemed decent enough. The girls had booked four rooms, and Tracey immediately announced that she would be the one sharing with “bride-to-be Dorothy”, Nicola and Di would share, Lisa and Lizzie, and finally Susan and Gillian “since you two seemed to get along so well on the train.”

“Well done, Susan,” Gillian said, gratefully flopping onto the bed as they found their way in. “At least we have a nice clean room.”

“Sorry about the train thing,” Susan said.

“It’s OK. You did your best, I’m grateful. This is Dorothy’s weekend and we’re supposed to be helping her enjoy it. She’ll tell that story for years to come. Let’s hope it doesn’t get me struck off.”

“Are you serious? Just for that?”

“No, I’m just joking. Doctors are supposed to be virtuous, but we’re allowed to enjoy ourselves, too.”

“Were you enjoying yourself?”

“No.”

“Well, if it’s any consolation, I didn’t either. And I have to take my clothes off for a living.”

“Do you do a lot of that?”

“There’s lots of money to be made modelling ladies’ underwear. But I never get the saucy ones. All I ever get is Marks & Spencers, Damart, that sort of thing. But if you model knickers, you don’t wear a bra at the same time. Too confusing. But the swimwear’s the worst. Most of the time the photoshoots are early in the morning when beaches are deserted and it’s absolutely freezing.”

“I don’t fancy your job myself.”

“Don’t you sometimes have to look at people’s embarrassing parts?”

“I suppose so.”

“I don’t fancy that,” Susan said. Then, changing the subject completely, she said, “Don’t know about you but I need a shower.”

“Good idea. You go first, but just leave the shower running and I’ll

follow you straight in.”

Afterwards, Gillian found drying herself in the presence of Susan less uncomfortable than she'd expected – a naked exchange in the ensuite helped break the ice a little. Surviving the weekend might be possible.

“What's the plan tonight, then?” she asked.

“Tex-Mex in some place in Rose Street. That's just round the corner, according to the map.”

“Runs parallel to Princes Street. Is it Cisco's? It used to be near the west end.”

“That's the name.”

“It's good,” Gillian said. “Noisy. I think we'll fit in perfectly.”

“Thank goodness for that. Then we're heading for a club I think.”

Gillian's heart sank. Clubs were not her scene.

“You don't have to come along. Just make an excuse.”

“I think I do, Susan, I think I do. I'd never live it down. Thanks all the same.”

Twenty minutes or so later, the eight had assembled in the foyer of the Thistle and Rose. The 'IKEA Four' – Tracey, Dorothy, Di and Nicola – had clearly finished whatever remained of the train alcohol and were in no mood to stop now. Dorothy actually looked only semi-aware of what she was doing, and she was giggling uncontrollably. Gillian's medical instincts told her to be concerned, hard as she tried to remind herself that she was supposed to be on holiday. And she'd seen this sort of thing so often before. Why did her job so often have to make her feel so middle-aged? Food should help. At the very least it should slow the drinking down. But that didn't seem to be the plan just yet, not for Tracey at least, and by now she'd

taken complete command.

“Girls!” she yelled from an extremely close distance, “we’re going SHOPPING!!” and marched out of the hotel in commanding fashion, hand in air like a tour guide. Tracey didn’t say anything until they reached Princes Street, at which point she turned round to check all were present and pointed left back towards Waverley Station. Not a word, simply an expectation they should all follow her along the pavement, until without warning Tracey stopped.

“ANN SUMMERS!” She yelled, waving her arms in the direction of the sex shop beside them. Most of the Friday afternoon passers-by chose to give the arms a wide berth. “In we go, ladies!”

Gillian looked at Susan with yet another ‘must we?’ look, but realised she had little choice. Susan shrugged, hooked her arm with Gillian’s in solidarity, and dragged her in. Tracey wasn’t messing about. She headed straight for the ‘adult’ section at the back of the store.

“There’s a kitty, we can spend up to £25 each,” Tracey called out, still far too loud, although fortunately, the eight girls were the only customers in the shop. Then she added, looking at Gillian directly, “But you must all buy something.”

She dragged Dorothy, who had donned her veil again, across to a rack of strange-shaped gadgets, Nicola, Di and Lisa following, and soon they were taking items of the display shelves and pressing buttons accompanied by fits of giggles. Dorothy’s sister Lizzy looked a little embarrassed, until Susan motioned her gently over, too. Then Susan turned to Gillian, now on her own some distance away.

“You look a little out of place, Gill.”

Gillian hated being called ‘Gill’, but understood Susan was trying to be friendly.

“Out of my depth, more like it.”

“Don’t worry, I’m an old hand at these things,” Susan said. “Buying your first one is the hardest. After that, you see sex toys as liberating.” Seeing Gillian’s doubtful look, she went on, quietly, “Look, I’ll choose one for you. How would that be?”

Twenty minutes later, and after a good deal of discussion, Gillian was the proud owner of a little something even she agreed was ideal for her needs: it looked exactly like a lipstick, but definitely wasn’t.

“Even my mum would never know,” she conceded.

Susan snorted. “I wouldn’t count on it.” She herself had lashed out on a pink egg-shaped object with a small silicon cord that doubles as an antenna – ‘wi-fi operated’, the sales assistant had assured them. Definitely for insertion.

“I’ve actually always fancied one of these,” she added. “I’m told they’re overrated, but there’s only one way to find out, isn’t there?”

Gillian was starting to relax a little, but was still a little bemused. “You have lots of these things?”

“Yup. In modelling, nobody cares one bit about the model. We’re just clothes-hangers for the goods. The only person who can be relied upon to look after me is me myself.” She waved the box containing the vibrator. “If times are tough, we sometimes even have to do a bit of soft porn.”

“Really?” Gillian was shocked.

“Only *soft* porn. Steamy scenes in fuzzy focus, that sort of thing. Can’t be too choosy. You have to treat modelling as just another business, and the

rewards at the top are pretty good for the best. So apart from this weekend, I eat and drink carefully. But Dorothy wanted me to be her bridesmaid, and I couldn't let her down."

She paused for a moment.

"Sorry – have I shocked you?"

"A little. I'm a GP, I'm supposed to be a woman of the world, but..."

"As I say, I stay away from vices like drink and drugs, try to eat well and exercise, that sort of thing. That leaves me with one pleasure."

"Healthy exercise."

"In the fashion industry, it's easy to grow tired of men." Susan led up her Ann Summers purchase. "You learn to be self-sufficient."

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Once the bags had been deposited back in their hotel rooms 'for later experimentation', according to Tracey, they turned around and headed off again. Unsurprisingly, the next part of the planned hen-weekend programme took them back towards alcohol and a pub-crawl. Most of the girls were slowing up now, their alcohol consumption with it, and all of eight were heading for varying degrees of major hangover the following morning. By now, they were clearly divided into three groups. The four IKEA girls were in various states of loud, rolling drunkenness. The other four felt a little left out, not wishing to get into the same state but at the same time not wanting to party-poopers. The others comprised two pairs: Susan and Gillian already seemed to be assuming some sort of responsibility for everyone's welfare; meanwhile, the final pair, Lisa and Lizzie, were

simply trying to stay part of each of the other two groups. It's fair to say that they weren't really managing.

The meal was booked for 8.30, and Tracey's plan was simply to work their way back along Rose Street from east to west, finishing up at Cisco's. By now, though, the pubs were full of Friday-night office workers, and finding seats together in bars was proving to be harder than anticipated. Nicola and Di managed to secure a table for eight in the second pub by offering its all-male occupants a 'feel' of their breasts in exchange for their seats, but the tactic was less successful elsewhere, and they were obliged to split up in the last two bars. It didn't stop the drinking altogether, but being apart slowed the momentum a little.

Eventually, hunger was beginning to affect all of them, and Lisa and Lizzie were sent along to Cisco's restaurant to claim their table, warn the restaurant that the others were coming but might be a few minutes late, and also to hint that some of the party were a little the worse for wear. It was helpful advice: Cisco's managed to find a spot near the back of the restaurant where their combined noise would be slightly less intrusive.

Later, Gillian was to recall the meal as a relatively peaceful part of the evening, with the emphasis on the word 'relatively'. Cisco's menu offered all the standard tex-mex fare: 'Mexican' was represented by nachos, potato skins, enchiladas, tacos, and burritos and so on, 'Texan' by various burgers and steaks. Tracey decided what they should all drink – tequila sunrise – and that they could all share nachos, but everyone was allowed to choose whatever main course they liked from the menu. Susan and Gillian found themselves at one end of the table; by now, Susan had decided that, joint bridesmaids or not, Tracey had placed herself in charge and it was safer not

to argue. As a result, because they were less visible, no one else saw Gillian and Susan topping up their tequilas with bottled water. Susan had also whispered in the ear of a waiter to ask that all future tequila sunrises to Gillian and her should have the alcohol missed out. They did, though, allow themselves each a beer, to be carefully nursed while drinking plenty of fake tequila sunrises; by now, Gillian was discovering a new respect for her modelling companion. Four of the girls had ice cream.

After some exceptionally noisy – and joint – visits to the toilet, it was time to head for the clubs, and that's where things started to go wrong. There were four in Rose Street alone, but Tracey hadn't counted on being refused entry by the bouncers on the door of BrightLights because they were almost too drunk to stand up. The doormen had been prepared to let some of the girls in at first, but when it became clear that all eight were together, they played safe and sent everyone packing. Nor did the IKEA contingent – even Dorothy lost control a bit – make things any better by unleashing a string of profanities at the two men who gently tried to point out that they were, after all, only doing what they were paid for. They were never going to get into BrightLights, but the noise they were making brought the group to the attention of the men on the door at With You further along the street. They didn't even bother trying the Royal, which proudly declared it (a) had a dress code and (b) didn't welcome hen parties. That only left Dancing Queens, but the very polite bouncer had to explain in words of one syllable that the girls might not feel comfortable in a gay club for men.

So in the end, the eight girls did what they were always destined to do anyway: head for another pub. Gillian, who was getting tired, saw the opportunity to edge everyone back towards their hotel. She suggested a pub

in Thistle Street that she remembered from her Edinburgh student days and was therefore not far from their hotel. At least they wouldn't have far to walk home. Fifteen stop-start minutes later, she'd steered everyone into the Scotia Bar, explaining that it was a famous TV detective's local. On Friday and Saturday nights, the bar closed at midnight, which Gillian reckoned she could just about endure, although in the end she dozed off for a little and was asleep in the corner when the barman finally came to throw them out.

Coming to, Gillian immediately tried to take stock of who was in what shape. Dorothy herself seemed perfectly happy, but was being led around by the other three IKEA girls, as well as by her schoolfriend Lisa. In contrast to those five, it turned out that, like Gillian, Dorothy's younger sister Lizzy had been asleep, head propped up on Susan's shoulder next to Gillian herself. Susan herself quietly admitted that she'd been pretending to be asleep to avoid having to drink any more. It was way past her bedtime, she reminded them: she was used to early-bed-early-rise, and bags under the eyes weren't a good look for a model.

If Tracey officially felt responsible for ensuring that Dorothy made the most of her evening, she'd now been joined by three able lieutenants in Nicola, Di and Lisa. Noisily weaving their way towards the hotel along the dark and narrow little street towards the hotel, they spotted a group of around a dozen men wearing kilts, and coming in the opposite direction. Some wore Scotland football shirts, but most had discarded even those. It was too much for Tracey, who wasted no time in establishing she'd bumped into a stag night.

“Come on boys, we can see the hairy chests. But what does a Scotsman

wear under his kilt? Anything?”

“Wouldn’t you like to know?” one said. The others laughed.

“Going to let us see, then?”

One of the young men, who was obviously the leader like Tracey, replied, “Maybe. What’s in it for us?”

“We flash our boobs, you flash your willies?”

The men looked at each other. “Em... no. We see like for like or it’s no deal. You can see most of us already,” – he pointed to his own naked torso – “so we need everything from you.” Then added, “Anyway, there’s more of us.”

Tracey laughed. “You want it all?”

“Why not? And all of you. Nobody ducks out.”

Gillian saw the danger, but it was too late. Tracey was up for it. She turned round to all the other girls and grinned mischievously. Di, Lisa, Nicola were already starting to undo clothing, and they started to help Dorothy, who was beyond doing much for herself.

“Too good a chance to miss, this, girls.” Turning back to the young man she simply said, “Deal. We’re doing this for Dorothy, after all.”

Younger than the others Lizzie looked panicked, and Gillian felt the way Lizzie looked. But there was no way out. Susan, though, was still cool enough to think.

“Not here, Susan, she said. “Let’s find somewhere where there will be no one else.” She turned to Gillian. “Is there anywhere near?” As she said it, Susan’s expression said *I’ve done all I can, now it’s your turn.*

Seven women and twelve men looked at Gillian, waiting for an answer. She could never live it down. Susan whispered in her ear, “Just do it if you

can. We can be quick.”

Gillian sighed. “A bit further along, this street has a small lane that you can into at both ends,” she said quickly. “Vans use it to deliver to shops’ back entrance – there aren’t any houses or anything. Follow me.”

Tracey seized on it. “Come on then, what are waiting for? Lead on, Gilly!”

Thistle Street Lane was, as Gillian promised, deserted. She led them well along the lane so that no passers-by in Thistle Street itself could accidentally see them.

Tracey was still in charge. “Right, boys, turn your backs, we’ll tell you when we’re ready. I’ll watch to make sure you don’t cheat, then I’ll quickly whip my kit off.”

Reluctantly, the young men did as they were told..

Tracey clapped her hands. “Come on girls! We don’t want to get cold!” To the boys, she called across, “Let’s have any underpants off you lot as well. We’re doing our bit! We’ll all keep our shoes on, if you don’t mind, so you can, too.” Most of the young men, in fact, were removing underwear.

Gillian, like all the other women, had her back to the men. It turned out that most of the girls hadn’t worn a bra to go out, and she was regretting having to wrestle with one. It took her a little while longer than everyone else, but she got there. Now, without even bothering to cover up, Tracey ripped her own clothes off in no more than twelve or thirteen seconds.

“OK, boys, on the count of three, we’ll turn around to face you, and you can lift up your kilts to let us see what you’ve got. ONE... TWO... THREE...!!”

Everyone did as commanded, and, as everyone cheered, Gillian was

confronted what she would in later years describe as “a dozen wobbling willies confronted by eight bouncing boobies”. Dancing in the quiet street wearing only her footwear, she was surprised to find it less unpleasant than she’d expected. The cool night air on intimate parts of her body felt strangely liberating, although she’d no intention of prolonging the experience. Lizzie still looked unhappy, while Susan looked utterly unimpressed.

Susan was even less impressed with what happened next. The young men started to dance towards the girls, performing little country dance moves that left the two groups on the opposite sides from where they’d begun. In no time, the men had snatched up the girls’ clothing and run off down the quiet lane back towards Thistle Street, hotly pursued by eight women who were squealing, cursing and panicking in equal measure. At the corner, they dumped the clothes in one huge pile at the corner of Thistle Street, and still laughing, ran off into the night.

Susan started to sort out what clothes belonged to her. She was furious, not with the men, but with Tracey.

“We’re supposed to be looking after Dorothy and her friends, Tracey. You’ve just been out to have a laugh at our expense. Why did you suggest that nonsense?”

“It was just a laugh. Just because you’re a fashion model, you think you’re superior to the rest of us. That’s what hen weekends are supposed to be like. Loosen up.”

“Don’t lecture me, Tracey MacDonald.” She pointed at the various members of the group. “Look at us – call this fun?”

Tracey was having none of it. “Don’t be such a stuck-up cow! There’s

no harm been done. We're just around the corner from the hotel. No one else will know apart from those guys. What happens on the hen weekend stays on the hen weekend, remember?"

Dorothy could barely stand and had her arm around Nicola's neck; Lizzie was crying inconsolably; Di and Lisa were crouched behind a parked van, peeing in the gutter. Gillian could do with getting back to a hotel toilet herself, but sorting out clothing looked some way off yet. Meanwhile, almost all of their underwear seemed to be missing, and she began to worry that the men had run off with it. Fortunately, Thistle Street was deserted, so she was able to take a moment to look around. Then, three things happened in quick succession.

First, Gillian spotted the underwear: it had been thrown high onto the window-ledges of the first-floor flats in Thistle Street itself: it was well out of reach, and even if they find some way of climbing up, there was no way to do so without completely losing what little remained of their dignity. There was nothing for it: they were going to have to do without.

Second, nachos, a chilli cheese burger and a double helping of chocolate ice cream – to say nothing of an enormous quantity of assorted liquors – finally caught up with Dorothy. Carefully lifting back her veil, and spreading her legs so that her shoes wouldn't get covered, she bent over and threw up in the gutter in the gap just two cars along from Di and Lisa's pool of urine. It was by far the most co-ordinated thing Dorothy had managed all evening.

Finally, no sooner had Dorothy stood up again, grinned and declared 'Better an empty house than a bad tenant,' than two policeman rounded the corner, roughly seventy yards from where they were all standing arguing

over their clothes. Nicola spotted them first, but it was Tracey who screamed, “Run!”

Had any member of the general public been casually standing on the opposite pavement, their eyes would have been drawn towards eight women in their late twenties running full tilt in an easterly direction. The women in question would have been wearing nothing but socks and shoes, but most would have been attempting to use any clothing they could grab to preserve at least the front half of their modesty. Naturally, they travelled at different speeds: bringing up the rear, in every sense, Susan and Gillian were left to ‘half-carry’ the bride-to-be as fast as they could manage. It wasn’t an easy task carrying Dorothy’s dead weight, and became harder still when Gillian tripped slightly and lost her right shoe. Gillian was about to stop and go back, but Susan yelled, “Leave it, you can afford a new pair!” so that the last hundred yards back to the hotel were completed half-hopping, half-running. Daring to glance back along the street as they turned inside, they were relieved to see that the two policemen were following them, but not running to catch them. They were safe.

Inside the hotel foyer, the three stragglers found everyone else laughing hysterically, even Lizzie, who seemed to have recovered from her miseries of not so long ago. The evening, it was clear, would be re-lived many times in the future. Items of clothing were returned to rightful owners – not that there was much to return now that they’d lost their underwear. Everyone just grabbed one of the ‘Dorothy’s Final Fling’ tee-shirts, which all looked the same anyway. Then – finally – Susan suggested it was probably time they were all in bed.

Back in their room, Gillian ripped off her remaining shoe and socks,

tossed her pile of clothes on the floor, and flopped onto the huge double bed. She no longer cared what Susan thought – or anyone else for that matter – she just needed to stretch out and relax with her eyes closed. A minute later, she was aware that Susan had joined her on the other half of the bed.

Gillian felt Susan squeezing her hand gently.

“We survived.”

They might have been lying like that for five minutes or so, each of them trying to work out how they could summon up the energy to wash and brush their teeth, when there was a knock at the door.

“What now?” Susan muttered. Half-expecting it to be Tracey once again, she peered round the door. But it wasn’t.

She looked towards Gillian. “It’s the police. They say it’s you they want to speak to.”

“Oh no...” Gillian said. Grabbing the first thing that came to hand, a ‘Debbie’s Final Fling’ tee-shirt, she got up and made her way to the door. Two very stern-looking police officers filled the frame of the doorway.

“Is your name Cindy?” one of them said.

Gillian looked bemused. She’d also realised that she’d grabbed Susan’s *much* shorter tee-shirt by mistake, and was frantically trying to stretch it downwards. “No, I’m – ”

“Dr Cinderella Clark?” he explained, drawing Gillian’s missing shoe from behind his back and offering it to her.

“Thank you. Look, I’m so sorry, I can explain – ” she reached out and took the shoe, accidentally letting go of her tee-shirt in her mortification.

He laughed. “It’s OK, Dr Clark. I don’t think you really need to

explain, do you.”

“How did you find me?”

“Well, now, let’s see... there’s a young man on the desk downstairs whose eyes must have been out on organ stops a little while ago when eight naked women appeared in Reception. So when we walked in shortly afterwards with your description and your missing shoe, he didn’t find it that hard to remember you. And therefore easy to be able tell me that the tallish one with the short dark hair in Room 205 was called Gillian Clark from Gateshead.”

Gillian had regained control of her tee-shirt, but now her face was bright pink to match it. “I’m so sorry. It won’t happen again.”

The other police officer spoke for the first time. “It happens every weekend, actually. Edinburgh’s the hen weekend capital of Britain. You signed in as ‘Dr’.”

“I do that to save having to use Mrs, Miss, Ms – or even Mr, I suppose.”

“Are you a medic?”

“Yes.”

“I think you might have a hangover clinic tomorrow, Dr Clark.”

Gillian was beginning to realise that she wasn’t going to be arrested. “Probably starting with myself. I promise to take better care of them tomorrow.”

“Thank you. We’ll be off then. Try to look after your clothing for the rest of your stay. Goodnight, stay safe, and our best wishes to the bride-to-be.”

Gillian mumbled thanks again, closed the door, then leaned back against it and closed her eyes.

“Jesus.”

“What’s wrong?” Susan asked.

“What a night.”

Susan chuckled. “Memorable, for sure.”

Gillian hadn’t moved.

“Is something the matter, Gillian?”

Gillian opened her eyes. “Did you see them?”

“Yes... I saw them.”

Gillian groaned. “Oh... the one on the left that handed me my shoe...”

“The bald one?”

“Nothing wrong with male patterned hair loss. Probably a sign of lots of testosterone. Did you see his *eyes*? Did you see that *smile*?”

“It’ll be the stab vests. It makes all policemen look like hunks.”

“I don’t care. I’m happy to leave what’s under that uniform to my imagination.”

Susan grinned. “OK... you can have him, I’ll have the other one, the one with the beard.”

Gillian groaned again. “Oh, please... that’s just *fine* with me.”

“You need to come back here,” Susan chuckled, patting Gillian’s side of the bed. Making her way back from the door, Gillian peeled off Susan’s tee-shirt.

“Sorry about your top, I hope I haven’t stretched it completely out of shape.”

Susan was paying no attention to the top, however. Instead, she’d found the Ann Summers bags.

“Right then,” she announced grandly, holding up two cardboard boxes.

“Let’s see what our men have to offer. Your guy’s got the ‘Lucy Love Lady Lipstick’ on his side, mine’s got the ‘OhMiBod with BlueTooth remote control’. Which of us is going to get the bigger treat, do you think?”

“I think we need to find out,” Gillian said. “I *really* need to find out soon.” She grabbed her box and ripped it open.

“I thought you weren’t sure how it worked.”

“I’m not. I’m going to rely on instinct,” Gillian added, settling back to make herself comfortable. “What’s more, I’ll be better informed for Tuesday.”

“What on earth happens on Tuesday?”

“My clinic at the medical practice back in Gateshead. I run the women’s drop-in sexual health clinic. We GPs are supposed to understand the female orgasm and there’s usually someone turns up every week looking for ways to spice up her sex life. Tuesday’s ‘tip of the week’ will be the Lucy Love Lady Lipstick.”

“And a bald, imaginary hunk of a policeman.”

“With eyes and smile to die for. Now leave me alone with him.”



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