

Choose font preferences:

Cinderella, Inc

by Christopher Anvil

The girl was sallow and scrawny, her face as unattractive as two pills in a smear of mustard. She squinted up and down the street before she hustled across to a wide doorway under a glowing sign:

Cinderella, Inc.

She hurried through the door and up to a handsome male attendant standing near a hotel-like desk. "At your service, madame," he crooned.

She fumbled in her pocketbook and brought out a piece of torn teletype. She crammed it into his hand. "Can they make *me* look like that?" she demanded.

He unfolded the paper and glanced at the lush advertisement. He smiled, and returned it. "Yes," he said, "but it will be expensive."

"Oh, I've got the money."

He raised his hand in an imperious gesture, and a round purple and gold couch whirled down from above. "Seat yourself, madam, and be borne on your voyage to beauty," he said grandiosely. In a sort of mesmeric trance she flopped down on the couch and it whisked away with her.

The couch vaulted through a wide oval opening into a rose colored room ringed with mirrors. From a hidden opening in the ceiling a grayish-green light rayed down on her. "Behold yourself as you are," said a taunting female voice.

The girl glanced with irritation at the mirror. "You don't have to sell me," she snapped, "I know what I look like."

The couch started forward with a jerk and slid toward a mirror, the image enlarging as it approached. The mirror swung up and the couch slid through to halt before a desk in a softly-lit room done in gray. A window looked out over the city. A man in a white coat rose from his desk and offered her a chair facing him. His eyes went over her impersonally. She got up from the couch and sat down beside the desk.

"What is it you want?" the man asked.

"This," said the girl, and spread the advertisement before him.

He studied the picture for a minute then looked the girl over again. "Stand up, please." She stood up. "Now turn around. Mm-hm . . . Well, sit down." He bridged his hands and looked at her. "I think we can do the body, but I'm not sure of the face. This will cost money. Ah, we insist on a cash payment. ..."

"How much money?" she watched him tensely, opening her pocket-book.

"One hundred thousand."

She took out ten crisp bills and spread them on his desk. He nodded, scribbled a receipt, and took her back to the couch. It whirled her out the door and down warm, gaily lighted perfumed halls to another hotel-like desk where two pretty young girls sat on the counter with their short-skirted legs swinging back and forth. They jumped to their feet and went to the couch. Automatically she showed them the receipt.

"Oh," said one of the attendants, "you've already paid?"

"Yes."

"Well, then we can forget the sales talk." They glanced at the receipt, and their eyes widened. "You get *the full* treatment!" They looked envious.

"Don't you think I need it?" she said coldly. "Why don't we get started?"

"Don't you be nervous," said one of the girls sympathetically. "You'll come out all right. Joanie and me looked almost as bad as you do when we got the treatment." She straightened and turned around slowly, then laughed in vibrant happiness. "And we didn't get *the full* treatment!" They climbed onto the couch and waved to an attendant who sent it whirling down the hall. . . .

It was twenty days before she returned to consciousness, and it was thirty days after that before the doctors and attendants could be sure of the results.

At last she stood in front of the mirror, naked, and saw what she had hoped for. She was, in physical existence, what men with overactive glands and vivid imaginations dream of. She moved sensuously and the male attendants hastily left the room. Her throaty laughter followed them out the door.

Later she was called for her final interview. "Please sit down," said the woman doctor, frowning at a sheaf of papers on the desk. The doctor picked up a clinical photograph and showed it to her. "Do you recognize this woman?"

"Of course," said her sensuous voice. "That was I." She laughed huskily.

"Quite a transformation. Sometimes I think I'll take the treatment myself." The doctor ran a hand across her face, with the fingers spread out, massaging. "Now you'll admit, there's been quite a change."

"Of course."

"It would be unpleasant to change back."

There was a momentary silence. "Change *back*?"

"Yes, yes, I know," said the doctor, "this sounds like a scene from a horror teleshow. But the fact is that the, er, change was brought about, among other things, with the use of glandular secretions. A few chemicals were even used that don't ordinarily exist in the adult human body. Now our doctors have stabilized your physique as effectively as they can." She shuffled through the papers. "But you'll need to use a jectokit. We have yours here."

She handed across a small cream-colored plastic box. "The directions are indented into the box, so you can't make any mistake if you read them. Your body can store some of these substances for a time, but don't go any longer than ten days without them. Don't get cocky. You're a beautiful woman now, but remember, your beauty rests on that little box. After six months, we'll give you a refill, or one of our branch stores will. You're safe, so long as you do as I say." The doctor looked up to see how her listener was taking it. She received a breath-taking smile in return.

"I'm off," said the new beauty, "to find a man."

"That won't be hard," murmured the doctor a little ruefully.

The wedding, three months later, was a striking one. The women stared enviously at the tall handsome

breadth of the bridegroom, and the men watched the bride with bulging eyes. When the ceremony was over, and the couple occupied the bridal suite for the night, there was a momentary interlude.

"Darling," murmured the bride, "forgive me for a moment. I want to pretty up."

"You're pretty enough to eat," said the groom huskily.

She laughed and slipped past him to the bathroom door with her travel case. "Compose yourself," she smiled, "I'll be out in five minutes."

The groom smiled back. "Five minutes, then."

Once inside, she locked the door and brought out the little yellow plastic box. She clicked open the cover and looked at the photograph snapped inside. "Cinderella, Inc.," said the legend, "*reminds you.*"

"I remember," she said, and began her ritual.

In the bedroom, the groom was in his shirtsleeves whistling and unpacking his suitcase. Suddenly he stopped and stared at a little brown plastic box rolled up in his bathrobe. "By George," he gasped, "I almost forgot."

Hastily, he rolled up his sleeve. . . .