

Rich and Beautiful

Bruce Holland Rogers

In Los Angeles, a man and a woman met.

He said, "How do you like me?"

She said, "You are rich and accomplished." She thought he could be richer and more accomplished if he just worked a little harder, but she didn't say so at first. Then she said, "And how do you like me?"

"You are young and beautiful," he told her. He thought that she could be made even more beautiful with a little surgery, but he kept this to himself.

They married.

"I would love you all the more," she admitted, "if we had not a penthouse, but a mansion."

"And I would love you more than I already do," he confessed, "if your cheekbones were a little higher."

So he worked harder as a deal maker, and she went under the knife. They sold the expensive penthouse and bought a far more expensive mansion. With her new cheekbones, she began a career as a model.

"I'm a lucky man," he said. "Although I'd consider myself luckier if your legs were a bit longer."

"I pretty much completely adore you," she said. "If only we were together in not just a mansion, but an estate with vineyards."

He worked harder than ever, making the deals he had always made and also promoting her as a model. Again, she submitted herself to the surgeons.

With her longer legs she was among the most beautiful women in the world, and her husband and promoter was among the richest men in California. They lived on a wine estate overlooking the sea.

She could imagine him richer. He could imagine her still more beautiful. Each admitted as much.

The surgeons made her lips a little more full, her breasts more round, her waist more narrow. The modeling contracts he negotiated for her brought in higher and higher fees. She was in great demand.

Before long, his most lucrative deals revolved around her beauty. She spent more and more time in surgery, making adjustments. Weeks after each operation, when the swelling had gone down and her scars were undetectable, she would appear in veils to be unwrapped like a treasure for the press. Each time, the world was eager to see how nearly perfect she had become.

For a few days, those who had paid a fortune for the right could pose her and snap her picture. Then, before anyone had much more than glimpsed her, her husband and the surgeons would discuss what was to come next—some alteration of her finger bones, an adjustment to her brow or the width of her mouth.

Now he is richer than Croesus. She is more gorgeous than Aphrodite. Images of her face and hair sell makeup and shampoo. The silhouette of her legs sells cars. A photo of her hand holding a drink sells vacations.

She's invisible much of the time, bandaged or in seclusion. Not even her husband sees her. She is available for only a few sessions a year. Her fees are sky high. Every few months, she emerges for a new

unveiling.

He's on the phone day and night, making deals, making plans. His wife is the most appealing woman in the world. Keeping her that way is making him richer and richer.

He hardly sleeps. New opportunities are always appearing.

She hardly exists. Perfection is always a work in progress.