

# Mandatory Equality By Ina Disguise

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Roger ran a manicured nail over the spot of paint on the glass. It came off fairly easily, which he was thankful for. Nothing must sully his view of Hyde Park. Roger congratulated himself on what he had achieved with his modest 'just-down-the-road' almost-Oxford English degree. Now that he had managed to get on the second rung of his career in investment banking, largely due to his parent's investment in his expensive schooling, he was looking forward to moving out of his stylish yet expensive rented 'bedsit' and into something of his own. He was, after all, self-made. He stood, enjoying the view from his rented millionaire mansion flat at the window of the shared living room. So nice to be sharing with like-minded hedge fund hopefuls. And so peaceful, after a hard week with the brokers.

"Roger, just popping out to Wholefoods Market, can I get you anything?"

"Maybe some chai, and some calorie free noodles." Roger was aware that his appearance was important in his line of work. He liked to keep himself trim. Only this morning, the nameless woman he had enjoyed his weekend ritual of cocaine and dirty martini with, had commented on his trim physique. She was still in his bedroom now. If only he remembered something about her? Some detail that would remind him of her name, if indeed, he had ever known it.

As he prepared some artisan coffee in his Italian coffee maker, and warmed some croissants, he heard the distant waterfall shower in the marble bathroom. Ah, there she was, she would be out soon. He plumped up the designer pillows on the leather sofas and positioned himself on a stool at the kitchen island, coffee in hand, croissants on square black plate. A vision of a thoroughly modern guy, in his luxurious, 70% of his abundant wages, rented flat.

At length, she emerged. My word, she was magnificent. Tall, slim, muscular, presumably from Pilates as nobody really had calves that long, surely? Blonde. Did she say she was a lawyer? His memory was fuzzy on that, since he had not really been listening to her.

"Coffee, how nice." Her long, toffee coloured hair fell forward as she reached for the sugar substitute. "I'm so sorry, I don't quite remember your name?"

Thank God, thought Roger. "Roger, Roger Bolton. And you are?" he shot her his best version of a ditzy Hugh Grant smile.

"Ah well, Roger Bolton, it was nice to meet you, too. This is your flat?" The lady was not for talking about her name, evidently. Roger felt too embarrassed to press further.

"I live here, yes." Roger did not feel the need to admit that he was living like a very wealthy student, with another four young financial whizzkids. He prayed that none of them would return. He twiddled a designer cufflink.

She gathered the silk bathrobe she had found in the wetroom closer to her to protect her cleavage. "I suppose I had better get dressed. I have things to do before work on Monday." She did not look particularly attached, either to him or her surroundings.

Roger supposed that this was a good thing, since he usually had problems getting rid of them.

“Do you.....do you want my number? We could do breakfast or something?”  
Roger was in the unusual position of feeling awkward.

“To talk over old times?” The honey-hair lady, as she was now to be known, laughed as she retreated to his bedroom to dress. “It’s been fun, sweetie, but this is a big city.”

This was true. London was a big city, and people did this all the time, without feeling the need for social niceties such as breakfast offers. Roger felt a peculiar mixture of relief and disappointment at the rejection. She was far more attractive as a result.

She emerged, fully made-up, hair in an elegant knot, toffee leather trousers and boots to match her hair and a fur of some sort. She smiled. “See you around, perhaps.” She headed for the door, and departed without further ado.

Roger was left somewhat nonplussed, and fiddled nervously with the cufflinks again as he opened his briefcase to see if there was anything he needed to catch up with before Monday. Ah yes, his forex experiment. He could take care of that, and perhaps enjoy some online poker later. He felt a little empty. Sex was a bit unfriendly, when you didn’t have to excuse yourself, he thought.

Some time later, after going through the international news and the financial papers, Roger settled down to his online poker and whiled away the rest of the night before returning to work on Monday. His flatmates returned, and after the inevitable guffaws and humorous chides he received due to his late night visitor from the night before, they settled into some financial gossip. Life was sweet when your earnings were unlimited. They all felt that they were doing pretty well, and nothing would stand in the way of their glittering future plans.

The following night they planned to meet at Aldo’s, the local chicken bar. Perhaps they could trash the place again, or loudly refuse to pay. They had done this in the past, with ‘hilarious’ results. They did not see anything wrong with this, since they would inevitably be able to produce a few thousand spare change to pay off Aldo if need be. They were untouchable bastions of Britain, shoring up the welfare budget with the results of their bonus-accruing gambling on the stock market.

“Oy, oy you dick’ead! Sell ‘em this way, yeah?” Roger was at his happiest in the computer room, where a selection of pale and sweaty boys made and broke their careers guessing what the money would do next. In recent years, the occasional woman would stop by for a few weeks, on her way to being sent somewhere better, or quieter depending on how much money she made. The computer room was where the high pressure stuff took place, and was not considered a long-term spot for girls. Some of the less talented boys were concerned about the impending loss of their career, but this was not something Roger had to worry about. He would actively avoid national news, in favour of market statistics and industry gossip. Yes, Roger was a celebrated, coke sniffing, womanising money-making machine. He had particularly enjoyed ‘Wolf of Wall Street’ and liked to model himself on the film’s anti-hero in more whimsical moments, flicking his hair and shooting his mouth off.

A few weeks later, Roger arrived at work to find the formerly sweaty computer room half empty. There was a sombre atmosphere. No-one was yelling, and nobody looked up as he strutted to his desk. A note was pinned to it. Roger was confused. He looked along his row to the next chap at his desk. Timothy looked up, and swiftly looked back down again. What could have happened? Roger's performance was exemplary, so the call to the floor supervisor could not be bad news, surely? Where was everyone? Usually they were at their desks for as many hours as they could blag, given the money that even the underperformers were taking home. He thought about asking Timothy what he knew, and rejected the idea. Timmy-boy might think he was worried. He wasn't having that. He snatched up the note and prowled confidently to the floor supervisor's office.

"Orright Roger?" The gruff floor supervisor looked surprisingly cheerful. "Grab a seat, mate." The plump little man waved his hand in the direction of a chair. "Nuffink to worry about, we can't lose you." The supervisor laughed.

"What's up, mate?" Roger did his best to sound nonchalant. "Wot's 'appened to the office?"

"Mandatory Equality Bill, innit. The slowcoaches have been filtered out to make way for the women."

"Mandatory Equality?" Roger had never heard of it. It did not sound good.

"Yeah, mate. In the news and that. Mandatory Equality. The 'less-gifted' amongst us have been moved to the customer service department, and the best performing ladies will be getting a promotion up 'ere. All the departments have to show equality, and the ladies have the same promotion prospects as the lads now." The supervisor continued to grin. "It'll improve the view, wunnit."

"Won't work, mate." Roger liked to adopt the same accent as the supervisor. He imagined that this would endear him. "They can't stand the risk."

"Don't matter, does it? It's legal, mate. And that brings me to why you're in 'ere."

"Yes?"

"I have some good news for you, my son. You're pregnant." The supervisor continued to grin.

"Pregnant?" Now Roger was really confused.

"Yeah, pregnant. Under mandatory equality, you have to decide when to take your paternity leave, innit?"

"This is a joke, right? I'm a bloke." Roger was beginning to feel a bit uncomfortable. What was going on? He looked up at the ship's clock on the office wall. How long was this gag going to take? He had money to make.

“If you want to ask about the birds and the bees, there are places to learn that. You’ve been reported as fathering a baby by a Miss....Miss Hartliss. Two months gone, she is. You can go to the Mandatory Equality Unit and find out about the logistics, the where, the when an’ that. All I want to know is – when do you want to take your twelve months off on half pay?”

“Twelve months...on half pay?” Roger felt his dreams of living alone were slipping away from him. He would barely be able to afford a one bedroom ex Local Authority flat on half basic pay and no bonuses. “What about my promotion?”

“You can forget that now, son. You can pick up when you get back. The way I see it, the sooner you take your year off the better.” The supervisor raised his eyebrows.

“How does anyone know that I’m the father?” Roger was already starting to think of ways he could escape this horrible fate. “I don’t know any....Miss Hartliss.”

“They can explain more at the Mandatory Equality Unit. I can tell you that they sent out a picture of Miss Hartliss to jog your memory. They were quite clear on paternity. Times, places, word of a talented young female barrister, that sort of thing.” The supervisor pushed the form, complete with photograph, across the desk.

Roger’s heart sank. Honey-hair. He had knocked up Miss Honey Hair. Bitch. Her name was Hartliss, how appropriate. That was his life fucked then. “Can they force me to accept this? Surely they need DNA?” He was really frightened now.

“Innocent till proven guilty, mate. She’s telling the truth until you can prove otherwise. Plenty of CCTV and GPS monitoring now, mate. If you didn’t want this to ‘appen, should have used a condom or stayed at ‘ome with yer zip up.” The supervisor looked serious. “Seriously, mate, I’ll be sorry to lose ya, but you’re job will be ‘ere when you get back. Best get yourself down to the Mandatory Equality Unit, there’s a good lad.”

Roger left the supervisor’s office in a daze. Just like that. Life screwed. He packed up his desk and took the box back to the flat. He wouldn’t be able to live here anymore on half pay. He reckoned he was down to average London wages now. All because of a lousy shag. Well, probably a good one actually, but not that good. A lawyer, eh? Better have some evidence then, he thought as he took his passport and ID and headed down to the local Mandatory Equality Office.

The office was surprisingly civilised, having been designed on similar principles to a posher-than-usual jobcentre. A security guard challenged him on the way in.

“Sorry mate, we get a lot of aggressive men ‘ere. Wot’s yer business?”

“I’m accused of knocking up some woman I don’t know. Well, it was only one night.” Roger looked up at the older man.

“Aren’t you all, mate, aren’t you all.” The guard sighed. “This is going to ruin things for us men, you know. No more chasing the titties, no more shagging at random and

running. This way..." The guard led him over to a grim, sad looking man waiting at a desk. Roger presented his ID and waited for the man to locate his file.

"Ah yes, Mr Bolton. Yes, there is no doubt about it. You are expecting a child with Miss Hartliss."

"Don't I get a say in this?" Roger was now incensed at the unfairness. "Where is the proof?"

"Well, Miss Hartliss is a barrister, so she has been a bit ahead of the game since she participated in our pilot scheme. Under Mandatory Equality, the ladies submit a swab after congress, retain mobile phone records with GPS tracking, and log any locations that they, ahem, enjoy, using our texting service. It is extremely efficient. Together with the new developments in pregnancy testing, I am afraid it is without doubt."

"What if I don't want to be a father?" Roger still did not grasp how the system worked.

"If you do not wish to risk pregnancy, there are a variety of methods of contraception. Personally, I foresee a lot of people choosing sterilisation rather than celibacy." The grey man almost laughed. "I am afraid it is still her body, and you would have to mediate with Miss Hartliss if you wish to discuss termination. We do have a mediation service, should she agree to meet with you."

"Yes, yes, can you arrange that? Mediation. That sounds good." Roger was wild with a new found sense of hope.

"I will send out a letter to both you and Miss Hartliss, and we can proceed from there. In the meantime, enjoy your time off. I presume you went for early paternity?"

"Yes, yes I did. I was about to be promoted too. Bitch." Roger grimaced.

"Now, now, Mr Bolton, I am sure there is no need for that. Keep it in your pants, next time, there's a good boy. Save yourself twenty five percent of your earnings for eighteen years." The grey faced man looked stern. "You can find other ways to let off steam, young man."

Roger was slightly embarrassed at this apparent reference to onanism, and got up. "Thank you, sir." He turned to leave. As he proceeded to the door, he wondered if he could perhaps find some cash work? Or make enough with the forex trading to keep his flat? Twelve months was a long time to stump up four grand a month for a bedroom and shared facilities, no matter how glamorous. He cursed himself, for not saving more, as he headed for the bus and back to his flat.

A baby. The idea struck him with some force as he was falling asleep. Twenty five percent of his earnings. He picked up his mobile and paid his credit card bills, for once. He looked at his bank balance. He would have to find somewhere else to live quickly to survive on half pay. At least he did not have a car to worry about. He wasn't cut out to be a father, of that he was sure. On a normal night, he would have gone out, bought some coke and found a woman, but he knew he could not really

afford to do the former, and definitely could not afford to do the latter. He was too embarrassed to ask the flatmates, so he looked on his tablet for landlords in cheaper areas, where he could perhaps even get a small flat of his own. Everything was expensive. How would he survive on the average London wage? He thought with astonishment about the cleaners, the canteen workers, the shopkeepers, and marvelled that such people could survive at all, never mind have children?

Imminent destitution aside, Roger felt that he had been cheated. Cheated out of his prospects, cheated out of his independence, cheated out of all that fun he had enjoyed as the fruits of his labours. He really did not want to leave London, he decided, and besides, he was sure that he would come up with a loophole that would allow him to do something to make money for the next year. The forex was doing OK, perhaps he could take bigger risks? He indulged in a spot of short term peer-to-peer lending in the meantime, just to get a marginally better interest rate, before he realised that he had tied up this money to make five percent or so over the next year. There had to be something he was missing. He did not have the capital to trade for himself to any great extent. The flash flat and cocaine had put paid to that, he thought ruefully.

By the following week, Roger had selected a very small flat, and had forwarded his mail in the hope that honey-hair would mediate to terminate her child. He moved his belongings from the expansive Hyde Park flat, and into a very small and rather dingy flat in Hackney. He thought that from here, he could catch up with some reading, look for some cash income of some sort, and continue his adventures in forex whilst waiting to return to work. A week after he had moved in, the letter arrived. Miss Hartliss did not wish to mediate, but had provided her mobile phone number, should he wish to arrange to see his child or discuss parental arrangements such as money and visitation. Roger's heart sank. He was off for the year. In investment banking terms, this probably meant that he would never recover. He was already one of the older traders on the floor.

Desperate to cheer himself up, he went to his local strip club, and was rendered even more miserable by the equal showing of male and female strippers. Mandatory Equality was an appalling idea. The national papers, which he now had time to read, proclaimed that there were shortages of women in government, in trades, in management and approximately half a million paternity vacancies had to be covered for the following year. This number was expected to rise significantly 'until men got used to it.' Men were beside themselves with rage, at this unexpected new sense of responsibility. Documentaries were regularly shown on TV, depicting the tragedy of the lost talent of men who were guilty only of neglecting to use a condom whilst having sex with a stranger. Marriages broke up, as women and men alike refused to continue in non monogamous relationships they had had no idea they were in. Old married women took tests for HIV, and the Sunday papers were full of the tragic tales of surprisingly old women who had been infected by their partners, and 'need never have known about it' according to more than one tabloid hack. The nature of hidden male sexuality, and its lack of loyalty, had of course never occurred to Roger. He wallowed in the unfairness. He became morose, and finally he decided to call Miss Hartliss Honey Hair.

“Oh Roger the Dodger! How are you!” Honey hair sounded remarkably cheerful. “I thought you would never call!”

“You.....ruined my life.” Roger was speechless at her happiness.

“You are having a baby. Cheer up, you might actually enjoy being a father. If you want to, of course, it’s not like I need you here.” Honey hair sounded on top of the world.

“I don’t want to be a father. I don’t want any of this.” Roger was incoherent.

“Well, you know, I didn’t particularly want to be a mother, but what can you do? I’m thirty. You don’t have to involve yourself, you know. Your wages will be docked by the Unit.” She sounded so carefree. “Hope the interruption to your work wasn’t too bad for you. I haven’t even started my leave yet.”

“I live in....Hackney.” Roger made this sound as if he was living in rural Mauritania.

“Good for you. Of course, if you were going to be involved, you could always save yourself the rent and live here and pay some bills of mine. I’m going to need the money, after all.” Roger marvelled at her lack of concern. “It’s quite a big place, you know. Room for a lodger. Why don’t you come over and have a look?”

“I’m not sure I’m ready for that.” Roger felt haunted, victimised by her happiness.

“OK well, if you want to meet up and chat, give me a call.” Miss Hartliss sounded rather put out. Full of the happy hormones, he surmised.

“Right.” Roger decided to end the call there and check his investments. He was dazed by the lack of worry. Mandatory Equality apparently allowed women to do whatever they liked. It just wasn’t right. They should have the responsibility and the worry. It just wasn’t natural. What would become of him? He was now too scared to have sex, in case it would happen again. He felt emasculated.

He tried spending some time in the pub, a comparatively cheap activity when viewed alongside snorting coke, and took up dominoes. After a couple of weeks he felt rather ancient, and decided to retry his communication with Miss Hartliss.

“What is your name? I mean I know the Hartliss bit, but what is your actual name?” Roger was now too despondent to mess about.

“Helena. Are you coming over or what? Take a taxi, I want to show you the ultrasound.” Helena honey hair Hartliss took control, as was her wont.

“Sure.” Roger flagged down a taxi and headed to the address Helena has provided. It was indeed, a rather large industrial unit.

“Ah, as soon as I paid my debts, I took on a few more. I have a very successful legal practise now. Go and see if you can find the guest room, I’ll dig out the pictures.” Helena was again, very laid back. She waved in the general direction of her guest



rooms. She lived in what appeared to be a former warehouse, with strange, expensively designed hobbit corners designed for sleeping. All very stylish, and doubtlessly very expensive. Roger felt more emasculated than ever.

“So you don’t even need to work?” Roger was aghast that he had been forced to take nominal paternity leave to demonstrate equality with someone who had far outearned him in the first place.

“I don’t suppose I do, no. That isn’t the point of Mandatory Equality, you do realise that, don’t you?” Helena looked contemptuous. “You aren’t taking the time off for my benefit, you are taking time off for the benefit of all the people you prevent from working by remaining in work. Women have been relegated to dispensable roles for centuries as a result of maternity leave, and men have taken little to no responsibility for their genitals. You do understand that, don’t you? This is the closest to genuine equality we will ever get.”

“Why should I suffer because you got yourself knocked up?” Roger looked petulant. “Your baby should be your problem, not mine. My office has been decimated by this stupid law, you know that?”

“Perhaps it is time you went home and had a think about that.” Helena took the scattered ultrasound pictures and looked disappointed. “I thought you were intelligent, but you’re a bit pathetic. You do know it takes two people to have sex in the first place, yes? Mandatory Equality is going to make it very difficult for people to get away with rape, denial or simply absconding. That’s the whole point. Not to mention the benefits to women in the workplace, suddenly getting a level playing field. It was the only way to make a fair society. If you can’t see that, Roger, you shouldn’t be here.”

Mindful of the offer of a decent place to live, Roger thought about it. The hobbit guest zone was self contained. Roger, in his new inhibited, responsible but still uncomfortable skin, thought he could probably be quite happy there, at least until he could get back to work.

“I think I need to prepare myself to be a decent father. I haven’t digested it yet. I still don’t know whether to join a protest group or leave the country or what.”

“The Mandatory Equality Unit is extremely efficient. I don’t think leaving the country would help. Unless you think you could seek asylum in North Korea, or Bolivia, I believe they are offering anonymity for men.” Helena, effortlessly beautiful as always, looked haughty. “I think you might as well consider moving in for a while, at least when the baby is born. If you can’t stand it, you can always leave. I won’t hold it against you.”

“Yes, Helena, I think I will probably take you up on that.” Roger, deep in thought, looked at her with new found respect. “Thank you, you are very patient.” Even after this succinct explanation, he still felt the rage bubbling below the surface. How could men fight back? How could they reclaim the rights of paternalism, without the responsibility of paternity? There had to be some way this equality thing could be

crushed. In the meantime, he wanted his free lodgings, given that he had lost a year's bonuses and half of his wages. "I will give you a call in a week or two, if that is OK?"

"That sounds reasonable, Roger." Helena pursed her lips at the frenzied tension she detected. "We can have a chat then." She was aware that Roger was not quite as accepting of the new status quo as he made out, but Helena was a generous spirit, and hopeful that he would respond well to fatherhood, against all known odds. She wondered if she was being silly, given the cocaine filled night that had spawned their child? One could only wait and see.

Three weeks later, Roger packed his belongings and a man with van moved him into his impossibly stylish new abode. He was horrified by Helena's bills for the warehouse, but it was no more expensive, and considerably more comfortable, than the house in Hackney. Roger's plan was to grow his men's movement from his computer whilst living in Helena's house. A just retribution. He would use her arguments against her, he thought. He read as much as he could, devoting himself to a robust defence of paternalism and male dominance. He wrote essay after essay, preparing himself with statistics of the decline in hedge fund management and lower risk performance of female staff in investment banking. He celebrated risk and reward, war, and progress, and sharpened his game in preparation for the fightback.

Helena, dimly aware of the spy in her midst, enjoyed her pregnancy, and enjoyed having some company. They spent many evenings discussing their brave new society, Helena explaining again and again why Mandatory Equality was necessary. Roger still seemed to be having difficulties grasping the point. It wasn't just about women, it was about opportunity for both genders. Men as well as women, were benefitting from the wealth of new opportunities they were afforded when formerly complacent and irresponsibly randy men were forced to take a year off work. Burst condoms aside, it was an extremely fair and progressive law. Some surprisingly famous faces were included in the crowds of men who were forced to take leave. Religious figures, family politicians, senior figures who one would expect to show some responsibility. Public figures with a self employed status were also forced to stand down and take leave, to show solidarity with the equalists. Mandatory Equality led to a generalised support for progression and personal development. Helena watched this and smiled. Roger saw this and plotted reversal.

When the baby finally arrived, Roger softened somewhat, and spent time with the baby whilst Helena tied up loose ends at work and took her own maternity leave. The time for Roger to return to work was approaching. In the meantime he had created a network of men, all of whom were ready and willing to fight for the reversal of the accursed bill that had destroyed their comfortable complacent lives. Economists, doctors, clerics alike waited for the chance to get their beloved old society back. They made videos, artwork, books, poetry decrying the new revolution and demanding a return to 'nature.' Men should spread the seed, and women should take the financial and personal consequences. This was only right. Roger would look down at the son in his arms and quietly promise that he too would grow up to sleep around indiscriminately and sit interminably in a job whilst overqualified women acted as secretary. It was only right, after all.

Eventually, Roger's revolutionaries decided that the best way of seizing what was theirs was to create a religious militarist movement, in emulation of America. Women were in no hurry for mandatory equality when it came to being shot whilst they had a baby at home, and religion was considered a good line to take as it was more flexible and confusing than mere politics. If they could all work together, via the media, religion and the military, it would not be long before they could persuade women too, that things had been better and more stable before. What they really needed, they decided, was a religious war. The Muslims were selected as appropriate enemies. A perfect storm – appear to fight Muslims on the grounds of their women being second class, in order to make women everywhere return to traditional paternalist values putting them in exactly the same position they had been in before the Mandatory Equality Law was passed.

They created their media storm, making full use of the data Roger had carefully collected during his paternity leave, and achieved a full twenty percent shift in attitudes to return to paternalism, despite the benefits to the majority of the population of a less stable male workforce. People decried the difficulties of finding a plumber. People complained that they were being forced to name the father of their children, even if they did not want to see them again. The Unit itself was said not to work. Muslims were, of course, slated at every opportunity to foster support for the impending religious war. The stage was set for Roger to return his world to one in which he need have no fear. His sex drive improved enormously. The right wing political parties, who were, as everyone knew, infested with defence manufacturers, were delighted with the plan and campaigned as hard as they could.

And so, when the election came, it was decided, despite the period of equality, that nobody wanted it. Men and women alike voted against it, for a government who lined their pockets by producing weapons and involving the country in bombing Muslims. When the Muslims fought back, they simply used it as an opportunity to remove liberty, to spy on the population, and to reduce people's freedom to the point that they were frightened to leave the house. Roger moved out. Helena moved away, and went to court to remove his visitation rights. Roger won. Helena gave up work.

**About the Author:** Ina Disguise is an author and artist from Scotland. She is not particularly feminist.

Her current muse is David Wolfe, health guru and general irritant.

You can find her regular blog posts, free books and artwork on [inadisguise.com](http://inadisguise.com).

Any proceeds from her work are for the benefit of the Better Person Project.

Thank you for your interest.