

## I Was a Playboy Bunny

*I undertook a reporting assignment armed with a large diary and this ad:*

### GIRLS:

Do Playboy Club Bunnies Really  
Have Glamorous Jobs,  
Meet Celebrities, And  
Make Top Money?

Yes, it's true! Attractive young girls can now earn \$200-\$300 a week at the fabulous New York Playboy Club, enjoy the glamorous and exciting aura of show business, and have the opportunity to travel to other Playboy Clubs throughout the world. Whether serving drinks, snapping pictures, or greeting guests at the door, the Playboy Club is the stage—the Bunnies are the stars.

The charm and beauty of our Bunnies has been extolled in *Time*, *Newsweek*, and *Pageant*, and Ed Sullivan has called The Playboy Club "the greatest new show biz gimmick." And the Playboy Club is now the busiest spot in New York.

If you are pretty and personable, between 21 and 24, married or single, you probably qualify. No experience necessary.

*I Was a Playboy Bunny/33*

Apply in person at SPECIAL INTERVIEWS being held Saturday and Sunday, January 26-27, 10 A.M.-3 P.M. Please bring a swimsuit or leotards.

THE PLAYBOY CLUB  
5 East 59th Street

THURSDAY, JANUARY 24TH, 1963

I've decided to call myself Marie Catherine Ochs. It is, may my ancestors forgive me, a family name. I have some claim to it, and I'm well versed in its European origins. Besides, it sounds much too square to be phony.

FRIDAY 25TH

I've spent the entire afternoon making up a background for Marie. She shares my apartment, my phone, and my measurements. Though younger than me by four years (I am beyond the Bunny age limit), Marie celebrates the same birthday and went to the same high school and college. But she wasn't a slave to academics—not Marie. After one year she left me plodding along the path to a B.A. and boarded a tourist flight to Europe. She had no money, but short periods as a waitress in London, a hostess-dancer in Paris, and a secretary in Geneva were enough to sustain her between beach-combing and other escapades. Last year, she came back to New York and worked briefly as a secretary. Three mutual friends have agreed to give her strong personal recommendations. To know her is to love her.

Tomorrow is the day. Marie makes her first trip out of this notebook and into the world. I'm off to buy her a leotard.

SATURDAY 26TH

Today I put on the most theatrical clothes I could find, packed my leotard in a hatbox, and walked to the Playboy Club. It is impossible to miss. The discreet six-story office building and art gallery that

once stood there has been completely gutted and transformed into a shiny rectangle of plate glass. The orange-carpeted interior is clearly visible, with a modern floating stairway spiraling upward at dead center. The total effect is cheerful—and startling.

I crossed over to the club where a middle-aged man in a private guard's uniform grinned and beckoned, "Here bunny, bunny, bunny!" He jerked his thumb toward the glass door on the left. "Interviews downstairs in the Playmate Bar."

The inside of the club was so dramatically lit that it took a few seconds to realize it was closed and empty. I walked down a short flight of stairs and was greeted by Miss Shay, a thin, thirtyish woman who sat at a desk in the darkened bar. "Bunny?" she asked briskly. "Sit over there, fill out this form, and take off your coat." I could see that two of the tables were already occupied by girls hunched over pencils, and I looked at them curiously. I had come in the middle of the interview period, hoping to see as many applicants as I could, but there were only three. "Take off your coat," said Miss Shay again. She looked at me appraisingly while I did so. One of the girls got up and crossed to the desk, her high-heeled plastic sandals slapping smartly against her heels. "Look," she said, "you want these measurements with or without a bra?"

"With," said Miss Shay.

"But I'm bigger without," said the girl.

"All right," said Miss Shay wearily, "without." Two more girls came down the steps looking fresh, and innocent of cosmetics. "Bunny?" said Miss Shay.

"Not really," said one, but the other took a card. Their long hair and loafers looked collegiate.

The application form was short: address, phone, measurements, age, and last three employers. I finished it and began to stall for time by looking at an accompanying brochure entitled *BE A PLAYBOY CLUB BUNNY!* Most of it was devoted to photographs: a group picture showing Bunnies "chosen from all over the United States" surrounding "Playboy Club President and Playboy Editor-Publisher Hugh M. Hefner"; a close-up of a Bunny serving Tony Curtis, "a Playboy Club devotee [who] will soon star in Hugh M. Hefner's film titled, appropriately enough, *Playboy*"; two Bunnies smiling with

Hugh M. Hefner on "Playboy's nationally syndicated television show"; Bunnies handing out copies of *Playboy* in a veterans' hospital as "just one of the many worthwhile community projects in which Bunnies participate"; a blond Bunny standing before a matronly woman, the "Bunny Mother," who offered "friendly personal counseling"; and, on the last page, a bikini-clad girl crouching on a yacht flying a Bunny flag. "When you become a Bunny," said the text, "your world will be fun-filled, pleasant, and always exciting." It cited an average salary of two hundred dollars a week.

Another girl came down the steps. She wore glasses with blue rims and a coat that looked as if she had outgrown it. I watched her as she nervously asked Miss Shay if the club hired eighteen-year-olds. "Sure," said Miss Shay, "but they can't work the midnight shift." She gave the girl an application card, glanced down at her plump legs, and did not ask her to take off her coat. Two more girls came in, one in bright pink stretch pants and the other in purple. "Man, this place is a gas," said Pink.

"You think this is wild, you should see Hefner's house in Chicago," said Purple. Miss Shay looked at them with approval.

"I don't have a phone," said Blue Glasses sadly. "Is it all right if I give you my uncle's phone? He lives in Brooklyn, too."

"You do that," said Miss Shay. She called me over, pointed to a spot three feet in front of her desk, and told me to stand up straight. I stood.

"I want to be a Bunny so much," said Blue Glasses. "I read about it in a magazine at school."

Miss Shay asked me if I were really twenty-four. "That's awfully old," she warned. I said I thought I might just get in under the wire. She nodded.

"My uncle isn't home all day," the girl said, "but I'll go to his house and stay by the phone."

"You do that, dear," said Miss Shay and, turning to me, she added, "I've taken the liberty of making an appointment for you on Wednesday at six-thirty. You will come to the service entrance, go to the sixth floor, and ask for Miss Burgess, the Bunny Mother." I agreed, but then she added, "Are you sure you haven't applied before? Someone named Marie Ochs came in yesterday." I was

startled: Could Marie have escaped from my notebook? I had a thirty-second fantasy based on *Pygmalion*. Or was there another Marie Ochs? Possible, but not likely. I decided to brave it out. "How strange," I murmured, "there must be some mistake." Miss Shay shrugged and suggested I bring "bathing suit or leotard" on Wednesday.

"Could I call you?" said Blue Glasses.

"Don't do that, dear," said Miss Shay. "We'll call you."

I left the club worrying about the life expectancy of Marie Ochs. Would they find out? Or did they know already? When I got halfway up the block I saw the two college girls. They were leaning against a building, their arms wrapped around themselves in a spasm of giggles, and suddenly I felt better about everything.

Everything, perhaps, except the thought of Blue Glasses sitting by her uncle's phone in Brooklyn.

#### WEDNESDAY 30TH

I arrived at the club promptly at 6:30, and business appeared to be booming. Customers were lined up in the snow to get in, and several passersby were standing outside with their faces pressed to the glass. The elevator boy, a Valentino-handsome Puerto Rican, cheerfully jammed me in his car with two uniformed black porters, five middle-aged male customers, two costumed Bunnies, and a stout matron in a mink coat. We stopped at the sixth floor. "Is this where I get out?" said the matron.

"Sure, darling," drawled the elevator boy, "if you want to be a Bunny." Laughter.

I looked around me. Dim lights and soft carpets had given way to unpainted cement block and hanging light bulbs. There was a door marked UNNIES; I could see the outlines where the B had been. A sign, handwritten on a piece of torn cardboard, was taped underneath: *KNOCK!! Come on, guys. Please cooperate?!!* I walked through the door and into a bright, crowded hallway.

Two girls brushed past me. One was wearing nothing but bikini-style panties; the other had on long black tights of fine mesh, and

lavender satin heels. They both rushed to a small wardrobe room on my right, yelled out their names, collected costumes, and rushed back. I asked the wardrobe mistress for Miss Burgess. "Honey, we just gave her a going-away present." Four more girls bounced up to ask for costumes, collars, cuffs, and tails. They had on tights and high heels, but nothing from the waist up. One stopped to study a bulletin-board list titled "Bunny of the Week."

I retreated to the other end of the tiny hall. It opened into a large dressing room filled with metal lockers and long rows of dressing tables. Personal notes were taped to the mirrors ("Anybody want to work B Level Saturday night?" and "I'm having a swingin' party Wednesday at Washington Square Village, all Bunnies welcome"). Cosmetics were strewn along the counters, and three girls sat in a row applying false eyelashes with the concentration of yogis. It looked like a cartoon of a chorus girls' dressing room.

A girl with very red hair, very white skin, and a black satin Bunny costume turned her back to me and waited. I understood that I was supposed to zip her up, a task that took several minutes of pulling and tugging. She was a big girl and looked a little tough, but her voice when she thanked me was tiny and babylike. Judy Holliday could not have done better. I asked her about Miss Burgess. "Yeah, she's in that office," said Baby Voice, gesturing toward a wooden door with a glass peephole in it, "but Sheralee's the new Bunny Mother." Through the glass, I could see two girls, a blond and a brunette. Both appeared to be in their early twenties and nothing like the matronly woman pictured in the brochure. Baby Voice tugged and pulled some more. "This isn't my costume," she explained, "that's why it's hard to get the crotch up." She walked away, snapping her fingers and humming softly.

The brunette came out of the office and introduced herself to me as Bunny Mother Sheralee. I told her I had mistaken her for a Bunny. "I worked as a Bunny when the club opened last month," she said, "but now I've replaced Miss Burgess." She nodded toward the blond who was trying on a three-piece beige suit that I took to be her going-away present. "You'll have to wait a while, honey," said Sheralee. I sat down.

By 7:00 I had watched three girls tease their hair into cotton-candy shapes and four more stuff their bosoms with Kleenex. By 7:15 I had talked to two other prospective Bunnies, one a dancer, the other a part-time model from Texas. At 7:30, I witnessed the major crisis of a Bunny who had sent her costume to the cleaners with her engagement ring pinned inside. At 7:40, Miss Shay came up to the office and said, "There's no one left but Marie." By 8:00, I was sure she was waiting for the manager of the club to come tell me that my real identity had been discovered. By 8:15, when I was finally called in, I was nervous beyond all proportion.

I waited while Sheralee looked over my application. "You don't look twenty-four," she said. *Well, that's that*, I thought. "You look much younger." I smiled in disbelief. She took several Polaroid pictures of me. "For the record," she explained. I offered her the personal history I had so painstakingly fabricated and typed, but she gave it back with hardly a glance. "We don't like our girls to have any background," she said firmly. "We just want you to fit the Bunny image." She directed me to the costume room.

I asked if I should put on my leotard.

"Don't bother with that," said Sheralee. "We just want to see that Bunny image."

The wardrobe mistress told me to take off my clothes and began to search for an old Bunny costume in my size. A girl rushed in with her costume in her hand, calling for the wardrobe mistress as a wounded soldier might yell, "Medic!" "I've broken my zipper," she wailed, "I sneezed!"

"That's the third time this week," said the wardrobe mistress sternly. "It's a regular epidemic." The girl apologized, found another costume, and left.

I asked if a sneeze could really break a costume.

"Sure," she said. "Girls with colds usually have to be replaced."

She gave me a bright blue satin. It was so tight that the zipper caught my skin as she fastened the back. She told me to inhale as she zipped again, this time without mishap, and stood back to look at me critically. The bottom was cut up so high that it left my hip bones exposed as well as a good five inches of untanned derriere. The boning in the waist would have made Scar-

lett O'Hara blanch, and the entire construction tended to push all available flesh up to the bosom. I was sure it would be perilous to bend over. "Not too bad," said the wardrobe mistress, and began to stuff an entire plastic dry-cleaning bag into the top of my costume. A blue satin band with matching Bunny ears attached was fitted around my head like an enlarged bicycle clip, and a grapefruit-sized hemisphere of white fluff was attached to hooks at the costume's rear-most point. "Okay, baby," she said, "put on your high heels and go show Sheralee." I looked in the mirror. The Bunny image looked back.

"Oh, you look *sweet*," said Sheralee. "Stand against the wall and smile pretty for the birdie." She took several more Polaroid shots.

The baby-voiced redhead came in to say she still hadn't found a costume to fit. A tiny blond in lavender satin took off her tail and perched on the desk. "Look," she said, "I don't mind the demerits—okay, I got five demerits—but don't I get points for working overtime?"

Sheralee looked harassed and turned to Miss Burgess. "The new kids think the girls from Chicago get special treatment, and the old kids won't train the new ones."

"I'll train the little buggers," said Baby Voice. "Just get me a costume."

I got dressed and waited. And listened:

"He gave me thirty bucks, and I only got him cigarettes."

"Bend over, honey, and get yourself into it."

"I don't know, he makes Milk of Magnesia or something."

"You know people commit *suicide* with those plastic bags?"

"Then this schmuck orders a Lace Curtain. Who ever heard of a Lace Curtain?"

"I told him our tails were asbestos, so he tried to burn it to find out."

"Last week I netted thirty bucks in tips. Big deal."

Sheralee called me back into the office. "So you want to be a Bunny," she said.

"Oh yes, very much," I said.

"Well . . ." she paused significantly, "we want you to be!" I was startled. No more interviews? No investigation? "Come in tomor-

row at three. We'll fit your costume and have you sign everything." I smiled and felt foolishly elated.

*Down the stairs and up Fifth Avenue. Hippety-hop, I'm a Bunny!*

## THURSDAY 31ST

I now have two bunny costumes—one orange satin and one electric blue. The color choice and the quality of satin are about the same as those in athletic supply catalogs. Costume bodices, precut to body and bra-cup size, are fitted while you wait. I waited, standing on the cement floor in bare feet and bikini pants. The wardrobe mistress gave me a small bathroom rug to stand on. "Can't have brand new Bunnies catching cold," she said. I asked if she could follow the line of my bikini pants in fitting the bottom; the costume I had tried the day before was cut up higher than any I had seen in photographs. She chuckled. "Listen, baby, you think that was high, you should see *some*." The whole costume was darted and seamed until it was two inches smaller than any of my measurements everywhere except the bust. "You got to have room in there to stuff," she said. "Just about everybody stuffs. And you keep your tips in there. The 'vault' they call it."

A girl with jet black hair, chalky makeup, and a green costume stopped at the door. "My tail droops," she said, pushing it into position with one finger. "Those damn customers always yank it."

The wardrobe mistress handed her a safety pin. "You better get a cleaner tail too, baby. You get demerits running around with a scruffy old tail like that." More girls began calling for their costumes, checking them out in a notebook chained to the counter. I learned that costumes were not allowed out of the building and that each girl paid \$2.50 a day to cover the cost of her costume's upkeep and cleaning. Bunnies also paid \$5.00 a pair for their thin black nylon tights and could be given demerits if they wore tights with runs in them. The wardrobe mistress gave me swatches from my two costumes and told me to have shoes dyed to match. I asked if the club allowed us any money for shoes. "You crazy or something, baby?" she said. "This place don't allow you no money for *nothing*.

Make sure you get three-inch heels. You get demerits, you wear 'em any lower."

I dressed and went to the Bunny Mother's room. Sheralee was at the desk. With her long hair pinned back she looked about eighteen. She gave me a large, shocking pink form marked "Bunny Application" and a brown plastic briefcase with a miniature nude girl and THE PLAYBOY CLUB printed on it in orange. "This is your Bunny bible," she said seriously, "and I want you to promise me you'll study it all weekend."

The application form was four pages long. I had already made up most of the answers for my biography, but some questions were new. Was I dating any Playboy Club keyholders, and what were their names? None. Did I plan to date a particular keyholder? No. Did I have a police record? No. The space for social security number I left blank.

Up one flight in the main office, I delivered the form to Miss Shay. The cement-floored room was checkered with desks, but, as personnel director, Miss Shay rated a corner position. She scanned the form and began taking more Polaroid pictures of me. "Be sure and bring your Social Security card tomorrow," she said. I wondered what to do about the fact that Marie Ochs had none. A stout man in a blue suit, black shirt, and white tie approached and gestured toward a chubby girl standing behind him. "Mr. Roma told me to bring her over, and I'd sure appreciate anything you can do for her," he said, and winked.

"In cases of extreme personal recommendation," said Miss Shay coolly, "we do schedule a girl's interview right away." She signaled to Sheralee, who took the girl downstairs. The stout man looked relieved.

A red-haired woman and two men came over, but Miss Shay asked them to wait. The younger man tapped the redhead's chin with his fist and grinned. "You ain't got a thing to worry about, baby." She gave him a look of utter scorn and lit a cigarette.

I signed an income-tax form, a meal ticket, a receipt for the meal ticket, an application form, an insurance form, and a release of all photographs for any purpose—publicity, editorial, or otherwise—deemed fit by Playboy Clubs International. A harried-looking young

man in shirt sleeves came to tell Miss Shay that two men working in the basement were going to quit. They had expected to work six days for seventy-five dollars and were working only five days for sixty dollars. They were upset about it because they had families to support. "I can't make changes," she said crisply. "I can only implement Mr. Roma's decisions."

Miss Shay stapled a set of Polaroid pictures to my employment form and gave me my schedule. "Tomorrow, you'll have makeup guidance at Larry Mathews', this weekend is Bunny-bible study, and Monday I've made an appointment for you to see our doctor for a physical exam." She leaned forward confidentially. "A *complete* physical," she said. "Monday afternoon is the Bunny Mother lecture and Bunny Father lecture. Tuesday you'll have Bunny school, and Wednesday you'll train on the floor." I asked if I could go to my own doctor. "No," she said, "you must go to our doctor for a special physical. All Bunnies have to."

Miss Shay gave me one last form to sign, a request that Marie Ochs's birth record be sent to the Playboy Club. I signed it, hoping that the state of Michigan would take a while to discover that Marie did not exist. "In the meantime, I'll need your birth certificate," she said. "We can't let you work without it." I agreed to send a special-delivery letter home for it.

Of course I won't be allowed to serve liquor or work late hours without proof of age. Why didn't I think of that?

Well, Marie's future may be short, but she can still try to make it through Bunny school.

#### FRIDAY, FEBRUARY 1ST

I was fitted for false eyelashes today at Larry Mathews's, a twenty-four-hour-a-day beauty salon in a West Side hotel. As a makeup expert feathered the eyelashes with a manicure scissors, she pointed out a girl who had just been fired from the club "because she wouldn't go out with a Number One keyholder." I said I thought we were forbidden to go out with customers. "You can go out with them if they've got Number One keys," the makeup girl explained.

"They're for club management and reporters and big shots like that." I explained that being fired for *not* going seemed like a very different thing. "Well," she said thoughtfully, "I guess it was the way she said it. She told him to go screw himself."

I paid the bill. \$8.14 for the eyelashes and a cake of rouge, even after the 25-percent Bunny discount. I had refused to invest in darker lipstick even though "girls get fired for looking pale." I wondered how much the Bunny beauty concession was worth to Mr. Mathews. Had beauty salons sent in sealed bids for this lucrative business?

I am home now, and I have measured the lashes. Maybe I don't have to worry so much about being recognized in the club. They are three quarters of an inch long at their shortest point.

#### SUNDAY 3RD

I've spent an informative Sunday with the Bunny bible, or the *Playboy Club Bunny Manual*, as it is officially called. From introduction ("You are holding the top job in the country for a young girl") to appendix ("Sidecar: Rim glass with lime and frost with sugar"), it is a model of clarity.

Some dozen supplements accompany the bible. Altogether, they give a vivid picture of a Bunny's function. For instance:

. . . You . . . are the only direct contact most of the readers will ever have with *Playboy* personnel. . . . We depend on our Bunnies to express the personality of the magazine.

. . . Bunnies will be expected to contribute a fair share of personal appearances as part of their regular duties for the Club.

. . . Bunnies are reminded that there are many pleasing means they can employ to stimulate the club's liquor volume, thereby increasing their earnings significantly. . . . The key to selling more drinks is *Customer Contact* . . . they will respond particularly to your efforts to be friendly. . . . You should make it seem that [the customer's] opinions are very important. . . .

The Incentive System is a method devised to reward those table Bunnies who put forth an extra effort. . . . The Bunny whose [drink] average per person is highest will be the winner. . . . Prize money . . . will likewise be determined by over-all drink income.

There is a problem in being "friendly" and "pampering" the customer while refusing to go out with him or even give him your last name. The manual makes it abundantly clear that Bunnies must never go out with anyone they meet in the club—customer or employee—and adds that a detective agency called Willmark Service Systems, Inc., has been employed to make sure that they don't. ("Of course, you can never tell when you are being checked out by a Willmark Service representative.") The explanation written for the Bunnies is simple: "Men are very excited about being in the company of Elizabeth Taylor, but they know they can't paw or proposition her. The moment they felt they could become familiar with her, she would not have the aura of glamour that now surrounds her. The same must be true of our Bunnies." In an accompanying letter from Hugh Hefner to Willmark, the explanation is still simpler: "Our licenses are laid on the line any time any of our employees in any way engages, aids, or abets traffic in prostitution. . . ." Willmark is therefore instructed to "Use your most attractive and personable male representatives to proposition the Bunnies, and even offer . . . as high as \$200 on this, 'right now,' for a promise of meeting you outside the Club later." Willmark representatives are told to ask a barman or other male employee "if any of the girls are available on a cash basis for a 'friendly evening.' . . . Tell him you will pay the girls well or will pay him for the girls." If the employee does act "as a procurer," Willmark is to notify the club immediately. "We naturally do not tolerate any merchandising of the Bunnies," writes Mr. Hefner, "and are most anxious to know if any such thing is occurring."

If the idea of being merchandised isn't enough to unnerve a prospective Bunny, there are other directives that may. Willmark representatives are to check girls for heels that are too low, runs in their hose, jewelry, underwear that shows, crooked or unmatched

ears, dirty costumes, absence of name tags, and "tails in good order." Further: "When a show is on, check to see if the Bunnies are reacting to the performers. When a comic is on, they are supposed to laugh." Big Brother Willmark is watching you.

In fact, Bunnies must *always* appear gay and cheerful ("Think about something happy or funny . . . your most important commodity is personality") in spite of all their worries, including the demerit system. Messy hair, bad nails, and bad makeup cost five demerits each. So does calling the room director by his first name, failing to keep a makeup appointment, or eating food in the Bunny Room. Chewing gum or eating while on duty is ten demerits for the first offense, twenty for the second, and dismissal for the third. A three-time loser for "failure to report for work without replacement" is not only dismissed but blacklisted from all other Playboy Clubs. Showing up late for work or after a break costs a demerit a minute, failure to follow a room director's instructions costs fifteen. "The dollar value of demerits," notes the Bunny bible, "shall be determined by the general manager of each club."

Once the system is mastered, there are still instructions for specific jobs. Door Bunnies greet customers and check their keys. Camera Bunnies must operate Polaroids. Cigarette Bunnies explain why a pack of cigarettes can't be bought without a Playboy lighter, hat-check Bunnies learn the checking system, gift-shop Bunnies sell Playboy products, mobile-gift-shop Bunnies carry Playboy products around in baskets, and table Bunnies memorize thirteen pages of drinks.

There's more to Bunnyhood than stuffing bosoms.

Note: Section 523 says: "Employees may enter and enjoy the facilities of the club as bona fide guests of 1 [Number One] keyholders." Are these the big shots my makeup expert had in mind?

#### MORNING, MONDAY 4TH

At 11:00 A.M. I went to see the Playboy doctor at his office in a nearby hotel ("Failure to keep doctor's appointment, twenty demerits"). The nurse gave me a medical-history form to fill out. "Do you

know this includes an internal physical? I've been trying to get Miss Shay to warn the girls." I said I knew, but that I didn't understand why it was required. "It's for your own good," she said, and led me into a narrow examining room containing a medicine chest, a scale, and a gynecological table. I put on a hospital robe and waited. It seemed I had spent a good deal of time lately either taking off clothes, waiting, or both.

The nurse came back with the doctor, a stout, sixtyish man with the pink and white skin of a baby. "So you're going to be a Bunny," he said heartily. "Just came back from Miami myself. Beautiful club down there. Beautiful Bunnies." I started to ask him if he had the coast-to-coast franchise, but he interrupted to ask how I liked Bunnyhood.

"Well, it's livelier than being a secretary," I said, and he told me to sit on the edge of the table. As he pounded my back and listened to me breathe, the thought crossed my mind that every Bunny in the New York club had rested on the same spot. "This is the part all the girls hate," said the doctor, and took blood from my arm for a Wassermann test. I told him that testing for venereal disease seemed a little ominous. "Don't be silly," he said, "all the employees have to do it. You'll know everyone in the club is clean." I said that their being clean didn't really affect me and that I objected to being put through these tests. Silence. He asked me to stand to "see if your legs are straight." "Okay," I said, "I have to have a Wassermann. But what about an internal examination? Is that required of waitresses in New York State?"

"What do you care?" he said. "It's free, and it's for everybody's good."

"How?" I asked.

"Look," he said impatiently, "we usually find that girls who object to it strenuously have some reason . . ." He paused significantly. I paused, too. I could either go through with it or I could march out in protest. But in protest of what?

Back in the reception room, the nurse gave me a note to show Miss Shay that, according to preliminary tests at least, I had passed. As I put on my coat, she phoned a laboratory to pick up "a blood sample and a smear." I asked why those tests, but no urine sample?

Wasn't that the most common laboratory test of all? "It's for your own protection," she said firmly, "and anyway, the club pays."

Down in the lobby, I stopped in a telephone booth to call the Department of Health. I asked if a Wassermann test was required of waitresses in New York City? "No." Then what kind of physical examination *was* required? "None at all," they said.

#### AFTERNOON, MONDAY 4TH

The Bunny Mother lecture turned out to be a casual and much interrupted talk with Sheralee in her small windowless office. There were seven other trainees, two of them already in costume. There was also a delicate blond, the part-time model from Texas whom I had already met, a very big girl with very long hair who said she was a magician's assistant, a square-looking girl in a plaid suit, and a pretty brunette who never took off her coat.

For the most part, Sheralee's talk repeated the Bunny bible, but some points were new.

1. Because of the minimum wage in New York City, we must get a salary of fifty dollars for a forty-hour week. We get tips, but the club takes 50 percent of the first thirty dollars worth of those that are charged, 25 percent of amounts up to sixty dollars and 5 percent after that. "That means half of everything," whispered a girl in costume. "Who gets more than thirty dollars a day?"
2. We may keep all tips that are given to us in cash, but if we indicate any preference for cash tips, we will be fired.
3. "We don't even want you kids to know what 'drink average' means," said Sheralee, and explained that it meant the number of drinks per customer. "But if you give good service, you're bound to get more reorders, and you get merits for good service. A hundred merits equals twenty-five dollars."
4. If we meet boyfriends or husbands after work, we must do it at least two blocks from the club. Customers must never see us meeting other men.
5. We should never leave money in our lockers. Two girls have just been fired for stealing.

6. Because of "special problems in New York," we can't be charged money for demerits, so instead, we may buy them back with merits. "If a hundred merits are worth twenty-five dollars," I asked, "isn't it the same thing?" Sheralee said it wasn't.
7. Number One keyholders are given special treatment, i.e., we bring them telephone, pad, and pen immediately. Playboy International then "absorbs" the amount of their bill. Number One keys go to the executives of all the clubs, important members of the press, and a few other VIPs. We may also give them our names, accompany them in the club, and go out with them. The magician's assistant asked if we *had* to go out with them. Sheralee said, "Of course not."  
 "But," the girl said, "one of the room directors got mad at me for not telling my last name to a Number One keyholder. I explained that I was married, but he said I should give my last name anyway." Sheralee said she was sure the room director didn't mean it. "You never have to do anything you don't want," she said comfortingly.
8. The apartment of Vic Lownes is used for Playboy's promotional parties in New York, just as Hugh Hefner's house is used in Chicago. ("Mr. Lownes used to run the clubs," Sheralee explained, "but now he's associated mostly with the magazine.") When we go to such parties, we are not allowed to bring men. "Not even husbands?" the magician's assistant asked. "Absolutely *no men*," said Sheralee. "But of course you don't have to go if you don't want to."

We all went down to the VIP Room for the Bunny Father lecture, but not before a Bunny stopped at the door of Sheralee's office and called "Gloria!" I froze. After what seemed an eternity, the Bunny sitting next to me answered. I have learned to answer to Marie. Now I must learn to stop answering to Gloria.

There was no Bunny Father, but two slide shows with taped narration and jazz background were presented as his lecture. One was on Bunnies in general and offered nothing new except that when customers tried to "get familiar," we were to say, "Sir, you are not allowed to touch the Bunnies." The second half of the Bunny Fa-

ther lecture was called "Cocktail Bunny." It showed how to set up trays, fill out checks, and place drinks on tables. The narration didn't synchronize with the slides, the room was cold, and I emerged with a splitting headache.

Sheralee said that Miss Shay wanted to see me. My heart sank.

The main office was the same fluorescent-lit chaos as before, but Miss Shay was an island of calm. I would need an identification card, she said, to get in and out of the building. I gave her the note from the doctor, and my real Social Security number. I explained that I had lost the card. She looked doubtful but took the number.

I wanted to ask about this morning's medical puzzle, but decided against it for the moment. By calling attention to myself, I might only jog her memory about the missing birth certificate. I told her that my file was complete except for a chest X-ray, and I left. It's hard to believe that the efficient Miss Shay won't catch up with me soon, but I'll stay until discovered.

#### AFTERNOON, TUESDAY 5TH

At noon today I waited in line for a free chest X-ray at the Department of Health, muttering under my breath "Flamingo gets cherry, orange, and lime circle. Mist gets lemon twist, cordials go in London docks." These bits of wisdom from my drink script and all the other documents in that brown plastic briefcase were to be the subject of a written Bunny quiz at three o'clock.

I reported to Sheralee and she greeted me with a rush. "Oh, sweetie, I'm absolutely *desperate*!" She needed an "over-twenty-one girl," she said, to work the hat-check concession from seven-thirty that evening to four in the morning. Would I help her out? Of course I would, I said, if she thought I could handle it. "Oh, sure, sweetie," said Sheralee, "it's terrifically simple." My matching shoes weren't ready yet, but never mind, I could wear black, she said. All I had to do was to be there in makeup by seven. I was surprised and elated. I would have at least one night "on the floor." I would, that is, if I could successfully avoid Miss Shay.

The quiz turned out to be a list of sixty-one short-answer questions. Our class of eight scribbled seriously while Sheralee read the

questions aloud. I could see the Texas model looking perplexed, her mouth slightly open, and the Bunny named Gloria was chewing on her knuckle. I decided it wouldn't pay to be too smart, and wrote down six wrong answers. We scored one another's papers and read out the results. I was top of the class with nine wrong, the magician's assistant had ten, and everyone else missed fourteen or more. Texas missed nearly thirty. When the club says a Bunny is chosen for "1) *Beauty*, 2) *Personality*, and 3) *Ability*," the order must be significant.

We went to the penthouse, a large fourth-floor room with a backlit plastic panel depicting rooftops. Sheralee seated us at a row of deserted tables and began to quiz us on drinks. "What is Fleischmann's?"

"Gin."

"What is Vat Sixty-Nine?"

"I haven't studied these," said Texas.

"Scotch," said the pretty brunette.

"What's Courvoisier?"

"I know, I memorized that. It's . . . cognac!" said Gloria.

"What's Piper Heidsieck?" The delicate blond didn't know. "Haven't you ever had champagne?" asked Sheralee. The blond said no, she'd never seen it. "It looks just like ginger ale," said Sheralee, "only it costs lots and lots of money." After several rounds of quizzing, everyone except Texas had been able to answer a few. She hung her hennaed head, and Sheralee lectured her severely.

A very tall, very pale black girl came over and introduced herself as our training Bunny. She was as thin and fragile as a high-fashion model, and very pretty. "She's one of the oldest Bunnies here. Everybody just loves her," said Gloria. "The men call colored girls chocolate bunnies," said another girl, and giggled.

We spent a hurried hour learning the Bunny stance (a model's pose with one hip jutted out) and the Bunny dip (a back-leaning way of placing drinks on low tables without falling out of our costumes). We learned the ritual serving sentences: "Good evening, sir, I am your Bunny, Marie. May I see the member's key, please? Are you the keyholder or is this a borrowed key? Thank you. Now I'll be happy to take your order." No deviation allowed. I wondered if the uniformity ever bored the customers. "Is there anything else I can

get you, Mr. Jones?" "Thank you, Mr. Jones, come back and see us again." I was being programmed.

At home, I retreat behind greasepaint and false eyelashes. The club's office will be closed when I get there: no Miss Shay to forbid me to work. At least my career will include one night of "Customer Contact."

#### EVENING, TUESDAY 5TH

The Bunny Room was chaotic. I was pushed and tugged and zipped into my electric-blue costume by the wardrobe mistress, but this time she allowed me to stuff my own bosom, and I was able to get away with only half a dry cleaner's bag. I added the tiny collar with clip-on bow tie and the starched cuffs with Playboy cuff links. My nameplate was centered in a ribbon rosette like those won in horse shows, and pinned just above my bare right hipbone. A major policy change, I was told, had just shifted name tags from left hip to right. The wardrobe mistress also gave me a Bunny jacket because it was a below-zero night, and I was to stand by the front door. The jacket turned out to be a brief shrug of imitation white fur that covered the shoulders but left the bosom carefully bare.

I went in to be inspected by Bunny Mother Sheralee. "You look sweet," she said, and advised that I keep any money I had with me in my costume. "Two more girls have had things stolen from their lockers," she said, and added that I should be sure and tell the lobby director the exact amount of money I had with me. "Otherwise they may think you stole tips." Table Bunnies, she explained, were allowed to keep any tips they might receive in cash (though the club did take up to 50 percent of all their charge tips), but hat-check Bunnies could keep no tips at all. Instead, they were paid a flat twelve dollars for eight hours. I told her that twelve dollars a day seemed a good deal less than the salary of two to three hundred dollars mentioned in the advertisement. "Well, you won't work hat check all the time, sweetie," she said. "When you start working as a table Bunny, you'll see how it all averages out."

I took a last look at myself in the mirror. A creature with three-quarter-inch eyelashes, blue satin ears, and an overflowing bosom

looked back. I asked Sheralee if we had to stuff ourselves so much. "Of course you do," she said. "Practically all the girls just stuff and stuff. That's the way Bunnies are supposed to look."

The elevator opened on the mezzanine, and I made my professional debut in the Playboy Club. It was crowded, noisy, and very dark. A group of men with organizational name tags on their lapels stood nearby. "Here's my Bunny honey now," said one, and flung his arm around my shoulders as if we were fellow halfbacks leaving the field.

"Please, sir," I said, and uttered the ritual sentence we had learned from the Bunny Father lecture: "You are not allowed to touch the Bunnies." His companions laughed and laughed. "Boy oh boy, guess she told *you*!" said one, and tweaked my tail as I walked away.

The programmed phrases of the Bunny bible echoing in my mind, I climbed down the carpeted spiral stairs between the mezzanine ("Living Room, Piano Bar, buffet dinner now being served") and the lobby ("Check your coats, immediate seating in the Playmate Bar"), separated from the street by only a two-story sheet of glass. The alternative was a broad staircase in the back of the lobby, but that, too, could be seen from the street. All of us, customers and Bunnies alike, were a living window display. I reported to the lobby director. "Hello, Bunny Marie," he said. "How's things?" I told him that I had fifteen dollars in my costume. "I'll remember," he said. I had a quick and humiliating vision of all the hat-check Bunnies lined up for bosom inspection.

There was a four-deep crowd of impatient men surrounding the Hat Check Room. The head hat-check Bunny, a little blond who had been imported from Chicago to "straighten out the system," told me to take their tickets and call the numbers out to two "hang boys" behind the counter. "I'll give you my number if you give me yours," said a balding man, and turned to the crowd for appreciation.

After an hour of helping men on with coats, scarves, and hats, the cocktail rush had subsided enough for the Chicago Bunny to show me how to pin numbers on coat lapels with straight pins or tuck them in hatbands. She gave me more ritual sentences. "Thank you, sir, here is your ticket." "The information Bunny is downstairs to

your right." "Sorry, we're unable to take ladies' coats." (Only if the club was uncrowded, and the coats were not fur, was the Hat Check Room available to women.) She emphasized that I was to put all tips in a slotted box attached to the wall, smile gratefully, and not tell the customers that the tips went to the club. She moved to the other half of the check room ("The blue tickets are next door, sir") and sent a tall, heavy-set Swiss Bunny to take her place.

The two of us took care of a small stream of customers and talked a little. I settled down to my ever-present worry that someone I knew was going to come in, recognize me, and say "Gloria!" If the rumor were true that one newspaper reporter and one news-magazine reporter had tried to become Bunnies and failed, the management must be alert to the possibility. I had seen more than enough Sydney Greenstreet movies to worry about the club's reaction. If someone I knew did come in, I would just keep repeating "There must be some mistake" and hope for the best.

Dinner traffic began, and soon there was a crowd of twenty men waiting. We worked quickly, but coats going in and out at the same time made for confusion. One customer was blundering about behind the counter in search of a lost hat, and two more were complaining loudly that they had been waiting ten minutes. "The reason there's a line outside the Playboy Club," said one, "is because they're waiting for their coats." A man in a blue silk suit reached out to pull my tail. I dodged and held a coat for a balding man with a row of ballpoint pens in his suit pocket. He put it on, but backward, so that his arms were around me. The hang boy yelled at him in a thick Spanish accent, "Leave her alone," and he told the hang boy to shut up. Three women in mink stoles stood waiting for their husbands. I could see them staring, not with envy, but coldly, as if measuring themselves against the Swiss Bunny and me. High up on the opposite wall, a camera stared down at all of us and transmitted the scene to screens imbedded in walls all over the club, including one screen over the sidewalk: "the closed-circuit television camera that flashes your arrival throughout the Club" explained publicity folders. I was overcome by a nightmare sensation of walking naked through crowds and the only way back to my own clothes was the glass-encased stairway. As men pressed forward with coats outstretched, I turned

to the hang boy for more tickets. "Don't worry," he said kindly, "you got used to it."

Business let up again. I asked the Swiss Bunny if she liked the work. "Not really," she shrugged. "I was an airline hostess for a while, but once you've seen Hong Kong, you've seen it." A man asked for his coat. I turned around and found myself face-to-face with two people whom I knew well, a television executive and his wife. I looked down as I took his ticket and kept my back turned while the boy found the coat, but I had to face him again to deliver it. My television friend looked directly at me, gave me fifty cents, and walked away. Neither he nor his wife had recognized me. It was depressing to be a nonperson in a Bunny suit, but it was also a victory. To celebrate, I helped a slight, shy-looking man put on his long blue-and-white scarf, asked him if he and the scarf were from Yale. He looked startled, as if he had been recognized at a masquerade.

There were no clocks anywhere in the club. I asked the hang boy what time it was. "One o'clock," he said. I had been working for more than five hours with no break. My fingers were perforated and sore from pushing pins through cardboard, my arms ached from holding heavy coats, I was thoroughly chilled from the icy wind that blew in the door each time a customer opened it, and, atop my three-inch black satin heels, my feet were killing me. I walked over to ask the Chicago Bunny if I could take a break.

"Yes," she said, "a half-hour to eat, but no more."

Down the hall from the Bunny Room was the employees' lounge where our meal tickets entitled us to one free meal a day. I pulled a metal folding chair up to a long bare table, took my shoes off gingerly, and sat down next to two black men in gray work uniforms. They looked sympathetic as I massaged my swollen feet. One was young and quite handsome, the other middle-aged and graying at the temples. Like all employees at the club, they seemed chosen, at least partly, for their appearance. The older one advised me about rolling bottles under my feet to relax them and getting arch supports for my shoes. I asked what they did. "We're garbage men," said the younger. "It don't sound so good, but it's easier than your job."

They told me I should eat something and gestured to the beef stew on their paper plates. "Friday we get fish," one said, "but every other day is the same stew."

"The same, except it gets worse," said the other, and laughed. The older one told me he felt sorry for the Bunnies, even though some of them enjoyed "showing off their looks." He advised me to be careful of my feet and not to try to work double shifts.

Back downstairs, I tried to categorize the customers as I checked their coats. With the exception of a few teenage couples, the majority seemed to be middle-aged businessmen. Less than half had women with them, and the rest came in large all-male bunches that seemed entirely subsidized by expense accounts. I saw only four of the type pictured in club advertisements—the young, lean, nattily dressed Urban Man—and they were with slender, fashionable girls who looked rather appalled by our stuffed costumes and bright makeup. The least confident wives of the businessmen didn't measure themselves against us, but seemed to assume their husbands would be attracted to us and stood aside, looking timid and embarrassed. There were a few customers, a very few, either men or women (I counted ten), who looked at us not as objects but smiled and nodded as if we might be human beings.

The Swiss Bunny took a break, and a hang boy began to give me a gentle lecture. I was foolish, he said, to put all the money in the box. The tips were cash. If we didn't take some, the man who counted it might. I told him I was afraid they would look in my costume and I didn't want to get fired. "They only check you girls once in a while," he said. "Anyway, I'll make you a deal. You give me money. I meet you outside. We split it." My feet ached, my fingers were sticky from dozens of sweaty hatbands, and my skin was gouged and sore from the bones of the costume. Even the half-hour dinner break had been on my own time, so the club was getting a full eight hours of work. I felt resentful enough to take him up on it. Still, it would hardly do to get fired for stealing. I told him that I was a new Bunny and too nervous to try it. "You'll get over that," he said. "One Saturday night last week, this check room took in a thousand dollars in tips. And you know how much we get paid. You think about that."

It was almost 4:00 A.M. Quitting time.

The lobby director came over to tell us that the customer count for the night was about two thousand. I said that sounded good. "No," he said. "Good is four thousand."

I went back to the Bunny Room, turned in my costume, and sat motionless, too tired to move. The stays had made vertical indentations around my rib cage and the zipper had left a welt over my spine. I complained about the costume's tightness to the Bunny who was sitting next to me, also motionless. "Yeah," she said, "a lot of girls say their legs get numb from the knee up. I think it presses on a nerve or something."

The street was deserted, but a taxi waited outside by the employees' exit. The driver held a dollar bill out the window. "I got four more of these," he said. "Is that enough?" I kept on walking. "What's a matter?" he said, irritated. "You work in there, don't you?"

The streets were brightly lit and sparkling with frost. As I walked the last block to my apartment, I passed a gray English car with the motor running. A woman was sitting in the driver's seat, smoking a cigarette, and watching the street. Her hair was bright blond and her coat bright red. She looked at me and smiled. I smiled back. She looked available—and she was. Of the two of us, she seemed the more honest.

#### WEDNESDAY 6TH

I got up just in time to rush back to the club for my table-Bunny training at two o'clock, and arrived feeling that I had never left. As I changed into my costume, one of the Bunnies was reading aloud from a weekly tabloid called *Leo Shull's Show Guide*. "Listen to this," she said. "It says, 'Although a thousand girls were interviewed for the club and a hundred and twenty-five are working there now, the Playboy Club's fantastic business, the lines and crowds of customers thronging there daily, have made it necessary to add another fifty Bunnies.'" I had heard Sheralee say that only 103 Bunnies were on schedule. I asked the girl who was reading if we really needed fifty more. Probably, she said, because the club had opened with 140 Bunnies—and nearly 50 of them had quit.

Another girl disagreed. "I heard that twenty were fired and forty more quit—but I think it's more, because we've only got about a hundred now, and a lot of them are new Bunnies." I said I was going to ask Miss Shay, just out of curiosity, how many Bunnies quit. "Don't bother, sweetie. Nobody around here ever tells us anything."

I picked up the paper and read on: "The girls, in this reporter's opinion, are the most beautiful ladies ever seen together under one roof. Most of them have superior education as well, and fine breeding. They are trained to give the optimum in restaurant service. . . . Their earnings are three to ten times as much as they could earn in any similar position. Average earnings are two hundred to three hundred dollars, and 'Bunnies' meet the most attractive people." The article ended with the club's address and how to apply. "Two hundred dollars to three hundred a *what*?" said the dissident Bunny. "I got a hundred and eight dollars this week, and the girl with the biggest check got a hundred and forty-five." I asked if she was waiting on tables. She said she was.

"The next time Leo Shull comes in here," said the dissident, "I'm going to ask him where he gets his figures."

"Watch out," said the newspaper Bunny. "He's a Number One keyholder."

Sheralee called me into her office. She was still desperate for "over-twenty-one girls" who could work until four in the morning. Would I take the hat-check concession again? I deliberated. It was another chance to work before Miss Shay remembered that I had never turned in the requested birth certificate. On the other hand, I would be training as a table Bunny until six o'clock and going right back to a full day's work at seven-thirty. My feet were still so swollen that I could barely get my regulation three-inch heels on, and I had gauze wrapped around my middle where the costume had dug in and rubbed my skin raw. I decided to take a chance on not being found out for a little longer, so I explained my tiredness to Sheralee. Couldn't she find someone else? "I'll try," she said, and looked annoyed. "But if I can't, I'm still counting on you."

I took the elevator to the mezzanine again and crossed to the spiral stairs. To be in costume walking down that staircase seemed even more surrealistic in broad daylight with dozens of lunchtime

shoppers staring in. One of the room directors was waiting for me at the bottom. "Go back up and come down again," he said, gesturing toward the crowds in the street. "Give the boys a treat."

Disobeying a room director was an automatic fifteen demerits, according to the Bunny bible. I searched for an excuse. "Look," I said, "I'm late to meet a Number One keyholder."

"Go ahead, kid," he said, smiling approvingly. "Get a move on."

I walked down the stairs at the back of the lobby to the Playmate Bar where I was to report for training. It had been dark and deserted when I came there for my first interview. Now it was alive with a lunchtime crowd, and the wall behind the bar glowed with blown-up color transparencies of seminude Playmates from the centerfold of *Playboy*.

I went to the service area at the end of the bar to set up a tray with a bar cloth, Playboy lighter, and all the other items prescribed in Bunny school. My training Bunny gave me checks from her pad and told me to follow her as she made the rounds of her station. At each table she said, "This is Bunny Marie, and she is a Bunny in training." Two men told me I would be okay if I did everything they said, and the first thing to do was get rid of my sourpuss training Bunny. "Don't pay any attention to those jerks," she said. "They've been guzzling all afternoon and just think they're smart." I asked if they could be from Willmark and just being difficult to test her. "Don't be silly," she said. "You can always spot a Willmark man. He never has more than two drinks."

Two of her tables were empty, and she told me to wait on anyone who sat there. My first two customers carried plastic briefcases and wore veterans' buttons in their lapels. Approaching them as confidently as I could, I embarked on the serving ritual. "Good afternoon, sir, I am your Bunny, Marie," I said, and put a napkin in front of each man ("this procedure informs the room director which guests have been served"), taking care to look directly at him as I did so ("eye-contact each of your guests immediately"). "May I see the member's key please?" One of the customers gave me his Playboy key together with a room key from the Hotel Astor. I gave it back and started to fill out the check.

"Well," he said, slapping the table with delight, "you can't blame a man for trying."

"Nope," said his friend, "you can't tell us your address, but nothing's to stop you from remembering ours."

I filled glasses with ice, called in their order at the bar for two Old Fashioneds, and asked how I was supposed to put in the proper "garbage"—Bunny-ese for drink garnishes. "With your hands, how else?" said the bartender. I picked up two orange slices and dredged around in a large trough full of juice until I found two cherries.

With the drinks balanced on my tray, I approached the two veterans. "Are you married?" asked the table slapper. I said no. "Well, it wouldn't matter anyway, because I'm married, too!" Pointing my right hip into the table, I bent my knees, inclined myself backward in the required Bunny dip, and placed the glasses squarely on the napkins. I felt like an idiot.

"You're doing just fine," my training Bunny whispered sweetly, and yelled, "One J & B, one CC, and two martinis straight up," at the bartender.

I waited on three more parties, all men. Two said, "If you're my Bunny, can I take you home?" One asked if my picture was above the bar.

My veterans left me a dollar tip. I thanked them and told them they were my first customers. The table slapper punched his friend in the arm and doubled over with laughter. "This girl," he said, still laughing, "this girl's a *virgin Bunny*!" He wiped tears from his eyes.

At six o'clock, I turned my checks back in to the training Bunny. All tips charged on them went to her, presumably her reward for training me. I told her the veterans had left a dollar. "You can keep it," she said magnanimously. I tucked it into the "vault," as I had seen the other Bunnies do, and went upstairs to change.

I was unfurling the plastic dry cleaner's bag from my bosom when Miss Shay entered the Bunny Room. I had never seen her there before. Had my lack of credentials caught up with me? She might not have been aware of my emergency hat-check duty, but she probably did know about tomorrow's assignment of serving drinks from eight o'clock to midnight. Miss Shay stopped next to me. "Keep up

the good work," she said, confidentially. "I hear you're a very good Bunny."

I decided to risk asking about "the other Marie Ochs" she mentioned at my first interview. "What other Marie Ochs?" she said, and disappeared into the Bunny Mother's office.

I am at home, and Sheralee has just phoned to say that she found another hat-check Bunny for tonight. My luck is holding.

#### THURSDAY 7TH

I went to the Bunny Room an hour early tonight to see what I could learn about my sister Bunnies. Newspapers described them as college girls, actresses, artists, and even linguists. I asked the Bunny dressing next to me about the linguists. She said yes, that there were quite a few foreign girls working the VIP Room. (As I had read in the Bunny bible, "That stands for Very Important Playboy, of course.") In fact, they had to speak English with a foreign accent in order to work that room specializing in dinner and midnight supper. Did Bunnies make a lot of money there? "Not really," she said. "It only seats fifty, and it's for dinner, so the turnover is slow. You're better off serving drinks and getting the jerks in and out fast." I asked about the college girls. "Oh, sure," she said, "I think there are three or four who go to classes during the week and work on weekends." How could they always get the weekends, which were the big tip nights? "Listen, friend," she said, "there are some people around here who get to pick whatever shift they want, and the rest of us get stuck with a week of lunches or that lousy hat-check bit. Mostly, it's the old girls from Chicago or somebody who's got an 'in' with the management." I asked if that couldn't just be seniority. "Sure," she said, searching for a place to put the Bunny ears on her upswept hairdo, "only there isn't supposed to be a seniority system. You're all treated alike—that's what they tell us." I asked what she had done before becoming a Bunny. "Nothing much, a little modeling once in a while." And what did she hope working as a Bunny would lead to? "I thought maybe I could save enough money to get some test shots and a composite and I could be a real model," she said.

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"But after three months of this, I want to get married. Guys I wouldn't look at before, now I think they aren't so bad."

I moved to the other side of the dressing table where four girls were eating doughnuts and drinking chocolate milk ("... eating in the Bunny Room, five demerits . . ."), and introduced myself as a new Bunny. First-name introductions were made all around. They seemed glad for the diversion and offered me a doughnut. I asked about the college girls again. "Yeah, there are some," said one. "I met a girl the other day, she was taking a course in photography." I asked what they had done before and what they wanted to do. Three said they wanted very much to be models—not high-fashion, but in advertising or the garment industry. The fourth said she was married, had a baby, and was just picking up money as a Bunny because she wasn't trained to do anything. They asked about me, and I repeated what I had put on my application as a likely, but not startling, background for a Bunny: that I had worked as a waitress (true, though it was at college), that I had danced in nightclubs and once hoped to be a professional dancer (also true, though I had to do some switching of dates to make myself younger), and that I had most recently worked as a secretary (untrue, but it was the only thing I could make up references for).

"Say, you've done a lot," said the girl who was hoping to crash the garment industry. "If you can type, what the hell do you want to be a Bunny for?"

I told them that everything I'd heard about the club sounded great. I read to them from the latest *Playboy Club News*: "Bunnies don't give up wages for glamour. A Bunny can easily earn twice the amount in a week that a good secretary averages. . . . An exciting extra is the anticipation of being discovered. Many Bunnies have moved on into the entertainment field and now can be seen in movies, nightclub acts, or as models. . . ." There was a small silence.

"Well, sure," said one, "if they say that, it must have happened to some girls." Another said that one of the Chicago Bunnies had been on the cover of *Playboy* about a year ago and there was supposed to be a Bunny on a cover again soon.

"Yeah," said a third, "but I hear that's just because they're short of Bunnies and they're trying to get more."

It was nearly eight o'clock, time to put on my bright orange costume (more comfortable, I hoped, than the electric blue) and serve drinks in the Living Room.

Again, I had a training Bunny whose checks I used, but this time I also had a whole station, because one table Bunny was missing. "Wouldn't you know it," said my training Bunny. "A girl gets in a car accident and it has to be from my shift."

My tables were in the "Cartoon Corner," that is, a corner of the Living Room whose walls were hung with mounted cartoons from *Playboy*. Because it was the depth of the building from the bar, with four steps to climb in between, it was considered a difficult station. The Bunny tray technique involved carrying our small round trays balanced high on the palm of the left hand as we looked straight ahead and did the stylish, faintly wiggly Bunny walk. It seemed simple enough, but after an hour of carrying trays loaded with ice cubes, full bottles of mixes, and a half-dozen drinks, my left arm began to shake, and the blood seemed permanently drained from my fingers.

Furthermore, I still hadn't been paid. I complained to my training Bunny, but she said I had no grounds for it. The girls hired before the December opening of the club had trained for three weeks with no pay at all.

I did learn a lot. I served twenty-two customers, spilled two drinks (one on me and one on a customer), and got propositioned twice. I also learned from the musicians at the Piano Bar that there is a song called "Playboy's Theme." These are some of its lyrics:

*If your boy's a Playboy,  
Loosen your control.  
If his eye meanders,  
Sweet goose your gander's,  
Just one more ornery critter,  
Who goes for the glitter.  
So if you've been over-heatin' your oven*

*Just remember that the boy is a Playboy,  
And the gal that makes a fireside lovin' man of the boy,  
Gets him to stay.  
Never talks to him but sweetly,  
When he plays it indiscreetly,  
Never takes the play completely  
Away.*

One of the diverse duties of the Willmark men is to make sure this theme is played at the beginning and end of every musical show every evening—like "God Save the Queen."

#### FRIDAY 5TH

I have finished my first night as a full-fledged professional table Bunny, and I am almost totally absorbed with my feet. They ache like bad teeth. They are so swollen that I can't even get sneakers on. My foremost fear is that my arches may be falling. Nonetheless, random impressions of this endless evening do come back.

*Item.* I had all the tables in Cartoon Corner, twice as many as last night, from seven-thirty to four o'clock in the morning with no break. With loaded trays balanced on one hand, I made sixteen round trips to the bar each hour until I lost count. I also had three iced drinks spilled down my back by customers who bumped into me or my tray, and two green olives to eat all evening. Why didn't I just give up, lie down, kick, refuse, quit? I wish I knew.

*Item.* The bartender in the Living Room is an artist. Fast, graceful, exact, and calm, he kept the room going almost single-handedly. "Last week, including overtime and bonus," he said, "I made a hundred and eighty dollars—and I'm the highest paid bartender in the house." I asked him why he didn't quit. "I'm going to," he said.

*Item.* Employees eat on the run from communal plates of food swiped from the customers' buffet. We're one big family.

*Item.* \$29.85 in cash tips—all in one dollar bills and silver—makes for increased prosperity but a very uncomfortable costume. And I lost five pounds last night.

## SATURDAY 9TH

My arches did not fall. I put on my rain boots (the only shoes big and loose enough to bear) and went to a chiropodist ("I do all the Copa girls"), who said there was nothing wrong with my feet except long hours, high heels, and muscle strain. "In a job like that," he said cheerfully, "your feet are bound to get a few sizes bigger."

I worked the Living Room again tonight, but at a station right next to the bar. By wearing borrowed shoes three sizes too large, wrapping my ribs in gauze inside the costume, and coaxing busboys to help me carry heavy trays, I managed to get through the night. I was rewarded with the following information:

1. A Bunny who has been a Playmate—that is, who has posed for the fold-out picture in *Playboy*—gets five dollars a day more salary than other Bunnies. She is also obliged to approach customers with, "I'm your Playmate Sue" instead of, "I'm your Bunny Sue," and autograph her centerfold if requested.
2. In a letter written to mollify New Yorkers who had bought keys to a supposedly private club, which is now open to the public, Hugh Hefner said that nonmembers "must secure a temporary pass good for one visit only and they must pay cash in advance before they are served." Perhaps contrary to Mr. Hefner's instructions, Bunnies are told to collect *after* each round on cash sales, but there are few who do even that. Most allow cash customers to run up bar bills just as if they were keyholders. If anything, Bunnies prefer serving a nonmember, because they are assured of a cash tip instead of splitting a charge tip with the house.
3. Bunnies and busboys have a love-hate relationship. A good busboy can make a Bunny wealthier by keeping her tables cleared for new customers. A bad busboy can whisk away cash tips before she sees them and insist that the customer "stiffed" her. As a result, a Bunny may spend all her working hours cajoling and vamping a boy whom she wouldn't dream of spending time with outside the club. It's a hothouse relationship, but a close one. Like some women and their hairdressers, they tell each other everything.

4. Many Bunnies regard plastic dry cleaner's bags as dangerous for bosom stuffing because they make you perspire, thereby causing a weight loss where you least want it. Kleenex and absorbent cotton are preferred.
5. The-Way-to-Get-Something-to-Eat, though a table Bunny, is to snatch it from the customers' buffet (on pain of instant dismissal, according to a recent memo) and hide it in the supply room. You can then grab a bite whenever you pass by. Almost no one goes to the employees' room to eat stew.

## SUNDAY 10TH

I got home at four in the morning and had to be back at the club and in costume by eleven for publicity photos. I was furious at first (twenty-five demerits if I didn't show up), but once awake and outside, I was glad. It was the first time in nearly three days that I'd seen full daylight.

The *Playboy* photographer was posing girls on the broad curving staircase at the back of the lobby. Each of us was put through a cheesecake series: sitting on the steps with legs outstretched, standing with our hands posed on the railing ("bend over from the waist, dear, over a little more"), and walking down the stairs with tray held high.

I asked what the photographs would be used for. "I don't know," he said, "I just got rush orders from Chicago." As a matter of routine, new Bunnies were asked to sign a release of all photographs. I asked if our pictures would turn up in some *Playboy* Club promotion, or in *Playboy* itself. No one knew.

A voice called to me from the darkness of the Playmate Bar. It was Miss Shay, sitting at the desk where I had first seen her, waiting for prospective Bunnies to come in for interviews. The photographer had asked if we could turn on taped music. "Marie will play," she said. "Marie plays the piano very well, don't you dear?" No, I said, I didn't play at all. "I'm sure you told me so when I interviewed you," she said firmly.

The oversight of my credentials, the other Marie Ochs, and now my piano playing. I thought of the several times I had heard the

seemingly efficient Miss Shay call busboys by a first name that was the wrong one. For the first time, I was sure that, unless someone recognized me, I could work at the Playboy Club as long as I liked.

Out in the bright sunlight again, I wondered just how long I *did* want to stay. If Marie wasn't going to be discovered, Marie would have to end her own career.

Still, I had lived through those weekend nights that were the worst of it. According to this week's Bunny schedule, I would be serving lunch for four hours each day and no more. It wasn't an envied assignment because the tips were bad, but it would give me more time to talk to Bunnies.

I decided Marie could live till Friday.

#### MONDAY 11TH

A story in today's *Metropolitan Daily* was the talk of the Bunny Room. Two ex-Bunnies are suing the club for back tips and "misrepresentation" of the amount of money a Bunny could earn. One has told reporters she received anonymous death threats immediately after filing the suit.

"I knew Phyllis Sands," said one girl, "but not this Betsy McMillan who got the threats." She studied their pictures. "They made sure to give out good publicity shots." Did she think the alleged threats were made up just for publicity? "Who knows?" she shrugged. "Maybe she wasn't told the club would take half her tips, and maybe her salary was a lot lower than she had expected. On the other hand, maybe she just had her boyfriend call up and threaten her so she'd get her name in the paper. Who knows?"

I went downstairs to the Playroom and began setting up tables for lunch. Of the six other Bunnies working there, I had met three: A Chinese Bunny, a Bunny who announced that *she* didn't have to stuff her bosom, and the big, baby-voiced redhead whom I'd met the first day in the Bunny Room. The room director assigned us our stations, and we sat down on the apron of the stage to wait for customers. The unstuffed Bunny talked about how much better tips were in Chicago. "They're dumber there," she said. "I mean it's

easier to make them think you'll go out with them, and then they tip you more."

"It's lousy at the Miami Club, too," said Baby Voice. "One time we all got together and said we'd quit if they didn't pay us more, but they said to go right ahead, they'd just hire more girls."

I said, "Maybe the girls had been outbluffed."

A little dark-haired Bunny said, "Sure, it would cost the club a hell of a lot if we all quit together. What would they do?"

"Bring in girls from the other clubs," said Baby Voice. "You can't win." There was a piano at center stage. She went over to it and pretended to play a jazz arrangement that was being piped into the room. "Laaaa-tee-ta-tee-turn," sang Baby Voice.

A Bunny with long brown hair got up and went through the motions of a very professional striptease. "They asked me to be a Playmate once," she said, "but I couldn't do it now. I'm too thin." The little dark-haired Bunny told her it didn't matter because they always used a fake composite body anyway, and that she personally knew a girl who did the breasts. I said I doubted it, there's only so much you can do with an airbrush. "Anyway, they must use different girls," said the stripping Bunny, "because the breasts are in different shapes."

"They co-omme in different shapes," sang Baby Voice, and got up to do her own striptease. She took off her bow tie, collar, and cuffs and tossed them off the stage, accompanying each with an expert bump.

"Okay, girls," said the room director in a voice like ice. "Cut it." Three middle-aged customers, the first of the lunchtime onslaught, were squinting into the spotlight gloom from the doorway.

"Wouldn't you know it," said Baby Voice, disgusted. "Here come the suckers."

Serving lunch for four hours wasn't quite enough to open up all my old foot wounds, but the piled-up plates of roast beef (which is all we serve, our room director is called "The Roast Beef King") make a tray even heavier than a full load of drinks. The customers are all men. The heavy sprinkling of dates and wives in the evening crowd disappears at lunch. One told me over and over again that he was

vice president of an insurance company and that he would pay me to serve at a private party in his hotel. Another got up from his fourth martini to breathe heavily down my neck. When I pulled away, he was sincerely angry. "What do you think I come here for," he said, "roast beef?"

At three o'clock, when the final table had been cleared, I went back to the Bunny Room. The wardrobe mistress stopped me. "Baby," she said, "that costume is way too big on you." It was true that I had lost ten pounds in the few days since the costume had been fitted, and it was also true that, for the first time, it was no more uncomfortable than a tight girdle. She marked the waist with pins where the tucks should be taken and told me to take it off. "I'll have it fitting you right when you come tomorrow," she said. "Needs two inches off on each side."

I took the *Playboy Club News* out of my locker and read aloud: "The Playboy Club world is filled with good entertainment, beautiful girls, fun-loving playboys . . . like a continuous house party. Cheerful Bunnies feel as though they are among the invited guests. . . ."

My co-workers from the Playroom giggled. "Some party," said Baby Voice. "You're not even supposed to go out with the customers." I asked if any of the Willmark representatives had tried to trap her. "Nooooo," she said thoughtfully, "but one did offer another Bunny two hundred dollars just for promising she'd meet him after work—and she took it," said Baby Voice contemptuously. "She should have known. Nobody but a schmuck or a Willmark man would offer you the money *before*."

## TUESDAY 12TH

Two of my classmates from Bunny school, Gloria and the magician's assistant, joined us in the Playroom today. I found myself explaining how to serve roast beef and convince customers that it was rare, medium, or well-done, though it was, in fact, all the same.

It was Lincoln's birthday and business was slow. I listened to the unstuffed Bunny explain that she liked older men because they gave you money. "I went out with this old guy I met in the club and fixed

up two other Bunnies with his friends. You know, he gave me a hundred-dollar check just because he liked me?"

The unstuffed Bunny also explained that one of the Playboy executives had given her seven hundred dollars for a dress. "I had five hundred dollars," she said, "and I bought a dress for twelve hundred, and he took me to a party in it." A dark-haired Bunny said yes, she knew the same guy in Chicago. "Doesn't everybody?" said the unstuffed Bunny. "If you counted all the Bunnies who went out with that guy, you . . ."

The dark-haired Bunny looked pensive. "We had this crazy thing going for three weeks," she said. "It was wild. I guess I should have known that nothing would come of it . . ."

"All the girls think something will come of it," said the unstuffed Bunny comfortingly, "but it never does." They talked about this executive's huge apartment, great wealth, and romantic impulses. He sounded like an artist of overkill.

Unstuffed got up to serve a customer, and the dark-haired Bunny looked after her with disdain. "I don't believe he ever gave her seven hundred dollars for a dress," she said firmly. "Nobody ever gets money out of *him*."

## WEDNESDAY 13TH

I've completed my unofficial list of Bunny bosom stuffers:

1. Kleenex
2. plastic dry cleaner's bags
3. absorbent cotton
4. cut-up Bunny tails
5. foam rubber
6. lamb's wool
7. Kotex halves
8. silk scarves
9. gym socks

I've also learned that we can not only go out with Number One keyholders but anyone they introduce us to. Also, anyone we meet

at Vic Lownes's parties. There is, however, only so far I'm willing to go with research.

## FRIDAY 15TH

The Playroom was crowded with men drinking heavily at lunch because it was Friday. I carried plates of roast beef and the Friday-only alternate, trout. Bunny Gloria was standing with a tray loaded with cups, waiting for the coffee urn to be filled. "You know what we are?" she said indignantly. "We're waitresses!" I said maybe we ought to join a union.

"Unions just take your money," said Baby Voice, "and won't let you work double shifts."

The magician's assistant was serving a table next to mine and agreeing earnestly that our costumes were "so intelligently made, so flattering to a girl's body." She tried so hard to do things "like a gracious hostess," as the Bunny bible instructed, that she wasn't an efficient waitress. In programming us with, as one Bunny put it, "all that glamour shit," the club sometimes defeated itself.

It was my last day of lunches and I was glad. Somehow, the usual tail pullings and propositions and pinching and ogling seemed all the more depressing when, outside this windowless room of perpetual night, the sun was shining.

I found Sheralee in her office and told her the story I had chosen because it left the door open, should I need more information: that my mother was ill and I had to go home for a while. She was dismayed. "But we're so short of Bunnies now!" she said, and asked when I could come back. I told her I didn't know but I would call. She gave me my first week's paycheck: \$35.90 net for two nights in the Living Room. I asked about my first night at the hat-check stand. "You don't get paid for training," said Sheralee. I protested that it wasn't training. "I'll talk to the bookkeeper," she said doubtfully.

## THURSDAY 21ST

Nearly a week has passed. I called Sheralee to say I had just come back to pick up my clothes and that I would have to quit perma-

nently. She pleaded with me to work the Playmate Bar just one more night. Somehow (might I learn something new?) I found myself saying yes.

## FRIDAY 22ND

But it was just the same:

ROOM DIRECTOR: "That's your station, four fours and three deuces."

CUSTOMER: "If you're my Bunny, can I take you home with me?"

BARTENDER: "They keep changing the size of the shots—up and down, up and down. It's enough to drive you crazy."

BUNNY: "I worked that LoLo Cola private party, and they gave me a six-pack. Big deal."

CUSTOMER: "I'm in the New Yorker Hotel, Room six-twenty-five. Can you remember that?"

MAN: "If little girls were blades of grass, what would little boys be?"

BUNNY: "Ummm . . . lawn mowers?"

MAN: "No. Grasshoppers!"

Sign in supply room:

THIS IS YOUR HOME.

PLEASE DON'T THROW COFFEE GRINDS IN SINK.

BUSBOY: "The money's coming out of your costume, sweetie."

BUNNY: "He's a real gentleman. He treats you just the same whether you've slept with him or not."

It was four in the morning when I went to the Bunny Room and took off my costume. A pretty blond was putting chairs together to sleep on. She had promised to take another girl's lunch shift after her regular eight hours in the Playmate Bar, and there wasn't time to go home in between. I asked why she did it.

"Well," she said, "the money's not too bad. Last week I made two hundred dollars."

At last I had found a girl who made at least the low end of the promised salary—but only by working round the clock.

In Sheralee's office, pinned to the bulletin board, was a list of cities next in line for Playboy Clubs (Pittsburgh, Boston, Dallas, and Washington D.C.) and a yellow printed sheet titled *WHAT IS A BUNNY?*

"A Bunny," began the text, "like the Playboy Playmate, is . . . beautiful, desirable. . . . We'll do everything in our power to make you—the Bunny—the most envied girl in America, working in the most exciting and glamorous setting in the world."

I turned in my costume for the last time. "So long, honey," said the blond. "See you in the funnies."

—1963

## POSTSCRIPT

Among the short-term results of this article were:

1. A long letter from Hugh Hefner saying that "your beef about the physical given the girls before they start work at the club prompted my eliminating it." (He defended it as "a good idea," but noted that my article was not the first time it had been "misunderstood and turned into something questionable.") He also included the first seven installments of his own Playboy Philosophy. For most of the three-page letter, however, he insisted he didn't mind the article at all.
2. A one-million-dollar libel suit against me and a small, now defunct New York newspaper that had printed a report on my article, as well as allegations that the manager of the New York Playboy Club had clear Mafia connections. Though those allegations were not in any quote from me, I seem to have been included in the libel suit as a harassment gesture. I spent many unpleasant hours in depositions, and being threatened with punitive damages. Eventually, the newspaper settled out of court without reference to me. I was told by other reporters that such

harassing actions, with or without actionable grounds, were a frequent way of discouraging or punishing journalists.

3. Serving as a witness for the New York State Liquor Authority to identify printed instructions given to me as a Bunny so they could be entered in evidence in a case against the Playboy Club for maintaining a public liquor license while advertising as a private club. This was related to the fact that the Playboy Club had paid to get its liquor license, then turned state's evidence against the same officials. The State Liquor Authority fought back with the public/private suit in which they asked me to testify. Lawyers told me that other Bunnies they had approached had been afraid to testify, even on the simple question of identifying instruction sheets in which we were told to emphasize the private, exclusive nature of the club. Having seen many movies about courtroom proceedings in which justice prevailed, I agreed. After a Playboy Club lawyer had spent cross-examination time trying to demonstrate that I was a liar and a female of low moral character, I began to understand why the other Bunnies had refused. In the end, the Playboy Club kept their public liquor license.
4. Several weeks of obscene and threatening phone calls from a man with great internal knowledge of the Playboy Club.
5. Loss of serious journalistic assignments because I had now become a Bunny—and it didn't matter why.

Among the long-term results of this article are:

1. Feet permanently enlarged by a half size by the very high heels and long hours of walking with heavy trays.
2. Satisfaction two decades later when the Playboy Club's payments for a New York State liquor license were cited as one of the reasons for New Jersey's decision that Playboy Enterprises was unfit to operate a gambling casino in Atlantic City until its relationship with Hugh Hefner, its founder and principal owner, was severed.
3. Continual printing by *Playboy* magazine of my employee photograph as a Bunny amid ever more pornographic photos of other

Bunnies. The 1983 version insisted in a caption that my article "boosted Bunny recruiting." The 1984 version was a photo taken at a dinner while I was reaching upward and my evening gown had slipped, exposing part of one breast. It was a benefit for the Ms. Foundation for Women, and also my fiftieth birthday. No other publication used this photo. But *Playboy* never forgets.

4. Thirty years of occasional phone calls from past and present Bunnies with revelations about their working conditions and the sexual demands on them. In the first few years, my callers were amazed that I had used my own name on the article. One said she had been threatened with "acid thrown in my face" when she complained about the sexual use of the Bunnies. Another quoted the same alleged threat as a response to trying to help Bunnies unionize. All said they were amazed to find my name listed in the phone book. Eventually, I had to switch to an unlisted phone.
5. In 1984, a dramatized version of this article starring Kirstie Alley, then an unknown, in my role as reporter, was made for television. It had a terrible title, "A Bunny's Tale," but was a good film, largely because director Karen Arthur got the women together to not only rehearse but to get to know each other; something virtually unheard of in television. A former Bunny from the Chicago Playboy Mansion also volunteered to be technical director. She had seen young women destroyed by drugs, and wanted to help us show the backstage realities of these women's lives. Though she said she received threatening phone calls, she stayed on the set; an exact replica of the New York Playboy Club constructed from the architect's drawings. Hugh Hefner was said to have tried to use his other television properties to pressure ABC out of doing this production, but it was shown, continued to be aired for four years on ABC, and is still re-run on Lifetime. Last year, the young woman in my neighborhood coffee shop said it had meant a lot to her, that her boyfriend also watched and finally understood what she went through as a waitress. That meant a lot to me.

6. Realizing that all women are Bunnies. After feminism arrived in my life, I stopped regretting that I had written this article. Thanks to the television version, I also began to take pleasure in the connections it made with women who might not have picked up a feminist book or magazine, but who responded to the rare sight of realistic working conditions and a group of women who supported each other.

—1995