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Being Emily

by Amanda Hawkins

Donovan Haines was a strange little man. Everyone said so, even me, and I'm his best friend. In stark contrast, Emily Adderson was the most beautiful woman in town. Everyone said that too.

True to his nature, Donovan took matters much further than anyone else. He thought Emily was perfect. He loved everything about her: the way she dressed, the feminine lilt in her voice, the womanly perfection of her figure, the soft blonde hair that spilled over her shoulders, even the way she walked. She didn't just walk, he once proclaimed in a fit of poetic rapture, Emily danced through life, as though nothing bad could possibly happen to her.

How wrong she was.

What I liked about Emily was more mundane. Simply put, she was just a very nice person. She never looked down her nose at other people the way some girls do, especially the attractive ones. She was friendly with everyone, even a dumpy little nobody like me, with a shapeless body and pop-bottle glasses.

Donovan, on the other hand, she ignored completely. Perhaps she sensed something a little 'off' about him, some hint of menace that the rest of us missed. Or maybe he just rubbed her the wrong way. Whatever the case, as far as he was concerned, it was the worst thing she could possibly have done.

Donovan's home—a run-down heritage building on the edge of the business district, that might barely qualify as a mansion to one unused to such places—was on Emily's usual route home from downtown. This day, a Saturday, we watched her pass as we often did, from our lookout on a third storey balcony, half-hidden by the spidery branches of a dead elm. She was wearing cutoff shorts and a long-sleeved T-shirt. Obviously, it was her day off.

Donovan stared until she was well out of sight, then stepped back inside. I followed. "It isn't healthy, you know," I told him. "The way you spy on that girl. Dangerously close to stalking, if you ask me."

Donovan stood before the fireplace, contemplating a hearth that hadn't seen a fire in decades. Finally, he went to his laptop and activated the media player. "Listen to this," he said.



A woman's voice, bright with life: "I'll have the Pearson file on your desk first thing in the morning." I knew that voice. It was Emily.

"Good Lord, Haines! Where on Earth did you get *that*?" He and I had sort of a Holmes-Watson thing going on—ever since we were kids, in fact, running around the woods outside town in pursuit of terrors both real (neighborhood dogs) and imaginary. The pattern had come to dominate our relationship.

"I placed a bug in her purse," he said casually, as if it were a perfectly reasonable thing to do. Before I could ask the obvious question, he held up his hand. "Just listen." He straightened his back, cleared his throat and blinked several times, whereupon a new voice spilled from his lips: "I'll have the Pearson file on your desk first thing in the morning." The same words, the same inflection, the same feminine lilt. Emily's voice, or near enough.

"How in blue blazes did you do that?" I sputtered, even though the answer was obvious. He'd been practicing. He must have listened to that recording—and others like it—hundreds of times, studied the pattern of her speech and learned to duplicate it with his own throat. But why?

"Voice lessons, my dear Wilson," he said smugly, in his own voice. "Ostensibly for singing, of course. I have 'genuine talent,' according to my instructor. But actually to learn how to control my voice—which, as you may have noticed, I now can," he said, switching briefly into female mode.

I shook my head. "Incredible. But why go to all the trouble?"

He rubbed his throat. "The pitch isn't perfect. Training can only do so much." He began pacing. "When the time comes, I plan to have my vocal cords tightened. It's a simple procedure—day surgery, no anesthetic. However, the tuning has to be perfect. I may even have it done in steps, so as not to overshoot." He grinned, an act he rarely performed. "I don't want to end up sounding like Betty Boop."

I rubbed my eyes. "Help me out here. Why do you want to speak like Emily?"

He scowled, a more familiar expression. "I've seen the way you look at her, you know. The way *everyone* looks at her." He grimaced at the mirror mounted over the fireplace. "No one ever looks at *me* that way. Why the hell should they?" His voice changed again. "Look at that fool. Such an odd little man."

I stepped toward him. "Really, you're being too—"

He spun on his heel, his anger blurring the two voices. "She doesn't give a damn about me and I don't blame her. So what's the point? Why be a man at all?" He stopped. Then his face cleared, like the sky after a rainstorm, and the sunshine of *her* voice returned: "That's why I decided to become Emily Adderson."

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I was concerned. My old friend was not one for half measures. I knew he would throw himself into this new project of his with a passion boarding on the obsessive. Who knew what he'd do next?

I went to see him a week later. He looked much the same, although I noticed he was overdue for a haircut. With some trepidation, I asked him what he was up to. His answer: "Studying my quarry." My heart sank as he led me into his study. One wall was covered with glossy photos of Emily Adderson. That was new.

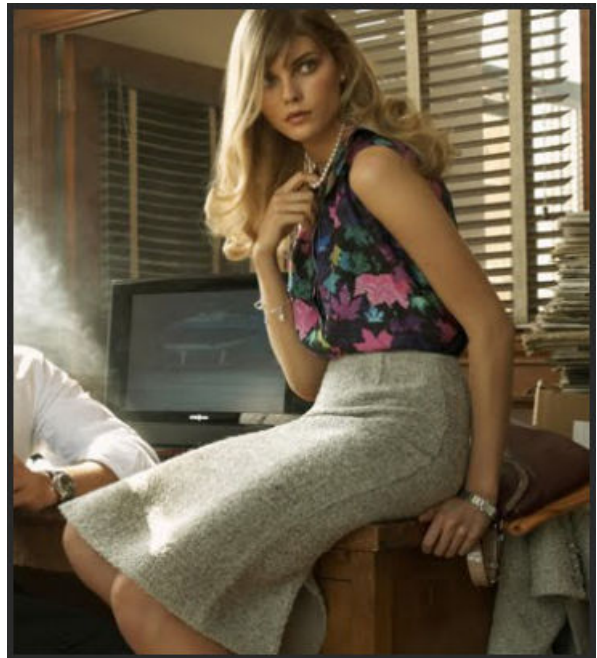
"As you might expect, I have methodically approached the question of how to become this woman. What you see here is nothing less than Miss Adderson's entire life. Where she lives, where she works, where she shops, with whom she associates. I have names, addresses, preferences—everything."

I looked closer. Some of the pictures were outdoors and could have been taken by Donovan himself. I knew he'd been spying on her for some time. But others were indoors, among groups of strangers. How had he come by those?

"Really, Wilson, you must learn to move with the times. The internet—perhaps you've heard of it? Miss Adderson is rather easy on the eye, to put it mildly, so naturally her image is everywhere. Her own Facebook page, for a start."

One photo that attracted my attention must have been taken at the law firm where she worked as a paralegal. It showed Emily perched on the edge of a desk, fingering the pearls at her neck as if they were worry beads. I wondered what she might have been thinking, in that lost moment when the camera captured the image that now served my friend's nefarious purpose.

Donovan was still talking. "Vacation photos on a drugstore website. A cousin's family photos. Once an image has entered cyberspace, it is effectively immortal."



He pointed to one group of pictures. “These, for example, are from a realtor’s website. Three years ago Emily put her home on the market for a short time, after her mother passed away.” He grinned fiercely. “She didn’t get the price she wanted, so she’s still there... all by herself in that creaky old house.”

My eyes explored the images of Emily’s home. They didn’t include her of course, but they clearly showed where and how she lived her life: the living room with her parents’ old couch and thick-screen TV, a refrigerator papered with pictures of cats, her bed with its modest collection of stuffed unicorns, the bathroom where she no doubt undressed... I found myself fearing for her safety.

“But enough chitchat, Wilson. This is an auspicious day. Let us be on our way.”

“On our way? Where to?”

“The shops, of course. I have cataloged Emily’s wardrobe to the point where I know it better than she does. I am anxious to put that knowledge to the test.”

“Well, certainly,” I mumbled, “but really, Haines, the shops? Couldn’t you just order something online?”

“Very good, Wilson, you’re learning. Of course, I have already done just that. But I find myself impatient to begin the change. Today is the day.”

I trailed along as he left the room. “But what are you going to do? Waltz into ladies wear and ask for something in your size?”

“Why not? I am a customer in their store, aren’t I?”

“But you’re a man, Haines. Men simply don’t—”

“That’s where you’re wrong, my friend. Men do so all the time. They shop for wives and girlfriends. Some even shop for themselves.”

“Yes, yes, I know all that. But knowing you—you won’t stop there. You’ll want to try these clothes on. It will look... strange.”

“Not as much as you might think.” Donovan dangled a plastic shopping bag in front of my face. “My legs are shaven, I’m wearing pantyhose, and I’m bringing along everything else—shoes, brassiere, breast forms, lingerie. When I step out of that changing room, all you’ll see is a woman trying on a dress.”

Thus did I find myself, a short time later, ensconced in a pink easy chair while Donovan rifled through the size-eight rack and chatted gaily with the sales lady—in his normal voice—like this was something he did all the time. I had to admit, the lady was a pro. She never once broke from her sales patter, even when Donovan emerged from the dressing room in a dark blue shift dress, nude hose and fashionably tall heels. He never even stumbled. He’d been practicing.

“It’s lovely,” the woman said smoothly. “It really brings out your figure, dear. And you brought your own slip, I see.”

“Girl scout motto,” Donovan chirped, posing before a full-length mirror, “always come prepared.” I shrank deeper into my chair. From the shape of his chest, he must also be wearing—and filling—the brassiere he’d brought.

After checking the rack once more, Donovan announced that what he was wearing would be just fine. “An excellent choice,” the woman said. “May I assume that madam will be wearing the dress out?”

“You may so assume,” he replied, and they both laughed the way ladies do.

“Wilson,” he said brightly, “be so good as to pay the lady while I collect my things.” The transaction passed in silence, my face beet red throughout.

“I hope you’re happy,” I told him, once we were outside. “My whole life, I’ve never been so embarrassed.”

“I am happy, thank you very much.” He’d switched into female voice, not specifically Emily’s but close. “Would it be too much to ask for my dearest friend in the whole world to be happy *for* me?”

“Good lord, Donovan.” I muttered something about being happy if he was, but shouldn’t my feelings count for something too?

He stopped. In heels, he was slightly taller than me—just as Emily was. “Not Donovan,” he said, smiling down at me like a mother correcting a somewhat dim child. “That’s my brother’s name. Call me Daisy.”

“Daisy?” Did he really expect me to treat him like a woman?

“That’s right, sweetie. Here, hold this.” *She* handed me the plastic bag containing Donovan’s clothes. Then she opened her purse and showed me the id in her wallet: Daisy Haines. Even her picture was there, a recent and rather androgynous image of Donovan with his hair pulled back. “It’s fake, of course,” she said with a shrug. “But I won’t need it for long.”

We were moving again. “It’s amazing,” Daisy said, “how three inches and a new attitude can completely change the way people look at you.”

“I think the dress and the high heels have something to do with it too.”

She nodded. “Not to mention the lessons I’m taking in feminine deportment.” She saw my surprise. “Oh, didn’t I mention? My instructor says I should’ve been born female. Or rather, Donovan should have.” She sighed. “God knows why she thinks he wants to act like a girl. Probably figures he’s gay.” She giggled. “Mother and I always wondered, you know. He was such a wimpy little boy.”

“He’s my friend,” I said, rather abruptly.

“Of course he is. I’m sorry. About what I thought back then. You know, how maybe the two of you were...” She composed her face. “Anyway, the lessons are *so* worthwhile, don’t you think? See how I carry myself? The way I walk—the key is to pretend I’m gliding—the way I move my hips. The way I hold my arms; shoulders back, chin up, a little limp in the wrist. It communicates that I’m a lady, born and bred. Which, of course, I am,” Daisy said archly.

“Yes, you, uh... must’ve had a lot of practice.” I swallowed hard.

“Oh, you have no idea. Hours and hours of traipsing from room to room in four-inch heels, like a model strutting down the catwalk—or some sweet young thing making her big entrance at the prom.” She studied the stores we were passing. “I know this area.”

“We’ve been down this street,” I said, eyeing the beauty parlors and trendy clothing stores that lined the block. “But it’s all for wo—”

“No, it’s those photos Donovan took. This is where Emily has her hair done.” She stopped in front of M’Lady’s Hair salon. “I think I feel a makeover coming on.”

“You can’t be serious.”

“You know me better than that.” She grabbed my hand. Inside, the combined scent of perfume, hair spray and perming solution was overwhelming. “Can you believe they advertise this place as *unisex*,” Daisy whispered. “Fat chance.”

The clerk behind the counter glanced at the clock. “You must be Miss Haines.”

“Guilty as charged. Call me Daisy.”

“Your chair is ready, Miss Daisy.” She motioned toward the back.

I whispered, “You made an *appointment*?”

“Of course. A woman doesn’t just walk into a salon. You men can get away with that, but not us.” She pushed me into the waiting area. “Just sit there and watch, okay? I need you to tell me if I say or do something that Emily wouldn’t. Not now, you understand. Not while we’re in here. Tell me later.”

I pretended to read a magazine while a beautician rolled curlers into Daisy’s flat brown hair, the two of them all the while chattering like long-lost girlfriends. I was amazed how well Daisy kept up her end of the conversation. I thought about how Donovan must have studied all those photos of Emily, staring at each one long enough to enter the scene in his mind, to take the place of the woman therein, to imagine what she might be saying or thinking, and then to say it himself, in *her* voice, over and over until each scenario merged seamlessly into his own mind.

Rather like being hypnotized, I mused. Only he did it all himself.

I listened to them talk about me as if I wasn't there. "Actually, no, I'm not seeing anyone at the moment," Daisy said. "If you know the right guy, I'm all ears. And various other body parts."

"Nah, you're too classy for the guys I know. What about him?"

"Him? He's nobody. Just an old friend of my brother's. He helps me run errands now and then. He's nice enough, but... you know."

They both laughed. My face burned.

The makeover came next. The beautician applied lotions and creams to cleanse, moisturize and finally bury my old friend's face under layers of pure womanhood. Then came powders to highlight, contour and finish his skin; lines and shadows to provide feminine accent to his eyes; mascara to grow his lashes; lines and color to fill his lips. In the end, of Donovan, there was nothing left.

A dryer was wheeled over and the woman left Daisy alone. She sat quietly for what seemed like a long time, her gaze fixed on the mirror, only now and then casting an eye my way. Not once did her lovely expression change, as if she were afraid that her newly minted female face might crack.

I couldn't imagine what kind of alien thoughts—of makeup and men, long hair and high heels—might be passing through her mind.

Eventually, the beautician returned, the curlers came out and Daisy's hair flared into an undisciplined mass of curls. The woman applied a highlighting cap and carefully pulled selected sections through with a needle. The cap didn't stay in place for long. Brushed out, Daisy's hair came alive, her loose curls gleaming with subtle light, dancing on air as she rose gracefully from her seat.



After that, there was never any doubt in my mind that Daisy was a woman. The way she carried herself, the way she spoke, the way she looked down at me—all achingly familiar from every interaction I'd ever had with the female of the species. Oh, I knew that some bits were just padding, and other bits that didn't fit the image were carefully hidden from view, but being a woman is more than just what bits you do or don't show. A lot of it is attitude, the way you present yourself to the world. As far as I was concerned, my old friend had already crossed the line. Daisy was a lady.

I didn't see much of Donovan after that. He reappeared now and then, signing legal papers or whatever else required his old face, but he was obviously finding the male look increasingly hard to bring off. Regular salon appointments, including electrolysis, saw to that. For the most part, it was all Daisy—and she was busy. I knew that Donovan had been taking classes in cosmetology at the community college; now Daisy took his place. She also continued his personal instruction in feminine deportment (a star pupil, no doubt), and was studying paralegal courses by correspondence. I got tired just hearing about it.

All the while she continued to change. Most obviously, her hair grew, now riding her shoulders in a soft fall. I came upon her one day, clad in a black skirt and paisley blouse, admiring her figure in the hall mirror.

"They're real, you know," she said archly, thrusting her chest in my general direction.

"So I see." I wasn't surprised. The last few months had thoroughly numbed my capacity for that.

"Oh, yes. As of today, no more padding." She smiled cat-like at the mirror. "Emily and I are now exactly the same cup size."



Amazingly, I'd almost forgotten about Emily Adderson. I saw her around town now and then, sometimes with Daisy at my side. The two of them appeared to be on nodding terms, with polite smiles going both ways. Emily was always friendly, but all she ever got back was a smile made of ice.

“It’s the hormones,” Daisy said happily. “I don’t even need hip pads anymore. Or that damn girdle.” She ran a manicured hand down her side. “Pure Daisy.”

“I’m glad you’re happy. Perhaps now we can forget—”

“Actually, I’m glad you’re here. I meant to call you. I need a ride into the city. I have an appointment at Mercy General.” She glanced at her watch. “If we leave now we’ll have time to stop at that bookstore you like.”

“Good God,” I sputtered, “you think I have time to just drop everything and—”

“You’re here, aren’t you?” She giggled. “Actually, it’s more the ride back I’m worried about. I’ll be a bit out of it. Mind that you don’t take advantage.”

That was the first of several adjustments to her voice box. She also had her Adam’s apple shaved and her cheekbones padded. I had a hard time telling the difference, but Daisy swore that it was worth the time saved in contouring alone.

Three more such trips and she was a different person. The change in her voice was subtle, but now I could swear that it was Emily imitating Daisy instead of the other way around.

Finally, Daisy said, “It’s time,” and I experienced the kind of dizzy sensation one might get having just stepped over a cliff.

“First thing tomorrow morning,” she continued. “You’ll drive me to the airport. It’s all arranged. I’m taking a private jet to Sweden. I’ll be travelling under my old passport, no questions asked. I’ll be away for two weeks.”

Staring at the ground, I nodded. I could not have felt more miserable.

“It’s the final surgery,” she stressed, “the final adjustments to my face. I’ll be a real woman. My hair will be blonde.” She paused, staring down at me. “You do understand, don’t you? Daisy isn’t coming back. I’ll be Emily. I’m sure you know what that means. It’s your job to take care of—*her*.”

We’d discussed it before, many times. But I never really believed it would happen. I thought that, surely, Daisy would settle for being the beautiful woman she’d already become. Why go to all the trouble of assuming someone else’s identity? Live and let live. I looked away.

“Oh, no you don’t.” She caught my arm and squeezed. “Remember who you’re dealing with, old friend.” She lifted my chin and caught my gaze in hers. For an instant she was Donovan again and we were together in the forest, united against some slavering horror from beyond the stars—I the faithful sidekick forever doomed to ride at another man’s side. That was my fate, and Daisy knew it.

“You will do this thing, for me,” she said softly, sweetly, insistently.

And I knew then that I would. God help me.

I won't bore you with the details. Suffice to say it was the longest night of my life, and it involved a drugged bottle of wine, rope, a carpet, a rented mini-van, and the old coal chute in Donovan's basement. It was no picnic for Emily either.



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At the end of the two weeks, I met Daisy at the airport. She looked pale, with most of her face bandaged, but what I could see didn't appear to be receiving enough blood. She was a ghost or her former self, a blonde ghost. Blonde hairs stuck out from under her scarf and she walked with a pronounced limp, as if it hurt to move her legs. Her voice, on the other hand, was strong and it was pure Emily. She seized my arm. "Wilson! Is it done? Tell me you took care of her."

I nodded sadly. "I took care of her."

Her grip relaxed. "Good. That's good. I knew you would." She slipped her hand into mine and smiled. "Such a dear friend. Always looking out for your Emily."

But she wasn't Emily, not really. That was the problem. The real Emily was imprisoned in Donovan's basement.

A few days later I returned from a trip to the grocery store to find a haggard-looking blonde woman in the kitchen, scrounging the ingredients for a sandwich. For one wild, dizzying instant I thought that Emily had escaped. But no, it was just Daisy, out of bed for the first time since her return. She had removed the wrappings from her face and I paid silent tribute to the skill of the plastic surgeon. My old friend had really done it: Donovan Haines had become the one, the only, the lovely Emily Adderson.

Strangely enough, with the very different kinds of stress and trauma each of them had been through of late, both Daisy and Emily still managed to look like hell in exactly the same way.

I sat Daisy down and prepared what she wanted: pastrami on sourdough, with cucumber, dijon mustard and a dash of barbecue sauce. Donovan's old favorite. Some things cannot be changed.

Her smile was weak. "My dear Wilson, what would I ever do without you?" I must have looked sad because she touched my hand with what felt like genuine sympathy. "You miss your friend, don't you?" She took another bite. "What was his name? Donovan? Mmmm." She daubed her lips with a paper napkin. "I know you were close, but just remember—he's in a better place now."

The next day Daisy felt well enough to drag herself down to the lawyer's office. I watched her touch up her makeup in the guest room. "Do you know what your friend did? He went and gave *me* this house and all his money! The papers are all ready. All I have to do is sign." She passed a brush through her wavy blonde hair, first one side then the other. "Can you imagine? I mean, I barely knew the man."

I bit my lip. "Yes, Donovan's generosity is... almost unbelievable."

After she left I warmed a bowl of stew and headed downstairs. The old house actually had two basements: one with a series of roughly finished rooms, cluttered and dirty but with solid concrete floors, and below that—down a narrow staircase and through a thick oaken door designed to keep out vermin—was the old root cellar. It had been empty for a long time, but I had recently equipped it with a cot, a table, even a portable chemical toilet. And of course chains, sized appropriately to prevent the prisoner from reaching the door.

Emily sat up as I opened the door. She looked awful. It was obvious she'd been crying. I set the bowl within reach and stepped back. I thought she might kick it over or throw it at me, as had happened twice before, but evidently she was too hungry for that. She picked it up and then sat there staring at me, the bowl untouched in her hands, as if to say "Why?"

I had no answer for her. I never did.

I expected her to plead for her life, to implore me with those warm brown eyes, to invoke all the images of courage and humanity and mercy in mankind's long history—but she didn't. Something was different this time. Her eyes darted past me, wide with shock, and the bowl crashed to the ground.

"Wilson! What the fuck is *this*?"

Oh, shit. I didn't have to turn around. I knew it was all over.

Daisy crashed into the room like a SWAT team in high heels. “What the hell is *she* doing here? I told you to take care of her!” She spun, skirts flaring, to tower over the woman on the cot. “Why isn’t this *thing* buried in a shallow grave in the woods? Yet here she is in my basement, being waited on hand and foot!”

“Who *are* you?” Emily’s voice was a mere croak.

“I’m you!” Daisy shrieked. “I am the beautiful Emily Adderson, the kind and sweet Emily Adderson that everyone in town loves! Just ask *him*. He knows who I am. He knows how hard I’ve worked.”

She fixed her glare upon me. “You little dipshit, you’re supposed to be taking care of *me*, not her.”

I backed away until my spine met the wall. I was trapped.

Daisy advanced toward me with hurricane force. “You can’t stop now,” she said, her eyes narrowed, her lips twisted. “You made me a promise.” In a voice that dripped acid: “I want you to take care of that fucking bitch. Right now.”

So that’s what I did.

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Life wasn’t the same without Donovan around. I missed his company, I missed our Holmes-Watson banter, I even missed his single-minded pursuit of his mad dream. But I often saw Emily, usually on the arm of some muscular young male who knew her only as the most beautiful woman in town—and one of the richest. Although we never spoke, she always met my gaze with a warm smile and a nod, as though we shared some secret bond. As indeed we did.

In what was surely the fulfilment of her dreams, Emily did finally marry. I could not bring myself to attend the wedding, although I was invited—along with half the town it seemed. Instead, I went into the woods, to a small clearing warmed by a single shaft of sunlight slanting through the trees, sat at the foot of a disturbed patch of earth, now overgrown with white daisies, and prayed that the man buried there would one day find it in his heart to forgive me. ■

