

by Amanda Hawkins

## Mother and Daughter

“You look lovely, my dear. Very pretty.”

“Thanks, Mom.” I shook my head, gently, and watched as my fiery red mane shook like Jello and settled back into place. The woman in the mirror—more feminine than I ever thought possible—really was me, plain old Colin Tamerlane, 20-year-old college dropout and all-around failure.

Mom appraised my new image from various angles. “Red is a good color for you. So much nicer than poor Colin’s mousy brown. You won’t be mistaken for *him* anytime soon, hmm?”

“I doubt anyone’s gonna—”

“I was kidding. And say ‘going to’, dear. A boy can slur his speech like that, but it makes a young lady look cheap. Try to speak more precisely.”

“Sorry, Mom.”

“Complete sentences, dear.” She aimed her camera at me and took another picture. She must have enough of them by now to animate my makeover. I hoped that wasn’t what she was planning to do.

“All right, Mom—er, mother—I’ll, uh...”

“Sh-sh-sh. Speak softly. You’re a woman now. It’s not an act; this is who you are. Just look at yourself. You’re sweet, demure—a pretty girl. Change your clothes and you become a sexy, desirable woman. It’s two sides of the same coin.” She paused. “Oh, by the way, from now on you are ‘Cheryl’.”

*Cheryl.* I whispered the name and let roll around my mouth. *Cheryl.* Sweet, feminine, a little naughty. Definitely a girl’s name. *Cheryl...*

“That’s what I wanted to call you when you were born, but your silly old father insisted on a boy name. He seemed to think you really *were* a boy.”

Well, I was, wasn’t I? And where the hell is Dad now? Oh yeah, according to Mom, whoring his way across Europe with some redhead young enough to be his daughter. And where did that leave me?



Well, according to Mom, I *am* his daughter. I tossed my head again. I still couldn’t believe it.

Mom adjusted the fall of hair across my shoulder. “You know, this is my favorite dress. The classic LBD, in velvet. You know what that means?”

“Yes, mother. Little black dress. It feels... nice.”

“I’m sure it does.” Her lips passed close to my ear. “And this is *not* your first time wearing it...”

I stared at the floor. No point in lying now.

“I thought so. A mother always knows. That’s why all this was so easy. The salon, the hair extensions,

the makeover, the lingerie—most boys wouldn’t put up with that.” She smiled. “But you did.”

“I didn’t think I... had a choice...”

“Oh, hush. You had a choice, and you chose to be that gorgeous creature in the mirror, the one you’ve been staring at ever since we got home.” She stood behind me, hands on my shoulders. “Well, Cheryl, it’s all yours now. The dress, the name...”

“Uh, we’re just playing around here... aren’t we?”

“No, dear,” she said firmly. “Colin’s gone.”

“What do you mean, *gone*? I’m—”

“I mean, he doesn’t exist.” She paced across the bedroom, her heels clicking on hardwood. “As you may have guessed, I always wanted a daughter. So, when you were born, I bribed a clerk in the hospital to list you as female—as Cheryl Tamerlane. That’s who you really are. I let your father and everyone else call you ‘Colin’, but I knew better.”

It’s funny, when you get hit with something this weird, you end up focusing on some utterly trivial aspect of the situation. I babbled something about losing my school records. Like it mattered.

“No worries, there’s always night school. I’m sure you’ll do better as a girl anyway. Of course, this is why I didn’t let you get your drivers license. But now you can—now that you look the part.”

I stood up. The hem of my little black dress rode my thighs, leaving my knees bare. I shifted my stance in three-inch heels, placed a hand on my hip, and sighed. “Well,” I said softly, “if this is who I am...”

Mom put her arm around me. “That’s my girl.”

I shook my head. “I’m 20 years old, mother. I’m not your little girl anymore.” I met her gaze in the mirror. “If I’m a woman, then treat me like one.”

“All right, dear. If that’s what you want.” She turned around and sniffled. Just like a mother, I thought scornfully, tearing up over nothing. ■