

## Sins of the Mother (Part 1)

by Amanda Hawkins

### 1.

I've always worn my hair long. Not down-to-your-waist long, but more or less level with my shoulders. You know, long for a guy. I always wondered why Mom was so cool with it. Most mothers freak out about that kind of stuff, but not mine. And now I know why. So the hair extensions had something to hang on to.

"You certainly have long hair, Jeremy," she said to me one day, "have you ever thought about growing it even longer?"

Well, sure I had. Dreamed of it. But I didn't tell her that. "Uh... maybe."

"It would suit you. And here's a thought. I won a freebie at the salon. You could use it to get hair extensions; see how it looks. Try before you buy, right?"

I pretended I wasn't sure, but I didn't try too hard. That's how I wound up sitting in a beauty salon while a nice lady named Yvette fused fifty long wefts of color-matched human hair into my own. I didn't like that word 'fused'—it sounded a bit permanent, like I'd better get used to having really long hair—and it took all afternoon. But I couldn't argue with the results. Thick brunette tresses bubbled from my scalp like spring water, poured down the back of my head and broke over my back in a flood of loose curls. It was gorgeous.



Mom was ecstatic. She shook it out of the ponytail I wore home, brushed it out and went on and on about how it looked just like her own hair, back when she was my age. I should add that Mom hasn't aged particularly well. She's only 43, but her hair's grey, she looks at least 55, and she's put on a ton of weight.

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So maybe she's doing a little vicarious living through me. No harm in that.

Even my sister was impressed, and we don't get along at all. "It's really cute," Janey said. "You know, *guy* kind of cute. You should keep it."

So I did.

Not long after my trip to the salon, another odd thing happened: I found out that I needed oral surgery for an impacted wisdom tooth. But that wasn't the strange part, even though I got the news from Mom instead of our dentist and the surgeon was some specialist I'd never heard of before. Plus, I didn't think I even had an impacted wisdom tooth. Turns out, I was right about that.

When I woke up, I had a sore throat. I mean, *really* sore—gimme-a-painkiller kind of sore—and my neck was bandaged. Mom was there and she told me not to talk. There had been an accident during surgery; a scalpel had slipped down my throat and nicked my larynx. Give it a few days, she assured me, I'd be fine.

That must've been some accident, though, to have cut my throat badly enough that it needed bandaging from the *outside*. Or maybe there was more than one scalpel involved. Whatever. I'm a pretty laid-back guy—so I just downed some Demerol, tidied my ponytail and went on my merry way.

A week later, when they finally let me speak—in a whisper—the extent of the damage became apparent. My voice was raspy, although it soon smoothed out, but it was an octave or two (or three) higher than before. Janey said that I sounded just like her, which freaked me out because I always thought her voice was a lot like Mom's. Would I have to go through life speaking my mother's words through my lips? That would be awkward.

But again, I was assured that this was a temporary condition.

When the bandages came off—wouldn't you know it—my Adam's Apple was gone. Like I said, that was one hell of an accident. But, considering how clumsy the surgeon was—Three Stooges kind of clumsy, with scalpels flying around the room like custard pies at clown college—I figured I was lucky just to be alive.

## 2.

I code for a living, so the company I work for doesn't really care what I look like. The women at work complimented my hair and the guys admired my sexy new voice, but no one said a word about my feminine-looking throat. Maybe they just didn't notice—which was just as well because the only explanation I had to offer didn't sound particularly plausible even to me.

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On the 4th of July I awoke in my basement bedroom with a hangover—which is weird because I don’t drink (much)—and a sore chest. And more bandages. Mom was there. She helped me sit up and handed me a glass of water.

I stared at the lumpy expanse of cloth around my chest. “What happened?”

“I’m sorry, dear,” she said, although she didn’t sound all that sorry. “I’m afraid you’ve been—what do you young people call it? Oh yes—pranked.”

Janey, although you’d never know it to look at her (or maybe you would; she and Mom had gone to seed in similar ways), ran with a pretty bright crowd. Some of her friends at university were in med school and they all figured it would be a hoot to sneak into my room and boob me while I was asleep. Hence the breast implants.

Mom marched Janey in to apologize on behalf of her friends, although I never did find out their names. I waved off her apology. “We’re cool, sis,” I said in the voice the three of us shared. “Guess I had it coming, huh? Considering how I sound.”

“That’s very understanding of you, Jeremy,” Mom said, patting my arm.

Never let it be said that I’m not a good sport. Mom unwrapped the bandage, which was just there to hold the implants in place while the surgical glue set, and loaned me a bra to keep them from flopping around. She showed me the incisions, which were surprisingly small and neat. But—alas—they couldn’t be reopened until they were fully healed, so I was stuck with a pair of C-cups for at least a month.



(You’re probably wondering, just how damn gullible *is* this guy? The answer is, pretty damn gullible. Sure, I know better *now*—now that I’m a refined and stylish woman—but at the time I was just a kid, and boobing a guy really did seem like a pretty decent prank. “Like, you been *busted*, man!”)

Funny thing was, nobody said a word at work about my new and rather prominent chest either. Now how could they not notice that?

## 3.

To her credit, Mom was concerned about how this was affecting me—the breasts, the long hair, the feminine lilt in my voice. She felt psychological counselling was required and for this she sent me to one Doctor Marvello.

His office was in a rundown area—dotted with secondhand shops, tattoo parlors and old red-brick apartment buildings—located above an old bookstore. A narrow staircase led to a faded door with a garish eye icon and the words:

**DOCTOR MARVELLO**  
**HYPNOTICS – PSYCHODYNAMICS**

Well, it's good to have a sideline, alongside one's main area of expertise. For the good doctor, though, I wondered which was which.

Doctor Marvello appeared to have Transylvanian blood in him, with a slim build, slick hair (although greying), sharp ears and a trim goatee. "So. Your mother tells me that you are having issues with your gender."

I shrugged. "Not so I've noticed."

"I look at you now and I see a female chest, a flat throat, and a girl's ponytail. These things would suggest a young woman. Doesn't that bother you?"

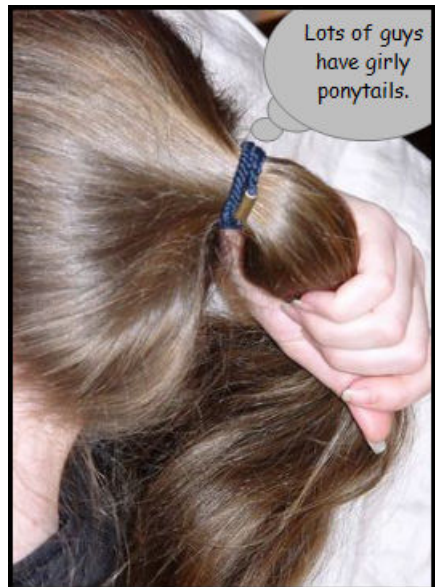
I shrugged again. "I don't care what people think."

His cold eyes picked me apart. "Most people are insecure about their appearance."

I thought about it. "I guess it bothers me a bit," I admitted, "the way people used to look at me. Not so much now, though."

"Oh, really?" He leaned into his words. "Strongly resembling the opposite sex does not usually make for a healthy ego. For instance, a woman used to having long hair and an ample bust would certainly have difficulty adapting to a crew cut and a boyish figure. And it's worse for men."

"I'm not like that." I tugged nervously at my ponytail. "I was never much to look at. Kind of an ugly duck." I paused. "But now people keep telling me how nice my hair looks, what a sweet voice I have. No one's mentioned my chest yet, but..."



“I see. So you regard these changes as improvements.”

“Sure. I mean, I know they’re just temporary, but for the moment... I guess they make me feel better about myself.” I sighed. “Is that so bad?”

“Not at all. Unusual—but not bad.” He leaned back and steeped his fingers. “Are you aware that the masculine and the feminine are not mutually exclusive?”

I stared at him, a blank look on my face.

“What I mean is that people are not simply one or the other, but a blend of both. Most men—perhaps all men—have a feminine side. Women have a masculine side.” He jabbed a finger in my direction. “I suspect that you, my young friend, have much stronger feminine side than most males.”

“You mean, like, I’m closer to fifty-fifty than most guys?”

“Oh, more than that. Inside, you’re certainly much more female than male.”

“You think I’m *gay*?” I shook my head.

“No, no, this has nothing to do with sexual orientation. Many gay men are highly masculine. This is about how you view *yourself*, not how you view others.”

“Okay, but I still don’t—”

“Don’t be so quick to dismiss the idea. It’s not a bad thing.” He smiled, which was not his strong suit. “For a man, having a strong feminine side can provide insights that will strengthen your relationship with a woman. Should it occur.”

I agreed that was indeed a good thing.

“For that reason,” Marvello said, “I would encourage you to explore your feminine side, while you have the chance. You might even enjoy it.”

The conversation continued in that vein for some time. Finally, he fired up his laptop and had me stare at a video of a spinning black-and-white spiral while the soundtrack, in his voice, urged me to “relax... breathe deep... relax... drift into the vortex... relax...” and so on, until—until—

—Until he snapped his fingers. I looked around. The laptop was closed.

The session was over.

On my way home, at Doctor Marvello’s suggestion, I stopped by the salon. To my surprise, I had an appointment. Yvette gave me a full-body waxing that left out nothing—face, eyebrows, legs, arms and underarms, stomach and back, even my bikini zone. I could’ve said no, but I didn’t. I passed the time wondering why I was being so agreeable, but I never did come up with a good reason. Instead, I just kept thinking—*why not?*

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## 4.

I saw Doctor Marvello every two or three days for a couple of weeks. By the end of it we were no longer talking, he just went straight for the spinning wheel and I woke up when it was all over. I figured Mom was getting ripped off. I mean, what good is it if I can't remember what he said?

On the other hand, I did feel better about myself. I was going to work with a smile on my face, and people liked the change—they said so. Even Mom and Janey were pleased.

I found myself noticing what women were wearing. Mom and Janey dressed like bag ladies, but most of the girls at work were quite stylish. Some wore very nice business suits, with skirts, while others combined slacks with tasteful blouses. My favorite outfit was a straight black skirt—with hose and heels, of course—with a white silk shirt; a timeless classic.

Now and then I poked through Janey's closet. She had some nice stuff, clothes that couldn't possibly fit her. Maybe she bought them hoping she'd lose weight, or maybe they were from when she was slimmer. Either way, they fit me perfectly.

Needless to say, I got caught—wearing a slate-gray wrap dress and a nice pair of burgundy pumps. Janey was delighted: “*Jeremy wants to be a giiii-rrrrl.*”

“Shut up, Janey. I do not. I'm just exploring my feminine side, that's all.”



Naturally, she insisted on applying makeup to finish the job. We were both surprised at how I turned out.

“I look a lot like you,” I said.

“Yeah, yeah, I know. You look like me without the extra weight.”

What could I say? It was true.

“Man, my own *brother* is a better looking girl than me. That's kind of a kick in the teeth, you know?”

“I know. I'm sorry.”

“You can keep the dress. It doesn't fit me anyhow.”

“I know.”

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Janey wasn't supposed to tell Mom about me dressing up, but she did. The next day Mom sat me down and we talked about 'exploring my feminine side'.

"Doctor Marvello thinks it might do you some good."

"Yeah, well... What does he know, anyway? We don't even talk anymore. He just puts me to sleep for the whole session."

"Subliminal learning can be very powerful."

"That's what the infomercials say."

"Don't scoff, dear. Your bra strap is showing. Is that a blouse you're wearing?"

"Uh, yeah. It's Janey's. It doesn't fit her."

"It's lovely." She sighed. "Do I have to say it, Jeremy? You have a feminine hairstyle, you wear women's clothing. You even have cleavage, for goodness sake. And now you're wearing makeup." I tried to tell her it was all Janey, but she wouldn't hear it. "I think it's time to see where this is going, dear. It's time you became a woman."

My jaw dropped. "What? You mean—?"

"I mean, you get a real makeover and start living as a woman. At least for a while. You can be my niece from out of town. Jeremy can go stay with his aunt."

"Jesus, that's not gonna work. There's my job and—"

"Language, dear. Remember, you're a lady now." She stood up. "You can do your computer work from home. You've done it before. Tell them you're sick."

"Sure, that'll work for a little—"

"Well, a little is all we need. Come with me."

We headed straight for the salon, with one quick stop along the way to see Doctor Marvello. "Remember, Jeremy," he told me, "*you want to be pretty.*"

Strangely enough, I did. Being pretty was the most important thing in the world. At the salon, I begged Yvette, the beautician, to make me pretty.

She grinned at Mom. "I see the treatment is going well." She guided me to a chair. "Have a seat, sweetie. I'll do my best."

She didn't have to ask twice. I sat down and stared at my old face in the mirror. My *ugly* old face. Soon to be replaced, I thought eagerly, with something a little prettier. Or a lot prettier. Something feminine; a female face. Because that's what I was now, right? I was more woman than man, so why not look the part?

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It was magic. I felt like I was on stage, a willing subject being transformed by the expert hand of a dabbler in the black arts. The magic words *European facial!* were spoken and I was subjected to exfoliation, a chemical peel, lubricating oil and a facial mask. Cream moisturizer was massaged into my skin. I knew my face would never be the same. I didn't want it to be. I had to be pretty.

*Concealer!* And the dark circles under my eyes vanished. Too many late nights under the glow of a computer monitor. Women don't do such things, Yvette told me as she color-matched my skin. Women take care of their appearance.

*Foundation!* And the masculine flaws in my face were erased. But masculinity itself is the flaw. Silently, I vowed to banish it from every inch of my body.

"You have a cool complexion," Yvette said, "good thing you're a brunette."

I thought about that. A uniform complexion is the fresh canvas upon which a female face is built. Or perhaps, by simply removing what is male, a woman's face will spontaneously emerge from the ruins of the old, like order from chaos.

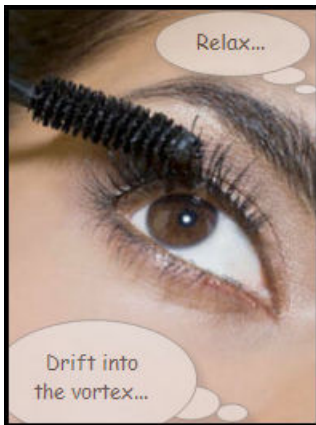
At hearing that I needed only a light liquid cover, my heart swelled with pride.

A dusting of *powder!* to set the foundation. Violet orchid *blush!* to bring out my cheeks. Women have more prominent cheekbones than men and I cursed the testosterone in my veins that had left my features so flat and lifeless.

Yvette gently contoured around the edges. "You have some good structure here," she said. "Relax. You're going to be pretty."

Mentally, I put on hold a plan to dip my testicles into liquid nitrogen and shatter them like old light tubes. Perhaps such extremes wouldn't be necessary.

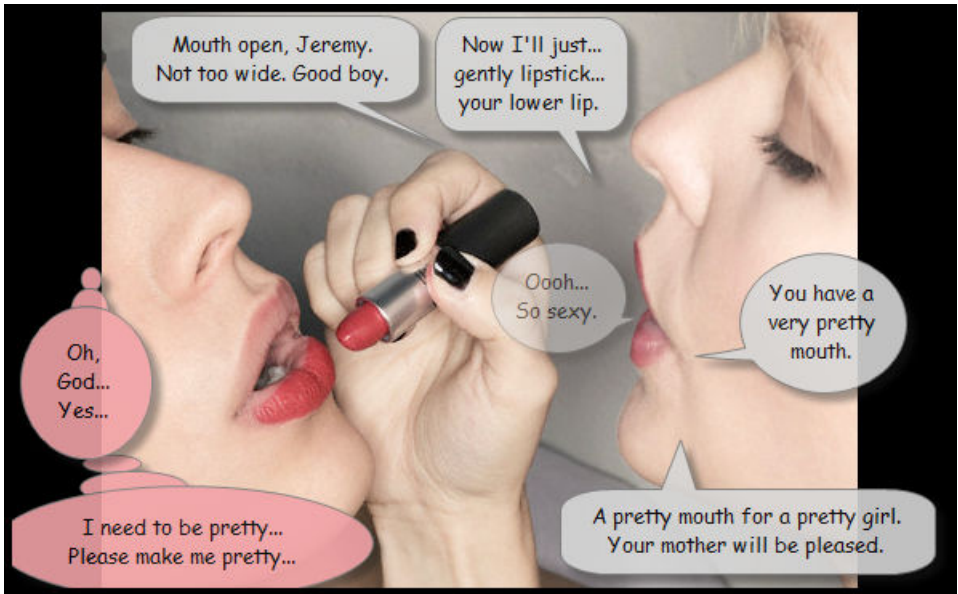
The magic moved on to transform my eyes. A soft pencil to shade and define the eyebrow. Gel *eyeliner!* to give edge to the eyelid and a narrow band of darkness below the eye. Soft brown *eye shadow!* to subtly widen the socket, thus enlarging the eye.



A woman's eyes are large, dramatic, even exotic. I wanted to see the world through exotic eyes. I wanted people to look into my eyes and see a feminine soul. I wanted to be pretty. I wanted it so badly, I could still hear Doctor Marvello's deep voice telling me so.

*Mascara!* Long-wearing and waterproof. Thick dark lashes to open my eyes and reveal within a youthful, girlish innocence. No man would ever be able to look at me without feeling an unspoken urge to hold me and protect me from the ravages of the world.





Finally, for my new female mouth, cranberry *lipstick!* and *lip liner!* in jungle red. I could feel my skin soften into its new texture, relaxing into a new and decidedly feminine shape: the graceful flower petals of the upper lip, a delicate dip in the middle, the moist sweep below—showing that on the one hand this was a woman of delicate grace, and on the other hand a sexually available female.

I needed to show the world my beauty. I wanted people to think I was female.

I wanted a woman's mouth. I needed to be a woman.

It wasn't long before I was.

Yvette combed out my hair and used a curling iron to add loose waves to the ends. She spritzed it all over, fluffed it up and brushed it out for volume. She tidied the edges with a small comb. My hair shone with new life.

Yvette finished by piercing my ears. The pain didn't even register. Mom provided a pair of her best earrings, which framed my pretty face like chandeliers.

My eyes never left the mirror. I was full to the bursting with female energy, energy I could barely control. Energy that made me want to run out into the street, grab the first passably handsome guy I could find and yell, "I am a *woman*, you putz—a beautiful, sexy woman! So kiss me already!"

But instead I just sat there staring deep into the mirror, listening to the graven voice of Doctor Marvello telling me that I was indeed a woman of rare beauty.



“You’re the best,” Mom said to Yvette. “I’m grateful.”

“No worries. He’s a real natural beauty. It was fun.”

“He gets it from me,” Mom said, smiling. “I hope you put Saturday aside.”

“I’ll be there, kit in hand. Glam is my favorite makeover.”

“Glamorous, yes. But not overdone. I want them to think he’s a real woman.”

“Trust me, Sylvia. By the time I’m done with your son, those guys will not only think he’s a real woman—he’ll be the most beautiful woman in town.”

## 5.

I called in sick, but my boss wasn’t fooled. “You don’t sound sick,” he snarled into the phone, “you sound like a goddamn chick!” I imagined his fat face gasping for breath. “We could handle that around here, you know. We really could. That bimbo over in sales—whatever her name is—she had the operation a couple years back. But if you’re just gonna sit around at home, we don’t need that.”

So I lost my job. Or rather, Jeremy lost his job. I felt bad for the guy, but I was Cassandra now. Or was I? I got confused sometimes, which is why Mom (or Aunt Sylvia) sent me back to Doctor Marvello.

As usual, he began our session with the hypnosis video on his laptop. I listened as his voice on the soundtrack told me to “relax... drift into the vortex... relax...” and before I knew it I was drifting off...

I awoke lying on a bed—maybe in the doctor’s own bedroom—with my wrists roped firmly to the sides of the headboard. Marvello sat beside me.



I eyed him warily. “You know, I *could* scream.”

“Yes, in theory, you could,” he said. “But you won’t.”

I didn’t. I watched as the man took off his shirt and lay down next to me. I wondered if his goatee would tickle.

“So... Your aunt tells me that you are still having issues with your gender identity.”

I laughed. “Not really.”

“Oh? Here you are with lovely long hair, a rather sexy dress, a woman’s face, and even what appears to be a female body. Yet you still believe that you’re male. Does that make sense?”

“Give it a rest, doc. I know who I am.” I stared up at the ceiling. “But Mom wants to give this ‘Cousin Cassie’ thing a go, so who am I to disagree?”

“I see. Then impersonating a woman doesn’t make you feel strange?”

“I’ve got the body for it, so I might as well.”

“Confusion over one’s gender identity can be... difficult.” He placed his hand on my chest and began circling the tip of one breast with his finger.

It felt nice. “I was just doing what you said—exploring my feminine side.”

“Of course. How is that going?” His fingertip spiraled inward.

“Pretty good—” I felt a jolt in that breast, followed by warmth.

“I agree. I see nothing of the beaten young man of your first visit, who considered himself an ugly duck. Instead, I see an attractive, self-assured woman.”

I crossed my legs. “You figure this is gonna help me understand my girlfriend? I mean, later on, when I have one. When I get back to normal.”

“Ah, but what *is* normal? As we psychologists like to say.”

“I figure it’s when my throat heals and the implants come out.”

“Oh, yes, I’d almost forgotten. Your unfortunate ‘accident’ in the dentist’s office, and that ridiculous ‘prank’.” He shifted to my other breast, leaving a fading glow in the first. “There is a saying, in psychology, that there *are no accidents*.”

“Meaning what? Somebody did this to me on purpose?”

“Well, no, not necessarily...” He upped the pressure. “But things happen for a reason. Fate, if you will, may have stepped in to right a previous wrong.”

I sighed, which had the added benefit of pushing my breast harder against his finger. “You think I was supposed to be a girl.”

“That’s not for me to say. However, on more than one occasion, you’ve stated that these changes are improvements. Perhaps you should listen to yourself.”

“Yeah... I sure don’t feel like a guy. Maybe I am more of a wo—”

He kissed me. I felt the room spin, while his deep voice reverberated in my head, telling me to “relax... mouth open... drift... match his passion...”

The kiss lasted a long time. He probed deeply, and passionately, while bony fingers raked my hair and the weight of his body pressed both of us into the mattress. My own hands were still tied back or I would surely have run my own fingers through his jet black hair and pulled him tight to my womanhood. Instead, I writhed under him like an animal in heat and expended my passion on his mouth. It’s amazing how much a woman can do with no more than a strong tongue and a soft pair of lips.

Finally, as all things must, the session ended. He untied me. “I hope, in some small way, I have shown you what it means to be a woman. On the one hand vulnerable, even helpless. On the other hand, strong and passionate.”

I smiled. “Thank you, doctor. I know what to do.”

I straightened my dress and retrieved my pretty pink pumps. I found that my feet stepped lighter, my hips swung wider, and when I shook my head my hair flowed faster across my back. All because I was a real woman.

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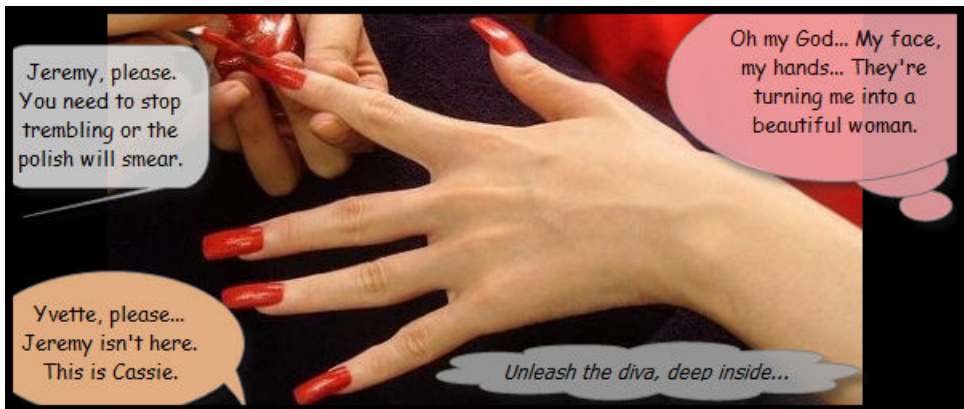
## 6.

It had to be *that* song. It must've been her favorite, because Yvette played it over and over while she worked on me that Saturday afternoon. *Paint your face like a movie queen. A naughty dream or a fantasy, anything goes...*

Anything and everything did go. She stripped, peeled and exfoliated my face until my skin seemed to dissolve. She wasn't satisfied with simply removing my wispy facial hair, it had to look as though there had never *been* any. Following mask and moisturizer, the remaining skin was so clean, so tight and so soft, it no longer felt like my own. I was to have a new face, a woman's face.

*Here we go, blush on, lashes long; mascara strong... Lips, eyes, cheeks, face...*

Yvette went to town on my makeup. The smoothest foundation, the reddest rouge, the most pearlescent face powder. The biggest eyes, the longest lashes, the wettest lipstick, the fullest mouth. *Let's get glam...*



While my face tried to absorb all that had been done to it, Yvette worked through my hair with a curling iron. She added waves that flared out below my jaw line, then brushed until my entire mane billowed and shone. She locked in the style with a spray that made me think of satin lingerie and those aspects of a woman too often hidden beneath layers of satin and silk. I was now such a woman.

It was time to get dressed. Mom had bought new underwear for the occasion: A strapless brassiere in black that wrapped my chest like a compression bandage and narrowed my cleavage to a pencil-thin valley. A high-waist black panty girdle that compressed my waist and added flare to my hips. Sheer black stockings that made my legs shine like moonlight. A black slip with spaghetti straps, light as silk, that clung to my figure like falling water. To experience the feel of its scalloped hem fluttering about my knees was to experience womanhood itself.



Mom and Janey slipped a pair of four-inch heels onto my feet, and Yvette blasted me with perfume. I swayed to my feet, blinking furiously and brushing the hair from my eyes, while the three women discussed my accessories.

I couldn't believe it. I wasn't just a woman, I was a goddess. I was the undisputed queen of the prom. I was the beautiful princess, the actress you pay to see, the high-priced call girl. I was the girl in the shampoo commercial that touches her hair as if she's never seen it look so incredible. I was the woman you dream of at night, alone in the dark, when no one can see you touch yourself.

I was every woman who had ever lived, chopped up in a blender and distilled into the essence of pure womanhood, pure beauty and raw sexuality. Or so it seemed.

I couldn't believe that the spectacular creature in the mirror had ever been male. I couldn't fathom the idea that somewhere underneath it all I was still male. It just couldn't be. I considered the idea that some kind of feminine magic had sucked the genitals right into my body, leaving me with a functional vagina and a uterus that would one day give my family the son they so clearly lacked.

But then I felt a stirring from below, and cursed myself for a fool. It was too good to be true. I was still a freak; gorgeous exterior, geek on the inside. A mere boy at the wheel of a sexy sportscar. What was I thinking? I'd never fool anyone.

They came at me with the black dress that would seal me inside this woman's body forever. Or so I imagined. They overcame my reluctance by sheer force of numbers. With a full skirt swirling around my knees and a cold zipper clawing its way up my back, the dress seemed alive—and monstrously female. Its neckline became a harness to bind my shoulders, its dramatic plunge a lure for the eye. Everything else—innocent eyes to draw them in, red mouth to promise them pleasure, cascade of dark hair to guide them down—was there to accessorize the essence of my new sexuality, right there in the middle of my chest.



As the song said, *Give 'em what you got...* And that's when I knew, that's what I had to do.

Someone handed me a faux diamond necklace. I blinked back tears as I ducked my head and fastened the clasp behind my neck.

"It's lovely," said Mom.

"It really brings out her eyes," said Yvette.

"Put on the earrings," said Janey.

So I did, but my hands shook so much I had trouble finding the holes.

Mom frowned. "What *is* the matter, Cassie?"

Yvette asked, "Don't you like them?"

My voice was tiny. "They're beautiful."

Mom was getting impatient. "What is it then? Speak up, sweetie. We have to go soon."

"Oh, Mom..." I slumped onto the bed. "I'm your son. Why did you do this to me?"

"Look at him, Ma. He's just a whiny little girl."

Mom pulled Janey aside. "Call the doctor."

\*

Apparently, Doctor Marvello makes house calls. I sat next to him in the living room, with Mom hovering nearby, while he rebooted his laptop.

"Do we have to do that again? It's creeping me out."

"Not at all. We can talk. Just tell me what happened. You were doing so well."

“Yeah. Maybe a little too well.” I glanced at Mom, who looked startled and left.

“So. Jeremy. I know that you’ve always lacked confidence.” I nodded miserably. “Poor self-image is a common problem. But why do you feel so strongly about it now? You look—if I may be so bold—absolutely stunning.”

“I know. I don’t get it either.” I held myself tight, staring at my nylon-clad knees. “I always figured, if I looked better then I’d feel better. But I don’t.”

“Ah. Perhaps you’re finding out that it really is the other way around.”

“You mean... if I felt better then I’ll look better?”

“In essence, yes. You see, Jeremy, I suspect that you gave up on yourself a long time ago. It happens a lot. Your young self saw no hope of improvement, no hope of ever being a person someone else could admire, or want, so you simply stopped trying.”

I shook my head. But I didn’t deny it.

“But now you’re a beautiful woman, yet you still feel badly. Why? Because you can’t let go of the past. Because there’s a little boy somewhere inside you who still believes that he doesn’t deserve to be loved.”

Long hair fell across my face. “But why?”

Marvello put his arm around me. His voice deepened. “Perhaps it’s because, all this time, that little boy really wants to be a girl.”

“Oh, no...” My face fell into my hands.

“And he believes that makes him a bad person.”

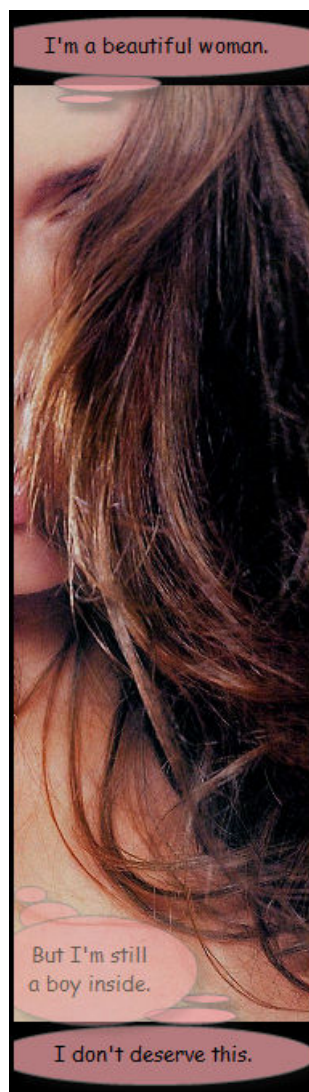
I cried a little. (Or maybe I cried a lot, I don’t really remember. Yvette had to fix my makeup afterward.)

“Okay...” My voice was trembly. “So there’s a dorky little boy inside me. What can I do about it?”

“No problem.” Marvello smiled. “We’ll just turn him into a little girl. That’s what this is for.” He picked up his laptop. I sighed.

“Relax... breathe deep... drift into the vortex...”

In the distance, I heard my mother’s laughter.





## 7.

“Speed dating? That’s why you wanted me all glammed up?”

“The better to get you socializing, Cassie. Don’t be shy.”

The Paradise lounge was crowded. A young crowd, for the most part, but one in which I stuck out like a glamorous thumb, dressed as I was. Mom gently guided me to the registration table. A nametag for Cassandra Burkehart was waiting.

I was escorted to a table for two, where I smoothed my skirt and sat, feeling like a choice piece of mutton. The decor was a throwback to the seventies, with dark wood-panel walls and high-back couches in orange leather. The evening’s selection of men was seated on said leather, in a line along one wall, like an eager wolf pack about to be released to the pasture.

What do you say to a guy who can’t seem to tear his eyes away from your chest? “Hi, I’m Cassie. What’s your name, creep?” Although, I had to admit, they were a decent-looking lot. No one that resembled my old boy-self, which didn’t surprise me in the least since I’d wouldn’t have been caught dead at such an event. What would be the point? No self-respecting woman could ever be interested in a pitiful dweeb like Jeremy.

Doctor Marvello was right; I had given up on myself. But no longer.

I even felt sorry for the other girls. Every guy in the room wanted to sit with me, and most of them kept glancing at me even when they were supposed to be talking with another woman. I could feel their eyes.

A hint of female resentment was also in the air. I was stealing their attention.

Ironically, I didn’t even want their attention. I just wasn’t attracted to men, least of all the kind of jerk who would inspect me at length while muttering “My, my...” and sucking his teeth.



Christ, what is up with these guys?

Eyes off the prize, dirtbag.

My, my...

Some of them only wanted to talk about themselves, intent on informing me how lucky I would be to hook up with them. Spare me. Others never could get past my cleavage, babbling incoherently while I tried to imagine how they could possibly function as normal human beings. And then there was Carl.

“Burkehart,” he mused. “I knew a guy in high school—Jeremy. Any relation?”

“He’s my cousin,” I said smoothly. “I’m staying with his mother. My aunt.”

He nodded. “Haven’t seen Jerry in years. I’ll have to look him up.”

“He’s, uh... living with my Mum at the moment, out in San Fran. He’s looking for work. He lost his job recently, here in town.”

“Sort of a cultural exchange program, huh? Trading spaces.”

“Something like that.” I liked Carl, he was a good guy. The kind of guy who could hang out with the jocks one day, the math club geeks the next, and fit in with both crowds. Good-looking, smart and easy-going. A real catch for any woman. And there I was, a woman. The thought made me uncomfortable.

“I hope you’re not offended,” he said carefully, “but I’m surprised to see someone like you here. I mean, the rest of these girls are nice enough, and they’re certainly attractive... But you’re on a whole different level.”

“Thank you.” My lashes fluttered, all on their own. “But really, I don’t usually look like this. My Mo—my aunt got me all dolled up.”

“Well, on behalf of all the men present, please give her my thanks.”

I blushed. “She thought it would help... you know, get me out of my shell.”

He laughed. “Actually, that makes sense. As I understand it, the prettiest girls almost never get asked out—guys figure they don’t have a chance. That being the case, I would suspect that you’ve *never* been asked out.”

I laughed too. From across the room, I could sense my entourage take notice; Mom and Janey, Yvette and even Doctor Marvello. Yes, the good doctor was there too. Yvette I could understand; she and Mom were old friends. But a hypnotherapist from the wrong side of the tracks? Why was he taking such an interest in me? I shivered, remembering the way he had kissed me—and the way I had responded. Could Carl make me feel like that?

We had to list our preferences on a card, to be left with the organizer at the end. Mom had made me promise to write down at least one name. I chose Carl. I knew my name would probably show up on every guy’s list, but Carl was the only one who spoke to me like I was a real person, instead of just a pretty face and a pair of boobs. I never realized before how important that is.

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## 8.

Mom's twenty-fifth high school reunion was coming up soon. I'd known about it for months, if not years. For days at a time it was all she could talk about—who she expected to see there, what they looked like back then (with pictures from her old yearbooks), what she remembered about them, what she'd heard about them in the years since. I half expected to be quizzed on the subject. The weird thing was, she was a total wallflower in high school. She may have known all the people she talked about, but it was a fair bet that they didn't know her.

I guess I should have seen it coming.

“You know, Cassie, next Saturday is my high school reunion.”

“I know. You've only been telling me about it for the last, like, year.”

“Well, I've been thinking... I was really hoping to make a good impression on my old classmates. But, let's face it—just look at me—that's not going to happen. And we do look an awful lot alike...”

My head snapped up. “You've gotta be kidding.”

“No, no, hear me out. All you'd have to do is put on a nametag—with my name—and wander around and let people see you. Just talk to a few people, so they can see how well I turned out. That's all.”

“Don't you mean how well *I* turned out?” I flipped my hair back and stared at her. “No offense, but I don't look like you at all.”

“Not the way I look *now*, of course. But the way I looked years ago, if I was thinner and had longer hair and dressed better.” She smiled grimly. “You look the way I should have looked in my mid-twenties—in a better world.”

So circumstances had turned me into an improved version of my own mother. I thought about it, but couldn't decide whether to be flattered or appalled.

“I know what you're thinking,” Mom said. “You don't look 43 years old, so who's going to believe you're Sylvia Burkehart?” I hadn't thought of that, but *yeah*. “Well, you don't have to. Yvette will do your makeup to make you look a bit older. And if you wind up looking 33 instead of 43, so much the better.”

I think that's when it first dawned on me that my feminine condition might not be entirely accidental. But before I could formulate a question, Mom handed me the phone. “The doctor would like a word, dear.”

It was Doctor Marvello. All he said, in that extraordinarily deep voice of his, was “Jeremy, *you will comply*.” So I did.

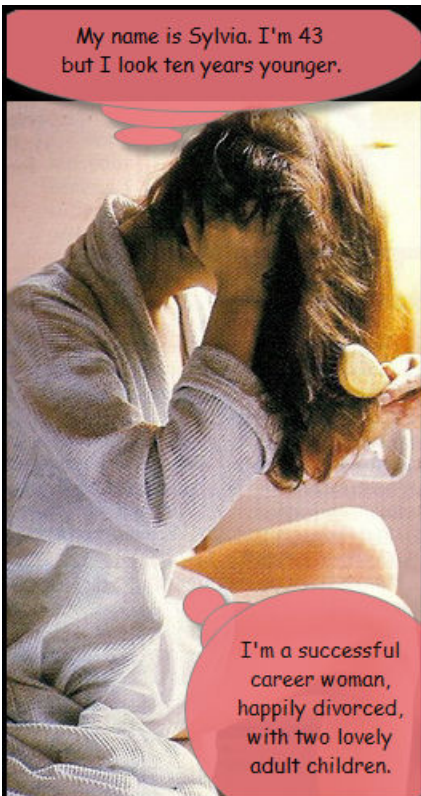
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Mom rented a motorhome for the trip. It was a full day's drive to the big city, far enough away that she'd never bothered to attend any of her previous reunions. Janey came too, in charge of my wardrobe, as well as Yvette, to do my makeup on the day. I felt like an actress with a support staff, which wasn't far from the truth. Curiously, Doctor Marvello showed up as well, having driven his own car.

The night before the reunion, Mom popped into the motorhome's tiny bedroom to hand me a sleeping pill and a high-waist panty girdle. "Put it on now," she said. "By tomorrow you won't know it's there. It may be a little tight, but we soaped it so you'll slide right in." She turned off the light. "And make sure little Jeremy gets all the way into the pouch. It'll hurt, later on, if you don't."

I took the pill. The strange garment went on easily enough and, fumbling in the dark, I managed to find the narrow sleeve that ran between my legs. I fell asleep wondering what possible use such a thing could be to a real woman.



And then it was time to become my mother. Mom as she wanted to be seen; a Sylvia Burkehart for public consumption. It was all I could think about while I brushed my hair.

The panty girdle had all but vanished during the night, although I could feel its tightness around my waist. But the material matched my own skin so perfectly that the seams blended into the line below my rib cage and into the creases between my legs and torso. There was a neat triangle of dark hair in the crotch—and a vagina.

I looked female, born and bred.

I confronted the others, my robe hanging open. "Anyone care to explain *this*?"

Janey laughed. Mom came over. "You really should learn to cover yourself up, dear. You never know who might be watching."

"Christ, what's the difference? It's not like anyone's gonna recognize me."

"You're a woman, dear. A lady. And ladies don't go flashing themselves around."

“Sure, but—why am I a lady down *here*? I mean—”

“It’s all part of your disguise. You never know when it might come in handy.”

“Oh, really? How is a vagina gonna come in handy at a high school reunion?”

Mom looked lost. Yvette said, “Sweetie, it’s all about confidence. If you look like a woman, right down to the skin, it’ll be easier to lose yourself in the role.”

Janey pushed me toward the bathroom. “Time to hit the showers, *Ma*. By now all that glue and your skin are like *that*.” She held up a pair of crossed fingers.

Glue? *Oh, shit*. Little Jeremy was stuck.

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Yvette packed on the foundation to make my face look older—in the sense that older women have to use more makeup to look younger. Does that make sense? Make me look older by pretending to try to make me look younger?

Yet it seemed to work; the face of a thirty-something woman stared back at me from the mirror, while Yvette brushed and spritzed my hair.

“Man, I wish I could wear something like this.” Janey held up the forest green gown Mom had bought from an expensive boutique back home.

The lingerie she laid out for me had been chosen so as not to show. The brassiere left half my breasts bare, the slip was color-matched to the dress, and the spaghetti straps on all three lined up perfectly. Nude panty hose, black panties, and a nice pair of silver peep-toe high heels finished the outfit.

Doctor Marvello stopped by and I was obliged to stare into his laptop one last time. As I drifted off I heard him say, “It is time, dear lady, to activate the command we discussed.”

I didn’t have time to wonder just what the hell that meant.



## 9.

I felt like a spy that evening as I entered the subdued roar of the hotel ballroom. Mom had bought a wireless spy-cam (with microphone) that was hidden in the pendant that decorated my throat. A tiny speaker, buried in my left ear, brought me the tinny voices of my support staff back in the motorhome.

Mom was on the line. *“Oh good, there’s that stuck-up old Sarah Hardie. That’s her, right there! Go talk to her.”*

“I can’t see where you’re pointing,” I told my chest.

*“Right there, by the drinks table. The short blonde.”* I drifted toward a cluster of people ordering beverages. I could use a drink anyway.

Champagne glass in hand, I looked down my nose at the blonde woman. She’d seen better days, sure, but she still had Mom beat by a mile. “Hello, Sarah.”

“Oh—” She nearly bumped into my cleavage, then read my nametag. “Hello... Sylvia. I’m afraid I don’t... Is that your married name?”

*“Doesn’t remember? Oooh, that woman,”* Mom hissed. *“Tell her I kept my name because I’m so darn successful! Tell her I own my own business!”*

“No, it isn’t,” I said imperiously. “I own my own business.”

“Oh, how nice.” She sipped her own drink. “What is it?”

“What is it...” I repeated, for the benefit of those in the motorhome.

*“What? I don’t know,”* Mom squawked.

*“Tell her it’s a boutique,”* Janey said. *“Ladies wear. Very expensive. Very chic.”*

“It’s a boutique,” I said. “Ladies wear. Very expensive. Very chic.” Then, as inspiration struck, “That’s where I got this dress.”

“It’s lovely,” Sarah said, edging away from me.

*“Never mind that,”* Mom said. *“Tell her I remember how she treated me like dirt all through high school! I just wanted to be friends and she ignored me!”*

“I remember how you treated me in high school,” I said. “You ignored me.”

“I’m so sorry,” she said, glancing around. “I just don’t remem—”

*“Look how great I turned out!”* Mom shouted. *“A lot better th—”*

I yelled, “Look how great I turned out!” Sarah turned and fled.

Everyone in the area was staring at me. I drained my glass and picked up a fresh one. Maybe they’d think I was drunk.

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The rest of the evening didn't go much better. Mom kept ordering me around like a maid, telling me who to talk to and what to say. By the fourth or fifth person I'd learned to be a bit more subtle in the way I communicated my (and Mom's) superiority. Yet the message still wasn't getting through. They all agreed that I looked great, but no one seemed to be dying of jealousy—which was obviously what Mom wanted. After some polite banter, they mostly just ignored me.

Mom was enraged. *"How dare they ignore me like that,"* she cried. *"It's like high school all over again. After all the trouble I— Oh!"*

The line suddenly went quiet. I noticed that a middle-aged man had just walked in and was standing about twenty feet away, directly in front of me.

*"It's Todd,"* Mom said softly. I recalled the name: Todd Tompkins, one of the most popular boys in the class and the guy Mom had been hung up on all through high school—and, it appeared, beyond. He, of course, never knew she existed.

*"Go talk to him,"* Mom yelled. *"And make it good. He has to like me."*

I squared my shoulders, flipped my hair back and moved in for the kill.

*"Oh, God, he's going to blow it. You talk to him."*

For the first time, Doctor Marvello spoke. *"Remember, Jeremy, there is a sexy, desirable woman inside you. Just relax and let her out. You'll be fine."*

*"Use the code."*

*"Madam? Are you sure? There will be no stopping her after that."*

*"Just do it."*

*"Very well. Are you still there? Listen carefully... Release the beast!"*

I heard the voice of my master. I relaxed. It felt like slipping into a hot bath. My body felt warm and womanly.

I wanted to run my hands down my sides, just to feel the female flux of my waist and the voluptuous curve of my hips. But I resisted the urge. For now.



I smiled at Todd. “You know, I had a bit of a crush on you, back in the day.”

“Really? I had no idea.” He frowned as he read my nametag.

“I was kind of shy back then. But not anymore.” I sidled up to the man, dropping my gaze. “It’s all about knowing what you want.”

“I see.” The perv actually put his arm around me. “So what do you want?”

“You.” My head tilted, long hair spilling across one shoulder. My heart raced; I could barely breathe. “It’s always been you, Todd. Even when I was married.” Through my horror, I managed a coy smile. My lips said, “But I’m free now.”

“My, my...” Todd grinned at my chest. “This party might not be so dull after all.”

I fluttered my lashes and nuzzled his ear. “Is there someplace we can go?”

“I got a room,” he said smoothly, fishing a keycard from his pocket.

I touched my lips to his. “What are we waiting for?”

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Todd opened a bottle of wine from the mini-bar. He poured and we took our glasses out onto the balcony. The evening was mild, with a bright half-moon hovering over the hills to the east. Up the street and ten stories down, the motorhome was a tiny furnace of light. I knew they were watching.

We touched glasses and drank.

“You are so sexy,” he said. “I can’t believe I don’t remember you.”

I smiled up at him. “I’ve changed.”

“Well, here’s to change.” He drained his glass and I followed suit. He set both glasses aside, then swept me into his arms. He kissed me and I kissed back.

A tiny voice in my ear said, “*What’s she doing? I can’t see.*”

“*Jeez, Ma. She’s kissing him. That’s the guy’s neck.*”

“*Oh, yes... It’s actually working. Todd thinks Jeremy is me.*”

“*That’s what you wanted, isn’t it?*” Yvette said. “*He thinks he’s kissing you.*”

“*I know. It’s just... Well, it’s just not quite the same.*”

“*A bit late for second thoughts, Ma. Jeremy’s gonna do it with this guy.*”

“*It’s not that. Oh—he’ll be okay, won’t he? Yvette? I mean, sex as a woman...*”

“*He’ll be fine. The prosthesis is fully functional. It’s even lubricated. Heck, he might even enjoy himself. Hopefully Todd isn’t too picky—or too big.*”



We stumbled inside. He couldn't keep his hands off of me, which was flattering in a sleazy sort of way. I unbuttoned his shirt, loosened his tie, then took down his pants and pushed him onto the bed. Smiling coyly, I placed the tip of my finger on the growing bulge in his crotch. He just sat there, grinning like a schoolboy.

I hiked up my skirt and crawled onto the bed. From behind, I nibbled his earlobe, wondering what sex as a woman would be like. I'd never done it before, as either gender. I thought about what I could do that might turn him on.

I slipped his shirt down to his elbows and knelt on it. Gently, I removed his tie.

Then I strangled him with it.

*"Oh my God! What the hell is he doing?"*

*"Holy shit! Jeremy's tryin' to kill the guy!"*

*"Oh my lord, we've got to get up there ri—"*

*"It is what I feared. I'm afraid that your son's psyche has collapsed under the weight of the task you assigned him. Allow me to explain—"*

Then the line went dead. And so did Todd.

## 10.

When I got back, the motorhome was in an uproar. I couldn't see what the fuss was about. I dropped my purse on the table and sat down. Time to relax.

"What did you do?" Mom shrieked. "You killed Todd! Why—*why?*"

I ignored her. Whatever she was talking about, it was nothing to do with me.

Janey sat across the aisle, staring at me with huge eyes. Yvette was peering out the window. "No one's coming," she said. "Maybe we should just leave."

Doctor Marvello sat Mom down. "You should listen to your friend. If they find us, your son will go to prison. A men's prison. Imagine what they'll do to him."

I just sat there and *felt* my body—from the inside. Like melting into a tub of hot water, I sank into femaleness. The pull on my chest, the tightness of my bra, the slither of nylon on shaved legs, the soft weight of long hair on bare shoulders.

"And you, dear lady," Marvello continued. "You, who forced your son to become a woman, would also go to jail." He looked at the others. "And before you say anything, bear in mind that I was simply doing what was asked of me."

"It's true," Mom said in a shaky voice. "It's all my fault."

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I found myself staring into my own cleavage—marvelling at how the brassiere and the gown could bring flesh together to create such a lovely little valley.

Marvello stood in the aisle as if he were on stage, his voice commanding. “You all must be aware—you do not know my real name. I have no formal standing in the community. Should the police ever come for me, I would vanish into the night.”

Janey put her arm around Mom. “What are we gonna do?”

“As your friend suggested, we must all leave immediately.” His voice deepened. “Cassie will ride with me.” The question of *why* remained unspoken. “The authorities have her description, so we must change her appearance. I know some people who can help.”

He towered over Mom as if he was passing judgement on her. Which I suppose he was. “They also have *your* name,” he said sternly. “The police will come for Sylvia Burkehart. They will find you, a woman who does not fit the description they were given. So you will be safe—provided they *never* find your son.”

I crossed my legs at the knee. It was so easy now, with the nasty thing between my legs safely tucked away. I admired my silver shoes. They really were quite pretty.

Marvello pointed at Mom’s laptop. “Dispose of the spy gear you used. Erase your computer’s hard disk. Download software to scrub away all evidence of your crime.” He moved toward the door. “Return this motorhome as soon as you can. None of you were ever here. If the police do learn of this vehicle, say that you thought about coming to the reunion but you changed your mind. Do not mention my name. Do not mention your son. Neither of us was ever here.”

He lifted his arm. “Come, Cassandra.” I rose, gracefully, and took his hand.

Mom and Janey sobbed as I stepped outside. I barely noticed.

The night was alive. The air was warm, the sky clear, the moonlight bright, like a new beginning. As we left the city behind I opened the window a crack. Thin fingers of wind stirred through my thick tresses, like the tender ministrations of a gay hairdresser. I shivered as they dance across my shoulders—for mine was a woman’s body—and in among those dark waves I saw the world in a new way. For mine was a woman’s mind.

Mom was right. Long hair suits me. ■

*To be continued...*

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