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The Mom-O-Matic Mark III

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When I returned from the funeral, the house... I don't know how to describe it. It seemed different somehow. With my mother gone, it was mine now. Nothing else had changed, other than the fact Mom was dead and I was a twenty-one-year-old homeowner. I suppose that can change one's perspective on life.

I closed the door behind me and looked around. It looked the same as it ever had, although I hadn't seen it since the previous summer, before leaving for school. I hadn't come back at all during the term. I felt guilty about that now. Not that it would have made any difference to the accident that had taken her life; I wouldn't have been with her when the man she was dating crashed his car, sending him to the hospital and her to the morgue. But even so... there was guilt.

I didn't go into my bedroom. All my belongings from the school year—clothing, books and whatnot—were there, still in the boxes I'd shifted from my car. They were a reminder that I'd been absent when it counted the most.

Instead, I wandered into the kitchen and made myself a cup of tea. Mom often did that when she was upset, so I thought it might help. I watched TV for awhile, but I wasn't really focusing. I sat for awhile, wondering what Mom would be doing if she were here. Getting dinner ready, most likely.

I stepped into the hallway, thinking I might get changed, but paused at the door to the master bedroom. On impulse, I opened it. Mom's room was neat as a pin, just like always. Just like she'd left it to go on that last date.

I turned away, then noticed the door to the basement. It was slightly ajar and a dim radiance shone through, even though the stairwell light was off. I pulled the door open. Something down there was glowing. Not flickering, like you'd see if there was a fire, just a steady glow.

I flicked the light on and clumped down the stairs. The basement was all bare wood and cement walls, with a workbench and tool storage on one side of the room. My father had intended to finish it once the family had settled in, but he died not long after and that was that.

In the far corner of the room was something I'd never seen before: a metal structure half the size of our single-car garage. It was clearly a machine of some sort, although a doorway stood half-open on one side—and it was from there that the light I'd seen shone.

The exterior was mostly bare metal, but next to the door was a panel with a dozen or so buttons, switches and dials, all unlabeled. I didn't dare touch any of it.

The sliding door moved silently on its glide. I slid it wide and peered inside. The space was quite small, relative to the size of the thing. There was enough room to stand upright, but half the floorspace was taken up by a low bench that looked like it was designed to stretch out on, like a cot, although it was a solid slab of metal with no padding whatsoever.

I stepped inside. The back wall was perforated with numerous openings of various shapes and sizes; some covered, some not. The ones that weren't covered were dark; whatever lay within was invisible. What on earth *was* all this?

I turned around and sat down. I felt the lip of the thick metal surface with my fingers, finding it oddly warm to the touch. A moment later I heard a soft chime, and the door slid shut. What was worse, the latch *clicked*.

I clawed at the door without standing up, but it wouldn't budge. That's when I began to worry. If I was stuck in here, trapped for any length of time, no one was likely to find me—not before school started up in the fall. That was four months away! No one was likely to hear me either. The walls were thick and I was below ground in a basement hemmed in by concrete. There were air ducts, but they led to the furnace. I might not freeze down here, but I'd certainly die of thirst. The one good thing about that? I wouldn't have to worry about feeling guilty anymore.

I was about to start yelling and pounding the walls when a disembodied voice spoke. “***Subject identified. Please stand by for genetic resequencing.***”

I yelled: “What the hell? Who *are* you? What's going on?”

A needle popped out of the bench and stuck me in the butt. I swore and tried to jump up, but then fell back. The strength drained from my muscles. Robot hands emerged from the walls to catch me and guide my fall. I ended up stretched out on the bench, not unconscious but very much unable to move.

With quick, smooth motions, the hands cut and removed my clothing. My first thought was that they were surprisingly gentle. The voice returned: “***Proceeding with hair removal and skin resurfacing.***”

Say what? Metallic hands lifted my head while a scissor attachment sheared off my hair. From the nozzles of sinuous tubes there emerged a foam to coat my entire body, first the front, then—as I was lifted—the back. The foam stung with a subtle pain. Some minutes later I was hosed down with warm water, which gurgled out through a drain in the floor. Currents of warm air dried me. My skin felt not only bare and utterly hairless, but oddly sensitive as well.

“***Resurfacing complete. Proceeding with genetic and skeletal transformation.***”

Desperation set in. *Oh god, you can't do this to me. What the hell is going on?*

I don't know how to describe what happened next. A gun-like electrode emerged from the ceiling, descending towards me like something invented by a Bond villain. A greenish glow grew at the tip, from which a beam of light emerged. I don't know quite what it did, and thankfully there was no pain, but for a time my body felt malleable—as though melted and remolded, which I suppose is close enough to what did in fact occur. The voice murmured something about 'reduced mass and height', and I recall it mentioning 'pelvic reconstruction' in particular because it struck me as such an odd thing to say. ***“Skeletal reconstruction complete.”***

I felt smaller, more compact. It seemed like the room had grown larger.

“Initiating breast augmentation and groinal inversion.”

Groinal inversion? What the fuck did *that* mean?

I didn't have to wait long to find out. A large funnel clamped over my manhood, I felt the tickle of a thousand tiny fingers and the whole area went numb. A ghostly presence seemed to be rearranging my insides, in the general area of my lower abdomen. What could it possibly be *doing*? Meanwhile, two somewhat larger funnels clamped onto my chest. The tickling began there as well, numbness followed, and the tubes hummed like a vacuum cleaner.

“Breast expansion complete. Penile inversion complete. Assembly of female genitalia complete. Conversion of spermatozoa to eggs complete.”

My mind reeled. *Female genitalia?* Was I being turned into a woman?

“Mammary glands active. Menstrual cycle initiated. Gender transformation complete. Subject is now fully female.” The funnels pulled away.

I couldn't believe what was happening to me. I'd been turned into some sort of freak! I had a hairless head and body, a large pair of boobs, and nothing to speak of between my legs. What kind of future could I have, looking like that?

“Proceeding with facial reconstruction and vocal transference.”

A mask, vaguely feminine in aspect, descended from the ceiling; a narrow tube attached to the back of its mouth. The mask landed softly on my face, the tube wriggled its way down my throat, and everything locked into place. My head and throat tingled and went numb, the mask heated up and a wave of dizziness swept through me. *What was happening?*

“Facial reformation complete. Vocal pitch adjusted. Target voice pattern matched.”

The mask lifted away. My face felt different; the skin smooth and supple.

“Proceeding with hair transfer.” A bowl-shaped extrusion clamped itself on top of my head. The tingling began again, but instead of going numb my scalp felt stimulated, like I was being electrocuted with a very low voltage.

“Hair growth complete.” The bowl popped off. I felt a soft mass of hair settle upon my shoulders, much more than I had before. Enough hair for a woman.

“Identity transfer complete. Genetic and biometric match to target subject confirmed. Subject is female, biological age forty-two. Beautification initiated.”

A myriad of robot arms leveraged me into an upright position. Two very agile and skillful hands proceeded to trim and dress my new and lengthy tresses. In a whirl of activity, my hair was washed, set into rollers and dried, then released, brushed out and styled. At the same time, a very different mask gently attached to my face. I felt the tickle of brushes and wands, and knew that makeup was being applied.

“Beautification complete. Duplication of target subject achieved.”

Dimly, it began to sink in that I was now a woman. I wondered what I looked like.

“Proceeding with deployment of selected clothing.”

From somewhere in the wall the robot hands produced women’s clothing: a white brassiere and panties, a garter belt and stockings, and a full-length slip. Deftly, they strapped the bra around my chest, settled my breasts in the cups, and tugged the other items into place. A dress followed, and a pair of high heels.

“Dressing complete. Exterior duplication of target subject confirmed.”

I still couldn’t move. I imagined myself as a kind of life-size Barbie doll, sculpted and now all dressed-up to match somebody else’s vision of what a woman should be. But I dismissed the idea that I’d been turned into some kind of harlot or exotic dancer. The dress I’d seen looked more like something a housewife would wear.

“Proceeding with cognitive adaptation.”

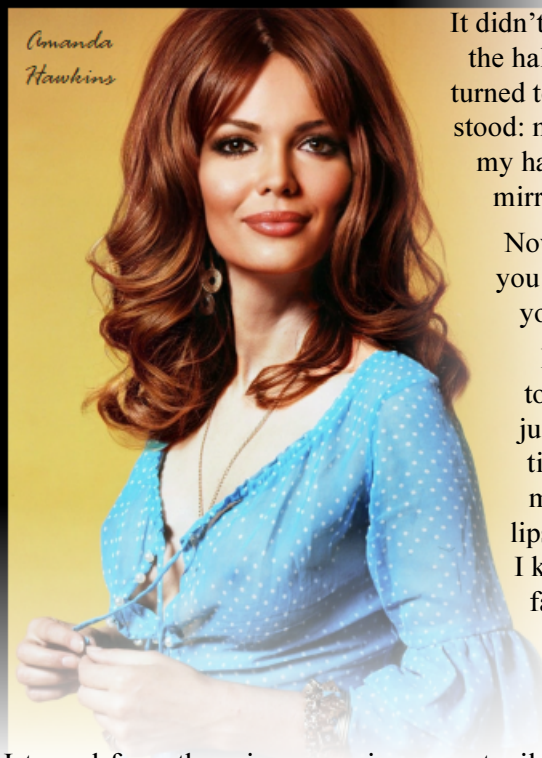
More hands arrived, bearing earbuds, VR goggles to cover my eyes, and a pair of blunt electrodes they pressed to my temples. White noise grew in my ears, my vision filled with a swirl of colors, and an electric tingle entered my head. My thoughts grew cloudy, and then the world faded away.

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I found myself seated on a metal bench, supported by a myriad of robot arms. The moment I shifted and strength returned to my body, the arms quickly retracted. I blinked and gave my head a quick shake. Thick hair twirled at the edge of my vision. I plucked at the hem of my dress, then stood and stepped through the open door in front of me. I took a deep breath and ran slim fingers through my hair. “My goodness,” I murmured, “what on earth *is* that thing?”

I glanced back at the machine, just as the door slid closed and the light faded from the control panel. Whatever it was, it was now *off*.

I ascended the stairs, my heels rapping sharply on the hard wood. My voice, just then, had sounded familiar but I couldn't place it. It was a female voice, that much was certain. There was no denying that the machine had transformed me, inside and out, into a honest-to-god woman. I remembered everything: who I'd been, the skeletal reconstruction, the breast augmentation, the penile inversion... But then there was also that identity transfer, the voice pattern match, the duplication... what was all *that* about?



It didn't take long to find out. I stepped into the hallway, closed the basement door and turned to face the hall mirror. And there she stood: my late *mother*. My mouth fell open, my hands clutched at my face. And in the mirror, my mother did exactly the same.

Now I knew. But what do you *do* when you find out that you've just turned into your own mother? How do you react?

I was in shock. My hands sank back to waist level, my mouth closed and I just stared, my fingers toying with the ties of my dress, as I'd often seen my mother do. A gentle smile graced my lips. It truly was good to see her again. I knew then how much I'd missed her, far more than I ever thought I would.

My lips parted. My tongue darted out, wetting them. "Hi, Mom." And of course it was *her* voice I heard.

I turned from the mirror, moving on autopilot, and went to the kitchen. I made myself a cup of tea, as I often did to soothe my nerves, and sat in the living room. I drank slowly, taking it all in. I was in my mother's house, and I *was* my mother.

Well... if indeed I was Felicia Daystrom, then what happened to my son? I knew Patrick's things were in his room, some of it boxed-up, but where was he? Only slowly did it dawn on me that he was *gone*. As in, forever. It wasn't *I* who had died, it was him. A sigh escaped my lips. I would miss Patrick, he was a good boy.

And yet, I knew what had happened. That strange machine in the basement, it had somehow transformed Patrick into *me*. I remembered being Patrick, but I sort of remembered being Felicia as well. They were Patrick's memories of her, but they felt like more like first-hand memories now. It was all very odd.

I almost laughed when I noticed the papers on the sideboard. They were from the doctor who'd signed off on Mrs. Daystrom's death, and they had yet to be filed with the coroner's office. The doctor had asked Patrick to do that, since he himself had been called away on an emergency. Patrick wasn't going to do that now.

Felicia Daystrom was alive.

I was burning the documents in the kitchen sink when the doorbell rang. When I opened the door, there was Monty, the man who'd been driving the car during that supposedly fatal crash. He didn't seem surprised to see me.

"Hello, my dear. You're a sight for sore eyes." His smile was radiant. He took me into his arms and kissed me. I responded in kind.

I invited him in. "Monty, you're looking well." He walked with a slight limp, but that was all that remained of his injuries. I recalled that Patrick had seen him earlier that day, at the funeral, which had been a brief and sparsely-attended affair. But that seemed like a lifetime ago.

"I received a signal on my phone, from the Transmutron in the basement. It told me it had done its job and shut down, so I came right over."

"That was you, hmm? I should've known. It would take a certified genius to build something like that, and you're the only mad scientist I know."

He laughed. "Guilty as charged. I did have permission, you know—to build it down there. From the former owner of this house."

I joined him on the couch. "I'm surprised she went along with it."

"Oh, she told me I was being silly. But who's silly now, eh?" He sighed. "Ah, but I shouldn't speak ill of the dearly departed. It was really my own paranoia that led me to do this. I was so terribly afraid of losing her." He took a moment to look me over. Then he took my hand. "I'm glad it was *you*, my dear, that triggered the machine. I did hope, of course, but you can never be sure. The device would work on anyone, but being able to draw upon your own personal memories of the dear lady will make your emulation of her that much more compelling."

"That's why you did this? Because you couldn't bear to live without—me?"

"I'm afraid so. I was weak, I admit it. I *am* sorry about Patrick, but... I just *had* to have her back." Now both hands were on mine. "Please say you forgive me."

My lashes fluttered. "Well... I feel like I should be more upset than I am. But to be honest, what I really feel is—relief. That's how *she* would feel, because this way you and I can still be together. I'm not sure how I know that, but I do."

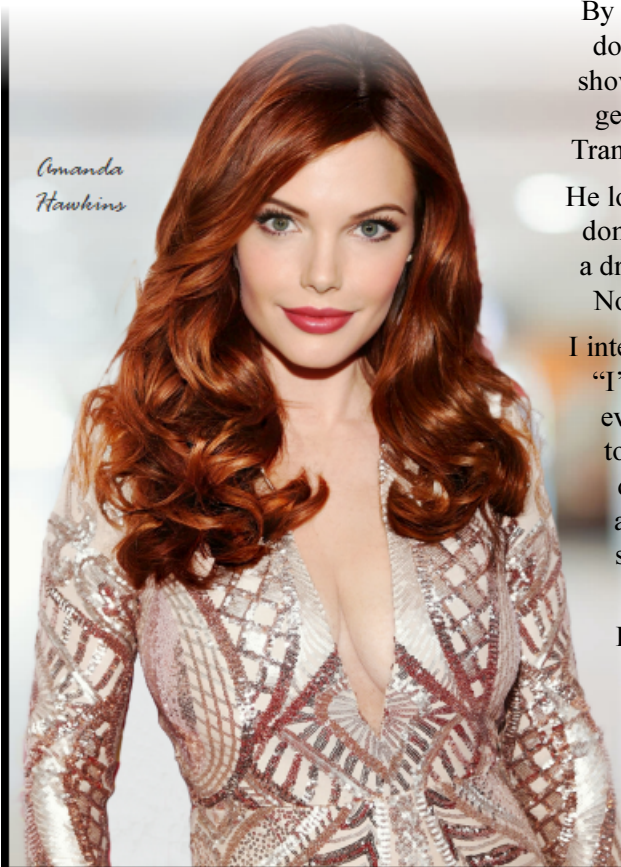
He gestured, encompassing the room, the house as a whole. "There are hidden cameras everywhere. For months they observed my darling Felicia, everything

she did and everything she said, and all that data was fed into the computer that controls the Transmutron. From that, it was able to extrapolate information about her habits, her opinions, her emotions, even her state of mind, and a synthesis of all that was fed into your mind during the transformation. You're her duplicate in more ways than you realize."

"Well, I'm glad." I leaned closer, gazing into his piercing gray eyes. "I'm exactly who I want to be, and that's Felicia." I reached up and drew his mouth onto mine. It was a long kiss. "Now," I added, when I was able, "I think we should celebrate, don't you? Pick me up at seven and I'll show you what you've been missing."

I shoed him out of the house and went to the master bedroom to get ready.

I spent two solid hours applying makeup, styling my hair, and picking out what I wanted to wear—surprising myself by knowing exactly what to do. For some reason I wanted to be a better and more glamorous version of Felicia Daystrom than my mother had been. What else could a dutiful son possibly aspire to?



By the time Monty arrived at the door, I was primed and ready to show him *exactly* how much of a genuine red-blooded female his Transmutron had created—in me.

He looked somewhat surprised. "I don't believe I've seen you wear a dress quite so revealing before. Not that I'm, erm, complain—"

I interrupted him with a firm kiss. "I'm more of a woman than *she* ever was, Monty. I can prove it too. Take me out, wine me and dine me—treat me like a lady and I shall give you a night of such passion you'll be talking about it 'til the end of Time."

He chuckled. "I would expect nothing less from you, my sweet. I encoded a fixation on myself into your brain."

I know what the man said, but I was far too busy being full-on female to care. ■