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Trusting Souls

Amanda Hawkins

All right, ya got me. You caught me with my pants down and my mini-dress on...

Now you know my deep dark secret: I'm a cross-dresser.

The question is: what are you gonna do about it? Call the cops? Alert the press? Spread the word on social media?

Honestly, I really don't care anymore. Whatever happens, happens.

*Amanda
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My friend Tyler stared at me with his face screwed up and one eye half-closed, apparently struggling to comprehend what he was seeing. At last he shook his head. “It’s hard to believe that’s really *you*, Kevin. You look like your own sister. If you *had* a sister, that is. ‘Cause if you did, I’m sure she’d look as pretty—” A panicky look crossed his face. “I mean, uhm... gosh, is that your actual hair?”

I arched an eyebrow. “Of course. I’ve only been growing it out for the last three years. This is what it looks like when it isn’t stuck in a ponytail.”

“Oh yeah... Dumb question.”

“Not at all. You were surprised.” I gave my head a quick toss. “When I style it right, it looks like a girl’s hair. Which is kinda the whole idea.”

His mouth twitched. “Man, it’s weird. You even *sound* like a girl. I’d never have known if I didn’t know you so well. And if I wasn’t expecting to see you—the male you, I mean.”

“Wish I could say the same. C’mon in.” I stepped through the open door I’d just left and into the atrium at the back of my parent’s house. Delicately, I settled into a rattan armchair, tugging on the hem my dress to keep it from riding up. Then I crossed my legs at the knee, just like any other woman.

He sat down, his eyes bugging out. “Doesn’t that, erm—hurt?”

“You mean, as in—am I squished? Don’t worry, I’m well tucked. We cross-dressers have this thing where we stuff our nads... actually, you probably don’t want to know.” I rolled my eyes.

He nodded and looked away. He didn’t seem to know what to do with his hands.

I sighed. “To be honest, I’m glad this is out in the open. It’s a relief to finally be able to *tell* someone. I didn’t actually ‘tell’ you, of course, you just sorta stumbled into it. But that’s okay, as long as you’re not too freaked out. I’d hate for things to be weird between us.”

“Weird? Nah. You know me, I’m a man of the world.” He took a deep breath. “I’m still just processing, you know? I’ll get used to it.”

“Maybe you just could pretend I *am* Kevin’s sister—the one he never had? And if you don’t mind, I prefer to be called ‘Katelyn’. When I’m dressed.”

“Katelyn? That’s a pretty name,” he said, sounding like he meant it. “You said it’s a relief—so even your parents don’t know? Nobody knows?”

“Pretty much. It’s the kind of thing we trannies like to keep quiet.”

“Your secret’s safe,” he said, crossing his heart. “I’m just impressed you’re acting so casual about this. Deep dark secret and all.”

I smiled. “There’s a reason, Ty. But yeah, all these years—my whole life—I’ve been dreading anyone finding out. I’m sure it’s the same with most cross-dressers. We sneak around, dressing at night, when no one else is around. We carefully put everything back where we found it... Actually, it’s pretty nerve-wracking.”

“I can imagine. And yet here you are, cool as a cuke.”

I flipped my hair back. “I’ll let you in on a little secret. You ever hear about those AutoMesmerizer thingies?”

His eyes widened. “The hypnosis machine? The one based on the tech those crazy aliens up on the moon are sharing with us?”

“Yeah. My parents got one. Dad’s trying to quit smoking and Mom’s hoping it’ll help her lose weight.” I shrugged. “I don’t know if it’s working for them—although Dad isn’t blowing through a pack a day anymore—but it sure fixed *me* up right. I used it to improve my self-confidence. It made me a *lot* less uptight about the whole cross-dressing thing.”

“Seems to be working.”

“I’ll say. If I hadn’t spent several hours being mesmerized the past few days, I’d have turned into a gibbering pile of mush when you caught me. Although—” I stretched my neck. “—if I hadn’t been mesmerized, I probably wouldn’t have wandered into the yard when I did. Maybe I wanted to get caught.”

“Nah. If you wanted to get caught you’d have dressed up when your parents were home. I gather they’re away this weekend.”

“No kidding. But if I keep *this* up, they’ll find out soon enough.”

“Heh. Maybe you should stick *them* in the Mesmerizer and make it so they don’t give a damn about you dressing up as a girl.”

“Would if I could. I could do both of ‘em at once, too, ‘cause they got the deluxe model with dual-user mode.” Tyler look puzzled. I added, “Sometimes they like to use it at the same time, so they got one with outputs for a pair of headsets. It can run two independent programs at the same time.”

“Cool. No waiting.”

“Exactly. Hey, if you wanna try it out, now’s your big chance. You got anything you’d like to change, or maybe improve about yourself?”

“Nope. I’m perfect as is. You know that.”

I chuckled. “Too true. Although... if you *were* freaked out about me cross-dressing, I could program the Mesmerizer to make you forget you ever saw me in a dress. I could change clothes while the program was running.”

He shook his head and laughed. “I’m not freaked out, Katelyn.”

“I’m glad.” I could’ve hugged him right then, which is what a real girl would do, but I didn’t want to push my luck.

Tyler leaned forward, elbows on his knees. “I *do* have an idea, though. You might find it interesting. Have you ever heard of something called a ‘trust machine’?” I shook my head and thick tresses swept my shoulders.

“It’s not real,” he continued. “It’s a made-up thing people write stories about on the Internet. The gist of it is, you’ve got this machine located in a public place—like a photo booth in a mall. It’s got two halves, so two people can use it at the same time. What it does is—it *changes* them, both physically and mentally. The change could be anything: they could get younger or older, change sex or species, even turn into an inanimate object. When the time limit is up—that has to be set in advance—they transform back, none the worse for wear.”

I rolled my eyes. “Sounds more like magic than tech.”

“I guess. But the deal is, each user has to specify the changes to be made to the *other* person. That’s why they call it a *trust* machine.” He paused. “I think it can also be used by one person, where somebody on the outside enters the changes. But that’s not important for us.”

“But this is just a fantasy, so what—?” Then I realized what he meant: a dual-use AutoMesmerizer could *be* a trust machine!

“I saw the lightbulb,” Tyler said, pointing over my head. “The deal is, I program your, uhm, mesmerization? And you program mine, before we run either one, and we trust each other not to do anything weird or harmful.”

Hmm. My fingers drummed on the armrest. I knew right away what I’d do: make Tyler think I was a real girl. That might be fun. “Hmm... There’s no preset time limit for how long the effects last, so we’d have to specify that ourselves.”

“Copy that. How about twenty-four hours? You’re on your own here until Sunday night, right? That’s plenty of time.”

“All right, you’re on.” Part of me knew this was an incredibly risky thing to do, but for once in my life I was feeling pretty confident about—well, just about everything. Whatever might happen, I could handle it.

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The AutoMesmerizer has a smart interface. You specify a time span, the changes you want to make, and some phrases to repeat, and it generates a script, which you can then edit. Once we finished programming each other’s sessions, I placed the

Mesmerizer in the living room between the couch and an easy chair. We sat down, put on our headsets and got comfortable. My finger hovered over the start button on the app. “Ready to do this, Ty?”

His voice was muffled. “Ready as I’ll ever be.”

“You programmed a three-hour session, right?”

“Sure thing: a three-hour tour.” He giggled. “The weather started getting rough, the tiny ship was tossed, if not for the courage—”

“Not funny, dude.” I tidied my hair where it fell onto my breasts. “I expect to wake up a little after four o’clock—like, *today*.”

“You will. Start thinking about what you want for dinner.”

“We aren’t going to be able to think about *anything* for the next three hours.” I paused. “No joke, Ty, we have to get this right. It made us specify the session length, but the other duration was optional—the time it takes for the effects to wear off. Twenty-hour hours, right?”

“Absolutely.” He glanced over at me. “What, you don’t trust? Check the program yourself, if you want.”

“No, no... That’s okay, I trust you. As long as you’re sure.”

“I’m sure. I got your best interests at heart, buddy. I would *never* do anything to hurt you—or, by inaction, allow you to come to harm when I could’ve done something about it.” He giggled again.

I muttered “goof” and touched the button.

~

The first thing I did when I woke up was check the time: ten after four, presumably the same afternoon. So far, so good. I set the helmet aside and swept my hair back. Sometimes I wonder why I ever let it get this long; it can be *such* a chore to keep it nice and flowy.

I heard a male voice: “Katelyn? Are you okay? Did it work?”

I glanced over at Tyler. “I’m fine. How about you?” He was staring at me with this goofy grin on his face. I knew *that* look. I rolled my eyes, reminding myself—not for the first time in my life—that the guy was my dumb brother’s best friend. I had to at least *try* and be nice to him.

“I’m good,” he said, standing and stretching. “I don’t feel much different, though. I remember programming your session, but... The memory’s fuzzy, and it doesn’t seem to make sense.”

I knew what he meant. I'd programmed *him* to make him believe I'm a girl—but since I *am* a girl, why would I bother doing that? It made zero sense. Of course, I also ramped up his infatuation with me, but that *did* make sense. For the next few days I'd have him wrapped around my little finger. All I'd have to do is make a kissy-face at him and he'd do *anything* for me.

Tyler appeared next to me. "I was thinking... since I'm here anyway, how about you and I go out for dinner tonight? My treat. Just name the place."

I lounged against the armrest, toying with my hair. "I guess that would be okay," I said softly. "But I'd have to change."

He nodded eagerly. "No problem. Is what *I'm* wearing okay?"

I looked him over. Actually, he *was* kind of cute, for a guy who was into all that science-fictiony stuff. "You're good. But—" I raised my forefinger. "You're the boy and you're paying, so *you* have to pick the place. Better make it good, mister." I rose, touched the tip of his nose with my finger, then glided from the room.

Upstairs, more confusion. The bedroom I recalled being mine didn't look much like a girl's room at all. The only women's clothing I could find was stuffed inside an old suitcase, which was hidden at the back of my closet. How strange!

Instead, I headed for the master bedroom. This wouldn't be the first time I'd borrowed my mother's things. I was pretty sure she'd be okay with it, too, as long as I put everything back where I found it. I remembered doing that a *lot*.

For whatever reason, I decided to go all-out. I spent half an hour re-applying my makeup and another ten minutes spraying and brushing my hair until it fell just right. Then I put on a cute dress covered with pick of high heels, red lips, and hair bows—Mom bought it for a Valentine's Day party, but never wore it—and added a pair of black velvet pumps. I'm sure I've never looked better, which is actually saying something 'cause I'm seriously cute.

Tyler was blown away—he told me so—when I came down looking completely and utterly gorgeous. I put on my mother's black blazer from the hall closet and checked my handbag one last time—just like Mom always did before leaving the house. Ever the dutiful daughter. "I'm ready," I said, snapping the bag shut.

"I made a reservation," Tyler said. "It's—"

"Surprise me." Then I sidled up to him, trying to look seductive. "I think we should get this out of the way right now, don't you? I'd hate to worry about it the rest of the night." Even in heels I had to reach up to slide my hand around the back of his neck. He resisted when I pulled his face down to mine, but only a little, and once our lips met he stopped struggling. The kiss was surprisingly sweet.



Wow, I really am gorgeous. I could probably get any man I wanted... and yet here I am about to go on a date with Tyler.

I mean, Kevin's goofy buddy of all people... I've only known him my entire life. Seriously, is he the right guy for a stone cold fox like myself?

*Amanda
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“Wow. Katie, that—” Our second kiss lasted somewhat longer. That’s when I realized that Tyler was rather good at this sort of thing. Who knew?

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To my surprise, I found Tyler to be thoroughly charming. He made me laugh, in a good way, and he had genuinely interesting things to say—not just about science fiction, but about normal movies, pop culture, and the world in general. By the time I figured out I was enjoying myself—and I knew what *that* meant for the way our date was likely to play out—we were on our way back to my place. He walked me up to the front porch, because that’s what guys do for girls they like.

And then—he pulled me into a tight embrace, and he kissed me. I saw stars!

“You know... I don’t have to be anywhere anytime soon,” he murmured, when our lips parted company. “My parents go to bed early. They sleep late on Sundays too, in case that’s in any way relevant.”

I lay my palm against his chest. “My brother’s not home. Wouldn’t it be perfectly wicked if we used *his* room?” We both giggled inanely.

Ten minutes later we were wedged into Kevin’s single bed, locked in an embrace neither of us could control. I was still wearing the lingerie I’d put on earlier—bra, garter belt, stockings—but no panties. Tyler was naked, of course, and after I explained to him how I did *not* want to chance getting pregnant he agreed to enter via the back door. I cleansed myself while he lubed up, and next half-hour or so were minutes that must have fallen straight from heaven.

As a woman, I’d never felt such bliss.

The next day, after Tyler called his parents and lied about sleeping over so he could hang out with Kevin, we spent the morning making love and the afternoon relaxing in the back yard like sweethearts who’d known each other for years. I could hardly believe this was the same geek who’d been buddies with my brother for as long as I could remember. How could I not realize he was such a great guy? How could I not notice he was so cute?

Anyway, that all came to a screeching halt when my parents came home.

Pandemonium broke out. My dad kept demanding to know why I was dressed up as a girl, while Mom kept repeating “Calm down, Frank, it’s only a phase!” I had *no* clue what they were talking about.

Tyler’s parents were called. When they arrived, they too demanded to know why I was pretending to be a woman. Tyler kept saying: “She’s not pretending, she (that is, me) really *is* a girl!” He also professed his undying love, bless his heart, which for some reason created an even greater uproar.

Eventually, I happened to mention that we’d used the AutoMesmerizer. The blood drained from my father’s face and he rushed off to check the programming. When he came back, he stared at me with an expression I’ve never seen before. I think you could describe it as ‘discombobulated’. Then he shoved Tyler and I into the back yard, closed the door and huddled up with Mom and Tyler’s parents.

Tyler gave me a nudge. “Whaddya think they’re talking about?”

“I dunno, but it must have something to do with the Mesmerizer.” I dropped onto a bench and arranged my skirt to cover my knees. “I remember using it,” I added, “but I’m not sure what we did. The weird thing is, I’m pretty sure the effects should have ended by now.” I threw him a sidelong glance.

Tyler sat next to me. “That’s my fault. I can’t remember *why*, but I recall thinking I was doing you a favor by making it last longer—like three or four days.”

I had to smile. “Don’t blame yourself. I did the same thing.”

He grimaced. “So much for trust, huh? We both failed the test.”

“Actually—” I took his hand. “I think maybe we passed.”

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Tyler’s parents soon left, with Tyler in tow. He looked back at me as he got into the back seat of their car, and I just knew we felt the same way. When would we see each other again? I suppose Romeo and Juliet had it worse, but not by much.

A stiff dose of reality followed, courtesy of my parents. Dad sat me down and explained the situation. “Your buddy wrote a Mesmerizer program that made you believe you were a girl.” I almost told him that I *am* a girl, but my father is not the sort of man you contradict. Instead, I nodded and stared at the floor. He went on to describe my behavior as ‘utterly unacceptable’, especially for someone who was supposed to be an adult—albeit barely.

Mom looked disappointed. “The program *you* wrote also made Tyler think you were a real girl. Why on earth would you *do* that?” I muttered something about having fun, but a wise little voice in the back of my head—possibly my feminine intuition—told me this was not the right time to mention sex; my parents were already freaked out, why make it worse?

Then they took me upstairs. Mom helped remove the clothes I’d borrowed from her, and *then*—in the bathroom, with the aid of a bottle of solvent I seemed to recall leaving there—she stripped the ‘lady parts’ from my body. With my face cleansed of the makeup I’d been wearing and my hair pulled back into a ponytail, I came face to face with the fact that I looked exactly like my brother.

“You *are* your brother,” Dad said, when I sat before him wearing Kevin’s saggy old tighty-whities, sweatpants and a sweatshirt that looked anything but stylish, and explained how I felt. “What I mean is, you are Kevin, our son. You don’t even *have* a sister; you’re an only child.”

It was hard to argue the point, given the pathetic little weenie between my legs. I curled up on the couch, my face in my hands. “I thought I was Katelyn.”

“You can thank the goddamn Mesmerizer for that,” he said, almost growling the words out. “Now it’s locked away where that so-called ‘friend’ of yours can’t get at it. You were naïve to trust him, but there’s no getting around the fact he took advantage. Frankly, I’m tempted to sue the lot of ‘em; him and his parents.”

My mother lets Dad get away with a lot, but when push comes to shove she's the voice of reason in the family. "Frank," she said, touching his arm, "you know very well that isn't true. Kevin wrote the program that made Tyler believe our son was a girl. His parents certainly didn't know about it."

He frowned at me. "Yeah, I don't get that. Why would you want Ty to think you're a girl? He's kind of a geek, but I thought you two were tight."

"Frank, please. There's only one way that could have happened. Before they ever used the AutoMesmerizer, Kevin was dressed up in my clothes."

Dad stood up so abruptly I thought he might take off and hit the ceiling. He glared down at me like a smouldering volcano. "Is that true?"

More nodding and staring at the floor. It was all I could do. That, and pray for a quick death. After a moment Mom took my father's hand. "Go to your room, Kevin," she said. "Your dad and I need to talk."

She didn't have to tell me twice.

I stayed in my room until bedtime, sneaking out only to use the bathroom when the coast was clear. The next day Mom made it clear that I was to *stay* in my room until I "came to my senses". I didn't know what she was talking about until late Wednesday afternoon when the Mesmerizer program finally timed out. All of a sudden I remembered precisely what we'd done.

That's when Mom and I had the dreaded "so you're a transvestite" talk. I won't go into details, but suffice to say that it made me want to hide in my closet, curl up into a ball and pray for the world to end. Embarrassing? Hell yeah.

Mom was actually pretty understanding. She said that dressing up like a girl didn't make me a bad person. (*Oh, good. Had me worried.*) She said that if I really *had* to do such a thing, then I should do it in private with nobody else around—and please *please* don't ever mention it to my father again.

Good advice, that. I wasted no time in agreeing with everything she said.

And that was the end of it—mostly. Dad never mentioned the incident, although I did catch him glowering at me now and then. I knew I was a big disappointment to him, but—nothing new there.

A few days later Tyler and I exchanged texts: "we okay?" and "we're okay". We eventually met up at the Mickey D's a few blocks away, grabbed a bite, then wandered into the park by the river, looking for a place out in the open where we wouldn't be 'alone' but where no one could hear what we were saying.

After a *lot* of beating around the bush we finally got down to business. "So, uhm, that whole sex thing... is it gonna make things weird?" That was me.

Tyler shrugged. “So I had sex with your sister. We can get past that.”

“You *do* know who she really was, right?”

He squirmed a little. “Yeah, but it’s easier to think of her as a different person. It’s weird, but I still seem to remember her from when we were kids.”

“Me too. I sorta remember having a kid brother too.” I shook my head. “That Mesmerizer thing really screws with your head.”

“Tell me about it. I keep thinking I’ve got a crush on her.”

That surprised me. “Really? Even though she’s not, you know, real?”

“Seemed pretty real to me.”

I recalled Tyler had never had a steady girlfriend before; hell, neither of us had. “It’s the Mesmerizer,” I said, my voice hoarse. “I can’t stop remembering what it felt like to be a girl—a *real* girl.”

He looked away. “That’s why I did it, you know. I wrote the program that way ‘cause I thought you’d want to know what it was like.”

I stared at the ground. “You were right. I did. And yes... I liked it.”

His voice was distant. “You made me believe Katelyn was real. I liked that too.”

I felt awful. It *was* like Romeo and Juliet, only worse. It wasn’t just our families keeping us apart, it was the fact that when we were in love—we weren’t even the people we thought we were.

~

The weeks crept by. Returning to college for our third year was getting closer, and with it—separation. We didn’t go to the same schools; mine was nearby, which was why I was still living at home. Tyler’s was out of state. We tried to act normal, but it wasn’t easy given all that remained unspoken between us.

But a plan was forming in my mind. I wrote a pair of AutoMesmerizer programs, not on the machine itself—which Dad had locked away—but in rough form, just to get the logic right. Then, when the time came, it would be simple to code.

At the end of August, my parents finally dared to leave me alone for the weekend. It was only a few days before college would be in session. I knew Tyler would be getting ready to leave as well, loading his car for the trip to Cornell.

Mom surely knew what I’d do when I got the chance; she looked worried. I guess Dad knew too. He said, “Don’t do anything I wouldn’t do, kid,” but the way he said it sounded more like a warning. And then they were gone. That was Friday afternoon. I spent the evening getting ready, and first thing Saturday I got dressed.

Amanda
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I wanted to look like a real woman, only in a more modest way. Not overly glamorous, just pretty—like I really was the girl next-door of Tyler’s adolescent fantasies. Then I dug out the AutoMesmerizer—Dad had put it under lock and key, but I knew where he hid the key—and got to work programming.

I finished just in time. I’d already arranged for Tyler to stop by on his way out of town and I heard his car pull into our driveway just as I got finished checking the code.

When I opened the door, his jaw hit the floor. “Katelyn? Ohmigod, you look—”

“—amazing? I do, don’t I? Come in.”

I led him to the love seat in the living room, then sat down close enough to make him a little nervous. “Sooo... I guess your parents aren’t home, huh?”

“How’d you know?” I tilted my head and toyed with my hair, as girls often do. “Guess you can read minds, huh?”

“Uh, no.” He was flustered. “It’s just, you know... the way you look...?”

I nudged his leg. “Pretty? Way sexy? What?” I smiled my sweetest smile.

“Yeah, both.” His hands were in his lap.

I knew I had him. Gently, my hand rested on his thigh. “Ty... remember when you made me think I was a real girl? And how much I enjoyed that? I want to feel that way again, and I think you want that too.”

He nodded. “If that’s what *you* want, then I’m all for it. I’ll support you all the way.”

“That’s not quite what I meant, but thanks.” I rose, and retrieved a box from the kitchen. From it, I lifted my Dad’s AutoMesmerizer.

He met my gaze. “You want to do that again? You *do* know I’m leaving today?”

I set the device on the coffee table in front of him. “I want *us* to do that again.”

He shook his head. “C’mon, Ke—Katelyn. How’s that gonna work? In a few days we’ll both be back in school. You can’t dress like *that* on campus.”

“I’m not going back to school. I withdrew. Just last night, in fact.” I sat down next to him, tilted my head and ran a hand through my hair. “I’ve already written the scripts for both of us. I’ll be a real girl again, you’ll believe I *am* a real girl—and we’ll feel ‘that way’ about each other again. That’s what you want, isn’t it?”

He looked at me, but his gaze fell. “You know how I feel. But it won’t work—it *can’t*. For one thing, our parents would kill us. Plus I’m leaving, like, right now.”

“We’re both adults, Ty. They can’t stop us.” I took his hand. “I’ll come with you. And yes, I mean *right now*. Your apartment’s big enough for both of us. I’ll get a job, and next year I can transfer—if not to Cornell, then to a college nearby.”

He groaned, but I knew he was weakening. “Oh, jesus, there’s only one bed—”

I massaged his inner thigh. “That’s all we’ll need, Boobear.” When he didn’t reply I added, “Just one hour, that’s all it takes. I’ll be your girlfriend again, with no time limit this time. But we’ll take the Mesmerizer with us, just in case.”

“We’re gonna steal from your dad too? Aren’t I already in enough trouble?”

I giggled. “Plus you’re about to kidnap his daughter. I’m all packed, by the way.”

He reversed his grip to enfold my hand with his. “If you weren’t so damn sexy...” He grinned. “I might’ve been able to resist you.”

“Ha! Like you’d want to.” I handed him a headset and put the other one on myself. We both plugged in and I set up the scripts to play. Tyler settled back on the couch, his head tilted back. I snuggled up beside him, pulled his arm around me, and settled the viewscreen on my nose. “See ya on the other side.”

~

I awoke slowly, trying to grasp who I was. Oh yeah—*Katelyn*. I sighed, feeling Tyler’s arm resting on my shoulders, remembering what I’d just done to myself. I sat up, peeled off the headset, stretched. I noticed Tyler staring at me.

“I woke up a few minutes ago,” he said. “I didn’t want to disturb you.”

“Silly boy. I don’t mind being disturbed, provided it’s *you*.” I leaned in and gave him a soft kiss. My eyes danced. “So, did it work?”

“I think so. I remember Kevin, no doubt about that, but it’s like—I’m not sure how to put it. It’s like you and him are two sides of the same coin, you know?”

I nodded. “It’s like we’re two different people who happen to share the same set of memories. And we can’t be in the same room at the same time.”

He chuckled. “So much for family togetherness. Phone calls are out too. I guess you two will have to settle for letter-writing.”

“I’ll send him a card on his birthday.” We both laughed.

Tyler glanced at his watch. “We need to hit the road. You said you were packed?” He looked worried. “How much do you have? There’s not much room in the car.”

“Not as much as you’d think. I’m only taking *my* stuff—girl clothes, makeup, that sort of thing. Kevin’s junk stays here. I’ll grab his textbooks some other time.”

“What about your parents? They’re gonna find out sooner or later.”

“I left them a note: ‘gone to visit Tyler.’” I giggled. “They’ll think it’s from Kevin. I’ll call them in a few days and explain.”

“If they notice the Mesmerizer’s gone, as well as your girl clothes, they might just be able to figure it out for themselves.”

“True. Although they won’t notice that if they don’t think to check.”

“They’re still gonna flip out. My parents too, for that matter.”

“Who cares? What are they gonna do, keep me in pigtails until they can marry me off to someone they approve of? Speaking of which,” I added, playfully, “you *do* have the option of making an honest woman of me.”

His eyebrows rose. Then he put his arms around me. “Interesting idea... Now that I’ve had my way with you, it *would* be the gentlemanly thing to do.”

My arms encircled his neck. “Was that a proposal?”

He grinned. “What if it was?”

My lashes fluttered. “What if I said yes?”

He sighed. “Then I say—no takebacks.” Our lips came together, and for a long time they stayed that way.

Two days later, in the chapel at Cornell, surrounded by a dozen of his friends from school, Tyler and I became man and wife. I called my parents the next day, while Tyler called his. The ensuing fireworks lit up the sky, figuratively speaking; every bit as impressive as we imagined they would be.

But it was too late. The marriage was legal, and we’d consummated it like bunnies all night long. More to the point, we were happy. It’s every girl’s dream to marry her best friend, and it was always my dream to *be* that girl. I don’t know who invented the AutoMesmerizer, but whoever he (or *it*) is—thanks. ■

BONUS CAPTION!



When Cory joined the theater program at Cornell as a naïve freshman, he never dreamed that his first big starring role would be as Helena, a naïve young woman who arrives in the New York of the 1950s without a penny to her name and winds up marrying into a rich family. But he learned to love it, when his mesmerized mind came to enjoy dressing up as a woman and to adore being kissed by the lead actor, Tom, who happened to be his best friend in real life. When the play ended, Cory became Tommy's girlfriend.