The Wedding

or

“Come as Your Mum”

For the perfect wedding, the best advice is this: don’t cheap out on the hypnotist.
Dedication

To those who take up the TG pen,

Your artistry is appreciated,
your efforts are not in vain.

Be stronger than the silence;
you bring life to the community.

Words are important;
we are… our stories.

Amanda Hawkins
The Wedding
or
“Come as Your Mum”

by Amanda Hawkins

Amanda Hawkins Publications

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First printing: September 2012

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I was in the kitchen making tea when Mrs. Murcheson returned, supposedly from holiday. She was carrying a suitcase and looked flustered. I set the tea to steeping, allowing her time to figure out what to say.

“That’s my best dress,” Sylvia said ruefully, placing the suitcase on the floor.

“I know.” I set the table for two.

“I see. So we’re sharing.” She found a seat and sat. “I suppose it’s okay. I haven’t worn it in quite awhile.” Her gaze wandered about the room, anywhere but toward me. “You’re dressed as a woman,” she said at length. “Any particular reason?”

I shrugged. “This is who I am.”

Her smile looked forced. “And who might that be?” I told her my girl-name.

“Sarah Lawrence.” Sylvia repeated the name as if it was new to her. “You do look very much like your mother, albeit somewhat younger.” She pursed her lips. “And what about young Graham? Does he still… exist?”

I poured the tea. “I haven’t seen him for awhile.”

Her hands were shaking. “Did something happen?”

“There was a party. A few of his friends from school. Only it turns out they weren’t really his friends after all. Milk or cream?”

“Black. What did they do?”

“Here’s the sugar.” I stirred milk into my own cup. “It was a theme party, you see. Some silly cross-dressing thing. They called it, ‘Come as your Mum’.”

“Oh, dear.” She took a sip.

“Only it wasn’t. It wasn’t a party at all.” I followed her lead, careful to extend my pinky. “Two of the girls helped him get ready. They were very thorough.”

“I’m sure they were. I’m just surprised he let—”

“They got some awful man to hypnotize him. To help him relax.” I patted my hair. “Graham was always nervous around girls. And he’s terribly suggestible.”

The woman looked worried. “Can you bring him back? I promised his mother—”

I shook my head. “My son is gone.” After thinking about it, I added, “I’m Sarah,” although it hardly seemed necessary. After everything I’d been through, who else would I be? Who else could I be?
Sylvia looked pale. “Oh, my God. She’s going to kill me.”

“I’m a bit surprised you didn’t know.” I touched her hand. “My son is a cross-dresser. He was always getting into my things at home. With me out of the house, he’d be straight into lingerie.”

“I had no idea.”

“I’ve known about it for a long time. Wrinkled dresses, makeup out of place, face powder all over the dresser…”

“I can honestly say I never—”

“Oh, he got better at hiding it. And now he has clothes of his own, and lingerie, hidden away in his closet. Not to mention his very own wig, which I’m given to understand looks very much like my hair.” I touched the classic bouffant atop my head.

“Are you saying that Graham actually wants to look like you?”

“I’m afraid so.” My smile was genuine. “It’s really quite flattering.”

“That wasn’t supposed to happen,” Sylvia muttered, clutching at the table.

“What I really want to know—” I drained my teacup. “—is who’s responsible.”

Mrs. Murcheson surged to her feet. “I don’t know! For God’s sake, why ask me?” She grabbed her suitcase and fled upstairs. Which was all rather odd, and kind of suggested she knew more about this than she was letting on.

I put the tea set away and followed her up the stairs.
I’d been dreading this moment all day. I couldn’t eat, my stomach was in knots; I felt sick the whole time. Their arrival was a relief from all that.

“Hi, Graham! We’re here to get you dressed for the party.”

I let them in; fair-haired Bethany and raven-haired Rhianna. One a perky blonde, the other a brooding brunette, which fit the basic stereotypes but went no further. Both were smart and ambitious, and both scared the crap out of me; in part because of their beauty, but mostly because either of them could crush me like so much road kill. Figuratively speaking.

“We brought some stuff.” Bethany lifted an overnight bag. “But we’ll need some of your landlady’s clothes too. Which one is her room?”

I glanced up the hall. “We’re not supposed to go in there.”

Rhianna laughed. “Yeah, right. Like you don’t.”

I stared at the floor. “Why would you say that?” The girls looked at each other and laughed. My heart, digestive system and all major organs sank. “Look, she’s got a bunch of dresses and stuff stored in the basement, in an old trunk…”

Rhianna’s smile was predatory. “I bet you found it your first day here.”

“And wore most of it the first night.” Bethany shook her head. “She’s such a nice lady, Graham. Don’t you feel bad, going through her things?”

“I bet he used to prance around in Mommy’s clothes too.”

“Probably.” Bethany sighed. “But it’s not like he can help himself, right?”

Rhianna scowled. “It’s still creepy, in my books.”

The bile rose in my throat. “Hang on. You do know that I’m only doing this for the party, right? It’s not like I dress up—”

“Shut up, Graham. You’re supposed to be more relaxed by now. Didn’t Simon take you to that hypnotist? Rhea, what was the trigger phrase?”

Rhianna grinned. “Come as your Mum.”

My panic dissolved. Why was I so worried? The girls were only here to help me. I knew I could trust them, so why not just do what they wanted?

“That’s better,” Bethany said. “Let’s get him in the tub.”

*
I was naked in front of two gorgeous girls, but I was beyond embarrassment. They slathered some sort of cream over my entire body, and it stung like hell, but I didn’t care. They wanted me to sit tight and wait, so I did—with bells on.

No more body hair. No great loss there; I didn’t have a lot to begin with, and when they told me it wouldn’t grow back anytime soon, I just shrugged.

“Girls don’t have hair down there anyway,” Bethany said.

“A lot of women do have hair down there,” Rhianna said. “I’m not saying they like it, but it’s there. I oughtta know.”

“Touché. Hand me those tweezers. I’ll do his brows.”

That hurt—a lot. But I didn’t mind.

One of the items they’d brought with them was a latex prosthetic that resembled an open wound. I assumed it was a prop from some low-budget movie. But for reasons I couldn’t begin to fathom, their intention was to attach it to my crotch; first stuffing my junk into a pouch on the back, then smearing on enough medical-grade cyanoacrylate to seal a C-section. It was there for the duration, they informed me—months—but I’d be able to pee sitting down, so that was okay too.

They marched me into Mrs. Murcheson’s room. I lay on her bed and the same glue was applied to my chest. Then it was back to their bag of tricks and a pair of flesh-toned breasts that seemed far too large for my small torso. Yet once they were in place, stuck down and blended with my skin, they looked just right.

While that was drying, they colored my nails. I saw no reason to object.

The girls rifled through Mrs. Murcheson’s lingerie drawer and took their time picking out what they wanted me to wear. Finally, Rhianna sat me up and strapped a black brassiere around my new bust. Bethany held up another garment in what appeared to be the same style. “Graham, do you know what this is?”

I shrugged. “It’s a panty girdle. High waist, extra-firm shape control.”

“How do you know that? Most guys wouldn’t have a clue.”

The answer died in my throat. Rhianna said, “Come as your Mum, Graham.”

“Mum had one,” I said dully, shocked at how easy it had become to divulge a secret I’d been hiding my whole life. “I wore it lots of times.”

“I knew it,” Rhianna said. “What a pantywaist.”

“C’mon, Rhea. Why else would we be here? Let’s fix him up.”

Meekly, I let them strap me into Mrs. Murcheson’s panty girdle, which looked to be brand new. It was awfully tight, and the boning at the top dug into my ribs, but
I figured it was no more than a pantywaist deserved. Without any body hair, and with a figure that could probably pass muster backstage at a fashion show, I was already looking at manhood in the rear view mirror.

But they weren’t done yet.

Bethany found a new pair of stockings at the bottom of the drawer. I winced as she tore open the package; there was no going back on that. They were thigh-high stay-ups in sheer black, and they fit me like a silk glove.

“What’s the matter, hon? Not looking forward to the party?”

“It seems like an awful lot of trouble to go to. Are all the guys doing this?”

Rhianna towered over me, bearing a black slip. “They sure as hell are. So are the girls. And the sooner you hurry up and get dressed, the sooner we can get changed ourselves.” She dropped the slip on my lap. “Put it on.”

I knew then that these clothes wouldn’t be returned to their proper place in the dresser; not tonight, and probably not ever. They weren’t taking careful note of the position of each item, how it was folded and what was around it, the way I always did. I dangled the slip from one thin spaghetti strap while it shivered in the wake of Rhianna turning on her heel. I stared at the dark folds of silk and wondered how I could possibly explain this to Mrs. Murcheson. She was my legal guardian. I had nowhere else to go. I couldn’t afford to piss her off.

Maybe this had gone too far.

Bethany tapped me on the shoulder. “Come as your Mum, dude.”

Then again, maybe it hadn’t gone far enough. I put the slip on, letting it shimmy it down my body and wiggling the lacy hem over my thighs. It felt good.

“Now the heels.” Rhianna handed me a pair of black pumps. I slipped them onto my feet, stood up and rolled my hips forward, then took a few steps and executed a smooth pirouette. It seemed to come naturally.

“Oh, yeah, he’s done this before,” Rhianna said.
I sat on the bed while the girls laid out their makeup on Mrs. Murcheson’s vanity and argued about how best to transform my face. But as for the rest of my body, its gender was no longer in doubt. I had become female, from the ample breasts that blended smoothly with my chest, to the dark slip that clung to my hips, to the stockings that soothed my legs, to the high heels that made me as tall as Rhianna. I’d worn it all before, of course, but never so convincingly. I couldn’t help but marvel at how simple it was, given the right tools, to turn a man into a woman. Not any old male, mind you. Maybe just me.

Bethany guided me to a seat at the vanity, her hand resting on my back. “Are you ready to be a woman, Graham? Don’t say ‘yes’ unless you’re sure.”

I nodded, although I was sure I had no choice in the matter.

For the next half-hour, four slim hands worked over my face, adding foundation and setting powder, contouring my cheeks, layering on blush, lining my mouth and my eyes, and filling in key areas with color. A bronzy eye shadow enlarged my windows on the world, while a fire-red lip gloss promoted my lips from bit player to starring role in my new image. At seeing that my breath quickened, imagining what a woman’s mouth might do, given the chance.

When they were done Rhianna placed an old black-and-white photo on the vanity. It was a close-up of my late mother in her youth, sometime in the late 1960s, dressed for a night on the town. My gaze flicked from photograph to mirror, back and forth, searching for some small difference that might set the two faces apart. I can’t say there were none, as I could tell us apart. The hair was different, of course. One face was smiling, the other dismayed. But the resemblance was clear. It was the same person, the same woman.

Rhianna pointed to the picture. “That’s you now—got it?”

Bethany added, “You’re Sarah. That’s a pretty name, isn’t it?”
My shoulders slumped. I couldn’t resist them if I tried, so I didn’t bother. They told me to say it out loud, so I did. But softly.

“Louder,” Bethany said sternly. “Say it like you mean it.”

“My name…” I wanted to mean it. I really did. Mother had been a strong woman, always so sure of herself, and she deserved better than this weak-kneed imitation. I stiffened my back, feeling the pull of my new breasts, lifted my voice and said, “My name is Sarah Lawrence.”

“That’s better. Let’s finish her.”

The final item in their bag of tricks was a wig. They bound my hair in a nylon net and fastened the edges with surgical glue. Three combs inside the wig slipped beneath short lengths of surgical tape stuck to my hairline, securing it to my scalp.

So I was to be the redhead in our trio of angels. My new hairdo started out as a basic shoulder-length pageboy, but it didn’t stay that way. The girls attacked it with twin curling irons and a whole can of hair spray, intent on recreating the hairstyle in the photo.

“All done, sweetie,” Bethany announced. “You’re one of us now.”

In the years leading up to her marriage, Mother had often worn her hair in a stylish bouffant—chic at the time, but now possessed of a distinct retro feel. Thick waves emerged from the left side of my head and swept across my forehead, descending into a mass of tight curls hovering over my right ear.

No point fighting it. I took a deep breath, picked up Mrs. Murcheson’s signature eau de toilette—a lighter, fresher, more relaxed version of Lady Million—and dove in. I sprayed my throat, then my wrists, and rubbed my hands together while gazing at the mirror through slitted eyes.

“Look at him,” Rhianna said, shaking her head.

“Her,” Bethany said, with emphasis. “Can’t you tell? She’s a woman now.” She touched my back. “C’mon, girl, let’s get you dressed.”
Much of Mrs. Murcheson’s wardrobe seemed to date back to the Sixties, when she was in her prime. For me, the girls picked out a brocade cocktail dress; a high-waisted garment with a full skirt and a metallic bodice patterned in festive reds. Rhianna opened the zip in the back and held it out. I hesitated only for a moment, then stepped inside. Bethany tucked my slip into the skirt’s black silk folds.

When the zipper rolled up my back, I knew I was done. Not just getting dressed, but as a man. Two beautiful girls had transformed me into one of them—although with my bouffant hair and vintage dress I was probably a better fit for the previous generation. Which was, of course, the whole point.

“What now?” I was back to muttering once more, my confidence having melted into the air like so much dry ice.

“Speak up,” Rhianna said, “you’re a woman now. Act like one.”

Bethany handed me a purse. “Time to go.”
Rhianna was scornful. “Don’t tell me you’ve never been outside.”

Not as a woman, no. Not in full daylight. A few times around the block at night, or out in the car under cover of dusk, but not like this. I felt like a vampire, cowering at the first sign of daylight.

Bethany gave me a gentle push from behind. Then she locked the door behind us and stuffed the keys into my purse. We were on our way.

It was a cool fall day, edging toward evening. A breath of wind ruffled through my hair, but it was the touch of cold air on shaven legs—not to mention up my skirt—that made me feel exposed. The tweed blazer we’d taken from Mrs. Murcheson’s closet did nothing to change that.

I stopped dead when I saw the limousine idling at the curb. Simon, a guy I knew from the university, stood nearby wearing a suit. Not a skirt suit, mind you; just regular menswear. “I can’t let him see me like this,” I whispered.

“Don’t be silly,” Bethany whispered back. “He’s expecting you.”

Simon looked nervous as he said hello and opened the door. I gathered my skirt beneath me and slid onto the soft leather seat. He followed me inside and shut the door. The girls waved through the smoked-glass windows.

“Aren’t they coming?” I asked.

“They’ve got their own car. They’ll meet us there, after they get changed.”

Which brought up an interesting point… “How about you? You’re not dressed.”

He rubbed his jacket and grinned. “What, this isn’t dressed?”

“You know what I mean. You’re not dressed as a woman.”

“Why would I want to do that? I mean, I know some guys are into—”

“Don’t be an ass. This is a ‘Come as your Mum’ party…” I gasped and felt myself relax. So the guy wasn’t wearing a dress—big deal.

The car slipped into motion. The driver was invisible behind a panel of dark glass. Simon studied me through narrowed eyes. “Come as your Mum, huh? Is that who you’re supposed to be, your mother? What’s her name?”

I flashed him a smile. “Sarah Lawrence.”

He grinned back. “Well, Sarah, would it surprise you to know that I am in fact dressed like my mother?”
I shook my head. “Uh-uh. No way. I know menswear when I see it.”
“No lie. Mom was a cross-dresser. She wore guy stuff all the time.”
“Uh-huh. There’s no such thing as a female cross-dresser.”
“Sure there is. Why not? Girls can wear anything they want.”
“That’s the point,” I sighed. “A woman wearing men’s pants—hell, even a tux—is still a woman. But a guy in a dress is pretending to be something he isn’t.”
“I see. Is that what you’re doing? Pretending to be something you’re not?”
I glared at him. “I’m not really my mother, if that’s what you mean.”
“Oh, good. You had me worried.”
I sat back and adjusted my skirt to cover my knees. “So why aren’t you dressed like your mother? C’mon. Really.”
“What, you’re not buyin’ the whole ‘Mommy was a cross-dresser’ thing?” I shook my head and he laughed. “Okay, you got me. The truth is, not all the guys at this party are gonna be dressed like their mothers.”
“Yeah… your invitation said that. Mine didn’t. Maybe it was random; the luck of the draw. You were just lucky.”
I giggled. “Lucky I’ve done this before, huh?”
“What, dressed up like your mother? Yeah, no kidding, huh? What are the odds?” Simon glanced at his watch. “Listen, it’s a couple of hours until the party gets going. Are you hungry?”
“Starved. I figured I’d eat at the party.”
“Uh-uh. No food at this party. How about we grab a bite on the way?”
“Nothing? What kind of party doesn’t have food?”
“Uh… It’s all alcohol. I know you’re not much of a drinker.”
“Hang on. You want to stop at a restaurant? Dressed like this?”
Simon touched my knee. “Come as your Mum, Sarah.”
“Don’t get fresh, sir.” I pretended to slap at his hand, then lowered my lashes. “All right,” I demurred. “But no funny business. I expect to be treated like a lady.” *
A few minutes later the limo was double-parked in front of a small restaurant, half-hidden from the road by a row of shrubs. I was confused; was Simon in telepathic contact with the driver? Because I couldn’t see how else the guy could possibly have known where we were going.

“I hope you like Italian,” Simon said, as he helped me out of the car. “It’s good; I’ve been here with my parents. I’ll find us a nice private corner.”

Thankfully, the Trattoria Italiana was dark, built mostly of old wood and empty wine bottles. On the other hand, my heels played the hardwood floor like a set of steel drums, with the noise ricocheting off the walls like gunfire. Everyone was staring—or so I assumed—so I focused on the waiter’s back and tried to walk gracefully. It seemed to work. No one yelled, *Hey, check out the tranny in the vintage dress!* In fact, the dress I was wearing was probably back in style at the moment, thanks to the ladies of *Mad Men*.

Simon held out my chair. “See, that wasn’t so bad.”

“Not bad at all,” I said in a low voice. “I’m so looking forward to exposing myself all over again on the way out.”

“Exposing yourself?” He looked surprised. “Sarah, nobody here knows who you are. You’re just a woman to them. A beautiful woman.”

I opened the menu. “I find that hard to believe.”

“It’s true. I sure as hell wouldn’t know—you know, if I didn’t… know.”

I eyed him over the menu. “Smooth, real smooth. You’re quite the lady’s man.”

He shrugged. “I calls ‘em like I sees ‘em.”

“You need glasses. Listen—” I leaned forward. “When we came in, you gave the waiter your name and he took us straight to this table. You had a reservation.”

He shook his head and grinned. “Come as your Mum, Sarah.”

I relaxed in my chair. Okay, so the guy wanted to buy me dinner—who am I to argue? When the waitress came, Simon ordered a bottle of wine and two glasses. Grudgingly, I drank.

“It’s like this,” Simon explained. “Half the guys at the party will be dressed up as their mothers, and the other half are their dates. Kinda like you and me.”

“That sounds pretty weird,” I said, picking at my half-order of rotini.

“Yeah, well… That’s the way it is.”

“Why? What’s the point? And what about the girls? They’ll be dressed up as their mothers too, won’t they? That’s what Rhianna said.”
“You ask too many questions,” he said, obviously annoyed.

Thoughtfully, I returned to my pasta. So I wasn’t meant to know what this silly party was really about. Maybe there was no party. Maybe it was all a setup to get me out on this date. Maybe the guy had a crush on me—or on my mother.

Simon finally broke an awkward silence. “I hear your family’s loaded…”

Ah-ha! So that was it. “So you’re after my money, huh? What’s your plan? Trick me into this date, then get me to fall in love with you? Then after we get married, BAM! One divorce later and you’re a millionaire. Well, the trick’s on you, buddy. I’m probably never gonna see that money. Why? Because Mother put in her will that I get exactly zilch until I finish my PhD.”

He looked stunned. “I’m not trying to trick you.”

“Whatever.” I slapped my fork on the table. “Jeez, why do you think I’m living with Mrs. Murcheson? I’m twenty-six years old, for God’s sake! I should have my own place by now, but I can’t afford one. The trust pays for my school and living expenses, and that’s it—until I get the degree. Like that’s ever gonna happen.”

“What’s the problem? Your research not coming together?”

“It may have escaped your attention, you being a drama major and all, but I’m not exactly a genius. I took science because it’s interesting, but I’m no scientist. What else is a degree in physics good for? I picked History of Science for a PhD ‘cause I figured it’d be easy. Well, what d’ya know—it’s not!”

Simon muttered into his pasta. “Ladylike my ass…”

We finished the meal in silence.

* 

Back in the limo, it soon became apparent that we weren’t headed for the campus. I’d had enough. “All right, where the hell are we going?”

He barely glanced at me. “Just ‘come as your Mum,’ okay?”

I breathed deep and sank back into the seat. This wasn’t about me. Graham Lawrence didn’t matter; maybe he didn’t even exist anymore. I brought my legs together and tucked my skirt around my knees, then checked my makeup with the compact in my purse. Mother was a lady, in the truest sense of the word, and she would certainly expect no less from me.

Half an hour later the limo dropped us in front of the Hotel Royale, in the heart of downtown. I stood on the sidewalk as the car pulled away. A stiff wind from the lake took my breath away, and threatened to remove my skirt.
“What are we doing here?” I touched my hair, where the breeze had set my curls to dancing in and out of my field of view.

Simon took my arm. “The party’s inside,” he said. “We rented a room.”

“Funny place for a theme like ‘Come as your Mum’…” But then again, I thought, as I allowed myself to be led through the front doors, why not here? Why not just about anywhere? Was there a proper place for a ‘Come as your Mum’ party?

The interior opened into an informal sitting area, which doubled as a tea-room—according to my mother—with love seats dating back to the Forties and Fifties loosely arranged in groups of four. Simon led me to one such seat, well away from anyone else. “Wait here, okay? I have to talk to a guy.”

I crossed my legs at the knee and clasped hands in my lap. I watched Simon stride over to a bank of old-fashioned elevators. A man in a dark suit, with slicked-back hair, probably in his late 30s, met him there. They spoke, glanced back at me, then boarded the elevator and rose out of sight.

This so-called party was smelling fishier all the time, and it wasn’t just the breeze from the docks. I was beginning to wonder if it wasn’t a party for two that Simon had in mind, and the fact I was in a hotel left little doubt as to his intentions. I thought about leaving, but a search of my purse revealed that I had no money and no identification. Plenty of makeup, though.

It was then that I noticed the middle-aged couple coming towards me, apparently having just stepped off the elevator. I looked away, trying not to call attention to myself, but they didn’t stop until they were standing in front of me.

The woman perched on the opposite couch, her hands apparently unable to stop twisting themselves into a knot. The man stayed right where he was, glaring down at me. I didn’t move a muscle. What could they possibly want?

“Hello, Sarah…” the woman said hesitantly.

I stopped breathing. They knew who I was! Or rather, who I was supposed to be. After a long pause I managed to say hello back, in the very best womanly voice I could manage. This was no time to be outed as a dude.

“I know how upset you must be,” she said. “But if you’ll just hear us out…”

“Screw that noise.” The man sat down. “Sweetheart, you have to understand… That boy’s all wrong for you. He’s after our money, pure and simple.”

“Horace! I thought we agreed. Conrad is a pleasant enough young man, but he’s simply not husband material. Our family has certain standards—”

“To put it another way, he’s dumb as a post.”
“That’s not what I meant! Please… you’ll just make her run off again.”

“But I didn’t make—” He threw up his hands. “All right, fine. I’m the bad guy. Do whatever you want.”

The woman reached toward me. “Please, Sarah. Don’t run off. We can talk about this. If you could just agree to wait awhile, instead of rushing in…”

I stared at her. “I’m sorry. Do I know you?”

Horace half-rose from his seat, his face twisted. “Don’t you dare talk to your mother that way, young lady! We’re still your parents, no matter what you might wish otherwise. Have some respect, dammit!”

So that was it. They were pretending to be my mother’s parents, Josephine and Horace Graves, as they were at the time of young Sarah’s marriage—to Conrad Lawrence. I’d seen the photos many times, which explained the tenuous sense of familiarity I’d been experiencing.

Josephine plucked at her husband’s arm. “For goodness sake, sit down! You’ll just make things worse.”

I had to hand it to Simon. He didn’t stop at printing a fake invitation and talking the girls into giving me a makeover, he’d gone to the trouble of hiring these actors too. At least, I fervently hoped the Oscar-worthy performance going on in front of me was an act. Otherwise I was in the presence of two certified lunatics.

Horace leaned back and gestured expansively. “Why am I always the one who makes things worse, eh? Why is it always me? Don’t you make the odd mistake now and then, my dear? Oh, that’s right, you’re little miss perfect! Only not so perfect these days, are you? And not so little either.”

“You—you brute. You promised… Oh, what’s the use. You’re never going to change.” She turned up her nose. “Treat me as you will. I can take it. But if it’s not too much to ask, could you perhaps not ruin our daughter’s wedding day?”


They never broke character. Josephine looked as though she might cry. Horace muttered something about ‘young people’ these days. And then Simon was back, sitting beside me, taking my hands in his and whispering into my ear those magic words every girl longs to hear: “Come as your Mum. Play along.”

I blinked rapidly, then cuddled up and lay my head on his shoulder.

“Whether you like it or not,” Simon said firmly, “I’m in love with your daughter.” He put one arm around me and lifted my chin. “We’re getting married.”
I fluttered my lashes. “Really?”

“Oh, yes. Today. Right here in this hotel.” Then he kissed me.

I found myself kissing him back, all the while wondering why? Why was I letting the bastard get away with this? Why wasn’t I whacking him upside the head, and for extra emphasis giving his crotch the shit-kicking of a lifetime? Why was my body melting in to his? Why was I opening my mouth? Why—mmmppph.

“You’ve made your point, sir,” Horace said stiffly.

Simon broke the kiss. “I’m not sure I have. You think I’m after your money, but I’m going to prove that nothing could be further from the truth.”

“How? By finally signing that pre-nup I wrote?”

“Not at all. I’ll prove it by demonstrating how totally I’m into your daughter’s body.” He turned to me and ran his fingers through my hair. “Hey, you…”

My breath caught. I couldn’t say a word. I was lost in his eyes.

Our mouths met, lightly at first. With an arm around my waist and a hand cupping the back of my head, he pulled me to him. My arms slid around him, clutching at his back and locking us together. My head tilted, lips parted. Simon forced himself inside. I did nothing to stop him; maybe I didn’t want to. Our heads moved from side to side. Thick curls slide gently across the back of my neck.

It was the most feminine sensation I’ve ever experienced. Not wearing a woman’s clothes, not being locked in a man’s embrace, not even swallowing his tongue like it was made of pudding. It was all those things, plus the exquisite feel of warm hair on bare skin; a reminder and an affirmation that I was indeed a woman.

I wanted more. I needed more…

Through it all, I could hear Josephine berating her husband. “Stop this, Horace. It’s not right. Not in public. Not on her wedding day.”

A rustle of papers. “You win, Mr. Lawrence. No pre-nup. I’m tearing it up, see?”

Simon pushed me away, leaving me breathless and confused. I’d kissed a few girls in my time, but those were brief and fumbled affairs—nothing like the passion I’d just experienced. Once more I had to ask myself why? Is kissing a guy that much better, even though I wasn’t attracted to him? Is kissing just better as a woman? Is it better to kiss, or be kissed?

Simon stood up and flashed his forefinger. “See ya at the alter, babe.” Then he wandered off, from what I could see, in the direction of the bar.

Mother helped me up. “Let’s get you dressed, Sarah.”
I was left in the bridal suite to await the arrival of my bridesmaids. Standing in a lounge filled with the kind of furniture my grandmother grew up with, I could see a vintage wedding gown laid out on the huge bed as though it were sleeping. I recognized it right away, of course. Hell, I’d even worn it once or twice. It was the dress my mother was married in.

Opposite the bedroom was a door to the adjoining suite. It opened, and through it stepped a tall man with dark hair—the man Simon had met by the elevator.

“Hello, Sarah. Do you remember me?” He spoke in a smooth baritone, with the velvety eloquence of a saxophone.

I melted a little inside. “I’m sorry. Have we met?” Instinctively, I crossed my arms beneath my breasts, as if to protect myself.

“Yes and no.” He smiled, not unkindly. “You were Graham at the time, and I did tell him to forget about our little chat. It’s not the best way to encourage repeat business, I must admit, but for legal purposes it does have certain advantages.”

I moved back a few paces. “What do you want?”

“Another chat. Please come this way.” He indicated the doorway behind him.

“I was told to wait here.”

“I realize that, but our discussion requires privacy that this room cannot offer. It won’t take long. You’ll be back in time to dress for your wedding.”

My wedding. I didn’t want to think about that. “Why can’t we talk here?”

“My methods are proprietary. They are not for prying eyes or cameras that never sleep.” He extended his arm. “Come as your Mum, Sarah. Now.”

I floated past him, lost in a fog of feminine thought. Such a handsome man; tall, with chiselled features, a strong jaw line… So unlike dear little Graham. It’s a pity I’m about to be married. But still, there may be time for a quick fling…

He closed the door. “I’ve been following your progress, Sarah. I must say, your physical emulation of your mother is remarkable, but your emotional attachment to the role leaves a lot to be desired.”


“Wolverston. But you can call me Blaine.” His smile was predatory. “Right there, that’s what I’m talking about. The trigger phrase puts you in the right frame of mind, but it doesn’t last. You keep popping in and out.”
“You say that like it’s a bad thing.” I checked out the room. Same decor as the suite next-door, but smaller, and dominated by an unmade double bed.

“It is. We got away with it so far, because they got enough footage of you at home, in the car, the restaurant, and so forth. They can edit out the bits where you’re not acting the part. However, it’s been made abundantly clear to me that that isn’t an option for the ceremony, and definitely not for the honeymoon.”

That was a lot to take in. “This is all on video?”

“This room is safe. But everything that came before, yes.”

I felt dizzy. The room wasn’t well lit to begin with and staggering around on high heels only made it worse. I shook my head. “Why would you do that? Are you the kind of sick perv who gets his jollies watching guys turn into girls?”

“Of course not. None of this was my doing.”

My small hand made a fist. “None of your doing? Because of you, I’m a woman! You might as well have stuck these boobs on me with your bare hands.”

“I wish I had. Then perhaps I wouldn’t feel the way I do about you.” He stepped closer. “Forgive me for saying so, my dear, but isn’t Graham exactly the kind of ‘perv’ you mentioned? Doesn’t he like to watch men turn into women?”
I wanted to hit him. “What’s your point?”

“Perhaps a woman with glass teats shouldn’t throw stones.”

Time to steer the conversation in a different direction. “My son,” I said archly, “is nothing more than a cross-dresser. It isn’t other men that tweak his interest, it’s the transformation itself. In his mind, he is the man being transformed. In that sense, there’s absolutely nothing gay about it.”

“Touché. But I didn’t say Graham was gay.”

I licked my lips. “It’s a common misconception. I assumed you share it.”

Blaine smiled. “You do your mother proud. In the future, perhaps you should consider doing birthday parties.”

My derriere backed into the sideboard, shaking the lamps; the room danced with our entwined shadows. “Why is it so important to you that I be a woman?”

He shook his head. “I was well paid for my services.”

“I see. So you use hypnosis to feminize men for a living. Is there really that much money in the field, or do you moonlight by turning dogs into cats?”

“You’d be surprised. But since you bring it up… I am a practicing psychologist, specializing in treating issues such as anxiety, depression and so forth. Hypnosis is merely one of the tools at my disposal.”

“Anyone can call himself a doctor.” I steadied the sideboard and backed away. “I’m fully qualified, I can assure you.”

“What would an ethics committee make of what you’re doing now?”

He frowned. “That, my dear, would not be advisable.”

“Speak for yourself.” The back of my knees hit the bed. I sat down, abruptly. “I was.” He sat down next to me. “Come as your Mum, Sarah. Relax.”

I was suddenly aware of the tension throughout my body. I relaxed my hands, my back, the muscles around my lips. Warm air slid in and out of my chest. I watched my breasts rise and fall. I’d barely noticed them before. Now they felt heavy.

Blaine dangled a pocket watch in front of me. “It might interest you to know that hypnotism cannot make you do something against your will. It doesn’t work that way. All it does is remove your inhibitions.”

I looked at him dully. “Does that mean I secretly want to be… her?”

“Well, you’ve been wearing her clothes for years… This won’t be your first time wearing her wedding dress… It’s not much of a secret.”
I lowered my gaze. “That’s sick.”

“Is it? Real life isn’t always so cut-and-dried.” He touched my back. “I know how much you admired your mother. You looked up to her; that’s perfectly understandable. And you were always so down on yourself.”

I shook my head, but it was Sarah’s hair that touched the back of my neck. More than that, it was Mrs. Murcheson’s firm-support bra that bound my chest, and Rhianna’s makeup that made my eyes wide and my mouth glow. The dress, the shoes, the lingerie… I touched my lips. Of Graham, there was nothing left.

“She was your role model. No one could possibly blame you for wanting to be more like her.” He spun the watch. “It’s such a fine line, isn’t it? Between wanting to be like her, and wanting to be her…”

I stared at the watch in front of me. It was spinning instead of swinging back and forth. Not the traditional method. It was suspended by a thin cord, but I couldn’t see the hand that held it. It coasted to a stop, then slowly reversed itself to spin in the opposite direction. Left to right, then right to left, then left to right again. Or was it the other way around?

“Let yourself go,” he whispered. “Be Sarah.”

That’s all I remember.
I am a woman.

I am a wanton woman, wearing a push-up bra and G-string panties.

I am a helpless female, kneeling on a mattress with my hands bound at my back.

My breath comes rapidly, through a mouth locked into a kind of dental appliance. Long hair streams halfway down my back. It is my own hair, the kind I’ve dreamt about my whole life. I feel its soft weight enveloping my shoulders and half-covering the ropes that crisscross my back.

I cry for help, but cannot form the words. I moan.

In the semi-dark I can barely see. A pink mist hides whatever walls there may be. But somehow I know: there is a man in the room with me.

I rock from side to side, straining against the rope that binds my wrists.

I hear quiet laughter, from behind me. “Struggle if you must,” he says, in a voice at once deep, strong and unstoppable. “You will not escape.”

I half-turn. My tongue flaps in its cave; I cannot speak. I see no one.

“You are mine,” comes a dark whisper. A hand grips my arm.

I jerk to the side. But he is here with me, on the bed. I stare at his bare chest, so much wider than mine. He is tall. I look up to see the face of Blaine Wolverston, its chiselled features so unlike my own.

“Do not be afraid,” he says softly. “I could not harm the woman I love.”

I whimper a little. But there is no escaping what is to come.

His face draws near. “Sarah,” he breathes. “You are so lovely. That you are helpless only deepens my desire.” He pulls me to him, an arm about my waist, a hand gripping the back of my head. His fingers entwine my hair. His mouth descends on mine, undeterred by the device that keeps my lips apart. His tongue explores this new cave like a hungry bear.

All I can do is get out of the way.

“That’s not how you do it,” he says. “You have to feel it. Taste it.”

I do as he asks, as my hands flail in the air behind me.

“Much better,” he murmurs. “And now for the full meal deal.”

He pushes me over, onto my back. I roll to the side, staring up at him.
Oh, no. Not that.

I watch him discard his boxers. What stands revealed is like nothing I have ever seen before. A lifetime as Graham has not prepared me for how big a man can be; a real man, not the kind who seeks solace in wigs and high heels.

“I am sorry to do this,” he says, not unkindly, “but you must know what it is to be a woman. For some women, at least, this is real. Some even choose it.”

Then he straddles my chest—and gathers my hair to make a pillow at the base of my neck—and inches forward—and grasps my head so I cannot turn away—and hunches over—and finally guides himself through the opening.

There isn’t much room to spare.

Like a torpedo in a submarine, ready to launch. Ready to explode.

I close my eyes. He tastes of salt and sweat, as I imagine a locker room might taste after a football game. He pushes in and shifts my head, seeking a clear path to the back of my throat. All too soon, my windpipe is full. I cannot breathe.


So this is what it’s like—to be a woman. To be used by a man, for the sake of his own pleasure. Degrading, yes. Humiliating. Oh, yes. But in the same breath—or lack thereof—strangely fulfilling. I experience a momentary thrill of validation. I am a woman—a beautiful woman, sexually serving a man.

It isn’t much, but it’s something. Perhaps only a distraction.

Then he grunts, and groans, and explodes. I drink as much as I can.

Finally—mercifully—he pulls out. I suck air like it’s just been invented.

He smiles down at me. “There. That wasn’t so bad, was it.” A pause. “Was it?”

I find myself shaking my head, if only to appease the man who can untie me.

But no. Against all logic, his manhood is rising. He effortlessly snaps the straps of my G-string and muscles his way into my womanhood—like a sausage sliding into a bun slick with mustard. My first foot-long, and I feel every inch of it as—to mix too many metaphors—the giant mole torpedoes into its new home.

“You’re a woman now,” he informs me, although it hardly seems necessary.

“Let yourself go,” he say softly. “Be Sarah.”
When next I became aware, I was flat on my back atop an antique bed surrounded by the hanging folds of a brocade canopy. Spread out on the comforter next to me was Mother’s wedding gown, wrinkle-free and ready to go.

But of course, I’m Sarah, so that’s my wedding gown. I’m getting married today.

I stood up and tugged on my skirt. Wearing a dress, it’s not really a good idea to lie down; the fabric can’t handle it. I straightened my bra and found a mirror on the wall over the desk. Goodness, is that me? My hair’s a mess!

I plucked at my curls to puff them out as best I could, then noticed that my fingernails were somewhat longer than they had been—not to mention lacquered in fire-red nail polish. I couldn’t remember doing that.

Two women appeared in the doorway.

“There she is! It’s about time, sleepyhead.”

“I told you, she just needed a nap.”

It was Bethany and Rhianna, wearing the pretty bridesmaid dresses we’d picked out weeks ago; sleeveless sheaths in cream taffeta under a tulle netting with cream-and-green daisies, a crew-collar neckline, and an empire waist topped with a gold satin bow. Gorgeous!

My hands flew to my hips. “Where have you two been? Why didn’t you get me up sooner? Now I’ll have to rush through everything!”

Bethany said, “We had to get dressed ourselves, you know.” Rhianna just laughed.

I managed a smile. “Sorry. You both look really cute. The guys’ll be all over you tonight.”

“Don’t bet money on it,” Rhianna said.

The girls stripped me down and started from scratch. A tight half-girdle with garters, followed by sheer nylon stockings. A satin half-slip with a lace hem that covered my knees. A pair of platform pumps with four-inch heels, wraparound ankle straps and bow-tie vamps, accented with rhinestones. All in white.
What I found disconcerting was the guy holding the Super-8 camera, documenting my transformation into a bride. He arrived as I stood awaiting my girdle—for all the world a naked woman—and began filming as I fruitlessly attempted to cover both breasts and groin with hands that seemed far too small.

“That’s just Paul,” Bethany said, playfully tugging on my arms. “He’s a friend of Simon’s. Trust me, when you look back, you’ll love having this film.”

“For God’s sake,” Rhianna said. “It’s Elmer and he’s a friend of Conrad. Didn’t you even read the script?”

“I read it,” Bethany shot back. “I didn’t memorize it, like some people.”

She was right; I would come to love this film. Mother had made me watch it many a time, until each scene—from the engagement party, to dressing the bride, to the wedding itself—was as familiar to me as any memory from my own life. But I could recall no nude scene in that film, no mention of the bride being coerced.

More unsettling still was the fact that the camera wasn’t making a sound. I knew that Super-8 film makes a distinct whirring sound as it winds from spool to spool, but Paul’s camera (or Elmer, or whoever the hell he was) didn’t seem to have any moving parts. Assuming the camera was even on, it had to be digital.

But that was just one more anachronism to go with the many I’d noticed just in the last few minutes—such as the flat-screen TV in the corner, the digital alarm clock, and the cell phone in Bethany’s purse that rang with “What a Feeling” from Flashdance, and which she hurriedly switched off.

Once I was fully ensconced in bridal lingerie, although my chest remained bare, Rhianna steered me over to the desk and sat me down. “Let’s fix that face,” she said sternly, as she laid out the makeup from her bag. “What’ve you been doing with it, anyway—farming?”

“I ate dinner,” I said numbly.

“Well, you definitely ate your lipstick. Pucker up.” She painted my lips, added a sealer, then touched up my eyes, re-contoured my cheeks, and powdered until I could barely breathe. Bethany worked on restoring my hair to its former glory.

It was time to pour me into my wedding gown. The girls drew it over my nyloned legs until it cleared my feet, at which point I stood, perched precariously on narrow heels while they worked the dress over my hips. It was a tight fit.

I remembered admiring this dress from afar, as a child, on the frequent occasions Mother would grant it day parole from its garment bag and hold it up to her body, all the while loudly informing anyone within earshot that of course it still fit! Even though it didn’t.
But the dress did fit me, if only barely.

It was a classic gown from the Forties—in white satin, of course; a sleek mermaid silhouette with a train that rolled off my knees and pooled on the floor. I couldn’t decide whether it made me look more like a young maiden rising from the sea, or a (white) witch melting into a puddle. Maybe that was the idea.

Either way, it looked incredible—a seductive embrace of waist, hips and thighs in shimmering satin with lace embellishments. Rhianna forced the zipper not much higher than the base of my spine, leaving half my back bare, and closed the button at the top. “Damn, this is sexy,” she murmured. “It so figures, a gorgeous dress like this and instead of me it’s a guy that gets to wear it.”

Bethany nudged her from behind.

Rhianna looked guilty. “Oops, I mean… A beautiful woman—like you, Sarah.”

They tugged the bodice into place over my bare breasts and drew the lace band of the single-strap neckline up over my right shoulder. With nowhere else to go, my hands eventually came to rest on my hips.

Terribly disorienting, this business of being two people at the same time.

While the girls hung pendulous earrings and diamond bracelets on my person, I gave some thought not to whoever I was now, but to who I had been and who I was becoming. Because the two were not one and the same, which isn’t something most people have to deal with. Even memories were not be trusted. As Graham, I had certainly admired the dress I now wore, but I knew that Mother had done the same when she was a child—with the very same dress, since it had formerly belonged to one Josephine Graves, mother to Sarah.

So, depending on how you looked at it, I was either the third in our lineage to wear the dress, or an instant replay of the second. I could sort of see it both ways.

“I think she’s done,” Bethany said, taking a step back.

The guy with the camera stopped filming—assuming he had been—then gave me a thumb’s-up and walked out. Rhianna handed me a bouquet of white roses.

Yet my eyes remained locked on the mirror. I had been transformed. I wasn’t just any old woman, or any old beautiful bride. I had become an icon of female beauty. Red lips parted in disbelief; long lashes aflutter in shock. Then a hesitant smile and a face aglow with inner light. Here was woman who could stand tall in her four-inch heels, secure in the knowledge that she was among the best the fair sex had to offer. Here was a woman who could command the passion of the bedroom, confident that the man she was with would be able to think of no other. And yes, here was the woman of my dreams.
“Uh, hello? Earth to Sarah. Anyone home?” Bethany’s hand failed to sever my contact with the mirror. “What was that trigger phrase again?”

“Blaine changed it,” Rhianna said. “It’s nice and simple now: ‘Sarah’.”

“Oh, yeah. Is that why she’s gone all zombie?”

“Nah. Her system’s just overloaded.” She laughed. “From Graham’s point of view, not only did we turn him into his mother—he’s a gorgeous bride too.”

“But wouldn’t that be a dream come true, for him?”

“Sure, but think about it. She’s about to get married. And you know what happens to the bride on her wedding day.”

Bethany dimpled. “She gets fucked.”

“Yeah. I bet she’s thinking about it now.”

My eyes refocused. I turned and glared. “Let’s get this wedding on the road, shall we? I’d like to be a married woman before sundown.”

I led the way into the lounge, where Elmer was filming my departure, followed by my bridesmaids who made sure I didn’t trip over my train. Father met me in the corridor, serving as my escort. And then, on to my wedding. ●
How had it come to this? The grand ballroom of the Hotel Royale had been fully decorated for what seemed like a royal wedding, with flowers and scented candles lining the aisle and a carpet strewn with the petals of white roses. The room was fully occupied, guests were standing and staring and whispering, and I—Graham Lawrence, son of Sarah—was the center of attention.

Alas, I was the bride, imprisoned in a wedding gown that barely let me move, while at the same time broadcasting every move I did manage to make for the viewing pleasure of every able-bodied man in the room. And watch me they did, their eyes upon me, following every bounce of my reinforced bodice, every roll of my silk-clad hips. I was the bride and, alas, there was no way out.

I leaned on the arm next to me; that of one Horace Graves, the man who claimed to be the father of the bride (i.e. me). I found his strength reassuring.

“It’s all right, baby,” he said in a loud voice. “All be over soon.”

We started up the aisle. There was a raised dais at the far end, upon which stood an elderly minister, smiling vacantly and clutching a white Bible to his chest. Simon and his friend Paul stood nearby, looking back at me, waiting. Then again, maybe it was Conrad and his best man Elmer, awaiting the bride’s arrival. Or maybe it was Bugs Bunny and Elmer Fudd; I was beyond caring.

Horace stopped abruptly, forcing me to do the same. He cocked his head, as if listening. That’s when I noticed his hearing aid; always assuming that’s what it was. “Hold on a sec,” he said quietly. “One of the cameras crapped out. They’re gettin’ a new one from the truck.”

I was confused. “Who is?”

He shrugged. “One of the crew. Won’t take long.”

I looked around the room. “I only see the one camera.” It was the fake Super-8 again, now held by an usher at the back of the room.

“You wouldn’t. They’re small, they can hide anywhere.”

None of this made sense. “Why are they hidden?”

He rolled his eyes. “You think maybe wireless camcorders were a common sight in the Sixties?”

I really hadn’t thought about it. “Is that what this is?”

“Christ, what turnip truck did you fall off of? What d’ya think we’re doin’ here?”
I glanced into my cleavage. “I’ve been wondering that myself.”

His eyes narrowed. “I figured as much. You ain’t a pro, are you?” He noticed my confusion. “A professional. An actor. A member of the guild.”

I shook my head. “I’m a grad student. History of science.”

“It figures. Tossin’ around all that cash like they never heard of the word ‘budget’ and they give the starring roles to students. Pisses me off.”

“Students?”

“You and that Simon guy. The groom.” He touched my arm. “Not that you don’t fit the part, darlin’. You look fantastic. If I weren’t your Daddy…” He leered down at me, grinning. “It’s amazing, actually, how much you look like her. The real bride, I mean. The one in the pictures they showed us.”

“That’s my mother,” I said softly, eyes cast down.

“Ahhh, so that’s it! They cast the daughter as the mother. Now that makes sense!” He draped an arm across my shoulders. “Let me guess, young Simon over there is your boyfriend. Yep, that does makes sense. I feel better,” he added.

I thought better of telling him that Mother didn’t give birth to no daughter. I bit my lip, tasting lipstick. “So you really are an actor?”

He looked surprised. “You don’t recognize me? Grad students don’t go to plays these days? Oh, right—history of science.” He scratched his head. “Just last month I played Tevye in Fiddler on the Roof. Ever heard of that?”

I shrugged. “Who hired you? Who’s behind this?”

“Beats me. I only know the casting manager. That guy.” He pointed. “Over by the wall, in the penguin suit. He doles out the cheques.”

I felt sick. I knew the man. Oliver Ingram, the Lawrence family lawyer; the man managing my mother’s estate. The man who doled out my cheques as well.

We moved a few feet, then stopped. “They’re re-calibrating light levels,” Horace said. “Bloody rubes. ‘Course they didn’t hire the guys I recommended.”

I gripped his arm harder. “What are they paying you? To do this?”

He smiled. “In the theatre, we tend not speak of such matters. But since you’re not in the business…” He leaned closer. “Twenty-five grand, for a mere ten days work. Script readings, walk-throughs and rehearsals, then a one-day run. Too easy. But tell no one.” He laid a finger aside his nose and winked.

Now it was my turn to be pissed off. That was my money being wasted—on this man, all these people, hotel, crew, equipment… At least, it was supposed to be my
money, and maybe it would’ve been mine by now if it wasn’t for Mother’s pig-headed insistence that I obtain a doctorate.

“Got big plans for that cash,” Horace continued. “A day at the races, as it were. Already got the ponies picked out.” He nodded. “I’ll turn that twenty-five into a cool hundred, then buy into one of the big-money games downtown.”

“Great plan,” I muttered. “You can use what’s left to light your cigar.”

He stared at me. “Now that didn’t hardly sound ladylike at all. Girls these days… I dunno.” He chewed on his cheek, then stopped to listen. “Here we go. Let’s get this over with, shall we?”

I yanked my train aside. “Maybe I don’t want to get married.”

“Yeah, you do,” he growled. “You’re gettin’ married so I can bloody well get paid and get the hell outta here. I got better things to do.”

“Right, like losing all your money. Let me go!”

His grip tightened. “Stop squirming, girl! How’s that gonna look on video? You’re supposed to be Sarah—”

My mind did a triple axel, once more phasing into Sarah Lawrence. I crouched, briefly, to fix the lay of my train. “Okay, Daddy,” I chirped. “We can go now.”

We proceeded up the aisle and Father left me standing at the alter, clutching my bouquet of roses and facing my husband-to-be. The minister smiled and opened his book. “Dearly beloved, we are gathered here today…”

In no time, we had said our “I dos” and Conrad swept me into his arms. He kissed me as the room applauded, then kept right on doing it. I remembered that from the original film; the bride and groom had locked lips for far too long, to the point where the guests stopped clapping and began muttering among themselves.

I opened my mouth and let him enter. The taste of scandal was delicious.

Still in a fog, I asked of the air, “Is that it? Are we married?”

“Not yet,” the minister said. “Sign here.” He handed me pen and clipboard. The document didn’t look like a marriage licence and I said so. “Humor me,” he said, in a manner that suggested he was not a man of God to be trifled with.

It was a Certificate of Name Change, with ‘Graham Lawrence’ already printed in. That wasn’t my name, but what the hell. I signed. The minister produced a notary stamp and validated the document. Only then did we sign the marriage papers.

Conrad kissed me. “You’re Sarah Lawrence now,” he said loudly. “No one will ever be able to take that away from you.”
Horace Graves seemed to take that as his cue to throw up his hands and stomp out of the room, followed by Josephine begging him to come back. It was all very theatrical. But I suppose that was the whole idea.

* 

The plan was to change clothes before the reception, but we never got that far. By the time Conrad had carried me over the threshold of the bridal suite and set me down next to the bed, our passion was too far gone.

“Oh, Sarah,” he whispered between kisses, and each time he spoke my name it pushed me that much further into being Sarah Lawrence.

I would reply, “Oh, Conrad,” and our mouths would melt into one another and only come apart when we really needed the air.

“You’re my wife now,” he announced, a bit too loudly.

“And you are my husband.” I twisted in his arms. “Unzip me, please.”

I felt him fumbling with the button, then the zipper gliding past the small of my back and halfway down my butt. I slipped the strap from my shoulder and wiggled the bodice over my hips. Conrad stared at my chest as I retrieved the dress from the floor and hung it up. A woman simply does not leave her wedding gown lying around, no matter how much she wants to get under her new husband.

We didn’t quite make it to the bed. I did him right where he stood; he with his head flung back and grunting, me on my knees and swallowing. Then it was his turn to do me, doggy-style on the bedspread, into whatever orifice he damn well pleased. I couldn’t care less one way or the other. I was his wife.

Ten minutes later my husband was asleep.

I lay there for awhile, thinking, then extricated myself from his arms and legs. For the first time in what seemed like hours, or maybe days, my mind was clear. More than that, it burned with lunatic energy. I knew what had been done to me. And it wasn’t just me. During the ceremony, Simon’s eyes had glazed over every time the name ‘Conrad’ was mentioned. He’d been speaking with Blaine in the lobby, and now I knew why. I wasn’t the only one being brainwashed.

I had to get out. I had to get my life back.

Unfortunately, my breasts didn’t want to peel off and there was nothing to wear but the clothing I’d arrived in. I discarded my wedding kit and replaced it with Mrs. Murcheson’s brassiere, and her slip too. Then I stopped. What I was doing no longer felt like cross-dressing; it lacked the attendant thrill, the dizzying fear of discovery. This was just… dressing.
I considered taking Simon’s suit but he was still wearing most of it. I didn’t have a better plan, so I quickly picked up my cocktail dress and shoes and the rest of my lingerie, and escaped into the darkened lounge. The door to the adjoining room was ajar, with dim light spilling through the crack.

I found myself seized with a new idea: to seek a path of my own choosing. Up to then I had allowed myself to be led around by the nose—from house to hotel, to the wedding bed—like a blue-ribbon Holstein at a livestock fair. Why not do what I wanted for a change?

I took a deep breath and stepped into the next room, fully intending to confront the occupant. If it wasn’t for Wolverston and his hypnotic skills, I wouldn’t be a bride, I wouldn’t have changed my name, and I wouldn’t have spent the last half-hour being reamed out by a guy from school—who he’d also hypnotized!

The dude had a lot to answer for.

The room was empty. The bed hadn’t been slept in, although I could still make out where I’d sat during my previous visit—as though a part of me had remained here in this room, while the rest of me was off getting married. I felt like I belonged here, far more so than the bridal suite next-door.

I left my clothes atop the bureau. Hanging nearby, on the bathroom door, was a woman’s animal-print robe. It couldn’t possibly belong to Blaine, unless he too was a cross-dresser. That seemed unlikely. I touched it, feeling the thin fabric run through my fingers like water. Then I put it on, leaving the belt undone.

Folded neatly atop the nightstand was a long leather strap. It seemed to have no purpose other than to draw my attention, so I picked it up. Unfurled, with my arms straight out from my sides, it stretched from one hand to the other. Secretly, I was pleased to find it. So much the better to get my point across.

I lay down. The bedspread was smooth, and in a silk slip and satin robe, so was I. I slithered over to the middle, staring up at the ceiling. No mirror, but the ornate gold inlay struck me as rather decadent. Such surroundings seemed to invite a gross violation of societal norms—such as the obvious taboo of sleeping with another man’s wife, on her wedding day no less.

I wrapped the strap around a post in the headboard, lay back and looped the ends about my wrists. I had some choice words planned for Mister Blaine Wolverston, when and if he dared face the man he had helped transform into a woman.

The dude totally had a lot to answer for.
Some time later, the lamp next to the bed flickered to life. Blaine stood nearby, his overcoat slung over his arm. “So this is where the bride’s been hiding,” he said, obviously amused. “I’ve just come from your reception. You were missed.”

“No fault,” I said, uncrossing my legs.

“Nonetheless, tongues were wagging. I, at least, managed to enjoy myself. But most of your guests seemed to prefer to wallow in scandal.”

“They’re not my guests. None of this was my doing.”

“Touché. I’ll put aside the question of why you weren’t down there, but that still leaves the far more interesting question of why you’re here.” He hung up his hat and coat, then removed his suit jacket.

“This is all your fault,” I said, clutching at the straps that bound my wrists.

“Is it? As I told you before, I only did what I was paid to do.”

“Was it Oliver Ingram? Is that who paid you?”

He sat on the edge of the bed. “I spoke to Mr. Ingram, yes.”

“Why would my mother’s lawyer want to turn me into a woman?”

“Not just any woman,” he said casually, picking at the topmost button of his shirt. “You appear to be a body double of your young mother.”

“I know. But why?” My body twisted against the bedspread.

“I can’t answer that.” He leaned back on his elbow. “I’m more curious about why you’re here, instead of off attending to your husband.”

“I did that already.” I grimaced. “Actually, he attended to me, then fell asleep.”

“A common complaint. The man gets what he wants and leaves the woman to fend for herself. Is that why you’re here? Fending for yourself?”

“I’m here to confront you,” I said, affixing him with a glare.

“I see. Is that why you’re lying on my bed, half-naked?”

“Is that the kind of man you are? One that takes advantage of helpless women?”

“I’m not sure how helpless you are… but no.” He touched the loose silk covering my waist. “What kind of ‘confrontation’ is this? The kind where you yell insults and kick me in the head? Or the kind where we make sweet love until your husband wakes up and walks in on us?”

My breath caught. “I… I’m not sure.”

He smiled. “Rather interesting you chose to use the strap in that manner.”
I knew what he meant. I was helpless. Why hadn’t I seen it before? I looked at him with fresh hatred. “Why did you do this?”

His hand crept toward my chest. “What makes you think I did anything?”

I felt a rising tide of bitterness. “You hypnotized me. Now I’m stuck here on your bed. You do the math.”

He touched my breast. “The treatment I provided only removed your inhibitions. You always wanted to become a woman, you simply needed a boost to overcome your embarrassment.”

“Then why am I here? Why the lingerie? Why the strap?”

He swung his legs onto the bed and crept closer. “I can only assume that you want to be here. Hypnosis can’t make you do anything against your will. But it can, shall we say, ‘liberate’ desires you may not have been aware of.”

My head fell back. The way I was dressed, the way I was posed—who could fail to believe that here was a woman who wanted to be seduced? And I’d done it all myself. I could barely breathe. “What do you want from me?”

“Nothing but the sweetness of your lips,” he said quietly. “And your willing participation in whatever transpires between us.”
I stared at him, dumfounded, barely able to comprehend his meaning. I could feel his body next to mine, his breath on my cheek. I shook my head. *No!*

He touched a finger to my lips. “Time to be Sarah.”

*I’m Sarah! How could I have forgotten that?*

I turned my face away. “Please, Mr. Wolverston. I’m a married woman.”

“I didn’t make you come here, Sarah.” He cupped my chin and effortlessly pulled me back. “And do call me ‘Blaine’.”

I stared resolutely at the ceiling. “My husband is expecting me.”

“He’s asleep. You told me so yourself. Is that not why you’re here?” He let me go, only to begin unbuttoning his shirt.

“I don’t remember.” Maybe I didn’t *want* to remember.

“I met your husband,” Blaine said. “Only briefly, but it was enough. The man is a narcissist. He cares only for himself, and for his own needs.”

“He was a selfish lover,” I said, admiring the gold inlay above.

“The man is incapable of love.” Blaine removed his shirt and dropped it behind him, revealing a wide chest with nary a hint of hair. “He treated you more like a whore than a woman, is that not so?”

I nodded, trying not to think about the ways Conrad had violated me.

“Your husband was wrong.” His body lay alongside mine, his arm draped over my midsection. “A woman deserves to be treated like a lady.”

I nodded, staring now at him instead of the ceiling.

“Have I not treated you as a lady, since first we met?”

I nodded again, my body now seething with anticipation.

He kissed my parted lips. “Then why would you wish to be anywhere else?”

I strained up at him, my hands struggling against the strap.

His face hovered above mine, just out of reach. “You need to say the words, Sarah. I’m not the sort of man to act against a woman’s wishes.”

I fought to control my breathing. “I want to be with you.”

“I’m glad. So, what would you like to do while you’re here? We could watch TV, or play cards. There’s a backgammon set in my luggage.” He smiled. “More to the point, Sarah, what would you like *me* to do?”
I would have slapped him, playfully, were not my hands tied. “Take me.”

“But you’re a married woman. You said so yourself.”

I almost laughed. “We both know the marriage wasn’t real.”

He looked concerned. “You’re changing again.”

My head snapped back. “I know who I am,” I said in a girlish voice, “and who I’m not.” I breathed deep. “I am Sarah, but I’m not my mother and it’s not 1968.”

“Oh, good. I was beginning to wonder.”

“I know what’s real,” I said, “and what isn’t.” He looked expectant. My tongue darted between my lips. “The marriage wasn’t real. But this is.”

He grinned. “Open sesame.”

His mouth descended on mine, which opened as per his request. Our tongues met and danced the tango. He tasted of fine wine and aftershave. My hands remained restrained, which secretly excited me; the strap holding them over my head in the universal gesture of surrender—which is what I wanted.

He entwined his fingers in my hair and cupped the back of my head, kissing me as never before. I gasped for air when he stopped, only to have him return for more. Much more. My entire body shook with the passion of it.

Minutes later his pants joined his shirt on the floor. He unwound the strap from my wrists. “A woman should not be bound while making love,” he said. “If nothing else, it restrains her passion.”

“We can’t have that,” I murmured, wriggling beneath him.

Then he was kissing me once more, our mouths in constant motion. One hand still gripped my hair, while the other looped around my back, drawing me to him. My hands were free and I set them to work, yanking on the waistband of his man-panties and liberating the beast that lurked within.

He grunted and forced his tongue deeper. With my mouth as painfully wide as it could go, he managed to reach the back of my throat and touch my tonsils. For reasons I couldn’t fathom, that was a huge turn-on. I stroked his member, gently but with increasing speed, while he hugged me like a rag-doll and tried to pour himself down my throat. I really didn’t care what he did to me; I just needed to be the woman who could bring him such pleasure.

He got very hard, very fast, and soon asked me to stop. “Back in a jiffy,” he said, and reached over to the drawer on the nightstand.

“Thank you, but it’s not necessary,” I told him. “It’s not like I can get pregnant.”
He half-laughed, half-gasped. “Not that. Lube.” He popped the lid on a small jar and daubed it between his legs.

I was suddenly nervous. “I’m not sure what you have in mind, but you do know that…” I hesitated.

He straddled my legs. “I know. I was at the briefing, okay? But according to the manufacturer, you should be fully functional.” He grinned down at me. “I guess we’re about to find out, huh?”

I gave him the go-ahead by tilting my pelvis toward his and pulling up the hem of my slip. He slid into me with an audible smacking sound. “Perfect fit,” he assured me. “Like we were made for each other.”

“I’m not sure it qualifies as ‘fate’,” I murmured, my arms about his waist.

“Close enough.” He bent over to touch my lips with his. “You are the lady Sarah,” he whispered. “As lovely a woman as ever has walked the Earth.”

That was good enough for me. My body writhed under his, while I clutched at the back of his head and thrust with my hips. I may not have actually done it before, but I’d seen it in films—what a woman can do actively to make love to a man, rather than being a passive receptacle. The key is to match his energy with your own, to show him how turned-on you are. To return his every thrust, his every gesture, with one of your own. Sex should be a two-way street.

The energy that goes into making this sort of love doesn’t lend itself to an overly long encounter—it certainly didn’t with us—but it does encourage the couple to give it another go, in about twenty minutes; in our case after a glass of champagne and a very expensive tin of Macadamia nuts from the mini-bar.

While he was up, Blaine locked the door to the adjoining suite. It wouldn’t do to have my so-called husband barge in on us when he woke up. Imagine the scandal. Imagine how it would look on the wedding video.

No, that wouldn’t do at all. ●
I am a woman.

I am a captive. Strange men have made me their prisoner. My mouth is sealed, my hands are bound. The men have weapons, but they are hidden.

They march me from the office where I work.

They are rough with me, but no one stops them. This happens every day.

We are outside. They push me into a limousine.

“You belong to us,” one of them says. He touches my hair.

I feel anger. I brush that hair every day, care for it. I don’t allow just anyone to touch it. It’s my hair, not his. It’s part of who I am. I am a woman.

There are two of them. They touch me from both sides. Their hands wander down my body; stroking, prodding, always evaluating. Like butchers.

I am pretty; everyone says so. The man says so.

The other man says, “Not for long,” and they both laugh.

But love is a two-way street. This is wrong.

They pull me from the limo. My dress rides up, my hair falls over my face. One of my breasts catches on the door and it hurts. The men do not care.

My mouth is covered. I cannot speak for myself.

We move through a corridor lined with storefronts; a mall, with crowds of people going about their business. People who look through me. People who see nothing out of the ordinary. This sort of thing happens every day.

I see women like myself, their hands bound, their mouths sealed. We pass through one another like ghosts. We all have men or children at our backs.

I can barely see. The crowds are gone. I am alone with the two men.

They cut my clothing. The blade enters my cleavage and slides down to cut the hem of my dress. They shred my sleeves. A flick of the knife snaps the straps of my silk slip. They pull the clothing from my body.

They remove my gag. I can cry out but there is no one to hear. I ask them, “What are you going to do with me?” I feel the shame of my fear.

“Wait here,” one of them says. Again, he touches my hair.

They blindfold me. They place me on a bed and tie my hands to the headboard.
They leave. I should feel relief, but is there worse to come?
I lie on the bed. I am too passive in the face of danger.
There is a man in the room. “Dear, dear Sarah,” comes a dark whisper.
I rock from side to side, straining against the rope that binds my wrists.
“Struggle if you must,” he says. “You will not escape.” His voice is strong and unstoppable. He is Blaine Wolverston.
I ask, “What do you want from me?”
He joins me on the bed. “Naught but the sweetness of your hips. And your willing participation in whatever transpires between us.”
I am here because of this man’s desire. But I’ve had enough. I say ‘No’.
He kisses my lips, as if to change my mind.
I shout “Bastard!” and kick him in the head.
It is not enough. He opens my mouth and forces a dental brace between my teeth. He straddles me. I feel his nakedness on my chest.
He whispers into my ear, “Hypnosis cannot make you do anything against your will. It simply liberates desires you may not have been aware of.”
Lies. Now I know what he is.
It isn’t fair. A woman should not have to give up her freedom to be loved.
He touches my lips. “Be Sarah.”
I will be. I will be.
I awoke with a bad taste in my mouth. I was flat on my back, staring up at the canopy over my bridal bed. I rolled over and a roll of curly hair flopped over my eye. The bright curtains told me it was morning. Thankfully, my ‘husband’—Conrad or Simon or whoever he was—was nowhere in sight.

I had regrets, that much was certain. I’d been screwed over by two different men, both of whom had professed their deep affection for me—as a woman—but I was far from certain that it wasn’t all just for show. Last night’s love-making in the adjoining suite was supposedly off-camera, but how could I be sure? Maybe they were making some sort of weird wedding porn.

Speaking of which, the last thing I could recall was drifting off to sleep under the watchful eye of my personal hypnotist. How had I—and my clothing, neatly stacked on the bedside table—ended up back here?

But the larger concern was figuring out exactly who I was—Graham Lawrence or Sarah Lawrence, or in some strange way both. I wasn’t suffering from multiple personality disorder, because my memory spanned both identities. I was, at one and the same time, the young mother and the grown son.

Sarah-Graham Lawrence. It was enough to give one (or the other) a headache.

I stumbled into the bathroom. On the counter was a bag of toiletries; thankfully, along with toothpaste and makeup, it held aspirin. I indulged.

I bathed, my hair protected with a shower cap. Somewhat surprisingly I didn’t need a shave. In fact, it had been nearly a week since I did. I’d never been more than wispy in that area; but still, it made me wonder. How long had this wedding been in the works anyway?

On the other hand, the thought of anything less than beautifully smooth legs made my stomach turn, so I fixed that with a tube of Skintimate moisturizing shave gel and a Lady Gillette razor from the toiletries bag. That wasn’t something Graham would normally do, unless he was preparing to cross-dress.

Still no fresh clothing to choose from. So it was back to Sylvia Murcheson’s black brassiere, the matching panty girdle with its too-tight boning, and her silk slip; followed by a pair of no-longer-new stockings and black satin pumps.

The poor woman’s cocktail dress had definitely seen better days. I shook out the wrinkles as best I could, zipped myself into the full skirt and secured the metallic bodice at the base of my neck. After brushing out my hair and fixing my face, I felt almost normal. Almost, but not quite.
I entered the lounge to find Bethany and Rhianna waiting, still clad in their cream-taffeta-and-green-daisy bridesmaid dresses. They looked exhausted, like they’d been up all night slaving over a hot floodlight. Maybe they had.

“Here comes the bride,” Bethany said, stifling a yawn.

“We packed your bag,” Rhianna said, staggering a little as she stood up. “Let’s get going, okay? Conrad’s waiting out front.”

“Your honeymoon awaits,” Bethany said, blinking rapidly. She wasn’t looking at me, but rather at the antique radio on the sideboard. A handy spot to conceal a spy-cam, I could only imagine.

“The honeymoon’s off,” I informed them. “I’m sick of being ordered around.”

“But Sarah,” Rhianna said. “Six days on the Mexican Riviera! Cabo San Lucas, Puerto Vallarta, Mazatlán… Why would you want to miss that, Sarah?”

Familiar names from my mother’s wedding album. I shrugged.

“Come as your Mum?” Bethany said hopefully. I grimaced at her.

The door to the adjoining suite burst open. Through it, I could see the angry face of Oliver Ingram, the family lawyer. “Fix her!” he yelled at the man next to him, then shoved the man, stumbling, into the lounge. Blaine Wolverston avoided a fall only by grabbing on to Bethany, who shrieked.

“All of this will be edited out,” Oliver said. Then he yelled, “Positions!” and shut the door. Bethany sniffled a little, but managed a weak smile.

Blaine’s face was dark with anger. “Sarah… We’ve all gone to a great deal of trouble for your sake.” He grabbed me about the waist. “You really should learn to be more appreciative.”

I experienced a moment’s epiphany. “I got you in trouble, didn’t I?”

“This isn’t about me, Sarah. It’s about you, and your honeymoon.”

“It’s not about me. It’s about this damn video.”

He pinned my hands together. “The honeymoon, Sarah. Focus.”

I glared at him. “It was never about me, was it? I’m not a woman to you, just a boy in a dress. Is that what gets your motor running?”

His eyes grew wild. “You should also learn to shut that pretty mouth of yours.” He tried to kiss me, roughly, but I turned away.

“What did Oliver do? Promise you more money? Threaten to call the cops?”

A cruel smile. “Your husband is waiting downstairs.”
The pain was getting worse. “I don’t care,” I gasped.

“Then let me explain it to you in terms you’ll understand.” He backed me into the sideboard. “You’re going on this honeymoon, if I have to drag you there myself. By the hair, if that’s how you want it.”

“That wouldn’t look so good on the video, would it?”

“We’ll fix it in editing.” He pressed harder. “Trust me… the camera will lie.”

Trust him? Not if my life depended on it. But I was starting to worry about the lack of feeling in my hands, not to mention the condition of Mrs. Murcheson’s dress. I didn’t have the strength to resist him for long… but then it occurred to me that I didn’t have to. In judo, you learn to use your opponent’s strength against him. I was no expert in self-defence, but…

“You loathsome toad.” I pretended to spit in his face, then turned my face away. “You can march me down there in chains if you want. But I’m warning you—one chance and I’m gone, heels or no heels.”

An amused snort exploded out of him. “No problem, lady. I’ll do just that.” He clamped down on my wrists, then hustled me out the door and down the hallway.
Horace and Josephine met us at the elevator. All six of us rode down in silence, the bridesmaids exhausted, the grandparents grim, and the bride pinned to the wall by the man who’d screwed her over the night before. Put that way, it sounds like a far more typical wedding party than was actually the case.

Simon was waiting by the curb, at the wheel of an old 1958 Bentley. I recognized the silver convertible as the car my father had owned at the time of the marriage; not the selfsame car, of course, as that vehicle had been junked decades ago, but like everything else in this reenactment, a faithful reproduction.

Blaine opened the door and forced me into the passenger seat. At the last moment I grabbed his tie and pulled his face close. “Let him go,” I said through clenched teeth, “or I go straight to the police and tell them exactly what you are.”

He looked shocked. “But I’m not—”

“Doesn’t really matter, does it?” I said coyly. “The accusation is enough.”

He looked behind him. “What the fuck do you want?”

“Simon. Whatever hold you’ve got on him, turn it off. Set him free.”

Blaine shrugged. “What do I care? My job’s over.” He shut the passenger door, then leaned over and snapped his fingers in Simon’s face. “That’s it, we’re done,” he said curtly, and walked away.

Simon looked confused at first, then angry, then disgusted. By that time he was looking at me. “You freak,” he spat, “I can’t believe—”

“Just drive,” I told him. “I’ll see that you get whatever Mr. Ingram promised you.” I took a deep breath. “Take me home and you’ll never see me again.”

“Deal.” He slammed the car into drive.

I wondered how much of this would make the final cut.

* 

After my tea with Mrs. Murcheson, I followed her up the stairs.

I found her bent over her vanity, head in her hands. “Who did this, Sylvia?” My voice was soft, but relentless. “Who’s responsible?”

“Leave me alone,” she said wearily. “I have to unpack.”

“Why bother? It’s not like you were really on vacation.” I grabbed her suitcase and flung it on the bed. “Someone paid you to disappear for a few days. And I bet I know who.” Oliver Ingram, that was who—I was sure of it.

She started toward me. “No! Don’t open…”
Too late. Inside the suitcase were a pair of men’s dress shoes, boxers and black socks, a shaving kit—and underneath that was a neatly folded tuxedo. In other words, the clothes Oliver Ingram had been wearing at the wedding.

Sylvia collapsed onto the bed. “Oh, shit…”

I couldn’t believe it. I stared at her, mouth agape. “… Mr. Ingram?”

She sighed and her voice changed. “Ya got me, kid. You’re not so dumb after all. Beats me why that degree is takin’ so long.”

My mind swirled. I’d been living with Mrs. Murcheson for months! Ever since my mother died and her will came into effect, with its stipulation that I was barred from the house until I received my doctorate. “What the hell’s going on?”

“I can’t tell you that. I’m legally—”

“Oh, yes you can.” I waved my finger in her face. “When the estate is settled—and it will be, eventually—who’s gonna be in charge? Me, that’s who! So if you value your continued employment, you better spill it. Now.”

So he told me.

* 

We returned to the family house in the same limousine that had borne Simon and I downtown only the day before. Home was a Victorian-era manor in the wealthy section of town, set well back from the street and surrounded by an iron fence that dated back to the nineteenth century. The security gate was the only nod to the twenty-first century, opening in response to a retina scan of the driver.

We passed through a cluster of oak trees and pulled up to the front door. This was the only home I knew, although my father had never lived here; Mother and I had moved in with her parents only after his passing.

“You have to understand,” Oliver said. “She never intended you any harm. She only wanted to re-live her wedding.”

“Yeah, I get it.” We wound our way through the entrance hall, up the curving staircase and ultimately to the master bedroom at the back of the house. The room was dark but enough daylight filtered through the curtains to show me the tiny occupant of the king-size bed. It was, of course, my mother.

Her breath came in harsh stabs. “The dress… suits you, dear. Very pretty.” She looked past me. “Oliver, is that you? God, you look… ridiculous.”

Oliver grabbed the wig from his head. “So sorry, Mrs. Lawrence.”

“You failed,” she said in a voice like broken glass.
He wrung his wig like a wet rag. “He figured it out himself. Very smart lad.”

“Shut up, Oliver. I saw… what happened.” Her gaze returned to me. “Just the raw footage, mind you. Probably won’t see… final version. Maybe it’s… just as well.”

“That’s the problem with improv,” I said. “No script.”

“Take my advice,” she wheezed. “If you want to… re-stage your wedding… with your son as the bride… don’t cheap out on the hypnotist.” She pointed a trembling finger at Oliver. “You’re fired. Get out.”

Oliver turned to leave. I stopped him. “Put on your wig, sir.” Hastily, he crammed the hairpiece onto his head. “Just so you know, you’re not fired. But from now on you’ll practice law as Sylvia Murcheson. Is that clear?”

His eyes got big. “Yes, ma’am. Thank you for the opportunity, ma’am.”

Mrs. Murcheson backed out the door, the tap of her heels fading slowly.

I faced my mother, likely for the last time, and asked Why?

“An old lady’s vanity,” she sighed. “I had to see it… one last time.”

“You had a wedding album. Not to mention the old film.”

Mother shook her head. “Wasn’t in high-def.” She fumbled with the buttons of her remote control. A flat-screen TV slid from the ceiling, coming to rest over the foot of her bed. There, in glorious freeze-frame, was the wedding tableau: the bride and groom at the alter, locked in the instant of their first wedded kiss. “At least we got… the money shot,” she wheezed.

“You could’ve just asked me. I might have agreed.”

“You couldn’t even… admit to yourself… what you are.”

“What am I?” I wasn’t sure of anything anymore, least of all that.

Her hand waved to encompass me. “This. A woman.” Her words dissolved into a fit of coughing. “A woman,” she repeated. “All this, your inheritance… but you have to be me.” She grinned. “Oliver has the… documents.”

So that was her plan. I stood looking down at her, my back stiff. “I won’t be you, Mother. But I’ll be a better Sarah Lawrence than you ever were.”

She collapsed onto her pillow, smiling. It was a ghastly sight. “All I wanted,” she sighed. “All a mother could want… from her daughter.”

I walked away. She died during the night that followed.

*
I ordered the video destroyed, but at the last moment I put aside a single copy in a safe place. If there should ever come a time when I succumb to vanity and force my own (probably adopted) son to recreate my own wedding, perhaps watching this farce will help me reconsider. Or at least avoid Mother’s big mistake and shell out for the best damn hypnotist money can rent.

In time, I grew out my hair; got breast implants; lost my testicles and underwent hormone replacement therapy—which in my case amounted to estrogen and lots of it. Sarah Lawrence became a wealthy shemale socialite, known as much for her philanthropy as for chewing through boyfriends like they were M&Ms.

I never saw Simon again, but I made sure to funnel enough money his way—via Mrs. Murcheson—for him to complete his education. Everyone else associated with the wedding video received exactly what they’d been promised, no more and no less. I bore none of them any ill will—with one notable exception.

I paid serious money to have Blaine Wolverston abducted and transformed, and I chose his fate by picking randomly from among the stories on Fictionmania. I still see him around from time to time. He’s the downstairs maid.