A secret society of women dedicated to the total feminization of males sought to turn him into a woman… but his wife soon had cause to wonder whether Geofferson was honestly all that opposed to the idea.
Dedication

To Tom...

Free fallin’ forever.

And to David...

We can be heroes,
just for one day.

Amanda Hawkins
ONE

Yvonne Janeway stared at her husband. She couldn’t have been more surprised if he’d just declared his belief in the healing powers of crystals; or that a UFO really had crashed in the desert outside Roswell and damn the government anyway for keeping the fact hidden from true believers like himself. “I thought you didn’t approve of this sort of thing,” she said, wondering if he was simply yanking her chain. Which he often did.

“I like to keep an open mind,” he said, checking his watch. They’d just arrived in the parking lot of the Crystal Palace, a New Age emporium on the north edge of Sonoma which Yvonne always insisted on visiting on their way to the cottage.

“Since when?” She shook her head. Was this the same man who in five years of marriage had never missed an opportunity to tell her that astrology was a load of bull cookies? Or that naturopath ‘doctors’ weren’t really doctors at all, or that the speed of light meant that any aliens who set out to attack Earth and ‘probe’ its citizens would be about a million years old by the time they got here.

“I’m turing over a new leaf, okay? I’m allowed to do that, aren’t I?” He opened the driver-side door. “I’ll even go first. Madame Katrina can read my future in the cards or the tea leaves or whatever the hell she uses, and I’ll listen politely and I won’t say anything negative to throw the reading off, and then I’ll thank her kindly and then you can go in. Seriously. I won’t ruin it for you.”

Yvonne stared at him. “But—why bother? What’s the point?”

He bit his lip, gazing at the emporium’s stained-glass windows, which were riotously decorated with wind chimes and dream catchers. “I just think we should take an interest in each other’s… interests. That’s all.” He looked at her with his narrow eyebrows raised. “That’s important, don’t you think?”

She drew back. “Of course I do. It’s just—”

“Good. It’s settled.” He dropped the keys into her lap and leapt out. “Browse around the store like always. I’ll find you when I’m done.” Then he was gone, into the emporium and presumably straight to the back room where Madame Katrina sat concealed beyond a curtain of rosewood beads.
Yvonne let out her breath through pursed lips. She’d been warned. Marriage was never easy; to anyone, much less to a man like Geofferson Janeway. He was an engineer, a hard worker and a good provider, but even with that going for him her mother had voiced her concerns. “Why marry a man whose view of the world is so different from yours?” Still, their personalities were a good fit and as long as they avoided talking too much (or at all) about science and New Agey ‘stuff’, as he called it, life was good. She knew her husband wasn’t about to do a one-eighty and start believing in psychics and fairies and the health benefits of aromatherapy, but if this meant no more pooh-poohing her opinions then she wasn’t about to look a gift horse in the mouth. Which in any case would be bad karma.

She adjusted the gypsy shawl draped across her back, shook out her wavy brown hair and entered the emporium. She nodded to the clerk, whose name escaped her, and trailed slowly through the figurines, where there was always something new to see. Her favorites were the unicorns. Geoff said there was no such thing, but she didn’t see how that could be. Something so pretty simply had to be real.

She was bent over a counter laden with healing crystals, seriously considering the purchase of a set of dark green Malachite hearts, when Geoff appeared beside her. He looked nervous. “Your turn,” he muttered, eyes darting from side to side.

Yvonne brushed the dust from her skirt. “How did it go?”

He shrugged. “Okay, I guess. She’s, uhm—very firm in her beliefs.” He licked his lips. “I respect that. Seriously.”

“That’s nice.” She pointed at the Malachite hearts. Time to push the envelope. “I was thinking about buying these. See what it says? They can soothe or pacify even the most restless of souls—like yours, for instance. Any objections?”

His eyes widened but he shook his head. “Not at all. You go and talk to Madame Katrina, and I’ll buy them for you.” Another gift horse. Yvonne smiled, handed him the car keys and headed for the back of the store.

The parlor behind the beaded curtain was lit in perpetual twilight, as usual, and the psychic’s inner sanctum was darker still. Katrina sat hunched over a circular table in the middle of the room, a black scarf draped over her hair. She looked up as Yvonne pushed through the second layer of beads. “Your husband,” she intoned, “is a troubled man.”

Tell me something I don’t know, Yvonne thought. She took her usual seat across the table. “Really? How did his reading go?”

The old woman shook her head. “It is not for me to say. The cards were not kind, but their message can be heard only by he—or she—who sought their guidance.
This is as it must be for all who seek the truth of the Tarot.”

“Sorry. I forgot. So, uh… what do the cards say about me?”

“The cards are not for you! Not today.” She slipped the Tarot deck into her pocket and moved a large ball of translucent green glass to the center of the table.

A crystal ball? Yvonne stared at it. “But you always read the cards for me.”

Katrina showed her teeth. “Not today. Not after what I have seen. The cards must rest. The crystal has special insight.” She rubbed the surface with a soft cloth until it gleamed in what little light seeped through the velvet curtains that covered the window at the back of the room. “Now join with me.”

Yvonne placed her hands on the tablecloth, palms up. The old woman covered them with her own dry-as-the-desert appendages. Her head bent toward the glass. “For this woman,” she murmured, “and the man whose essence lingers still… show us what lies ahead. Show us what fate has in store.”

A tiny light sparkled deep within the crystal ball. Shadows seemed to swirl across its surface. Not for the first time, Yvonne wondered what caused this effect. Was it really the work of spirits from another realm? Or as Geoff would say, could it be something more prosaic? Like a small laser hidden under the table. Katrina had been very precise about where she placed the ball, and its heavy silver base would conceal any stray reflections from the underside. But—no, no, no. Yvonne took a deep breath and dismissed the idea. You have to have faith.

“A challenge awaits you,” Katrina said, in a voice that slithered past her lips like a worried snake. “It will strike at the very heart—of your marriage.”


Katrina shook her head. “The shape is not clear. It is like nothing that has come to me before. I cannot hold the essence of it in my mind.” She lifted her hands and caressed the globe, without quite touching it. “Darkness lies ahead… but you, my girl, are not at risk. The danger belongs to your husband. His fate is unclear.”

“Geoff? What’s wrong? Is he sick?” Yvonne’s fingers twisted together. The man put her patience to the test, but still—Geoff was hers. They were a team.

The old woman waved her fingers. “Not sick. The risk is to his mind. To his soul. Perhaps he is not the man you think he is. Perhaps the man he is… will change.” She clutched at the crystal ball with both hands. She leaned forward and her eyes shone. “The risk is his, but the challenge of which I spoke—that belongs to both of you. Of this the spirits are certain. He will deal with it as best he can. That is his destiny. Your reaction to his misfortune—that is what will determine the fate of
your marriage.” She sat back. Her hands sank into her lap.

Yvonne stared at her. “I don’t understand. What’s going to happen?”

Katrina shrugged. “Spirits are often cryptic. They reveal what they choose. We must accept what is given. Please pay the cashier on your way out.”

Geoff was waiting in the car. He handed Yvonne a small paper bag; inside was the set of four Malachite hearts. “How’d it go?”

Yvonne sighed. “I might have to find a new psychic. I think she’s losing it.”

He started the car. “I dunno. She sounded pretty straight-ahead to me.”

“Geoff, she told me your soul was in danger. She said the cards weren’t kind to you. What on earth did she tell you?”

He shrugged. “Something like that. Some sort of danger is ahead, but she couldn’t figure out exactly what it was. And there was something about a challenge to our marriage.” He backed out and they headed back to the highway.

“She told me that too. What do you think it means?”

“Guess we’ll find out when it happens.” He flashed her a grin. “Whatever it is, I’m sure we’ll get through it—together. Team Janeway, right?”

“Yes thing. Go team.” But in her heart, she wasn’t so sure. Madame Katrina was never wrong. And Geoff, beneath his bravado and his habitual skepticism, was a bundle of nerves. She knew her husband well enough to sense that.

Geoff was afraid. But of what?

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The cottage was located on the shores of Atlas Lake in the Klamath Mountains of northern California. It was a timeshare Geoff had inherited from his late parents. She and Geoff had been going there since they were married; twice a year, one week at a time. Yvonne was sick of the place, stuck out in the middle of nowhere, but Geoff insisted. Family traditions are not easily discarded.

They arrived at dusk, unloaded the car and put away the groceries they’d bought in the nearest town, an hour’s drive away. The resort’s property extended halfway around the lake and included some two dozen cabins and a lodge where the paved road from the highway terminated, but the forest hid all of that from view. Standing on the front porch, Yvonne surveyed the lake and, as always, wondered whether there was anyone else here—other than the caretakers in the lodge, which was two miles distant around a bend in the shoreline. The nearest cottage was at
least a hundred yards away, on the other side of a thick stand of ponderosa pine. In other words, she thought, they were alone out here, which is what Geoff seemed to want. She herself would’ve preferred Vegas.

Sadly, as if to rub it in, there was a hint of rain in the air. Terrific. With a sigh she went inside and closed the door, shutting out the gathering dark.

Geoff was pacing the floor in the kitchenette. “Are you hungry? I’m not really all that hungry.” He opened and closed the refrigerator door, then resumed pacing.

Yvonne did a slow-count to ten. “We haven’t eaten since lunch,” she pointed out. “And we brought enough food for six people. I know it’s getting late, but wouldn’t a small dinner settle your tummy? Otherwise, knowing you, you’ll be prowling around in the middle of the night, starving hungry.”

“Yeah, sure. A small dinner. Why not?” He helped her make sandwiches and toss up a garden salad, which they ate at the kitchen table in near silence.

Yvonne was struck by how quiet it was. Back home, the TV was always on and traffic noise bled through the windows at all hours. It was peaceful up here, there was no denying that. On the other hand, with her husband almost incomunicado, she wouldn’t have minded the company of a prime time show or two. But she knew better than to say such things out loud.

Two hours later she was three chapters into a very creepy murder mystery, but her eyes wouldn’t stay open. She was done. “I’m off to bed,” she sighed, setting the novel aside. “You coming?”

“Later,” he muttered, staring hard at the computer magazine in his lap.

He must be tired, Yvonne thought as she shuffled into the bedroom, given that she couldn’t recall him actually turning any pages. Ten minutes later she was done in the bathroom, clad in a pale blue nightie and standing beside the couch. “Geoff? You shouldn’t stay up too late or you won’t feel like getting out and doing something tomorrow. We could go for a walk, if it isn’t raining. Or we could drive into town. Or down to the coast.”

Geoff looked up. He barely acknowledged her existence before his gaze slipped away; to the fireplace, to the back door, anywhere but at her. He nodded. “I won’t be long,” he said without affect. “Just need to check a few things.”

She knew what that meant. His phone, email, surfing the internet. She gave him a kiss and went to bed. A vague time later she awoke from a sound sleep when her husband climbed in next to her. She murmured ‘hello’ and snuggled deeper under the covers. But she had not yet returned to the arms of Morpheus before he was up again, muttering ‘bathroom’ and rooting around the floor for his slippers.
Yvonne sighed, counted to ten, then down from one hundred. Why not relax and fall asleep at the same time? Sadly, it didn’t work. Neither did the second hundred. Fifteen minutes later she was still listening to rain drumming down on the roof, wondering why she couldn’t hear pipes rattling in the bathroom. How long could it take? What on earth was he doing? At last, curiosity won and she got up.

The lights were on in the kitchenette. The first thing she noticed was that Geoff was bound to one of the kitchen chairs. His back was to the table, with his arms behind the chair and presumably tied together. His pajama-clad legs were individually roped to the legs of the chair. He was facing the bedroom, across the cozy expanse of the living room, and his eyes went wide when he saw Yvonne.

He wasn’t alone. There were two women next to the kitchen table, one with long sandy blonde hair, the other with equally long auburn hair. They were bent over an apparatus that resembled an old-fashioned salon hair dryer, complete with helmet-like bonnet. Two men were also present; one stationed by the front door, the other at the back door. Both of them carried handguns, which for the moment at least were not aimed at anyone in particular.

No one said a word.

Yvonne blinked a few times and found her voice. “What’s going on here?”

The blonde woman strolled into the living room, stopping between the couch and fireplace. She was wearing capri pants, black rocker boots, and a black leather jacket over a white blouse. “You must be the wife,” she said coolly. “My name is Heidi. That is Monique.” She gestured toward the redhead. “Needless to say, these are not our real names. As for them…” She made a dismissive gesture toward the man guarding the front door. “They need no names. They’re just muscle. Which is pretty much all men are good for, don’t you agree?”

In spite of herself, Yvonne drifted into the open. “What have you done to my husband? … Geoff? Are you all right? Did they hurt you?”

He shook his head. “I’m sorry. I couldn’t—they said they’d shoot if I made any noise. I was… hoping you wouldn’t wake up. Until they left.”

“I’m glad I did.” She faced the blonde woman, who seemed to be in charge. “Take whatever you want. We don’t have much. Our phones, I suppose. Geoff’s laptop.”

The redhead laughed. “Did you forget about your car?”

Yvonne bit her lip. Once the sun was up they could walk to the lodge and report the theft. It was a small price to pay for their lives. She pointed to the desk. “The keys are in the top drawer.”

Heidi shrugged. “We don’t want your car.”
“What then? We aren’t rich. We’ve only got one car and our house is mortgaged halfway to the next century. We don’t even know any rich people!”

Heidi smiled. “We don’t want your money either. Just him.” She turned toward Geoff. “Oh yes,” she mused. “He’ll do quite nicely.”

Yvonne looked blank. They wanted Geoff? What on earth for? “He’s not rich either, I hope you realize. He’s a software engineer. They don’t make very much money. No rich parents. No rich anybody.”

Heidi raised her hand. “No matter. Our interests lie elsewhere.” She pointed to the couch. “Please have a seat. This may take a while.”

Yvonne didn’t move. The man by the front door cleared his throat and tapped the barrel of his gun against his free hand. She bit her lip and sat, maintaining eye contact with Geoff. The poor man looked terrified.

Heidi returned to the kitchen table and picked up what looked like an oddly thick diver’s mask with an opaque faceplate. “The Oculus Rift,” she said. “The best virtual reality headset on the market.” She slipped the mask over Geoff’s eyes and tightened the strap, securing it to his head.

Yvonne stared. Geoff had been going on about that exact product for months. It was on his wish list for Christmas. Could this be some sort of weird make-a-wish kind of intervention? Why would they need guns?

The redhead, Monique, adjusted the built-in headphones over Geoff’s ears. “These are for noise isolation,” she said. “Your husband will hear only what we wish him to hear.” She opened a laptop on the table—it wasn’t Geoff’s, Yvonne noticed—and plugged the headset cable into it.

Heidi moved the device that resembled a hair dryer behind Geoff and lowered the heavy bonnet over his head. A second cable connected it to the laptop. “There’s really nothing to worry about,” she told Yvonne. “The procedure is perfectly safe. Although, admittedly, it’s still under development.”

Yvonne shook her head. “What is perfectly safe? What are you doing?”

Heidi smiled. “We—myself and Monique—are members of the Society for the Feminization of Most Males Everywhere. Also known as ‘SOFEMME’.”

“Most males?”

“Funny how everyone zeroes in on that. It’s simply that we can’t feminize all of them or the human race would cease to exist. True story.”

Monique clicked through several options with her mouse, muttering, “La société pour la féminisation des hommes partout,” then sat back and crossed her arms.
She was wearing jeans and a black-and-white tie-dyed peasant blouse that couldn’t have been warm enough for a night in the mountains, late spring or not.

Yvonne was confused. What was all that supposed to mean? Feminization? The image of a limp-wristed gay man sprang to mind, even though she knew perfectly well that such a stereotype was thoroughly outdated, and even offensive.

Heidi perched on the arm of an easy chair. She nodded toward Geoff. “What we have here is a method of mental indoctrination. Our intention is to take what you might call a typical ‘masculine’ cognitive pattern and transform it into a typically ‘feminine’ pattern. There’s no loss of memory, or any other gross change in personality; the transformation is more subtle. A shift in his personal style, for instance. His preference in clothing. The way he moves and speaks. These are the sort of things that distinguish male and female behavior in our society—once you get past the obvious physical differences, of course.”

“What are you saying? You want to turn Geoff into a woman?”

“Well… that’s up to him, in the long run. What we’re trying to do is feminize his mind; the way he thinks. Whether or not he chooses to go all the way and feminize his body as well, that’s his business. Or her business.”

“Well, what choice would he have? If you ‘feminize’ his mind—”

“It’s not rocket science. We can’t predict how this procedure will affect any given individual. Some take to it hook, line and sinker, and for all intents and purposes become women. With others, the effects can be more superficial. However, that should happen less often once we perfect the process.”

Yvonne began to wonder if she was still asleep. This certainly didn’t feel like a dream, but what the blonde was saying simply didn’t make sense. What would be the point of targeting random men like this?

“I know what you’re thinking,” Heidi said. “Isn’t this just hypnosis by another name? And isn’t hypnosis just a big scam? Aren’t those people up on stage acting like chickens just having a bit of fun, after the hypnotist released their social constraints and let them act out? Well, you’re right about that.” She twirled a finger toward the redhead. “Monique? Turn the screen around and let Ms. Janeway see what her husband is up to in the other world.”

Monique turned the laptop and full-screened the window. Yvonne saw a scantily-clad woman leaning into the camera, as if she were using a mirror. She was in the process of applying eyeliner to her lower lashes, carefully feathering the line.

“This isn’t just a makeup tutorial,” Heidi said. “That’s only part of it. It’s dressing up as well, and scads of other feminine imagery. We started with the sort of thing
you find online under ‘feminization hypnosis’, then added our own videos. And bear in mind that your husband is experiencing this in his own little world, as if that woman really is him sitting there fixing his face. There’s nothing to distract him from thinking he’s doing that to himself.”

Monique spoke up. “Perhaps the lady would care to hear the audio component.” She clicked the mouse and a soft female voice rose from the speaker. “You are a woman,” it said smoothly, relentlessly. “A beautiful woman. You have always been a woman. The world may once have seen you as a man—but in your mind, you have always known that you are a woman. A beautiful woman…”

“That’s terrible,” Yvonne cried. “A man shouldn’t have to listen to that sort of… twaddle! I mean—a lot of them are fragile, on the inside. They get confused.”

The women of SOFEMME laughed. “That’s a crock,” Heidi said. “Most guys could listen to this stuff all day, and end up no different than before. Certainly not in the long run, although their purses might be a bit lighter. But our process takes the indoctrination much further, and deeper.”

Monique gestured at the laptop. “You cannot hear it through this tiny speaker, but we are also feeding subliminal messages through the headset. Keywords, like ‘girlish’ and ‘feminine’, that pass too quickly to be heard with the waking mind. These are inserted into long sequences of binaural beats, which help to re-train his brain. Each ear hears a slightly different low-frequency tone, to create interference within the brain itself, which in turn increases the subject’s retention of everything he sees and hears. And this—” She tapped the base of the ‘hair dryer’. “—this is a generator of low-frequency ‘infrasound’, which is focused there.” She pointed to Geoff’s head. “The signal cannot be heard, but it creates the feeling of autorité you get in church when the pipe organ plays. It will make your husband feel as if what he is hearing is the word of God. Le mot de Dieu.”

“That’s not all,” Heidi added. “The helmet is a brain-wave sensor. By linking the audio and visual playback to activity in certain areas of the brain—the primitive hindbrain, for instance, where we process fear, or the prefrontal cortex—we can intensify the significance of the message. It also uses focused magnetic fields to target those same areas and amplify his brain waves at key moments. He won’t be able to ignore the message he’s getting. In the end, he’ll believe it.”

Yvonne’s mind was reeling. She couldn’t believe that anyone would do something so awful. “That’s… monstrous,” she managed. “How could… I mean, what did Geoff ever do to you? He’s such a gentle man. He wouldn’t hurt a fly.” She sighed. “Literally. He traps the horrid things in a glass and puts them outside.”

Monique shrugged. “It is not personal. We do not know this man.”
“We saw him in town,” Heidi said. “We knew his size and his mannerisms would make him easy to feminize.”

Yvonne stared at her husband. His arm and leg muscles were twitching. At first she thought he was trying to wriggle free of the ropes that bound him, but then she noticed his squirming was synchronized to what the lingerie-clad woman was doing on-screen. He was at least trying to follow every move she made, from the way she brushed her hair to the way she perched on the stool and crossed her legs at the knee. Yvonne shivered. He might know better with his conscious mind, but on a deeper level Geofferson Janeway seemed to believe he was that woman.

When the lady in the video picked up a perfume atomizer, Heidi was quick to grab a bottle of Miss Dior eau de toilette from the table. And when the woman squeezed the tasseled spray pump, Heidi applied a cloud of cologne to Geoff’s throat. “A little extra authenticity,” she said with an impish smile.

Yvonne ducked her head. She couldn’t watch. Geoff wasn’t the sort of manly man who could walk away from this treatment unscathed. Would he, as Heidi suggested, choose to go ‘all the way’ and turn himself into a woman, like Yvonne herself? Or would living as a man with a feminized mind make him someone she no longer knew? Either way, how could their marriage survive?

It was too much. She curled up on the couch and wept. What kind of world was it where an innocent man could be feminized against his will?
TWO

The field agents of the Society for the Feminization of Most Males Everywhere departed at first light. They packed their equipment, untied Geofferson and roared off in an old van one of the men drove up from the road. Yvonne watched them go with mixed feelings. It would’ve been easier, she thought, if they’d just taken the car and whatever else from the cottage. If they’d been no more than thieves, the situation would be easier to deal with.

She turned to Geoff, who was still sitting in the chair he’d been tied to. “We should report this,” she said. They still had their phones, although coverage was spotty in the region around Atlas Lake. Or they could drive into town.

Geoff rubbed his eyes. “What’s the point? They didn’t steal anything, did they? What are we gonna say? They tied me up and made me watch videos? It sounds so lame.”

“I know. But we can’t just let it go, can we?”

He stood up and stretched. “Why not? The cops won’t believe us anyway. Think about it—would you? A story like that?”

“Maybe not. But still—”

“Let it go, okay?” He tottered toward the bedroom. “I need to lie down. Feels like I’ve been up all night.”

“You were. The woman on the video went out dancing, after trying on half the dresses in her closet. You were twitching right along with her, every last cha-cha. You must be exhausted.”

“Yeah. My feet hurt too, from those damn heels.” He ran a hand through his hair and shook his head, the way a woman does to spill long hair over her shoulder; the way Yvonne herself often did, although his hair was nowhere near as long as hers. Their eyes met. “I’m sorry,” he said, almost too softly to hear.

“It wasn’t your fault.”

“I know. It’s for what’s likely to happen, as a result of this. That’s what I’m sorry about. I don’t… I never meant to hurt you. Remember that.”
Yvonne watched the bedroom door close. She made sure the outer doors were locked and bolted, then wrapped herself in a coarse woolen blanket and lay down on the couch. She fell asleep almost instantly. In the dream that followed, she watched as her husband was transformed into a princess—by a fairy godmother, no less, with glittering gossamer wings—who was swept off to a castle on the hill overlooking the village. There she danced and whirled from one man to the next, each more handsome than the last, until the prince of the castle claimed her for his own. When the clock struck midnight the princess tried to leave, but the prince would not let her go. Instead, with arms entwined and heads held high, she was marched off to his bedchambers for a night of passion that ladies throughout the kingdom would speak of for generations to come.

But of course, it was only a dream.

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“How do you feel?” Yvonne was busy in the kitchen when Geoff stumbled out of the bedroom at half past two in the afternoon, and that was the first question out of her mouth. Snapping at its heels were several others.

He shrugged. “Okay, I guess. Slept like the proverbial log.”

“I can imagine. Do you feel any, er… different?”

“Like how?” A lopsided grin. “As in, do I feel more feminine?”

Yvonne put down the bowl with its gooey mixture of eggs, mayo and as many spices as she had on hand. “That woman ended up making love, Geoff. To a man. I can’t imagine what that must’ve been like for you.”

He laughed. “Sure you can. You’ve done the deed, haven’t you? Well, that’s what it was like. More or less.”

“For you, I said. For a man—a straight man—to go through that, against your will. I can only imagine—”

He waved her off. “I was female at the time, right? So it wasn’t what you were thinking. It just felt… I dunno. It’s what women do.” He entered the bathroom and closed the door.

They ate lunch at the kitchen table; egg salad sandwiches and lemonade. Outside, the rain had returned and the lake was choked with fog. “I went online while you were asleep,” Yvonne said. “According to Google, there’s no such thing as ‘sofemme’. It’s a lingerie store in France, but that’s two words: ‘So’ and ‘Femme’. And Nordstrom sells a ‘So Femme’ lace garter belt. But otherwise—”
“Whaddya expect? They aren’t the kind of outfit that advertises.”
“Maybe not. But you’d think someone would have report—”
“I’ll bet they’re a start-up. They said that process of theirs was still being developed, didn’t they? So there you go.”
“All right, but isn’t that a good reason to report this? So that other—”
“Oh, no. Not me.” He wiped his mouth. Yvonne eyed him with raised eyebrows. “What—you want me to talk to some reporter and have my name splashed all over the internet as the dude some women’s group decided to feminize? Not a chance. I’m so not gonna be that guy.” He pushed his chair back and grabbed his jacket. “I need some air.”

Yvonne watched him disappear outside. “Give him space,” she muttered. She took her time finishing her own lunch. Geoff would get over this, she told herself. The whole thing was a huge shock, of course, but nothing as goofy as a ‘virtual reality feminization’ could change a person the way those strange women said it would. No sensible person could possibly believe otherwise.

Yvonne considered herself quite sensible. Then again, Geoff wasn’t what you’d call a ‘manly’ man—this according to her mother and most of her friends. He was the sensitive type. Early in their courtship they used to joke that he was ‘in touch’ with his feminine side—which may not be such a good thing after all, she mused. Not when this experience could amplify the female aspects of his personality.

* *

The next day, with clouds clinging to the treetops and the lake a drizzly fog, they decided to head home. Being at the cottage had lost its appeal, and Yvonne was concerned that the women of SOFEMME might return.

On the way, they again made a pit stop at the Crystal Palace; more from habit than anything else. “Do you want another reading?” Yvonne asked, pointing toward the back of the shop. But she already knew the answer.

Geoff shook his head. “We know what she meant,” he said. “All that stuff about me being in danger. I hate to admit it, but she was right.”

“She usually is.” There would be, Yvonne recalled, a challenge to their marriage. Was this it—Geoff hypnotized into becoming a woman? Maybe not a real woman, but some facsimile thereof? As challenges go, it seemed a bit weak.

Geoff lingered over a rack of colorful silk scarves. “These are nice,” he said idly, running his fingers through the smooth folds of cloth.
“They’re for women,” Yvonne said, biting her tongue as she said it.

Geoff shrugged. “It doesn’t seem fair, does it? Women can wear whatever they want, more or less, but if a guy so much as touches a lemon chiffon scarf everyone figures he must be gay—or that he’s a woman on the inside. What’s wrong with wearing a nice scarf?”

“Nothing at all. Buy it if you like. I don’t mind.”

“Maybe I will.” He browsed through the other scarves, and then nearby displays of jade and aventurine jewelry, before returning to the lemon chiffon. He made the purchase, and with one eye on Yvonne draped it around his neck in full view of everyone in the store. In silence, Yvonne followed him out to the car. The woman in the video, she recalled, had donned a yellow scarf for her night on the town. She prayed that Geoff wasn’t planning to do the same.

* 

Home was a detached condo in Los Gatos, southwest of San Jose. It was part of Silicon Valley, which was where Geoff worked, although as a software engineer he had a lot of flexibility in terms of hours and locations. He often chose to work from home, while Yvonne had little choice but to commute to her own job in San Jose. Human resources is a hands-on business. But leaving him there alone, near a bedroom full of women’s clothing, made her uneasy.

She got the call on her first day back at work. Geoff phoned her at the office and said, “Men can wear skirts, right? It’s not really such a big deal, is it?”

Yvonne bit her lip. “Lots of men wear kilts. If you—”

“I don’t own a kilt,” he snapped. “Neither do you. Just skirts in general.”

“It probably depends on the skirt. I’m not sure you could get away with a mini, but a sarong would be fine, especially if it’s just around the house. Or maybe a loose gypsy skirt. Something casual.”

“I was thinking more along the lines of a pencil skirt, or maybe a nice ‘hip pleat’. I love the way the fabric goes from smooth to crimped.”

Yvonne’s lips twitched. “Are you sure you have the legs for that? And don’t take this wrong, but—have you been going through my closet?”

“Lots of guys shave their legs,” he muttered. “Did I mention that I decided to take up swimming?”

“If you want to borrow one of my skirts, go ahead. I don’t mind. Just be careful, okay? Some things won’t fit you. Look for one with an elastic waist.”
When she hung up, Yvonne noticed that her office door was ajar. Hopefully no one had overheard her conversation. She didn’t want Geoff’s ‘issues’ to turn into office gossip—mostly for his sake, but also for hers. There was, of course, nothing wrong with a man who wanted to cross-dress… but it should be a choice made in private, not a matter of public debate.

Geoff was wearing shorts instead of a skirt when Yvonne got home, but she did notice that his legs were smoother than they had been—and looked pretty good to boot. They were lean enough for a woman, without a whole lot of muscle to get in the way. She wondered if he’d borrowed a pair of her stockings as well, or even pantyhose. For some skirts you’d really need to wear a half-slip, and if he opted for all that could a pair of high heels be far behind? Where do you draw the line?

“Which one did you pick?” she asked him later that night, after they had retired to adjoining beds. “Which skirt?”

She heard him sigh in the darkness. “Is this gonna be a problem?”

“No, no. I was just curious. I mean, it’s a small price to pay… Wearing a skirt around the house, or whatever else. No one has to know.”

“It was your navy blue hip-pleat. The woman in the video wore one like it, as part of a skirt suit, before she switched to the red dress.” He paused. “But, you know… it’s okay if you’d rather I get my own stuff.”

“I don’t mind you wearing my things. It’s not like this is gonna last forever.”

Silence. “How do you mean?”

“Well… the effect is bound to fade, over time. Isn’t it?”

More silence. “I don’t know. I was reading about cross-dressing online. For most people the urge never really goes away. They might put it aside when they grow up, to focus on their family or their career, but it’s always there. Inside them.”

“That’s different. They were born that way.”

He chuckled. “Nature versus nurture is a long way from being settled.”

“Okay. But the potential to cross-dress has to be there from the beginning, right? Some combination of hormones in the womb and the way they were raised. You didn’t have any of that. Mental conditioning is a temporary effect.”

Yet more silence. “Maybe. But… what if it woke something up inside me? What if all men have a feminine side, and all it needs is a jump-start to get going?”

Yvonne frowned. “What are you saying? You’re turning in a woman after all?”

“It doesn’t feel like something that’s just gonna go away… that’s all.”
Inwardly, she cringed. Of course, it couldn’t be that simple. It never was, with Geoff. “Either way, I don’t mind if you borrow my things. What are roomies for, right? As long as the item’s clean when you return it.”

“Thanks. That means a lot.” He paused. “I think I will get a few things of my own, though. Even roomies don’t share their underwear.”

As Geoff’s breath deepened into sleep, Yvonne stared up at the invisible ceiling. So he had been wearing her panties, or pantyhose, or both, and probably a slip as well. She wondered if any of her shoes would fit him. He wasn’t much taller or broader than she was, but feet are a different matter. What next? Would he go on to buy his own lingerie? Dresses? Cosmetics? Where would it end?

At last, she slept. But the dream that followed—wherein Heidi and Monique returned with a vengeance, forcing Geoff into a salon at gunpoint and somehow turning him into a flesh-and-blood female—gave her very little rest.

* 

Three days later, Yvonne returned home to find Geoff wearing shorts and a loose sweatshirt. The hug they exchanged gave her a shock. She drew back, staring. Geoff tugged on his shirt, looking embarrassed. “Sorry,” he muttered. “I got stuck into this app I’m developing. Forgot to take it off.”

The bumps on his chest stood out clearly now. Yvonne was at a loss for words. “Is that… one of my bras?”

His eyes widened. “Oh, no! I wouldn’t touch your stuff. Your undies, I mean.” Self-consciously, he touched himself. “I bought this online. Overnight delivery.”

“I see.” Yvonne hung up her coat, trying to figure out what a normal person would say next. Not that this was any kind of normal situation. “So, uhm… what did you use to stuff the cups? Kleenex? Socks? Water balloons?”

“Uh, no… I got them online. A cross-dressing store.” Slowly, he lifted his shirt. A black brassiere, filled with what appeared to be genuine breasts. The edges merged seamlessly with the skin of his chest. “They’re color-matched,” he said. “Twelve different shades. I sent them a pic. Of my chest.”

“That sounds expensive.” Her eyes rose to meet his.

His gaze fell. “Same-day service, if you pay for it.”

She shrugged. “Well, if that’s what you need to do…” She plucked the block-heel pumps from her feet, which were killing her, wondering if she should offer them to her husband. Would that appeal to him? Straight from her feet to his?
He stared down at his chest. “I had to. I just… needed to feel the proper weight, in that area. Like the woman in the video.”

“It’s okay, Geoff.” Her voice softened. “I don’t mind. Really. Just maybe don’t let anyone see you, okay? You know how people are. Word gets around.”

“Yeah, I get it. Like your husband’s some kind of freak.” He turned away.

“No! I don’t think that—you know I don’t. It’s the neighbors I worry about. They might not understand.”

“I know. I’m sensitive to all that. God, you have no idea.” Armed folded, he stared out through the living room window at the street. “I promise—no one out there is ever gonna see me looking like some dude in drag.”

Yvonne nodded. “That’s all I ask.” But a part of her wondered: if Geoff were to go all-out and dress like she did—lingerie from the skin out and a nice dress, nothing outlandish, plus a realistic wig and light makeup—would he actually look like a man in drag? Or would he look like the real thing? The answer wasn’t obvious and that bothered her. But it seemed inevitable that she would soon find out.

* Yvonne car-pooled to and from the office, with four other women who worked in the same skyscraper and lived within a few blocks of one another. On the days she was a passenger, she often chose to walk home from the driver’s house, weather permitting. Which is how she came to be strolling down her block at quarter to six on a warm but not-too-hot evening, to find a battered white van parked in front of their condo. As she approached, it pulled away from the curb and moved slowly up the street. The driver gave her a quick wave, before roaring off in a cloud of unburnt oil. Yvonne felt a chill race through her.

It was Heidi. ●
THREE

Fearing the worst, Yvonne hurried inside. She found her husband tied to a chair in the living room, his mouth sealed with duct tape. The moment she saw him, she stopped, barely able to grasp what her eyes saw. Geoff was wearing a short black dress, black stockings and a pair of white-and-black peep-toe pumps. His ankles were tied together. A wide belt encircled his waist and a loose-link gold chain fell across a scoop neckline. The ensemble would not have looked out of place on any of the women at work, herself included. But it was his face and hair that held her attention. He really did look like a woman.

Her jaw sagged. “Geoff? Is that you?” Long hair fell across his shoulders—it had to be a wig, but it looked so real. His ears were pierced with tiny studs, and… had his eyebrows been that thin this morning? Maybe they had. She’d almost stopped noticing all the feminine attributes he’d been accumulating.

The ‘female’ in the chair ‘mmmphed’.

Yvonne stepped closer. “I saw Heidi leave. From the looks of things, I’d say she just gave you another dose of video feminization. Is that what happened?”

The woman nodded, struggling with the ropes that bound her wrists.

“Did she also make you put on that cute little dress, which I’ve never seen before? And those darling shoes, which don’t belong to me? And the wig?”

The woman’s gaze fell. Reluctantly, she shook her head.

“I see.” Yvonne pursed her lips. “I wonder how she found out where we live.” She peeled the tape from the woman’s mouth, freed her hands and unwound the rope that secured her torso to the chair.

“Oh, god—I’m so sorry you had to see this.” Geoff rubbed his wrists and set to work on the rope around his ankles. “She said a friend of hers at the DMV ran our plates. She threatened to send pictures of me to everyone at work, if I didn’t cooperate. I knew she just wanted to make me watch that video agai—”

“And she tied you up anyway? In spite of you being so agreeable?”

“It was part of the treatment.” He flexed his nylon-clad legs and stood.
Yvonne looked her husband over. He did not look like a man in drag. “So… you were dressed like this when she got here. Let me guess. You bought the dress and the shoes online. Nice fit, by the way.”

“I dress while you’re at work. Not every day, but… fairly often.”

“I see you got your ears pierced.” She held up her hand. “I know, lots of guys do that. Very few of them wind up looking quite so pretty, of course.”

“I’m sorry. I’ll go change.” He paced across the carpet, perfectly at ease in the narrow heels, heading for the staircase.

“Don’t bother.” She took a seat on the couch and patted the cushion next to her. “Sit. We need to talk.” Geoff hesitated, then parked himself, neatly smoothing his skirt under his derrière. Yvonne studied him. “Was it the same as last time?” she asked. “The same equipment? The same virtual world?”

He sat with his knees together, staring across the room. “Same equipment. She managed to get it all packed up and loaded into her car before you got home. The video was different. It was the same woman, fixing her face and dressing, but this time she was getting ready for work. Subtle makeup and a tailored skirt suit.” He tugged idly at his hem. “Then the scene shifted to her office. Chatting with other women. Giving a presentation to a bunch of men in a meeting room. I think she was supposed to be in sales or marketing.”

“That doesn’t sound too bad. Not like last time.” Geoff hung his head. “She had a quickie with her boss.”

“Oh my. How shall I put this… was it ‘upstairs’ or ‘downstairs’?”

He chewed his lip. “Both. First under his desk, then on top of it.”

“I’m sorry to hear that. Must be a tough thing to go through.”

He shrugged. “It’s what women do.”

“You aren’t a woman, dear, in spite of your appearance. And no, that is not what women do. Surprisingly, very few of us have intercourse with our bosses—at work or anywhere else. No one I know would put up with that kind of crap.”

Geoff glanced at her, eyes wide. “I know. Really, I do.” He stared at the floor. “It’s this feminization treatment. It goes overboard with the femme stuff, probably to reinforce the female role it puts me into.”

“Well, obviously. I can only imagine how difficult it would be, to think of yourself as a man when you’re flat on your back, skirt hiked up, legs in the air, while some dumb alpha male is going to town on your pussy. That’s life-changing.”
A haunted look crossed his face. “… it kind of is.”

Yvonne gave her husband’s thigh a quick squeeze. “Let’s put that aside. You were dressed up before Heidi arrived—head to toe, just like a real woman. In your own clothing, no less. What I want to know is this: what comes next?”

Under the blush he was wearing, his cheeks grew redder. “I—I’m not sure what you mean. I was planing to get changed…”

“Geoff, where is this going? Are you planning to dress like this all the time? Are you actually 

becoming a woman? Is surgery in your future?”

He gulped. “I’m not transsexual. I don’t feel I’m the wrong sex on the inside. And I’m not planning to femulate full-time either. It’s just plain-jane cross-dressing.”

He sat back, his fingers twisting together. “I don’t expect you to understand. It’s like having this overpowering itch… you just have to scratch it.”

Yvonne sighed. “Femulate?”

“That’s when a cross-dresser presents himself in public as a regular woman. It’s not going over the top like drag queens do. It’s just ‘passing’ as female.”

“That doesn’t sound so bad. Uhm… you do know there’s nothing wrong with a man who wants to become a woman—don’t you?”

He looked pained. “Sure. But that’s not what I am.”

“I shouldn’t have to ask, but here goes. Exactly what are you?”

He turned his head, staring at the wall. “I’m—” His breath caught. “Because of what those women did, I… cross-dress.”

“So you aren’t a woman, but—because of all that feminization—you feel you have to dress up like one. From time to time. To scratch that itch.”

“Yeah. Some guys… you know, they can throw on a wig and a dress and that does it for them. But for some of us, that isn’t enough.”

“Guys like you, I assume. You need to femulate. But not full-time.”

“I didn’t ask to be like this! It wasn’t my choice.”

“I know. Those awful women forced this on you. Forced feminization.”

“No one really has a choice,” he said in a soft voice that could easily belong to one of her girlfriends. “Some people are born this way. Other guys end up having their brains re-programmed.” He managed a laugh. “Either way, it’s just something you have to figure out as you go. There’s no user manual.”

“It’s okay,” Yvonne said, just as softly. “We’ll figure it out together.”
“Thanks. I needed to hear that.” He sighed. “Feels like I’ve been waiting my whole life... for someone to understand me.”

She took his hand. “Does being this girl, now and then... scratch the itch?”

A shy nod. “I just need to ‘pass’. Don’t ask me why. I just do.”

“No problem. You pass very well, as it happens. However...” She smiled. “I can’t very well call you ‘Geoff’ when you look like *that*, can I?”

“Sheila.” His lashes fluttered downward.

* 

A few days later Yvonne was at work when she received an email on her personal account. It had been sent to Geoff’s home account, and cc-ed to her. The message was from Heidi, and it was *not* good news.

Had enough? Your next session might turn you into a sex-mad bimbo, or an uptight school teacher with a bun, or it might send you on a one-way trip to a convent. Don’t want to risk it? You have a choice. It’s called $3450 (just because), in small-ish bills. Twenties will do, except for the last fifty which must be in $5 bills with a four-leaf clover drawn in the lower left corner (because whimsy). Get it together and I’ll be in touch about the drop point. Think about it, princess. Your next feminization will take place in ONE WEEK. All secrets will be revealed. — Heidi

What the hell? And *how* the hell, Yvonne fumed, did the bitch get ahold of their contact information? Did she have a friend in their local ISP as well?

She arrived home to find Geoff sprawled on the couch, staring at the ceiling, clad in shorts and a T-shirt. He didn’t look female, but not all that male either. Shaved legs, clear skin and a slender physique left him squarely in the gray area between genders. “I guess you saw the message,” he said.

“What on earth is going on here? I thought the SOFEMME deal was to feminize everyone and their dog. Why would she let you *buy* your way out?” She dropped into an easy chair.

Geoff sighed. “She’s gone rogue.”

“A rogue agent of—what was it again?—the Society for the Feminization of Most Males? There’s something you don’t hear every day.”

“Most males everywhere. I guess she’s not as dedicated to the cause as we thought.” He shook his head, looking disappointed. “Just when you think you can trust someone...”
“I still don’t get it.” Yvonne kicked off her shoes. “If it was money they were after, why didn’t they steal our stuff? They could’ve taken our car and left us stranded at the cottage—probably sold it to a chop-shop before we could call the cops. They could’ve taken your computer, our wallets and cell phones… The other day, she could’ve taken the jewelry, the silverware… the list goes on.”

“Cash is easier to handle. Besides, I think this is just Heidi. She probably doesn’t want the others to know.”

“Huh. Maybe we should tell them. Serve her right to rat her out.”

“Uh-uh. Don’t know where to find ‘em. They’re, uh—covert.”

“Whatever. We can let the police worry about that.”

His head whipped around. “N—no, we can’t do that! I’d be exposed.”

“Well, we can’t just knuckle under. Pick your poison.”

He swung his feet to the floor. “It isn’t that much money. We can afford it. I make more than that every month, even after taxes.”

“How about when she comes back next month and wants another three thousand, four hundred and fifty bucks, and then another after that? It’ll never stop!”

“I don’t think she’s like that.”

“Like you know her so well. You’re talking about our money, Geoff.”

“I know. I need you to trust me on this one.”

“For such a classy dame, you sure fight dirty.” She stood up and headed for the bedroom. “But if she does come back for more, then we go to the police. That’s where I draw the line. Somebody has to,” she muttered to herself as she mounted the stairs. If it was up to Geoff, he’d hand over the deed to the house rather than be outed as a man who—god forbid—felt the need to dress up as a woman. What on earth was so awful about a guy wearing women’s clothing? Why get so bent out of shape about it? Men, she mused, were hard to figure out.

*  

They received a second message several days later, from the same untraceable email address. Geoff, disguised as a woman, was to bring a plain brown bag with the cash to Seal Rock in Santa Cruz. Not to the rock itself, of course, since it lay offshore, but to a nearby lookout. Any sign of police and the deal was off. Pictures would be mailed, and Geoff could look forward to a feminization that would render him unable to pass as male even if he wanted to.
The drop was set for Friday afternoon. Yvonne took the day off work and watched Geoff turn himself into Sheila. He began, curiously enough, with his hair. “I don’t mean to nitpick,” she said, sitting cross-legged on his bed, “but wouldn’t it be easier to put the wig on last?”

He shrugged. “Maybe. But it wouldn’t feel very authentic.” He finished pinning the womanly mane to his own hair, using a series of tiny clips sewn into the lining. “Think of it this way,” he added, running his fingers through what were now shoulder-length tresses. “Do you put your hair on last?”

“Don’t have to. It’s part of the basic package.”

“Exactly. It’s part of you.” He gathered his hair into a loose ponytail. “I learned it from the feminization video. The first thing you have to do is turn yourself into a woman. After that, you can dress up like one.”

“But it takes more than long hair to… oh.” She watched as Geoff peeled a pair of lifelike breast forms from their box and applied them to his chest. They were a good match to his skin and the seams were hard to see. Clutching both breasts with one arm, he picked up a pair of flesh-colored panties with a vagina sculpted into the crotch. “I’ll be back,” he muttered, avoiding eye contact. He disappeared into the en-suite bathroom.

Twenty minutes passed. When the door opened, a young woman emerged, clad in regulation bra and panties, looking very much like Yvonne did after a shower in which she didn’t wash her hair. *That isn’t my husband*, Yvonne thought. The girl was obviously female. Her breasts bounced lightly with each step, and the subtle outline of a camel-toe could be glimpsed between her legs. This was Sheila.

“I see what you mean,” Yvonne said. She leaned against the wall as Sheila stepped into a black half-slip. “I guess you bought that stuff online too.”

“You can buy anything online.” The girl added a matching camisole, then went to the closet. “Mind if I borrow that yoke-waist flutter skirt of yours?”

Yvonne was shocked. How did he… “Are you sure it fits? It’s got a zip—”

“Uh, yeah. It fits.” She removed the knee-length black skirt from its hanger and glanced at Yvonne. “I kinda wore it once or twice.” She pulled it over her hips, buttoned it without looking and tugged the zipper closed.

Yvonne shook her head. “Well, you’re welcome to it.”

Sheila retrieved a pair of lace-top thigh-highs from a cardboard box. She rolled the off-black stockings up her legs, then stepped into the same pair of bicolor pumps she had been tied-up in. Yvonne marveled at the ease she exhibited in such narrow heels. All this in only three weeks.
Sheila hesitated, then returned to the closet. She rifled through Yvonne’s clothing and emerged with a long-sleeved silk blouse—yellow and blue orchids splashed across a black background. “This totally goes with the skirt,” she said, holding the garment against her body. “Do you mind?”

“Knock yourself out.” Yvonne chewed her lip as Sheila slid her arms into the sleeves, wrapped the front across her chest and knotted the sash around her waist. The girl certainly knew her way around Yvonne’s side of the closet. Yvonne struggled to find the words to express how she felt. “This ‘feminization’ process they used… it’s the real deal, isn’t it?”

“How do you mean?” Sheila sank onto the stool in front of Yvonne’s vanity. Their eyes met in the mirror.

“One session as a woman in that virtual world,” Yvonne said, “with the infrasound going and that machine to monitor your brain waves, and you turn into the kind of man who… well, let’s just say that not many men have even heard of a yoke-waist skirt. Not many would be able to coordinate their outfit like that.”

Sheila nodded. “It’s weird for me too. I’ve learned so much since then… reading blogs about cross-dressing, watching makeover videos… It was like discovering a part of myself I never knew existed.” She studied the array of cosmetics before her and chose a tube of cream foundation from among several.

Yvonne gazed out the window, looking west. “I guess I’m still trying to wrap my head around… you know, that something like this is even possible.”

“No kidding. Try living it.” She dotted the cream all over her face and neck, and worked it into her skin. With a wide brush she dusted loose powder over the area and waited for it to set.

Yvonne watched in silence. “I won’t pretend to understand what you’re going through, but I really do sympathize. Whatever you feel you have to do, to scratch that itch… I’m here to help.”

Sheila’s shoulders slumped. She stared at the array of makeup as though she was seeing it for the first time. “I… don’t deserve someone like you.”

“Sure you do. You’re one of the kindest, gentlest—”

“I’m a freak.” She waved off Yvonne’s denial. “Let’s just make the best of this, okay? I need to finish.” What followed was a master class in facial contouring. In spite of herself, Yvonne was fascinated. Some areas, such as the cheeks, were subtly darkened; others were lightened to make them less noticeable. Once the colors had been artfully blended one into the other, the entire shape and profile of Sheila’s face changed. Then she unpinned her hair and shook it loose.
Yvonne stared. The long hair falling onto her shoulders made the girl’s nose and mouth appear even more delicate, more feminine, than the cosmetics alone had accomplished. “You learned to do all that… in the last three weeks?”

Sheila’s shoulders tensed. Again their eyes met in the mirror. “That machine… it made me want to do these things. To watch tutorials on how to apply makeup, male-to-female transformations… You wouldn’t believe how much of it there is, on YouTube and elsewhere. Really detailed information.”

“Well, seeing is believing.” She stood up and straightened her jeans. “I’m just surprised I have any makeup left.”

“I bought my own.” Sheila took a brush to her hair and worked until it flowed in smooth waves past her shoulders, ending in a froth of loose curls a third of the way down her back.

Yvonne moved to the dormer window overlooking the street. She peered out, then closed the curtains, wondering if Heidi might be watching the house. “We should probably go. God knows what that woman will do if we’re late.”

“Nearly there.” Sheila applied lipstick and eye makeup. Her touch with eyeliner and eye shadow was light, resulting in a subtle daytime look. She spritzed on eau de toilette and added the same necklace and earrings she’d worn before. Finally, she chose to accent the outfit with—surprise, surprise—a lemon chiffon scarf.

Yvonne beheld a woman who not only bore little resemblance to her husband, but was apparently more stylish and feminine than she was. For the road trip Yvonne was wearing jeans, walking shoes and a casual shirt, with her long hair pulled back into a ponytail. There was no denying it: if either of them looked more like a man, it was her.

“I’ll drive,” Yvonne said. “A pretty little thing like you shouldn’t have to get her hands dirty.” Surprised, she realized that she meant it.

Sheila just nodded, concealing her own shy smile. She slung a handbag over her shoulder and picked up the paper bag that held precisely one hundred and eighty small bills, ten of them with a four-leaf clover drawn in one corner. Yvonne had told him he was crazy to bother with that, but Geoff wasn’t willing to take any chances. Not with his future as a man at stake.

But as they headed for the car, Yvonne couldn’t help wondering if that ship had already sailed. Sheila looked like she was here to stay. ●
FOUR

They parked on Cliff Drive across from the beach and strolled down past the old lighthouse, which doubled as a surfing museum, and took the path that followed the edge of the cliff. Seal Rock was readily visible offshore, as were a fair number of seals, sunning themselves atop the tiny island.

“Where the hell is she?” Yvonne muttered, scanning the sparse crowd of tourists for a familiar face.

“She said she’d find us.” Sheila gripped the paper bag as if her life depended on it, and perhaps it did. Fortuitously, for both the bag and Sheila’s long hair, the air was calm with little in the way of surf and even less onshore breeze.

“She’d better.” Yvonne fingered the iPhone in her pocket, resisting the urge to check the app. She already knew it was working.

Heidi was waiting for them at the tip of Point Santa Cruz. She fired a wolf-whistle at the skirt-clad Sheila, grinning fiercely. “Check her out! This feminization stuff is fierce, innit? Lemme see the cash.”

Sheila handed over the paper bag. Heidi peeked inside but didn’t bother to count the bundles. “I know you’re good for it,” she said. “No one in their right mind would risk being feminized again. Look what it did so far.” She laughed gaily. “Ta-ta, ladies. Do check out Steamer Lane while you’re here. Lots of surfer dudes on the sand this time of day. You might get lucky.”

She sauntered off south, toward the city’s main beach. “Lucky, my ass,” Yvonne said, whipping out her iPhone. “That bitch’s luck just ran out.”

Sheila plucked at the strands of hair across her face. “Wha—what are you talking about?”

“Watch and learn, babe. If you’re gonna be a girl, you need to learn how to deal with the Cruella de Vils of the world.” She led the way back to their car and Sheila took the wheel. “No one could walk that fast,” she muttered, studying her phone as they drove. “Has to be a vehicle. Probably that ratty old SUV.”

Sheila moaned. “Oh my god. You tagged the money.” [HERE]
“Sure did. Spy store special: mini GPS tracker, glued under a fold in the bottom of
the bag. She’ll never know it’s there. She’ll probably toss the bag when she gets
where she’s going, but by then we’ll know where that is.”

“Can’t we just go home? These aren’t people you should mess with.”

“Who’s messing? I’m just gonna tell SOFEMME what Heidi’s up to. After that,
it’s up to them. We probably won’t get the money back, but that blonde battle-axe
won’t get to enjoy it either.”

The tracker drifted inland and across the river, toward the cross-town highway. “I
still think we should go home,” Sheila said, slowing as they neared the on-ramp.
“How’s that sound? Can I turn left?”

“That’s just the feminization talking. Steady as she goes.” Ten minutes later the
icon came to a halt. “That’s weird. It stopped at a mall.” The retail district seemed
like an odd location for a secretive organization like SOFEMME, but who was she
to judge? Maybe newly feminized males needed to be near the shops.

They circled the mall while Yvonne decided where to park. From there, the target
was one block east. Approaching the hideout on foot seemed like the thing to do,
if her readings of Nancy Drew were anything to go by. They strolled along a line
of storefronts as the clickety-clack of Sheila’s heels grew slower. When she finally
ground to a stop, Yvonne lost her patience. “What the hell is your problem?”

Sheila avoided her gaze. “I just… don’t want to get feminized again, is all.”

“My god, look at yourself! What difference could it possibly make? Anyway, I
think this is it.” Beside them was a display window for the New You Too ‘concept
salon’ and boutique, which was packed with hair products, airbrushed photos of
female models, and a variety of wigs. “Whaddya know,” Yvonne said slyly, “they
do cross-dresser makeovers. Sure didn’t see that coming.” She pointed to a small
sign in the lower corner. “It’s ‘by appointment only’, though, so I guess you’re out
of luck.” She moved toward the door.

Sheila didn’t budge.

“You can’t stay here,” Yvonne said. “I might need your help.” She came back and
put her hand on Sheila’s shoulder. She was long past thinking of the girl as her
husband. “Look, I know you’re nervous, but—here’s a thought—just take a deep
breath and try to do what Geoff would do, if he was here.”

Sheila took a deep breath. Still nothing.

“I’ll do the talking, okay? All you have to do is stand there and look feminine.”

Reluctantly, Sheila nodded. “All right. I’ll try.”
Yvonne faked a smile. “That’s all I ask.”

A bell over the door tinkled as they stepped into the air-conditioned interior. A row of styling chairs ran down the left side of the room, facing a long wall mirror, and several women—each attended by a stylist—were in various stages of having their hair coiffed. The room was sparsely decorated in California Casual, with soft colors, a faux stone floor and lots of sunshine from a row of narrow skylights. Yvonne lowered her voice. “Doesn’t look much like the HQ of a top-secret outfit like SOFEMME, does it?”

“It’s a front,” Sheila whispered back. “For all we know, those could all be guys.”

“Seriously?” Yvonne pulled a face. “If they are, you got off easy.”

One of the stylists made her way to the front desk. “Welcome to the New You Too, ladies. What can we do-you for?”

Yvonne glanced at Sheila and mouthed ‘play along’. “My friend here—she needs a mani-pedi in the worst way.” Sheila shook her head and plucked at Yvonne’s sleeve. “She’s a little shy. Doesn’t get out much. Can you fit her in?”

The stylist grinned. “Sure, why not. Our nail tech is on break, but I think I can talk her down. She likes a challenge. What’s the name?”

Yvonne ignored her husband’s pleading eyes. “Sheila.”

“Sweet. Guys think it’s sexy.” She added an entry to the appointment book. “I’ll take you through now,” she said, rounding the counter.

Yvonne moved toward the waiting area. “By the way, we heard about this place from a girl we met the other day, at a party. Heidi—tall, blonde, long hair? Black leather jacket? She might work here.”

“No ‘Heidi’ here,” the stylist said, taking Sheila’s arm. “Kinda sounds like Tabbi, though. She just came in, if you’d like to say hi.”

“That’s okay. She probably wouldn’t remember.”

The stylist half-dragged Sheila into the back of the salon. Yvonne hoped she wasn’t delivering her husband into the hands of SOFEMME for yet another feminization. God knows what effects a third session would have.

She found a seat in the waiting room and pretended to leaf through a two-year-old issue of Cosmo. The salon certainly didn’t look like it had anything to do with the Society for the Feminization of Most Males whatever, but on the other hand… what would such a place actually look like? The salon’s focus on beauty did seem appropriate, and they certainly had the necessary equipment to feminize people. But she was pretty sure the women in the chairs were the real mccoys. Maybe the
place was an everyday salon during working hours, and by night—ground zero of forced feminization for all of central California. How could you tell?

Back to the problem at hand. She needed to find someone in SOFEMME so she could spill the beans about Heidi, or whatever her name was. But the stylists could easily be normal employees. SOFEMME agents weren’t likely to announce themselves, or admit to it when confronted, so who could she talk to?

Yvonne was still considering her options, and was halfway through an article on how to tell the difference between real and faux leather, when the bell on the door tinkled. A woman with long auburn hair entered the salon.

Their eyes met. A startled look crossed the redhead’s face.

It was Monique.

“Wha—?” The newcomer glanced around the salon, apparently hoping not to be overheard, then lowered her voice. “What are you doing here?”

Yvonne closed the magazine and set it aside. “My husband,” she began, in a voice that could melt glass, “is back there receiving a full-body manicure. Full credit to you and your ridiculous group, thank you very much.”

“Really? He’s here?” Monique slipped into a nearby chair and kept her voice low. “Dressed up and everything?”

“Of course, dressed up! Skirt, blouse, fake tits—the whole nine yards! What did you think would happen when you feminized the poor man?”

“Oh… Je suis désolé. But you know,” she added, “there is really nothing wrong with cross-dressing. Many men do it.”

“I know that! But at least they have a choice. What choice did Geoff have?”

Monique shrugged. “Most men don’t have a choice; not really. The ‘nature versus nurture’ debate has not been settled, but I feel that it must be—how is it said? A combination of genes and their activités in childhood.”

“You’re missing the point,” Yvonne said coldly. “I wouldn’t mind if Geoff was a run-of-the-mill cross-dresser. That happens. It’s just life. But you and your group turned him into one, against his will. By force. That’s wrong.”

Monique stared at the floor. “I do see your point,” she muttered.

“It’s a bit late for an apology. The man calls himself ‘Sheila’ now. I’m serious, he wouldn’t look out of place in that crowd of debutantes.” She gestured at the row of women facing themselves in the mirror. “Aside from that,” she added, leaning closer, “do you know what your colleague is up to? I’m talking about Heidi, or
whatever her name is.” The other woman was silent. “She’s extorting money from your feminized ‘clients’,” Yvonne said, “under the threat of further feminization. So—” She sat back, arms folded. “What do you say to that?”

“She extorted money—?” Monique clenched her fingers. “That greedy pute. I had no—”

“I came home two weeks ago, to find Heidi just leaving—and my husband tied up in our living room, fully cross-dressed. He’d been re-feminized with that machine of yours. A few days later, we received a blackmail letter.” She described the note and the exchange at Seal Rock.

Monique was tight-lipped. “I did not know. I’m sorry.”

“Never mind that. What are you gonna do about it?”

“Moi? I, uh… I suppose I could speak to ‘Heidi’ about—”

“Uh-uh. No way. Go over her head. Talk to her boss—whoever the hell runs your ‘society’. You don’t have to tell me who that is, but that person has to come down on Heidi with both feet. Set her on the straight and narrow—or whatever passes for that in a group that runs around feminizing men against their will.”

“Whoever runs…” Monique touched her mouth and looked away. A sigh escaped her lips. “Actually… I don’t know who the leader is. It was Heidi who got me involved in this. We both work here.”

“What about those men who were with you? At the cottage.”

“That was my brother and his friend. They are not part of the group. I am ashamed to say this, but they did it for beer money.”

Yvonne frowned. “Is it possible Heidi herself is in charge?” A moment later she was struck by another thought. “Oh my god… maybe Heidi created this so-called ‘feminization society’ just to make money!”

Monique bit her lip, gazing up at the skylight. “I suppose that’s possible.”

“Girlfriend, you’ve been had. You’ve been used. I don’t how many men you’ve feminized, but I bet Heidi’s extorting money from all of ‘em. Thirty-five hundred bucks from us for starters; god knows how much from the others. I bet she’s rolling in cash by now, like Scrooge McDuck in one of his moods.”

“I doubt it. She has a certain fondness for les jeux, you know. Gambling.”

In spite herself, Yvonne smiled. Her adversary had a weakness, and in the right light any advantage, however small, can become a weapon. “I say we call her bluff,” she urged. “Confront her. Tell her we know what’s going on. Trash that
equipment she’s carting around and the bitch is out of business.”

Monique nodded. “Yes. This has gone too far. It must stop.”

Yvonne stood up. “Are you with me?”

Monique rose as well, though she looked uneasy. “She should be in the employee lounge, preparing for her shift. I’ll take you there.”

But the only person in the lounge was the salon’s nail technician, who was still on her break and totally engrossed in a lurid romance novel. Heidi was nowhere to be found. And neither was Geofferson Janeway. ●
Their route led east through the Mojave Desert, which looked to Yvonne like the fast track to Hades. Nothing but scrubland and a highway that went on forever. Fortunately, it was high midnight, the sky was packed with glittering stars, and the heat was almost bearable. Still, what a time for the AC to go belly-up.

She glanced at her phone, for about the millionth time since leaving the New You Too salon. The tracker showed up as a pulsing icon, hovering over a road map of southeastern California. A second icon marked her own position. Both were on the same interstate, but the tracker had a wide lead that was only getting wider. “Tabbi drives as one possessed,” Monique had warned her, before they set out. “She knows this road très bien.”

“Not her first time in Vegas, I take it.”

“Mais oui. It’s her second home.”

Heidi was approaching the Nevada border and would reach ‘sin city’ before sunup—if indeed that was her destination. Yvonne hoped the thieving bitch would at least stop there for awhile. In the passenger seat, Monique began to stir. She’d drifted off to sleep after their pit stop in Bakersfield—for fuel, a ladies’ room and a Del Taco drive-thru—but she was awake now, rubbing her eyes and staring out the window. “Merde… Where we are?”

“Half past the middle of nowhere. I’m pretty sure this is what ACDC had in mind when they came up with ‘Highway to Hell’.”

A muted laugh. “I would not have taken you for a metalhead.”

“Dated one in high school. Longest three weeks of my life.”

“You’re lucky. My father only let me date nice boys. They’re safe.”

“Is that why you got mixed up in this feminization business—to make the world safe for nice girls?” Yvonne wagged her finger in the darkness. “If so, you might want to revisit your choice of targets. Geoff is no threat to anyone. He was one of the good guys… make that, is one of the good guys.”

Monique sighed. “As I said, it was all Tabbi. Or Heidi, if you prefer. I was simply
in it for the money. I suppose I thought it might be good for a laugh, like one of those hidden-camera shows.” She glanced at Yvonne. “Désolée.”

“I guess it could be, if you looked at it right. Maybe someday I’ll be able to see it that way. Right now…” She bit her lip and checked the tracker. “I just wish he’d answer his phone.”

“I’m sure it’s turned off. Heidi would not hurt him.”

“I hope you’re right. But I need to be sure. I… I need to see him.”

“Of course.” She fell silent but Yvonne felt her gaze. “You look exhausted, mon amie. Would you like me to drive?”

Yvonne stared at her. “You? One of the chowderheads who deliberately feminized my husband? How could I possibly trust you? Christ—” She rubbed her eyes. “I’d probably wake up in a dungeon someplace… locked up in SOFEMME’s fortress of solitude, deep under Cheyenne Mountain.”

“That would be NORAD. Or something to do with Superman. As far as I know, the group does not own any such property.”

“Smart move. Why own when you can lease?” She waved off the reply. “Never mind. I get it. You better drive; I’m starting to see things.” Things like her once-happy marriage fading into the sunset, if this feminization nonsense continued its present course. She pulled over and they traded seats.

Now it was Yvonne’s turn to stare pensively at the passing desert. Between the ruined landscape and the bowl of glittering black that cut them off from the rest of the world she felt very small indeed—and that struck her as the most trite insight imaginable given the situation. Who wouldn’t feel just a wee bit tiny in the face of such immensity? What importance did the feminization of her husband have in the grand scheme of the universe?

Annoyed with herself, Yvonne's muse returned to the problem at hand. “Why do you suppose,” she mused, “that some men actually want to be feminized?” Not Geoff, she reminded herself; he had to be forced. But there were a lot of cross-dressers out there in the world who fantasized about that sort of thing on a regular basis. She’d been reading up on the subject.

Monique was silent. “They want the experience, I suppose,” she said, eventually. “But without the guilt.”

“Sure, sure—but why? Why all this guilt? You and I are feminine and there’s nothing wrong with that. Some girls are more feminine than others, but that’s okay too. We can be as femme or as butch as we want and it’s no one’s biz but our own. Why can’t men be the same way?”
“Perhaps they are. To an extent. It isn’t such a big deal, is it? If one man isn’t quite as masculine as the next…” Her voice trailed into the darkness.

Neither of them, Yvonne realized, believed that for a second. In the male world there was a definite pecking order—no pun intended—based on one’s masculine traits. It was certainly possible that women were freer to be themselves, at least to a certain extent. But to a man like Geoff, gender was a straightjacket.

“Perhaps some women fantasize about being ‘masculinized’.”

“Could be. But they sure as hell aren’t writing about it on the Internet.”

Monique laughed. “Mai oui. I have yet to meet such a woman. Perhaps that has something to do with my line of work.”

Yvonne glanced at the redhead, barely visible in the dark. How had it come to this? Not long ago this woman had been feminizing her husband at gunpoint; now here she was gunning their car across a post-apocalyptic wasteland. When life throws you a curveball, it can sure as hell be a doozy. “You know,” she said at length, “it occurs to me, I still don’t know your real name.”

Monique drew a quick breath. “Given the circumstances, mon cherie, I would just as soon leave my real name out of this.”

* 

It was nearly noon by the time they reached Las Vegas. They criss-crossed the city several times trying to get a definite fix on the tracker. It had stopped moving, but the location kept hopping around as the signal was picked up by different base stations. Triangulating finally led them to a parking lot outside a small casino at the northern end of the Strip: the Viridian Queen. It wasn’t one of the city’s premiere attractions, Yvonne realized; more like one of its lesser lights.

Monique tsk-tsked as they got out of the car. “Heidi has become too well known in most of the larger hotels. She may have been banned in some places.”

Yvonne marched toward the battered white van. “Isn’t that how they make their money? Bleeding dry the ones who can’t stop?”

“To a point. But some establishments are more responsible than others. This does not appear to be one of those,” she added, eyeing the plain three-story building.

Yvonne peered through the driver-side window, then moved to the passenger side. “The bag’s on the floor,” she said. “The track ends here.”

Monique cocked an eyebrow. “Does it? We know where she is. There is only one place Heidi could be, when cash she has in hand.”
They found the blonde woman hunched over a blackjack table, zealously guarding her cards from prying eyes. She laughed as Yvonne slipped onto the neighboring stool. “You, I was expecting,” she said, wagging her finger. “Her, not so much,” she added, jerking a thumb at Monique.

Yvonne was exhausted. “…expecting me?” she muttered, rubbing her eyes.

“Your lesser half said you’d be here. He didn’t say why, and I didn’t care.” She glanced at Monique. “You two got a Thelma and Louise thing goin’ on? If you do, leave me out of the grand finale.”

“Where is he?” Yvonne’s fist came down on Heidi’s cards, scattering them across the table. The dealer calmly returned them to the bottom of the deck.

“Hey, that was a soft nineteen! I was win—”

“Where’s Geoff, you bitch? What did you do with my husband?”

“Him? He’s next-door, at some cross-dressing place.” She waved in the general direction of the casino entrance. “Madam whoozit’s.”

“Take me there.” Yvonne gripped the neckline of Heidi’s blouse, slowly twisting it into a knot.

“What—now? But I’m winning! I mean, sure, I lost three grand or so before… but now? I is totally on a hot streak. Revving on all cylinders. I can’t lose.”

“Calm yourselves, mesdames.” Monique loosened Yvonne’s grip and straightened Heidi’s blouse. “This serves you right, mon petit fou, for cheating these people. Is mere money so important to you? It’s a tool of the patriarchy, you know.” She grimaced. “Come back and lose the rest later, if you must.”

Heidi’s eyes flashed, but she slid off the stool, gathered her remaining chips and led the way to the entrance. To either side, gaming machines beeped and buzzed, flashed their lights and spun their reels, as if warning of dangers to come.

Across the street was a four-story professional building that had seen better days; home to payday lenders, second-rate lawyers, notary publics, tattoo and massage parlors—and on the top floor a cross-dressing service owned by Madam Suzette. Heidi took them up in the elevator, but halted outside the boutique’s glass door.

“There—are you happy? Can I go now?”

“Take us inside,” Yvonne growled.

Heidi shook her head and opened the door. Inside was a reception area, decorated with Asian wall hangings and separated from the rest of the boutique by a curtain of yellow beads and several silk-screen room dividers. The receptionist flashed them a smile. “How may I help you ladies?”
Yvonne moved toward the curtain. “Where’s Geoff? Is he in there?”

Heidi muttered, “She means Sheila.”

The girl shot to her feet. “Oh, you must be the wife! It’s, ummm—too late! That’s right, it’s way too late. We of, er… oh, shoot… it’s on the tip of my tongue.” Yvonne glanced at Heidi in time to catch her mouthing ‘SOFEMME’. Behind her, Monique was trying to hide a smile.

“Oh, yeah—SOFEMME,” the girl exclaimed. Theatrically, she rubbed her hands together. “You’re too late! Your precious husband has been feminized beyond all recognition. No one can save him now.”

“Oh, for christ’s sake—” Yvonne pushed through the curtain.

The interior of the boutique was a long room lit with indirect lighting, resembling a cross between a beauty salon, a dress shop, and the rumpus room of a twelve-year-old girl with a prom fetish. It appeared to be unoccupied, but after several moments an Asian woman in a blue silk gown rose from a velvet chair set against a tapestry depicting the fall of the Song dynasty to Mongol hordes in the thirteenth century. She was svelte, middle-aged and her expression implied that she was not one to be trifled with.

“I am Madam Suzette. Your presence here… is not welcome.”

“To hell with that! Where’s my husband?”

The receptionist burst through the curtain, followed by Heidi and Monique. “I’m so sorry, Madam. They all just—they wouldn’t—”

“Quite all right.” She waved the girl to silence. “You are… the wife,” she purred, advancing on Yvonne. Her lips toyed with a smile. “She who was your husband… is here. She has chosen a new path.”

Yvonne’s hands clenched. “What have you done to him? Or her. Whatever.”

The woman smirked, prowling past Yvonne like a panther eyeing its prey. “In accordance with her own wishes,” she murmured, “your husband has been… altered. As you can see, we provide a full range of salon services. To bring out the woman… from within the man. This is what we do.”

“Geoff doesn’t…” The words died on her lips. If the events of the past few weeks had shown her anything, it was that Geofferson Janeway really did have a woman inside him. Hell, she even had a name. Most men have a feminine aspect to their personality, but Sheila was light-years beyond that.

From the back of the room came a voice that gave her heart joy. “I’m here, Yvonne. It’s all right. They didn’t hurt me.”
A woman stepped into view. It was Geoff—or rather, it was Sheila, but it wasn’t the same Sheila as before. Her skirt and blouse had been replaced by a slim black dress with a tight hem, cap sleeves and a straight neckline. Her hair had been restyled, her makeup subtly altered, and she was wearing a pair of pink pumps Yvonne had never seen before.

“Human-hair extensions,” Suzette said with a grand gesture. “Fusion attachment, one strand at a time, keratin adhesive. The process is quite irreversible. Although in time her own hair will grow to replace it, of course.”

“They made me do it,” Sheila said. “That machine—”

“Indeed we did.” Suzette gently adjusted Sheila’s hair, where it lay draped across one shoulder. “We of SOFEMME... we have ways to bend men to our will. Your husband is now one of us.”

“They made me want this,” Sheila said, twisting her hands together. “They—they made me ask for it. They made me beg for it.”

Heidi laughed. “Holy crap, are we a nasty bunch of women or what?”

“You would be,” Yvonne snapped, “if any of this was true.”

Dead silence. The muted hum of the air conditioner suddenly seemed loud.

Suzette drifted closer. “What ever do you mean, my dear?”

Yvonne stared at her husband. “Simple. There is no such thing as SOFEMME.”

Sheila’s eyes widened. She recoiled. “You’re wrong—you’re just wrong. I was feminized against my will and that’s all there is to it! Christ, is it too much to ask for my own wife to believe me? I need some air.” She marched past Yvonne and bumped into Heidi. There was a brief scuffle, then Heidi was shoved aside and Sheila flew through the beaded curtain. The girl from reception followed.

Suzette smiled as she prowled past Yvonne, returning to her velvet chair. “The trans-formation is complete, poppet. No refunds.”

Yvonne was left glaring at Heidi and Monique. “Jig’s up,” the blonde muttered.

Monique only shrugged. “How did you know?”

“I figured it out last night, somewhere in the middle of the Mojave. The whole thing never made much sense, frankly. You were all hired to pretend to be part of this silly group, weren’t you—including Madam whoozit and her staff.”

Heidi shook her head. “Like the lady said, poppet—puppet? No refund.”

Yvonne bit back a sharp reply. “You ought to be ashamed.” Then she turned on her heel and followed Sheila through the veil of beads.
The receptionist was back at her desk. She looked up as Yvonne swept past and peered around the room. “Your husband left,” the girl said, when Yvonne turned to her. She pointed to the glass door.

Yvonne ground her teeth, waiting for the elevator. She hadn’t chased her husband halfway across two states only to lose him now. But Sheila wasn’t in the lobby, nor was she out on the sidewalk. Yvonne scanned the area, slowly counting to ten. What now? Was he back in the building, getting a massage or hiring some skeezy lawyer? It didn’t seem likely.

A minute later, she was joined by Heidi and Monique. “My keys are gone,” Heidi exclaimed. “That’s why she—”

Yvonne headed for the nearest crosswalk, fuming. They made it back to the casino in time to see the Heidi’s white SUV roar out of the parking lot. “Well, that’s just great,” Yvonne snapped. “He’s on the run again. Where the hell is he headed this time? Reno? Atlantic City? The Big Apple?”

“She can’t get far,” Heidi said. “The van’s running on empty.”

Yvonne checked her phone, then tossed her car keys to Monique. “You drive.” The tracker was once more on the move.

They followed their quarry up and down the Strip, as it reversed direction three times and traversed streets adjacent to theirs. Yvonne scanned the passing traffic, her frustration growing with each passing block. “What on earth is he doing? He hasn’t stopped for gas. How long can this go on?” She tapped nervously on the armrest. “Where would a man go… if he wanted to prove he’d been feminized against his will?”

“Don’t know why you had to drag me along,” Heidi said, pouting in the back seat. “I’ve got bets to place, money to make.”

“Money to lose, you mean,” Monique said. “She has your van.”

“That pile of junk? I was gonna buy a new one anyway, from my winnings. I’m thinking maybe a Maserati. Something with real class.”

“Money,” Yvonne said tiredly. “Thousands of dollars of our savings—wasted.” She shook her head, staring out the window. “Three thousand and change for the blackmail, ten grand for that fake feminization at the lake—I saw the etransfer notice from our bank,” she added, when Monique looked surprised. “At the time I thought it might be a shitload of women’s clothing… And then there’s whatever Madam Suzie felt like charging for today’s makeover, which I—”

Monique flung a poisonous glance over her shoulder. “You told us six thousand! Four for you, two for me, the rest for the boys.”
Heidi laughed. “What, you never heard of taxes?”

“Si égoïste! You are not the government.” Monique clenched the steering wheel like it was Heidi’s throat. The car swerved, but managed to avoid hitting the party limo in the next lane.

“Hey, you earned two whole grand for doing sweet bugger all. Pretending to feminize some guy? Pfft! What’s that? Get over yourself.”

“The tracker stopped,” Yvonne said. She pointed right. “Turn here.”

It wasn’t a gas station. It was the jam-packed parking lot of an off-Strip hotel; not one of the larger venues, but it did have a fairly impressive marquee. Monique pursed her lips. “There is your answer, mon ami.”

They gazed up at the six-foot neon letters in wonder: **LES MEN.**

*  

“I think we feminized this guy more than we thought.” Heidi gazed up at a poster of six oiled, scantily-clad male models reprising the iconic flag-raising scene from the Battle of Iwo Jima.

Monique shook her head. “I cannot imagine he would actually do anything to—how shall I say—draw the attention of men such as these.”

“I dunno. We whipped his ass pretty good, with all that full-immersion virtual world womanhood stuff. How much of that could a guy take?”

“Alors! How would you know? How many men have you feminized? You do recall that the device was merely a hair dryer, and not an actual brain-wave sensor and infrasound generator?”

“I know what it was. I’m the one who hauled the thing out of storage, remember? And fixed it up all high-tech like.”

“Oh of course. How silly of me. And if you were the one who programmed the virtual reality headset, you might even have deserved all that money.”

Yvonne snapped her ticket between her fingers. “I’m going in. Can I count on you two to watch the exits, and the car? I’d hate for him to sneak out the back and get away again.”

Heidi frowned. “Who died and made her boss?”

“Oh, hush,” Monique said, nudging the blonde with her elbow. “Would you rather be in jail for extortion? We will keep eyes pelées,” she told Yvonne. “But he must have known your tracker was in the van. I believe he wants to be found.”
Yvonne passed through the pearly gates of the music hall. An older woman in a leather jacket ripped her ticket in half. “We’s nearly full-up,” she said. “Only seats left’ll be at the back.”

“That’s where I’m headed.” The door opened to a raucous thump-thump-thump of stripper music and Yvonne stepped into a pit of inky darkness.

The six men gyrating on stage were easy to enough to see, but the crowd was invisible; although she could hear them, of course—a chorus of feminine whoops and cheers that was loudest near the stage. She moved in the opposite direction, studying the nearby silhouettes and letting her eyes adapt. There was a lot of long hair; mostly loose, but some of it swept up in more elaborate styles. Those tended to be in the quieter seats, deeper in the theater; most likely older ladies wondering if their husbands had ever looked like that.

Geoff wouldn’t sit near any woman who might be inclined to ‘out’ him, and even less likely would he dare venture into the estrogen-infused mosh pit in front of the stage. In fact, she knew exactly where to look—and when she arrived at the back row that’s where she found Sheila, sitting by herself three seats in from the corner. Yvonne slid into the adjacent fold-down and whispered, “Enjoying the show?”

Sheila didn’t seem surprised. “Yeah. Totally. Who wouldn’t, with all that going on?” She gestured at the stage, where the lads were re-enacting the cabaret scene from Moulin Rouge!

“You like that sort of thing, huh?”

“Like it? I love it! And if me liking a bunch of over-endowed meatheads dancing around in their skivvies doesn’t prove that I was feminized against my will, I don’t know what will.”

“Well… instead of sitting way back here, you could be up front with the rest of the over-eager feminine types, stuffing dollar bills into sweaty g-strings.” She paused. “On the other hand, all that hooting and hollering does seem rather unladylike. So there’s that.”

“Damn straight,” Sheila muttered.

“And it’s not like those guys are perfect or anything. I bet we could come up with a few ways to improve the act. For instance, I bet they’d look way better decked out in stockings and heels. And they are a bit beefy, so maybe bring in some boys with better figures—with a bit more going on in the chestal area.”

Sheila’s head bobbed. “Wouldn’t hurt.”

“So, in other words—you’d like it better if these guys looked more like women. Or if they actually were women.”
A sigh. “What’s your point?”

“My point? Isn’t it obvious? You weren’t ‘force-feminized’ at all. The whole thing was a sham, from beginning to end. Aaaand the wackadoodle-dandy who dreamed up this hair-brained scheme—was none other than you.”

“Oh god…” Sheila slipped down in her seat.

“Let me guess. You’re a cross-dresser. And by that I mean, you’ve always been a cross-dresser—probably since you were a little boy. Am I close?”

Her face fell into her hands. “You must hate me.”

Yvonne touched her husband’s back. The girl was trembling. “I don’t hate you, sweetie. Although, truth be told, I could’ve done without this bizarre adventure you put us through the past few weeks.”

“I—I thought maybe… if there was some good reason…”

Yvonne sighed. “This whole charade was for my benefit, wasn’t it? You figured that if you were forcibly feminized, then you could dress up as a woman whenever you felt like it—and no one could say it was your fault. No one could blame you. More specifically, me.”

Sheila drew a shaky breath. “I just feel… guilty.”

“Well, you could’ve saved yourself—saved both of us—a lot of trouble.” Yvonne gripped her partner’s hand. “If you need to dress up as a woman from time to time—or even all the time—I’m okay with that. That’s just life, Geoff. It happens. This is who you are.”

Sheila gaped at her, eyes wide. “Are you serious?”

“Of course I am.” She drew her husband into an awkward embrace, burying her face in his long hair. The sweet scent of Elnett hairspray filled her head.

Sheila sniffled, as though tears were on the way. “You have no idea how awful I felt, Vonnie… sneaking around behind your back. Thank you.” She accepted a tissue from Yvonne’s purse. “And it’s only now and then, by the way.”

“What’s now and then?”

“Dressing up. Like this.” She glanced down at herself. “I’m not really sure if this is who I really am. But I do know, I don’t need to do it all the time.”

Yvonne felt like laughing, but managed not to. “You know what? Women don’t turn into someone else when they put on sweatpants and hit the gym, or when we put on a fancy dress and pretty ourselves up with makeup. I’m the same person, regardless of what I’m wearing. Does that make sense?”
Sheila dabbed at her eyes. “Sure. But either way, you’re still a woman.”

“Would it matter if I put on a pair of trousers and everyone thought I was a guy? Who cares what other people think? It’s what you think that matters.”

“I’m not sure what to think.” Her hand found Yvonne’s in the dark. “But what you think… of me… that matters too.”

“Like I said. I fell in love with who you are—on the inside. What’s on the outside doesn’t matter so much.”

“Oh, man. You’re gonna make me cry again.” She took a deep breath. “But how can you say it doesn’t matter? What if we went out someplace dressed to the nines as a couple of women? What would people think?”

“Probably the same thing some of ‘em are thinking right now: that we’re a couple of lipstick lesbians who wandered into the wrong theater.” Yvonne rolled her eyes. “I’m okay with that if you are.”

Sheila nodded. “I’m sorry. I really am. For putting you through this.” She stared straight ahead. “And for not giving you enough credit.”

Yvonne followed her gaze. The boys of Les Men had moved on to a re-staging of the chariot race from Ben Hur. She blinked hard. “Maybe we should get out of here—before this gets any weirder.”

* * *

Out on the sidewalk, they rejoined the erstwhile members of the Society for the Feminization of Most Males Everywhere. “We’re good,” Yvonne assured them.

Heidi held out her hand. “My keys?”

Sheila dropped them in her palm. “I’d like to say I’m sorry—but quite frankly, I’m not. Thirty-four hundred bucks buys a gal a lot of leeway.”

“Don’t expect a refund.” The blonde turned on her heel and walked away.

Monique watched her go. “A lovely girl,” she murmured, “and very bright, in her own way. She squanders her talents.” She turned back to the Janeways. “I must be on my way as well, mes ami. Bon chance, to you both.”

“Do you need a ride?” Yvonne asked. “We could swing through Santa Cruz.”

“Merci, but no. I have business here.” She nodded to Sheila. “Thanks are due to you in particular, mademoiselle. Your virtual feminization videos, coupled with the Oculus device, was a brilliant innovation. It will be put to good use.”
Sheila looked puzzled. “I don’t understand. What good is it to you?”

Monique glanced from side to side. “Well… I suppose it would do no harm to tell you. It will not be long before this hits the headlines.” She flashed a smile. “Your little SOFEMME group was fictional, of course, but there is a real organization in France with more or less the same objective. It has been active in Europe for more than ten years. I am one among many who were given the task of expanding our network to this country. It was I who set up the cross-dressing service at the salon; by sheer chance you spoke to Tabbi first. She often assisted with the makeovers, but she is not part of the organization.”

Yvonne was incredulous. “You mean people are actually going around feminizing men? Against their will?”

Monique laughed. “It isn’t like that. We feminize those who need to be feminine, in order to be content with themselves—whether they know it or not at the time, it must be said. We also feminize those who do not deserve their masculinity; men who have misused their position of power in a patriarchal society. We do not seek to feminize all men,” she added with a wry smile. “We aren’t crazy. Our goal is a society of balance between the sexes. Not a matriarchy.”

Sheila shook her head. “I’m not sure I’m comfortable with you using the program I created, on other guys.”

“Ah, well. The genie, as you Americans say, is out of the bottle.” She shrugged. “Once invented, such powers cannot be contained. In any event, we were bound to develop these techniques sooner or later.” In a low voice she added, “My superiors were also quite intrigued by your notion of using targeted infrasound to influence the mind. They have struck a committee to develop the technique.”

“But—that’s monstrous,” Yvonne said, struggling to grasp the implications. “It’s brainwashing—it’s 1984! It’s Big Brother on steroids.”

Monique chuckled. “More like ‘Big Sister’ on estrogen, but I see your point. I will caution our leaders to use this power with restraint. Either way, I believe you will find your new lifestyle increasingly in vogue. Perhaps even in Vogue. Ta-ta.” The redhead strolled off toward the Strip, talking into her phone.

“This is incredible,” Yvonne breathed. She looked at her husband. “What can we do? We’ve got to do something—don’t we?”

Sheila shook her head. “Not me. Anyway, who’d believe us? We have no proof. Just a crazy cross-dresser and his wife. Heck, for all we know, Monique might’ve been feeding us a line, just like Heidi did.”

“I guess… But we’d feel bad if it hit the news.”
“Maybe it won’t. Who’d ever want to go public with something like this? Hey, look at me—I’ve been feminized against my will!”

“I hear that.” She took Sheila’s hand in hers. “In any case, I’d hate to be known as the wife of a crazy cross-dresser.”

“I’ll try to restrain myself.” They exchanged fist-bumps. “Let’s go home.”

* 

On their return trip through the Mojave, Yvonne’s attention strayed from the road to her husband in the seat next to her. Sheila was gazing out the window, smiling to herself as the light drained from the desert and the stars resumed their eternal march across the sky. “You look happy,” Yvonne said. “Let me guess. No more lies, no more sneaking around behind my back, no more putting yourself down… It must feel good.”

“Something like that.” Sheila cracked the window and let the warm desert air sift through her long, loose hair. “I’m free. I’m finally free.” ■
I hope you're happy, Kath. You turned your husband into a girl. What am I supposed to do now? I can't walk the high steel like I used to. This body doesn't have the strength. What good am I?

Au contraire, Mike. Now you get to use your mind for a change, not to mention that pretty face. You'll work your way up from reception in no time.

Mike was an ass, but Michelle with her cute blonde ponytail was very popular with the men of Gynaxian Corp. When her resolve failed, the salesman scored!

Okay, I'll try. But if that guy Matt in sales hits on me again, I'm gonna cave for sure. When he talks I just wanna crawl into his arms and forget who I used to be.