Mother's Way: It's her way or the highway, so just relax and let it happen...

I tell you, I was roped into this. Not literally, of course, but for sure there was a sneaky kind of coercion involved. Why else would a regular guy like me show up at a lady’s salon and let the girls ‘have their way’ with him? The women were under direct orders from my mother, and I had no say in what they did. “You’re a real sport, Jesse,” one of them said; her name was Marie. “My brother’s around your age and no way would he sit still for this kind of stuff. Which is kind of too bad, ‘cause I always wanted to give him the works.”

‘The works’ is what they gave me. The hair extensions were expected, but not the way they piled the long tresses atop my head in a series of elaborate coils. To take that kind of punishment the extensions had to be fused to my own hair, which did make me wonder. I expected the makeover, but it was beyond strange to watch my mother’s face emerge from my own, like a slow-motion morph. Was that just because I looked kinda like her—or was it done deliberately? They wouldn’t say.

The icing on the cake was when they took me into the back room to change. Mom had given me her favorite dress, along with the required lingerie, and I was given no choice but to wear the lot. Amazingly, it all fit.

Then it was back out front for the finishing touches: Mom’s jewelry, her signature scent, and a final once-over for my hair. I swear, if I didn’t know it was me, it could’ve been Jessica Epcott herself staring at me from the mirror, right down to the curliques of long hair dangling next to my face. She always wore her hair that way when she wanted to look attractive—like for a date.

Marie gave my up-do a final dusting with holding spray. That scent was yet another powerful reminder of my mother. In fact, everything I was wearing, from the dress to the high heels to the Russian Red lipstick coating my lips, was all stuff Mom used on herself. The question was—why?

“You look fabulous, Mrs. Epcott. I’m not just sayin’.” Marie had started calling me that after zipping me into Mom’s dress. “I sure hope the guy’s worth it. They aren’t always.”

I finally found my voice. “What guy?”

“Whoever you’re dressing up for. Whatever the function is—a party or whatev—there’s always a man involved.” She winked.

I wasn’t sure what to say. As it turned out, I didn’t have to speak at all. Marie seized my nose and, when my mouth hinged open, she hit the back of my throat with an icy spray that left me gagging.
“—what the hell—” I could barely breathe.
“A little something to stiffen the vocal cords. It’ll help you sound more like ‘yourself’ for awhile… Jessica.” She handed me the slim tube, which resembled an asthma inhaler. “The effect should last for six or seven hours. Just take another hit when you start sounding croaky.”

I wheezed. “—why would—I care?”
She flashed me a tight smile. “It might save you a beating or two. Guys don’t like being fooled.”

* My brother Rudy was waiting at the front desk, holding Mom’s purse, which he dangled in front of him like it was radioactive. “Hi, Mom. You, uh, forgot this.” He handed me the purse.

“What the heck are you talking about?”

“But why?” Marie harrumphed from behind the counter, so I offered her Mom’s credit card. Rudy didn’t answer, he just led the way outside.

Mom’s car was parked curbside. He handed me the keys. “You look nice, by the way. I kid you not.” He looked uneasy, glancing up the road in the general direction of home, then back at me.

“Are you out of your mind? Where’s Mom?”
He shushed me with both hands. “Calm down, okay? She’s gone.”

“Gone? Gone where? When—”
“We have to go. I got football practice. As for you—” He moved toward the car. “You have to be at the airport by four o’clock.” He studied my face. “You’re picking up Dan, remember?”

Danny Boyce, Mom’s second husband. He was down in LA for a regional sales conference and Mom had agreed to meet him. I shook my head. “Why can’t his damn wife pick him up?”

Rudy sighed. “You are his wife, Ma. Get a grip.”

* Right. For some reason that no one had bothered to tell me, I was now Jessica Epcott. But why? And for how long? A day? A week? Until the goddamn president came to his senses?

I slipped into the driver’s seat and adjusted both it and the mirrors. Rudy was younger than me by six years, but he had at least six inches and sixty pounds on me, which neatly explained why he was the one playing football and I was the one wearing Mom’s bodycon dress. Function follows form, as they say in architecture. Sort of.

I pulled out into traffic, sticking to the speed limit like glue. I had no wish to be pulled over, even though a cop would need a fingerprint reader to distinguish me from my mother. “Rudy, just tell me when she’s coming back.”

Rudy shook his head. “Who?”

“Mom, dammit! When is this gonna be over?”

“You tell me,” he muttered. “You’re her.”

I threw him a glance. “You don’t know, do you? I bet you don’t even know where she went.”
Rudy just shrugged. Twenty minutes later, at the field, he hopped out and pulled his gear from the trunk. “I’m gonna hang out with Lynda tonight,” he said, she being his girlfriend of the moment. “You and Dan got the house to yourselves. Don’t do anything I wouldn’t do.” He grinned. “But, ah, feel free to do what any woman would—on her wedding anniversary.”

My mouth dropped open. Of course—that was why Dan had cut short his trip to return today. It was two years almost to the hour since they’d capped a whirlwind romance with a quick trip to the altar. And now I was the blushing bride.

By the time I got to the airport, I was determined to end this charade. Right off the bat, I’d tell Dan who I was and what they’d done to me. I wasn’t sure how he’d take it; for all his finer points, the guy had a bit of a temper. I was even less sure how I’d explain why I’d gone along with being turned into a woman. In fact, the whole day leading up to the salon was a bit fuzzy in my mind. I recalled talking to Mom about something or other, and then chatting with some middle-aged dude in a suit that belonged back in the Fifties, but after that… come to think, it was the guy in the suit who had driven me to the salon. Herr Doktor something-or-other. But who was he? He owned a pocket watch, I knew that much.
The plan changed when I saw Dan striding up the Domestic Arrivals corridor, suitcase in tow. He was a few years older than me—than Mom, I should say—but his shock of dark hair wasn’t in the least bit receding and for a guy with a mostly-desk job he’d kept himself in pretty decent shape. When he spotted me, he smiled—and my heart skipped a beat. I’d never thought of Danny Boyce as a handsome man before, but now…?

I really did try to tell him. The moment he arrived, towering over me by a full head, even with me in heels, I opened my mouth to spill the beans—but then I was too busy being kissed.

Surprisingly, I found myself returning his passion, just like Mom would have. I tried to tell myself it was because I was caught up in the role, being totally done-up as my mother. But there was a lot more to it than that, as I quickly discovered when my lips were free once more.

“Missed you, Danny-boy,” I said, which shocked the hell out of me. Why would I go and say that?

And I said it with a coy smile, as a woman might who had more on her mind than a simple kiss.

“Me too, babe. Two years already. Can ya believe it? Time flies when you’re havin’ fun, I guess.”

“I know I’m layin’ down, my pod is in do not disturb mode and we’re about to land. Three hours gone, just like that.”

Pondered the information. “My shrink?”

“That therapist you been seein’. Herr Doktor Love- whatever. The vid was supposed to relax me somehow; help with that fear-of-flying thing.”

I laughed. “Come to think, I guess it worked!”

I rubbed his thigh. “I’m glad to hear you’re well rested.” An image flashed into my mind, of an old-time pocket watch swinging back and forth before my eyes, while a deep voice intoned the words now etched into my subconscious: from then on, insofar as my husband was concerned, I was to be Jessica Epcott—and no one else.

As quickly as it came, the image vanished.

“Sounds good to me,” Dan drawled. “Forgive me for sayin’ so, but that kid is just a little too… I’m gonna say ‘shy’. What he really needs to do is get himself laid. That always fixes me right up.”

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“I snorted delicately. “Men… my goodness, are all of you so fixated on sex?” I stared at his butt as he hauled his suitcase inside, then drew him onto the stairs. “In any case, there’s hope for the boy yet. I hear he’s this close to getting some action.”
“Awesome! Who’s the lucky gal?”

That would be you, I thought dimly, aware of the irony. But outwardly, all I could say was, “I have no idea. He never tells his mother a darn thing.”

“I know it’s tough,” Dan said as we mounted the stairs hand in hand. “But it’s high time the kid cut the apron strings. You can’t mother him forever.” I could only hope that was true! “I never much liked wearing an apron anyway. Not the type.” “I’ll say. You’re a lingerie gal all the way.” Scandalized, I slapped him on the rear. “Now there’s a thought. I’ll see what I can find.”

I was spoiled for choice. Mom’s lingerie drawer was rich pickings, and it was all mine. I had a series of mental flashes of her booking a flight to Maui while her psychiatrist chanted feminization slogans at me through his swaying pocket watch. In any event, it didn’t stop me from picking out a pink nightgown with spaghetti straps and delicate lace trim around the bodice. I hurried off to the ensuite, emerging ten minutes later clad only the nightie while gagging on a fresh hit of my throat spray and scented with the rose water Mom wore when she wanted to get her husband going.

That’s when I began to fear for my sanity. How the hell could I even know all that? “Babe, you look fantastic.” Dan was already in bed, propped up against the headboard with his hands clasped behind his head.

I joined him under the covers. “You’re not lookin’ so bad yourself, sailor.” I gave him a quick taste of my newly-applied lipstick, then snuggled up against him. My arm slithered across his waist. “Y’know,” he said softly, as thick fingers probed my hair, gently loosening my coiled tresses. “That video I saw gave me a few ideas. I was thinkin’ we could try something a little… different.”

I kissed him on the chest. “So up for different.” “Well, to start, I think we should place more of an emphasis on the oral aspects of lovemaking.” He must have noticed the dismayed look that crossed my face, because he hastily added, “Not me, girl. Just you. Ya know, a little girl-on-guy action to bring the engine to full throttle.”

I flashed him a coy smile. “Oh, well—that I can do.” I peeled back the bedspread and freed his manhood from the sheet. It was much larger than the one hiding between my own legs, but that didn’t stop me from swallowing it whole.

In the back of my mind, I was screaming. What the hell was I doing? I was a man, wasn’t I? And what did I know about pleasing a man in bed? Yet none of that stopped me from doing it. “Afterwards,” he mused, “I figure we should go the back door route. Couples do that sometimes. Heck, some of ‘em do it all the time. Whaddya think, babe? Doggy-style for a change?”

We made eye contact. I managed to nod while my lashes fluttered uncontrollably. “Mmm-hmm.”

“Good. I think this is gonna work out.” His eyes went glassy and he grabbed my head, his fingers entwined in my hair. Apparently, it had been quite a while since ‘our’ last session. Who knew?

After I got cleaned up, we split a bottle of white wine and reviewed the situation. “You are my wife,” Dan told me, looking unfocused. I had to wonder who he was trying to convince.

“I am your wife,” I assured him, my eyes equally unfocused. “My name is Jessica Epcott.” “Let’s do this,” he said.

Dan made his entry via the trap door in the back, as couples sometimes do. Only then did I feel a sudden stab of betrayal. Lovestrange, that was the guy’s name. Herr Doktor. Lovestrange, love-craft, strange-love, Dr. Strange… whoever or whatever the hell he was, the dude had sunk his claws into my mother. I hated to think what they were doing together on Maui; besides lying around the beach, that is. For all I knew, he might even have used his evil hypnotic powers on her, compelling my mother to transform me into her replacement.

Strangely, that notion made my fate a little easier to bear. Better a mother forced to abandon her child, than one who did so by choice. Maybe all three of us knew, on the inside, exactly what had happened, but were simply unable to resist the subconscious forces that now ruled our minds.

Don’t you just hate it when that happens? I know I did. But I kept it to myself.
When Dan was finished, he flipped me over and we made out like a couple of horndogs in the back seat of a 1969 Mustang. He might have tried to apologize once or twice, but it didn’t take.

After another bottle of wine, we both fell asleep. Or passed out. Whatever. Does it matter? Nothing mattered. For a long time after that day we were just going through the motions.

Eventually, I arrived home after a tough day at the office—where ‘Ms. Epcott’ was the Director of Human Resources—loaded down with groceries, and there I was: a very tanned Jessica Epcott, clad in a short yellow-and-black sundress. “There you are,” she said. “About freakin’ time. As of now, you’re off duty.” She snapped her fingers and said, “Abracadabra, the zombie rises at noon.”

That must have been the trigger phrase, because all of a sudden I wasn’t her anymore.

I dropped the bags on the kitchen table. “Mom? What the hell? How could you do this to me?”


“Has it been that long?” My knees went weak and I sank into a chair.

“Times flies, huh? Well, I’m back to reclaim my husband. Thanks for keepin’ him warm for me.” “Is that all it was? Five years of my life, just to keep your precious hubby from running off with some other woman? Jesus, Ma…” My face fell into my hands. “I am a woman now, you know. It’s a little late to go back to my old life.”

“Really. How’d that happen?”

“God…I’m not even sure. We were in Thailand a few years back; maybe that was it. Seems like all of a sudden I just noticed I was female—and Dan could do me the proper way round, of course, and in a way that was a nice change after all the back-door stuff; sort of like things were getting back to normal, even though they’d never been this way before. Pretty confusing, actually.”

“Well, you can’t be me anymore, so you’ll just have to deal with being someone else.” She laughed. “It seems I have a daughter now. She’s a real chip off the old block too. Just look at her—the resemblance is uncanny!”

* I moved out asap, of course. It wouldn’t do for Dan to find two Jessica Epcotts waiting for him when he came home. How he dealt with the fact that his wife had a very deep tan all of a sudden was anybody’s guess. It wasn’t my problem.

I was left to muse on the duplicity of mothers; or some of them, at least. Perhaps it’s all down to the stereotype. Your typical mom, the one we were all raised to expect, is kind, loving and selfless—but real people are only human and it’s pretty hard to live up to an ideal like that. Maybe that’s why they so often get the short end of the stick in the literature. Then again, I hear most mothers don’t feminize their sons. Guess I was just lucky.

After I got my own apartment, Mom and I sat down to dicker. We split the jewelry box down the middle, figured out who got to keep what from ‘our’ closet, and sorted things out at work. She retired from working life while I kept the job, now attending as the much younger ‘Jessie Epcott’. To Dan and everyone else who knew us, I was the prodigal son who’d left as a boy and returned as a woman, which wasn’t too far off the mark. No one besides my brother knew that Mom was the one who had left, although it took some serious tap-dancing at the office to convince management to look the other way.

The upside in all this? I could finally start acting my age. Now that I was no longer impersonating a middle-aged woman, I could let my hair down and my hemlines rise. And I could start dating.

They call it ‘forced feminization’ in the stories you find online, but for me it kinda worked out. Then again, don’t all the stories end that way?