The problem with cross-dressing, Gareth mused as he watched the last of his body hair swirl down the drain, is that you end up stuck in no-man’s-land. Normal men and women know who they are. The same is true for gay people; regular folks who just happen to be attracted to the same sex. Even transsexuals know what they truly are, he thought morosely as he stepped from the shower—nothing less than a man or woman with the misfortune of being born in the wrong body. You can fix that these days, he mused, toweling himself off. It’s no problem at all; in and out of the clinic the same day. But what can you do about a man who knows he’s a man—and for the most part doesn’t really mind—but who enjoys being a woman from time to time? Gareth eyed himself in the mirror. From time to time? More like pretty damn often. Whatever. Yet he knew he wasn’t a woman on the inside, no matter how appealing the idea.

“But as of today,” he told his reflection, “you can be fixed.” He patted himself down with baby powder, brushed off the residue and headed for his bedroom. A set of prosthetics awaited him on the bed.

First the boyshorts: a tight, yet breathable, layering of latex, silicone and various intelligent materials (marketed as NuSkin) that self-bonded—ever so gently—to one’s body and then changed to match the skin tone underneath. He tucked his member into a pouch that ran back between his legs, then pulled the garment tight to his groin. It took only a minute or two for the bonding agent to set. There was a spray you could apply—after the customary 12-hour delay—that would loosen the bond and allow you remove the garment. Gareth kept a bottle of the stuff in the cupboard under the sink in the bathroom. He was fairly sure there was enough left to reverse the process. If not, it was easy to find online.

Next came the prosthetic breasts. He lay down and carefully positioned them on his chest, then held them in place while the bonding agent sank its claws into his body. Once the proper color emerged within the hour, you wouldn’t be able to tell where chest ended and NuSkin began. It already felt like the real thing, and once it warmed to body temperature no one would be able to detect the difference. The prosthetic even managed—somehow—to convey the sensation of touch to his own buried skin. That part always amazed him, even after wearing the things off and on for the better part of two years.

Blissfully, the same was true of the boyshorts and the lady parts that now graced his groin. He passed a finger over the neatly trimmed triangle of pubic hair poised above the lotus-like opening—and felt the lightest of touches.
Marvellous! he thought with genuine awe. A wonder of the biotech era. Outposts on the moon and journeys to Mars were nothing compared to this. Oddly, Gareth felt naked; the items he’d just put on felt very much a part of him. The bottom drawer of his dresser yielded a firm-support brassiere and a pair of mid-rise briefs with ‘hip enhancer’ butt pads, both in black. His closet yielded a light robe.

Back to the prosthetics. A pie-sized box held a thin-skin face mask, which he gently peeled from its teflon base. A silver image of his own face stared up at him until he closed the lid. He drew the mask over his face and lay down. Working quickly, with much deft pulling and pressing, he brought the silky-smooth NuSkin into phase with his own not-overly-masculine features. He’d shaved, of course, and a drug infused with the fabric would inhibit hair growth for as long as necessary. The mask provided him with raised cheekbones, a somewhat smaller nose—narrower at least—and subtly feminized facial contours. Its surface was also designed to emulate a light application of makeup. More could be added as desired, for a more glamorous look, although in practice he found he only needed extra eye and lip cosmetics for evening wear.

Five minutes later it felt as though the mask had vanished. Gareth worked through his major facial muscles and studied the result in a mirror over his dresser. He was already quite attractive, in a spartan, short-haired sort of way. To the untrained eye, he had already become a young woman—a girl who only needed to properly dress herself to pass in public as the real deal. But needless to say, he couldn’t stop there.

From a box in the back of his closet came the NuSkin HairExtruder®. It consisted of a helmet-like device mounted atop a six-foot telescoping pole that screwed into a weighted base. He set it up in front of his low dresser—which did double duty as a vanity—plugged it in and pulled up a stool. The Extruder® was a recent model, with a wide range of colors and styles, and full-spectrum strand emulation. He lowered the helmet over his head, then launched the NuHair app on his tablet and browsed through the options. This was the fun part.

Brunette, of course; the color of his own hair, with a few highlights for definition. He wasn’t against going blonde, or being a redhead from time to time, but a deep chestnut brown felt most like himself—or rather, her-self. Long hair, down to his shoulder blades, in loose waves with curled-up tips. He opted to match the weight and structure of his own hair, for veracity—and because it felt more like the female version of himself. He selected ‘blowout’ styling and hit Apply.

His scalp tingled as his boyishly short hair was electrified and stood on end. Each strand, he knew, was being sucked through its own tiny opening in the helmet’s interior, where it would be augmented by NuSkin’s patented Extruder technology.
The process included keratin bonding to the end of each hair, then extending the hair using 3D nanoscale printing that almost instantly created a filament that even a hairdresser wouldn’t be able to distinguish from what nature had provided. Of course, it meant that he’d have to get a haircut to fully return to boy-mode, but that was a small price to pay for an amazing head of hair.

Gareth split his attention between the progress bar on the screen and the mirror in front of him, where the helmet was rising imperceptibly. It did so in concert with the extruders working to lengthen his hair, more and more of which could be seen trailing up into the helmet. Precisely how long each hair would get varied with the chosen style, the layering, and where on the scalp it was located.

It took about ten minutes before the device stopped, pinged, and the progress bar reached a hundred percent. He lowered his head to pull the ends from inside the helmet. A thick mass of dark brown hair struck the back of his neck, split and flowed to dangle on either side of his face. Not for the first time, he marvelled at the kind of technology that could accomplish this.

He gave his head a shake and set to work with a hairbrush, tidying and taming his unruly tresses. This was the sort of thing that a real woman would likely view as a chore, but that he actually enjoyed.

When it was done he gave his head a practiced toss to flip his feminized mane onto his back, then gazed at himself in the mirror. He looked as much or more like a woman than he ever had—but still felt dissatisfied.

Such beauty was wasted, he mused, on him. Even though he could wear a pretty dress and pass through the streets of the city as a girl most would describe as lovely—still he felt like a man on the inside.

Maybe there was nothing wrong with that. It was certainly a rewarding and hugely fun thing to do; there was no denying that. Yet there were times when it felt like living a lie—as though he was doing something fundamentally wrong, having to become not his female self, but someone else altogether. A stranger, in essence, to both himself and everyone he’d ever known. That was the problem.
Gareth strolled into his living room. He drew the curtains and gazed down at the city, letting the late-morning sun warm his body. It lacked the raw intensity of naked sunlight, since the glass filtered out the ultraviolet and—at this time of year—reduced the infrared as well, so the apartment required no air conditioning. The world had gotten a lot smarter as the climate changed, yet he remained unable to reconcile his gender identity with his preferred appearance. It simply wasn’t fair. Most of the people down there—an anonymous throng from eight stories up—could wear whatever they wished, simply because their choice in clothes happened to coincide with their gender. Meanwhile, he had to skulk around in the shadows, under an assumed name, ever fearing discovery.

Well—no longer. He dropped onto his couch and launched the Dreamscape© app on his tablet; or rather, his altered version of it. The original app enabled the user to reprogram their dreams. It interacted with his cranial implant the same way as most other apps—such as those designed to cure addictions or make you crave vegetables—and it let you choose a setting and a theme for your sleep-time trance, or even turn it into a lucid dream. Gareth had often used it to become a woman in his sleep, placing himself in clothing stores trying on dresses or as a princess at a formal ball. Waking up was always such a bummer.

But he’d called in a few favors and managed to obtain a copy of the source code. Then he hacked it. This version of the app—at least in theory—would provide him with a waking dream of being a woman, co-opting the same mental circuitry that allows you to dream about being someone other than yourself. He’d tried to make it as specific as possible: a female version of himself, with much the same personality, but one who thought of herself as a real woman. In effect, while the ‘dream’ lasted, he would become transsexual.

In its original form, the effects of Dreamscape ended when you woke up. The new version did the same, but of course that wouldn’t be until the following morning. So he could spend the entire day in this altered state, go to bed as a woman and wake up the next day as himself. This was as much for safety as anything else; no matter what the app actually did—and he couldn’t be sure it would work as planned—the effects would vanish within twenty-four hours.

He tucked a stray tress behind his ear, staring at the screen. This was dangerous. Messing with your own brain is a fool’s game. Get it wrong and he wouldn’t just end up with an insatiable desire for turnips, it might change who he was. Still… wasn’t that the whole idea? He wanted to experience what it was like to walk down the street in a skirt and not feel like a freak. This might be his only chance. Sometimes you just have to close your eyes and jump.

Gareth touched Apply. His eyes fluttered closed.
Her eyes fluttered open. She was seated on the couch, tablet in hand, so she knew she couldn’t have fallen asleep. In a daze, she set the tablet aside and rubbed her eyes. Something felt… different.

She stood up and went to the window, reflexively checking her robe to make sure she was covered. It wouldn’t do for a drone to fly by at the wrong moment; the Net was awash with videos of women in their delicates. Men could be such pigs.

Her name was Lynette—from the poem by Alfred Lord Tennyson, “Gareth and Lynette”. She was Lynn to her friends, although she couldn’t think of anyone who actually knew her as a woman. She remembered being Gareth the way one might recall a particularly vivid dream. He was a man who enjoyed dressing up as a woman, and who often attempted to pass as female in public, but he could never quite get it right. She sighed, amused in spite of the painful memory. There was always some small nuance in the way he moved or the way he spoke that gave the game away. Not that anyone else gave a damn, but he surely did. She knew how much it hurt him when that happened—and felt a burst of sympathy.

Gareth was a good man; kind, thoughtful, tolerant. He deserved better.

Today would be different. Lynette ran her fingers through the long hair tumbling over her shoulders. No point dilly-dallying, she decided. Time to get dressed.

Back in her bedroom, Lynette surveyed the decor with apparent distaste. It simply reeked boy, from the drab curtains to his awful taste in bedclothes, to the overall color scheme. She shook her head. All that would have to change.

First things first. She set to work on her hair, arranging the part down the middle, combing it out, misting herself with hairspray, then vigorously brushing and back-combing for volume. She perched on the stool in front of her dresser, studying her features in the mirror, turning her head this way and that. It was a pretty face, she decided—surprising herself—but it needed help. Most faces did.

She added a subtle shade of eye shadow—nothing too garish—and stroked dark brown mascara through her lashes, to match the color of her hair, then touched up her lips with a hint of pink gloss. For her cheeks, a mere dusting of blush; it was, after all, the middle of the day.

Pleased with the effect, she let Gareth’s robe slip from her shoulders and opened the top drawer of the dresser. It was full of men’s socks, boxers and briefs. Her lips curled and with a single digit she pushed it closed. Other drawers yielded a motley assortment of male T-shirts, sweaters, trousers and workout gear.

Only at the very bottom did she find clothing that belonged to her.
“That hardly seems fair,” she murmured, as she selected a pair of sheer nylon stockings from the few that were available. “Things are certainly going to change around here.” She drew the thigh-highs up her legs; first one stocking, then the other. She pulled gently on the silicone band at the top to convince herself they would stay put.

What to wear? She dropped the ugly old robe in the hamper and opened the closet. Three-quarters of it was men’s wear, and most of that were things Gareth didn’t even wear all that often. What a waste! Lynette flicked through her own meagre allotment of clothing and finally chose a black knee-length bodycon dress with a lace inset panel and side darts. It was a style versatile enough to be worn from afternoon straight through the evening. That made sense, given that she had no idea what the day might bring.

Fortunately, a short black slip was also available. She donned that, then the dress, and smoothly drew the zipper up her back.

At her vanity she set to work on her nails, which were barely long enough to look decent under a thick coat of ‘ravishing red’ China Glaze nail lacquer. She added silver polygon earrings to her pierced ears; a pair of oversize bangles to her wrist; and for her neck a spritz of Viktor & Rolf ‘flowerbomb’ perfume for a classic feminine touch. *Purrfect.*

The closet yielded a shoebox with a pair of beige open-toe pumps and not much else. Lynette mentally added shopping for shoes to her to-do list.
Time to go. She filled her purse, recalling the way Gareth felt as he was about to leave the apartment *en femme*. In a word: *fear*. She shook her head. Such a silly boy. Going outside wasn’t some sort of earth-shattering experience, like hauling the Ring of Power into that pit thingy in Mount Doom; it’s simply what people *do* when they need to be someplace else.

In spite of this, her steps faltered as she approached the elevator. A black tide of, yes, *fear*, surged from the innermost part of her mind. *Go back!* it screamed in techni-color. *Forbidden!* She shivered, briefly overcome by a surge of adrenaline. *Goodness*, she chided herself, it was only a memory—too deeply ingrained to be easily brushed aside. But it was part of *his* reality, not hers. Then her chin lifted. Cool air flooded her lungs. For Lynette, nothing was forbidden.

She joined the flow of pedestrians on the sidewalk; office workers, returning from lunch. No one gave her a second look. She might have been one of them. A smile crossed her lips. This—*this* was what it felt like to be at peace with oneself. She had at last discovered who she was, and the world seemed to approve.

Giving that up was gonna be pretty tough, she thought idly.

* 

Gareth’s eyelids clicked open. He was lying in bed, bathed in the glow of amber sunlight filtering through his curtains. He blinked twice. *His* curtains were olive green, but these were gauzy yellow with a floral motif. They belonged to *her*.

He swept back the covers, discovering a female body clad in a hot pink nightie. She hadn’t bothered to remove the prosthetics. Twin falls of thick dark hair swung on either side of his face as he sat up. He rubbed his eyes.

The *fear* was back—like an old familiar face you never wanted to see again. He remembered buying the curtains and hanging them, but now he found himself worried someone else might see them—and then they’d *know*. His terrible secret. And if they happened to go poking around in the closet, they’d find a half-dozen brand new pairs of high heels that would be awfully hard to explain.

He took a deep breath and counted to fifteen. No one was going to see any of this. Besides Lynette, no woman had set foot in this apartment in nearly two years—before his feminine wardrobe had begun its inexorable growth. For the moment at least, his secret was safe. In fact, given that he’d just spent an entire afternoon prancing through the shops wearing slingback pumps and an Adrianna Papell cocktail dress, it seemed silly to worry about a few flowered curtains. On the other hand, when you’ve spent your entire life basking in the dark dread of discovery, looking over your shoulder is a hard habit to break.
He stood up, pressing the bridge of his nose. His head hurt. It felt like a low-grade hangover, the kind you get from too much champagne on an empty stomach—only he, or she to be precise, hadn’t been drinking. Maybe too much dreaming of the ‘waking’ variety had a similar effect.

Gareth couldn’t bring himself to remove the prosthetic breasts or boyshorts, or even the face mask. They fit almost too well, as though they’d become acclimated to his body. Prosthetics were certainly more flexible and adaptable than ever before, so maybe that really was a feature. The only way to remove his extruded hair would be to have it cut, and it was too soon for that. Instead, after showering, he drew his hair into a ponytail, bound his chest, and covered himself with a loose sweatshirt and an old pair of jeans.

Later that morning, on his customary stroll along the waterfront, he could almost convince himself that life was back to normal. Almost—but not quite. He’d shared an elevator with three of his neighbors, and in the park had walked straight past a man he’d worked with for three years, and not one of them recognized him. Even in his own clothes, he still looked like a woman; the mask alone made sure of that. And it wasn’t uncommon for girls his age to dress down on a Saturday morning; hit the park, go for a jog or just unwind. Having to be pretty all the time can be a chore, as he knew all too well.

Once again, he found himself trapped, by what he had once termed his ‘transvestic urges’. It truly was a curse, he thought, to never feel at home in your own body, no matter what gender you ‘presented’ to the world. And it was depressing to realize that for his male self, that would never change. It couldn’t. He was drawn to the feminine like a moth to a flame, and fire does what fire must do: it destroys.

Gareth had too much wine that night, alone in his apartment, watching the second and third reboots of *Priscilla, Queen of the Desert*, then fell asleep on the couch and spent the next day atoning for his sins with an orgy of house-cleaning, doing his greatest femulation of a charwoman.

Then the rains came and Monday was born cool and gray, and Gareth decided to call in sick. He told himself he didn’t have enough solvent to remove all three prosthetics, but that was just an excuse.

He stepped into the living room. The apartment felt utterly empty; the air flat and stale; the world drained of its color. It was intolerable. How could anyone live like this? He found himself searching for his tablet. Without intending to, he launched Dreamscape. His eyes closed. She—she would know what to do.

*
Lynette’s eyes snapped open. She was bent over the kitchen table, finger pressed against the screen of her tablet. Her lips twisted into a grim smile. She did indeed know what to do. Changes were a’coming, and to more than mere curtains.

She marched into the bathroom and applied the solvent to her chest. For what she had in mind, prosthetic breasts would only get in the way.

* 

Gareth fought to open his eyes. Again, he was in bed, covered now with a floral bedspread. Slowly, he took in the other changes. The walls were a warm pink, the ceiling a cool shade of blue with specks of glitter, and next to the bed was an oval throw rug that might once have belonged to a very huggable polar bear. A sit-down vanity with lighted mirror had replaced his old dresser. Long story short, this was her bedroom now, not his. He no longer belonged here.

He took a deep breath and flung back the sheets. Under a hot pink nightgown he found gently rounded breasts—but they weren’t fake. Not after Lynette’s trip to the NuU GenderBar, an outpatient clinic specializing in gender-related physical alterations. ‘In and out the same day, or your money back’—that was their slogan. It had taken barely an hour to stretch the skin of his chest—it was still sore to the touch—slip the implants inside, and heal the incisions with the Trek-like quantum cascade laser that recently hit the market.

It was a done deal. He had breasts. Solvent wouldn’t help him now. As for the rest of his body… it was only a matter of time. The implants were a warning shot across the bow, so to speak, to give him time to get used to the idea. Lynette would not, and could not, be denied her prize. Not for long.

Most of the closet was hers, along with the entire vanity. She had gone through his clothes, winnowed out what she found distasteful and stowed the remainder in boxes stuffed into one end of the closet. The rest of it was gone, dropped with no little disdain into a clothing donation bin a block away.

Gareth flicked through more than a dozen new outfits hanging in the closet; skirts, dresses, blouses… how did women do it? Spend so much, make so many choices, and all in the same day? There was no real mystery: he remembered the whirlwind of shopping the previous afternoon, while in his apartment the painters worked their magic on his bedroom with the new quick-dry acrylics. By mid-evening, Lynette was relaxing with a glass of wine, admiring her new decor, her new clothes in the closet and her new breasts feeling oh-so-snug in a new brassiere.

Without bothering to change, Gareth stumbled into his living room. The furniture had been shifted into the kitchen and the walls taped off to protect the ceiling and
the hardwood floor. The painters were due to return that very day—to finish the job. To complete the transformation of his apartment into one that a woman like Lynette could call home. He didn’t belong here either.

His hand shook as he picked up his phone. He had to call in sick again—he had to. He couldn’t be seen like this, no more than half a man—if not less. “Yeah… I’m still under the weather,” he told his boss. “Tomorrow for sure.”

He put the phone down. Tomorrow would be different. He found his tablet and launched Dreamscape. Pressing the button felt like… falling.

* Lynette’s breath trailed out in a long sigh. Today was the big day. Much to do.

* Even before his eyes opened, Gareth knew. He knew. Probing fingers revealed the truth. The boyshorts were gone, and what had taken their place was all too real. It wasn’t really a surprise. He remembered Lynette’s visit to the NuU GenderBar, her second in as many days; the two hours she’d spent under the knife, the three hours spent relaxing in post-op with a quantum cascade vaginal dilator firmly in place. There was no denying it: he was female.

He rose from the bed and peered at himself in the vanity. He knew the mask was gone, replaced with more permanent alterations, yet he was still shocked at the feminine face staring back at him. Eyes wide, gently rounded womanly lips… hesitantly, he touched the side of his face. They had inserted wedges to elevate his cheekbones, shaved his jawline, pinned his eyelids to make his eyes look bigger—all these among a dozen subtle adjustments that served to feminize his image. He would never be mistaken for male again.
His living room had undergone a similar transformation. Pink walls, a sprawling 
beige couch, brightly floral curtains, and on the far wall a large print of Botticelli’s 
The Birth of Venus, which seemed all too appropriate.

Gareth parted the curtains and stared out across the city. Sunlight glittered across 
the lake and set the tips of the tallest buildings afire. The streets were enlivened by 
early birds on their way to work, and soon she would be joining them.

Lynette had dropped in on his boss the previous morning to give him the good 
news. “Hihi, I’m a woman now,” she’d said, in her brand new and sweetly chirpy 
voice. “Just on my way to the clinic to make it official.” His boss wasn’t too 
concerned; such transitions were no longer uncommon. Throughout the company, 
including its three satellite offices, there had been sixteen others in the previous 
year alone, most of them male-to-female. He had jotted down her new name, sent 
out an announcement to all employees, and wished her well.

There was only one thing left to do. It seemed like such a waste of time to wake up 
as Gareth every morning and have to run Dreamscape to fix the problem. Why not 
just be Lynette 24/7? It made sense, he had to admit. Besides which, wouldn’t it 
be better to be a woman at peace with her body, instead of a man who happened to 
enjoy dressing up as a lady—but who (now) actually was female?

He sank into the soft couch, tablet in hand. The source code needed only a small 
tweak to remove the part that ended the dream when you woke up. Delete one line 
and Gareth would be gone forever. She could have done it herself, but she wanted 
him to do it. Needed him to, really. So there were no hard feelings.

It wasn’t a Jekyll-and-Hyde transformation, with all the ill-will that sort of thing 
entailed. Gareth and Lynette were the same person; there was no discontinuity. It 
was simply a matter of whether or not he would think of himself as a real honest-
to-God woman, going forward, instead of a wannabe. And since he was already 
female in body… he shrugged and made the change, then recompiled the app.

There’s no downside to feeling comfortable with yourself. Gareth closed his eyes, 
pressed the button—and passed into the light.

* 

Lynette’s eyes opened. She set the tablet aside, sat up and stretched. It was done. 
She was female, inside and out. There would be no more cross-dressing, no more 
conflicted male mind at odds with itself—just pure, uncomplicated womanhood.

It felt different—but oh so right.
Whaddya think, Ronnie? The guys in Props whipped up this Betty mask and the costume lady dyed my hair, added extensions and styled it. I look just like her! Isn't that cool? Now that I'm Betty, we don't have to fight over Archie 'cause I'm not him anymore. There's always Reggie, but Moose is more my type. Maybe I should've become Midge, huh?