When Jonathan Hyde bends the laws of nature in a bold attempt to recreate his namesake’s transformative experiment, he succeeds beyond his wildest dreams.
Dedication

To Robert Louis Stevenson

For creating Messieurs Jekyll and Hyde, one (or two) of the most enduring characters in the canon of imaginative literature.

And to Brian Clemens

For turning Hyde into a woman.

And to Martine Beswick

For bringing Sister Hyde to life, for her talents as an actress, and for that fabulous head of hair.

Amanda Hawkins
When I was a boy of ten or eleven years, which would place this reminisce in the mid-Nineties or thereabouts, amongst endless reruns of Star Trek old and new, I chanced to come across the film that would change my life. It was a midnight retread from the Seventies, and the print was so dark I had to douse the lights in my bedroom and sit close to the screen so as to follow the action, but it was then and there I first met the infamous Sister Hyde.

The film was Dr. Jekyll and Sister Hyde, starring the infinitely alluring Martine Beswick. There was also a male lead, whose name escapes me. He existed in the film solely to be transformed into the spectacular woman who was superior to him in every way. The character of Edwina Hyde exerted upon me what can only be described as a hypnotic fascination. The notion of altering one’s body to become an entirely new person—a gorgeous woman, no less; this captured me as nothing else ever could. It became my passion. It became my obsession.

I became a cross-dresser that day, thereafter experimenting with my mother’s clothes and other effects. Yet that wasn’t enough, of course, as most cross-dressers ultimately discover; to their endless frustration. The usual surgical and chemical methods of changing gender did not arouse my interest. In fact, I did not then consider myself to actually be a woman, born to the wrong body, so such methods did not seem appropriate. What I wanted—what I desired—was to become a woman such as Sister Hyde, using the same kind of dramatic transformation.

A tall order, I realize. But such was my goal, however distant it might be.

To that end I studied the sciences in school; first the biological—so as to be able to create the near-magical elixir needed to effect such a transformation—and when that proved beyond the scope of any conceivable medicine, the physical sciences, so as to develop some means of manipulating the body on the atomic level. And after some fifteen years of research, which drew upon my background in both arenas, this is precisely what I managed to achieve.

My name is Jonathan Hyde and this is my story.

Fortuitously for my endeavours, I did not lack for funding. As the only child of a successful banker and his socialite wife, I inherited a sizeable estate. It included a grand old manse on six acres of land on the outskirts of town, which put me far enough from the neighbors that the noise of my experiments—the failed ones, that is—did not draw unwanted attention. It also included enough wealth in terms of
properties and other assets that I was able to build and equip a fairly sophisticated workshop in my basement—the customary location of a laboratory in tales such as this. I taught physics at the local university, but the fact I had endowed the chair I held meant that I did not have to concern myself with the usual ‘publish or perish’ (at times ‘publish and perish’) rat race my esteemed colleagues were obliged to endure. It did lead to considerable jealousy on the part of said colleagues, but winning a popularity contest was not my goal.

It might be apropos at this point to introduce the other actors in this drama.

I was at this time romantically involved, with a tall auburn-haired lady named Cassandra Foxx. We had been introduced three years prior by the president of the university, who believed that tongues would wag less were a bachelor of my age and means to marry. She was four years younger than I and a curator at the historical museum, which sat adjacent to the school’s History and Anthropology departments, with which it was affiliated. We were often together at functions on campus and around town, and spent numerous nights together both at my house and in her apartment, but—and perhaps this is so obvious it need not be stated—she was never allowed to see what lay in my basement.

I believe it could be said that Cassie and I were ‘going steady’ in the parlance of the day, but I could not allow it to become more serious than that. My goal, I say again, was not to wed a woman but to become a woman. Marriage under such circumstances, were I to succeed, would be unconscionable.

At this juncture, the reader may be wondering how I, a confirmed bachelor living alone in a large home that was not quite a mansion (but close)—and splitting my time between teaching and research—managed to keep house. The short answer is that I employed people, though not of the live-in variety. The cook, Mrs. Dubois, and the cleaning lady, Ms. Blaise, were in-house most days, but both went home in the evening—albeit Mrs. Dubois only as far as the dwelling atop my detached garage. A handyman and other specialists were on-call for situations that required their expertise; a circumstance that did crop up on numerous occasions, in the wake of unfortunate accidents during the course of my research. All concerned were well paid for their efforts, and for their silence.

The remaining actor was my best friend, Victor Sloane. We had met in our middle school’s chess club, both having an interest in the natural sciences, and continued our association throughout our university years, even rooming together at times. Victor ultimately took a degree in journalism and now works for the city’s sole remaining newspaper.

My research is based on the theory that there is far more to the universe than the familiar four dimensions of space and time. I believe there exist multiple higher
dimensions, perhaps many, and that everything we see around us—including our own bodies—exists partly in these other dimensions. We are simply incapable of seeing or measuring the extent of, say, a coffee table as it exists in the fifth, sixth and seventh dimensions, or however many there might be.

This was my way of addressing the ‘mass problem’ which is often overlooked in tales were one object is transformed into another. In the sort of stories that concern us here, when a man weighing in excess of two hundred pounds is somehow turned into a hundred-and-ten pound woman, where does the extra mass go? It is my contention that it can be shifted into another dimension—or dimensions.

In fact, the man’s male body need not cease to exist at all. The male body could be ‘rotated’ out of our plane of existence and replaced by rotating a female body into our familiar space-time continuum. All while keeping the same mind attached to both bodies, though in truth both are part of the same larger body. This would be a way of storing one’s male aspect—putting it on ice, so to speak—while inhabiting the female aspect as though it were one’s normal body.

You see the difficulty, I trust. Not only is it necessary to figure out how the male body can be ‘rotated’ in the first place, but who is to say that a female body even exists to be returned in its place? Needless to say, you cannot assume such a thing. A female body first has to be created before it can be used—perhaps ‘inhabited’ is the better word—but would thereafter be available on demand, so to speak.

Were such a thing possible, it would solve the issue of what happens to a person’s mind, or consciousness, when they are transformed into, say, a rock. The rock has no brain, and therefore nowhere to store a mind. But the person’s body is not altered in any way, it has simply been shifted into a timeless dimension where it can be safely stored while the rock takes his place. When the process is reversed, the man returns and the rock goes off to the timeless place. Simple.

Well, the devil is in the details, let me tell you.

The first device I created was effectively a death ray. Not so much a ray as a death chamber, inasmuch as the object to be transformed has to be placed within a cavity inside the machine that fills one entire room of my basement. The interior resembles the interior of an MRI scanner, being a horizontal cylinder with a metal bed on which the subject lies during the transformation. The entrance is sealed while the machine is active.

Why then ‘death chamber’? The first items I attempted to transform were rotated elsewhere—God knows where—but nothing tangible returned in their place. And when I reversed the process, only scattered atoms came back. Had I attempted to transform a living being, it would certainly have perished—instantaneously, and
without any mess to clean up. I resolved never to allow this technology to fall into
government hands—or anyone else’s—because the temptation to utilize it as a
simple and humane way to put people to death would surely prove irresistible, and
moreover very likely invite overuse.

This is when I invented the concept—and the practice—of the Hyde Matrix. An
object that exists in our space-time continuum has it’s own unique Hyde Matrix,
which is simply the sum total of all the particulate matter within the object, their
specific descriptors and their relationship to each other. My insight was to realize
that while the object in our space has a well-defined Hyde Matrix, the rest of its
extent in other dimensions is more malleable.

The machine I designed and built simply—oh how easy it is to gloss over years of
intense effort—manipulates the object’s malleable aspects to create a second
Hyde Matrix, or a third or a fourth, encapsulating whatever parameters I specify.
That way the object can be transformed into a rock, or a woman, or whatever else
the heart might desire. One word of caution: while it would be feasible to turn a
rock into a woman, the resulting person would have no mind. The machine cannot
invent an entirely new personality, in terms of thoughts and memories.

In addition, the computer must know a great deal about whatever ‘thing’ I wish to
turn the subject into. Fortunately, it can find much of what it needs to know by
tapping into the resources of the World Wide Web.

You might be thinking: but Señor Hyde, surely the amount of information needed
to fully specify a human body must be astronomical. How can one mere machine
handle all that data? Well might you ask! My machine is not technically a scanner,
like the transporter in Star Trek. It merely—merely!—casts a kind of net, entirely
immaterial, over the object and rotates it—that word again—into some higher
dimension; a timeless space. It isn’t necessary to know everything there is to know
about an object, if one’s goal is simply to push it through a doorway.

No, the hard part in all this is creating the new matrix. There you do have to know
everything there is to know about the item you wish to create. A computer may
someday be able to accomplish that task from scratch, but for now one must begin
with the matrix of an existing object and modify it in ways both minor and major.
This remains, in fact, my most active area of research.

All that was left to do, once I had tested the device on various inanimate objects—
and also transformed a cat into a dog, a mouse into a raccoon, and so forth—was
to apply the process to a human subject. Since I could ask no one to take such a
risk on my behalf, of necessity that task fell to me.

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Naturally, I wanted to turn myself into a woman. Turning myself into a dog or a cat or even a chimp wouldn’t be terribly useful, because even though the process was entirely automated—from locking and unlocking the hatch, to performing the transformation, once the parameters had been set—the animal mind I would be left with wouldn’t be up to the task of initiating a transformation. Since my target had to be a human being, and preferably an adult, why not then a woman?

The problem lay in creating the proper Hyde Matrix. Most of the layout of the human body can be carried over from male to female—the major organs, skeletal layout and such—but the chromosomal differences were a major issue. I couldn’t just delete the Y-chromosome and duplicate the X; I wasn’t even sure what would result. After all, there are males with XX chromosomes and I didn’t want to turn into one of them. I did consider using my mother’s DNA—which I could probably scrounge up from her bedroom, sealed and largely untouched since her passing several years prior—but even assuming the sample wasn’t too degraded to be of use, it would not provide the breadth of information I required. What I needed was the Hyde Matrix of a living female, one not too dissimilar to myself in age. Naturally, I thought of Cassandra.

You can imagine the difficulties involved. She knew nothing of my research, and probably would not approve of it if she did. I cared for the woman, and surely wished her no harm, so it was with heavy heart that I added a strong sedative—in retrospect not quite strong enough—to the nightcap I served her one evening, prior to what she thought would be a night of passion. As we lay together in my bed, with me caressing her body to ease her passage into a drugged sleep, I found myself wondering what it would be like to possess such a body for my own. The breasts, the delicate curves of her figure, soft skin the consistency of silk, long hair that spilled across my pillow in dark waves—it was beyond belief that all this, or something quite like it, might soon belong to me.

Once Cassie was safely in dreamland, I bore her down to the basement, placed her in the transformation chamber, and initiated the process—not to transform her, but simply to record her Hyde Matrix. Moments later, a loud thump sounded from somewhere in the room. My first thought was that a raccoon had invaded the basement—as had happened only the week before—but several more thumps ensued, and they were coming from within the machine!

Alas, Cass had awoken earlier than anticipated. As the machine ground to a halt, I sprang into action and doused the lights. The hatch opened, the poor woman arose and began stumbling around in the dark. I felt my way to her.

“It’s okay, I’m here. It’s Jonathan. You’re safe.”

She clutched at me. “Jonny? What the—what’s going on? Where am I?”
“You’re in the basement. You were sleepwalking.”

“The basement? God, what do you keep down here? What is all this stuff?”

Gently, I guided her to the doorway. “That’s just the furnace. You were pounding on the ductwork. How do you think I found you?” She didn’t argue, but I’m not sure she believed me either. I helped her back to the bedroom, but she’d lost all interest in staying. Instead, she hurriedly dressed and fled the house.

I felt badly for mistreating the woman I loved, but it had to be done. My ultimate goal was so close I could taste it. Nothing could be allowed to stand in my way; not love, not loyalty, not even basic morality. Besides which, no harm had befallen the lady. She’d get over the shock of it soon enough.

Later, as I examined Cassandra’s Hyde Matrix in the machine’s matrix editor, it did occur to me that it could be used more or less as it was. With only a few tweaks to replace her mind with mine, I could turn myself into a carbon copy of her. It was an intriguing thought, but I dismissed it as quickly as it came. I did not wish, and had never sought, to become Cassie, or to replace her in any way.

Yes, my machine could certainly be used to transform each of us in turn, one into the other, and thereby achieve that Holy Grail of transgender fiction: the fabled body-swap. But such was not my goal.

I attempted to use the Matrix editor to artfully combine our two matrices, so as to provide a complete description of an adult female, but quickly ran into a limitation in the process: one female matrix was not enough. Were I to use only hers, I would indeed end up turning into Cassandra Foxx; my own male matrix simply did not provide the information I needed about variations in the female form.

Clearly, I needed to scan more women. Well, there were two others close to hand. I deemed Mrs. Dubois to be too old—I didn’t need that much variation—but Nanette Blaise was only a few years older than I. She would do nicely.

One afternoon, while she was dusting the upstairs bedrooms, I brought the lady a glass of iced tea. She accepted it gratefully, if somewhat doubtfully—this being the first time I had ever done such a thing—and before long she lay crumpled on a chaise lounge in the guest room. I picked her up easily, for she was but a slight woman, and bore her downstairs.

Unfortunately, Agatha Dubois chose that moment—as I descended the staircase from the upper storey—to pop out of the kitchen. A stricken look crossed her face. “No, no… Please, Mister Hyde, you not kill Nan. She my friend!”

Agatha had been with my family for nearly twenty years; she’d nursed my parents through their final ailments, and she probably knew me better than anyone else.
She, as well as Nanette, knew of my cross-dressing habit, but in addition Agatha was aware of my research. She didn’t understand a word of it, but she knew what I was hoping to do. That information had emerged two years before, when we shared a bottle of wine at midnight with both of us clad in pale blue nightgowns.

“For god’s sake, Agatha, I’m not a monster! It’s a nondestructive scan. I simply need to place her inside my machine for a few minutes. Naked, of course.”

She shook her head, discarding her apron. “Non non, Monsieur. This is not proper, for you to see a lady that way. She must keep her dignity, oui?” She touched her chest. “I help. You carry, I remove her clothing. You not look!”

I quickly agreed, and we descended to the basement. I placed Nanette on the scanner, then busied myself preparing for the scan while Agatha did her work. I successfully obtained the Hyde Matrix I needed, waited for Agatha to redress the subject, then carried her back upstairs to the guest room. When at last she awoke, Nanette would remember nothing of what had transpired.


I frowned as I closed the door. “Are you asking for a raise?”

“A raise? Mais non.” She took my arm. “You smart man, Mister Hyde. Professor, scientist… I ask you to use your machine, and make me young again.”

“It doesn’t work that way. I can’t just transform anyone into anyone else. We’d need a Hyde Matrix for you as a young—”

But she was way ahead of me. “You do not understand. My niece, she comes to visit me this week. From France. My niece from Nice.” She smiled. “People always say she look so much like me, only younger. You see?”

All too well. “You want me to record her Hyde Matrix. But—” I could scarcely believe this of the woman. “—you surely don’t intend to replace…”

Her eyes went wide. “Non non, Monsieur. Not that. She go home next week. We wait. One month, maybe two. Then use your machine—turn me into her. I change my hair, my clothes—look much different. If anyone ask, I say I pray to God to make me young again. He make miracle for me.”

I was doubtful. “I don’t know… people would talk, regardless. You couldn’t keep something like that secret. I don’t want a bunch of rabid Bible-thumpers—no offense—snooping around here looking for a miracle of their own. I understand the crowds at Lourdes can get pretty out of hand.”

She sighed. “Oui, Monsieur. They do.” She was silent as we returned to the main
floor. Then she stopped me. “I will leave,” she said. “Go to California. Start new life there, as young woman. Maybe become famous actress.”

How could I refuse? I agreed to her terms: a second chance at life for her, in exchange for her assistance with my research, and for her continued silence.

She embraced me. “You good man, Jonny. Not a monster. In spite of the name.”

Another drugged woman, another Hyde Matrix for my collection. Fortunately, the magic number was three and I was able to artfully blend their matrices with my own, specifying a body that was uniquely female yet bearing a distinct familial resemblance to my old self. This, after all, was my goal: to become the woman I would have been had I been born female. Sister Hyde, as it were.

My first test run, on an non-living object, was a success. The machine needed something in the chamber to ‘rotate’, so I placed there a bust of Athena, the Greek goddess of wisdom—as well as handicraft and warfare—fetched from the mantle of my living room. The machine effected the transformation, which I immediately reversed after verifying that the resultant female body—which of course lacked a conscious mind—was the one I had envisioned. The bust seemed unaffected by its brief visit to a formless void beyond time and space, so I returned it to the mantle with a murmured word of thanks.

There was naught left to do, but transform my own self into a woman.

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I waited until the following Saturday. Nanette did not work weekends, and I instructed Agatha to stay away from the house. She agreed, although she may well have guessed what I was planning. It meant no help would be forthcoming should something go awry, but I was supremely confident nothing would.

I arose that fateful morn and performed my usual ablutions, then realized there was little point in getting dressed. I was far too excited to eat, so I padded down to the basement in bare feet and birthday suit, activated the machine and climbed onto the scanner bed. Why wait? I had checked the settings numerous times over the preceding days. All was in order.

The bed slid into the chamber, the hatch swung closed, and latched, and darkness fell. The machine hummed to life. For the first time, I heard that sound from the inside and realized how pervasive it was; how terribly it set one’s teeth on edge. Already I felt divorced from the rest of the universe.

Then, in the blink of an eye, all my senses were rendered null and void. For a time I could not even estimate, much less measure, I was not only without sight, but
sound and touch as well. Taste and scent were likewise absent. This then was the life—if you can call it that—of a disembodied brain. It was not a life I would commend to others, to put it mildly. Too much of such solitude would no doubt drive a man mad. Perhaps it drove me mad. It’s hard to know.

What I failed to anticipate was the pain. The electric hum of the machine returned, followed by a wave of searing agony as every nerve in my body seemed to spasm at once. It passed in a moment, but left a deep imprint upon my mind. Then the hatch opened and the bed slid from the cylinder, bearing me with it.

Hesitantly, I opened my eyes. I felt surprisingly normal. I could breathe; my body seemed intact, insofar as I could tell from the inside. The pain had departed as quickly as it came. I took a deep breath and licked my lips. They—my lips, that is—felt somewhat ‘fuller’ than before. Perhaps it was my imagination.

I sat up. My first sensation was pure shock, as a soft mass fell upon my back and slithered around my shoulders—as if someone had flung a shawl across my neck, one made of the finest fabric ever devised by human hands. But it was, of course, only my hair. I gave my head a shake, still disbelieving. Silken brunette tresses fell around my face as I gazed down, hands clutching at my chest and the thick flesh bulging thereon, past the curves of a shockingly female figure to rest with perverse fascination upon the thatch of brown hair betwixt my legs and the cleft it only half-concealed from my fevered inspection. Only then did I know.

I was female. I was a woman—a woman.

Gently, as if fearing for my newfound delicacy, I slid off the scanner and stood. From this new angle, I inspected the feminine curvature of my body. Truly, I had succeeded—I had become that which I had long sought. Sister Hyde.

There were, I realized then, no mirrors in the basement. Cursing my lack of foresight, I padded upstairs to the foyer. There, in the floor-to-ceiling mirror that stood by the entrance to the living room, I met my new self. She was, of course, identical to the body I’d seen during the earlier test run. But that body had been almost lifeless; it breathed, but was not animated by the life force of a living mind. The woman before me was gloriously animate, her features aglow with the sheer wonder of the mind within discovering itself.

I’d already chosen a name and now I spoke it aloud: “Katerina.” Her voice was, for want of a better word, smoky. Somewhat low for a woman, but coy and, well—I could only describe it as seductive. “You—” No, that didn’t sound right.

“I—I am Katerina.” Yes, that was closer to the truth. In the mirror, Sister Hyde smiled. Coyly. Seductively. Like a woman who knew what she wanted.
I had not planned for my success. My research had been meticulous, precise in every detail; I had chosen the day and sent the ladies away to ensure I would be alone. But I had given no thought to what would come next. A naked woman requires clothing, and my old wardrobe simply would not do. My ‘brother’ often cross-dressed, but I was no longer his size; I could sense that simply from the way every room I entered appeared larger than it had only the hour before. My waist was slimmer, my torso shorter. My own clothing, whether mens- or ladies wear, would hang off me like a little girl in her sister’s hand-me-downs. Which meant—given also that Cassie wasn’t the sort of woman who left a stash of clothes in her lover’s home—I was stuck.

Unless… my mother’s room had been sealed since her passing. Her clothing and other belongings were still there, untouched. I’d never been able to bring myself to clear the room, and in fact had no real need for any of it. I’d set up my own ‘dressing’ area in the guest room across the hall. But Katerina was heiress to both rooms. I could pick and choose from either closet, either dresser. What could be more natural than for a daughter to inherit her mother’s belongings?

I mounted the stairs, pausing at my old bedroom and peering inside as if seeing it for the first time. It was a boy place, I realized—not for me. I closed the door.

I unlocked Mother’s bedroom—the key was kept in a vase in the guest room—and entered. It was just as she’d left it, the morning she’d been taken to the hospital never to return. The woman in the vanity repaid my gaze with what I can only describe as confidence. She belonged here. This was her birthright.

I rifled through the drawers, selecting panties and a brassiere, pantyhose and a short black slip. The closet yielded a little black dress she’d often worn for soirées held on warm summer evenings, but a cool Saturday afternoon was well within its capabilities. Zipping up the back was a small thrill; it was a perfect fit. As much as anything, that brought my new body into abrupt clarity. I was no longer Jonathan Hyde in his awkward male body. I was Katerina Hyde, and my female body was anything but awkward.

The makeup was too old to be of use, so I popped across the hall and borrowed my old vanity. I knew my former self wouldn’t mind. I didn’t want to overdo it, but I rouged my cheeks, lined my eyes, enlarged my lashes and painted my lips, simply to emphasize my female attributes. That seemed important.

Then it was back to Mother’s room, because I knew precisely what it was I needed to complete my outfit: her fur coat. I extracted it from its garment bag at the back of her closet and held it up. I knew it was fake fur, but regardless very expensive.
It looked luxurious; easily as soft and shiny as real mink. In fact, I sometimes wondered if it truly *was* mink, and she’d only told me otherwise because she knew I would disapprove. But no, the label itself said otherwise.

I slipped into the coat, then pinned on a few bits of her jewelry; things Mother often wore in her younger days. And then there she was, Sister Hyde in all her glory, gazing back at me through hooded eyes. She seemed to like what she saw.
What does one do, when a lifelong quest comes to a successful close? Celebrate? Throw a block party? Invite all your friends, then burst onto center stage and cry, “Here I am—check out the new me!” That hardly seemed appropriate, not least because no one would have a clue who I was.

And in fact, my time was limited. On Monday, Agatha and Nanette would return to their tasks and they wouldn’t know this strange woman from a hole in the ground. As Katerina, I had no legal existence. That was a problem.

Still, I couldn’t let a trifling problem like not existing stop me. My little cherry-red Miata looked like the sort of vehicle a woman might drive, so I took it out for a spin, resolving to stay within hailing distance of the speed limit to avoid trouble with the law. I brought my license along just in case, even though no policeman would ever believe it was mine. But since the name on the license matched the car’s papers, it might enable me to say that I’d taken my brother’s wallet by mistake. A faint hope is better than none, as the saying goes.

In the event, I spent a carefree three hours circumnavigating the city, and returned without incident. What got me into trouble was what—or rather, who was waiting for me upon my arrival.

I pulled into the circular driveway in front of the house to find none other than my old friend Victor Sloane seated on the stoop. I knew he’d seen me because he immediately stood up, having no doubt recognized the car. A puzzled look crossed his face when he noticed who was driving.

Busted. I parked the car and got out, knowing there was no way to avoid some sort of explanation. Telling the truth never crossed my mind.

“That’s my friend’s car,” Victor said. “Jonathan Hyde. Maybe you know him. I sure as hell hope you know him.” His cell phone was in his hand.

I smiled; seductively, one hoped. “Of course. You must be Victor. My brother has mentioned you to me several times. I understand you’re quite close.”

“Your brother?” He shook his head. “No way. I’ve known the dude since high school. He’s an only child.”

I steeled myself against the lies to come. “Forgive me. I should have said ‘long lost’ brother.” I climbed the stairs, wary of my high heels. “I was the result of his father’s affair with his secretary. My mother raised me by herself, but Father was always quite generous with his support. That is why, when I came of age, I chose to take his name.” I held out my hand. “Katerina Hyde.”
Looking dazed, Victor shook my hand. His touch stirred something within me. It was reminiscent of when first I met Cassandra; her touch had struck a spark.

“So, uhm—where is Jonny-boy anyhow?” He looked up at the house. “I knocked awhile ago, but there was no answer.”

I chose my words carefully. If I told him Jonathan was at the office, Victor might call there. If he was in the basement, Victor might want to go down. Jonathan had to be completely unavailable. “Field trip,” I said, as quickly as it came to me. “He took a group of students out to the observatory. I’m afraid he won’t be back ‘til late because, you know—stars.” I dipped into my purse. “However, he did leave me the key, so if you’d care to come in… a drink, perhaps? I’d hate for you to waste your time waiting for someone who turned out to be me.”

He agreed and we went inside. “Funny, that,” he said. “I’d have thought they’d get a star-gazer to handle an astronomy field trip.”

“Apparently, it was a last-minute thing. Somebody got sick.” I led the way into the living room. “Besides, it’s all just ‘physics’, isn’t it?”

“I suppose.” He offered to prepare the drinks and, after some thought, I requested a Cosmopolitan. The ingredients were there at the bar, and—bonus—it was a drink Victor could mix in his sleep. He often served it to his dates.

I perched on the antique French settee beneath the front window and watched him work. How odd I had never noticed the man’s lean build, his strangely appealing height, or the masculine set of his jawline—but I suppose those weren’t the sort of things Jonathan would notice. It was another jarring reminder that I was no longer male. Women view men in a much different way.

I accepted the cocktail and gestured to the seat next to mine. “I suppose you’re wondering where I’ve been all your life,” I said coyly.

He chuckled. “The thought did cross my mind.”

By chance, I’d been thinking about a cover story during my excursion. “Like a lot of girls, I went to Europe for my gap year. Travelled around a lot. Then I met an English chap and we got married. He worked at a high-tech firm and we settled in Cambridge. Have you ever been?” Victor shook his head, as I knew he would. I’d chosen a place he’d never been. “I’d still be there if he hadn’t passed away.”

His face shifted into practiced sympathy. “I’m sorry.”

I rolled my shoulders. “There wasn’t much to keep me there. No family or any of that. I wasn’t close to my in-laws. So I came home.” I sipped at my drink. “I lived with my mother until a few months ago, when she passed. There was no one else, so I decided to look up Jonathan. Just to, well… have someone in my life.”
“I imagine he was surprised to see you,” Victor said dryly.

“Oh, he knew about the affair. His mother told him before she—you know. I guess it wasn’t something he liked to talk about. He never told you?”

Victor shook his head. “It’s good, though. You both lost people close to you.”

I rested my head on the back of the couch. “Jonathan was a godsend. Frankly, I’m still not sure what to do with myself, so… I like having someone I can talk to. Someone I can trust.”

“All you need is—trust,” he said, humming the old Beatles song.

I took a deep breath, then looked straight at him. “I know what you must be thinking… Mister Sloane, isn’t it? Do I have that right?” He nodded guardedly. “This isn’t about the money,” I continued. “I know Jonathan is fairly well-off, but so was my husband. My mother was comfortable as well. When I sell her house, I’ll have more than enough to live on.”

“That’s good.” He shrugged. “None of my business, of course.”

“No, but—I know you look out for him.”

“Yeah, I guess. He’s always been a bit naïve. He trusts people.”

I sipped from my glass. “I won’t let him down, Mister Sloane. Or you.”

He smiled. “Call me Victor.”

We talked for over an hour; mostly him telling me about his work and some of the stories he’d covered for the paper. Then hunger got the better of me. He offered to buy dinner, and took me to a little French bistro—which I knew to be his go-to site for a first date. Afterwards, he drove me home and escorted me up to the front porch. I felt like a teenage girl returning from the junior prom, wondering if she was going to be kissed before her father could open the door.

I needn’t have worried. I was kissed. And it curled my toes.

~

On Sunday evening I re-entered the machine and returned to the masculine side of the family. It was a shock to once again possess a penis, particularly after the way I’d pleasured myself the night before. The man scowling back at me from the mirror seemed almost a stranger.

On Monday I called Agatha and Nanette into the dining room—neutral ground—and sat them down for a chat. I told them about my long-lost ‘sister’, who lived two states over but was thinking about making a move to our fair city.
Agatha knew what I meant; she smiled and began humming to herself—no doubt imagining her new life in California. Nanette misunderstood. My cross-dressing proclivities were an open secret among the three of us, along with an unspoken agreement never to mention the subject, and she assumed this was my way of bringing my feminine alter-ego ‘out of the closet’. She wasn’t far off.

I told her this was not the case. “She’s quite real, I assure you. Whether I’m here or not, I ask that both of you follow her wishes as you would mine. After all, she’s family. In every sense of the word, my home is hers. I hope that’s clear.” It was, but Nan still didn’t seem to believe me—at least until later in the week, when she met Sister Hyde face to face.

Agatha feigned ignorance. “Your ‘sister’, Monsieur—she gonna stroll around in high heels and pretty dress? You want us to call her ‘Lady Hyde’? Why she still named ‘Hyde’ anyhow? You said she marry in England. She gonna keep changing her name ‘til she get it right?”

I frowned at her, thinking that it really wasn’t a good idea to antagonize a man who could literally turn you into anything. I repeated my cover story, adding that Katerina had kept her own name when she married. Once more, I assured them that Ms. Hyde was not me. Besides which, on those rare occasions when they caught me en femme, didn’t I answer to the name ‘Jennifer’?

Agatha shrugged. “Your sister not the only one who changes her name.” But then she vowed the household would run just as smoothly no matter who happened to be calling the shots. And that was that.

On Wednesday, however, events took a turn for the worse. Cassandra showed up at my university office just before lunch, as she sometimes did when I had no classes in the afternoon. But she wasn’t smiling. “I’ve been told there’s a woman staying with you,” she said, in a voice that bled acid.

My eyes went wide. “Where did you hear that?”

“Victor stopped by the museum this morning. He had a lot to say.”

I saved the article I was editing. “She’s my sister.”

“I’m not sure I believe that.”

“The woman looks like my sister, for god’s sake. Didn’t he tell you that?”

“He did. He also told me there’s no such person as ‘Katerina Hyde’.”

Damn. “That’s not fair. It could be her middle name. Or maybe the database Vic checked wasn’t up-to-date and didn’t include her new surname.”

“Maybe. Or maybe she lied. Or maybe you’re lying.”
I was shocked. I’d never heard Cassie speak so frankly, or so forcefully. It was like talking to a stranger. “What are you saying?”

“I thought we were an item. You know, a couple. Two of a kind.”

“Sure we are. Why wouldn’t we be?”

“You have to ask? You’re seeing this woman behind my back!”

“God, no! How can you even say that? I can’t even imagine—”

“Victor said she comes across like sex on wheels.”

“What—really?” Curiously, I felt pleased. It was gratifying to think, as a woman, that I’d made such a strong impression on the first man I met. As a long-time cross-dresser I did have some experience in acting feminine, but still…

“You’re surprised? She came on to Victor like gang-busters, did you know that?”

“Uhm… I know she kissed him. Or he kissed her. Whatever.”

“Uh-huh. Right at your own front door. How did that make you feel?”

I shrugged. “It’s none of my business.”

She looked doubtful. “I don’t know… this is very strange, Jonathan. You never said one word to me about having a sister.”

“I didn’t know myself, until recently. I guess I’m still dealing with it. You know, my father’s affair. The shock. It’s kind of embarrassing.” She still had doubts. I offered to take her to lunch so we could talk it through.

“Not right now. I need to think about this.” She gave me a mournful look, before disappearing into the hallway. I was left to wonder about our future.

Naturally, I called Victor right away. “Dude, what did you tell Cassandra? She was just here—spitting mad. What happened to the Bro Code?”

He was dismissive. “I told her what I saw. Cass is the smartest, classiest woman I know—way out of your league, frankly. She deserves to know what’s going on. As her friend, I owed her that much.”

“What you saw? You didn’t see anything! Christ, I wasn’t even there.” I took a deep breath. “Jeez, if you thought she and I were, you know… together… then why the hell did you come on to her like that?”

“I did it for you, man. You and Cass belong together. She’s the best goddamn thing that ever happened to you. That ain’t original, but it’s how I feel. You can’t let some random skankasaurus break you up.”

I rolled my eyes. “You’re a regular ‘Dear Abby’, Vic.”
“Look, if this chick really is your sister—no harm done, right? But if she isn’t… Fair warning, bro—I’m gonna do whatever the hell it takes to take her away from you. That’s for your sake, and for Cassandra as well.”

“That’s real selfless of you.”

“All right, I get it. She told you we hit it off, right?” He paused. “I admit it: I like the chick. She’s hot. Way out of your league—again.” He laughed. “Being with her is no sacrifice, believe me. But that isn’t why I’m cutting in.”

I thumped my desk, even though he couldn’t see it. “You think that bothers me? News flash, buddy—it doesn’t. Do whatever the hell you want. We aren’t dating. Believe me, it isn’t even possible.”

I imagined him grinning. “No kidding. Then you wouldn’t mind if I came by on, shall we say Friday? To call on the lady. How’s that sound?”

Nothing to do with me. I told him to go right ahead; I wouldn’t be there.

~

I barely slept. Katerina nattered away in the back of my mind, in a voice that began as my own internal monologue and slowly morphed into hers. I couldn’t ignore her for long without going mad, so I returned to the machine. Since I had no classes that day, there was really no reason not to.

I was smarter this time, bringing with me underwear, footwear and a robe that had once belonged to my mother. The pain returned once more, but an instant of searing agony now seemed like a small price to pay for the body I desired. I leapt from the scanner and got dressed: brassiere and panties, garter belt and stockings, black silk robe and a cute pair of slipper mules with a mid-sized heel and a tuft of fur atop the toe. Thusly clad, I shut down the machine and headed upstairs.

I ran into Nanette in the foyer. Her eyes went wide, no doubt quickly realizing this was no mere cross-dresser. I feigned ignorance, peering down my nose at her. “You must be the help,” I said haughtily, knowing full well the woman would take an instant dislike. But it would add authority to my role as lady of the house. “I am Katerina Hyde. Once I finish dressing, I ask that you prepare the master bedroom for occupancy. While I am here, that room shall be mine.”

Her eyes, if anything, got even wider. “His mother’s room? I was told never to go in there. Does the master—?”

“My brother has given his consent.” I smiled. “He is away for the weekend, so you’ll have to take my word for it.”
“Yes, of course.” She nodded and hurried off toward the kitchen, perhaps to ask Agatha if this arrogant woman was to be believed. No worries there; I knew Agatha would back me up, for reasons of her own.

I proceeded upstairs and sifted through Mother’s closet. I needed a dress—it did have to be a dress—apropos for day wear, yet chic enough not to look out of place on a dinner date. Call me conceited if you must, but I was quite sure as to how my evening was likely to pan out. I settled on a sky-blue chiffon party dress with short sleeves, draped neckline, gathered waist and a full tea-length skirt. It was lined so I didn’t need a slip. A pair of silver pumps with narrow heels completed the outfit. I added a few choice items of jewelry, then moved next-door to fix my face. I kept it simple, not wishing to appear overly made-up during the day.

Victor arrived at half past one, as I suspected he would. It was his habit on Fridays to work mornings in the office, then lunch with his colleagues and contrive to slip away when the others returned. Ostensibly it was to follow up a lead for whatever story he was working on, but in reality very little work was involved. Unless of course one were to count the drudgery of foreplay.

I sent Nanette to the door and met him in the study. My back was to the door when I heard him enter and cough discretely. I continued my inspection of a shelf of texts pertaining to the assent of mankind from tribal hunter-gatherers to a world-spanning industrial civilization, then turned, languidly, my lips pursed as if lost in thought. “My father was a learned man, Mr. Sloane. I often find myself more appreciative of what a man knows, and can speak to with some authority, than of his more—shall we say—‘physical’ attributes.”

“I met him a few times,” Victor said. “He was quite a guy. Very smart.” He strolled toward me, hands clasped behind his back. “As for me, I like to think I can hold my own in both areas. You be the judge.”

“Oh, I shall.” I flashed him a coy smile, while inwardly wondering just what the hell I was playing at. This was my friend, my buddy, the compadre of my school years. Did I really want to seduce him? Was I that different as a woman?

He suggested a personalized tour of the city, given that I was—as far he knew—new to the area. How could I refuse? I knew exactly where the tour would end up, and my female aspect approved. In fact, she could hardly wait.

We began downtown with a stroll around the art gallery and its environs, followed by drinks in the revolving lounge atop the Savoy. From there, Victor took his time pointing out every landmark within ten miles, but succeeded only in boring me to tears. Tell me something I don’t know! Back in the car, we headed out on the scenic drive around the lake and here my anticipation rose.
To be precise, my nipples became curiously stiff. By turning to admire the view, I contrived to touch one without being seen. I was rewarded with a quick jolt of pleasure. I drew a deep breath and tidied my hair atop my shoulders. My body seemed to be running the show, regardless of what my mind might think. Then again, my brain was awash in estrogen. Who knew where that might lead?

The road executed several switchbacks and emerged on a plateau overlooking the lake. From there it would pass through a forested area and ultimately return to the city via the more circuitous route. But we weren’t going that far. As anticipated, Victor pulled the car into the parking lot at Lover’s Leap. It was his go-to view for when he wanted to take a date to the next level. I was ready.

I took his arm as we strolled down the path leading to the viewpoint, then along the cliffside to a bench he had once pointed out to me—or rather, to Jonathan. It sat at the far end of the path, discretely out of sight of the main viewing area. Here we stood by the railing while he pointed out places I’d know my entire life. I made appropriate cooing noises at how lovely the place was, which was no lie because the sun was setting and the landscape was amazing. For some reason, seeing all that beauty made me feel more feminine.

Victor turned toward me, his arm sliding around my waist. “This is gonna sound corny, but… next to you, all this pales into insignificance.”

I had to smile. “Yes, that’s terribly corny. But I’m glad you said it.” My small hand touched his chest. “I can’t help wondering though… is that something you’ve said before? Right here, to some other girl?” I knew darn well he had.

He shook his head. “I’ve been out here before, but never on a date.”

*Liar! My god, what a rogue! I almost called him on it, but at the last moment I chickened out. It wasn’t what a woman in my shoes would do. My hand flattened against his chest. “Just waiting for the right girl to come along?”*

He grinned. “Something like that.” His eyes glazed and he leaned toward me.

*Finally. I lowered my lashes, lifted my face toward his—and we kissed.*

His arm about my waist tightened, pulling me to him. My breasts pressed into his chest. A wave of pleasure washed through me, cleansing as it went; in its wake I felt utterly, almost impossibly feminine. I knew my mind was still in its original receptacle, safely tucked away in another dimension, but my thoughts were now filtered through a brain that was entirely female. Moreover, the input from all five of senses arose from a female body—a body that seemed intent on imposing its own desires in place of my own.

Helpless to stop myself, I sank into his lips, almost forgetting who I was.
Eventually, we came up for air. Victor nuzzled my ear and planted soft kisses all down my throat. I faced the sky, relishing the feel of long hair dancing across my shoulder blades. I’d never felt more alive.

He whispered my name. “Katerina. You are… an amazing woman.”

“You’re not so bad yourself.” My heart sank. That wasn’t what I wanted to say. I had meant to respond with words that spoke of the pleasure he’d given me, and how much I loved being the feminine counterpoint to his masculinity. Instead of that, mere flippancy. The mood broke. I stepped back.

His head tilted to one side, but he left the question unspoken.

I gazed across the lake. “My brother says you’re doing this to break us up, he and I. Not that we need breaking up, of course, because he’s family. I could no more have an affair with him than I could—a shadow.” I waved weakly in his direction. “Don’t bother to answer. I know it’s true.”

He sighed. “That’s not the only reason. You know that.”

“But it was in the beginning.” I rubbed my arms against the breeze.

He nodded. “Jonny and Cass were meant to be together. I couldn’t let you come between them, although I can see how tempting it would be.” I felt his eyes upon me. “You’re saying you really are his sister?”

“You don’t believe me?” I turned to face him. The wind flung hair across my face. I pulled at it, giving my head a shake.

“I’m trying. It’s just that—”

“Don’t I look like him? Just a little?” I lifted my chin, feeling naughty.

“I guess so. Actually, I’m kind of trying not to see the resemblance.”

“Trust me.” I leaned against him. Our bodies seemed to fit together perfectly, like they were made for each other. “There’s nothing between Jonathan and I. He’s my shadow, nothing more.” I gazed up into his eyes. “I’m yours, if you want me.”

What man could resist an offer like that from a beautiful woman?

Victor swept me into his arms and kissed me, and it was a deep kiss that lasted for a long time. When it was over he drove me back to his apartment. The woman in me rejoiced, and her heart was full of passion. The man locked somewhere deep inside me despaired of ever being male again.

Womanhood, it must be said, is a powerful drug.
I had to pretend I’d never seen his place before, which was a problem because to my now-female eyes it was kind of a dump. It was hard to think of something nice to say—and frankly all the ignorance I had to feign that evening was getting a bit tedious. Fortunately, he had a pretty nice view—of the lake, of course, from a very different angle—so I oohed and ahed over that while he mixed the drinks. Another ladylike Cosmopolitan for me, needless to say.

We stepped onto the balcony, linked arms and toasted the night to come.

I undressed in his bathroom, all the while studying myself in the mirror. I was a woman all right, and my body was decidedly female. Full breasts tipped with areola the size of a silver dollar and stiffened nipples. Such strange entities…

I brushed my hair, locking eyes with my reflection. I am female, I informed her—or him, in case Jonathan was still lurking within—and there is nothing wrong with a woman making love to a man. To the extent that I might still be male… well, there’s nothing wrong with that either. So why this residual guilt sloshing around inside my skull? I made a conscious effort to ignore it.

Interesting. Some previous girlfriend had left a bottle of _eau de toilette_ in Victor’s medicine cabinet: _Miss Dior_. It sounded nicely feminine, and right about then I was in the mood for Feminine with a capital F. Playfully, I spritzed my throat and wrists, wondering which of his old girlfriends I would remind him of. Perhaps, in the throes of passion, he would cry out her name instead of mine. It was a wicked, almost perverse thought and it made me smile. How better to become a woman than to be called one during the male orgasm?

I slipped into his robe and padded into the bedroom. The apartment was dark but enough light filtered through the curtains to show that he was in bed, half propped up on the pillows. I let the robe slip from my shoulders, knowing the silhouette of my oh-so-female body would be faintly visible. I half-turned approaching the bed, just to let him know what was coming.

His arm encircled me as I slid between the sheets. He nuzzled my hair. “You smell fantastic.”

“Just call me ‘Miss Dior’.” I nuzzled him back. “What’s that scent you’re wearing? Some kind of musk?”

He smothered a laugh. “I shaved this morning, so there might be some of that left. Not much. So mostly just good, honest sweat.”

“Really? But I never—it’s kind of, I dunno… masculine? It’s nice.”

“You’ll have to check me out down at the gym, after a workout.”

My nose wrinkled. “I’ll pass. Probably too much of a good thing.”
“Smart move. Too much of anything is a turn-off.”

I ran my fingers through the wiry hairs on his chest. “I don’t think I can remember what being ‘turned off’ feels like.”

He moved a stray tress off my face. “Is that such a bad thing?”

My gaze fell. “No.”

He kissed the top of my head. “You are the sexiest wo—”

I touched his lips with my forefinger. “Shhh. I’m sure I’m not the first woman you’ve shared your bed with. It doesn’t matter. I’m here now.”

“Kat—Katerina. I dunno. There’s something special about you.” He pulled me to him. “I mean that. It’s not just words.”

“You’re right. There is.” I gave him a long kiss while probing the space between his legs. “Would you believe me if I said I used to be a man?”

His laugh broke when I found his penis. “Ha! No, I wouldn’t. So you’re the product of the most stunningly successful sex change in history?”

“Something like that.” I kissed him again. “Would it matter?”

He caressed my back. “I don’t believe it for a sec—” I felt him stiffen between my fingers. “Oh, hell, just the thought that you might’ve been—that you might have chosen to become—” His hand found the slit between my own legs. “I knew it, you are female! But—I admit it. The idea that you might have deliberately turned yourself into such an incredibly sexy woman… it’s a turn-on.”

That tore it. I kissed him again, hard. My tongue invaded his mouth while my fingers got busy. “Thanks for being such a modern man,” I said, a long time later. “You’re serious? It really doesn’t matter?”

“Don’t know why it would.”

I shivered as his fingers dipped inside me. “You have hidden depths, Mr. Sloane.”

“As do you. Katerina Hyde, international woman of mystery.”

“I guess we were made for each other.”

He touched my face in the dark. “Let’s find out.”

It was time. He didn’t seem to be in any hurry to claim the high ground, so I rolled onto my knees and straddled him. I was reminded of my lovemaking sessions with Cassie, only with the penis on the other foot, so to speak. Recalling what she had often done for me, I gripped his member and guided it into my waiting tunnel.

As he entered me, I shuddered. Such an alien feeling…
I shook my head to clear it. Long hair flowed across my shoulders. I took a deep breath and impaled myself. A strange warmth spread through my body, pulsing in waves focused on the point of entry. Victor took my breasts in both hands, gently squeezing and rubbing the tips. My head rolled back, my mouth gaping open. Our bodies surged and danced to chaotic musics neither of us could hear.

After a while, we settled into an easy rhythm. Privately, I found myself astonished that the dam, so to speak, had not yet burst. It certainly would have for Jonathan, but Victor seemed to be made of sterner stuff.

He ran his hands up and down my sleek sides. “This is nice. Damn nice.”

From where I sat with my pelvis fused to his, I could see through a gap in the curtains. Moonlight skittered over the surface of the lake, but in the distance—perhaps far beyond Lover’s Leap—dark clouds were on the march. I may not have been in my right mind, but these words found my lips: “There’s a—storm coming. I hope we—can ride it out—together.”

He laughed. “And here’s me thinking it’s such a lovely evening.”

I lowered myself onto his chest. “There’s always another storm,” I whispered. He drew me into a kiss that outlasted the moonlight. Long enough for him, at least, to find his place in the center of the world. I followed him down.

~

Victor was still asleep when I arose and stole into the bathroom. I washed my face and my womanly parts, but averted my gaze while I dressed. At first I wasn’t sure why, but with one last glance in the mirror—I knew.

It was shame. Not for having made love to a man, but for taking to bed someone who wasn’t Cassandra. Try as I might to convince myself that Jonathan and I were two separate people, I knew better. I had cheated on the woman I loved.

I fled into the cold morning air, summoned a ride and went home.

But returning home wasn’t enough. I marched straight down to the basement and summoned the machine to life with angry fingers. Five minutes later, I was him again. Jonathan was angry.

I gathered the clothes Katerina had worn and returned them to my mother’s room. Let her put them away. I left the garments in a heap on the bed, knowing it would pique her. I showered, then returned to my own bedroom and lay down. Though it was not yet eight o’clock, and the night had brought very little rest, sleep would not come. Alas, guilt did and I was left to deal with a toxic mixture of regret and self-loathing—until noon, when finally I arose for a second time.
I found Agatha puttering in the kitchen. She really didn’t have a lot to do, working in a house with only one occupant and not having to keep clean any room other than the kitchen. She did keep the larder well-stocked with elaborate dishes that I often used as snacks. It’s a wonder I wasn’t quite a bit heavier.

How I was feeling was obvious. I requested and received a hug, then slumped into a seat at the kitchen table. She poured us both a drink and I told her everything. All the guilt, all the regret, all the loathing.

She shook her head, clucking her tongue. “You in it deep, young Hyde. Being a woman… this is like riding a wild horse. Never been tamed. You never even been on a horse before. No wonder you cannot handle it.”

I glared at her. “This is supposed to help me?”

She pursed her lips. “When I was just a girl, back in France, I meet a man named Hugo. Nice young man, very handsome. He earn my favor, we probably gonna get married. Not right away, but someday, you know?” She sighed. “Instead, he run off with my best friend. They go to Paris, get married, have kids. They very happy. I come to America, live alone, work as cook to rich family.” She patted his hand. “Do not misunderstand. Good life. Not great, but okay.” She lifted her hands, palms up. “But when I think about Hugo…” Briefly, her fingers became claws and she mimicked wringing the neck of an invisible adversary. “Like a chicken, yes? Pop it right off. I still love him, you see, but hate him too. This is what happens, when a man break a woman’s heart.”

I nodded dully. “You mean, like I did to Cassie.”

“Oui, if she ever find out. You be smart, Jonny. Keep quiet.”

“What about honesty? What about, you know—a healthy relationship?”

Agatha shook her head. “You gonna tell her you turn into woman and sleep with a man? That is too much.”

“Maybe I could work up to it,” I mused. “First tell her about the machine and what it can do. Then mention that I’ve been using it to turn myself into a woman—just to see how the other half lives, right? Have her meet Katerina at some point, and then down the road mention in passing that, yeah, I did mess around with Victor once, awhile back, but that’s real over.”

Agatha climbed to her feet. “That gonna take quite awhile. Not sure you can keep it together that long, Jonny. The woman is gonna take over one of these days. Not that nice Miss Foxx either. The other one.” She patted my shoulder. “I make you mushy peas, ‘kay? You feel better.” That may not sound like much, but it was my favorite dish as a child—and make me feel better it did.
A few days later I was listlessly consuming a late lunch in the faculty cafeteria when Cassandra dropped into the chair opposite. She set her tote bag on the table, greeted me breezily—as though our last meeting hadn’t been awkward as hell—and pulled out a sandwich wrapped in wax paper. “Mind if I join you?”

“Not at all.” Privately, I was freaking out. Exactly how obvious was the guilt I was wearing? Was it literally written all over my face? Or just chiseled into my chest like one of the Ten Commandments? Would she tell me if she knew?

“I talked to Victor today,” she said, unwrapping the sandwich. **Oh joy.** I had to remind myself that no one else knew Katerina and I were joined at the hip. So Cassie couldn’t possibly be here to accuse me of sleeping with Victor. Or could she? My head spun with the implications.

“He told me,” she said, measuring her words carefully, “that he and what’s-her-name… did the beast with two backs the other night.” She took a bite and stared at me while chewing.

“I heard.” I set my plate aside. My appetite, meager to begin with, was gone. “She told you, huh? How’d that make ya feel? Jealous? Betrayed?”

I shook my head. “Katerina can do whatever she wants. Nothing to do with me.”

“Oh-huh. Victor said she felt guilty afterward.”

Nervously, I drummed on the tabletop. “Where would he get that idea?”

“She was gone when he woke up. Why would she just take off, unless she did something wrong? In her own eyes, I mean. Like betray someone.”

“She didn’t betray me. She couldn’t. It’s impossible. For god’s sake, Cass—”

She waved off my reply. “The way I see it…” She paused to choose her words. “The important thing here, is that she’s moving on. She may not fully realize it yet herself, but she’s distancing herself. From you.”

I pursed my lips. Interesting theory. It might even be true—though not, of course, in the way Cassandra thought. Curiouser and curioser.

“She’s moving on—the sooner the better. But as you can see, I’m still here.” She smiled. “We’re gonna get through this, Jonny. You wait and see.” She opened her bag and pulled out a magazine, then leaned back and leafed through it, humming to herself. The cover was plain to see: *Guns & Ammo.*

My breath caught. Was that a warning?
Cassie wasn’t actually into guns; the subscription came courtesy of her father, along with the lady-sized Glock-43 handgun she kept beside her bed. I knew the magazine usually went unread, spending a week or two on her coffee table—in case Daddy happened to drop by unexpectedly—before being recycled. I’d never seen her take it out of the apartment, much less actually read it.

“I’m telling you, Cass—” My voice emerged as a croak. “Nothing happened. She’s a whole different person. We have nothing in common.” A bit of a white lie there, but what the hell; it was getting truer all the time.

“Oh, I know. A woman like that… she’s nothing like you, Jonny. The two of you are as different as, oh… fire and ice.”

“She’s my sister,” I croaked.

“She’s fire,” Cassandra said. “Touch her and you’ll melt. Think about it. A little puddle on the ground. All that’s left of Jonathan Hyde.”

I was left to ponder: a puddle of water—or blood?

~

I was torn. My love for Cassandra was strong; it was real. My sense of myself as male was perhaps not quite so strong, yet I could not ignore the responsibilities I had acquired as a man. But Katerina was in my blood. She was part of me, and it was a part that grew stronger by the day. She wanted out.

Perhaps it was foolish to do so, but in a weak moment one evening I was driven to re-watch the movie that had started me down this path: Dr. Jekyll and Sister Hyde. The house was empty when I pressed Play on the DVD I had so often viewed over the years, and that was probably a misstep as well.

Such is life. We all make mistakes. For example, the rather large mistake made by the hapless Henry Jekyll when he decided to create an elixir that would prolong life indefinitely. It was, naturally, based on female hormones, because women live longer than men. But let’s get serious—the man was asking for it. What did he expect would happen when he ingested a cocktail extracted from the bodies of deceased prostitutes? Of course he turned into a woman!

It was the scene where Jekyll is first transformed that long fascinated me. Having swallowed the potion that sealed his fate, he stumbles into his living room, barely able to maintain his balance. He collapses into a chair and we see him from behind as his hair begins to grow—more than anything I wanted to experience that for myself. His face lifts slowly from his hands. He stares into the mirror, only to find a woman gazing back at him. Oh, horrors!
Well, that might’ve been terrifying to some people, but I wasn’t one of them. In fact, it set me on the path I now tread, with a machine awaiting me in the basement that could accomplish more or less the same thing as Jekyll’s potion. Jekyll goes on to discover he now has a wonderful head of hair, as well as a woman’s face and a female body. Oh, how I envied him! The beauty of the woman he became, the strikingly gorgeous Edwina Hyde, served only to deepen my obsession.
For the first time ever, I failed to see the movie through to the end. I knew how it turns out: Henry Jekyll loses control over his feminine alter ego, who then goes on a wee bit of a murder spree before being discovered and hunted down like a bitch. The moral of the story? Men of science should not and must not meddle with forces they do not understand, because if they do they’ll come to a bad end; yadda, yadda, yadda. We’ve seen it all before. It’s so simplistic.

As I hastened down the stairs to my workshop, I gave silent thanks that I wasn’t a witless sap like Henry Jekyll. I for one could control the forces I had unleashed. I was free to become a woman anytime I chose and no one had to get hurt. In that regard, my machine was far superior to some crude elixir that required a dead body as its primary ingredient. How medieval is that?

I disrobed, set the program in motion and lay down on the scanner bed. As I was drawn into the machine, I couldn’t help wondering what poor old Henry would say if he could see me now—his namesake and scientific heir, about to be turned into a woman through the power of modern physics, rather than base chemistry.

*You’ve come a long way, baby. Don’t blow it.*

~

I awoke in the bed that once belonged to my mother, with pale sunlight streaming through lace curtains. I had been dreaming that I was Sister Hyde from the film, being pursued across the English moors by a mob equipped with flaming torches, as such mobs usually are. Needless to say, reality was much to be preferred: I was a woman, and one who bore no small resemblance to the illustrious Ms. Beswick herself, curiously enough. Best not read too much into *that*.

I stretched languidly, reveling in the female body hidden beneath the covers. I was wearing one of Mother’s nightgowns as well, but of course it belonged to me now, along with the bed, the bedroom and everything else. Her legacy as a woman of means was also mine; I was the lady of the house.

On a whim I slipped into Jonathan’s old robe—which he’d been wearing the night before while watching the movie—seated myself before the vanity mirror and began to re-enact the scene where Henry Jekyll discovers he has been transformed into a woman. I buried my face in my hands, then lifted it to gaze upon my reflection with that transcendent look of horror I knew so well. I approached the mirror in a mock state of shock, then puzzlement. I touched my cheek: it was a woman’s face—but how could this be? I stumbled away, refusing to believe…

Inwardly, I could only smile. It was just as I’d dreamed, so often throughout the long years of my youth, and of the research that had led to this moment.
Again I approached the mirror, studying the woman’s face. She was so lovely… I lifted a profusion of long hair from the collar of my robe, sending it spilling over my shoulders. My robe parted and I gazed in wonderment at the breasts that now gilded my chest. My smile grew. Coyly, I turned to admire myself from the side, fingers trailing through long hair, then peeked over my shoulder. Spinning about, I hugged myself and laughed. *Success!*

My robe slipped open. Hesitantly, slim fingers crept inside to touch the tip of one firm breast. My smile faded as a new sensation arose within. I looked down upon my body—no longer male, but *female* flesh. Amazing!

In the film, the potion wore off rather quickly and Sister Hyde is dismayed to find herself turning back into a man. I could hardly blame her. Henry Jekyll must be a real comedown after a taste of being a beautiful woman.

His problem was not mine. My transformation wasn’t about to wear off. I could possess this wonderfully female body for the rest of eternity if I so chose. Only the machine in the basement could change me into anything else.

I had transcended the film. *Dr. Jekyll and Sister Hyde* was not *my* story; from here on I could blaze my own path. Henry ended up dead, sprawled in an alley of old London town—but I, Katerina Hyde, would live. As a woman.

Once dressed—rather plainly, I thought, but it was only eight AM and hardly time to glam it up—I descended to the ground floor, feeling regal in spite of the pencil skirt and basic white blouse. Might a queen dress down and go out among the commoners, to see how her subjects live? That’s how I felt.

Nanette was scrubbing the floor in the foyer. She gave me a long, silent look—not angry or resentful, merely resigned—before returning to her work. I headed for the kitchen. Agatha was in the midst of preparing breakfast, but stopped when she saw me. A sly smile spread across her weathered face. “Jonny go away again, I see. Maybe for a long time, I bet.”

I took a seat at the table, crossed my legs at the knee and relaxed. “Make me something girly,” I said, upon reflection. “Something a lady would eat.”

“I think you already something girly. What you need me for?”

“I think you *already* something girly. What you need me for?”

I flashed her a mock frown. “You know what I mean.”

“Yes, I know.” She stood over me, wiping her hands on a tea towel. “You want food woman would eat, ‘cause you a woman now. Well, news flash, Jonny…” She paused. “Can’t call you *that*. Miss Hyde? Too formal. Katerina? Too uppity. Kat—Katie? Yes, I call you that. Like you are little girl.” She wagged her finger at me. “News flash, Katie. Girls eat same thing as boys, pretty much, only less of it.”
Agatha returned to the counter, divided the two-egg omelette she just made into halves and placed them on separate plates. Two pieces of toast, one on each plate. She added orange and melon slices, a few grapes, then split an avocado down the middle and discarded the pit. One plate for me, the other for her and she joined me at the table. “Fruit is girly,” she said. “Avocado is very girly. Enjoy.”

“Thanks for the tip.”

“Anytime. So… how does it go, dealing with all that guilt you got?”

Agatha had never been one to beat around the bush. I felt like saying something flippant—guilt, shmilt—but settled for a shrug. “It’s still there. I just figured having breasts and a uterus would make it easier to deal with.”

“Got that right. Boobs and baby-maker make everything easier to handle.”

I had to think about that one. I’m pretty sure she was joking, but I couldn’t avoid the question. I had put it aside for a time, but my guilt was alive and well and gnawing at my fallopian tubes. Her vague threat notwithstanding, I loved Cassie with all my heart. Yet my female body was undeniably drawn to the male of the species, and for the moment at least to Victor—he being the only man I’d spent any time with. How could I reconcile these disparate feelings?

I could imagine myself switching back and forth between Mister and Miss Hyde, a day or two at a time, but trying to be two different people for two other people was bound to end in tears. Jekyll and Hyde as a French farce.

Agatha finished and placed her plate in the sink. She returned to her seat and touched my hand. “Katie, you remember what we talk about? Oui, I know—that was Jonathan. You remember the promise he make?”

“Certainly. He and I are the same person, you know. Mostly.”

A wan smile. “Mostly. For now.” She tapped the table. “I think time has come. My niece been gone for more than two weeks. You make me young again, yes?”

I looked at her steadily. “You think you’re ready?”

She nodded. “I buy her nice things in stores; too much to take on plane. So I have clothes that will fit, you see? I make copy of her ID. I tell her, just in case you lose yours. I already sell and give away most of my clothes. Travel light.”

“Color me impressed. You still want to head out to the West Coast?”

She laughed. “Leave tomorrow, if I could. We start new lives, both of us.”

I let that comment pass. “All right, let’s do it. Is this afternoon okay?”

“Of course, Mademoiselle Hyde.” Smiling, she rinsed my plate in the sink.
I spent half the day with my sleeves rolled up, inspecting the machine and running diagnostics. It was one thing to risk the transformation myself; I knew it would work, but if it did happen to fail I wouldn’t have to live with the consequences. Die with them, yes, but it would all be over in an instant. Not so for someone else. In the unlikely event something happened to Agatha, I’d wear the guilt for the rest of my days. Me and guilt were not exactly best friends.

I was upstairs splashing water on my face when my phone beeped. It was Victor. I stared at the screen until the call went to voicemail. He was trying to reach Jonathan, who wasn’t exactly home—hell, at the moment he didn’t even exist. In the mirror, a coy smile crept onto my lips. My hair was in decent shape, even after a few hours in the basement. My face was clean; it could be repaired. And that tingling in my chest—it could not be ignored for long.

I decided to call him back. I had to; my female aspect would allow nothing less. But I had some serious crow to eat.

“Hi. Yes, it’s Katerina. I know you were trying to call Jonathan, but he’s not here at the moment. He left his phone—”

The phone barked. “Christ, who leaves his phone just lying around these days?”

I cringed a little, but I knew he was hurting. “He’s down in the basement, Victor, in that workshop of his. You know how he gets.”

“Yeah, okay. Whatever. So you decided to call me back, huh?”

“I’m sorry. I know I should’ve called earlier, but—”

“No, what you should’ve done is not leave that morning, without a word.”

“I know. I’m sorry. I said that already, didn’t I? Sor—ah. I was…” I struggled to find the right words. “I guess you could say I’m conflicted.”

“So I gathered. I guess you have feelings for your ‘brother’ after all.”

“No! Not him. Someone else… an old flame.”

“I see. Well… if this guy is still in the picture, there ain’t much else to say.”

“It’s not like that. I just had some stuff to work through, that’s all.” Deep breath. “Listen, can we talk? Meet up, I mean? It’s important.”

He sounded wary. “I guess so… it couldn’t hurt. When?”

“Tonight, if that’s okay.” I plowed on, not giving him a chance to refuse. “How about that little bistro you took me to? It’ll be my treat.”
We settled on a time. I put the phone down, shook my hair back and fanned myself with both hands. I felt all hot and bothered, but it wouldn’t do to sweat. I had to fix myself up, quick-like. I wanted to impress.

Full glamour mode. Flawless complexion, smokey eyes, dark red lipgloss. I ended up spending far more time on my hair, getting it to volumize and flow the way I wanted it to. Black lingerie: strapless bra, French cut panties, nude stay-ups and a silk half-slip. I’d had my eye on another of Mother’s little black dresses, one she hadn’t worn in half a century: pure velvet, with off-the-shoulder sleeves and a neckline that showed a fair bit of cleavage. Fortunately, I had a lot to give.

Agatha intercepted me at the front door. In my haste to turn myself into ‘sex on wheels’ I’d forgotten our appointment. She certainly hadn’t. “Little Katie looks pretty sweet,” she said with a smirk. “Got a big date?”

I stared at the floor. She’d always been able to make me feel like a little boy; now I felt like a little girl caught wearing her mother’s things—which wasn’t far from the truth. “Never mind me,” I said. “Let’s focus on you.”

I led her down to the basement and introduced her to my machine. That’s when her practiced façade cracked and some of the fear leaked out. I took her hand. “It worked for me,” I told her. “As recently as last night. You can see that—you can feel it. You’ll be fine. That’s a promise.” I crossed my heart, bumping into my left breast as I did so.

She smiled, although it looked strained. “Nice boobs, Jonny.”

“Yes. But I prefer Katie. On his best day, Jonathan never looked this good.”

“You got that right.” She didn’t seem to mind removing her clothes in front of me, probably because—duh—we were both female. I found that strangely touching, as if that casual gesture had just validated me as a woman.

“There’s one other thing you should know.” I warned her about the pain she could expect. A wave of searing agony, yes, but one that would quickly pass.

“I know,” she said, surprising me. “I hear you, that first time, all the way from my apartment.” She touched my arm. “Do not worry. I will survive.”

Agatha climbed onto the scanner bed. At the touch of a button, it slid smoothly into the machine. I activated the control panel and brought up the Hyde Matrix for Agatha’s niece. No point wasting time. I clicked Apply and then Transform.

Agatha Dubois was made of tough stuff; she didn’t make a peep. When I opened the chamber a young woman leapt off the bed, took one look at herself and flung her arms around me. “Jonny, you did it!” she exclaimed. “You are most brilliant man in the world! You make me young again!”
Feeling embarrassed, I extricated myself and straightened my dress.

The girl was slender and her shoulder-length brunette hair was styled in a simple pageboy flip. She stepped back, touching her lips. “Sorry. Not man; woman.” She laughed. “I cannot call you Katie anymore. I am closer to little girl than you.” She hugged herself. “Merci, Mademoiselle. Je suis jeune fille.”

Hurriedly, she dressed herself in the clothing she’d brought with her; gifts she had bought for her niece that the girl hadn’t been able to take home. I shut down the machine and we returned to the foyer. “What will you do now?” I asked her, as we prepared to part ways.

“Salon tomorrow,” she said. “Shorter hair, more modern style. Get new driver’s license, with photo. Don’t need passport, but must be able to move freely within country.” She pursed her lips. “Purchase airplane ticket.”

“You’re leaving soon?” Dumb question, but it needed to be said.

She nodded. “Sorry, but must give notice now.”

“I’ll miss you.” I felt like tearing up, but that would ruin my makeup.

“Is not forever. I will come visit—even when I am big star actress.”

We smiled and embraced, as women do, and spoke of our feelings, also as women do. She told me this house felt like home and she would certainly come back to visit, and I said she would always be welcome—but I think we both knew it was not to be. Some partings are forever.

I told her I would transfer the salary she was owed, along with a substantial bonus, to her bank account—to help her settle into her new life somewhere in the vicinity of Hollywood. “Elocution lessons,” she said eagerly. “I must learn how to enunciate all nice and proper.” We both laughed.

She took my hands in hers, as though for the last time. “Bye, Jonny. I hope you find what you looking for, as a woman.” Her eyes were bright with tears. “A very beautiful woman.”

A line from the Stones popped into my head. “You can’t always get what you want,” I murmured. “But if you try sometimes, you just might find… you get what you need. I hope you find what you need, Agatha.” I kissed her on the cheek before hurrying out the front door. Damn it, there goes my mascara.

~

I arrived at the bistro before Victor and spent a restless ten minutes watching the door. Between sips of espresso I kept touching and rearranging my hair, checking
my makeup in Mother’s gold-leaf compact, and generally trying not to look nervous. But who was I kidding? I was nervous as hell. The strange thing is, I wasn’t even sure why. It’s not like I was in love with the guy. He was my best friend and nothing else, yet there was something between us I couldn’t ignore.

Victor’s jaw dropped when he saw me. He hesitated, as though not quite sure this vision of loveliness could possibly be me. He dropped into the seat opposite. “Wow, you look…” He shook his head. “Amazing doesn’t begin to cover it.”

“Thank you for that,” I said demurely, peeking out from behind a veil of hair that covered one eye. The act made me feel almost ridiculously feminine.

After some uneasy small talk, the waiter brought us menus. Victor opened his with obvious pleasure. “This is the first time since I was a kid that I can just go ahead and order whatever the heck I want, without worrying about price. Lemme see… what’s the priciest item in here?”

I had to smile. Classic Victor. He always let the girl order whatever she wanted, but chose the cheapest entree for himself. Not this time; it was Lobster Thermidor all the way. I told him to knock himself out; it didn’t matter to me.
“You really are a gal after my own heart. Too bad you’re still hung up on this other guy, whoever he is. Color me jealous,” he added.

“It told you, it isn’t like that. There’s no other man.”

“I get it. You’re into the ladies. I should’ve known. All the—”

“Didn’t we just play hide the sausage, like, last week? Okay, maybe it didn’t make the earth move for you, but still…”

“Bisexual then.” He stared at me. “That’s really weird. You sounded just like a friend of—well, like Jonny. He talks like that. I know both of you keep saying you’re brother and sister, but…”

“I’m not bi either.” Or was I? I’d been on both ends of the stick lately, but in each case I was the opposite sex. Did that make me bisexual, or just straight in two different ways?

Victor looked confused. “What else is there?”

This wasn’t going well. “You remember when we were in bed—”

“Could I forget?”

“—I told you I used to be a man.” There, I’d said it. Part of it.

“Not true. You said ‘would you believe’; somethin’ like that. I thought you were kidding.” His face sobered. “You weren’t kidding?”

I shook my head, staring at the table. My hair hung in curtains.

“Hey, it’s no big deal. You’re a woman now—I know that for sure. How you got that way doesn’t really matter. Not to me.”

“I’d like to believe that.”

“Take it to the bank.” He touched my hand. “May I say, it’s absolutely fantastic what surgeons can do these days. You look amazing.”

I smiled. “You said that already.”

“I wasn’t sure you heard me the first time. When did you transition?”

I bit my lip. “That’s… not an easy question to answer.”

He grimaced. “I get it. Too personal. Sorry. I’m used to barging in and demanding answers; comes with the job.”

“It isn’t that. It’s just that I’ve transitioned several times…”

More confusion. He blinked. “What, the first two or three didn’t take? No offense, babe, but that’s kind of hard to believe.”
How much should I tell him? “No, they ‘took’ all right. But… you see… it isn’t the kind of ‘transition’ you’re thinking of.”

“You aren’t making much sense.” Victor sat back. “What did you want to talk to me about anyhow? From the way you’re dressed, I thought it might have something to do with us getting together. Now I’m not so sure.”

“I did sort of want to…” I tucked my hair back. Deep breath. “There is someone else. It’s a woman, like you thought, but… I love her, but I can’t deny I feel drawn to you—and, well…” Oh, screw it.

I leaned forward. “Listen. You know that experiment Jonathan’s been working on down in his workshop? In the basement?”

“He talked about it. Something about matrices and higher dimensions.”

“Something like that.” I lowered my voice. “It’s complicated, but he actually built a machine that can turn a person into somebody else—anybody else, in fact, providing they’ve been scanned by the machine.”

He looked dubious. “C’mon, Kat. That sounds like X-Files bullshit.”

“I know, but it’s true. What he did was scan several different women and combine their matrices. He blended that information with his own matrix to create a template for the woman he might have been—if he’d been born female.”

“You mean, his own sister. If he had one, that is.”

“Exactly. And then he used the machine to turn himself into that woman.”

His eyes grew. “You mean, you—?”

“That’s right. I am Jonathan—at least, I used to be. Still am, for the most part.”

I waved a finger at my head. “In mind only, of course. Although I find that having a female body really does alter the way you think. The more time I spend in here, as Katerina, the more I feel like I truly am her.”

Victor sat back. “Jesus… You don’t expect me to believe that, do you?”

“I suppose not.” I thought for a moment, then shrugged. In for a penny, in for a full-body male-to-female transformation. “I can prove it, though. If you let me.”

“How are you gonna do that? Haul me off to Jonny’s secret dungeon?”

“I was hoping you’d come willingly.”

“I’ll go wherever you want, but I still don’t believe it. I mean, it’s just—”

“I thought journalists were supposed to keep an open mind.”

He spread his hands. “Open, yes. But, c’mon… it just ain’t possible.”
“Get ready to blow your mind.” I retrieved my purse and stood up.
“What, right now?” He pointed out that the food had not yet arrived.
“Talk to the waiter. Get him to box it up. We can have it later.”
“I dunno if this place even does takeout.”
“Everyone does takeout. Just ask nicely.”
“Yeah, but—Lobster Thermidor? Nobody does that.”
“You’ll be the first.” I waved at the waiter. “C’mon, Vic. This is important.”
We drove home in Victor’s car, with me stuck holding a bag of hot lobster. Oddly enough, now that I was committed to this path, I felt only relief. It was the right thing to do, sharing this part of myself with my closest friend. Agatha knew my secret, so why not Victor? For that matter, why not Cassandra? This might be the first step to revealing myself as Katerina, which would hopefully ease her fears about my fidelity. What she might think about her boyfriend turning into a woman from time to time was another matter.

We left the food in the fridge and headed down to the basement. Victor looked uneasy as we entered my workshop. “Man, Jonny’s not gonna like this. He blew a gasket the last time I tried to see in here.”
I pointed at my head. “I’m right here, Vic.”
He rolled his eyes. “Oh yeah. I forgot.”
I booted up the machine and gave him a quick run-down on how it worked. “But we’ve still got a problem here. You wouldn’t believe me, even if I turned back into Jonathan right in front of your eyes.”
He smirked. “You mean, if you disappeared into that tube and then Jonny popped out of it? Magicians have been doing that trick for a hundred years.”
“Yeah, that’s what I thought. So how about we do you instead?”
“You want me to get in there? So you can turn me into whoever?”
“Why not? You think this is all one big con—what’ve you got to lose?”
He shrugged. “Okay. But I bet Jonny’s gonna get a big laugh out of this.”
I ignored that and opened the hatch to the scanner. “You have to take your clothes off.” He eyed me suspiciously, but complied. When I warned him about the ‘slight discomfort’ that lay ahead, he just laughed.
Whatever. I slid him inside and manned the controls. I pondered over which Hyde Matrix to use, but ultimately there was only one choice. **Energize.**
When the change hit him, Victor screamed. I flinched, but it was over quickly and he lapsed into silence. I hit the eject button and he sat up. My god, I thought, taken aback. It was like staring into a mirror!

“What the fuck was that?”

“I did warn you,” I said.

“Slight discomfort, my ass! That damn machine nearly turned me inside out.”

“That’s pretty much what it does. See for yourself.” I pointed him to the mirror I’d recently mounted on the wall. He got up and walked over.

“What the hell—?” He clutched at his face, felt his chest and arms, peered down at his pecker. “This is impossible,” he muttered. “I look… I look like—”

I stood next to him, feeling like I’d stepped into a funhouse. “It’s pretty weird for me too. I used my own Hyde Matrix, so…” I squeezed his arm. “You’re me now, Vic. You’re Jonathan.”

He stared at me, eyes bugging out. “Y—you really are Jonny?”

“In the flesh.” I suppressed a giggle. “Not my flesh, of course.” I handed him the old robe I kept down here for just such an occasion. “I figured turning you into me was the best way to prove what the machine can do.”

He watched his reflection knot the belt. “You could’ve turned me into anybody?”

“In theory, yes. But I’ve only scanned a few people and the others are female. I didn’t think you were ready for that.”

He bit his lip. “I dunno… that might be interesting.”

“It is, but I’ve had a lifetime of cross-dressing to get used to the idea.” Oops. My fingers flew to my mouth. “I shouldn’t have said that. You didn’t know.”

He waved it off. “Doesn’t matter. I’m not surprised.”

“Really? I thought I hid it pretty well.”

He laughed. “Nobody hides it that well.”

I stepped back, idly wrapping my hair around a finger. My head felt like it was wrapped in gauze. Seeing my old body from the outside…

Victor decided he was hungry. Small wonder; I’d skipped a couple of meals at the time of my original scan. He led the way back to the kitchen. We set the table and split our respective meals: his lobster and my Blackened Tuna salad.

“So… what’s it like, being a woman?” He was staring at me, like I was the feature exhibit in a travelling freak show.
I shrugged. “I’d like to say it’s utterly awesome—an in, the gender equivalent of a 24/7 sugar buzz. But the truth is, you get used to it. I love watching myself in the mirror, doing girly things like tucking my hair behind my ears, but when you aren’t thinking about stuff like that you just feel normal.”

“Hard to believe.” He chewed thoughtfully. “You sure don’t look normal.”

“Beauty is only skin deep.” I batted my lashes playfully.

“But back at the restaurant, you said you were starting to feel like a woman. So the changes must go a lot deeper.” He waved his fork. “We slept together too. So unless you’ve always been gay…”

“I’m not gay. Vic, I’m still in love with Cassie. It’s just that, when I’m like this…” I peeked down my cleavage. “When I’m a woman, I can’t help reacting the way a woman would. More or less.”

“Isn’t that kinda weird? Being a straight guy in a female body?”

“Tell me about it. But the body wants what the body wants.”

We finished our meal and moved to the living room. Victor mixed another Cosmo for me and Jonathan’s favorite cocktail for himself: The Moonwalk. He joined me on the couch facing the gas fireplace. Wearing only a robe, I thought he might be cold—I certainly would’ve been. Not Vic; he simply stared into the flames. Oddly enough, I found my own face surprisingly difficult to read.

He drained his Moonwalk and turned to me. “What does your body want?”

I averted my eyes and sipped the Cosmopolitan. Women have to be subtle about these things. “That depends…” I murmured. “What’s on offer?”

“This.” He took my half-full glass and placed it next to his, then leaned down and kissed me; very gently, without touching any of the rest of me.

My eyes searched his. “You still want to? Knowing who I am?”


“Me neither.” My eyes fell. “A girl can’t help being curious though…”

Our lips met once more, and this time he drew me into his arms. My hands clutched at his back—or was it my back? Then again, when we were like this, with my eyes closed and our lips moving in unison, he was just a man like any other. And I was a woman.

Footsteps clattered into the room. “I knew it!” a voice cried, high and shrieking. “You bastard—you bastard! You lied to my face!”
Oh God—*Cassandra!* Victor leapt to his feet. I stood as well, reflexively shaking back my hair and smoothing my skirt. Only then did I notice that Cass had not come alone. She’d brought her father’s Glock for company.

“I knew you two were up to something.” The hand that held the gun was shaking. “I was right—goddamn it, I was right!”

I stepped toward her. “Cass—”

“Shut up! Shut your face, you bitch!” She glared at me but the gun, I realized, was aimed at Victor. “You know what? I don’t even blame you—bitch that you are. You’re a goddamn slut, but I don’t blame you for wanting him. *I* sure as hell did.”

Now she was crying.

Victor moved away from the couch, creating distance between us. “We’re all friends here,” he said calmly. “Just… put the gun down, okay?”

“*Friends?* Don’t make me laugh.” Her voice was wild and raw. “I *trusted* you, Jonny. I thought we had something special. But then you had to go and throw it all away for that—that skank… that trash. I know she’s sexy as hell—I *get* that. But you and I were supposed to be forever!”

Victor looked startled. I think he’d forgotten he was wearing my body. I must have forgotten as well, based on what I said. “Cassie, we *are* forever. You have to believe me. This was just physical need, nothing more.”

She stared at me, incredulous. “*What?* What the fuck—? You mean *nothing* to me, you bitch. In fact, just get the hell out of here. This is between me and him.” Her venomous gaze fell upon Victor.

“Me? I’m not—for God’s sake, I’m Victor. He’s Jonny!” He pointed at me.

Cassandra stepped towards him. “That is the lamest… effing excuse I ever heard.”

“No,” I cried. “Cassie, it’s true—I’m Jonathan!”

“Shut up!” she yelled, her eyes wide. “Both of you—just shut up.”

And the gun spoke. It barked. Victor fell.

“Oh… dammit.” The hand that held the gun hung limp at her side.

I knelt beside Victor. The bullet had entered his chest. Already his eyes were open and unseeing. That meant we had mere minutes to act.

I grabbed the love of my life by the shoulders. My voice was as calm as I could make it—which wasn’t really all that calm. “Cassie. You have to help me get him downstairs. We’ve only got a few minutes.”

Again she was incredulous. “*What?* Jonny’s dead.”
“No he isn’t. I’m right here. You shot Victor, and he will be dead if you don’t help me carry him down to my workshop.” She stared at me, mouth open. “For Christ’s sake, come on.” I shook her. “I invented a machine that can turn people into other people, okay? I used it to turn myself into a woman—I know how weird that is, but it’s what I do. If we get to the machine in time, I can give him a new body—a body that hasn’t been shot!”

That was a lot to take in. Cassandra stared down at Victor, tears flowing.

“No. Do you want him to die?” I slapped her.

At last she moved. Between us, we lifted Victor and staggered for the stairway to the basement. “You can’t be him,” Cass muttered. “It’s not possible.”

Not this again. “Sorry to tell you this,” I said through gritted teeth, “but your precious Jonny is a cross-dresser. Always has been.”

“I know that,” she hissed back. “He couldn’t hide stuff like that from me.”

I almost dropped Victor. “You knew? Why didn’t you tell me?”

“Why the hell would I tell you?”

“Because I’m him!” Round and round we go. “I told you, Cass. I built a machine that could turn me into a woman. I’m the woman it turned me into!”

She shook her head, looking grim. “Impossible.”

“You damn well better hope it is possible.”

We arrived in the workshop and heaved Victor onto the scanner bed. I stripped the bloodied robe from his body, pushed him into the chamber and ran to activate the machine. Cassandra stood by, looking miserable.

Which Hyde Matrix? I paused only briefly, because there was only one pattern that would convince Cass that the machine was for real. I hit the Apply button and prayed it wasn’t too late.

Victor was, of course, silent during the change. Dead men feel no pain.

The bed slid from the scanner. I saw Vic move and relief washed through me. Victor may have been dead in body, but not in mind.

The naked woman sat up, staring straight at Cassandra. “Y—you shot me,” she yelped. Then she looked down at herself. “Oh man… I’m a chick?”

Cassandra looked like her head might explode. “Y—you’re me,” she cried. “How can you be me?” She peered into the scanner. “Where’s Jonny?”

Sighing, I raised my hand. “Right here.”
Full credit to Victor: he grasped the situation with admirable speed. Apparently, being dead didn’t faze him one bit. Neither did waking up in a female body. He—or rather *she*—leapt off the scanner bed and was all over Cass before she could react. The Glock, as it turned out, was in the pocket of her jacket. In seconds, the naked woman took the weapon and pushed Cassandra away. She leveled the gun at both of us. “Strip,” she said, in a surprisingly calm voice.

I stood up. “Vic, what on earth are you doing?”

“Shut up, Jonny. Take ‘em off,” she told Cassie. “I need your clothes.” Cassandra disrobed. Victor ordered her into the scanner, then closed the hatch. “Run the machine,” she said, aiming the Glock at me. “Turn her into me.”

My jaw dropped. “Why?”

She laughed. “You think you’re the only guy in the ‘hood who wants to be a girl? Why’d ya think we got along so well?”

My eyes widened. “You *knew*?” Christ, who *didn’t* know I was a cross-dresser?

“Not as such. But I figure that’s why we got along. We’re very different in other respects.” She pressed the barrel against my neck, using it to brush my hair aside. The muzzle kissed my skin. “Do it.”

I sank onto the stool. “I can’t turn her into Victor. She’ll die.”

“Nice try. Use the matrix you recorded earlier, when you turned me into you.”

I was out of options. I selected Victor’s original matrix and activated the machine. Cassandra’s scream nearly tore me apart. Victor gathered Cassie’s clothing, clutching the pile to her chest. I ran to the scanner, heels clicking madly on the concrete floor. I swept Cassandra, now in Victor’s body, into a desperate embrace. “I’m so sorry,” I cried, now in tears myself. “He—she made me do it.”

Cass hugged me back. “I know.”

“How touching.” Victor laughed, her voice as wild as the woman who had invaded the living room. “Stand back. The fur’s gonna fly.”

She aimed the Glock at the control panel and pulled the trigger. Sparks exploded and the machine shut down. More bullets followed, into the heart of the scanner and into the computer housing. I heard the hard disk shatter. My heart sank in deep water. The Hyde Matrices were lost, and there were no backups.

Jonathan Hyde was gone for good. “Vic… *why*?”

“Elementary, my dear Katerina. No one—and I mean *no one*—is gonna take this body away from me. I plan to be a woman for a very long time.”
Then, like many a villain before, Victor was out the door and into the night.

~

One might think Cass and I would have spent our time mourning what had been lost: our old selves, our identities, the lives we had once led. But such was not the case. I was dressed for seduction, with long hair falling in thick waves around my shoulders and a little black dress that did little to hide my female attributes, and Cass was having trouble adapting to being male, so we spent a long and satisfying night discovering what our bodies could do.

At the same time I was becoming intensely conscious of my own irresistibly female body; the insistent tug of firm breasts, the never-ending caress of soft hair on naked shoulders, the warm grip of nylon on bare legs, the waxy taste of blood-red lipstick. Impaling myself on Cassie’s erection was a revelation. I was a woman now and it was my duty to embrace that fact. Even were I were to repair the machine, this body would remain the nearest I could ever get to being me. Sister Hyde was here to stay.

Jonathan had previously spoken to the family lawyer about building a complete legal identity for Katerina, as well as listing her as co-owner of the property. As far as anyone knew, he and Cassandra had simply run off together. Neither were ever seen again. Cass changed his name to Cassius Sloane and moved in with me. A year later I became his unblushing bride.

I was haunted, though, by what that friend of my youth had said before departing. “I did you a favor, Jonny-boy. Now you get to be the girl and still have the woman you love in the body you’ve got the hots for.”

God help me: he, or she, was right. Given a choice, this is exactly the life I would have chosen. In the film, Sister Hyde was surely the villain, wantonly murdering the innocent to get what she wanted. And the fate she found was no more than what she deserved. But some stories do have a happy ending.

“Don’t try to find me,” Victor had said. “I’m leaving town tonight. In a few days I’ll have a new name and a new life—as a woman. It’s all I ever wanted.” She paused, and her voice softened. “Please don’t hate me, Jonny. I need this.”

I don’t hate her. We both got what we needed.