The Magnificent Miranda

A forced mind-swap with a man threatened to destroy her womanhood, but the new Miranda became a better person and a better woman, and the power of her choice urged a nation to turn back from the brink of disaster!
Dedication

To the Blue Wave of 2018...

And more of the same
in the years to come.

Because the alternative is
worse than you can imagine.

Amanda Hawkins
“Tell me, Mr. Garrod, how long have you been working for my husband?”

I had to swallow my astonishment. Mrs. Madison had never spoken to me before, other than to issue a crisp “come in” or a dismissive “he’s in the study” on the rare occasions when I came by the house to drop off papers that required her husband’s signature. I recovered in time to stutter “F—four years.”

“Four years,” she mused. “Your first job after graduation, correct? Which would make you, what, twenty-six?” I agreed that it did. She continued, “You majored in journalism—how’s that working out?” I said something about there not being as many newspaper jobs as there once were. She nodded idly, but her eyes studied me like a hawk eyeing a mouse caught in the open. “Been there,” she said at last. “Ten years ago. Top of my class, but the only job I could find was Trophy Wife.”

I swallowed hard. There was, I sensed, no correct reply to that. I opted for the safe route. “I’m very happy to have this job, ma’am.”

“No argument there. Being Terrance Madison’s personal assistant certainly doesn’t get boring, does it? I hear it pays pretty well.”

No argument there. “Is he, uh—in his office, Mrs. Madison? I have these papers that really need to be signed right—”

“Are you aware it’s been two years since my husband and I last made love?”

Too much information! I hid my rising panic, studiously examined my shoes and finally muttered, “None of my business, ma’am.”

“Actually, it is. But let’s put that aside for the moment.” Miranda Madison was a petite woman, quite slim, with a long coil of thick blonde hair that floated about her shoulders like a restless snake. She was always well dressed, I was wont to note, in dresses that were stylish without being overly expensive. She certainly had the looks to be a trophy wife, but she never seemed to quite fit the role.

I murmured my thanks—for what I wasn’t quite sure—and edged past her. The boss was probably in his study, so I started off that way. Mrs. Madison grabbed my arm. “Did you know, Mr. Garrod, that my husband is gay?”

Oh, God. This was too much. I repeated the “None of my business” line.

“Perhaps ‘gay’ is too strong a word. Let’s go with bisexual. But he’s got the hots for a certain personal assistant we both know, and that’s why—”

“Please—this has nothing to do with me! I have to go.” I tried to pull away.

Her grip tightened. “This has everything to do with you, young man.” A laugh
escaped her lips. “It sounds so odd to say that. I’m not much older than you are. But that’s what happens when you marry an older man. You end up feeling like an old lady. That isn’t good for the soul, Gavin. Not in the least.”

“I guess I, uh… really wouldn’t know about stuff like that, Mrs. Madison.” I tried to pull away, but the woman was surprisingly strong.

Her smile was sweet, but savage. “Would you like to find out? Here’s the thing,” she said, pulling me closer. “A lot of people—gossips, busybodies, social climbers; you know the type—they think that I married Terrance for his money. But that isn’t true. Silly little me, I married for love. And then my husband decides that he prefers the company of a certain younger male instead of me. That’s a problem.”

I shook my head, trying—and failing miserably—to look at anything but her.

Very gently, she shook me. “You, Mr. Garrod, are my problem. But as luck would have it, you’re also my solution.”

I showed her the manila envelope I was carrying. “Ma’am, I need to get these—”

She plucked the envelope from my hand and placed it on the sideboard. “Terrance isn’t home at the moment. I’ll see to it these get signed later on. Right now, you and I have a date in the basement. You see, I have an offer you cannot refuse.”
Now it all made sense. The gorgeous wife of a wealthy old man latches onto the manly young assistant to satisfy her burning sexual needs. You hear about this sort of thing, but you sure as hell never think it’ll happen to you. The basement seemed like an odd place for such a tryst, but who was I to argue?

She pulled me down the hall that led to the back of the house. “My husband and I are planning a trip to Europe. He’s out right now making the arrangements. We’ll be gone for at least a month, perhaps longer. So here’s the deal.” A side door opened onto a descending flight of stairs. She snapped on the light. “You get to live here while we’re gone. Amuse yourself however you like; just make sure the house doesn’t burn down. It’ll be like you own the place.”

I started down. “You want me to house-sit for you?” That didn’t sound so bad. My own apartment was a studio in a less-than-affluent neighborhood.

“Much more than that,” she said, smiling. “Is there such a thing as ‘body-sitting’? If there isn’t, I’m sure there will be—when this technology catches on. It’s quite expensive at the moment, so this situation may not have cropped up before.”

I had no idea what she was talking about. We struck concrete and she guided me to a locked room toward the back. The key emerged from her cleavage.

“It’s very simple, Gavin. I’m going to France with my husband—as you. You get to stay here as me. Think about it: you get to use this body as your own for a whole month or two—perhaps longer, if things go well. How does that sound?”

This was mind-boggling. “You—am I hearing you right? You actually want me to cross-dress and pretend to be you the entire time you’re away?”

“Don’t look so shocked, dear. It’s not like you never cross-dressed before, is it?” She giggled. “I hired a man to follow you around for a week or so. When I saw the videos he took of you mincing around the neighborhood, I knew you were the right choice. You’re a nice-looking man and you make a fairly convincing woman as well. I was impressed the way you moved; anyone would think you had child-bearing hips. You’ll do quite nicely in this body.”

“But… Mrs. Madison, I don’t look anything like you. No one’s gonna—”

The light came on and I saw what was in the room: a pair of what appeared to be MRI chambers, linked together by a forest of bundled wiring and surrounded by racks of computer equipment. A padded stretcher extended out of each chamber, clearly meant for a person to lie upon. Miranda touched a power switch mounted on the wall and the machine hummed to life.

“You still don’t get it, do you? We’re going to switch bodies, Gavin.” She ran her fingers through her hair. “You’re going to be a woman—me, to be precise.”
I stared at her, dumbfounded. “Tha—that’s not possible.”

She sighed. “I assure you, it is. Terrance and I purchased the device a few months ago. This is it, right here,” she said, waving at the machine. “He used it exactly once, to become a younger man—just to satisfy me. It was a male escort we hired for the night, and we were careful to keep my husband’s body fully sedated while the other man was in it.”

I stared at the machine, convinced this must be some kind of prank. Was Mr. Madison hiding somewhere nearby, filming my embarrassment?

“I did offer him the use of my body,” Miranda said, “but it seems Terrance has no interest in being a woman, even for a few hours. I can’t say I’m too disappointed, though. I wasn’t really looking forward to being an older man. But it did leave us at a bit of a crossroads—until I came up with this idea.”

A body-swapping machine? I stuttered something along the lines of there being no such thing. Because, of course, there simply wasn’t.

Miranda went to the control panel and tapped a few keys. “This act is getting old, darling,” she said. “Rich people have all sorts of stuff in their basements that poor people like you have never heard of. This is one of them.” She pointed to one of the stretcher-beds. “Hop on, there’s a good boy.”

“Why? What’re you gonna do?”

“What do you think? I’m going to switch our minds around.”

“Jesus. It can do that?” I sat on the bed but didn’t lie down.

Miranda moved to the other bed, looking pained. “You did graduate, didn’t you? You didn’t just coast through on your looks? Because I’m starting to worry about how all my smarts are gonna fit inside that pea-sized brain.”

That stung. “Sure I did. Top percentile.”

“Well, for all that you’re acting remarkably dim. What part of ‘you and I are going to switch bodies’ don’t you understand?” She stretched out with her head pointing towards the opening in the scanner.

“I know what you’re saying,” I said. “It just doesn’t seem possible.”

She lifted her head to adjust the lay of her hair. “Humor me. I’m your boss’s wife, so maybe you should just shut up and do what I say. What’ve you got to lose?” She gave me a hard look. “If I’m wrong, we go back upstairs, I give you a nice tip for your trouble, and then you’re on your way, none the worse for wear.”

I thought about it. “Okay… But what happens if you’re not wrong?”
She shrugged. “Cross that bridge when you get to it. You don’t believe the damn bridge even exists, so what’s the point in worrying about it?”

True enough. Just humor the nice lady. I lay down.

“Hands by your sides,” Miranda said. “The machine will know when we’re ready. The trays load and unload automatically. Try not to move until it’s over.”

I didn’t. I couldn’t. That’s what mind-boggling will do to you.

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I felt disconnected; from reality, that is. That’s what happens when you see your own body stand up, stretch and scratch its butt. My body was over there and I was here, strangely apart from it, and I was slow to realize that I was now lying on the bed Mrs. Madison was on. Hardly any time had passed since we entered the machine, although I was later told the transfer had taken nearly twenty minutes.

The new Gavin inspected himself in a mirror mounted on the wall. “Well, it’s done,” he said. “I sure hope the old bastard likes what he sees.”

I sat up. A soft mass struck me in the back, broke around my neck and flowed over my shoulders. My eyes darted this way and that, agog at the sight…

—of wavy blonde hair dangling halfway down my—
—of the gentle swell of my chest beneath the intricate pattern of my—
—of the dress that did so little to hide the feminine curves of my—
—of the lithe body wearing the dress and my now-hairless arms and legs—

Oh god. She was telling the truth. She turned me into a woman!

The other Gavin was at my side. “I did warn you,” he said, offering his hand.

I tottered to my feet. “I—I didn’t know,” I whispered in a voice that didn’t sound like me at all. “It’s incredible…”

He chuckled. “It is that. But we human beings can get used to anything. Give it a few years—or a few decades—and society will adapt. Someone will invent some scientific doodad to figure out who’s in which body. Things’ll work out.”

I took one hesitant step, then another, leaning on him for support. My old body. The heels weren’t a problem; I’d worn them often enough before. Nor was the shift in my center of mass; the breast forms back in my apartment were properly weighted for that. Being so much smaller kind of blew my mind but I got used to it soon enough, and by the time we were back upstairs I was walking on my own.

One body is much like another in that respect.
Still, I did an almost comical double-take at seeing myself in the hallway mirror. I couldn’t help giving my head a quick shake and pawing at what was now my hair. So hard to believe the woman I was seeing was well and truly me. “So, uhm… what happens now?” I asked. Was that throaty purr my voice?

Gavin laughed. “Do whatever you want. You’re Miranda Madison now. You’re the lady of the house. Oh, by the way: I wrote down everything I could think of you might need to know about being me—being Miranda. It’s in the top drawer of my dresser. Oops, pardon my English, ma’am: I meant your dresser.”

It was an awful lot to take in. I was sitting in the living room, my brain still thoroughly boggled, when Mr. Madison arrived home. He peered through the doorway at me, then up at my old body that was hauling a large suitcase down from the bedroom. Gavin dropped the luggage by the front door and the two of them embraced. The kiss that followed looked bizarre to say the least. The old me wasn’t gay, but the new and improved version certainly was. But was he really gay if there was a woman inside him, pulling the strings? My mind spun. Would I be gay if I slept with a man? I was a woman, after all.

Here’s a conundrum for you. There’s a male mind in a female body with a female brain. Who wins? Which one dominates? I remembered being attracted to girls, but my mind was now running on hardware that was drowning in estrogen: female hormones. The former Mrs. Madison was attracted to men, so what would happen to me? Was I more Gavin or more Miranda? Was it 60-40 or 30-70? I had no idea.

“Sorry we had to do this to you, lad. Spring it on you like this, as it were.” Mr. Madison stood over me, a concerned expression on his weathered face.
I couldn’t bring myself to speak. I didn’t know whether to curse the bastard out or thank him. I just nodded, trying not to imagine the two of them together in bed.

“It’s a damn fine body, though,” he continued. “You’ll find that out yourself, soon enough. Damn fine.” His eyes darted this way and that, looking anywhere but at me. “You’ll have the run of the place, of course. Our home is your home.” A nervous laugh followed.

I took a deep breath and licked my lips. “I’ll be fine, Mr. Madison.”

He looked befuddled. “Yes, well… we’d best be on our way. Out of your hair, as it were. Take care of yourself,” he added in a choked voice.

My old body waved from the entrance, and then they were gone. An echo of the softly latching front door hung for a time in empty air. I looked around the room, then down at myself. It was true: I was female. Amazing.

What would you do? What would any cross-dresser do? I headed for the bedroom to try on one outfit after another, mostly dresses. That sort of thing never gets old.

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The Madisons were pretty well-off, certainly as compared to me, but they weren’t rich. The house I found myself in was seriously nice—three bedrooms, two-and-a-half bathrooms, home office, big kitchen, gas fireplace—but it wasn’t a mansion. However—and lucky for me—it did employ a cleaning service, so instead of indulging in the common cross-dresser fantasy of being a maid (not my thing anyway) all I had to do was make myself scarce every second Monday and the house magically cleaned itself. All well and good.

At first, I spent most of my free time studying the dossier Miranda left for me, memorizing what I needed to know—full name (middle name ‘Prospera’, the feminized version of the father’s handle in Shakespeare’s The Tempest), birthday (the first of February, an Aquarius), family names, address, phone number, pin numbers, passwords and so forth—and trying on clothes. I lost count of the number of high heels Miranda owned. Why bother shopping when everything in your closet is both new-to-you and a perfect fit to boot?

On Tuesday I got a text from Gwendolyn, a friend of Miranda’s she often met up with for drinks and chatter. She suggested lunch. Strictly speaking, I had little to no interest in the woman. But this wasn’t the sort of thing I could avoid forever, and the dossier said that Gwen was liable to do most of the talking anyway, so I decided to bite the bullet.

“Miranda! Like, so nice to see—<kiss, kiss>”
As per her bio, Gwen talked a blue streak, straight through cocktails and halfway through the salads and watercress sandwiches that followed, complaining about everything from the clown in the White House to the sad-sack husband who was, apparently, ruining her social life. I expressed deep sympathy, as per my instructions.

When it was my turn, I trotted out the cover story I’d been given: Terrance was off on a business trip to Europe—France, Switzerland and Germany—accompanied by his personal assistant. They’d be away for several weeks.

Gwen wrinkled her nose. “You mean that silly Garrick person? Wasn’t he the one in that awful video you showed me? Prancing around in a woman’s dress, all gussied up like that. There ought to be a law, don’t you think?”

I nearly choked on my watercress. She’d been showing the video around? Christ, how many people knew? There ought to be a law against what? It was a struggle, but I managed to hold my tongue and stay in character. “His name is Gavin Garrod. It’s a free country, Gwen. The young man’s not hurting anyone.” I decided that, on balance, Miranda seemed like the sort of person who wouldn’t vote for you-know-who. Hopefully.

“Not if that awful grump in Washington gets his way. Men like your little friend—why, they’ll probably be rounded up and shipped off to some sort of camp, like boot camp for the army, see? Recondition the little sissies. Be a man or die trying.” She waved her fork in the air. “Not that I would personally support such a policy, of course. Not me, no sirree! I’m terribly progressive. But you know what? It’ll probably happen. After all, you can’t fight city hall.”

If I wasn’t such a lady, I would’ve decked her. But instead, I counted to ten and ate another delicate ladylike watercress sandwich. What the hell is watercress anyway? Some kind of lettuce?
Gwen seemed not to notice anything amiss. “While we’re on the subject, aren’t you worried about what the two of them will get up to? Over there in France? You know what those people are like. They’d boink just about anything.”

I was confused. Who exactly were we talking about?

“Your husband and that awful Garvin. Isn’t he the one Terrance has some sort of man-crush on? All that time together in hotels and such. Aren’t you concerned?”

I lied through my teeth and told her I trusted my husband completely. As if!

“Well. I don’t know about that. After what you told me about Terrance being—” Her voice sank to a whisper. “—bisexual. My goodness, who would’ve thought? And that young man… he’s just so available. You’re not worried?”

I was, actually—about how many people Mrs. Madison had blabbed to about her husband. It was no skin off my nose, of course—I was done working for the guy, regardless—but I still had to function in society when I went back to being my old self, and being renowned as the boy-toy of an older man wouldn’t exactly help me find future employment. So I told Gwen I wasn’t the least bit concerned, and to drop it already, and I may have growled at her. So much for lunch.

My next hurdle arrived on Thursday, when the pool boy stopped by. Blake was listed in the dossier: every Thursday at ten in the AM he came by to clean the pool. Miranda even attached a headshot so I’d recognize him. It wasn’t until I’d let him in and he swept me into his strong arms—more of a pool man, really—and kissed me that it finally twigged: the Madisons didn’t even own a pool. The man was here to service me!

I considered pleading the sudden onset of a headache, but it was already a bit late for that. So inwardly I shrugged and allowed myself to be kissed, and then carried upstairs to the guest bedroom. I believe it was then that the delicate balance between Gavin and Miranda shifted decisively toward the feminine. This was an act that only Miranda would contemplate, and the further I sank into my role as a female in heat the more like her I became.

Blake wasn’t one to waste time. Without seeming to hurry, he had my clothes off, and his, in little more than two minutes. It occurred to me that I might not be the only filly on his route. Thrillingly, with a wicked grin on his broad face, he tore the blankets from the bed. We lay naked upon the sheets, I upon my back and he on his side next to me. He nuzzled my hair, whispered sweet nonsense into my ear and toyed with my breasts. My nipples rose alarmingly, heat pulsed between my legs, and before I knew what was happening the man sat astride my pelvis. He sank into me, and it was like sliding into a warm bath—only I was the bath. Then he saddled up and rode me off into the sunset, like any good cowboy would.
My first hint that anything was amiss came the following week. I’d spent ten full days living as a gorgeous woman without a care in the world, and I have to say—the lifestyle has *everything* to recommend it. Feminine hygiene was a breeze and making myself pretty every morning took time, but it certainly wasn’t a chore. In fact, I gloried in the process. Brushing my hair was particularly rewarding.

Then the mail arrived, and it included a mortgage statement. Nothing strange in that, except it showed the house had been mortgaged to the hilt only one month before. *How odd,* I thought. Why would Mr. Madison do that, just before heading off to Europe on a long trip? (Yes, I was terribly naïve.)

The other item was an investment summary, stating that the Madisons’ retirement portfolio had been cashed out and the funds transferred to a Swiss bank account. *How odd,* I thought. Why would they do that, just before—well, Switzerland was in Europe, wasn’t it? Maybe they needed the cash there. (*Very* naïve.)

But still the truth didn’t sink in—until that afternoon, when a delegation from the company arrived at my front door. I recognized all four of them. Two were close associates of Mr. Madison’s; senior board members with worried expressions. The others were security guards; a pair of large men wearing frowns. I’d seen them at the security check desk; they were large then, but now they looked more like giants. I felt like a Hobbit among those awful creatures that erupted out of Mordor. *A very small female* Hobbit.

The older men were all business. “Good day, madam. Is your husband home?”

I explained the situation: business trip, Europe, personal assistant. The board members exchanged dismayed glances. “May we come in? I’m afraid we have news that might come as a shock.” The three of us settled into the living room. Both guards, with my permission, wandered off to search the house. I’m not sure what they expected to find; my husband hiding in a closet?

“Mrs. Madison…” one of them began. Henderson was his name; the other man was Thorndyke. “Miranda. Yesterday was our monthly financial review. There seems to be a rather large… absence.” He looked uncomfortable.

Thorndyke chimed in: “Most of our operating capital is missing. An audit showed that it was siphoned off piecemeal over a two-week period, ending some ten days ago. That would be about when your husband left on his trip, would it not?”

I agreed, and mentioned that the same thing had happened to our personal investment portfolio. We all stared at one another.

“You knew nothing of this?” Henderson asked.
I did not. And I couldn’t help wondering what it all meant. It was obvious that Mr. Madison had no intention of coming back, because if he did he’d go straight to jail (no passing GO, no collecting $200). But surely Miranda would return to reclaim her body. The novelty would wear off; Terrance would get over his man-crush, and Miranda never wanted to be male in the first place. She’d be back.

The men departed, with Thorndyke advising me to talk to a lawyer. The company would be coming after anything and everything Mr. Madison owned, most notably the house. They’d also be going after Terrance himself. They might not be able to touch that Swiss bank account, but rules had been broken and the long arm of international law would find him, however long it took.

Of that I had no doubt. And they were welcome to his lying ass.

After that, things fell apart rather quickly. The bank foreclosed on the house before the company could do so, giving me two weeks to pack up and get out. The following day, representatives from Acme BrainScan showed up to repossess the machine in the basement; the device was on lease and a payment had been missed. “Sorry, ma’am,” the repo man said, after walking me through the paperwork, “but word kinda gets around, ya know? The company is pretty juiced about getting its scanner back before someone else snakes the house.”

I couldn’t blame them for that. But as I watched the machine being disassembled and packed in crates, the realization dawned that there went my last chance to get my old body back. Miranda might return, only to find the scanner gone and the house occupied by some other high-flying financier. Her former body—aka me—could wind up anywhere.

I had to think about myself and my future. There was little left in the Madisons’ personal bank accounts. More to the point, I had no job, no career, and no family to fall back on. I needed cash and, if not lots of it, at least enough to get by.

I rolled up my sleeves, figuratively speaking. The property was spoken for, and Mr. Madison’s vehicles had been abruptly reclaimed as well, but it was open season on everything else. I contacted an art dealer and sold off the paintings, the prints, the sculptures. A furniture dealer bought couches, chairs, tables, rugs and everything else that wasn’t nailed down. I sold Terrance’s clothes and some of Miranda’s, and her most expensive jewelry as well. Books, videos, music—all of it went for cash. Nearly everything else went to charity shops or into the dumpster. Why let the bank have it?

The money I earned went into my own Swiss bank account; two can play that game. The only things I kept were Miranda’s clothes—the stuff I liked and wasn’t worth selling—jewelry, cosmetics and various toiletries. Girl stuff.
On the other side of the ledger, I still had my studio apartment in my old less-than-affluent neighborhood and my ageing ‘classic silver’ Corolla. I made several trips in the car to move Miranda’s things and deliver my old male clothes to the needy, since it didn’t appear I’d have any use for them. When the time came, I abandoned the Madison house to its fate and moved into the studio.

I informed the building manager that I was a friend of Gavin’s and I’d be living there while he was out of the country. Adding a couple of post-dated rent checks sealed the deal. I wasn’t the registered owner of the Corolla, but that would only become a concern if I were pulled over—so I drove slowly, but not too slowly.

Terrance’s lawyer, who was just as shocked and flabbergasted at the turn of events as everyone else, advised me (as the current Mrs. Madison) to seek an immediate divorce. The grounds were infidelity and gross criminal misdeeds; not to mention scarpering off out of the country, leaving me to face the consequences.

So there I was, six weeks after my life was turned upside-down: free as a bird, female and jobless, with a few bucks in the bank and nowhere to go. I couldn’t go home. My family had never accepted my cross-dressing, and waltzing back into their lives as a woman wasn’t likely to make it all better. Not that they’d believe me, of course. Who’d believe a story like that?

Which left Miranda’s family. I still had the dossier; there she’d listed her parents (father deceased, mother not), other family members (she was an only child, but there were aunts and uncles and cousins), and various friends (some in this area, some not). Most of the clan and her old friends lived up in Oregon, in the Portland area, where she was raised. So that’s where I went.

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I had my belongings shipped, and two days later I woke up in a Portland hotel. The question one might ask at this point is Why? Why would I invite detection—as an imposter of some sort, even though a simple DNA test would conclusively identify me as Miranda Madison—by seeking out her family and the friends who had known her since she was a little girl?

Simple: never underestimate the power of belonging. Think about it. My old life was gone. No one I knew before would ever accept me as Gavin, even if they could bring themselves to believe I was actually him. I was just too different now. Women are treated differently than men; that’s just a fact. I was never close to my former family, and I’d lost contact with the friends I’d grown up with. As Gavin, there just wasn’t much to hold on to.

So I made the choice to let it all go. It was time to embrace being Miranda.
I studied the dossier and flipped through the single photo album of hers I’d saved. Nothing from the last decade; I tossed those pics in the trash. Marriage to Terrance Madison wasn’t something I needed to remember. These were family photos of Miranda growing up; of her parents and her childhood friends. These were the faces I needed to know.

Miranda had left town ten years ago for the bright lights of SoCal, and since then she’d only been back once: for her father’s funeral. She had since maintained only sporadic contact with her mother—there seemed to be some sort of disconnect there, which Miranda hadn’t bothered to write about—and none at all with her old friends. Since leaving town, she’d been married to a much older man, she’d lived a more affluent lifestyle, and she’d seen her marriage break down in a very public way. Put it all together and one might expect her to be a notably different person from the one her friends and family knew. I was depending on that.

If questions arose, my fallback excuse was the nasty concussion I’d sustained a few months back, from a fall at the house. (What could they do—talk to Miranda’s family doctor in SoCal? Not likely.) The headaches and dizziness were gone, but my memory might never fully recover. What had been rendered unreliable were memories of my childhood and my school days, all the way through university. It was unfortunate, to be sure. Still, one has to muddle through.

“Hi, Mum.” Miranda’s mother was living with two other ladies, widows all, in a house that was thankfully not the one in which Miranda had grown up. I had no excuse for not looking her up asap on my first full day back in town, so here I was.

She went from total shock to tearing-up in about three seconds. “Ooooooh,” she wailed, “my little girl is home!” She swept me into the deepest, warmest, most complete hug I’d ever received—and I began to understand what it might feel like to have a supportive parent. Gavin wasn’t used to that sort of thing.

I assured her it was good to be back. That was a little white lie, of course; Gavin had only been to Portland once, on a road trip through Oregon and Washington, with his unsupportive parents and his insanely vindictive brother. The whole thing was one big unpleasant memory. But the city itself had seemed pleasant enough.

“Look at you,” she breathed, pulling me into the foyer. “Such a lovely young woman.” She stretched the word out for emphasis; it was enough to make a girl blush. “I’m so proud, the way you turned out. You know that.”

I told her I knew—but it was nice to hear anyway. She sat me down in the living room. She was worried: Terrance absconding to Europe with the company’s cash had been all over the news, and the divorce as well. “Why on earth didn’t you call? You know how I worry.”
I felt a pang of guilt. Truthfully, it hadn’t even occurred to me—because the nice lady isn’t my real mother. Duh! But I should have called regardless, because she is Miranda’s mother and I’m Miranda. Stay in character!

“I’m sorry. It just slipped my mind, I guess. I just got so busy, saving what I could from the house, and moving out and everything… I’m sorry.” I didn’t have to fake looking miserable.

She patted my hand, smiled and reached over to adjust the way my hair lay across my shoulder. It made me feel like a little girl—which is kind of weird when you think about it, because I had never actually been a little girl. “It’s all right,” she said. “You’re so pretty. Who could stay mad?”

I gave her the whole sordid story: Terrance’s silly man-crush on his handsome young assistant, his mortgaging the house, cashing in our retirement fund, the abrupt departure to France—all of it. I left out the minor matter of the body-swap and the fact that I was not, in fact, her daughter. Why spoil what was otherwise a perfectly good reunion?

She shook her head. “My goodness, what a thing to go through… But, darling, I knew that man was bad news from the beginning. Didn’t I tell you that? He’s too old—didn’t I say that? I’m sure I did. Of course, I had no idea was one of those homosexuals as well, but—”

“I know, Mum. You were right. I should’ve listened.” None of that was in the dossier, of course, but who was I to argue? Being contrite felt like the right thing to do. Besides which, that was exactly what my new mother wanted to hear.

Then I told her the big news: I was back for keeps. That led to more tears and hugging, which I endured as best I could because that’s what daughters do. I’d never been one before and the learning curve was pretty steep.

But when the day was done and I was lying in my too-soft hotel bed, clad in a silk nightie, hair spilling across the pillow, I had to admit that the encounter had left me with a warm glow. It felt like home.
Fast forward two weeks and I was settled in my new apartment. It was a fifth-floor loft in Boise-Eliot, a stone’s throw from downtown, with a half-decent view of the Willamette. My stuff was out of storage and stowed away in closets, shelves and drawers. Mother contributed some furniture she thought I might recognize from home: a small dining table and chairs, a beige loveseat, a few lamps, and ‘my’ old dresser and vanity. I told her they were exactly the homey touch I needed, then set to work convincing myself that they really *did* look familiar.

It’s surprisingly easy to convince yourself of something you truly want to believe. Take the *X-Files*, for example. Good old Fox Mulder wanted to believe so badly that he convinced himself to do exactly that, and lo and behold his beliefs came to pass—all last one of them. No notion was too wild, too bizarre, or too far ‘out there’ to resist the power of his belief, which conjured them into being. Would it be too much to ask for me to do the same? To convince myself—and by extension everyone else—that I truly was the one and only Miranda Madison?

It was worth a try. Anything worth doing, as they say, is worth swallowing the whole damn thing, hook, line and sinker—to coin a phrase.

A friend of a friend of the family owned a local magazine that covered issues related to Portland’s physical heritage, architecture, construction and real estate. Building on my old journalism degree, I landed a job as a stringer. I was paid by the article and it didn’t come close to covering my expenses, but at least it meant I was going broke more slowly. It was a start.

After two-plus months I was really starting to get the hang of being female. Being a woman was yet another step beyond that, with its attendant role in society, but I was getting more comfortable in that role as well. I could insert a tampon without flinching, buy lingerie without blushing, and stroll down the street in a short dress without feeling like I was committing a crime. Heady stuff for a boy who grew up raiding his mother’s closet for skirts and heels, and whose major exploit before all this was waiting until dusk to take a quick walk around the block *en femme*.

I’d just left the offices of *Landscape Portland* when a man caught my eye. He was sitting alone at an outdoor table of the Starbucks on the corner, and he was openly checking me out. I’d learned enough about being a woman in this century to know that confidence is king; not just to avoid detection (for those who aren’t actually female), but to forestall automatically being relegated to the subservient role. So I stared right back. *You* back down, bud.

To my surprise, he smiled and waved. That’s when it hit me: he *did* look familiar. He was someone from Miranda’s past; someone whose picture was in the photo album I’d been studying. I hadn’t cracked the cover in weeks, but I knew that face. He was a bit older, a bit more filled-out, his hair was thinner, but it was—who?

Bobby. The name hit me just before it would’ve been kind of awkward not to remember. Robert Drayson, Miranda’s steady boyfriend for the last three years of university. Apparently, he was worth a whole paragraph in the dossier, meaning that it must’ve been fairly serious.

“Bobby? Is that really you?” We came together for a brief hug, then parted clumsily. No need to fake that. How was I supposed to treat the guy? Was Miranda in love with him? Did they part on good terms or bad? Did he leave her? (Was he out of his mind?) Without knowing whether I should be angry or overjoyed, I split the diff and opted for awkward. When in doubt.

“Hey, where’s my manners?” He pulled out a chair. “Will you join me? Old times sake?”

I smoothed my skirt and sat, crossing my legs delicately at the knee. Where was this going?

He seemed eager to please. “Cinnamon latte?”

“What?” I looked up at him. He was about six-foot, maybe six-one, and fairly trim. Probably a jogger. His curly brown hair was starting to gray around the temples. He had a nice smile, I thought, which was probably the woman in me making her views known.

“You still like that, don’t you? I remember you used to.”

“Oh. Yes. Of course.” He whipped inside and returned a few minutes later with a foam-topped glass. I spent the time wondering what fresh hell I’d gotten myself into.

He slid into the seat opposite. “I caught your name in the news the other day. Quite the mess. I’m glad you got yourself out of there, though. You deserve better.”

“Tell me about it.” I took a sip, then seized the opportunity to tell him the whole story: the thieving pervert husband, the divorce, the concussion (emphasis on memory loss), the moving back home. “You’ll have to forgive me if I slip up now and then,” I said. “I’ve still got some gaps.”
“Sure thing, Mira. You’ve been through a lot. But you know, it’s just so cool to see you back on your feet, with a job and everything. You—you look great.”

I smiled. “You said that already. Uhm—how’d you know I have a job?”

He looked sheepish—and, strangely enough, adorable. “Oh… yeah. I haven’t been stalking you, if that’s what you’re wondering. One of the old gang mentioned they saw you in town, so I called your mom. I thought you might be staying with her. She told me you were working for this magazine, so… Oh, damn. I guess I have been stalking you. I didn’t mean to,” he added.

“No worries. I’ve been thinking I should look you up, but… you know, I didn’t know where you were at, relationship-wise. I didn’t want to intrude.”

He shrugged. “The short answer is unmarried, no kids. I’ve dated some, but no one special. No one—” He stopped short, averting his eyes.

That told me a lot. It was serious. And no way had he left her. “I know what you mean.” I blew on my fingers. “Once you’ve had the best, why try the rest?”

He stared at me for a moment, then laughed. “Oh my god, Miranda—you really have changed! You’d never have said that before; never in a million years. You were fun to be with, but I was the one always joking around.”

“I’m glad we didn’t have to wait that long,” I said coyly.

You might think two or three months would be enough time to get nice and comfy with the whole womanhood shtick. Not a chance; two or three years might do the trick, but I had my doubts. Never mind the physical stuff, like feminine hygiene and dressing stylishly and making oneself look pretty—that comes with practice. But there are nuances of how to act and especially think like a woman that simply cannot be faked. When a man puts his arm around your shoulders, you can’t pull a Nancy Drew and just freeze until they lose interest. You’ve got to respond, and it really has to be instinctive. If you like the guy, lean in, get comfy and get ready to be kissed; if you don’t, then tense up and pull away—or flee in panic, or jam your pointy Louboutins into his nads, whatever seems appropriate.

The lean-in moment arrived on our second date. Not counting lattes at Starbucks, our first date was an arthouse flick at the university, followed by a quick kiss in the foyer of my apartment building; our second was a live-action version of Orlando—which I thought was an interesting choice—after which we took a stroll alongside the river. It was there, seated on a bench, watching the dark waters swirl past, with the autumn sun on its way down, that Bobby finally made his move. I’m not sure what took him so long, but I guess it’s tricky when two people are getting to know each other all over again—or in my case, for the first time.
Either way, I responded just as Miranda would have. I leaned in and made myself comfortable, and then sensed a change in his stance as he prepared for launch. I gazed up into those puppy-dog eyes, then lowered my lashes in the universal gesture of feminine surrender—and allowed myself to be kissed.

It wasn’t like kissing a girl at all. Nor was it like the oral hygiene Blake had inflicted upon me during his visit to the Madison household. It was softer, for a start, and seemed to last for a long time; our mouths clinging together like a couple of half-melted chocolate caramels. Did I mention his lips were sweet as sugar? Or was that me I was tasting?

“I’m glad you’re back in my life, Mira.” He caressed the arm of mine that wasn’t pressed against him. “I hope you stay for awhile…”

It’s what he didn’t say that was so revealing: this time. He’d been hurt badly when Miranda left for the bright lights and sugar daddies down south. Just how badly I was only beginning to appreciate. “Bobby? Can you ever forgive me? For what I did?” My head rested on his shoulder.


“No, it isn’t. I can hear it in your voice, sometimes.” I bit my lip. “I hurt you pretty bad, didn’t I?”

I felt him swallow, hard. Whatever he was going to say, in the heat of the moment, was gone. “It’s okay,” he said. “It was bad at first, and for quite some time.” He sighed. “But—it’s been a long time. I got better.”

I spoke earnestly. “Pain like that, it never really goes away. You just push it deeper and deeper inside, until you manage to convince yourself it isn’t there anymore. But it is,” I said, lifting my head. “It’s still there. Seeing you again, like this…it stirred all those things up, inside me. The good stuff and the bad stuff. The love and the—whatever else was down there.” God—where the heck did all that come from?

He stared at me, eyes wide. “Inside you? Miranda…when you left, I thought it was over. I thought—”
“You thought I didn’t love you?” I shook my head. “It was never like that. I… I’m not even sure why I left. Scared of being tied down, I suppose. I wanted a career.”

A bitter laugh escaped my lips as I remembered what Miranda herself told me. “I was at the top of my class, but the only job I could get was Trophy Wife.”

“I wouldn’t have treated you like that.”

“I know. I’m sorry… I’m sorry I never gave you the chance.” That’s when he bent down to kiss me again—and then it was like fireworks, all night long.

I speak figuratively, of course. There were no roman candles and the kiss didn’t last all night long. But it was a very long kiss, and when it was over we got up and continued our walk, now with arms encircling each other’s waist. I felt very small next to this amazing man who was no longer a stranger, and with long hair heavy against my neck, the hem of a mini-dress pulling on my thighs, the slow clickety-clack of narrow heels on pavement, and a brassiere that was somehow rubbing my breasts exactly the right way—I felt mind-numbingly female. That’s when I took another big step into womanhood, and became that much more Miranda.

Yet another portentous event occurred when he drove me home and I asked him in for a drink. We both knew what that meant, but the code of conduct between a man and a woman—with me very much the woman—states that you never ever say it out loud. So I didn’t, and he didn’t, but when we went upstairs and the door to my apartment closed behind us—there were no drinks.

But perhaps there was. Once we were in bed, we drank deeply of one another. We kissed, we stroked each other’s bodies, and I took everything he had to offer—which was quite a bit, as it turned out—and swallowed it all, and then he did the same for me, although the results weren’t quite so dramatic. We washed ourselves and opened a bottle of wine that was chilling in the fridge. A hit of Cobaw Ridge Chardonnay, all the way from Australia, woke me up and I went to work getting him hard, right there in the kitchen. We stumbled back to the bedroom, our hands grasping at body parts that weren’t usually visible. I pushed him onto the bed and mounted him like the stallion I once rode in high school—although I was male at the time and for a few long seconds that was awfully confusing. But skewering myself on Bobby’s manhood solved the problem: I was definitely female. After a minute or two, he pulled me down onto him and we rolled over. Then it was me being mounted like an untamed filly, and this went on until he exploded within me and fireworks did the same inside my head. We both fell into an exhausted sleep.

After that, I could never again think of myself as even slightly male.
I was six months a woman when the bottom once again fell out of my life. Interpol caught up with the outlaw Terrance Madison, who was holed up in a remote villa in the Italian Alps. He was arrested unhurt, but when the police stormed through the front door his young paramour had been shot—not killed, as the reports were quick to point out, but he’d been rendered comatose.

As might be expected, Terrance sang like a stool pigeon on meth. He returned to the company what monies he could, made a public apology, and detailed his plans in full before being marched off to prison. Unfortunately, the details he divulged included the small matter of his wife’s bodyswap with his young male assistant; both the how and the why. That was a problem.

Acme BrainScan was upset because this kind of publicity no one wants or needs. The CIA was upset, because BrainScan had been developing the technology for use in espionage and the cat was now decidedly out of the bag. The government was upset for the same reason, and because the political elite—the rich dudes who run the country—were hoping to use body-swapping to prolong their own lives without telling anyone. But the press wasn’t upset, no sirree. This was the story of the century and they loved it.

It emerged that Terrance had obtained access to a prototype not so much because he had the cash to pay for it, but because he had the right contacts in the defense industry. To no one’s surprise, similar machines turned up in quite a few other executive basements—and their most common usage was to temporarily switch bodies with wives or young female lovers. The press loved that too.

Reporters beat a path to my door with a steam shovel. I went to ground in my apartment, speaking to no one, but they stuck a microphone in front of everyone who had ever known or even heard of Gavin Garrod or Miranda Madison.

Gavin’s parents took full advantage of their moment in the sun. My former father said, loud as always, “Ya know, it don’t surprise me one bit he’s a dame now. He were nothin’ like his brother. Always had his head stuck in some book or other. I dunno how many times we caught him in the wife’s closet. Damn fairy.”

Gavin’s mother wasn’t much better. “I blame myself, ya know? Smoked while I was pregnant and they told me it might be bad for the baby, but who takes that sort of thing seriously? Everybody was doing it. I probably shouldn’t have dressed him up as Barbie that time, but it was Halloween and all the gals were doin’ it. But no one else’s son turned into a girl—so, you know, why me? I did have such lovely clothes though—skirts, dresses, lots of shoes, lingerie—so I really can’t blame the kid for wanting my stuff. But like the Reverend says, it simply isn’t proper, is it? Boys shouldn’t dress like girls, it’s not natural. But it’s my fault, I’m his mother. It’s always the mother’s fault, ain’t it?”
I had to count to ten a few times after hearing *that*, but once the initial outrage had faded I found myself strangely indifferent. Why bother being upset? It was Gavin they were bad-mouthing and I wasn’t him anymore.

On the second day of the media storm, my mother called—Miranda’s mother, that is. I wasn’t picking up for media types, but Mum was a different story. I owed her an explanation. “Hello, dear,” she said cheerfully. “What’s this I hear about you switching bodies with that silly Gavin person?”

I admitted it was indeed so, and braced myself for the outburst sure to follow.

She was surprisingly calm. “So which one are you—Miranda or Gavin?”

I opened my mouth to provide the obvious answer, then stopped. The answer, I realized, wasn’t obvious at all. I’d been living exclusively as Miranda for more than six months—shouldn’t that count for something? Who was the female here, me or the dude in the Zurich hospital bed? Who was the one bitching about her period every month? Who was the one dating her boyfriend?

So I told her: “It’s not really one or the other. I’m kind of *both*."

“I’m listening,” she said, channeling Frasier Crane.

I chose my words carefully. “Here’s the thing… I remember being Gavin. I can’t deny that. But I also remember being Miranda. Those memories—I don’t know how many might be leftovers from before the swap or how many I’ve rebuilt since then, in talking about my past with you and Bobby and other people. I can’t tell the difference. Maybe there isn’t one.” I bit my lip and stared down at the vans from a dozen media outlets lining the street. “I’ve been reading up on this. The brain constantly rebuilds our memories. It’s sort of like picking up a library book, flipping through it, then reshelving it. There’s really no difference between a memory your brain’s been refiling for twenty years and one you just copied from someplace else. Does that make sense?”

“Of course it does, dear. I read, you know. *Time* has a science section.” She *ahemmed* loudly. “In any event, I hope you can still come to dinner this Sunday. I know you’re busy, but the ladies and I would love to get the whole story—straight from the filly’s mouth, so to speak.”

“You still want me to come over?” I’d been dining with Mum and her roomies every couple of weeks for months. They were a lively bunch; always laughing and poking fun at each other. I couldn’t imagine a better way to deal with life after the passing of their husbands.

“Of course. Why wouldn’t I? You’re still my daughter.”

*Was I?* I’d certainly been playing the part, but recent events had shaken my faith.
“Here’s the way I see it, Muffin. If my little girl was badly injured in an accident and got amnesia, would she still be my daughter? Of course she would! And if the same accident made her remember being someone else, would she still be my daughter then? Sure she would! She’d just have a lot of issues to deal with, that’s all. And it’s my duty as her mother to do whatever I can to help. I don’t know how scientific that is, but it’s how I feel.”

Mothers. Just when you think you’ve got ‘em figured out, they go and shock the socks off you. After the call ended, I went and had a good cry—and felt like ten times more of a girl afterward. Six months in and still learning the ropes.

Bobby called the day after Mum did. “Hey. I figured you needed some space, so I gave it a few days. How ya holdin’ up?”

“Me? I’ve been better, but I’ll survive.”

“Could be a lot worse. Like, you could be the one in the coma. Oh—” I heard him kick something. “That came out dumb. Sorry.”

“It’s okay. You aren’t wrong. But—” My throat seized up, briefly. “—aren’t you, I dunno… upset? Angry? Ticked off? The person in the coma—that’s Miranda, the girl you fell for back in school. I’m, uh… well, I’m not her.”

Silence. “She’s also the girl that left me ten years ago—to go off and marry some rich old geezer for his money.” There was no point correcting him; I could see why he’d feel that way. “On the other hand,” he continued, “you are the woman I fell in love with four months ago.”

A lump formed in my throat. Did he say love? Oh gawd, I’m such a girl!

“As soon we started talking, that time at Starbucks, I knew you’d changed. For the better, I mean. You seemed more mature—more grounded, I guess. More relaxed and open.” He paused. “This may sound weird, but to me you seemed even more feminine. It’s hard to put my finger on why… maybe it’s just being more at ease with yourself, knowing who you are.”

I refrained from laughing. “Given the circumstances, that is truly weird. I’ve been trying to figure out who I am since this happened.”

“You’re too hard on yourself. As far as I’m concerned, you are Miranda. You lost a few memories along the way—who hasn’t?—and picked up a few from somebody else. Stuff happens. You were gone for ten years; a person can change a lot in that time. But you’re the better for it, Mira. You really are.”

A tear trickled down my cheek. I fought to keep it out of my voice. “It’s funny… I keep trying to remember… stuff that happened back then. Be—before I turned into who I am now. But I—I want to remember, Bobby. I really do.”
“Hey, hey… it’s okay. I remember. As long as one of us does, right?” I could tell he was forcing himself to sound cheerful. “If I tell you about it often enough, then you’ll start remembering it like you were there. That’s how it works.”

Yes, that’s how it works. Bobby was going to reprogram my mind. It would take a long time—years, even decades—but in the end I’d have to think long and hard to remember that I had not in fact grown up as a girl. My memory of being Gavin would slowly merge with everything I knew about Miranda’s past, until one day I’d be able to recall being a young co-ed in love with a boy named Bobby.

“The way I figure it,” he continued, “we’re already making a whole bunch of new memories, and eventually there’ll be a lot more of those than the old ones. Like I said, people change. What’s important is that we do it together.”

That did it. I cried. That evening Bobby managed to sneak past the media and up to my loft, and we spent the rest of the night turning each other inside out. Words of love were exchanged, and as he penetrated the garden of my womanhood I found myself imbued with the feminine qualities of ten women—plus two!

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Several weeks after the raid, Gavin was flown back to the States. He was still in a coma, but stable. Doctors were optimistic that he would eventually awaken, but some form of brain damage was inevitable. Acme BrainScan wasted no time in stating their official position: they could not allow their device to be used for a bodyswap that would return the two of us to our original bodies. The effect on a damaged brain was incalculable; it could result in further damage to either mind, or even death. The bodyswap, they said, was permanent.

Privately, this came as a great relief. I had been worried that a court of law might try to force the return of Mrs. Madison’s original body, so she could be indicted as Terrance’s co-conspirator. As it was, she’d been charged but was unlikely to serve any prison time; her lawyer would no doubt argue that she had been coerced into committing the crime by her husband—and in any case, her physical injuries and being trapped in a male body was surely punishment enough.

As for me, returning to my former self was unthinkable. It wasn’t just that I had adapted to being Miranda—I now thought of myself as a woman; my inner psyche had become decisively female. Being Gavin would amount to nothing less than cruel and unusual punishment. Fortunately, it was not to be.

The three of us—Mum, Bobby and myself—drove down to visit Gavin in a long-term care facility in San Jose. He couldn’t move or speak, but his eyes were open and tests confirmed his awareness. He knew exactly who we were, that much was
apparent. His eyes tracked each of us in turn, with added emphasis on me. I told him what had happened since our body-swap, and how well I had adapted to being Miranda—and that he need not feel guilty for what he’d done. Mum said that as far as she was concerned, she now had a son as well as a daughter, and promised to visit often. Bobby expressed forgiveness for what had happened between them ten years ago. I held Gavin’s hand and broke the news that Bobby and I were now engaged—and was amazed to feel a faint squeeze in response. His eyes shifted between Bobby and me, and a tear rolled down his cheek. Mum wiped it away, both of us ladies had a good cry, and Bobby hugged everyone.

“You didn’t deserve this,” I said, once the others had left the room. “I know you were only trying to save your marriage.” I promised he would always be part of our family; brother and sister. More tears followed, from both of us. I dried them with a tissue and tucked it into my bra.

The fallout from all this was truly amazing. Once my story became widely known, I became something of an icon for the transgender community. A mind born male, albeit with a feminine side, forced into a female body—who could resist a story like that? The fact that I was a man living comfortably as a beautiful woman made me the envy of male-to-female transsexuals everywhere, while cross-dressers the world over could only look at me and think: that could be me! But these are difficult times for the ‘gender challenged’, as polite company call us. The first re-education camps recently opened in Georgia and Alabama, with more to follow. Males with feminine tendencies are to be interred until they are taught how to be ‘real men’—sports, shop classes, vocational training, marksmanship and outdoor survival exercises are all on the agenda. What is not part of the curriculum is getting in touch with your feelings or learning to cook any dish more complicated than a grilled cheese sandwich.

Now that I inhabit a female body, the government deems me to be a true woman, and hence I will not be part of the general round-up of effeminate males that has already begun in parts of the country. But I say this now, for all to hear: as a woman who was once male—I stand with you! I will present myself at the gates of the re-education camps and demand to be imprisoned with my brethren. We will suffer together as we gap spark plugs, field-strip hunting rifles, snake clogged drains, and hurl ourselves at tackle dummies on the gridiron. My example will prove to the world the absurdity of these laws. One day, God willing, the walls will fall and we shall return triumphant to the land of the free. This is not the time for easy answers, my friends. It is a time for hard questions.
BONUS CAPTION

You read the rest, now read the best!

Jeez, don't have a cow, Ma. Miranda and I just figured we should swap bodies for awhile, that's all. We'll totally switch back before the wedding. Is my hair holding its curl? It feels off.

Robert Drayson, who do you think you're fooling? You've been wearing my clothes since you were six years old! Am I supposed to believe you only did this to prove you're a liberated male? Pull the other one!

How much body swapping can a body take? Bobby and Miranda are bent on finding out!

Bobby’s mother gets wise to the madness behind the method!