“You’re, uh… still sure you want to do this?” Feeling nervous, I studied my wife. She had arrived at the hotel first and was in the process of hanging up the clothing she had brought with her: the satin wedding gown she’d worn seven years before, which was a hand-me-down from my own mother; a fit-and-flare black dress for the reception; a fashionable skirt-and-blouse combo for tomorrow; lingerie…

“Of course I am,” Cassandra replied, half-smiling as she smoothed out the creases in the gown she wasn’t planning to wear. “Is that cold feet I hear?”

“Me? No, no… I just wanted to give you every chance to change your mind.” I slung my suitcase on the bed and clicked it open.

She ahemed loudly. “It’s a bit late now. I’m having a hard time speaking in my old voice. It’ll be a relief to—you know, drop the act.”

“It’s never too late, Cass. Everything can be undone.” Almost everything. I lay my suit on the bed and, like her, worked on smoothing the fabric.

“We’d have a lot of explaining to do. Like me all of a sudden having short hair.” She ran her fingers through the wavy blonde hair that fell to her shoulders.

“That’s easy. Just keep wearing that wig until it grows back.”

She laughed. “What about you? It’s hard to hide a total lack of body hair. What would people say next summer?”

I shrugged. “Who cares? Lots of guys shave their legs.”

“I wouldn’t know about that.” She scratched at her thigh through her slacks. “This stuff takes some getting used to.”

“You’ll get the hang of it. Guy’s pants fit differently.” I hung the suit next to her dress, finished unpacking and stowed both suitcases in the closet, in the process brushing against the gown. I wondered what it would feel like to be fully encased in such a feminine garment. Of course, looking the part would help.

Cass tapped me on the shoulder. “Time to hit the shower, babe. Don’t forget to use the right bodywash. It’s the pink tube: Sweet & Sexy, which is exactly what I want you to be by the time we’re done.”

*
I emerged twenty minutes later wearing the standard-issue white bathrobe that came with the room. Cass had laid out her jewelry and some basic cosmetics on the vanity. She was wearing an identical robe. The two of us were very nearly the same height, and with very similar builds as well—her feminine figure aside, that is. Not many couples could say that. Of course, very few couples would even contemplate doing what we were about to do.

We faced each another across the bed, which seemed terribly symbolic. One way or another, we’d been at cross purposes for the last seven years, neither of us quite satisfied with what the other brought to the marriage. It was amazing we were still a couple, or that we had decided to stay together and do whatever it took to make the relationship work. Love finds a way, I suppose.

“How do you want to do this?” she asked. “The face, the hair…?”

“Bodies first.” I touched my leg through the robe. “We’re already half there.”

“I wouldn’t call it ‘half’ but you’ve got a point. There’s something to be said for building up to one’s crowning glory.” She opened a drawer in the vanity and took out two boxes, each about the size of a hardback book. She handed one to me.

We sat next to one another on the bed. “I hope they got every last hair,” Cass said. “Otherwise we’re so gonna feel it four months from now.”

“My girl was very thorough,” I said, wincing at the memory. I opened my legs. “You wouldn’t believe how many little hairs were left, even after the…” Seven months later and I still couldn’t bring myself to say the word.

Cass took my hand. “It’s nothing to be ashamed about,” she said softly. “People like you were called ‘castrati’ in old Italy. As singers, they were revered.”

I shook my head. “Only if it was done before puberty, before their voice fell.”

“Well, yes… but they’ve got other ways to fix that now. You’ve done a wonderful job of hiding that particular change, by the way.”

I stroked my throat, feeling the smoothness. I’d been wearing turtlenecks outdoors for weeks. “Like you said, it’ll be a relief to drop the act and speak normally.”

She rubbed my arm. “We could do that right now, if you like.”

“Let’s wait. At the moment it would look a little weird.” I opened my box and peeled the custom-made prosthesis from its pubic-shaped mount. Turning it over, I forced my remaining ‘equipment’ into the tight latex sleeve, then held it away from my skin while Cass spread glue around the base of my shaft, using a small brush. She added more to the underside of the prosthesis, then helped me press and pull the artificial vagina into its proper place in my groin.
“O-M-G,” she said breathlessly. “It looks exactly like mine does, right down to the shape of the lips and the way I trim that little triangle of pubic hair.”

“Not much of a mystery there. It’s modelled after yours.”

“Well, yeah. But seeing it on someone else is still kinda weird. How’s it feel?”

“Tight. Like I’m gonna have to pee sitting down from now on.”

“That’s the deal. As for tight—you should be used to it by now.” She laughed. “How long were you in chastity? Up to a half-hour ago, that is.”

It was a rhetorical question; we both knew the answer—ever since the operation that had removed my manhood. Seven months, one for each year of our marriage. But I’d mostly stopped noticing since the hormones had kicked in.

“I’m not sure why we bothered,” I said, referring to how our new private parts had been designed to replicate the other’s. “It’s not like anyone else is ever gonna see them—or would know the difference if they did.”

Cass frowned. “I’d know. So would you. You’d think about it every time we made love. This is more about convincing ourselves than anyone else.”

“Everyone else better be convinced too, or I’ll want my money back.”

“No returnsies. This is for keeps, Simon. You know that.”

“I was kidding. C’mon, it’s your turn.”

Cass removed her own prosthesis from the box, coated the back with surgical glue and positioned it between her legs. A short phallic insert slipped into her vagina, and the surrounding flap made a tight seal with her bare skin. The surface of her new genitalia, like mine, was color-matched to her skin. The seams vanished as she smoothed out the edges.

Now it was my turn to marvel. “Man, it looks just like mine used to, before all that electrolysis. Not to mention the operation.” I cupped her testicles. “It’s crazy how real they feel.”

“Yeah, you can’t even see the little valve under the scrotum. That’s where I pump in warm water, so I can respond properly to what you’re doing right now.”

“I better stop. No point getting you too excited before the wedding.”

Cass lifted her new penis and wiggled her hips. “Lemme just make sure… okay. It’s in. Did you know I can even pee through this thing? As long as I flush out the little tube now and then.” She chuckled. “Seriously, I can hardly wait to try out the urinal in a public men’s room. Preferably with other guys around.”

“Men don’t look,” I told her. “Just focus on what you’re doing.”
Cass stuck out her tongue. “Killjoy. What’s next?”

“Undies.” I handed her the pair of tiny-white-thies from the bed.

She made a face. “Used? I suppose you want the panties I was wearing.”

“Yes, please. Do I need a tampon?”

“It’s not my—your time of the month. I’ll let you know when.”

“Oh, yeah… about that. What about your, uh… when you have to—”

She grinned. “My dick? Well… there’s this little flap underneath where I can push a tampon all the way—” She raised her hands. “Uh, no… that’s guy stuff. Don’t you worry your pretty little head about it.”

I stepped into my wife’s still-warm panties and drew them snugly over my hips. French-cut pink lace, I noticed—just the way I liked ‘em.

“That’s not all.” Cass handed me a pink garter belt, and a pair of nude stockings. “They’re not stay-ups,” she said, “but they go with the dress.”

“Are—are these the ones you wore…?”

She nodded. “I knew you’d want them. They aren’t very practical for anything else, so they’ve been sitting in a drawer the last seven years.”

“Thank you.” I wrapped the belt around my waist, letting it settle onto my hips. “I know it doesn’t seem like much, but it’s important to be authentic.”

“I guess. But forgive me for giving your old socks a miss.”

“Just as well. I don’t even remember what they looked like.”

“I do. Women remember stuff like that, Simon. You might want to take notes—you know, for like an hour from now when you are one.”

“I’ll keep that in mind.” I unrolled a soft stocking up each leg in turn and fastened it to the dangling garters. “Anything else?”

“Of course.” She held up a white corset. “I got your waist trainer right here. Women have to make sacrifices for their figure.”

“I never saw you wear that thing.”

“I didn’t need to. Stand up.” She lifted my robe and wrapped the garment around my waist. “It’s got a bunch of hooks in the back,” she muttered, “so I’ll just—” She grunted with the effort. “—try for the third row. Suck in that gut!” I let my air out and stopped breathing for awhile. “Got it,” she muttered. Cass tugged the hem down to my hips. I sucked in air, but not quite as much as usual. “It’ll help prop up your bust too,” she said, as I hyperventilated.
“My—god,” I gasped, standing at attention. “How do—you women—do this?”

“What’s this ‘you women’ business? You’re the one with the bat cave between her legs.”

“How do—we women—manage this?”

“Beats me. I’m a guy. Guys know squat about women.”

“Very funny. I could—use some help—before I pass out.”

“You won’t. Just take small breaths. Move your hips. That should help push your internal organs around and give your lungs more room.”

I wriggled my hips and took a lot of shallow breaths, which slowly began to feel less like drowning. “Okay… I think I’ve got it.” I stretched my arms and twisted my body from side to side. “Sitting down could be a problem though.”

“You won’t be able to slouch, if that’s what you mean. Keep your back straight and you’ll be fine. It’ll make you look more lady-like too.” Cass shucked her robe. Underneath, she was wearing a man’s sleeveless undershirt.

My eyes widened. “You already bound your chest?”

“Actually, no… This is the real me.” She thumped her chest. “Surprise! I got breast-reduction surgery. Three weeks ago, it was. It’s outpatient surgery these days—in and out in three hours. Since then I’ve been wearing the breast forms we had made. You didn’t even notice, did you? That’s because—you guessed it—they look exactly like mine!”

I shook my head. “And here’s me asking if you’d changed your mind.”

“Yeah, that was funny. C’mon, off with the robe. Let’s get you fully feminized.” She spread surgical glue on the wrinkled backs of the prosthetic breasts that had recently graced her own chest; the wrinkles providing extra skin contact for sticking power. I lay down on the bed and pressed the teardrop shapes against my chest, smoothed out the edges and held them in place while the glue set.

“Every four months we’ll have to do this,” I mused. “Take everything off, clean it, let the skin breathe for awhile.” My eyes sought hers. “I think it’s important that we don’t see each other while we’re doing that.”

She nodded. “After today, we can’t let ourselves spoil the illusion. Ever.”

“Until death do us part.” It was almost a joke, but I wasn’t smiling. Neither was she when she pressed her lips against mine.

“I love that you’re doing this,” she whispered into my ear.

“It isn’t just for me. Or just for you either—it’s for us.”
“I know. To stay together, I’d do anything for you.” She giggled. “I’d do anything as you as well.”

“Me too. I plan to do pretty much anything and everything as you.”

Cass stroked the tip of my new breast. “For the rest of your life.”

My chest twitched. “Hey, I felt that!”

“Of course. There’s a tactile sensor right here—” She touched my nipple. “—and it’s connected to an electrode in contact with your male nipple. It delivers a small current, synchronized with whatever’s touching your boob. Not enough to hurt. Just enough to make your libido sit up and take notice.”

“I never knew about that. It wasn’t in the specs.”

“It was a last-minute addition. Surprise again.” She passed her hand over the tip of my breast. “It’s motion-powered, so you’ll never have to change the battery. Just skip wearing a bra now and then.” We both laughed.

I sat up, still holding my new breasts. “Where’s your bra?”

Cass tut-tutted. “You can’t wear that one. It’s got shoulder straps.”

Of course, the wedding gown was strapless. I lifted my elbows for Cass to wrap a different brassiere around my chest. My breasts burrowed gently into their new home. “It’s got molded cups with underwire support,” she said, pulling the clasp tight in the back. “And silicone strips around the sides for grip.”

“Feels about right.” I tugged at the edges to adjust the fit.

“It should. I only had to try on about a hundred different bras.”

“Well, thanks muchly. My girls are grateful.”

“Oh, they’re your girls now, huh?” Her smile was playful.

“Totally. Just like the family jewels between your legs. Your boys.”

She pointed to the closet. “Enough chit-chat. Your slip awaits.”

I lifted the long garment from its hanger. “I’ve never seen this before.” It had a stiff bodice to the waist, smooth fabric over the thighs, and ended in a swirl of petticoat-style ruffles—presumably to add volume to a skirt.

“The only time I wore it, it was under my wedding dress. Just step in and pull it up.” She helped me tug the bodice into place over both the waist trainer and the brassiere. “It’s designed to support the shape of a tea-length dress,” she said, straightening the hem. “So your skirt won’t get stuck between your legs when you walk down the aisle.”
“Bonus. I love the tulle at the bottom. And the lace trim.”

“Wow. You were so meant to be a girl, Simon. How did I not see that?”

“Kept it well hidden. Kind of like you repressing the tomboy inside.” I drifted toward the vanity, feeling the stiff rayon of the tulle skirt bouncing off my thighs. I examined my figure in the mirror. “That’s your body alright.”

“Oops, almost forgot.” Cass went back to her box and retrieved a fleshy strip that wrapped around her neck, locked in place with surgical glue. The resulting bump bobbed visibly when she swallowed. “Like you said,” she murmured, stroking her throat, “it’s important to be authentic.”

“Speaking of which…” I leaned toward the mirror and picked at the skin of my upper lip. I found the seam and tugged at it until the bulk of my nose peeled away. What remained was smaller, much more delicate, and altogether indistinguishable from my wife’s ladylike sniffer.

Cass applauded quietly. “Excellent nose job.” She studied the organ from both sides, then picked up the small prosthetic. “I guess this is mine now.”

“You’re welcome to it. This stuff too.” I peeled a fleshy strip from my jaw that had given me a squarer face, and from my eyelids a pair of elastic strips that had narrowed my gaze and kept my eyes from opening fully. In an instant, my face softened, its feminine attributes no longer hidden. The wide eyes that greeted me in the mirror added a kind of girlish naïveté.

Cass added the new items to the pile. “I suppose,” she said, leaning into the mirror, “you’ll be needing these.” She picked at the skin of her cheek until she found a seam and peeled away first one prominent cheek, then the other. What was left was flat and unremarkable, much like my own.

I accepted the oval prosthetics, added glue, and applied them to my own face. “Darn good thing we’ve got the same skin tone,” I muttered, stating the obvious. “Yeah, this wouldn’t work so well otherwise.”

I caressed the seams until they vanished. That did it. I knew those eyes, that nose, those high cheekbones. The surgeon at the clinic, working from photos of Cass’s face, had given me the same mouth, the same lips, the same basic facial shape—which in any case hadn’t been so far apart in the first place. More than once we’d been mistaken for brother and sister, which worked in our favor now. In any case, I knew that face—and it wasn’t mine. It was hers.

The surgeon had done the opposite for Cass, shaving her cheekbones and making other subtle alterations to make her face resemble mine. The prosthetics would do the rest, at least until we returned to the clinic to finish the job.
“I’m you…” My breath quickened. I’d known what was coming, but it still blew me away. I had to sit down. I sank onto the stool in front of the vanity, deftly smoothing my skirt under me to avoid crushing it. Curious how that was getting to be second nature.

“I have another surprise,” Cass said, “but let’s do your hair first.” She stretched a nylon wig cap over my head, which was still slightly damp from the shower. She stuck the edges down in several places with clear surgical tape. I felt her hands touch my shoulders. “That’s it. Are you ready?”

Ready to become Cassandra? How could I not be?

Cass went to the sideboard, where a bottle of champagne sat chilling in an ice bucket. “Cause for celebration, don’t you think?” She popped the cork and filled two fluted glasses. She set them on the vanity, then reach up to her hairline. A few quick jerks, side-to-side and back-to-front, freed the wig from its grip on her head. It lifted free, then landed on my own head. It was still warm.

I took over from there, adjusting the fit and tucking the tiny combs underneath the surgical tape on my hairline. I ran my fingers through the long blonde tresses. It was real human hair—hers, of course—and custom-made to duplicate the style she’d worn for our wedding. Insofar as anyone else knew, she’d simply gotten it styled that way in preparation for renewing our vows—which was no lie.

Meanwhile, Cass had removed her own wig cap. She brushed out her now-curly short hair, which had been dyed light brown to match my old style. She wasn’t yet wearing any facial prosthetics, but she was the old me in every other way.

And I was the old her.

We raised our glasses and clinked rims. Neither of us spoke. We knew what was coming. Once we had tasted the champagne, and cleared our throats, we would speak in our new voices—the voices the clinic had subtly altered our vocal chords to achieve. Voices we’d been training ourselves to use for months.

That was the plan. There was no turning back now.

We drank.

* 

I set my empty glass aside and turned to the mirror. “I think renewing our vows was a wonderful idea,” I said, pleased to hear a smooth contralto flow from my lips—not for the first time, of course, but for my first time as Cassandra. I picked up a brush and set to work tidying my hair, which looked scruffy and not up to my usual standards. That would simply not do. Certainly not today, of all days.
Simon—for the former she was *he* now—returned the glasses to the sideboard. “Yeah, it’s all good,” he remarked, in a masculine tenor.

I paused my brushing. “Is something wrong?” He sounded so… offhanded.

“Nothing at all.” He saw my expression and came to stand behind me. “C’mon, Cass. You know how guys are. Stuff like this means more to a woman.”

“Well. I’m sorry you had to put yourself out.” I unpaused my brushing.

“Don’t be like that. I’m here, aren’t I?” He leaned down and whispered in my ear, “Besides, I have a surprise for you.”

“Another one? A girl can only take so much.”

“I know you’ve been practicing your makeup skills, getting ready for today… and I do admit you’re pretty good at it…”

I put the brush down. “I sense a ‘but’ coming.”

He grinned. “But… I hired a professional beautician. I gave her the best picture I could find of us on our wedding day, so she could recreate your look.”

“Oh… Simon. That’s so thoughtful.” I touched his hand. “But I’m not sure I want to get all dressed up and go out. Wouldn’t it be—”

“She’s in the next room,” he said, pointing to the connecting door. “It’s not locked. All you have to do is walk through.” He paused. “Bear in mind, it was Cass that hired her. I was Cassandra at the time, right? So you’ll have to pretend it was you that talked to her before. Her name’s Arabella.”

I stood up, facing the man who was and would be my husband. My arm slipped around his waist. “I’m very good at pretending,” I purred.

“You got my vote for Best Actress.” Gently, almost hesitantly, we kissed. Our lips parted, paused, then returned for a longer kiss. Then longer still.

“What will you do while I’m gone?” I asked him.

“Got to work on my face.” He rubbed his jaw. “I’m not feeling as masculine as I should. Nothing I can’t fix.” He opened the connecting door and held it for me. “Your chariot awaits, m’lady.”

“Thank you, sir.” The opposite door was ajar, so I swept on through, feeling the tap-tap of my rayon skirts against my legs. The door closed behind me. I heard it lock.

For the first time, I found myself facing another human being who thought that I was none other than Cassandra Bartholomew. And she wasn’t wrong, of course. Really, I shouldn’t have to keep reminding myself.
“Mrs. Bartholomew… so nice to see you again.” The girl was very young and oddly tiny, with a pixie haircut that reminded me of Tinkerbell. Yet for Simon to have chosen her she must be a stud makeup artist. Wouldn’t she see that I was wearing a wig? Or prosthetic cheek pads? And what if she did? The other ‘me’ must have been wearing the same items when last they spoke. So why worry?

I approached the chair that was waiting for me. “Arabella. Please call me Cassie. It’s just us girls.”

“Cassie it is. Have a seat.” She guided me into the recliner and adjusted the headrest. A soft spotlight shone down on my face. It felt like being at the dentist. “When’s the big event?” she asked, eyeing my outfit.

I checked the clock. “Three hours. Less than.”

“Not a problem.” She sat on the stool next to me and pulled her cosmetic cart closer. “I studied the photo you left me. I’ve sourced a makeup palette that should reproduce that look. They probably aren’t the exact same products, but the overall effect should be the same.”

“That sounds fine.”

“From what I see here—your skin tone and the like—I think you’ll come out of this looking very much as you did before—as in ‘dead ringer’. That is what you had in mind, correct?”

For an instant, our eyes met. “Very much,” I said.

“You’re lucky. Not too many women would be able to pull that off, seven years later.” She used a hand-held colorimeter to get a precise skin tone reading, and chose a liquid foundation accordingly. “Looks like you already moisturized, so we’ll skip that step.” She shook the little bottle vigorously. “I love the slip, by the way. Is it the same one you wore first time ‘round?” I nodded, feeling a little self-conscious, but she only smiled. “The same dress as well, I assume.”

I squirmed a little. “Everything has to be… authentic.”

“May I ask why?” She daubed the viscous liquid around my face and used a small sponge to spread it evenly.

“Why?” The question baffled me. Of course everything had to be the same. Cass had to wear the dress last time—the other Cassandra, I mean—and now it was my turn. What could be simpler than that?

“I’m just curious, is all.” She studied my face and added a touch of concealer here and there, to what she called minor blemishes. She followed that with a dusting of translucent powder and the gentle touch of a powder brush.
I stared at the ceiling, avoiding her gaze and trying to look ‘bridal’.

“This is a part-time gig for me,” Arabella said. “I’m enrolled at Stanford, you see, majoring in psychology. My main interest is abnormal psych.”

“You think I’m—abnormal?” I regretted the words instantly. They were out of character. The right voice but the wrong mind, if that made any sense.

“No, no… but it’s an unusual pattern of behavior. Most women in your position, renewing their vows with the same man—they’re looking for a fresh start. They’d choose a new dress, a new venue, a different time of year…” She switched on a small fan, sending a waft of cool air my way. “You seem to be taking the opposite approach. Your anniversary… it wouldn’t be today, would it?”

I gritted my teeth and admitted that it was; and yes, we were married in this very hotel. In the same room. I stammered out some excuse about not making my poor husband remember two different anniversaries.

Arabella clucked her tongue. “Fascinating. You weren’t looking for a fresh start at all. Which brings me back to ‘why’. Not that it’s any of my business.” She picked up a lip pencil. “Relax, Cassie. I need to see the natural shape of your mouth.”

I kept quiet while she sculpted my lips. But I was thinking. Why on earth would a normal woman—someone who hadn’t just turned into one—want to recreate her wedding down to the last detail? Her marriage must be working, or it wouldn’t be a memory she’d want to relive—so why go to all the trouble? Wedding photos get lost in a fire? In an age of digital backups, that sounded hopelessly lame.

I seriously considered telling her that my husband had a bad case of amnesia, and this was our way of recreating a memory he’d lost, but that sounded too much like a movie of the week. The girl would never buy it. Maybe it was because she was a born psychoanalyst, or maybe I was just jonesing for a sympathetic ear, but she had a way of drawing out the truth, or at least something close to it. By the time she finished painting my mouth and blotting my lips, I was willing to spill.

“I suppose… on some level, I need to prove that I’m… still… the woman in that picture.” As I spoke, I was staring straight at the photo from my wedding.

Arabella nodded, but I could see the pity in her eyes. To her, I was a woman who had just turned thirty and was already desperate to recapture her youth and fading beauty. “I’m not one to judge,” she said, then fell silent. She touched a loop of my hair that had fallen next to my left eye. “I see you’re wearing a wig…”

The bottom fell out of my stomach. My expression probably did the same.

“Oh—but it looks lovely!” Arabella exclaimed. “I’m sure you had it custom-made. It’s just the hairline over your forehead… it doesn’t quite—”
I turned my head away. “I can’t imagine what you must think of me.”

“Don’t be like that. You look wonderful, Cassie. I’m serious.” She waited for my gaze to return. “You’re gonna be a beautiful bride, just like last time. I promise.”

I had to smile, just a little. “You promise?”

“Sure! That’s my job. Look, I can fix the hairline thing. It’s just me being so close and all; that’s why I can see part of the seam. It looks like the lace cap at the front was color-matched to your skin—it’s that close.” She ran her finger lightly across my forehead. “You can hardly even feel it. I could add a touch more makeup here, if you like—make the seam all but invisible. Everyone at the wedding will swear it’s your real hair.”

“Please do.” I licked my lips, tasting the heavy lipstick. My heartbeat began to return to normal. All was well. I was still Cassandra.

At length, Arabella turned her attention to my eyes. She paid particular attention to my brows, shaping them with an electric eyebrow epilator while her eyes darted back and forth between my face and a blow-up of the photo she’d been given. The arch and movement of the eyebrows, she declared, is a major part of what gives a face its distinctive character. That, and the shape of the mouth.

A thrill swept down my back. My lips shaped to match hers, smiling her smile… my mouth shaping her words, speaking in her voice… my eyebrows, shaped to duplicate hers, lifting in the precise way hers often did. I wanted all of it.

Arabella applied a base eyeshadow, only slightly darker than my overall skin tone, from lashline to brow, then used a contouring shade along the lashline and within the eyelid crease. To emphasize the outer half of my eyes, she formed a wedge in each corner using a smoky accent color, then blended to avoid any hint of a sharp line. She applied eyeliner above and below my eyes, but only from the inner edge of each iris to past the outside corner. She did the same with mascara, emphasizing the outer lashes. She added a dusting of baby powder, followed by a second coat.

“This isn’t how I usually work,” she muttered, more to herself than me it seemed. “Not much call for repeat weddings, I suppose.”

“It’s not that.” She peered at the wedding photo, cast a critical eye toward me and then selected two shades of blush from the selection on her tray. “Usually, I’m just trying to make the client look as pretty as possible. It’s a lot different, trying to duplicate a specific ‘look’.”

“Not too different, I hope.” My eyes sought the mirror next to the dresser, but she’d positioned my chair such that it reflected the closed door I’d come through. Apparently, it was against the rules to see an unfinished makeover.
“I’ll manage. For sure, it’s easier when it’s the same person. This would be way harder if you weren’t the woman in that pic.” She opened the first pot of blusher. “You’ve got very fair skin, so I swapped the usual bronzer for a warm nude blush. This one’s got just a hint of peach. It’ll give you a more natural glow, which is what the photo shows.” She dusted my entire face with the light powder, sweeping the soft brush from side to side, then up and down.

I glanced at the clock. Nearly an hour had passed, and I still had to get dressed.

Arabella followed my gaze. “Don’t worry. We’re nearly done.” She uncapped the second pot of blush. “This is a nice warm blush, a soft rose, to give your cheeks a little extra glow. They already look pretty good, so we don’t need much.” I closed my eyes as the powder fell and a smaller soft brush blended around the edges.

*I’m Cassandra*, I thought. It was her face I’d see in the mirror, when I was finally allowed to look. What would I say? What should I do?

“People’s faces change over time,” Arabella said, returning the blush to her tray. “Aging, gaining or losing weight… stuff like that. What I find interesting is that yours didn’t. If it had, I would’ve contoured your face right off the hop. But I didn’t have to. You really haven’t changed much.”

My lips twitched into a smile. “Just lucky, I guess.” I didn’t mention the cosmetic surgery that had given me that face.

“Eyes closed.” She waited, then misted my entire face and throat. “It’s L’Oreal’s *Infallible,*” she said. “The best setting spray on the market, for my money. This should keep your makeup looking and feeling fresh all night long, which is just what you want for a wedding, *n’est-ce pas?* After all, you never know long the reception will last,” she added with a sly grin.

I ignored the innuendo. “Is that it? Am I done?”

“You’re done, Cassie. As promised, you’re a beautiful bride.”

I rose, trembling, and stumbled to the mirror. My mouth fell open. I had to force it back into an appreciative ‘Oh’, because that’s the reaction Arabella would be expecting. But it was Cassandra looking back at me; Cassie whose smile grew as I realized—deep down, and for the first time—that this crazy body-swapping idea really was going to work.

This was the face of the woman I’d married seven years before, looking exactly as she had then, just after speaking her vows and before I kissed her. I half-closed my eyes, almost expecting to be kissed. But that would come later.

*
Simon opened the door when I knocked. And it was truly Simon, because he’d applied his facial prosthetics and now looked just as he should. An appreciative whistle escaped his lips as he locked the door behind me. “Wow, Cass, you look… just amazing. Beautiful.”

I touched his cheek. “Am I the Cassandra you remember? From our wedding day, seven years ago? You can tell me the truth, Simon. I won’t be upset.”

He laughed. “Are you sure? It sounds like one of those ‘do I look fat?’ traps women are so fond of.”

“I’m not playing games. I need to know.”

He took my hand and kissed it. “You are every bit the woman I married, lo these seven years past. I’d know that face anywhere.”

“Well, you should.” I flitted toward the closet. “We’d better get dressed.”

“No hurry.” He checked his watch. “The ceremony isn’t until seven. That gives us nearly four hours.”

“Since when? It was booked at four o’clock. Did the hotel mess up?”

“Nope. I changed the booking, a month or so back. All the guests were notified. They’re downstairs now having an early dinner.”

I was dismayed. “Simon… we were married at four…”

He lifted his hands. “I know. Everything was supposed to be the same. Forgive me, but I thought it was more important that we take the time to rest. Now we can nap for three whole hours. I left a wake-up call at the front desk for six PM.”

I stared at him. “You want me to sleep? Looking like this? When I’m about to be married—as a woman?”

“Well, neither of us got much sleep last night. Too nervous, I g—”

“That’s not the point. A tranquilizer fit for an elephant couldn’t put me to sleep right now. I’m keyed up like you wouldn’t believe.”

“I believe. I remember how it was last time, for both of us. But fear not, we’ve got pharmaceutical help.” He held up two Ziploc bags. Each held a large pill and a small MP3 player; one blue, the other pink.

I wasn’t impressed. “What do you expect me to do with that? Swallow the player and stick the pill in my ear?”

“It’s an experimental drug, Cass. It’s been cleared for use in human—”

“Oh, good. I’d hate to think you signed us up for a drug trial on our wedding day.”
“—but so far it’s only being used by a small number of psychiatrists. They use it to treat patients who don’t respond—or don’t want to respond—to standard talk therapy. Psychopaths, mostly.”

“Oh my god. Are you serious?”

“What happens is, it puts you to sleep. At least, that’s what it looks like from the outside, so the body does get some rest. But it’s different on the inside.” He sat on the bed and looked up at me. “Scientists say the drug induces a deeply ‘receptive’ state in the brain. Your conscious mind is turned off, as if you were sleeping, but it’s different. You’re not dreaming, you’re listening. The brain takes whatever you hear and stores it at a subconscious level. The information isn’t evaluated, it simply becomes a part of your mind, as if it’s always been there.”

I couldn’t believe what I was hearing. “That sounds like brainwashing.”

“Well… I suppose it could be used that way. In the wrong hands. But in the right hands, it’s a powerful therapeutic tool. To help people.”

I sank down next to him on the bed. “What are you suggesting, Simon?”

“For the last two months I’ve been working with a psychiatrist who has access to this drug. She’s helping me deal with the issues I faced in becoming a man. This drug is part of that. I’ve taken it four times. I lie down on the couch in her office and listen to an audio file prepared by Dr. Dazzler and her staff.”

I looked at him dubiously. “Did you feel any different?”

“For sure. Not right away, but over time I definitely felt less anxious about what we were doing. More confident… that we’re doing the right thing. More sure of myself.” He shrugged. “It’s all good.”

I stared at the floor. “That sounds all right. But why take it right now?”

“Well… this session is the key. So far, they’ve been making me more masculine; turning me into more of a man on the inside. Getting me used to the idea of being Simon. This time, my mind will be reprogrammed to believe that I am Simon.”

I clutched his hand. “Oh, no… isn’t that—? What do they call it? Identity death?”

“Not at all. My memories won’t change. I’ll still remember being Cassandra, but it’ll seem like I should have been Simon all along. That’s why I’m so calm about this. It doesn’t seem like some big life-changing step anymore. We’re just fixing something that should have been this way from the beginning.”

I withdrew my hand. “That’s fine for you, I suppose. But what’s the point in me taking the drug? From what you said, one session isn’t going to make that much difference. I’m already willing to be Cassandra.”
“Yeah, about that… this wouldn’t actually be your first session with the drug.”
“What—?!?” My mouth fell open.
“You’ve had the same four doses as me,” he said hastily. “Those times we had a late dinner and you felt so tired afterward? I ground up the pill and put it in your quiche or whatever… Once you fell asleep, I inserted the earbuds and played the audio file Dr. Dazzler made for you.”
“You drugged me? Simon, that’s—”
“That’s why you stopped feeling anxious about being a woman, Cass.”

What could I say? It was true. A month ago I was a nervous wreck. Was I doing the right thing? Could I really pull off pretending to be a woman, perhaps for the rest of my life? But as the wedding grew closer, I found myself more at ease with the idea. More certain it was the right thing to do. Feeling more feminine.

I toyed with my hair, staring at the two MP3 players. “What will it do to me?”

“Same as me.” He put an arm around my shoulders. “The first four sessions made you think more like a woman. This one will reprogram your mind to believe that you are one. You won’t have to pretend anymore. By the time you wake up, you’ll believe you’ve been Cassandra all along—on the inside.”

“But my memories won’t change? I’ll still know who I was?”

He handed me the bag with the pink player. “You’ll still be you, Cass. But the ‘you’ that you’ll be—is a girl named Cassandra.”

I nodded. “The part about ‘not pretending’ sounds good. I was worried.”

“So was I. But in a few hours, our worries will be over.” He grinned and pulled me closer. “So whaddya say? Want to be my best girl, for keeps?”

I smiled coyly. “You know I do.” My hand touched his chest and our lips met, but only briefly. “That’s all you get, mister. For now. Arabella went to a lot of trouble for this look and I won’t let you ruin it.”

Simon swung his legs onto the bed and scooted over to the far side. I stretched out next to him. We opened our Ziploc bags and put the pills to our lips. He gazed down at me with the easy-going grin I knew so well. “Down the hatch, Cass. Then it’s straight through the rabbit hole and no going back.”

“Why would I want to?” I took the pill and lay back, artfully arranging my hair on the pillow so as not to crush my curls. I pressed the earbuds deep into my ears and hit ‘play’ on the pink music player.

The drug did its thing. The old world spun into darkness.
I felt my husband’s touch before opening my eyes. My earbuds popped out.

I gazed up at Simon’s smiling face, for an instant not quite recognizing the man. He seemed stronger than before, more masculine. How odd that I hadn’t noticed that before. “Welcome to Wonderland,” he said softly.

He helped me to my feet. I looked around the room and everything fell into place. Of course. I was Cassandra—and in fact had been her all along. My life as Simon was one big charade, pretending to be someone I wasn’t, without even realizing what I was doing. Everything we’d done—from the castration, the hormones, the cosmetic surgery, learning to speak in my true voice, even the mind-altering drug I’d been given; to the surgeries yet to come, including breast implants and vaginal construction—all of it was no more than putting right what had once gone wrong. How could I not have known that before? It was clear as a bell now.

He took my hand. “How do you feel?”

I took a deep breath. “The nap was a wonderful idea, Simon. I feel so… energized. I’m sorry I gave you a hard time about it.”

“No worries. We’d better get you dressed, huh? Everyone’s expecting us.”

It was amazing. For our entire lives I was him and he was me, yet somehow we’d managed to find each other. I suppose it was destiny—of a sort—in that we were bound to be drawn toward our true bodies. Love finds a way.

Simon held up my dress. I straightened my slip and stepped into it. He pulled it up and wrapped the bodice around my chest, securing the clasp in the middle of my back. I shivered as the zipper snicked into place, effectively trapping me within the voluminous gown and its billowing skirt. I hadn’t a hope of undoing the clasp myself, which left me at the mercy of others. My husband in particular.

It made me feel a little helpless, like a damsel in distress. That’s when I knew—I would have no trouble giving myself to Simon; during the wedding itself and again during the night, flat on my back in the marital bed. It was what I wanted.

While Simon put on his tuxedo, I returned to the vanity and brushed my hair. Then I applied Dolce & Gabbana’s *Velvet Rose*, purchased just for this ceremony, to my wrists and throat, and opened the velvety box that held the jewelry from our first wedding. It had been worn by Simon’s grandmother during her wedding, then his mother, and now it was my turn. I lifted the necklace with its clusters of tiny diamonds, fastened it around my neck and aimed the pendant at my cleavage. The jewels were a matching set: earrings that dangled from the holes in my ears and a delicate bracelet for my right wrist. It was done.
I smiled at the mirror. I knew that face. I remembered its beauty from seven years past, but even then I must have known that something was wrong. Now it was my face and that was as it should be. What was once disjoint had been made whole.

I swept back to the closet to retrieve the satin pumps from our first wedding, then found a chair from which to watch Simon struggle with his cummerbund. My tummy did a flip-flop when I realized that right there was a working set of ovaries and a perfectly good uterus going to waste inside my husband’s body. They were mine for the asking, of course, but had surgery come far enough for me to reclaim them? Time would tell. Perhaps birthing my own child was still in the cards.

And why not? In Wonderland, anything is possible. Everyone knows that.
Adam’s newly perfected cross-dressing ‘mad skillz’ soon went to his head. He found himself becoming Alisha at every opportunity; first once a week then progressing to every day. He perfected the half-hour transformation from mild-mannered copy editor to party girl. Alisha began frequenting upscale wine bars, where trendy young men with beards bought her drinks and spoke of their need to show her their Porsche. One day, desperate to be treated more thoroughly as a woman, she accepted the invitation. Her first ride in a silver Porsche ended at a viewpoint overlooking Lake Woebegone, where she began learning a whole new set of mad skillz: the fine art of pleasuring a man without technically losing one’s maidenhood.