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Touched By An Angela (sorry!)

Amanda Hawkins

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The letter that came with the package was, to put it mildly, mind-boggling. Things like this just don't happen, not in a world built by engineers and ruled by the laws of physics. Magic wasn't real—it *couldn't* be! And yet...

Dear Theo: I know it must be a shock to see me this way, and for that I am truly sorry. I tried not to let it show, but lately I've been under a great deal of stress. To put it bluntly, I needed a break. But I can't just leave; I have responsibilities, to the gallery in particular. That's why I'm asking you to do me a huge favor. This may sound strange, but I need you to become me for a while. All you have to do is wear this bodysuit, dress like me and act like me. My sister helped me do this and she'll soon be in touch with you. When it's time for me to return, she'll help you with that. Thank you so much! All my love... Mum.

Theo read the note three times before he dared touch what lay underneath it in the box. His mouth ran dry as he held it up. It was a real live bodysuit—or a skinsuit, or even a 'costume' if you believed those ridiculous stories on the Internet. And it looked exactly like his mother, who had gone missing the day before.

Well... was this *really* all that different from what he'd been doing, off and on for the last decade or so? That involved dressing up on the sly, of course, sneaking into her closet when she was out of the house, trying—if we're being honest—to make himself look exactly like she did. Theo's mother was a beautiful woman. Evangeline Donatelli: smart, classy and graceful—everything the modern woman aspires to be—and since his father died he'd spent his whole life looking up at her, admiring her, and secretly wanting to be just like her.

And now she was asking, even *begging*, Theo to do precisely that: be just like her. Even better, she wanted him to *be* her. He wouldn't have to pretend; for however long this took, he would be the one and only Evangeline Donatelli. What would become of Theodore Donatelli for the duration? Hell, why even worry about that? Theo was nobody. He was a Beta's beta. He wouldn't be missed.

At any rate, his mother needed a favor—and by god he was going to come through for her! Isn't that what a good son should do? With a nod to the inevitable, Theo stood up and headed for the master bedroom.

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The transformation was astonishing. One moment he was a twenty-year-old male, and the next—in the minute or so it took to encase his body in the soft skinsuit—

he became female. The instant he closed the clasp at the top of his spine, and the magic of transformation swung into action, he turned into a real live woman, aged thirty-eight, who looked *damn* good for her age.

Theo didn't hesitate to rifle through his mother's underwear drawer for something to wear. She was a vintage lingerie aficionado, so he chose an open-bottom girdle, drew it over his torso, and attached a pair of nude stockings to the garters. Already knowing what dress he wanted to wear, he added a strapless brassiere, settled his newfound breasts in the cups, and with an ease born of long practice reached behind his back to fasten the clasp.

His lips settled into a grim smile. "I don't know if you ever knew I was a cross-dresser," I said in *her* melodious contralto, looking straight into the mirror, "but I bet you just figured it out—if you're still somewhere in there."


That's what he wasn't sure about. Was the real Evangeline somehow still *aware* of what was going on? Could she see herself at this very moment, no longer able to control her own body? It seemed unlikely, if for no other reason than it wouldn't exactly be relaxing. If she wanted a break from her life, surely she wouldn't have chosen to be conscious of herself being dressed and marched around like a robot. So Theo crossed *her* fingers and hoped his mother was getting the rest she needed.

He padded over to her closet and chose the off-black cocktail dress she'd recently purchased for tonight's reception. It was straight out of the nineteen-fifties, with a low-cut off-the-shoulder neckline, a fitted waist and a tea-length swing skirt. "Too bad you never got the chance to wear this," he said, with a coy smile, "but don't worry, I'll do you proud." He stepped through the back and drew it up over *her* body. He almost dislocated his arm getting the zipper closed, but after he'd settled his newfound curves into the satiny fabric—the breath left his body in a rush. The dress was classy, flattering and intensely feminine, and it showed enough cleavage to grab the immediate attention of any man with a pulse.

His lips moved. "Oh my... Good choice, Mother. This dress is definitely *you*." Was that something his mother would say? Theo wasn't sure, but it no longer felt so strange hearing Evangeline's voice when he spoke.

He stepped into a pair of black stiletto pumps and fastened the ankle straps. Back at the vanity, he ran a brush through her hair and checked that the makeup she'd applied the previous day had survived being turned into a costume. It had, so he added a double strand of pearls and—in a final nod to the era both mother and son favored—a cartwheel hat made of black lace.

Theo spritzed himself with *Chanel No. 5*, breathed deeply and faced his reflection. Evangeline Donatelli gazed back at him, appearing at once surprised and satisfied. Her chin lifted just enough to suggest how aware she was of her feminine allure.



Well, Mother... it would seem that being turned into a "costume" hasn't done you any harm. Not on the outside, at least. You're still the loveliest woman I've ever seen...

Congratulations, kid, you're a woman now. But if you screw this up, you're grounded.

Oh god... it's really her. This is what I always wanted, all those times I snuck into her closet and tried on her clothes, to see her looking back at me from the mirror. I always felt so small around her, so powerless... But now? Her beauty is mine. Her strength, her confidence... I really am a woman. I feel... powerful.

Theo's steps faltered he approached the gallery. It occurred to him that this would be the first time he'd ever interacted with other people as a woman. In the last year or two he'd driven around town *en femme*, rarely daring to get out of his mother's car, and more recently he'd been promenading around the neighborhood under the cover of dusk. The people he passed in the street had *seen* him in feminine dress, but he'd never spoken to anybody while pretending to be female. Of course, Theo reminded himself, he no longer had to pretend—Evangeline was the real deal and he was very much a *she*. They could call in the FBI to take her fingerprints and a DNA swab and it still wouldn't blow his cover. With that in mind, he squared her shoulders and entered the gallery with head held high.

"Ms. Donatelli?" A thin man with pinched features waved her over: Ace Jenkins, her dull but capable aide. "I opened up for the caterers, like you asked. They're all set up, but somebody—not me—knocked the Sioux headdress off its perch! It's all mussed-up, so I figured I'd better leave it for you. Also, your 'ex' is here."

Theo's mouth ran dry. Sergio Montanari was Evangeline's most recent partner. They had been together for two tempestuous years—full of noises from the master bedroom the teen desperately tried to ignore—followed by his sudden departure just over a year ago. She hadn't seen him since, but her body's elevated heartbeat suggested that the intensity of her attraction may not have abated.

"I'll take care of it," he said, his gaze wandering. There were a dozen or so guests milling about the foyer, with more visible in the adjoining rooms. Theo was late to the party, which never would have happened when his mother was in charge of her own body. He hastened to the exhibit of Sioux artwork and returned the headdress to its stand. He didn't have his mother's touch, of course, and Ace could have done a better job, but Theo couldn't own up to that.

"Evangeline?" Oh God, it was *him*.

His heart thumping, Theo turned. Sergio loomed over him, a six-foot-three finely-tuned male body that wouldn't look out of place striding down a runway in Milan. As a restless sixteen-year-old, Theo had rebuffed the man's half-hearted attempts toward being a stepfather. Given that, it was a shock to feel her body's reaction to Sergio's masculine presence. Some part of Evangeline still desired—*that*.

"Sergio? It's, well... what a lovely surprise."

He grinned. "Really? I texted you last week that I'd be here."

Theo blinked. His mother *knew*? Could this be why she needed a 'break' all of a sudden—she didn't want to face her ex-boyfriend? Which meant it now fell upon *him* to give the dude the royal brush-off. "Oh yes, how silly of me."

Sergio didn't press the issue. "You've done a great job with all this." His gaze took in the room and its displays, but quickly returned to a point quite a bit below the level of eye-contact. Theo muttered a thank-you, belatedly recalling that her cleavage was on hundred-watt display. He felt torn between his own awkward embarrassment and his mother's confident sexuality. For an instant he literally couldn't remember if he was a man or a woman.

"How about the tour?" The man smiled, utterly disarming. "If you're not too busy, that is." *That*, Theo realized, could be a problem. He knew nothing about the Native American artwork his mother had assembled over the preceding months, and it would look odd if all he did was read off what was written on the signage. So he begged off: too much to do, he explained, too many people to schmooze.

"I get it. You're a busy lady. Always were." That was a big part of what had come between them, Theo recalled. Evangeline often mentioned feeling bad about not devoting enough time to their relationship; her guilt now belonged to her son.

Sergio wasn't done. "So how about dinner? Tomorrow night, perhaps? That lovely little bistro we always liked, the *Sotto Mare*. I'm staying at the Savoy, so it's right around the corner. Seven o'clock, shall we say?"

Theo mumbled his acceptance; anything to get rid of the guy. Then he moved off to circulate among the guests, as he'd so often seen his mother do. He recognized some people as Evangeline's friends, and greeted them by name, while for others he utilized his mother's inborn technique of intimate formality. She was good at it, as she had to be as Director of the gallery, and to his surprise he found that it came easily to him as well—as did a growing awareness of being female.

As the evening wound down Theo was startled by a tap on his shoulder. He turned to find a blonde woman smiling at him. "Aunt Angela?"

The woman laughed. "Come now. I might be Theodore's dear old auntie, but I'm still *your* big sister." She brushed past.

"Oh, right. Sorry." Theo followed her to the mostly empty catering table. "What are you doing here? What's going *on*?"

"Can't a girl visit her *sista* now and then?" She shushed him with a wave. "I know what you meant. You saw the letter, didn't you?"

"Yes, but—how long is this supposed to last? When's she coming back?"

A shrug. "When she's had enough of a break, I suppose." She piled a paper plate high with the finger foods that remained.

"But—how will she *know*? She's not, uhm, 'aware' of what's going on, is she?"

"You mean, is she conscious?" Angela frowned. "That's not possible."

Theo drew her into a corner where they could talk privately. “Then how the hell— How is she supposed to know when she wants to come back?”

“No worries. She left that decision in my capable hands.”

His jaw dropped. “You mean, I have to be a woman—my own *mother*, no less— until you say otherwise? That’s not fair!”

She paused in the stuffing of her face. “You have a better idea? She’s my sister. I think I’ve got a pretty good handle on what she’d want.” A sly smile crept across her face. “Besides, this little setup is pretty much right up your alley, isn’t it?”

Theo’s eyes threatened to pop. “Whaddya mean?”

“You know, the whole cross-dressing thing? The wanting to *be* your mother?”

Worst-case scenario. “What the—she *knew*? She *told* you about that?”

“She may have mentioned.” Angela raised her hand. “Hey, don’t worry about it. I’m broad-minded about that sort of thing. Whatever you do with your body—or hers, for that matter—is your own business.”

Theo groped for a wall to lean on. His world had just blown up in front of him—he’d been so careful, but was there anyone in town who *didn’t* know his awful secret? “Did you know Sergio was gonna be here? Was that part of the deal?”

“So I heard. Has he said hello yet? What was that like?”

His head spun. “What was it like? I felt like a freaking schoolgirl.”

She stopped eating. “Do tell—did your body react to his intense masculinity?”

“Well, yeah... like it had a mind of its own.” He grabbed her arm. “But it doesn’t, does it? Mom’s not in here with me, is she? Isn’t that what you said?”

She shook him off. “Calm down. Trust me, she’s not.”

“But Mom said she was through with the guy, that he drove her crazy, he was so full of himself. And then I go and agree to a date with him!”

“Really? Now that *is* interesting. What was it that piqued your interest? The fact that he’s much taller than you, stronger than you? The size of his schlong?”

Theo sputtered. “I wouldn’t know about—look, it wasn’t anything, okay? I just wanted not to have to show him around. I’ll call him and cancel.”

“No, don’t do that. It would look rather odd, I think, for Evangeline to do that after making the date.” She put her empty plate aside. “Look, all you have to do to get through this is be yourself. Don’t worry about what your mother would do, just act naturally and you’ll be fine.”

“But I’m a guy. My natural instinct would be to get the hell away from him.”

Angela smiled and shook her head. “You aren’t a ‘guy’, sweetie. You’re not even male anymore. You’re a woman. That’s all you have to worry about.”

He rolled his eyes. “Great. All I have to do is act like myself as a woman.”

“Now you’ve got it.” She touched his arm. “I have to go, but do give me a call the morning after. I’ll be very curious to hear how it went.” Then she was out the door and gone, leaving Theo to wonder why his aunt was taking such an interest in him. Until recently, she barely seemed to know he existed.

Leaving Ace to close up and supervise the cleaners, he headed home.

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The next day Theo extracted himself from his mother’s bed, staggered into the *en suite* bathroom and found himself face to face with Evangeline. She was wearing a pink nightgown and looked dreadfully ruffled, like she’d barely slept. He could relate; cool water on a washcloth felt amazing.

None of this made sense. As far as he knew there was *no such thing* as a ‘costume gun’, which was just a fictional device—invented by some TG author with a limited grasp of reality—that could magically transform a living, breathing person into a ‘costume’ that someone else could wear to ‘become’ that person. At least, *fictional* is what he used to think, and probably still would were he not at that very moment wearing such a costume. The whole situation was about as plausible as chasing a large white anthropomorphic rabbit down a hole and finding oneself in Wonderland. Still, there was no arguing with reality.

At his mother’s vanity Theo struggled with her cosmetics for over an hour, but his face just wouldn’t come together the way it did for her. At last he gave up and made the call to her favorite salon, begging the receptionist to squeeze him in—because “big date tonight”. Afterwards he sat at the kitchen table sipping a coffee and staring into the back yard, wondering if that was true. *A date? A big date? Is that what it is? I’m just gonna give the guy the heave-ho... aren’t I?*

His visit to the salon was like stepping onto another planet. He’d dreamed of such a moment, of course, and being Evangeline made it that much better—but at the same time he was terrified of making a mistake, saying something out of character that would make the beautician take a step back and wonder, “Who *is* this? It certainly can’t be *her*, because she would *never* say such a thing.”

So he feigned feeling out of sorts, perhaps worried about her ‘big date’, and let the girls do whatever they wanted. Fortunately, they knew Evangeline and they knew her style, so they just did their thing—facial treatment, makeup, hairstyling—and transformed him into the glamorous woman his mother was. Curiously, as the full force of her womanhood came together, Theo’s own confidence grew.



Theo arrived at the bistro fashionably late, as he felt a woman should. Sergio rose from a secluded table in the corner, flanked by potted palms, and held her chair while Theo sat. “You look lovely,” he said, returning to his own seat. “I swear that your beauty grows mightier by the day. It threatens to engulf my world.”

Theo smiled. “As does your flattery *my* world, Sergio. But don’t stop.”

“The English language may run out of superlatives, my love, but I never shall.” He filled her wine glass; they touched rims and drank.

Over dinner, Theo let Sergio do most of the talking—about where he'd been for the past year, what he'd been doing, and why he was back in town. "Business did call me back," he said, "but my heart never left. There has been no one since you," he added, taking her hand in his. "I know we had issues. I was rather self-involved back then, was I not? But I am a changed man. If you could see your way to give me another chance, I pledge ever to be there for you, body and soul."

Theo looked him in the eye. *This*, he thought, *is where I lower the boom and get rid of the dude*. But those words wouldn't come. Instead, her lashes fluttered and her lips spoke different words, in his mother's voice: "One more chance then, for old times sake. We'll see how it goes."

He kissed the back of her hand. "Thank you, Evangeline. That's all I ask."

Half an hour later Theo was curled up on the love seat in Sergio's suite, toasting their rekindled relationship with champagne. He found himself thinking, *What the hell am I doing?* But at the same time, he could feel this body's nipples begin to stiffen. Whatever was about to happen, her body wanted it—and he had little choice but to tag along for the ride.

Sergio wasted no time in moving the party to the bedroom. As their lips met, Theo felt the zipper of his dress begin its descent. A moment later the dress itself fell to the floor. He stepped clear, suddenly hyper-aware of being clad in nothing but lingerie, and began unbuttoning Sergio's shirt. A pair of male hands enclosed hers. "Do not trouble yourself. I will do this. It is only for the beautiful woman to lay back, and relax." He nodded toward the bed.

Theo felt a trill of fear. Was he truly ready to do this? His confidence began to fade but then he caught a glimpse of *herself* in the wall mirror. Evangeline was radiant; womanhood itself crystallized into feminine perfection. Her hair, her makeup, the sensuous curves that marked her figure—all beyond compare. Theo had become the kind of woman other women want to be, and he could no more fail to deliver this body into a man's loving embrace than he could cease to breathe.

Hesitating only briefly, he slipped beneath the covers. After removing his lingerie he snuggled into the fresh sheets, reveling in the feel of cool satin on soft skin. And when a naked man slid into bed next to him, Theo was more than ready to participate in the deflowering to come.

"Evangeline, my love." A powerful arm drew *her* close. Their lips met, moving in unison. A thick paw kneaded her breast, whereupon her mouth opened and let him inside. Her slim fingers stroked his maleness, while their tongues mated and his fingers crept into her hair. *This* is what Theo had been waiting for—to be treated without reservation as the woman he wanted to be. He had accepted a man's touch and now it was his turn to return the love that only a woman can give.

“Sergio...” Theo felt the man’s lips against *her* throat. Long silky hair writhed across her shoulders. One muscular arm encircled her waist while a thick finger probed her hidden depths. Theo couldn’t have resisted his ministrations if he tried, and resistance was the last thing on his mind. *Her* hands raked his chest and gripped his manhood, and she found herself longing to feel him inside her.

Theo didn’t have long to wait. Now eager for the deed, he slithered under the male body looming above and guided the man’s lance into her waiting sheath. As it began its slow entry, her body stiffened and slipped beyond her control. Theo knew then his life could never be the same. No longer would he be able to merely play at being female, not after this man had made a woman out of him.

A long sigh escaped her lips as Sergio sank deep inside her. She gave him a fierce smile and wrapped her legs about his thighs—and after that the only thought that remained was to match her rhythm to his—and to feel everything that a woman *must* feel, when a man takes from her all she has to give.

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Back home the next day, Theo spent a long time pondering what he’d done. How could he debase himself that way, no less with a man his mother had come to despise. Then again, was that truly how she felt? For the first two years of their relationship, Evangeline had loved the man no less passionately than Theo had the night before. Perhaps that love was still there, in her heart.

Once he was out of the shower and dressed, he phoned Angela. “You wanted me to call? So I’m calling. And before you ask—yes, I ‘did’ the guy.”

Angela’s voice was quick and eager. “Seriously? That fast? You *are* aware that Evangeline couldn’t stand the man, right? By the end, I mean.”

“I know. I was all set to dump his ass, right after he bought me dinner. But then... I dunno, I just couldn’t do it.”

“It was your *body*, wasn’t it? Now that you’re female, you wanted a man so badly it just overwhelmed your male mind. What’s left of it, that is.” She sighed. “I’ve been thinking that gender might not be entirely a social construct; that there really is a physical aspect. However, it’s also possible that a lifetime spent cross-dressing has left you highly susceptible to being feminine.”

Theo blinked rapidly. “Uhm, Aunt Angela? Why do you sound like my Psych prof all of a sudden? You’re still an antiques dealer, aren’t you?”

“Who, me? Well, of course! I just find cross-dressing *so* fascinating, don’t you?”

“Seeing as how I *am* one, I—”

“Ever since Evangeline happened to mention what you got up to when she was out

of the house—well! I just *knew* I had to find out everything I could about it. I read all the published research I could find, but you know what? All the scientists on this planet and they don't know a darn thing—about cross-dressing, I mean. They're quite knowledgeable in most other areas. That's when I decided... well, it doesn't matter what I decided. What matters is *you*, Theo. Tell me all about this 'night of passion'. Did you *truly* feel like a woman?"

Theo felt off-balance, like the ground was shifting underfoot. "Are you saying it was *your* idea for Mom to take this 'break'? I mean, seriously—did she really need a break, from being *herself*? Did you talk her into this?"

"I didn't talk her into anything, dear. That wasn't necessary."

"You didn't—oh my god, she didn't even *know* about this, did she? You just got hold of one of those 'costume gun' things and blasted her. Jesus—*Why*? So you could trick me into wearing the bodysuit? So you could see what happens when a cross-dresser magically turns into a real woman?"

A chuckle came over the phone. "You're a smart boy, Theo. Or you would be, if you weren't female. But it's not just the cross-dressing; it's what happens when a cross-dresser who's fixated on his mother is transformed *into* his mother. Can his psyche survive that transformation? Or will he ultimately in effect *turn into* his mother? I can't wait to find out."

Theo bit his lip. He shook his head, even though she couldn't see him. "We have to bring her back—this is wrong!"

Another chuckle. "Not gonna happen. Wrong or not, this experiment has to run its course. We'll talk again in a few days. I'm sure you'll be seeing Sergio soon, *n'est pas*? I look forward to hearing about it." The call dropped.

Theo collapsed onto the couch. What had he gotten himself into?

Later, after Theo dressed and worked on his face for hours, Sergio called. To his surprise Theo felt flattered, in spite of the way his life was spinning out of control. Then again, a woman does want to be appreciated, and after a night of passion the man *should* phone, shouldn't he? "Lunch? At the French restaurant we went to on our first date?" Theo felt conflicted—he, after all, had never been there before—but he answered as Evangeline would. "All right, but *only* lunch."

He managed—with difficulty—to put Sergio off that time, but a few days later he again found himself writhing in the man's bed, being penetrated in a way that made him wonder if he had ever truly been male. *Her* body seemed to delight in force-feeding him feminine ideas and pleasures, to the point where he could spend an entire day without recalling that he was the *son* and not the mother.

When this happened, he felt frightened—and terribly guilty.

“Please, Angela,” he begged the woman on the phone. “You’ve got to tell me how to remove this bodysuit. I’m doing my best, but I don’t know the first thing about all this artsy stuff. Also, I can’t keep my hands off Sergio.”

“That’s wonderful! Let me ask you this: Do you think you’d feel the same way if you were simply ‘dressed up’ as a woman? Or is it being female that makes you see men in a whole different way? Inquiring minds, dear!”

She was no help at all. More weeks followed, of being wined, dined and nailed to the mattress by Sergio. Eventually, Theo realized he was *that* close to crossing the line into full-fledged womanhood. If he didn’t do something about it right *now*, he might not be able to talk himself into removing the bodysuit when the time came. Keeping it wasn’t an option either because that wouldn’t be fair to the real Evangeline, who deserved to get her life back. It was time to confront his aunt.

Rather than phoning, Theo drove out to her small but upscale home at the edge of Lake Luna, just outside town. It was very secluded, with a small forest protecting her from prying eyes. Upon his arrival he noted that her car was in the garage.

He rang the bell and waited—no answer. He rang again, then marched around the house to the patio facing the lake. It opened off of the downstairs rumpus room, which Angela used as her office. The sliding door was ajar. A woman’s voice filtered through the opening, speaking in a foreign tongue that to his untrained ear didn’t sound entirely human. He peeked into the room.

Angela was seated at her desk with her back to the door, facing a large computer monitor. The screen held the image of— Theo gasped. It was a *creature* with huge round eyes, green skin, flat nostrils and pointed ears. It looked vaguely aquatic.

Of course, he realized, it had to be some kind of second-rate Sci-Fi flick, but then why would she be *talking*—? Abruptly, the creature cried out and pointed, straight out of the screen. Angela whirled about. Her eyes went wide when she saw him.

Busted. Theo stepped inside. “I need to talk to you, Aunt—” He stopped. The creature on the screen was speaking, again in that guttural language, and *gesturing towards him!* So—it wasn’t a movie?

Angela half-turned and gestured back. The creature nodded curtly and the screen went blank. The blonde woman looked annoyed. “Thanks a bunch, Theo. You just got me fired.” She sighed. “Okay, not *fired*, as such. I’ve been recalled.”

Theo found his voice; or rather, Evangeline’s. “What the freaking heck is going on here? What *was* that thing, Aunt Angela?”

She grimaced. “That ‘thing’ is the Dominus for the contact project. As soon as he saw you, he invoked the Primus Lex. There can be no exceptions: if your cover is blown you have to remove yourself *immediately* from the study area and return to

base.” She eyed Theo speculatively. “I supposed you’ve figured it out by now... I’m not actually your aunt.”

The notion had, in fact, just crossed his mind. “Oh my god, you’re wearing *her* as a bodysuit? What is this, some kind of body-snatching setup? Are you an alien? Like, from another planet?”

“Close, but no cigar. I’m from *this* planet, only a different version of it. I’m sure you’ve heard all about alternate timelines. Thanks to a lot of hard-working Sci-Fi writers, they’ve become pretty mainstream. Well, my timeline is *so* alternate that you mammals never came anywhere near being the dominant species.”

Theo gaped. “That’s why he looked kinda... reptilian?”

She laughed. “You monkeys! ‘Reptile’ isn’t a dirty word, you know. My people aren’t out to enslave—or *eat*—you or anybody else in this world. We’ve got quite enough to eat back home, thank you. We’re just here to study your people, and ultimately—when we know how to go about it properly—open full diplomatic relations. As you suspected, I’m a scientist. I specialize in human psychology.”

Theo sagged against the door frame. That was a *lot* to process. “Okay, but... how does that explain why I’m standing here in my mother’s body?”

“Good question.” She glanced at the blank screen. “I don’t suppose it would hurt to tell you, now that the study is over. Let me see...” She gazed into the distance. “You remember that car accident your aunt had, about five years back?”

“Sure. The cops said you—I mean *she* was lucky to get out in one piece.”

“True, except that she didn’t. Angela died in that crash, I’m sorry to say. One of our research drones witnessed the incident. There’s a short window following one’s death when a person can be processed into what you call a ‘bodysuit’ or a ‘costume’. We made the decision to seize her body and run it through—let’s call it a ‘bodysuit machine’. I volunteered to wear the suit and return to the site of the crash, before any of your people could get there.”

Also a lot to process. “So she’s been *you* ever since? All those family dinners and outings? Not my aunt, but some kind of alien being?”

She grimaced. “Don’t say it like that. I’m not a face-hugger, I’m not a body-snatcher, and this isn’t an invasion. Psychologically, our species are very similar. That’s why I’m here. I’m fascinated by the specific areas where we differ. In particular, your sexuality. With us, it’s just egg here, sperm there, put ‘em together and off you go—no drama. With you mammals, it’s *all* drama.”

All drama—pretty hard to argue with that. Theo glanced down at his cleavage and found himself acutely aware of the alien presence between his legs.

Angela eyed her own chest. “We’re what you would call hermaphrodites—all of us, all the higher lifeforms. We only observe singular gender in smaller animals, like mice and gerbils. Imagine our surprise when we came to this world and found beings like yourself at the top of the food chain. We have hundreds of researchers studying the biology of your planet, though only a few are permitted to be here at any given time. Due to my ongoing experiment, I’m the only one who’s been able to live here for an extended period.” Languidly, she examined the back of her hand. “I quite like being female. You and I have that much in common.”

The notion of having *anything* in common with an alien hermaphrodite was odd, but Theo was way beyond being surprised. Very few of his fellow human beings could understand him wanting to be a woman—much less his own mother—so why not a reptilian scientist from a parallel Earth?

Angela ran a hand through her hair. “I didn’t realize I’d enjoy it this much when I volunteered to become your aunt, but that’s why I stayed on. My superiors didn’t know, of course, so mum’s the word.” She giggled.

Theo shook his head. “Okay... let’s say I believe all that. You’re here to study male and female sexuality. So *that’s* why you made me take over mom’s life? This is all one big experiment?”

“Smart girl. The short answer is yes, but not the way you’d think.”

“I really don’t know *what* to think anymore.”

“Most of my colleagues focus on how the sexes differ and how they relate to each another. That would include variations in behavior, gender status in the economy, mating rituals, and so forth. I was all set to study those things myself—but then *you* came along.” She aimed a crimson-tipped fingernail at Theo. “Your mother mentioned your cross-dressing—*that* piqued my interest. Why would a perfectly normal young male want to disguise himself as a female? Not for entertainment or for economic reward, or even as punishment. And it was never enough for you to just *wear* a dress, was it? Your ultimate goal is, and has always been, to assume the actual *role* of a woman in your society. Can you imagine how fascinating that is, for someone like me?”

Theo nodded wearily. All his life he’d felt that same fascination.

“Long story short, I made cross-dressing the focus of my research. One thing that caught my attention is that your own scientists don’t understand it. There’s been a lot of speculation, but nothing definite. That gave me a chance to break new ground and make a real contribution to science, both on my world and yours.” She leaned forward. “It’ll be some time yet before our government is ready to open formal relations, but when it does I’ll be ready to share my findings.”

Great, I'm a lab rat. Theo took a quick breath, squared his shoulders and tried to look taller. "I don't care about that," he heard Evangeline say. "You're going home now. The experiment's over. I want you to show me how to take this off."

Angela smiled. "You know what they say: it ain't over 'til it's over. Even if I'm not here, my team will keep gathering data for as long as we can."

Theo blinked as the import sank in. "You're gonna spy on me on for the rest of my life? What was it you said—research drones?"

"You'll never know they're there, so why worry? No human will ever see the raw data. You have my word on that."

"That makes me feel *so* much better."

"You'll get used to it. One thing I've learned is that you primates are highly adaptable." She rose from her chair. "You should go. I have to pack, and my assistants will be coming through the portal to clear out my equipment."

Theo stood his ground. "What about the bodysuit?"

"It's yours to keep. Take it off, leave it on, that's up to you." She jerked a thumb toward her own body. "You can have this one too. Try being blonde, it's fun." She urged him out through the door. "Drop by tomorrow, okay? I'll leave the house keys on the kitchen table, along with the instructions for the bodysuits."

"But how do I restore them? Don't I need—?"

"Whelp, gotta go. Come back tomorrow, all will be explained." The sliding door slammed shut, the latch clicked and Angela drew the curtains.

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One restless night later found Theo back at his aunt's lakeside home. For once he had dressed in feminine casual, with slacks and a soft blouse, and a pair of canvas flats. For himself, he'd brought a backpack with menswear he hadn't worn in nearly two months. He wasn't looking forward to explaining to his mother what he'd been up to in her body, but he pushed that thought out of his mind. What mattered was giving Evangeline her life back.

The front door was unlocked. He stepped inside, momentarily startled by his mother's reflection in the mirrors flanking the foyer. He found Angela waiting for him in the kitchen, staring off into space as though entranced.

Theo slid into the seat opposite. "I thought you'd have left by now."

She refocused, but her expression was flat. "Greetings, Theodore Donatelli. I am not the one you knew as your aunt. I am, in fact, the 'creature' you saw yesterday on the telescreen. I am Dominus for the contact project."

His jaw dropped. It's one thing to know that other bodysuits exist—other than the suit he was wearing—but quite another to see one in use by somebody else. The blonde woman's speech pattern and body language were completely different from Angela's; or rather, from the being he'd come to know as his Aunt Angela.

“The one who posed as your aunt has been removed from the project. He has also been placed under arrest. You have my word: he will pay for the crime he committed.” She brought her hands together. “We all share the shame of what he did. It cannot and will not happen again. Procedures have been revised.”

She eyed him solemnly. “I must inform you that we have decided to retain this bodysuit for future use. We have determined that salvage rights apply, in a manner akin to your maritime law. To be precise, the vessel was abandoned by its owner, who is in fact deceased. However, in deference to you, we will make no further use of your aunt's identity. In future, this bodysuit will be deployed elsewhere on your planet, under a new name.” She glanced around the room. “You may now claim her belongings as your own, in accordance with human laws. That is what would have happened five years ago had we not interfered.”

Theo found his voice. “What ‘he’ did to me—that was a crime? I know he kinda forced me into wearing this...” He glanced down at his female body. “But you know, he didn't exactly have to twist my arm.”

The woman nodded. “We are aware of your predilections. Needless to say, they are your own business, regardless of their scientific interest. The criminal had no right to force you to participate in his experiment.” She pushed a sheet of paper across the table. “As promised, these are the instructions to remove the bodysuit. They are somewhat complex, so as to avoid accidental removal. It is your choice whether to return to your former life or remain in female form, or indeed to switch back and forth at your leisure. Our only requirement is that you keep the bodysuit to yourself—and that it remain known *only* to you. If the suit is worn by anyone else, or if it is handed over to your government, our sensors will detect this. The bodysuit would then be repossessed and destroyed.”

Theo scanned the long list of ‘press this’ and ‘touch that’ commands. It might take some practice to get right, but it looked clear enough. He glanced up. “Uh, where is the part about how to bring her back to life?”

Her mouth twitched. “I believe you have been misled by the stories cross-dressers like yourself have been promulgating online, regarding this fantastical ‘costume gun’ thing. I regret to inform you that there is no such device. The criminal may have led you to believe otherwise, but in fact... the process to transform a person into a bodysuit is destructive. It cannot be reversed. That is why, according to our laws, its use is restricted to the bodies of the recent dead.”

“You—you can’t bring her back?” His chest heaved. Obviously, that was *exactly* what the creature meant.

His aunt’s voice softened. “We cannot. I say again, this should not have happened. The criminal placed his zeal for scientific knowledge—as well as personal gain, in the form of career advancement—ahead of fundamental moral principles. That is why he will be punished to the fullest extent our laws allow. On our world, as in yours, murder is the ultimate crime.”

Murder? Theo felt the blood drain from his face. “But—I thought someone had to be dead, recently dead—whatever that means—for the machine to...”

The woman nodded. “That is the way it *should* be done, for the simple reason that a living being cannot survive what the machine does to it. Apparently, the criminal decided that he required your mother’s bodysuit badly enough to do whatever was necessary to acquire it.”

Theo closed his eyes. That *damn* experiment! “He wanted to see how I’d handle being my mother—so badly—that he... he *killed* her?”

The woman’s head sank. “I express sympathy for your loss.” Slowly, she climbed to her feet. A moment later, a circular portal opened behind her, its rim fizzing with repressed energy. Through it, Theo glimpsed a room that resembled a cross between an alien spaceship and a mad scientist’s laboratory.

“I must go. Peace and long life, Theodore Donatelli.” She paused at the threshold. “I leave you with this thought. Humans often say that a loved one is not truly gone so long as they remain alive in your heart and in your memory. In your case, you have but to look in the mirror.” Her lips crept into a smile. “Perhaps, in a way, the female Evangeline can live again—through you.”

She stepped through. A moment later the portal vanished.

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Theo did consider destroying the instructions he’d been given; burning the sheet of paper. But in the end, he kept it. There could be a need, he decided, for his male self to walk the Earth now and then—if only to prove to other people he was still alive. Otherwise questions would be asked about the whereabouts of *her* son.

Evangeline checked her look in the hallway mirror. She was wearing the off-black cocktail dress she’d purchased for the gallery opening, since Sergio had more than once expressed his affection for the item. They would soon dine together, and she expected another intimate evening to follow. “Oh yes,” she murmured in a voice that was now all her own. “This dress is definitely *me*.” ■
