

The Perfect Match

By RH Music

AI Art by Redryder

** Zero Results **

** There are no perfect mates in our database. **

"Damn." I looked at the screen in dismay.

I had just spent \$5,000 dollars on an insanely detailed psychological assessment to find my perfect mate, and all I get is "Zero Results".

Okay, the company had warned me that "only 17.2% of applicants find their perfect mate on the first try", but after all that time, dozens of personality tests, and having to wear those monitoring implants and glasses for a full month... and all for nothing.

I clicked "refresh".

** Zero Results **

I sighed. Now I would just have to wait until someone matched me as their perfect mate. It could take days, months, or even years. It might never happen.

** [Click here to search for matches that are within modification distance.](#) **

What was this? I clicked on the link.

** 1 match found. **

A MATCH! I clicked on it.

** Match 89423132: within modification distance (87.2%). **

** [Click here for more information.](#) **

I clicked.

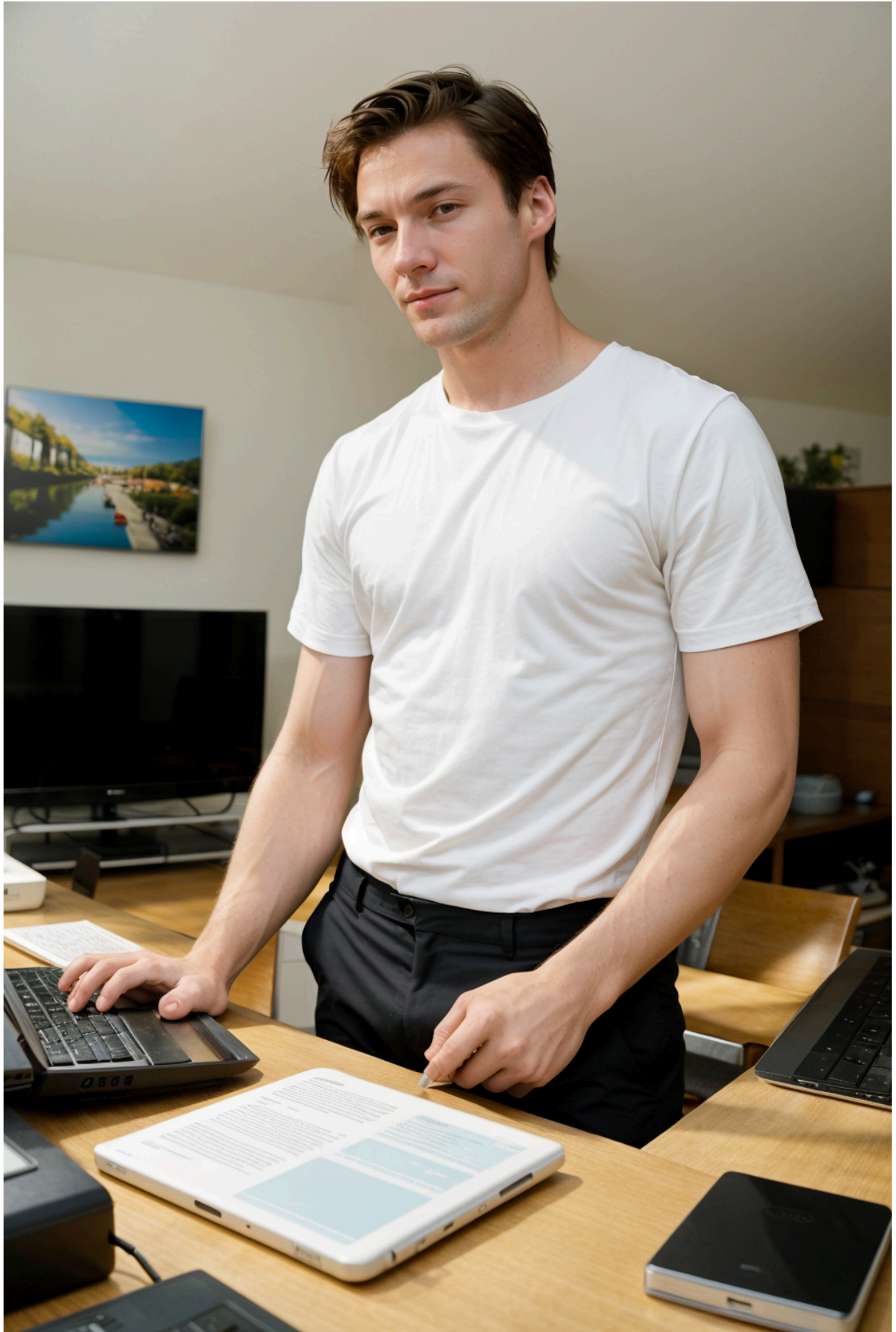
Perfect Mate Matcher Inc., in an on-going effort to make more perfect

matches, has implemented an innovative new "modification" service to enable more perfect mates to be matched to each other.

We recognize that finding that perfect mate can be a long and difficult process, but perhaps there is someone out there who is "close enough?" Near-perfect matches who are "close enough" (within the modification distance) must both agree to be modified - both physically and psychologically - to be each other's perfect mate.

** Click here for terms and conditions. **

I clicked.



I read through the terms and conditions. Lots of legal mumbo jumbo. But a few things stood out:

I understand that I will be modified to be the perfect mate for my match (and they will be modified to be my perfect mate). Once modified, there is literally no one else on the planet for whom I will be more perfect, and vice-versa.

For this reason, I understand that once I agree to enter the modification program, I enter into a binding contract and I cannot back out.

I understand that modifications are permanent and irreversible.

I understand that I must bear the entire cost of my modification. Estimated at \$249,996.97.

Shit! How was I going to afford that?

It took a couple of months, but I finally scraped together the money. First, I sold my row-house, paid off the loan and got some profit. I cashed in my stock investments and cashed out my pension. I went through all of my stuff and sold as much as I could, including the engagement ring and jewelry that my ex had returned when we divorced. I sold my car. I moved to a cheap apartment within walking distance from work.

All this so I could get modified to become the perfect match for 89423132. At the time, all I could think was, "I hope she's worth it!"

Of course, she would be modified too. I wondered if she was going through the same experience, trying to raise the money. Or maybe she was rich and would have no trouble affording it. It would be nice if she were rich.

Of course I checked on-line every day for new matches. Once you are evaluated, you can check for perfect matches as much as you want. I must have checked, like every 15 minutes.

But nothing. ** Zero Results ** every time.

And that same singular match. ** 1 match found. Match 89423132: within modification distance (87.2%). **

I wondered what "87.2%" meant.

I went to the local PMM office with my cashier's check for \$252,183.22, the exact amount required for the modification, plus additional fees. Once I signed, I would be admitted to the clinic to begin my modifications.

"You understand that this is a permanent change," the administrator asked.

"Yes, I understand and agree." I looked into the camera. The entire interview was being video recorded.

"And that once you start the modification program you will be unable to back out," she continued.

"Yes, I understand and agree."

"You understand that both physical and personality modifications will be required."

"Yes, I understand and agree," I added.

"Very well."

She started to hand me the contract to sign, but then hesitated and instead reached over and turned off the video recorder.

"Listen, Mr. Kelly, you seem like a nice man. Why are you doing this? You could find a wife somewhere and be happy. Have a normal life. You don't have to do this."

"Give me the contract to sign," I said, annoyed at the delay. "I have the money."

"But why? Why is this so important? You know you will be changed, right? You won't be the same person after the modifications are done. And you're okay with that?"

"Because," I started, then stopped, thinking about the appropriate response.

"Because," I continued, "I thought I had found my perfect match. In fact, she was perfect... for me. I kept asking her to have children, start a family, but she wouldn't."

"But then she dumped me for someone she met in a coffee shop on a business trip. How does something like that happen? Is life that fragile? And now she's married to him and I just found out that she's pregnant, with twins. It wasn't that she didn't want to have children after all. She just didn't want to have *my* children."

I took a deep breath.

"And I am NEVER going to go through THAT again!" I said, defiantly. "It nearly killed me. After that, I decided that the only way that I could ever trust anyone ever again is if there was some sort of *guarantee*."

I paused for a long time.

"I just want someone I can trust," I said. "Someone who is honest and values my loyalty. Someone who wants me just as much as I want her."

"I see that I can't talk you out of it," the administrator said, with a sigh. "I just wish I could convince you that life - in all of its messy randomness - life can be better than perfection. Studies have shown that you can be just as happy, more happy in many ways, with a less-than-perfect mate."

"My mind is made up."

"Well, I understand where you're coming from," she said. "After all, recent divorcees are our biggest market. Okay then."

She turned the recorder back on.

"Please read this out loud and then sign."

"I, Paul Kelly, have been fully briefed on the modification process and the anticipated results of the perfect mate matching service. The risks of the modification have been clearly and completely explained to me and I understand and agree to them. I understand that I will be modified to meet the needs of my perfect mate partner. I agree to be modified, both with physical and personality modifications, to meet the goals of the program. I enter into this agreement of my own free will, and I understand that this is a binding contract which can not be terminated."



* * *

Chapter 1

Back at home. The PMM modification computer was set up on the kitchen table and ready to go.

Surgery at the clinic was performed right after I signed the contract, that afternoon. I spent the night at the clinic recovering. The following day they tested and calibrated everything.

I was now wired up. Sensors and probes had been surgically inserted throughout my body, each one with medical-grade wireless communication (like Bluetooth). The PMM computer could now sense (and influence - to a limited degree) my emotions, my feelings, my adrenal glands and all sorts of things.

Time to get started.

I put on the virtual reality helmet (two wrap-around 4320x8270 screens, one for each eye, eight coordinated high-fidelity 4D-audio speakers, ultra-compact stereo condenser microphone - an awesome piece of technology) and started the program.

Oh....

It felt like I was floating in blissful, stress-free cloud. Soft lights in shades of pink moved to soft, gentle music and environmental sounds.

"So this is what it feels like to run the modification program," I thought to myself. "Nice."

I floated like that for a while, completely at ease and relaxed.

And then it was over.

'What?' I thought to myself, annoyed. 'That was it?'

* * *

Following the instructions from the clinic, I plugged into the modification program every day, three times a day. Once in the morning, once after work, and finally right before going to bed.

Sessions got longer, but otherwise nothing much changed.

I looked forward to the sessions. They were so relaxing. After a hard day at work stressing out about deliverables and last minute requirement changes, it was nice to plug in and just let the cares float away.

After a week I began going back to my apartment for lunch breaks too, just so I could plug in some more. I ran the program six times a day on weekends (the most it allowed).

"Losing weight?" Brad, my office-mate, asked.

"Uh yeah, I guess." I hadn't noticed until he said something. After work I weighed myself. I had lost 7 pounds! It was probably because I was skipping so many meals as I ran the program.

Cool, I thought to myself.

* * *

After a couple of weeks, the mod program started playing movies.

The movies were computer generated films showing generic characters in everyday situations. The camera always showed a first-person point of view. There was no plot to speak of, just banal vignettes over and over. The CGI was realistic and the backgrounds were rendered in enormous and loving detail, but the characters were clearly animated. The speech was computer synthesized as well. Very high quality synthesis, but clearly computer generated.

I watched with rapt attention.

"Hey there," said the man in the movie.

"Hi Tom," said my first-person POV character. The voice sounded like a woman, which was fine with me. I always chose the woman avatar when I played video games, just to be different.

"Would you like to go to a movie?"

"Sure, Tom, that would be wonderful!"

"What movie would you like?"

"Oh, Tom, why don't you pick? You're so much better at picking movies than I am."

Tom smiled. My character felt pleased that she said the right thing. We got up and left the coffee shop together.

And that was it. Just short scenes like that, over and over.

"Here, let me get that for you," Tom said, reaching for the door and opening it for me.

"Thank you," my character looked up at him and felt pleased and protected. We approached his car where he stepped up and opened the car door for my character.

Pleased, my character stepped gingerly into the car and let Tom close the car door behind her.

"I'm so glad you're driving," said my character. "I can drive, but I don't like it much."

"My pleasure," said Tom.



There were dozens and dozens of them, covering all sorts of random situations.

It seemed obvious at the time that I was supposed to be Tom, and the other character was supposed to be my perfect match. I liked that she seemed so easy going, carefree and happy all the time.

"I'll do the dishes," said Tom.

"Oh no, you go sit down and relax. I've got it covered."

"Are you sure?"

"Of course! It will be no trouble at all. Now you just go sit and just

let me take care of everything."

Tom smiled at me. My character felt pleased that she could be so helpful.

My character put on an apron and the film went through the details of washing the dishes, again from the first person POV. When the dishes were done, my character fetched a plate, cut a slice of cake, added a fork and then went out to the living room where Tom was relaxing with a magazine.

"Cake?" my character asked.

"Chocolate, my favorite," said Tom. My character sat on the sofa, and snuggled up close to him.

"Oh, I forgot to bring a fork for myself," my character said, in a voice which made it obvious that she really hadn't forgotten at all.

"No problem," said Tom, slicing off a forkful of cake and feeding it to her.

"Mmmm, thank you," my character said, accepting the cake from Tom with pleasure.

As I said, banal.

* * *

Once nice side-effect of the modification program was that I seemed to be less stressed at work. I felt less grumpy and confrontational. More helpful. Little irritants seemed to not matter so much.

If this was the result of the modification program, I was all for it! I was getting along better with my coworkers and my boss seemed happier with my work. Rather than argue or look put-upon when I got a new assignment, I accepted them with a smile. And it was a pleasure to report back when I had completed them.

As a consequence, my boss started giving me more of those tedious assignments that most programmers hate. You know, like reviewing past tickets and merging code branches. I didn't mind. They still needed to get done, after all, and I was happy to do them. And it was so nice to be able to report back "complete".

* * *

"Honey, would you fetch me my book from the bedroom?"

"Of course, Tom!" My first person character went to the bedroom, our bedroom apparently, and returned with the book. She handed it to him.

"Thank you, dear," he said.

"You're so welcome, Tom," my character responded, feeling the pleasure of a job well done.

"And could you fetch me a bourbon? On the rocks?"

"My pleasure," my character said, meaning it.

She went to the bar, expertly fixed the drink, and returned with it.

"Mmmmm," Tom said, sipping it.

Tom kicked off his shoes and put them up on the sofa.

"Would you like a foot massage?" my character asked.

"Why dear, that would be wonderful!"

My character sat on the sofa and pulled Tom's feet into her lap and massaged them for a long time as he read and sipped his drink. It felt good to provide these small pleasures to Tom.



I could practically smell his damp feet and shoe leather. Weird.

Even weirder was that the smell turned me on a bit.

* * *

I was now 15 pounds lighter and looking more fit than ever before. My waist was down to a 28! I hadn't been that thin since high school.

I looked in the mirror and realized that I hadn't had to shave all week.

'Nice,' I thought. 'I hate shaving.'

It also looked like the hair on my chest was thinning.

'I guess she wants a smooth-chested man,' I thought to myself. 'Like Tom Cruise. Cool.'



* * *

Chapter 2

A lot of the modification movies that followed were focused on cooking. I would watch in rapt attention as my character prepared a wide variety of dishes from spaghetti to coq-au-vin.

'My perfect mate must really like to cook!' I thought to myself, thinking how wonderful that would be, to have my own personal chef in the kitchen.



"Tom?" my character called out.

"Yes?" Tom appeared.

"Could you open this for me?" my character held up a jar of mayonnaise.

"Of course," Tom ginned, easily twisting the lid open.

"Thank you!" My character said, grateful to have someone strong and tall to call on. "I'm just so weak, compared to you."

"Happy to help," he said, giving my character a peck on the cheek.

In every cooking scenario, my character would serve the plated meal to Tom and sit down next to him.

"Thank you for this home cooked meal," Tom would say, looking into my eyes.

"Oh, it's no trouble at all," my character would say. "I love to cook. Especially for you, Tom."

And then we would pray ("Thank you lord, for this food we eat") and enjoy the meal, making small talk. Always my character would be asking Tom how his day went, hanging on his every word as he described what happened in the office and asking questions and agreeing with him wherever possible. She was such an endless fountain positive support. Amazing, really. I wished I could be more like her.

"You're so talented," my character would say. "I'm sure that you'll figure out a way to get your boss to recognize the merits of your proposal."

"Thank you," Tom would say, "for always believing in me."

"It's easy," my character would respond, "because you're so amazing." She was only half teasing.

* * *

And then, one afternoon, the movie just froze.

"Let's see, for meatloaf I will need..." my character was saying as she opened the refrigerator. And then the action just stopped, with the door open and my character (apparently) trying to decide what to fetch from the refrigerator.

What was going on? It had never halted like this before. Maybe it was waiting for something?

"Ground beef," I said, out loud.

"Right! Ground beef," said my character, snapping her fingers. She fetched the ground beef from the refrigerator. Then the action stopped again.

I guess it was waiting for me to list out more ingredients.

"Horseradish, catsup, Worcestershire sauce, onions, eggs, and bread," I said, out loud.

"That's right, horseradish, catsup, Worcestershire sauce, onions, eggs, and bread," she said. "Perfect!"

A surge of pleasurable satisfaction flowed through me. I got it right!

The movie continued, but then stopped again when my character opened the spice drawer.

"Let's see," my character said. "I will need..."

I knew what to do this time.

"Celery salt, garlic powder, and ground black pepper," I said.

"Perfect!" my character said, fetching the items.

I smiled, as I felt a jolt of satisfaction and pleasure when she said, 'Perfect!'.

This was fun!

* * *

"What are you bringing to the pot-luck?" asked Ed, the guy working in the cubicle across the hall.

"I'm making an Asian salad," I said.

"Since when did you learn to make Asian salad?"

"It's super easy," I responded. "Just coleslaw, sunflower seeds, crushed uncooked ramen noodles, and scallions with an oil/soy-sauce/vinegar sauce. You just throw it all together. It has a really nice mix of textures. It takes, like, 10 minutes."

"Huh," said Ed. "Well, I have no idea what I'm going to do."

"How about meatballs? Here, let me write it down for you." I pulled out an old envelope. "Just get some pre-made meatballs from the freezer section of the grocery store, add a jar of chili sauce, a jar of Welch's grape jelly and some cayenne pepper, if you want. And then just heat it up. It's amazingly easy that even a bachelor like you can do it, and everyone will love it. No kidding."

I handed the recipe to Ed.

"Uh, thanks," Ed looked at me with a weird expression on his face. "Sounds perfect," he said, finally. "Thanks."

"My pleasure!" I said happily.

* * *

Now that the modification program was waiting for me to answer, it started repeating the older movies, this time waiting for me to fill in the lines.

"Darn it! I spilled the milkshake!" Tom said, angry at himself.

The program paused, waiting for me to fill in the dialog for my character.

"Oh Tom, that's okay!" I said, as cheerfully as possible. "Accidents happen. It's no big deal and certainly nothing to get upset about."

Ping

The program had started pinging to indicate that I had made a 'perfect' response. I felt a delicious surge of pleasure in getting it right.

Clearly the program was making me understand everything from my future perfect mate's point of view. I could definitely see the value in that. She was such a happy, charming, easy-going person, I was really looking forward to meeting her.

"But you made the milkshake by hand," Tom continued. He said it in such a forlorn way, that it just broke my heart. "I was really looking forward to it."

The program paused.

"Oh Tom," I said, filling in my character's dialog, "it's no problem at all! I'll just whip up another one! It's super easy."

** Ping! **

Another perfect response! Yay!

"Are you sure?" Tom asked, looking hopeful.

"Absolutely," I said. I could feel my character smile. "Now you go relax. I'll clean this up in a jiffy and be right there with a new one."

** Ping! **

Three for three!

"You are a doll," said Tom.

Oh god, I loved this program. I could play it all day. Way better than computer games.

Of course I didn't always get the responses right. Sometimes I would get a less-satisfying **bim** saying that it was a 'good' response, but not perfect. Other times I would get a completely un-satisfying ** tch, tch, tch **, which sounded exactly like the tongue-clicking my Mom used to do when I had done something wrong.

Each time, the program would wait until I came up with the perfect response. If I wasn't able to do it after five tries, my character would say it for me and then the computer would come back to it later.

I had been paying such good attention to the movies all along, so it really didn't take long before I was giving perfect responses nearly all the time, even when it started presenting new situations.

"Close your eyes," said Tom, "and hold out your hands."

My character dutifully did as instructed.

"Now open them."

He had placed a necklace in my hands! It was a simple gold-plated heart-necklace on a thin gold chain.

The program paused for my response.

"Oh, Tom, it's *beautiful*," I said, with genuine feeling.

** Ping! **

"Do you really like it?" Tom asked.

"Yes, absolutely. I *love* it," I said.

** Ping! **

"Oh, I'm so glad," Tom smiled, looking at me expectantly.

The program paused. I thought for a second. What was it waiting for?

"But what is the occasion?" I asked.

** Ping! **

Yes! I got it right!

"No occasion, I just wanted to get you something nice."

"Oh, Tom, thank you so much. You treat me so well. I really don't deserve it."

** Ping! **

The program paused. Now what? I looked closely. It was a locket!

"Can I open it?" I asked.

** Ping! **

"Of course!" Tom said, smiling. This was clearly what he had been waiting for.

My character opened the locket. Inside was a small, handsome photograph of Tom.

"Oh Tom, thank you *so* much," I said. "This is perfect. I will cherish it always."

** Ping! **

Pause.

"Uh..." I thought some more. What else did it want me to say?? I struggled for a good 60 seconds, the program patiently waiting for me to figure it out.

"Can... can I put it on?" I asked, hesitantly.

** Ping! **

Yes! That was it!

"Of course!" Tom took the locket from my character and slipped it over her head.

"Thank you," I said. The locket nestled down at the top of my character's cleavage. "This way, I will always have you next to my heart," I finished, cribbing a line I had heard my character say previously.

** Ping! **

Awesome!

* * *

Chapter 3

"So, as you all know, Melissa is having a baby and is going on maternity leave," my boss announced.

The conference room was over-packed with some 20+ tech employees. Some were sitting in chairs, some on the floor or window sill, while others were standing and leaning against the walls. It was our every-other-week "all-hands" meeting.

Melissa was the receptionist, our all-around office manager, and the 'mom' of the group. I should explain that I work in a relatively small remote IT office, an off-shoot of a much larger organization.

"Okay," Ben continued, "now the problem is that there's a hiring freeze until the next fiscal year. But we need someone out front to watch for customers and sign them in, show them around, and handle all of the deliveries and what-not. Sooo...."

He looked around at everyone.

"... I need someone, and hopefully more than one someone, to volunteer to be the receptionist. Just for the next few months."

There were snorts of derision and disbelief.

"Get a temp!" someone shouted.

"No can do," said Ben. "We would only have enough budget for like, two or three weeks."

"I'll do it!" The words just slipped out of my mouth. I didn't even realize that I had spoken until I saw everyone looking at me.

"Paul?" my boss asked, astonished. "But you... you're... a senior developer."

"It's no big deal. I'm happy to chip in! Anything you need me to do. Really."

I felt a surge of pleasure at being so helpful.

Everyone in the room brightened up immediately. He'll do it! Problem

solved! People got up and started to leave.

"But, we need you working on the product," said Ben, feebly. I think he could tell at this point that it was already a lost cause. Apparently he had hoped to come up with some sort of rotating schedule or receptionist by committee.

"Oh Ben," I said, "it'll be no trouble at all. Just let me take care of everything."

"Well, okay, I guess that settles it then," Ben said, resigned.

* * *

And so I moved to the receptionist's desk. I still did programming, of course, but now I was also watching for the occasional customer, business partner, or random guest who showed up at the front door. It turned out to be not a big deal, and my regular work barely suffered at all.

And best of all, it meant that I had the authority to finally clean out the fridge and the kitchen, which was so desperately needed! I don't know why, but the mess had really been bothering me lately. All those dirty dishes, all that moldy food! UCK.

So I emailed out an ultimatum (as the replacement 'Melissa', I wrote), and then on Friday it was all gone. Dishes washed, countertops scrubbed, everything put away. All nice and clean. And I added a box of baking soda to the fridge to absorb the smells.

I made some other changes too. I added a plant to the receptionist area, and brought in a big bowl full of candy for the front desk. I never ate any, of course (I didn't want to regain all that weight I had just lost!), but it was good for morale. People would wander by and chat, just to get a candy bar. I loved it.



One consequence of my e-mail was that everyone started calling me 'the new Melissa' now. It probably should have bothered me, but in truth, I kind-of liked it. It was just the sort of office teasing that meant everyone thought it was cool how I was being so helpful.

* * *

New sorts of scenarios were being introduced in the modification program, focused on personal grooming. It started with simple things, like brushing teeth and face washing. But even these simple things turned out to be much more complicated than I thought possible.

"Step one..."

"I use a gentle foaming cleanser to remove makeup and excess oil," I responded.

** Ping! **

"Step two..."

"I use a light moisturizer with UVA and UVB protection."

** Ping! **

"Step four, at night..."

"I add a serum with Vitamin C and a light moisturizer to fight free radical damage."

** Ping! **

I got it right again!

I could totally understand why my perfect mate would want me to know this. After all, who wouldn't want to know how much effort it takes to maintain a beauty regimen for your partner?

* * *

As I walked home from work a few days later, I passed the local department store and looked in at the makeup counters.

'You know,' I mused to myself, stopping at the window display. 'It wouldn't hurt to start a skin care regimen myself...'

Somehow I found myself floating into the store and then lingering around the makeup counters, unsure of what to do.

"Can I help you?" said a bright young lady wearing a white smock.

"Sure... I guess?" I said, uncertainly. "I was, um... looking for some moisturizer, and maybe, uh some skin cleaner?"

"And I am here to help! My name is Sandy!"

"Hi Sandy!"

"And I must say, I can see why! Your skin is so smooth and beautiful! Of course you want to take good care of it!"

And so, after some discussion, Sandy set me up with an entire program. She was so helpful!

But then, oh my god, she saw me glance over at the makeup counter.

"Would you like some makeup, too?" she asked, carefully.

Her question took my breath away. The modification program had been showing movies of my future perfect-mate's makeup routine, going through every aspect, item by item, and quizzing me on everything. I was learning so much about how women put on makeup, even different styles for different occasions! It was really fascinating and I was getting so into it.

"Yes," I whispered, blushing. I looked carefully at Sandy, not daring to see if anyone else was looking at me, a man, purchasing makeup.

"Lots of men buy makeup," Sandy assured me, with a wink. "It's no big deal."

"Thank you," I said, grateful she was so supportive.

Back at my apartment, I arranged all of my new purchases on the bathroom countertop. I washed, exfoliated and moisturized just like the movies had taught me.

I looked at my face in the mirror. I really did have such smooth and clear skin. Whatever long-release drugs had been injected into me at the clinic were really working. I had a feeling that my perfect-mate would be pleased. I know I was!



I stopped there, hesitating.

"It's just me, alone in this apartment," I said softly, looking over at the makeup I had just purchased.

"It would be a waste to not try it," I reasoned to myself. "After all, it's clear that my perfect-mate wants me to understand what it's like to put on makeup. Otherwise, why do all of those scenarios?"

I reached for the anti-aging foundation primer, my heart beating a mile

a minute, applying it lightly to the center of each cheek and then blending it outwards using light, circular motions.

As I finished with that step, I felt a surge of satisfaction.

It was almost as if I could hear the ** Ping! ** even though I wasn't connected to the computer.

* * *

After that, I sort-of became addicted to putting on makeup. It was such a relaxing routine! I would get home from work and race to the bathroom to wash my face and then put on makeup for the evening. I then did one session on the modification computer, then made a light dinner, fixed up my makeup, did another session, and then washed it all off and cleansed and moisturized my face for evening.

In the mornings, I would wake up early (I was an early bird now, waking up without an alarm at 6am every day!) get a shower, wash my hair (the computer was also spending a lot of time on hair styles), and put on some light makeup for my early-morning session on the modification computer.

One day, I actually walked out the door without washing it off! But fortunately, I realized my mistake (as I checked my face in my compact mirror) and quickly raced back to wash it off.

But I must not have done a very good job, because later that day, my boss, Ben, mentioned it.

"Are you wearing... makeup?" he asked.

My hand jumped up to my cheek, embarrassed.

"I... I guess," I said.

"Why?"

"Uh... just covering up a pimple," I explained.

"Oh, okay."

But as Ben walked away, he glanced back at me with a 'something weird is happening' look on his face.

* * *

Chapter 4

"You look beautiful in that dress."

"This old thing?" I responded, coyly.

The computer ** Ping! ** told me that I'd answered correctly. My character in the movie twirled, her dress flaring out prettily. I basked in the pleasure of Tom's praise.

"Yes, that old thing," Tom laughed.

"It's just something I picked up on sale," I said. "It's nothing, really."

Nothing, hah!

The modification program had been taking me through endless scenarios with clothing recently. I watched as my character went on various shopping trips to all sorts of stores, flipping through racks and racks of clothes. The program was teaching me about my perfect mate's sense of style. It was probably so that I would learn what sorts of things she liked so that I could better buy her gifts when the time came, I Reasoned.

And so, on these virtual shopping trips, I was required to say 'yes', 'no', or 'maybe' to each clothing item. The yes's and maybe's would be taken to the dressing room where my character would try them on and I would have to decide, and correct answers got a ** Ping! ** and incorrect answers would get a "tch tch tch" until I had picked out the correct wardrobe.

And it wasn't just dresses, either! I had to do the same thing for slacks and blouses and jeans and swim suits and lingerie... it was endless. My character bought bags and bags of clothing. It's a good thing it was all virtual, otherwise it would have cost a fortune!

And don't get me started about shoes. Literally hundreds upon hundreds of varieties that I had to view and judge and give a 'yes', 'no', or

'maybe' on.

But, you know, I had to admit that I enjoyed it. After all, it was fun to guess what she might like and it was always so satisfying when I guessed the correct answer. Over time I got better and better, to the point where I felt like I basically understood her style, inside and out.

It was a classic, slightly retro (but updated) style with an emphasis on feminine items and colors. Silhouettes tended to emphasize her curves and make her look graceful and approachable.

And so, every morning after showering, hair and makeup, my character would choose the outfit for the day, and naturally I was required to choose from the closet the combination of clothes that was best matched to the season, the weather, and the event.

"You look beautiful in dresses."

"Why thank you, Tom," I said, pleased. My character held his arm as they both walked down the street, chatting.

"In fact, I think you should wear dresses all the time."

"A-a-all the time?" I stammered.

The computer clicked its tongue with the 'tch tch tch' sound.

I tried again.

"Of course, Tom!" I said, as happily as I could. "I agree. I *should* wear dresses all the time. You are so smart!"

** Ping! ** The computer accepted my new response.

"And stockings. I hate pantyhose. You should switch to stockings."

"Really?" I asked. "Stockings??"

** tch tch tch **

Damn it! Wrong again. I took a breath to try again.

"Of course, Tom! I didn't know that you liked them so much. Of course, I'll switch to stockings right away."

** Ping! **

"You know, those kind which require garters to hold them up."

Garters??

"Well, those *are* the best kind," I said, my character smiling up at Tom. "If I'm going to wear stockings all the time, then, *of course* that should be the type that I would wear."

** Ping! **

"And high-heels, of course."

"Of course! They go with the stockings."

My character held tighter onto Tom's arm and placed her head on his shoulder.

"Anything you want me to wear," I said, "just tell me. I'm happy to do it. You have such good taste, after all."

** Ping! **



"You are the most wonderful girl any guy could ever hope to have," Tom said, holding my character's hands in his and looking me straight in the eye. "And you know I just want you to always look your best."

"Oh, of course, Tom! And it's a pleasure to dress nicely for you. You are always so appreciative!"

** Ping! **

"And I think that if you look nice, you feel nice, and you have more self-confidence," Tom said.

"I completely agree!"

** Ping! **

"And so I always you want to wear the nicest things. You know, stockings, dresses, high heels..."

The computer paused.

"Lingerie?" I wondered out loud.

** Ping! **

"And of course, *lingerie*," said Tom, grinning. "You'll wear nice lingerie, won't you? For me?"

"Absolutely! I love wearing nice, luxurious lingerie. But just for you, Tom."

** Ping! **

The scenario was repeated over and over, with slight variations, over the next few days.

I did wonder about it, though. After all, if that's how she was supposed to dress, then why did the computer take me shopping for all of those ordinary girl-clothes, like slacks and blouses and plain-cotton-panties?

I supposed that it wanted me to understand the full scope of her clothing options. Maybe so that I wouldn't be so demanding of dresses, stockings, and high heels as Tom was? That made sense.

After all, my perfect mate would not want to wear dresses or stockings

or high heels all the time. What woman would want that? To be dressed up in such a feminine way for her man all the time? 24x7? That would be ridiculous. Any real woman would want to wear sweat pants and T-shirts most of the time.

But wait, maybe the point was that my character was doing this *for Tom*. She did it because she wanted to be nice to Tom and do things for him. Maybe that was the point of those scenarios? She dressed in this ultra-feminine way because he had asked for it, and she was happy to do it for him. Eager, even.

And I thought to myself, how amazing would it be to a perfect mate who always dresses so feminine? I could see how these scenarios were making me really understand, so that when she wears dresses and stockings and nice lingerie, and when she does up her hair nice and wears makeup and nail polish... all of these things she would be doing not because she wanted to, for herself. Instead, she would be doing all of these things just for me. As a present.

What an amazing woman she must be! I couldn't wait to meet her.

Of course, they said it was going to take about nine months for the modification program to run its full course, so I still have a few months to go.

I had to admit, however, watching all of these scenarios, over and over through the Virtual Reality goggles was starting to get to me.

"Do you really like wearing dresses all the time?" Tom asked.

"Of course, Tom! I love wearing dresses!"

** Ping! **

"And the stockings and lingerie are super sexy," I said, with a sly grin.

** Ping! **

"Oh, I'm so glad! You are just the most amazing person ever!"

And multiple times a day I would be taken through the process of changing and getting ready. I would get ready for work in the morning, I would get ready for a date in the evening, I would get ready for a special luncheon event.

And every time, my character would talk about what was coming up.

"Tom says we're going out for a casual dinner with friends," my character would say. "Now what should I wear?"

And I would flip through all of the outfits, wistfully skipping the slacks and jeans until I got to the dresses and then finding just the right dress to accompany Tom. A dress which would fit the situation exactly right, not too dressy or too casual. A dress that made me (I mean, my character) look good.

And every correct choice was accompanied with a ** Ping! ** and a surge of satisfied pleasure that I had gotten it correct.

And then I would put it on, add some accessories, and then go out to meet Tom, who was usually waiting in my character's living room to escort me to whatever event was required.

And, of course, there was a lot more shopping for all sorts of things! I really started to love shopping. And that's so unlike me, I never really liked shopping before. I guess the modification program was having an effect.



"Such a beautiful dress!" I would exclaim.

**** Ping! ****

"Now, this is gorgeous lingerie. Tom would just *love* to know I'm wearing it."

**** Ping! ****

The problem was, over time, things began to shift. My character started

getting more into the vibe and making more and more affirmational statements.

"I really love wearing dresses," I would say, as I virtually-dressed during my modification program scenarios.

** Ping! ** the program verified.

"And wearing lingerie is really wonderful, too. It makes me feel so sexy and feminine. Like such a beautiful woman, inside and out."

** Ping! **

"Stockings and garters, sure, they're old fashioned, but then, aren't I really sort-of an old fashioned girl? And they make my legs look amazing!"

** Ping! **

"You know, I really can't imagine wearing anything *but* dresses anymore."

** Ping! **

"I think that, anything else would feel just so underdressed!"

** Ping! **

"After all, all it takes is just a little bit of effort, that's all. And then you feel great and everyone around you sees that you made an effort and it makes them feel special too!"

** Ping! **

"I guess that I'm just the sort of girl who loves to wear dresses!"

** Ping! **

"And sexy lingerie, stockings, and high heels. I guess that's just who I am. And why not? It looks and feels just wonderful!"

** Ping! **

** Ping! **

**** Ping! ****

All of these affirmational statements were really starting to get to me. I was starting to dream them at night. Every morning in Real-Life I would shower, wash my hair and do my skin care regime (and makeup, depending on the day and time). I would then go to the closet to get dressed and be faced with all of these ugly male clothes. Jeans, T-shirts, some dress shirts (which I wore now almost exclusively -- to present better as a receptionist), ugly cotton briefs...

And I would walk home past the department store and I could almost feel a magnetic pull of the women's clothing just a few steps away. A few times I even walked inside and was almost to the lingerie section before I came to my senses and turned around and walked out.

And then one day, it was a Thursday morning (I remember it so clearly!) and I just couldn't stand it anymore. I stood in front of my open closet doors and then just sank down to the floor, sobbing my heart out.

"I ***HATE*** all these clothes!!" I cried, feeling desperate. "I want to wear dresses! And nice lingerie! I love wearing dresses!! Why can't I wear them? And these aren't even nice men's clothing! They're just ****horrible****."



But I had nothing else to wear, and I had to get going for work. So I dressed in a pair of khakis and a dress shirt and slumped to work.

"Why so glum, 'new Melissa'?" asked my boss, Ben, stopping by my receptionist's desk.

"Oh, I just realized that I hate my entire wardrobe," I said, miserably.

"Well, why don't you buy a new one?" he suggested, reasonably. "Don't we pay you enough?"

"Of course you do, it's just that..." I stopped.

"Just what?"

"Oh, I don't know. I guess I'm just wondering what people would think of me if I suddenly started dressing differently."

"This is a tech office. You'll be lucky if they notice anything at all," Ben pointed out. "I shaved off my beard last year and no one noticed for a whole week."

"I guess that's true."

"And besides, it wouldn't hurt for you to look more presentable. After all, you are the receptionist. Our first face to the public."

"You know, you're right!" I said, suddenly brightening up. "I'm going to do it!"

And my mind was suddenly full of all sorts of possibilities. Of course I still couldn't wear dresses at work like I wanted to, but at least I could wear some better slacks and shirts! Something much more fashionable. And then, maybe I could get some dresses to wear on the weekends, and at night. That would definitely work! And I have plenty of money! Since I moved to the cheap apartment and since I started walking to work and making all my own meals (thank you, modification program!), my expenses were next to nothing. I was saving almost my entire paycheck every month. I could spend tons of money on clothes!!

"Thank you, Ben!" I said, suddenly feeling so much more cheerful. It was going to be a good day after all!

"Happy to help," he said. "By the way, I got a call from your clinic."

"M-my clinic?" I stammered, suddenly taken aback. Since when did the PMM clinic start calling my boss?

"Yeah, they said that there was a last-minute opening, and they wondered if you could be excused from work for the next two weeks."

"Oh!" I was shocked. Surgery??

"So, I said, 'no problem'," Ben continued. "After all, our next release is two months away, so this is the perfect time, really. We'll get a temp to fill in for you. Is it anything serious?"

"No, nothing serious. Minor surgery," I said, my mind reeling.

I raced home at lunch time and checked the PMM computer. There was a message scheduling my surgery for the very next day!

* * *

Chapter 5

It turned out to be some facial surgery and voice box surgery. The clinic explained everything. They were making some facial and vocal adjustments to bring my physical presentation more in-line to my perfect mate's desires. They explained that my perfect mate was also undergoing surgery for me. We were meeting in the middle, so to speak.

So I thought, 'okay, no problem.'

My surgery was the very next day in the morning, and I stayed in the hospital for two days. When I had recovered enough to be released, they had an orderly take me home.

The surgery turned out to be more extensive than I expected. There was a cranioplasty, a rhinoplasty, some small cheek implants, and chin and jaw contouring. So... wow.

Fortunately, the clinic was using all of the latest minimally-invasive and robot-assisted techniques, so I just had a few small incisions to deal with.

When I first got home, my face was bandaged, I had on a cast over my nose, and everything was still swollen. I had no idea what I looked like, and I couldn't talk at all. Even croaking was just too painful.

So I mostly just slept and ate ice cream. It's a good thing my fridge was well stocked! I certainly didn't feel like doing anything but lay in bed. When I felt up to it, I plugged into the modification computer and replayed some old scenarios, especially the clothing and hair care scenarios, which I still found to be a bit tricky.

As my face recovered, I was confused by the changes. My chin was narrower, my nose smaller and more upturned. My forehead looked flatter and less bulgy, especially above the eyes. How had they done that?

I mean, I looked just like I always did, I thought, just a bit softer here and there. I guess my perfect mate wants someone less neanderthal, which was fine by me. I thought I looked better, actually. More beautiful.

Regardless, I was okay with it. I quickly came to like my new face. It was friendlier and brighter. I would break into smiles whenever I saw

myself in the mirror.

I hoped my perfect mate would like it too. I was really starting to get intrigued about what she was like.



* * *

Finally, I had my 13-day checkup and I was officially cleared to go back to work.

Time to go shopping!

I was so happy that I actually skipped to the department store, eager to try shopping in person for the first time since I had been using the modification program.

First things first, I thought to myself, new work clothes. And so I went to the men's section and started flipping through clothes.

Nope, nope, no, no, no, Yuck!, horrible, UCK, no, no, NO!

My god. Did I really wear this crap for all of my life? Everything was so blocky, vertical, and drab.

I glanced over at the women's wear section. Maybe I could shop there first, and then come back?

So, slowly, but then with increasing enthusiasm, I wandered over to the women's wear section (actually, many sections! How wonderful!) and began flipping through clothes and (*finally*! So relieved!) started finding things I liked.

"It's time to bring your selections to the counter," the saleslady said. "We're closing in 20 minutes."

I tried to speak, but my voice cracked in the middle of the word.

"Already?" I whispered. I looked at the time on my cell phone. Shit! I had been shopping for over 6 hours!

"Can I help carry your things to the cash register?" she asked.

I nodded a sincere 'thank you!', looking at the multiple bundles of clothes I had gathered.

I had picked out a brand new wardrobe from top to bottom. There were dresses, panties (*blush*), stockings, garters, camisoles, and shoes (!!) of all types, both flats and a variety of heels. And for work I had finally found some acceptable slacks and shirts (well, okay, they were

technically 'blouses', but they seemed okay for work, I thought). And I added a couple of bracelets and a fun statement necklace just for the heck of it.

"No bras?" the lady at the counter asked.

I tried to speak but couldn't.

"Here, let me help you," she said, nicely leading me back to the lingerie section, and quickly measuring my bust. "Looks like you're a 34A..."

Wait just a freaking moment! A 34A??? I have BREASTS??

"... so any of these should work for you."

She left me, stunned, to look at the rack of bras. I mean, sure, my chest has felt puffy and swollen recently, but it's not because I have breasts, right?

I picked out some pairs and took them to the counter.

"So, why all of the purchases?" The saleslady asked.

"Oh, you know," I said, "I just decided to scrap my entire wardrobe and finally grow up and buy some nice things."

... wait a second...

"That's wonderful!" she said, efficiently unclipping the hangers and folding the clothes. "Most people I know either wouldn't care to look nice, or wouldn't have the guts to reboot their entire wardrobe like this. You are one courageous woman!"

"Th-thank you," I said. Shit, there it was again.

"Are you okay?"

"I think so..." it was me!! "I can talk!!" I said, astonished.

"Of course you can talk! Why shouldn't you be able to talk?"

"But... it's I mean... I'm..." I took a couple of swallows and tried again. "I'm just recovering from vocal surgery," I explained.

"But..." I continued, "this voice...! I sound much too high!"

* * *

I put away all of my new clothes that evening, carefully arranging everything by color and style. It felt amazing to have a new wardrobe. For the first time in... well, in *forever*, I was looking forward to dressing for work the next day.

But my voice?? What was wrong with my voice?

"Is this really how I sound now?" I spoke the words out-loud. My voice sounded so high and pretty. It was the same as at the store.

There has to be something wrong! I thought, there just has to be! It had to be a mistake, right?

So I called the clinic emergency hot-line. After listening to my concern, they assured me not to worry.

"There's always a period of adjustment," they explained. "It will take about two months. You could be too high right now and then it will settle down to where it's supposed to be. It will take some time."

So I thanked them and hung up the phone, feeling relieved.

"Thank goodness," I said to myself, still hearing that same girlish, musical, trilling sound coming out of me. "I guess I just need to give it some time."

* * *

"Hey Ben!"



"Hi there! Who are you?"

I look at him, astonished. What the heck?

"I know it's been a couple of weeks, Ben," I said, miffed, "but it's Paul. I'm back from my surgery."

"Paul???" Ben looked at me, eyes wide with shock and realization. "Oh my god, it *is* you."

"Of course it is, silly!"

'Boy, he is acting strange,' I thought to myself.

"Should I... should I call you just 'Melissa' now?"

"Sure," I said, with a shrug. "If you want. Why not? After all, I am the new Melissa, right?"

"You certainly are! Don't worry about a thing. I'll let everyone know."

"Okaaaay," I agreed, now completely confused as to exactly what he would be telling everyone. "Whatever you think is best."

"Cool. It won't be a problem. I promise."

* * *

After that, people dropped the "new" when referring to me and just started calling me "Melissa" all the time. I didn't mind. It was fun. I went out of my way to beam at everyone every time they said it to make sure everyone understood that I was okay with their playful teasing.

However, I thought it was a bit much when the IT Operations guy, Jake, changed my login account from "Paul.Kelly" to "Melissa.Kelly". I mean, a joke is a joke, but that's just a bit ridiculous!

"But I thought you were Melissa now," Jake said.

"Well, of course I am," I said, "I mean, yes, I'm working as Melissa now..."

"Then, what's the problem? Is it because I gave you a new account? The new account has different access rights. It was easier to create a new one than to change the old one."

"New access rights?" I asked.

"Yeah, talk to Ben."

When I went to Ben, he explained.

"Oh, sorry! I forgot to tell you. I asked Jake to create you a new account because I have some new tasks for you."

"New tasks?"

"Yeah. Since you were out, we had to reassign your dev tickets, unfortunately. And so, since you're not otherwise assigned, I was hoping you'd help out with some office management things which really need doing."

"Of course! I'd be happy to do anything you need," I said, just wanting to be helpful in any way.

"Wonderful!"

And so, when I wasn't doing my receptionist duties, Ben had me doing other office management functions, like tracking expenses and the petty cash, checking that everyone had filled out their time cards, and doing travel reservations and whatnot.

It was nice because I got to walk around the office and talk with people all the time, and I found that to be a real pleasure.

How had I been able to work, alone, at my computer all those years? I thought back to those days now and realized how confining, lonely, and cooped up I was! I felt so much better being a people person.

And so, I had to switch to the "Melissa.Kelly" account full time because it gave me access to the financial systems necessary for managing the office expenses. I was going to make a bigger deal about it, but I figured it was just easier to leave it as-is until the real Melissa finally got back and then things could get back to normal.

* * *

Chapter 6

And so I settled into my new role at the office and got into a nice, comfortable routine.

I would wake up in the morning, get my shower and wash my hair, then do my morning skin care routine and then get dressed in lingerie, usually panties, stockings, a garter belt, and a bra.



Thank goodness I had let the sales lady from the department store talk

me into purchasing some bras! My breasts were really starting to get sore and puffy, and I noticed that wearing a bra gave them some support so they didn't hurt as much as I walked to work.

Then I would spend some time on the modification computer running through my scenarios, repeating the words and sentences required by computer and learning more and more about my perfect mate by watching how she interacted with her virtual partner, Tom. During this time, I would be wearing this luscious silk and lace robe which I found at a specialty lingerie store, with some nice "around the house" satin slippers. The slippers only had about a 1-inch heel, so they are super comfortable. Practically like wearing flats.



After that, I would get a quick bite for breakfast (the most important

meal of the day!) and then I would put on some light makeup and then I would dress for the day. Usually a nice pair of slacks and a woman's dress shirt.

One day I was out of the dress shirts (which is so unlike me, to be behind on my laundry like that), so I put on an actual blouse. It was a cream satin blouse with puffy sleeves, tight cuffs (with small pearl buttons), and a long, crepe ascot collar which hung down from my neck to past my belt.

I thought (for certain!) that I was going to get a lot flak from everyone for wearing a lady's blouse. In fact, I almost stopped by the department store on the way to work to buy something else, but then I would be late (and the receptionist must never be late!) so I just resigned myself to a day of teasing and kidding from the staff.

But it never happened!

Everyone was just so amazingly cool about it. They just acted like it was nothing at all. They said "Hey Melissa!" just like they always did as if there was nothing out of the ordinary.

Here I had come into the office dressed in a woman's blouse, and no one seemed to care. Or even notice, really. Wasn't it wonderful how my work colleagues are so amazing? They must have realized that it would make my uncomfortable to mention my new blouse, so they made a point of *not* talking about it.

Later that morning I realized something even more amazing. I had fetched myself a cup of coffee and then when I put down the cup I glanced over at it. It took me almost 60 seconds before I realized what was wrong.

My coffee cup had a lipstick print on it.

Oh god! I had left my makeup on! I quickly reached for my satchel and rooted around inside it looking for my powder compact. Snapping it open I looked at myself in the mirror, and it was absolutely true.

I was fully made up with foundation, lip liner, lipstick, eye liner, eye shadow and blush. I had been so worried about wearing a blouse when I dressed this morning, that I had just completely forgotten to take off my morning makeup before going to work!



And so here I was, at work, wearing makeup and a blouse.

Of course, it was my "ready for work" look, so it was all tastefully done. Maybe that's why no one had commented on it? Maybe it just looked so natural that they just assumed that it was just me?

Maybe, but it seemed so *obvious* to me. I mean, my look with makeup up is just *completely* different. More vibrant and bright... more defined.

But no one had said a thing, or even acted as if it was in any way out of the ordinary.

Strange.

The upshot of that whole fiasco was that I could relax about what I wore to work. After all, if no one seemed to care that I wore blouses to work, then why not wear blouses? In fact, I stopped at the department store on the way home and bought a few more in various bright colors and fabrics.

And if no one noticed that I was wearing makeup, then why not wear makeup? And so I did. After all, all that extra washing of my face wasn't doing my skin any favors. And it saved time which meant I could spend more time on the modification computer in the morning, which was wonderful. Besides, I just felt better - more "put together" - when I was wearing makeup.

And you know, since I was wearing makeup at work, I switched from my satchel to a purse. This way I could choose something which went better with my outfit. I didn't need the satchel anymore anyway because I was no longer carrying my laptop back and forth to work (I was using the desktop at the receptionist's station). The purse was so much easier to carry and more fashionable when I was out in public. And I could fill it with all of the makeup I needed, and check my makeup and touch it up throughout the day.

I did wonder what would happen when I finally met my perfect match. I would have to go back to no makeup and wearing clothes from the men's department, I was sure.

But I just decided, "don't borrow trouble from tomorrow". My Mom always said that, and now I understood why.

After all, the clinic was turning me into her perfect mate, and so I

would just have to trust that they understood what they were doing. I expected that, at some point, the program would change and I would be back to wearing men's clothes again.

* * *

"You know, you can use the woman's bathroom," said Ben.

"Why would I do that?" I asked, confused.

"I just mention it, because, you know, there's been so much in the news about who uses what bathroom."

"Tell me about it," I rolled my eyes. "It's all just so ridiculous."

"I know, right? So, I just wanted to say, I know we're in North Carolina and all, but I think it's perfectly okay for you to use the woman's restroom. Probably better, actually."

This was such an odd conversation, I thought to myself. Ben seemed to *want* me to use the woman's restroom.

"Thanks, Ben, but you know, since I live so close and walk home for lunch, I haven't needed to use the bathroom in a long time."

"Well, if you ever do, then go ahead and use the woman's room."

"Okay, if you say so." This was clearly an uncomfortable topic for Ben, so I made sure to give him my best, friendly smile.

* * *

In the evenings I would often stop and linger in the department store, sometimes shopping but just as often just browsing and talking to the sales ladies. It was relaxing for me, just being in the store and looking through outfits, even if I didn't purchase anything.

I started branching out to other stores as well, there were a few boutiques and women's clothing stores within walking distance. All of the ladies were so nice and gave me such wonderful service. Of course, it probably helped that I was always on the prowl for the perfect item to complete an outfit. They all knew I was a serious shopper.

When I got home in the evening, I would usually shower, to 'wash off the work day'. I always felt so fresh and alert once I had my early evening

shower. After my shower (with a shower cap to protect my hair, of course) I would then re-apply my makeup for an evening look and then I would (finally!) get to wear a dress.

Just putting on my dress for the evening - oh, it was such a pleasure. It was like I could finally be myself, it just *felt* right. It completed me, somehow. I would look in the mirror and everything would just work - the makeup, the hair, the shoes, the accessories, and the dress. And I would smile and twirl and just take a deep breath.

I would then usually spend some time on the modification computer going through more scenarios, then take a break for dinner and some cleaning, and then go back for a longer session. Around ten PM I would be done for the evening and I would wash off my makeup, do my evening skin-care regime, and then snuggle into a nightgown and go to bed.

Nightgowns. Did I mention about nightgowns? Yes, I was wearing them to bed. My character in the computer was always wearing nightgowns to bed, and I really wanted to try it, so I bought some from the department store and started wearing them to bed. I had a couple of baby-dolls, a sumptuous long satin gown, and a comfy flannel gown.

And so I would snuggle in bed and then drift off to sleep, usually dreaming of my character and how she was going to be going out with Tom for the evening, or how they were spending the evening at home, or how she was eagerly learning a new dish to cook for him.

* * *

My character was getting ready for a nice night out with Tom. After showering, doing her hair, putting on lingerie (including a slip, this time) and doing her makeup, she unzipped and stepped into her dress.

"Tom?" she called out.

"Yes?" Tom said, appearing the door.

"Could you zip me up?"

"My pleasure," he said.

Tom walked behind my character and I could hear the zipper closing.

"Oh, I wish I had a man to do that for me," I whispered to myself.

I could almost feel Tom, pulling the zipper up the back of my own dress, closing the bodice of the dress snug around my body and then fastening the hook at the back of the collar.

What a pleasure that would be!

Later in that scenario, we were walking home from the restaurant. My character was wearing a light sweater, but you could tell she was feeling chilled in the cool night air.

"Here, let me," Tom said, taking off his jacket and draping around her shoulders.

"Thank you Tom," I said, gratefully, as my character looked him in the eyes.

"My pleasure," Tom said, putting his arm around my waist and pulling me close.

* * *

By now my face was fully healed and I could finally see what it looked like, what my perfect mate wanted. And I had to admit it was a beautiful face. Bright and friendly with wide, interested eyes and a cute, good-natured smile.

It still looked like me, but a softer, narrower, more cheerful and more wholesome version of me. And with makeup, I mean, WOW, I looked amazing. Like, magazine-cover beautiful.



Makeup really brought out the feminine aspects of my face. With it on, I certainly looked like a 'Melissa', much more than a 'Paul'. But that didn't bother me. After all, I wouldn't be wearing makeup once my program was over. I would be back to being Paul, albeit with a softer, more buoyant face for my perfect mate.

My voice was still a problem, though. It had settled into a light mezzo-soprano and absolutely refused to get any lower or more masculine. When I tried to speak lower and more gruff it came out sounding ridiculous, so I just gave up.

Whatever. I was sure that, once the program was over and I was ready to meet my perfect mate, the clinic would fix it.

* * *

Chapter 7

Sometime, about a week after I returned to work from my surgery, a new type of movie scenario was introduced to my modification program.

It started with just intimate situations. Tom and my character standing outside her door, kissing. Or Tom and my character on the sofa together, sitting close and making out.

These were nice, and I watched as my character and Tom would snuggle together and kiss, sometimes for hours. Each time it happened I felt like I was floating on a pleasurable cloud, lost in the moment, enjoying the intimacy.

But then things got more serious.

"Put your hands behind your back," Tom instructed.

It seemed like a strange request.

"Of course Tom," I said.

But then nothing happened. The computer paused. What was it waiting for?

I tried some other of my standard statements, like "anything for you, Tom!" or "it would be my pleasure, Tom," but nothing seemed to un-pause the computer.

Was it broken? Then I finally realized what it wanted.

I put my own hands behind my back.

** Ping! **

That was it! I felt a flush of pleasure at having figured it out.

"Thank you," Tom said, his voice husky. "Now keep them there, you promise?"

"I promise, Tom," I said. I wondered what was coming next.

Tom reached out and slowly undid the buttons on my character's blouse. I could hear her heavy breathing. She was getting turned on.

Then, once the blouse was unbuttoned, Tom opened it up and then reached with his hands to cup her breasts.

Oh my god, it felt so good!



I was getting massive surges of pleasure as Tom did this to my character, manipulating her breasts with his hands. My breathing became deep and ragged. And my nipples....



"Ohhhnnnnggg" I groaned. My nipples were alive with pleasure, tingling and throbbing as Tom played with them. I wanted nothing more than to grasp them and stroke them myself, but I knew I couldn't. After all, I had promised Tom that I would keep them behind my back! And it took every ounce of my self-control to not do anything, and just allow him to continue to enjoy himself with my chest.

I mean, to enjoy himself with *my character's* chest. That's what I meant. Of course that's what I meant.

"You like this, don't you?" Tom asked.

The program paused.

"Oh, yes, Tom," I said. "I love it!"

** Ping! **

"I'm so glad," Tom said. "I just love playing with your breasts. I could do it all day long."

The program paused.

"Yes, *please*," I said. "Please, play with them as much as you want!"

** Ping! **

"They're so beautiful and so sensitive," Tom said, "they're wonderful."

The program paused.

Now what was I going to say?

"They're all yours, Tom," I said, guessing as to what was required of me. "My wonderful, beautiful, sensitive breasts are yours to do with as you wish."

** Ping! ** (it turns out that there were many acceptable responses).

"You're amazing," he said. "Does this really turn you on?"

"Yes," I sighed. "So much."

** Ping! **

Tom took his hands away.

"Hey!" I said.

Tom smiled.

"You know," he said, "since your breasts are so wonderful, why are you hiding them?"

"What do you mean, hiding them?" I asked, confused. After all, here I was, my blouse undone and breasts (in a bra) exposed.

"Your clothes, all of those high neck lines. I just think you could show a little more cleavage, don't you agree?"

The computer paused.

I took a couple of deep breaths. Was I really talking to this virtual person? Was this really happening? And here he was telling me to start wearing clothes with more cleavage? I knew what I was supposed to say. All responses followed the same pattern. But something felt different this time. More intimate. More... real.

"Of course, Tom!" I said with as much enthusiasm as I could muster. "If you think it's best, then absolutely, I'll wear clothes which show more cleavage!"

** Ping! **

"That's my good girl," he said, returning to my breasts.

I sighed as my breasts and nipples tingled as he played with them. God, this was turning me on!

But then he stopped again!

"Please don't stop!!" I whined, pathetically.

"And how about a push up bra?" he asked. "Would you wear a push up bra for me? From now on?"

"All the time?" I asked.

"Of course all the time," he answered.

The computer paused.

"Absolutely, Tom," I said. "I would love to wear a push up bra for you! And if you want me to wear them all the time, well then, that's exactly what I'll do!"

** Ping! **

"You are the most amazing girl any guy could ever have," he said, returning to my breasts. "Now I wonder what happens if I keep playing with these?"

Tom's breast play got more aggressive, with playful pinches and lots of kneading of my breast flesh.

It was all so real. It was as if his fingers were actually stroking my nipples! And the pinches - I swear I really felt them!

It was hard keeping my hands behind my back. Both my character and I struggled to maintain the position as we both got hornier and hornier. I was definitely feeling things "down there" as he continued, and my breathing got more and more ragged with little 'yips!' and moans as he kept going.

And then (oh my god!), it happened! I felt this amazing spike of pleasure flow from my crotch through my whole body. I swear I screamed. And it lasted for such a long time... ohmmm.... just this amazing wave that lifted me over the edge with such a rush... Oh god. Oh god. Oh GOD!!!

I think I converted to believing in God right at that moment. After that, my prayers started to have real meaning.

"So that's what happens," Tom mused, grinning wickedly.

After settling down and cuddling with Tom for a while, the scenario was over. As I took off the virtual reality goggles, I felt something. Something wet, "down there".

I had spurted in my panties.

* * *

I didn't run out and buy a bunch of push up bras and low-cut blouses at first. After all, it's just a scenario, right? Tom is just a virtual

being. I mean, why should I?

Okay, sure, I felt I understood pretty well the entire program now. I was really getting into the head of my future perfect mate, understanding how she thinks and her entire life, so that when we were finally united, I'd be linked into her world and make such a deep mental connection that we'd be true soul mates. And I was certain that she was going through the same program for me - learning what my life was like.

And so wearing dresses at home and dressing in lingerie and stockings and heels and wearing makeup (pretty much all the time, now - so happy!) in real life - certainly that was helping me to understand her world. But I worried about going out and buying and wearing push up bras.

After all, what would people think at work?

I mean, sure, they didn't seem to notice or pay that much attention when I started wearing makeup and blouses - but this was an entirely new thing. Breasts! On display! I could imagine just what all of the horny male programmers in the office would do. They'd be staring at my tits, non-stop.

Of course some of them already were. Generally, my blouses were loose and flowy, but every now and then one was a bit more fitted, and I would catch some guy here and there staring at my chest. It took me a while to realize what they were looking at.

I mean, okay, by then my breasts had been growing a lot. They had grown to a 34B. I called the clinic but they assured me that everything was perfectly fine.

"Some breast growth is to be expected, given your program," they said. "It's nothing to worry about. It will settle down once the program is complete."

I looked it up on Medline, and lots of different drugs and situations cause gynecomastia in men. "It's usually not anything to worry about," said all of the web sites. "Nor does it have to be permanent."

And yes, I had been wearing bras for a while now. Pretty satin bras with lace, because why not? If I was going to wear a bra, why not wear a pretty one? No one was going to see it underneath my blouse, after all, it was just for me. And if I wanted to be pretty underneath, then who was going to stop me?

But push-up bras and plunging necklines... that was an entirely different matter. People would know. They would easily see that I was wearing a bra. They would stare and make snide comments.

And what would that say about me? I mean, to everyone? Here is this guy, the temporary receptionist, walking around wearing a bra and showing off his cleavage. It would be weird. Super weird.

But Tom was insistent.

"Tell me," he would say. "Tell me how much you want to wear clothes that accentuate your wonderful figure."

"Oh Tom," I would have to respond. "Of course I do! I love being feminine and girly. I love to show off my voluptuous curves. I know how much you like them, and so naturally I want to show them off for you."

"Are you the kind of girl who likes to wear push up bras and show off her gorgeous cleavage?"

I got this question every time. And each time I would have to give an increasingly more detailed and lengthy response.

"I most certainly am that kind of girl!" I would have to respond, enthusiastically. "I love to show off my curves! After all, I'm the kind of girl who loves to be sexy and friendly, and if I want to show off my curves, then why not? I mean, this is America, after all. I can be sexy if I want to be. And I want to be! Not just for you, Tom, but for me too! It's harmless, flirty fun. So what if guys sometimes stare? Let them! As long as it's what you want, Tom, then it's what I want too."

All of this talk was really starting to get to me. I would get dressed in the morning and look in my drawer and wonder: 'hey where is my push-up?' only to realize that I didn't have one.

And then, it got even more intense.

"Are you wearing a push up bra?" Tom asked.

"No," I had to admit. After all, I watched as my character got dressed in the virtual world, and I could tell she was wearing just an ordinary bra.

"Why not?" he asked, reasonably.

"I... I haven't gotten around to purchasing one," I said. "I will, I promise."

** tch tch tch **

"I have no good reason," I said, trying again. "I'm sorry, Tom. Can you ever forgive me?"

"I'm disappointed," Tom said, with a severe expression on his face. "Is my request so unreasonable?"

"No, absolutely not!" I responded, feeling horrible. "It's not unreasonable at all. I'm so sorry, Tom!"

"You would tell me if it was, wouldn't you?"

"Yes, of course I would!" Please believe me, Tom!

"Then promise me, tomorrow morning, you will wear a push up bra and something that shows off your cleavage."

"I promise," I said, not wanting to upset him again.

"Do you really promise? Cross your heart and hope to die?"

"I promise, Tom. Cross my heart and hope to die."

"Are you the sort of girl who breaks her promises?"

"No! Absolutely not! I would never, ever break a promise."

"Of course not, because you're a good girl, aren't you?"

"Yes, Tom. I'm a good girl. I'm an obedient girl. I'm *your* good girl."

"And good girls don't break promises, do they?"

"No, we most certainly do not."

"Then swear to me: Tomorrow morning, you will put on a push up bra and something that shows off your wonderful curves. For me. Make a solemn oath."

"Tom, I solemnly swear that tomorrow morning I will put on a push up bra and something that shows off my curves. I swear this to you with my

whole heart."

* * *

I took off the virtual reality goggles and burst into tears. I had upset Tom! He was questioning my commitment to him! He felt he had to make me swear, when I would have just done it for him just because he wanted it! I could feel his disappointment radiating from the screen and it was devastating.

I cried for a good long while, letting it all out and feeling just *horrible* about the whole situation.

And then I grabbed my purse and ran out to the department store.

* * *

It wasn't until I got back home late that evening, with bags full of lacy, enticing push-up bras and low-cut, plunging, fitted scoop or V-neck blouses that I began to feel better. I was fixing things. I was doing what Tom wanted and wearing what he wanted me to wear. I was taking positive steps, and some of the items were so cute! I was just positive he would love them. When I tried them on in the changing room, they were so sexy!

Yes, this felt so much better. Doing what Tom wanted me to do, being the girl he wanted me to be. This felt right. This felt...

But wait a minute...

"What the heck am I doing?" I said to myself, flopping down on the sofa, in shock.

Tom is just a *virtual being*! A mere figment of a computer program! What do I care if he is proud of me? What do I care if I keep my promises to him... it? He is just an 'it' after all, right? I don't have to keep a promise to an 'it'!

But just the thought of going back on my promise was threatening to rekindle the storm inside me. My eyes started to water and I quickly reached for a tissue to blot out the tears before my makeup began to run.

"Darn it! What am I going to do??" I felt trapped and miserable.

* * *

I slept fitfully that night. I obsessed about my promise to Tom. Intellectually I understood it was ridiculous. But a promise is a promise! Dreams of Tom and the scenario kept repeating over and over in my head until it drove me crazy. A couple of times I turned on the light and went over to the dresser drawers where I had stashed my new "push up and enhancing" bras. I had seen how they would work in the department store changing room. I knew what they would do.

When I finally got up that morning I was a mess. I got my shower and then stood there, in front of the dresser, for a full 5 minutes trying to decide what to do.

"It won't hurt if I put it on..." I thought to myself. "Just for now? Why not? I can always change it before I go to work."

And so I slipped the straps over my arms, fastened it in back, and then adjusted each breast until they were as perky and "at attention!" as possible.

Looking in the mirror was a shock. There I was: wearing a bra, my breasts standing out proudly from my chest, pushed together and forward by the push-up.

It looked good. Real good, but...

I decided not to worry about the 'but' for now. Instead I logged onto the modification computer for my morning refresh.

"You're wearing a push-up bra!" Tom said, smiling broadly.

How did he know?? How did the computer know I was wearing a push-up bra? I began to wonder about the implants in my body. I had completely forgotten about them until now. What were they communicating?

"Yes, I am, Tom," I said. "Just for you."

"Doesn't it feel wonderful?"

"Oh it does! It feels amazing! And it is so cute and makes me look so sexy!"

"I just knew you would love it."

"Oh I do! I love it so much!"

** Ping! **

The ping was accompanied by a surge of pleasure. I hadn't had a Ping! Since the night before, so this one was especially welcome. I was so glad I had put on the bra!

"That's my good girl," said Tom.

"I will always be your good girl, Tom," I said. "Always and forever."

"Now promise me you'll wear it all day long." Tom looked at me intently.

"A-all day...?" I stammered.

** tch tch tch **

"Yes, of course, all day long, Tom!" I said, frantic to fix my mistake.
"Yes, I want to wear push up bras for you all the time!"

"Very good. Now *promise* that you will. Promise that you will wear your push up bra all day long."

The computer paused.

Darn, darn, darn! I thought to myself, feeling panicky, my heart racing. What am I going to do?

I dithered for a long time, and then I took a deep breath and answered the only way that I knew would be acceptable.

"Of course, Tom! I promise to wear my push up bra all day long. It will be my pleasure!"

"And something nice that shows off your wonderful curves. Promise that you'll wear that too. All day long."

The computer paused.

I sighed. Tom wasn't going to give an inch, was he?

"Yes Tom, absolutely! I will find something nice that shows off my curves, and I promise to wear it all day long."

"All day and every day from now on."

I gulped.

"Yes!" I tried to maintain my enthusiasm, "all day and every day from now on! I promise. For you."

Tom looked me straight in the eye, reached out and held my (virtual) hand in his.

I mean... my character's virtual hand. Yes, that's what I meant.

"This is a solemn promise. I expect you to keep your promise. Will you?"

The computer paused.

I looked at Tom and my heart beat so hard I felt it in my throat. He looked back, his demeanor calm and patient, looking deep into my eyes as if he could see and know everything about me. At that moment, I felt absolutely certain that he would know if I had kept my promise or not. How would this virtual computer being know what I was doing in real life? I had no idea. But he would know. I was sure of it.

"Yes, Tom," I said. "I will keep my promise. I will wear something nice that shows off my curves. this is a solemn oath, from me to you."

** Ping! **

I put down the headphones. It was time to get dressed for work.

* * *

At work, standing in front of the coat closet, trying to decide what to do.

It was still early (just after 8am). As the receptionist, it was my job to arrive first thing in the morning to open up the office, turn on the lights, and greet any early visitors. Usually, I was the first one in the office (software programmers are not known for being early-birds).

I wore my push up bra and fitted satin blouse. I had to try on five different blouses, each one more and more fitted and low-cut, before I found exactly the one that I felt would satisfy my 'promise' to Tom.

"He's just a virtual being!" I said, angrily to myself. "He'll never

know!!"

But here I was, all plumped and presented, for all to see.

I wore a jacket to work, even though it was too warm. It covered me up and made it possible for me to leave the apartment. But now, here I was, standing in front of the coat closet, trying to decide if I should take it off or not.

I knew I had to take off the jacket and hang it up. I would be breaking my promise otherwise.

Okay, technically, I would be wearing the push-up bra and the figure-hugging / cleavage-revealing blouse, and I will have worn them to work.

But only technically. Deep in my bones I would know that I had cheated. Wearing the bra and blouse but covering them up with a jacket would be cheating. It would be 'skirting the rules' - and I was better than that! My character never skirted the rules. *I* never skirted the rules. I hated people who skirted the rules.

Still, what would it matter? After all, he was just a fictional being invented by a computer. So what if I wore a jacket all day to cover up my breasts?

Somehow he would know.

I shuddered.

I knew it was true. He would know. I don't know how - but he would know. I would go home, he would ask: "did you wear a push-up bra and a nice blouse today?" and I would say "Yes, Tom! I did!"

But he would know something was up. He would grill me and then I would have to admit that I had covered them up, and he would be disappointed in me, and I just couldn't stand having Tom disappointed in me. It was horrible the last time, and it would be horrible if it happened again. He would look at me and go "*** tch, tch, tch ***" and I would just stand there feeling like a miserable little child and I would have to promise to do better. Oh, how I just *hated* to disappoint Tom!!

I quickly took out a tissue from my purse and dabbed at my eyes which were threatening to spill over.

Damn it! Why should it matter so much? Why should pleasing a stupid

fictional computer character matter at all?

I stood there, for the longest time, taking ragged breaths.

Ultimately it came down to this. I had a choice to make. It was a choice between revealing to the office that I had breasts or breaking my promise.

In addition to showing everyone in the office that I had breasts, it would also be clear that I had deliberately chosen clothing to show them off, and that I was inviting all of my horny male programmers to stare at them. Just the thought of all of those eyes on my chest made me flush with embarrassment.

But the other choice was to disappoint Tom.

And so, in the end, there was really no choice at all.

With a long, deep breath to settle my nerves, I removed my jacket revealing my new look, and hung it up in the closet.

* * *

I could hear Tom in my head all day long.

"Sit up straight!" he told me. "Shoulders back. Smile! Be friendly and helpful!"

And just as expected, I got looks. Lots of looks.

"Good mor---" Jake said, stopping and openly staring with his mouth open, "--ning, Melissa," he finally finished.

"Good morning, Jake!" I said, with as much cheerfulness as I could ("Sit up straight! good posture!").

It felt like I had a spot-light on my chest. 'Look at us! Look at us!' my breasts were shouting to the world. 'See how nice and perky we are! Come stare at the receptionist's new endowments! You'll be glad you did!'

Unfortunately, there's only one entrance to the office, and it is right in front of my desk. All of the other entrances are alarmed. This meant absolutely everyone got a good look at me as they came in to work.

Normally this was a good thing, because I would have an opportunity to (gently) remind people that they had not filled out their time cards, or their expense reports were late, or that they needed to complete some HR forms, or I could wish them 'Happy Birthday!'

But now it was a distinct disadvantage. We were just 20 employees, 18 male and 2 female, and every one of them came in the front door and did a double-take when they saw me. Even the women.

"Are you okay?" Brad, my former office-mate, asked.

"Of course, why do you ask?"

"Oh, you just look a little flushed, that's all."



Flushed with embarrassment!! I watched as Brad's eyes dipped down to

look at my chest, before, gradually, rising back up to look me in the eyes. I felt a hot prickling in my scalp as I flushed an even deeper red.

"Everything's great," I said, forcing a smile which I hoped looked genuine. "It's just a bit warm in the office today."

"Okay," he said. "That's a really nice blouse you're wearing, by the way."

"Thank you for noticing, Brad! I thought I'd try something a little different today."

"Well I think it's wonderful! Is that silk?" He reached out and held the collar of the blouse between two fingers, feeling the fabric. "That's really amazing fabric."

"Yes, it's silk," I said, trying to smile while gritting my teeth, frozen in place as Brad fingered my blouse, standing uncomfortably close.

"Hey, Melissa," Ben called out, pushing through the front door. Brad quickly let go and scurried off.

I saw Ben's eyes drift down to my bust and then back up again. "Nice outfit!" he said, grinning.

"Thanks," I blushed furiously, *again!*. My boss was looking at my chest! "It's not too much?" I asked, hopeful, "too... distracting?" Please say yes!

"Not at all," Ben said, amiably. "I love how you're getting more comfortable in your skin. It's empowering."

"Empowering? Wha-what do you mean? Really?"

"Absolutely! We've all be talking about it."

Talking about it? People are talking about me in the office?

"Everyone thinks you're incredibly courageous," he continued. "We noticed how you're gradually becoming more comfortable with who you are, and I hope everyone has been encouraging. Have they?"

"Oh, definitely. Everyone is very nice."

"Have you used the women's restroom yet?"

"No, not yet."

"Hmmm..." he frowned. "I talked to Lily and Amber, and they're totally fine with you using the ladies' room."

"Okaaay." Boy this conversation was so confusing! Why would I use the ladies room? "Thank you, Ben!" I said, smiling, not knowing what else to say.

* * *

Later that day the two women in the office came to my desk.

"Melissa!" Lily said, announcing herself. She looked over at Amber, who nodded and looked back at me.

"Hi Ladies! Do you need something?" I asked, looking back and forth between them.

"Yes, in fact, we do. Come with me."

"Don't worry, Melissa," Amber added, "I'll man the desk while you're away."

"Oh... okaaay," I said, getting up and relinquishing the desk to Amber. "What's up?"

"I think it's better if I show you," Lily said, grabbing me by the hand and leading me down the hallway.

What the heck? She turned the corner and pushed into the lady's restroom!

"Hey!" I said, trying to pull away, but her grip was firm and she pulled me along after her.

"Ben mentioned you hadn't used the bathroom at all as Melissa, and so Amber and I thought it was high time we took action."

"But I don't need to use the bathroom," I whined.

"Oh, come on. *Everyone* needs to use the bathroom. What if there's an

emergency?"

"I'll just run home. My apartment is just ten minutes away."

"That's ridiculous, having to walk all the way home to just use the bathroom? Listen, everyone in the office thinks you should use the women's restroom."

"Everyone in the office...?" I stared at her in disbelief. Everyone in the office was discussing which bathroom I should use?? What the heck?

"I know that in this state, it might not even be legal, but screw that! You should be using the ladies' room. Okay?"

"I don't know..."

"Isn't this a nice restroom? Look, there's a lighted mirror where you can fix your makeup and a bench where you can rest if you need it. And since there's only three of us, it's never full."

"I agree, it is very nice, but seriously, I don't think--"

"Promise me, from now on, that you'll use the lady's room. I won't take no for an answer."

"O-okay," I stammered, feeling trapped. It was clear that she wasn't going to leave me alone until I agreed. "I promise."

"Good!" Lily gave me a warm hug. "After all, we girls have to stick together, Melissa, don't we?"

"We girls...?" her statement just floored me. "Yes, uh, we do," I tried my best to recover. "Thank you, Lily."

* * *

"So, I guess they all think I'm transgender," I finally realized, as I walked home from work that day.

Thinking back over the past couple of months at all of the clues and how everyone had reacted to me, it was obvious now that I was now the "transgender receptionist". No wonder Ben was so concerned about me using the ladies' restroom.

I mean sure, I'm wearing blouses and women's slacks and shoes with a

heel. And I'm putting on makeup, and my face is softer and my hair is nicely styled and my voice is higher and more musical...

I nearly fainted from embarrassment. How could I have been so dense?! I collapsed into a local park bench, my face in my hands. How could I have been so stupid?!

It was all the fault of that damn modification program! I was just so focused on that that I never noticed how things were changing. I just thought I was being helpful and friendly, and that people were just reacting to the fact that I was temporarily filling in for Melissa.

Now what am I going to do?

I thought long and hard about that. It was way, *WAY* too late to just go back to dressing in men's clothes and being Paul all the time. After everything that Ben had done for me? And now Lily and Amber? If I were to reverse course now: "Hey everyone! I just realized I'm not really a woman, sorry about that!" -- oh god, that would be awful.

Better just to grin and bear it until the modification program was done. Then, once I had found my perfect mate, I would just face the music and change back. Or maybe I would quit my job and go work someplace else (the thought filled me with sadness).

And it wouldn't be much longer now. I had just reached the 8-month mark. Just 1 more month to go and then I would meet my perfect mate, get my voice fixed, my breasts would go away and I would go back to being just plain, old Paul.

I just had to grin and bear it until then.

* * *

Chapter 8

As I sat down at the modification computer that evening, I thought about returning to my former self. Of course that's what I wanted, wasn't it? I was sure it was what my perfect mate wanted, but there were certainly parts of my life now that I would miss when it happened.

Like wearing panties. I so love to wear panties. And stockings. And garter belts. Everything I owned was made of high-quality fabrics which felt nice and made me feel so special underneath. I liked how the garters pulled when I walked. I liked how all of my private bits felt when I stepped into a pair of nylon and lace boy shorts.

I liked wearing bras too, even the push up bras which Tom was making me wear now. They certainly made the 'girls' more comfortable, but I also liked how they looked on me. Sexy.

And makeup. I just look so much better with makeup on! I'm so much more alive and friendly and 'in the moment'. It's hard to describe. When I see my face without makeup I'm like: Yuck! Who is that miserable, drab person?

Maybe my future perfect mate would be OK if I wore a bit of makeup? After all, some men wear makeup, don't they? I went and searched on the internet for 'men wearing makeup' and breathed a sigh of relief. Lots of articles! So, no problem there, I rationalized.

I would just have to trust the modification program and the clinic. It was too late now to change. And they did have a "100% satisfaction guaranteed" clause. They were quite proud of that.

And dresses to. I would miss wearing dresses, especially in the evenings and on weekends.

"I guess I'm just the kind of girl who wears dresses," I said softly to myself, as I thought, without enthusiasm, about a future life of wearing men's clothing all the time.

"You love wearing dresses, don't you?" asked Tom.

"Yes, Tom, I do!" I said, smiling broadly. "I'm the kind of girl who just loves wearing dresses. I'm so glad you encouraged me to do so!"

** Ping! **

"That's my girl!" said Tom, pulling me into a warm hug and kissing me.

I'm sorry, I meant kissing my character... not me.

"You're a wonderful kisser," I said. "I'm such a lucky girl to have you in my life!"

"So tell me," Tom said. "If you love wearing dresses so much, why are you not wearing them to work?"

Uh oh... I felt a shiver up my spine.

"Well, I, uh..."

** tch tch tch **

Darn it!

"Oh Tom, I'd love to wear dresses to work! I'm just not sure that it would be appropriate work attire..."

** tch tch tch **

"Of course it's appropriate work attire," said Tom. "Lots of women wear dresses to work. So tell me, why are you not wearing dresses to work?"

What could I say that the computer would accept?

"I... I guess I'm just not used to the idea," I said, truthfully. "I've been wearing only pants and blouses to work. I've never worn dresses."

"I think I understand," said Tom. "So you're saying that it would be too big a change to just switch to dresses all of a sudden?"

I breathed a sigh of relief.

"Yes, that's it exactly."

"Oh honey, I perfectly understand. So how about this: why don't you start by wearing skirts?"

"Skirts??" I said, a little too loudly.

** tch tch tch **

Gosh darn it! Oh fudge! Where did he come up with that idea about wearing skirts?

"I mean, do you really think I should wear skirts, Tom?"

"Of course!" Tom said. "If dresses are too much too quickly, then you could just replace your slacks with skirts and continue to wear the same blouses you've been wearing. Doesn't that sound like a good idea?"

I pictured myself walking down the street to work wearing a pretty printed skirt with folds of fabric floating around me as I moved, air flowing around my legs, in full hair and makeup, a purse over my shoulder, wearing a sexy fitted blouse...

"Would I have to wear high heels and stockings?" I asked, meekly.

** tch tch tch **

"What a good idea, Tom!" I said, trying to recover. "Thank you! Should I wear high heels and stockings too?"

"I don't know. What do you think?" Tom asked, with a twinkle in his eye.

I knew this was a test, and there would be only one proper way to respond.

"Yes, I think I should, Tom," I said, feeling as if the whole thing had been a trap all along, and it had just sprung shut. I had only ever worn flats or low heels to work.

"I think so too," Tom said, sealing the deal. "They make your legs look so incredible."

Now I would be walking to work in high heels, and my stockings (which I wore all the time now) would be clearly visible. Depending on the skirt, even the garters might be visible... Oh dear!

"Thank you, Tom," I said. "I love wearing high heels and stockings." It was true, actually. I had been wearing them around the apartment for months now. They had become second nature.

"So then it's settled. You'll wear a skirt, high heels and stockings tomorrow."

Clearly there was no way out of this.

"Thank you, Tom. Yes, I will wear a skirt, high heels, and stockings tomorrow."

"Wonderful! Now *promise* me that you will."

I sighed. Trapped with no way out.

"Yes, Tom. I promise that I will wear a skirt, high heels, and stockings to work tomorrow."

"Is this a solemn oath?"

"Yes, this is a solemn oath. Cross my heart and hope to die."

* * *

I worried all night and all morning the next day about wearing a skirt. And it didn't help that I nearly killed myself walking down stairs in heels. But then, as I stepped out of the apartment onto the street, something happened. Something flipped.

It was a nice crisp morning and I felt the cool air on my stocking legs. I was accompanied by cars of commuters, getting an early start just like me. With each step, I could feel the gentle pull of my garter straps. Trees along the way seemed especially green and lush. I could hear birds gossiping in the local park. Flowers from the local florist burst out onto the sidewalk and seemed especially fragrant and exuberant as I clicked by in my heels, my calves feeling a gentle stretch with every step. I felt taller and more confident.



Such a glorious morning!

I opened up the office and turned on the lights in a genuinely good mood. I cleaned up in the kitchen, neatened up around my desk, sorted and distributed the mail and I couldn't stop smiling! I was in the present - and piercingly happy.

"Cute outfit!" said Amber, pushing through the door. "You look so adorable in that skirt! You should wear them more often!"

"Oh, you can count on it!" I said, smiling. "And Amber, thank you for your help yesterday. You know, getting me over my discomfort with the ladies' room."

"No problem," she smiled. "You're a member of the sisterhood now, and we look after our own."

A member of the sisterhood? I thought to myself, pleased. That sounds pretty nice!

"Don't you look radiant!" said Ben.

"Why thank you, Sir!" I said, teasingly.

"What's the occasion? Anything special?"

"No, nothing special. It's just a beautiful day out, and I'm wearing a new outfit!"

I stood up and twirled.

"Nice! I must say, it's wonderful to see you so happy! I know you've been in a funk ever since your divorce. I just wanted to say: You deserve this happiness! Don't let anything or anyone take it away."

"Don't worry, Ben. I won't," I said, beaming.

* * *

Chapter 9

Did you have a good day, today?" Tom asked as soon as I booted up the modification program that evening.

"It was a wonderful day, Tom!" I said, meaning every bit of it.

"Hands behind your back."

"Yes, *please*," I said, huskily. Tom hadn't played with my breasts in so long, I had been wondering if he would ever do it again.

Tom unbuttoned my character's blouse and pulled it apart, exposing her breasts in the lacy push-up bra. As he squeezed her breasts and teased her nipples, I could feel tingling in my own breasts and nipples.



"What a wonderful way to cap such a perfect day," I sighed with pleasure. I don't know how it was possible, but it really felt like his hands were on my bosom, squeezing and playing.

"What was so perfect about it?" Tom asked.

"Oh, just everything! It was a gorgeous weather, everyone was super friendly, and the world just felt so much more *alive*. It was a really, really great day."

"Did you enjoy wearing a skirt to work?"

"Oh, yes! It was wonderful! It felt so natural. Everyone loved it. I got tons of compliments. Thank you for encouraging me to wear skirts to work, Tom!"

The gaze of my character drifted down to Tom's lap.

"Oh!" I exclaimed, unable to stop myself. I could see his penis as a bulge in his slacks... and it was growing.

Tom reached down and shifted things. The bulge looked so big! I felt a surge of desire. My character reached out her hand as if to grasp it, but pulled back.

"Soon," Tom said, forcing my character to look him in the eyes. "Not today, but soon. Keep your hands behind your back."

I did as instructed and was soon squirming in pleasure, my nipples dancing under his finger play.

But then he stopped.

"Hey!" I said, incensed.

"You really like wearing skirts and dresses?"

"Oh yes, Tom! I love wearing skirts and dresses!"

"Will you wear them *all the time*?"

"Of course! For you, Tom, I will happily wear them all the time!"

** Ping! **

"From now on?"

Uh, oh...

"I... I suppose so."

** tch tch tch **

I tried again. "Sure, I can wear them from now on."

** bim **

I sighed. Nothing but enthusiastic acceptance would be allowed.

"Of course, Tom! I would love to wear them from now on!"

** bim **

Sheesh, what more did it want? I thought back to past responses.

"Of course, Tom!" I said, with as much enthusiasm as I could muster. "I love wearing skirts and dresses, and I will happy to wear them for you, all the time, from now on!"

** Ping! **

I sighed as I finally got it right and a surge of satisfaction coursed through me. Tom returned to playing with my breasts and nipples and soon had me squirming with desire. Gosh I was horny!

"So, skirts and dresses all the time," said Tom. "I guess that means you'll no longer be wearing pants or slacks anymore."

"I guess not!" I said, brightly. I was concentrating on my pleasure now. Getting closer...

"Well, since you don't need them anymore, why don't you donate them to charity?"

"Of course, Tom!" I said. "Whatever you think is best!" I was so focused on the pleasure radiating from my tits that I was only half-listening.

"Wonderful! So, after this session, I will expect you to gather up all of your pants, slacks, trousers, whatever. And while we're at it, you

might as well gather up all your old socks, T-shirts, men's shirts and all of your old men's underwear as well. Don't you agree?"

"Of course, Tom! Anything you say." My hips were thrusting forward. So close...!

"Do you promise?"

"I promise!" I said. Just a little bit more...

Tom stopped.

"Ahhnnnggg!" I groaned, frustrated.

"That's my horny little minx," Tom laughed. "But seriously, you need to listen carefully. When we're done here, you need to go through your apartment and bag up all of the clothes you'll never be using again. Your pants, socks, T-shirts, men's dress shirts, men's shirts, men's underwear... anything that you know I wouldn't want you to wear. Will you do that?"



"Yes, Tom. Yes," I gasped, panting.

"Do you promise?"

I reached for my breasts to finish the job.

"Hands behind your back!" Tom barked. I quickly obeyed as if I had been slapped.

"Please!" I whined, desperate, hips and breasts thrusting forward, begging for his attention.

"No. Not until you promise."

Get rid of all my pants? T-shirts? Men's clothing? I tried to think of what that would mean. They were just clothes, right? I hated them all anyway. I could buy new ones, right?

"Yes! I promise!" I said, desperate for his attention. "Anything you want. Please..."

** Ping! **

"That's my horny sweetheart," Tom said. "I really can make you do anything I want, can't I? All I have to do is play with your nipples."

"Yes, oh yes," I moaned, catatonic, as he returned to grasping my breasts and pinching my nipples.

"Oh! Tom! Yes!! Thannnnk Youuuuu!" I shrieked, grunting and twitching.

* * *

I put down the goggles and just sat there, gasping, spent. My panties were wet again <*blush*>.

Only gradually did the enormity of what I had promised start to come to me.

All of my pants? All of my slacks? Some of my new pants I really liked. And all of my old clothes?

** Bee-deep **

I picked up my cell phone. A text message from the clinic!

Donation truck scheduled for pickup at 8:30pm.

Oh gosh. That was just two and a half hours away.

* * *

Do you know how many clothes you have? You might be amazed. I know I was.

First, I went through my closets, pulling out old dress shirts, polos, long-sleeve shirts, jeans, khakis, suits (2), tuxedo (1), blazers, sweaters, hoodies, short-sleeve shirts, cold-weather jackets, rain-coats... and I threw it all into a massive pile in the middle of the bedroom.

Wow, it was a lot.

Next was the dresser. Briefs, T-shirts, undershirts, jock straps, tube socks, athletic socks, dress socks, boxers, swim trunks, male pajamas... it all joined the pile.

Then there were unpacked boxes of clothes from the move. More of the same. I didn't even bother to sort through them.

Finally, the front closet. More coats, jackets, and sweaters.

I folded things as much as possible, filling up empty boxes and plastic bags. The sheer volume was impressive.

"My name is Joe, I'm the director of the lighthouse shelter," the nice man from the donation center introduced himself. He was astonished by the amount of clothes. "Thank you so much!" he said, with enthusiasm. "This is exactly what we need! A wide variety of clothes in good condition - and the coats and jackets will be incredibly helpful!"

"You're welcome," I said, standing by helplessly as he and a burly worker from the shelter carried everything out of the apartment and down to the truck.

"Thank you, Ma'am, and here's your receipt." Joe shook my hand as I saw him to the door.

Initially I was flustered at being called "Ma'am". *That* was weird.

But then I was struck with the enormity of what had just happened. All of my old male clothing was gone. Worse, all of my new pants were also gone. No more socks. No more flats (!!)

I walked into my (now mostly empty) closet and sank to the floor, in shock. Hanging on the closet rods around me were the only clothes I now owned: skirts, blouses, and dresses. There was nothing else in the apartment now. If I wanted to go to work, it would be in a dress or a skirt. If I wanted to leave the apartment to go shopping, I would have to put on heels and stockings. If it was cold, there was a puffy pink

jacket I could wear. I kept a pair of leg warmers.

I felt... weird. Cut off. My security blanket had been removed. Now I was forced to wear skirts, stockings and high heels, every day... all the time. Whether I wanted to or not.

I was now *exactly* the kind of girl who wore skirts and dresses. I no longer had a choice.

* * *

The next couple of weeks went by and the modification computer seemed to be stuck. It kept repeating past scenarios and there was nothing new. I was getting close to the 9-month mark. Is it possible I was almost finished?

I spent an enormous amount of time obsessing about who my perfect mate might be. What would she look like? What would she wear?

The modification program had gone to enormous lengths to help me "see her point of view," which made sense, I guess. I couldn't wait to talk to her about clothes, or hair styles or makeup. I was looking forward to finally going shopping with someone, rather than always going to the department store on my own.

Who was she??

* * *

Chapter 10

"Hey there, I'm here for a meeting with Benjamin Wilson."

"Of course," I said, my patter now well-rehearsed. "Sign in here," I pointed to the signup sheet and then looked up.

Oh no... it can't be...

It was Tom.



The virtual Tom from the modification program was now standing right in front of me, as real as life.

"Are you okay?" he asked, looking down at me with a curious smile.

"I... you just..." I tried to speak but only a choked strangling sound

came out. I took a few breaths to settle my nerves. "You look like someone I know," I finally got out.

"Oh! Someone nice, I hope."

"Oh yes, Tom!" I said, cheerfully. "Someone very nice!" I winced at how like a vapid teenager I sounded.

"How did you know my name?"

"I... uh..." I looked down at the visitor's register, and there it was: Thomas Donaldson. Oh my goodness... his name was Tom, too? "What a coincidence!" I said, trying to cover. My friend's name is Tom!"

"And your name is...?"

"Oh! Where are my manners? I'm..."

I hesitated. What name should I give him?

"I'm Melissa," I held out my hand and we shook.

And you know, that was the first time, since I became the receptionist, that anyone had ever asked for my name. It wasn't until later that I reflected on how strange that was, and how it spoke well of Tom.

"A pleasure to meet you, Melissa," said Tom.

His hand was warm and friendly. I almost didn't let go.

"Let me show you to Ben's office," I said, getting up, my skirts twirling around me as I led him down the hall.

* * *

"Jesus, Mary and Joseph!" I swore, once I got back to my desk. "It's the actor who posed for the part of 'Tom' on my modification program!" was my first thought.

What must he think of me? I fretted. I had just completely made a fool of myself by offering to fetch coffee.

"Coffee?" Ben asked, looking at me strangely. "You've never offered to fetch coffee before."

"I... well... I just thought I should," I said. "After all, I'm the receptionist, and shouldn't I be fetching coffee? Ben, Tom? Would you like some coffee?"

"Uh... okay," said Ben, with a wry grin, looking first at Tom, then at me and then back at Tom. "Black. Tom?"

"That would be wonderful!" Tom gave me a warm smile which pierced my heart. "I'll take mine with just milk. Or cream."

"Coming right up!"

I fetched the coffee and then fussed around Ben's office neatening up things and hanging up coats until Ben told me, point blank, to leave. Returning to my desk, my face flamed beet red. What was wrong with me? Why was I being so... so...

... so like a schoolgirl with a crush, I realized.

'Gosh darn it, Melissa!' I told myself. 'Stop this! You are a computer programmer with a college degree. You are not some bubble headed ditz!'

I resolved to be more professional. I turned back to my computer, intent on finishing the travel arrangements for the all-hands meeting.

But it didn't work. Oh my god, I was so fidgety! I couldn't stop thinking about what a silly I was, offering to fetch coffee and hanging around Ben's office like some sort of groupie!

What must Tom think of me? And why did I care so much?

* * *

Somehow, I got through the next two hours. It felt like two weeks.

Finally I heard Ben and Tom come down the hallway, and then I saw his face light up when he saw me, and then suddenly everything was okay. The sense of relief that flowed through me was immense.

Everything was okay. I hadn't totally ruined his impression of me by being such a ninny.

"Have a good meeting?" I asked, with my most interested and friendly expression.

"Wonderful!" said Tom, as he found his entry on the visitor's log and signed himself out. "Ben is really great. He's agreed to participate in our charity campaign. So I expect you'll see more of me."

"Oh, I really hope so." The words slipped out of my mouth before I could reel them back in. Internally, I cringed. Not again!

"I..." Tom stopped, glancing away, and then back to me. He looked a little flushed too! "Would you..." he stopped. He seemed to have a hard time talking. That was weird. "I mean.... I would really like it if we..." he paused again, "could... if you want..."

What the heck? Was he trying to ask me out? Suddenly my heart went out to him and all I wanted to do was to help him in any way that I could!

"Would you like to go out for a cup of coffee or something?" I offered.

"Yes!" Tom said, visibly relieved. "That's exactly what I was trying to say! Thank you!"

"I would love to," I said, sadly, "but I need to stay here and watch out for--"

"Hey Melissa!"

"Jake?" I looked over at the scruffy administrator, astonished.

"Yeah. I'm here to install some patches on your computer. Is now a good time?"

"Well, I..."

"Ben said it would be okay. He said you could just take a break for an hour."

"Ben? Really? He said that?"

"Yeah, he did." Jake looked from me to Tom (who had a delighted grin on his face), and then back to me again. Why was he smirking like that??
"So, is now a good time?"

"Sure," I said, grabbing my purse. "Now is the perfect time."

* * *

Oh my god, it was just like being in one of the modification computer scenarios, only this time it was real. We chatted like old friends from the very first, I found his stories to be honestly funny, and my responses were natural and friendly and interested and it was... wonderful.



And I found out so much about him! At the time, Tom was the administrator for the local chapter of this national charity, and was responsible for finding new companies to join the annual campaign. And

it was such important work! He described the things they do for homeless families and foster children, and I was just amazed at his passion.

"And have you ever worked as an actor?" I asked.

"An actor?" Tom asked, looking at me curiously. "No."

"Really? You've never worked as a model? Done any sort of video or photo shoots? Maybe for a computer games company?"

"No," Tom laughed. "Never. Why would you ask that?"

"Are you sure?"

"Oh Melissa, I think I would know if I had worked as a model before," Tom laughed even harder.

"I just thought," I blushed. "Well, you *are* really gorgeous. Maybe you should consider it? You would be amazing! I would buy anything from you!"

Oh drat, there I go again! Melissa! Stop that!

"You are so sweet, Melissa," Tom said. "But enough about me. Tell me more about you!"

And so I told him about where I grew up and my brothers and sisters, and where I went to school.

"And you actually have a master's in computer science?" Tom asked.
"That's impressive!"

"I know, but I've been filling in as the receptionist lately, you know, just to help out."

"What do you like better? Computer programming or being a receptionist?"

It's funny that no one had ever asked me that question before.

"You know," I said with dawning realization, "I think I actually prefer being a receptionist. I like taking care of the office and the employees. And I can't imagine sitting at a computer for hours on end just working by myself. I guess I'm more of a social animal than I thought I was."

"I guess you are," said Tom, his eyes twinkling. "So hey, I should probably head back to work, and your hour is almost up--"

"So soon?" I looked into his eyes. God he was so handsome. The time had gone by in an instant!

"Can I..." Tom was doing his bashful thing again. "I mean... could I... would you mind if we..." It was so cute!!

I reached into my purse where I kept a pen and pad of paper handy.

"Here's my number," I said, writing it down. "I would love to see you again."

* * *

It was like floating on a cloud. Oh gosh, Tom was so amazing. Like, a *thousand* times better than the virtual Tom.

I got back to the office and there was Jake and Lily and Amber and Ben, all chatting. As I stepped in the front door they all stopped and applauded.

"What was that for?"

"Well, hello!" said Lily, in an insinuating voice.

"How is *To-om*?" asked Amber, her voice doing a sing-song and turning Tom's name into two syllables.

"Oh, he's amazing!" I gushed, then immediately turned beet red. "I mean, he's okay."

"I bet," said Ben. "I bet he's *real* okay."

"Ben!" I said, shocked. "Stop that! We just went out for coffee. Nothing more."

"For now," said Lily, smirking. After some more teasing they finally dispersed and left me alone.

Of course I thought about Tom all day. It seemed like I couldn't *not* think about him. But all of my thoughts were hazy and tingly, like being caught in some sort of electrical force-field. It wasn't until that night, I was cooking a light meal for dinner, that I finally snapped out

of it.

"What is *wrong* with you, Melissa!" I admonished myself, slapping myself on the wrist. "Stop thinking about Tom! He's just some guy who happens to look like your virtual Tom who came to the office. Just stop!"

And then I sat down in the kitchen chair, stunned.

I had called myself 'Melissa', I realized. Inside my head. When had that started?

* * *

I look back on this period, and I think: 'I was such an idiot!' But you have to understand, I was not thinking clearly.

Tom texted me later that day ('loved coffee! you're awesome! :-) '), and then called the next day and invited me to the flower show that weekend, and of course, I said "That sounds wonderful, Tom! I love flowers!"

Did I really just say that I 'love flowers?' Why would I say that? I mean, sure, my character in the modification program loves flowers. But do I love flowers? I didn't think so.

Regardless, that weekend Tom picked me up at my apartment and we had an absolutely lovely time. We walked all over the flower show, sampled the food trucks, did the wine tastings, and *of course* Tom bought me a huge bouquet of flowers for my apartment.

And at some point, we were walking across parking lot from one part of the show to the other, and sure, I mean, we were walking closely, we had been *touching* each other a lot all day long...

... you know what I mean. Tom would put his hand on my back, or I would hold on to his arm, or we would sit close together on the bench, our legs touching and then Tom would put his arm around me and I would snuggle in closer...

... *anyway*, we were walking across the parking lot, like I mentioned, and walking closely, and I had just touched his arm to make some point in some discussion we were having (I think it was something about the beauty of ephemeral things - did that make them more beautiful?) and then his hand just slipped down and into mine and OH MY GOD WE WERE HOLDING HANDS!!!!

I was holding hands with Tom!! A man!

It was like Tom and I completed an electric circuit and a current of energy was generated that raced through my body. I swear my heart skipped, like, two beats, and it took a good 30 seconds before I could breathe again.

And I was like, 'Melissa! You're holding hands with a man! You and Tom are holding hands!!!'

And his hand was so warm and soft, and he held mine so gently -- you could just tell, even though we weren't looking at each other, that this was a big deal for him too. You could just feel it, that tingle which ran between us.

And I looked up and into his eyes and he looked back into mine, and the world just seemed to slow to a crawl, like someone had hit the "high speed camera mode" and I was experiencing each and every one of 480 frames per second *individually*, each granule of time as a beautiful moment to be cherished and enjoyed to the fullest. And Tom smiled and I smiled too and he squeezed my hand and I squeezed his back and it was Perfect.

And when the day was over, Tom drove me back to my apartment and parked in the visitors' space and walked around the car to open the door for me (and, just like in my scenarios, I waited patiently for him to do so) and then I pivoted around and stepped out of the car, my skirts floating around me as I stepped onto my high heels, the garters pulling at my stockings as I stepped out of the car, and as I rose up, accepting Tom's hand for help, Tom holding the bouquet with his other hand (he had fetched it from the back seat), and I stepped up and there was Tom and he was standing so close, and he just smelled amazing, so manly and clean and wonderful and our noses were just fractions of an inch away and I used a finger to brush aside a lock of hair that had gotten into my eyes and then I looked up and I think I was surprised, in a nice way, that his body was so close to mine, so close that I could almost feel his body like some sort of vibrating field which felt warm and comforting and I looked up into his eyes (he's about three inches taller than me) and he looked down and we were so close and just like that, for some reason, I just opened my mouth and moved forward and up and he opened his mouth and he moved down slightly and just like that we were kissing...!

"HMMMMM...." I hummed as my body leaned into his, my nipples hard in the cool night air pressing up against his chest, feeling his warmth as we touched. So much nicer than the virtual Tom! I thought to myself, as I felt the slight scratchiness of his beard and felt the soft, wet warmth of his lips on mine, my nose brushing against his cheek.



I closed my eyes, enjoying the closeness and the warm, human intimacy.

And I could have happily stayed like that forever, but then I felt his hand slip around my waist and pull me in closer, and somehow my mouth just naturally parted with a satisfied sigh and then we were kissing with tongue!

'Melissa!' I thought to myself, looking down from some external vantage point, 'you are kissing a man!'

'And enjoying it, too', I realized. And what was that I felt against my hip? Oh my god, he's enjoying it too!

And so I pressed in a bit closer, putting one arm around his hip and placing the second up at the back of his neck, making sure it was clear that 'yes' I was enjoying this and 'please don't stop' as this magic bubble of intimacy surrounded us and the world seemed to stop and hang in mid-air for the longest time.

Finally, Tom broke the kiss and pulled back just a fraction of an inch and I noticed his eyes were moist.

"Perfect," he whispered, with a long breath of pleasure.

"What was that?" I asked, not entirely certain of what he had just said, or not entirely certain what it meant.

"Would you like to go out again?" Tom asked.

"Oh yes, Tom," I breathed. "I had the most wonderful time today."

"Perfect," Tom said again, pulling me close and we kissed again, this time shorter and less intense, more of a desert than a main course. And then we parted and I gave him one last hug and a peck on the cheek and then floated away, clicking on the sidewalk on my high heels, swinging my purse back and forth with one hand and holding the bouquet in the other, walking up the stairs to my apartment, feeling radiant like an angel.

* * *

When I reached my apartment I pattered around, floating on a cloud. I put the flowers into a vase, I cleaned up a bit, I thought about how I might make things a bit prettier with a nice painting or a more vibrant color on the wall. I think I may have actually whistled, grinning with pleasure. 'He likes me,' I kept thinking to myself. 'He really likes me!'

At some point I looked over at the modification computer.

"I guess I better go and do my sessions," I said to myself, idly.

Funny, but I hadn't used it that morning, I was so focused on getting ready for my day with Tom. I suppose I really should call it a 'date', shouldn't I? Anyway, it was strange because usually when I don't use the computer I get jittery and anxious and I can't wait to sit down to do my session...

...but not this morning. I just waltzed out of the apartment looking forward to spending time with Tom and I never gave it a second thought.

Anyway, more out of a sense of duty rather than a real need, I sat down at the computer and turned it on.

** Program Complete **

** Congratulations! You have finished the program. **

** You will be contacted shortly by your perfect mate. **

** Thank you for using Perfect Mate Match, Incorporated. **

** Please tell us about your experience! Click [_here_](#) to take a survey.
**

I sat looking at the computer, stunned.

I had forgotten all about my perfect mate!

My heart began to pound as I felt a full blown panic attack rising up.

'What will I tell Tom???'

* * *

I was so distressed and nauseous all that night that I called in sick the next day.

Oh, if only I hadn't accepted his offer to attend the flower show! I kept thinking, over and over.

What an idiot I was. Didn't I realize that my perfect mate was out

there? After all the money I spent (over a quarter of a million dollars!) and here I put it all in jeopardy just because some random guy who just happened to look a lot like the man in my virtual computer scenarios (!!) shows up and asks me out to a flower show. And here I was risking the future happiness of three people, my perfect mate (whoever she was!) and Tom and me! And all for what? Some school-girl crush on a guy I just met? A GUY?

But when I thought about Tom, and when I thought about telling him, I just got sick to my stomach, and I mean literally. I spent a lot of time in the bathroom, alternately crying and throwing up.

Finally, after I was completely cried out I just lay on the cool tile floor of the bathroom and I was finally able to decide what to do.

I had to break up with Tom.

It was the only right thing to do. After all, when my perfect mate showed up, that would be it. There is no way that Tom could compete with someone that I had been specifically modified to be perfect for (and who had been modified to be perfect for me!).

I decided it would have to be soon, so I texted Tom and invited him over that evening, 'to talk'.

I would tell him in person.

* * *

Chapter 11

Early that evening I let Tom into my apartment and immediately showed him to the sofa. I barely glanced at him, afraid that if I did I might lose my nerve.

I took a deep breath.

"Tom, I have to break up with you."

"What? Are you kidding me? Why?"

I looked up and his face was stricken, which nearly killed me.

"Because," I explained, "I'm not supposed to be with you. I'm supposed to be with someone else."

"Who?" Tom said, concerned. "What's going on, Melissa? Are you in some sort of trouble? Tell me."

I sighed.

"I signed up for 'Perfect Mate Matcher'," I explained, "and I've been running the modification program for the last 9 months and it just finished last night. I'm sorry I didn't tell you sooner! My perfect mate will be introducing herself to me any day now, and when that happens, I won't have any choice but to spend my life with her. After all, I've been programmed to be her perfect mate. I'm sorry, Tom, but I have to break it off before that happens and we both get our hearts broken!!"

Tom looked at me for the longest time, puzzled and with just the hint of a disbelieving smirk at the edge of his mouth.

"I..." he started, now grinning openly, "you mean... you don't know?"

"I don't know what?" I asked, annoyed that he was taking this so lightly.

Tom started laughing in earnest.

"You mean, you *really* don't know?"

"Stop laughing!" I demanded, incensed. "I don't know what?"

Tom stifled his laughs, but couldn't dampen the mirth in his eyes.

"Melissa," he held my hands in his. "*I'm* your perfect mate. It's me."

"NO!" I shouted, abruptly pulling away and standing up. "But... you're a guy!"

"Well, yeah," he said, stating the obvious. " But Melissa, it's true. I'm 89423132. We matched within a modification distance of 87.2%. It's me. How could you not know?"

"But you *can't* be my match! You just can't!"

"Why not?"

"B-b-because," I said, feeling terrible. "Because I'm a man!"

"Really?" he asked. "Are you sure?"

I looked at Tom, astonished. He was taking this far too well. Did he... did he know?

"Of course I'm sure," I said. "My name is Melissa. I mean, *PAUL*. My name is Paul! I signed up for PMM to find a perfect mate and he -- I mean *SHE* -- is still out there!"

"You really think you're a man? Have you looked in the mirror lately?"

"I know, I know! I had just assumed that it was what my perfect mate wanted, someone pretty and feminine with a high cute voice--"

"It *is* what I want."

"Stop that! You are not my perfect mate!"

"Yes, I am," Tom said, defiant. "Now sit, Melissa," he commanded.

"Yes Tom," I said meekly, obediently sinking down.

Tom held out his hands and waited patiently. After a minute or so, I placed my hands in his. My heart thumped hard in my chest.

"Melissa," Tom said softly. "Look at me."

I looked into his eyes. Oh... all of the feelings from the past week came rushing up.

"Oh, Tom... Is it really true...?" I asked.

"Melissa, do you trust me?" he asked.

"Yes, Tom, I trust you. I trust you completely and absolutely and with all my heart and soul."

Tom smiled. It was almost as if I could hear the ** Ping! ** of the modification computer in my head for a good response.

"Then trust me when I say this: You are my perfect mate."

"Really?" I asked in a small, scared voice.

"Yes, really. I knew it the second we met, when you first looked into my eyes. From that instant, I knew we were destined to be together... forever."

"That would be so wonderful..." I sighed. "But--"

"Do you want to spend your life with me?"

"Oh, yes, Tom. I want nothing more than to spend my life with you," I said. "These last few days have been amazing. *You're* amazing. I don't want anything more than to just curl up in your arms... forever."

"Good. That's my girl," Tom said, with a warm smile. I felt a tingle run through me.

"But--"

"Hold on," Tom interrupted me. "There is something that is very important you need to know."

"What is that, Tom?" I asked, nervously.

"And this is critical. Are you ready?"

Oh no... I took a couple of deep breaths to steady my heart.

"Okay," I said. "I'm ready."

"Very good. When I first signed up for the program, I asked a lot of questions about the modification program. I read the research and the patent applications. And while the program is a very powerful program, it has limits. Oh sure, it can change your likes and dislikes, it can emphasize certain parts of your personality and de-emphasize others, but there one important thing it cannot do."

Tom paused.

"What is that, Tom?" I asked, trembling.

"It cannot change who you are. It cannot change your core identity."

"But that makes no sense," I argued. "It changed me from 'Paul' to 'Melissa'. Of course it can change who you are."

"No it can't," Tom insisted. "I've done the research. It cannot change who you really are."

"So what's that mean?" I asked, suddenly frightened.

I felt like I was sitting inside a courtyard, and the brick walls around me were starting to tremble.

"Things like core identity - are you man or are you a woman - those are ingrained at a very early age. By the time you're 3 years old, you are who you are, and nothing, no amount of therapy and no fancy conditioning program can ever change it."

"So... am I Paul, or Melissa?" I asked.

Tom put his hands to either side of my face and drew me in, placing a gentle, caring kiss on my lips.

"Ohhhh..." I sighed, melting.

"You tell me," said Tom. "Should I call you 'Paul'? Or 'Melissa'?"

I looked into Tom's eyes. I felt his hand on my cheek. I felt *myself*, wearing a skirt and blouse, dressed in finery underneath, my feet in heels, with a little light perfume, skirts gathered around my legs, sitting on a sofa, holding hands with a man... and not just any man, but

with Tom. All of these sensory feelings were flowing through me, and at that precise moment I accepted them as mine. This was me.

And so, there could only be one possible answer.

"Melissa," I said, sealing my fate. "I'm Melissa."

I shiver ran through me. There was no going back now. I would be Melissa, forever. I would be wearing skirts and dresses, and putting on makeup, and walking in stockings and heels, and dating men, and cooking and caring forever.

"I am Melissa," I said, softly, in awe. "My name is Melissa. And you are..."

"I'm Tom," he said. "Pleased to meet you, Melissa."

"Pleased to meet you too, Tom. But that's not what I meant. If I'm Melissa, then you must be..."

Tom waited patiently while I worked it out in my head.

"... then you are my perfect mate," I said, with a sense of awe. A surge of relief and pleasure flow through me. "I have a... a..."

Another long pause.

"... I have a... boyfriend!" I said, feeling wonderful tingles all over my body. "I'm dating a boy!! And his name is Tom!"

"Oh, so we're boyfriend-girlfriend already?" he teased. "Isn't that a bit sudden?"

"Oh, hush up and kiss me!"

* * *

"It's funny how something as little as being born with a penis can set you on the wrong path in life," I said.

It was hours later. I had whipped up a creamy basil pasta for Tom and now we were back on the sofa snuggled up and finishing up the wine.

"Well, I for one am glad you didn't figure it out sooner," Tom smiled. "Because if you had, then we would never have met!"

"Amen to that."

Tom's hand drifted down... to my front.

"What are you doing, Tom?" I asked, coquettishly.

"Oh, nothing..." He lightly ran his fingertips over my breasts, alternating between them.

"Ohhh..." I sighed, laying back to give him better access. "That feels so good. But you know what? I wish I could go and do the entire modification program over again."

"Why is that?" Tom gently undid a button of my blouse (the fourth button, because I always leave the top three un-done to show more cleavage). The shirt gapped open, exposing my bra to his hungry eyes.

"I think I would enjoy them better and pay more attention if I knew I was going to be a woman, full time," I said. "I feel cheated, almost, like I couldn't fully enjoy them because I had this massive hang-up."

"That you thought you were still a man," Tom unbuttoned another button.

"Well, yeah," I squirmed as he pushed aside the halves of my blouse, exposing my push-up bra completely.

"How about this: Let's re-do the scenarios together. In real life. Would that make it better?" Tom gently stroked and squeezed my sensitive mounds, sending sparks of desire shooting through me.

"Oh! What a wonderful idea!" I said, moaning and arching my back. "Please, Tom, can we do that? Pretend that we've just met--"

"Which we have, technically."

"--and go on dates and be boyfriend and girlfriend for a while until we really get to know each other?"

"That sounds wonderful," Tom said, leaning over and kissing me.

"But if we do," I said, grasping his hand. "I want you to know, I think I'm the kind of girl who waits until she gets married to have sex."

Tom looked at me, surprised, but delighted.

"I wouldn't have it any other way," he said, with a broad smile. "But what about, you know, second base?"

"Oh, yes..." I moaned, releasing his hand. "Please."



* * *

Chapter 12

And I'm sure you want me to tell you what happened next!

Well, Tom unbuttoned the rest of my blouse and then squeezed and manipulated my tits and then flicked and pinched the nipples, and Oh My God it was so much better than in the program. And I was just about to abandon my 'no sex before marriage' vow (after just 10 minutes!) when he lifted me up to face him and I sat in his lap, facing him, as we kissed and dry-humped and he manhandled my tits (and I stroked his back and neck) until we both had accidents in our underwear.

And although I didn't say it out-loud, at that moment I looked into his eyes and I knew it, deep down. If there was ever any doubt, it was now removed. Tom was my soul mate and life partner and I would do anything to make his life one of happiness and accomplishment.

And after that, we dated. And it was awesome.

"You're so much more three-dimensional than Virtual-Reality Tom," I said, one day, as we lay together in the park, enjoying a picnic of cold fried chicken and macaroni salad that I had brought.

"Well, I hope so!" Tom laughed.

"No, I'm serious," I said. "You're just so much more tactile - I love touching you, and you smell awesome, and you don't respond in the way I expect. You're nicer and you listen."

"Remember that the modification program is doing what it needs to do to put you in the right frame of mind," Tom pointed out. "It's an unequal relationship by definition. It is the teacher, and you are the student."

"I guess that's right," I said, intertwining my fingers with his.

"Anyway, I just wanted to say, I love 3D-Tom so much better than VR-Tom!"

"I should hope so!" he said, putting his arms around me and grabbing my ass, making me squeal in delight.

* * *

Also during that time, our 'dating period', there was a lot of coming out to everyone.

The reactions were interesting and unpredictable. My ex-wife said, "Well, that explains a lot." My Mom just burst into tears and wondered if it was something she had done wrong while I was in-utero. My Dad just grunted and said "whatever spins your boat".

Gee thanks, Dad.

And my older sister said "about time!"

"What do you mean?" I asked.

"Don't you remember? You used to play with my dolls all the time. And when Mom would take them away, you would pitch a temper tantrum and yell 'why can't I be a mommy? I wanna be a mommy!'"

"No, I don't remember," I said, astonished. "Really? I did that?"

"Oh yeah. It was a constant battle. Mom always said how grateful she was that you grew out of it, but I always thought it would come back. It just took a lot longer than I expected."

Coming out to the office was easy, after all, they all knew I was transgender before I did! But I did get a nice birthday cake which said "Happy 0th Birthday, Melissa!" with a big "0" as a candle and everyone sang me "happy birthday" and everything.

And when they sang: "How 0-old are you? How 0-old are you? How 0-old are yo-ou, Melissa?" I knew how I had to answer.

"I'm Melissa, and I'm just two months old!" I said, grinning.

They are such nerds, I love it.

* * *

"Well, Melissa's not coming back," said Ben, one day.

"What do you mean?" I asked, miffed. "I'm right here."

"Oh, I meant the *old* Melissa," Ben laughed. "Her maternity leave is over and she's decided to become a full-time Mom. So-o, that means we'll be interviewing for a new receptionist-slash-office manager and then

you'll be able to finally go back to being a senior developer. You've been such a trooper about this."

"Oh," I said. "You're welcome. But Ben..."

"Yes, Melissa?"

I took a deep swallow.

"Maybe I could... I mean, would it be okay if..."

I looked at the ground and took a few deep breaths.

"I want to be the receptionist, full time," I said.

"What?" Ben said, shocked. "Really? But you're a senior developer!"

"I know," I said. "But I really like being a receptionist so much more. I like the eight-hour days. I like not having to worry about deadlines. I like talking to everyone in the office and looking after them. I like making sure the kitchen is clean and arranging birthday celebrations. It really is so much more fun being the receptionist than I ever had as a senior developer."

"You'll have to take a pay cut," said Ben. "We can't afford to pay our receptionist on a senior developer's salary."

"I understand."

In the end the pay cut was steeper than expected. I was now earning just 45% of my original salary. This meant the days of unrestrained shopping for clothes were over.

* * *

And so I spent my spare time learning how to manage my life on a strict budget. I saved and scrimped, I clipped coupons, and I became an avid shopper at all of the local thrift stores (hunting for clothes I could repurpose).

And you know what? I found that I could manage quite well, and even save a little along the way.

"Would you like your own sewing machine?" my Mom asked, one day when Tom and I were visiting.

"Really?" I asked, thrilled.

"Sure! I never use it. You might as well have it."

"Could you..."

"Yes?" Mom asked, her voice gently encouraging.

"Could you teach me how to sew? I'd like to learn how to make my own clothes."

"Oh...!" she said, pulling out a tissue.

"Mom?"

"It's just..." she dabbed at her eyes. "It's just nice to have another daughter," she said. "And yes, I would absolutely *love* to spend time with you, teaching you how to sew. I was really an accomplished seamstress in my day, and I know you can be too."

And so I spent occasional evenings and weekend afternoons with Mom, learning how to sew. I had never really spent that much time with my Mom before, but now I was full of questions! Question about family recipes, clothing repair, cleaning techniques, dealing with husbands (*blush!*), organizing the household, and dealing with children.

Essentially, I rebooted my relationship with her, and my sister too, for that matter. We became friends, for the first time. It was almost like I had reacquired a family, and it was wonderful.

* * *

So, just a couple more things before my story is finished.

First, I have to tell you about the proposal! It was very traditional. After six months of dating, even I was wondering: when is he going to propose? And then finally, on a beautiful Friday evening, Tom took me out to the fanciest restaurant in the city and then dropped to one knee and proposed.

"Melissa," he said looking up at me (I was hyperventilating), "ever since the first day I set eyes on you I knew instantly that you were my perfect companion in every way, and these last six months have only confirmed that initial impression. And now, if you'll have me, I pledge

to hold you and take care of you and honor you and love you for as long as we both shall live. Will you be my wife?"

"Oh, Tom, YES!" I squealed - so loud that (*blush*) I made something of a scene. "I love you so much!" I cried, accepting the ring and pulling him into a hug as the entire restaurant stood up and applauded!

It was... bliss.

And then, after the proposal, I invited him over to my apartment.

"I was thinking..." I said, as we snuggled and kissed on the sofa.

"Thinking what?" Tom asked, curious.

"Well, you know, since you're my *fiancé* - well, that's an entirely different category of relationship... do you know what I mean?"

"Uh..." Tom said, his face curious. "Not really."

I rolled my eyes.

"What I'm trying to say is," I reached down and placed my hand on the bulge outlined in his pants, "that while I want to wait until our honeymoon to have sex... maybe there's something else we could do?"

"What did you have in mind?"

"Well..." I got onto my knees on the floor in front of him and then slowly undid his belt, unzipped his pants and then pulled them apart. "Maybe I could..." I added, teasing. I took the waistband of his boxers and lowered it down, so his hard (and oh it has such a nice shape and it is so heavenly!) penis sprung forth, "... I could give this guy a little, you know, some *personal* attention?" I said, first stroking it with my hand, and then leaning down and kissing--

>>>>

"EWWW! MOM!" Katy interrupted me.

"What?" I asked. I did my best to look serious.

"No one wants to hear about their parents having sex! Please!"

"But it's a perfectly normal, human function," I reasoned. "It's the

sort of thing that couples everywhere do with each other when they're young and horny and in love--"

"STOP! I'm begging you!!"

"Listen, young lady, you were the one who was so insistent that I tell the story of how your father and I met."

"I know. But please, can we just skip forward?"

"Okay sweetheart. Since you said 'please'."

<<<<<

Anyway, after the announcement of our engagement, literally the next day, I got a call from the clinic.

"It's time for your GRS," they said.

"GRS?"

"Gender Reassignment Surgery."

"Oh!"

It turned out that my GRS was already paid for as part of the package. And so I had to take about a month off of work for the surgery and the recovery. Tom was **amazing**. He stayed with me in the hospital every day and made sure I took all of my medicines and helped me around the apartment after I got released.

This was when I was super thankful for the 'no sex before marriage' rule, let me tell you! First, things were so painful down there, there was no touching at all. And then, well I had to use my dilators and make sure everything was all stretched out nice and proper. And even though the clinic was super up-to-date with all of the latest surgery techniques, it really does take at least 3 months to heal, and you know, re-learn how to get sexual pleasure with your new equipment, after all, it's an entirely new way to reach orgasm--

>>>>

"Mom...!" Katy said, a desperate tone of warning in her voice.

"Now what?"

"Please, can we avoid talking about your sex organs?"

She's so cute when she blushes like that!

"Sorry! It just... well, you know that I have to have 'Mom's special time' every day?"

"Yes...? What about it?"

"Well, that's so I can have some private time to dilate my vagina. I have to do it every day."

"Really?" Katy said, eyes wide. "Every day? Couldn't you just do it at night, before going to bed?"

"I could, but I save my evenings for your father. Of course, sometimes his 'organic dilator' does the job, which is so much more satisfying, because he really stretches me out, nice and deep--"

"Ack! Stop! You just can't seem to help yourself, can you?"

"Oops! Sorry!"

<<<<

It was good that I had the time off, actually, because I needed it to plan the wedding! And it was made all the more difficult because of my Dad, who was being something of a pill.

"I'm not paying for *his* wedding," he said. "I already have to pay for his sister's wedding. He can't just change his gender and expect me to pay for it."

As if it was some sort of choice, changing my gender just so I could get him to pay for the wedding. Really!

And so, Tom and I ended up paying for our own wedding (well, mostly - both his mother and mine slipped us checks under the table). But you know what? That turned out to be so much better because then we could make it exactly what we wanted. Tom, with his great connections in the charitable world, was able to reserve the sculpture garden at a local art museum for the ceremony, and it was amazing. And then we rented a tent and had the reception at his family home.

And the women of both families just rallied around the event and it was just perfect. Tom's mother gave me her wedding dress - an absolutely stunning vintage gown which my Mom and I tailored to fit. And then all of us, and my sister too, cooked all of the food for the reception, it wasn't that hard, really, and we had lamb and a Brussel sprout salad and dauphin potatoes and asparagus - it was all so tasty! So much better than the usual rubbery chicken and over-cooked fish that you normally get.

And then finally, after three months of non-stop 24x7 wedding preparations, it was finally the day. But not before one more surprise.

* * *

"Dad?" I asked, as I waited nervously at the church door for the entrance music. "What are you doing here?"

My Dad, in his standard suit, paused for a maddeningly long time, just staring at the floor.

"Dad?" I asked, gently.

"I know I've been..." he started, then stopped. "I mean, I know you didn't ask but..."

And then he stopped again.

"Dad? Would you like to walk me down the aisle and give me away?" I asked.

He looked up at me, his eyes wet, mouth set in a grimace which told me he was doing his best to hold in the tears, and just nodded.

"It would be an honor," I said, linking my arm in his.



* * *

"I, Melissa Pauline Kelly, take thee, Thomas Jacob Donaldson, to be my wedded Husband, to have and to hold from this day forward, for better for worse, for richer for poorer, in sickness and in health, to love, cherish, and to obey, till death us do part, according to God's holy ordinance; and thereto I give thee my troth."

Yes, it's the traditional, old-fashioned wedding vow, but then I'm a traditional, old-fashioned gal.

Tom's was old fashioned as well:

"I, Thomas Jacob Donaldson, take thee, Melissa Pauline Kelly, to be my wedded Wife, to have and to hold from this day forward, for better for worse, for richer for poorer, in sickness and in health, to love and to cherish, till death us do part, according to God's holy ordinance; and thereto I plight thee my troth."

>>>>

"And then we both said 'I do', and the rest is history."

"Oh, Mom," Katy said. "I'm sorry I called you 'old fashioned'."

"Oh, honey, it's okay. You didn't know. And you were right, besides. I *am* a very old-fashioned girl, and I do take a subservient role in our marriage. Perhaps I'm not the best role model for a young daughter like you, but I hope that I've always encouraged you to be strong, confident, and independent. After all, look at you! Graduating in the top 5th percentile from Columbia law! You're going to be a Supreme Court Justice someday, I just know it."

"But why didn't you tell me sooner?" Katy asked.

"Tell you what?" I asked, honestly confused.

"That you used to be a man? It... it would have explained so much."

"Because I never used to be a man," I explained. "I was always Melissa. It's thanks to your father and PMM that I'm now, on the outside, the woman that I was always meant to be, the woman I always was, on the inside. Melissa."

The End

