

Love & Sex

The writer and her fiancé, Liam Lowery, in New York City.

When **MARISA ARROLL** met an intriguing new guy at her local coffee shop, she had no idea that his life-changing journey would become hers, too

Photograph by Ryan Pfluger

MY SELF-MADE MAN

HAVING LEARNED ALMOST EVERYTHING I know about dating from watching teen dramas like *The O.C.* and *Gossip Girl*, I expected to do some crazy things for love: get wrapped up in a lover's drug-smuggling ring, perhaps, or steal a rival's yacht. But helping my boyfriend in his transition from female to male was not an act of devotion I could ever have anticipated.

I first met Liam in a coffee shop in my Bronx neighborhood three years ago. When he started a casual conversation in line, I was struck by his country-boy charm and cute gap-toothed grin. "What's your name?" I asked. His slow, swaying voice sped up: "Liam, but that's a recent thing because I'm transitioning—I'm transgender. I was born a girl, but I've always known I was a guy. Is that OK?" From looking at him, I never would have known about his recent past. "Of course," I said, posturing behind my liberalism and years of gender studies classes. But I wasn't actually so confident. While I'd met other transgender people, Liam was the first to come out to me directly. I felt like I was handed a live grenade—weren't confessions like that supposed to be explosive?

"How's that going?" I asked. His warm eyes lit up. Apparently, I was trustworthy. He told me the basics: He had never felt like a woman and had never tried to look feminine. In high school, he bulked up his 6'1" frame with weight lifting and diet supplements. He played rough sports, worked construction, and trained his voice to sound deeper. Now that he was an adult, he could finally live as a man. For him, that meant using a new name and wearing a binder—a tight, meshy undershirt—to tamp down his chest. "That's impressive. I can barely commit to a new haircut," I joked. In truth, I was in awe of

