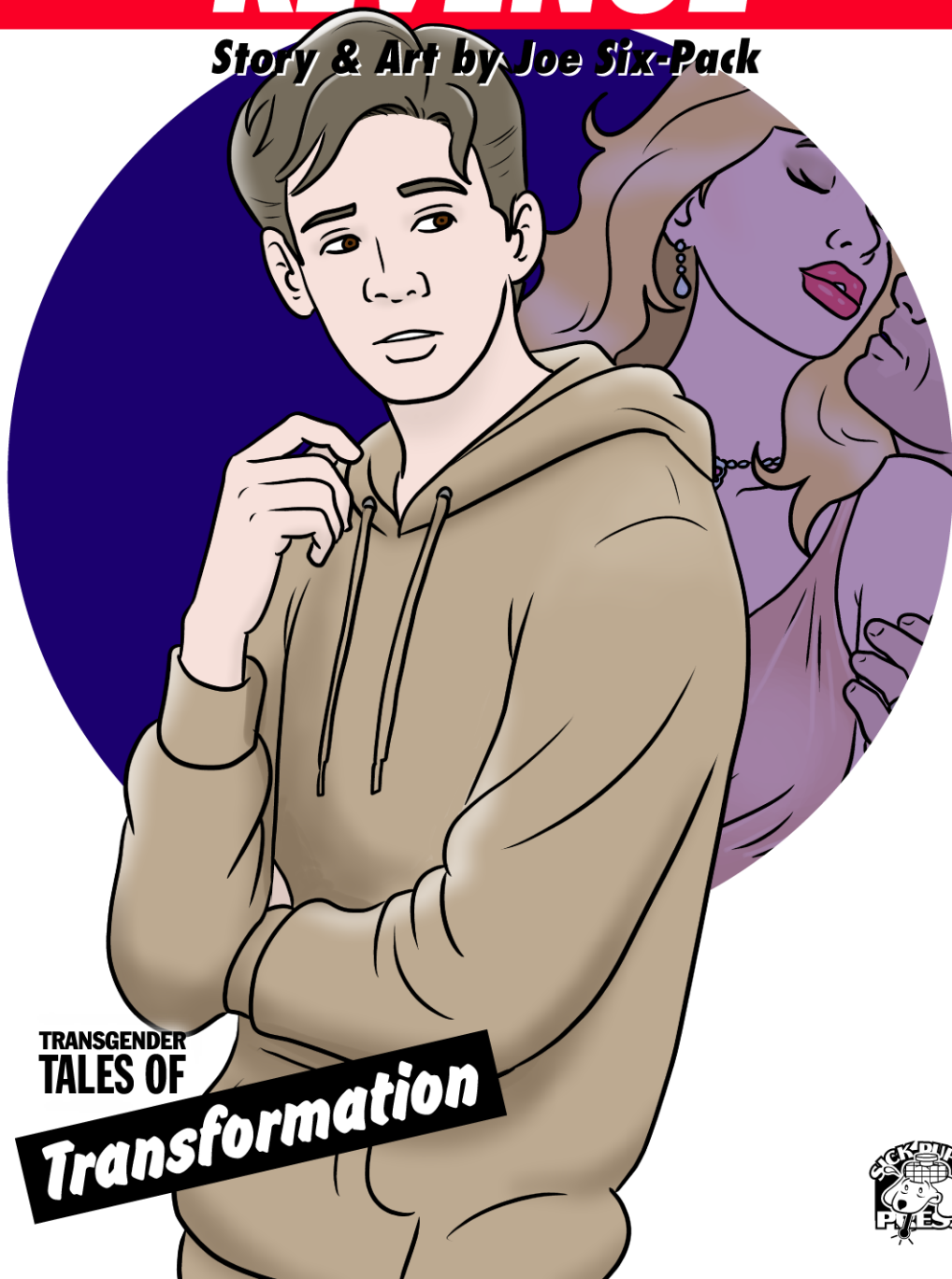


ADULTS ONLY

103 pages 33 illustrations

# HIS PRETTY REVENGE

Story & Art by Joe Six-Pack



TRANSGENDER  
TALES OF

**Transformation**



**J O E   S I X   P A C K**

# ***HIS PRETTY REVENGE***

**Story & Art by Joe Six-Pack**  
**A Tales of Transformation story**



2026 Edition

Design & layout © 2026

Story & Illustrations © 2026 Joe Six-Pack

All rights reserved.

The body text is printed in New Caledonia.

All rights reserved. No part of this publication may be reproduced, stored in or introduced into a retrieval system, or transmitted in any form or by any means (electronic, mechanical, photocopying, recording or otherwise), without the prior written permission of the copyright owner. All characters and situations are fictional.

Printed in the United States of America.

[j6p@sixpacksite.com](mailto:j6p@sixpacksite.com)

[www.sixpacksite.com](http://www.sixpacksite.com)

## HIS PRETTY REVENGE

“Call me Ishmael,” A.J. said to his phone, in a ridiculous accent. “I’m Ishmael. No one named A.J. lives here. Can’t help you.” He ended the call as quickly as he could.

In truth, he was a little astonished his phone was even working. He hadn’t paid the bill in months. What possessed him to actually answer the call was beyond him. He’d been more than willing to let it go to voice mail. The twenty new messages on his phone demanding money was a testament to that. He dropped the phone on the carpet and kicked it away like a curling stone to the other side of the room. He didn’t need these constant reminders.

He went back to his laptop to try and finish the paper he was writing, but so far “The” was the one only word he’d managed to get down. As usual, it was overheating, the keys red hot and getting soft. Any more heat and he’d leave fingerprints molded in them. He closed it and let it cool down, since he didn’t have anything to type anyway. All he could think about was the looming prospect of hearing a series of ‘ka-chunk’ noises, coming from a staple gun being applied to his front door, affixing the eviction notice he’d been expecting for days. That was, if he could hear it over the groans of his stomach.

A.J. walked over to the dwindling 24-pack of ramen cup noodles and plucked another one out. He’d bought it at Costco with a bad check and was down to his last three. He didn’t even like Picante Shrimp.

Against the wall, his phone chirped. He languidly went over to check, dreading another message from someone, but instead it was from Carter. He was in the neighborhood, and wanted to meet up at a café a block away. A.J. hated Carter. He was a smug jackass. But he would buy the coffee, so he grabbed his jacket and headed off. He wondered if he would be allowed to get back into his place when he came back.

A.J. had never been to this particular café. One look at the price list, and he knew he would never be back. The cost of a cup of coffee was as much as he spent on food in three days. Yet here he was, feeling like he was trespassing as he stepped outside, looking for Carter.

“That didn’t take you long,” Carter said. “Must be hard up for free coffee.”

“I was already in the area,” A.J. said. “I can buy if you want.”

Carter looked over his friend, with the tattered edges to his pants and the many stains on his hoodie sleeves. He was so bluffing. “That’s okay, I got it.”

“Nah, it’s fine,” A.J. replied.

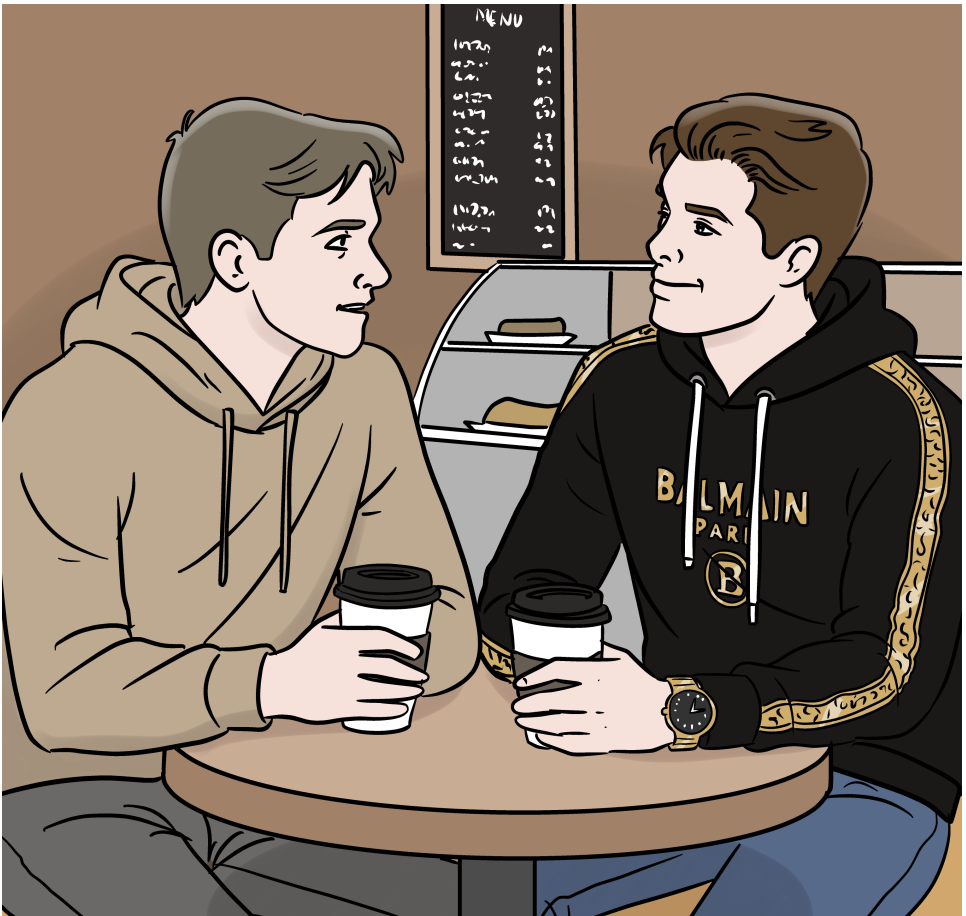
“Go ahead and order,” Carter answered as he got to the counter.

“All right,” A.J. said. “If you’re sure.”

After that pantomime was over, they found a table and stared at their cups for a while. Smalltalk was attempted, abandoned, and the restarted again. Carter mostly just wanted to talk about classes they shared.

A.J. looked at the hint of a refection he could see in the café window. It looked like he felt. Barely alive. Barely even allowed to participate in life like everyone else could. He had to worry about money so constantly, he had no room to do anything else. Not a single brain cell for a spare thought. He was living in a state of paranoia, which controlled his every decision. He couldn’t go out. He couldn’t get a drink. He couldn’t do anything where he might be asked to chip in. He couldn’t do anything that would cost him money. He couldn’t do anything that *might* cost him money.

Leaving his apartment was a risk if the landlord decided to change the locks while he was gone. Eating a meal meant no meal later. Turning on the heat meant a bill he couldn’t pay. Watching a video worked against his data plan



limit. Even changing his clothes meant trying to find quarters on the street to run the washing machine.

Employment was the obvious solution, but assuming he could even find something, he would have to drop classes. The last five jobs he applied for never called back, and even before that he had been interviewing with nothing coming through. Finally, he had just given up.

His attention focused back on Carter, and as it did, he nearly coughed up his drink. Carter had new sneakers, a new iPhone and a designer hoodie. He wanted to ask, but he didn't. It felt like he'd be giving Carter some kind of credit, and Carter didn't need any more of a swelled head. Still, his friend was loaded, and he needed to know how.

"So, why'd you text me?" A.J. asked. "I can think of a few people you'd want to hang out with besides me."

"You're always putting yourself down, A.J." Carter said with a bemused smile. "Stick up for yourself, dude."

"Yeah, sure, I guess. Listen, where does one come up with money... to pay for coffee and not worry about it?" He figured that was an innocuous enough question.

Carter gave his friend a shrug. "I just look after my money, that's all."

"You have more to look after than I do," A.J. remarked, hoping Carter would bite and spill some secrets of how to get a few extra dollars.

"Knock on wood," he only said before sipping his coffee.



"Nice shoes," A.J. said when he saw him after their shared psychology class the next day. "I saw where those for for seven hundred."

"Yeah, I think I got then for twenty off," Carter answered.

"Good deal. Still, that's what, six hundred and eighty? On shoes?"

"I suppose it is," Carter said, before taking a turn on the walkway and heading off to his next class.

The evasion was just fueling his interest. A.J. knew his friend was hiding something, and he was going to get it.



Two days later, A.J. was at a party Carter was attending. "Hey, A.J. I didn't think you liked parties," Carter said with a smile. "Are you stalking me?"

“C’mon, dude,” A.J. said, terrified that he had been figured out so easily. “I get out.” He needed to know. He needed to know how Carter got so damn rich. He knew he wasn’t from a wealthy family. He had figured something out, and the more A.J. thought about it, he was sure his friend had a secret income source.

“Yeah, that’s you all over. Mr. Social. I’ll let you mix.”

“No, hey... Where you goin’?...” A.J. said, desperate to get him to blab about his money train.

“Talk to you later,” Carter said, sensing he was about to get trapped.

“Fuck,” A.J. said, headed for the door. That was the only reason he even got himself invited to this party. He kept the free beer, though.



It was during their developmental psychology class that Carter looked over to his left to see A.J. sitting next to him. A.J. didn’t even take this class.

“What’s up, A.J.?” Carter asked, putting his pen down as turning to face him in his seat. “Something on your mind?”

A.J. knew he had pushed it too far, but he was desperate. He couldn’t worry about being polite. “Look, you gotta tell me. We’re bros, right? You wouldn’t hold out on your bro, would you?”

Carter inquired, “Tell you what?”

“Where are you getting all that money?” A.J. finally asked.

“You’re nothing if not persistent,” Carter said. “You wouldn’t even believe me if I told you.”

“I’ll believe anything. I’m desperate.”

Carter seemed to contemplate the statement. He fiddled with the drawstrings on his \$400 hoodie. “Come to my place tonight.”

“Just tell me, man.”

“Not here. I don’t want anyone to overhear me.”



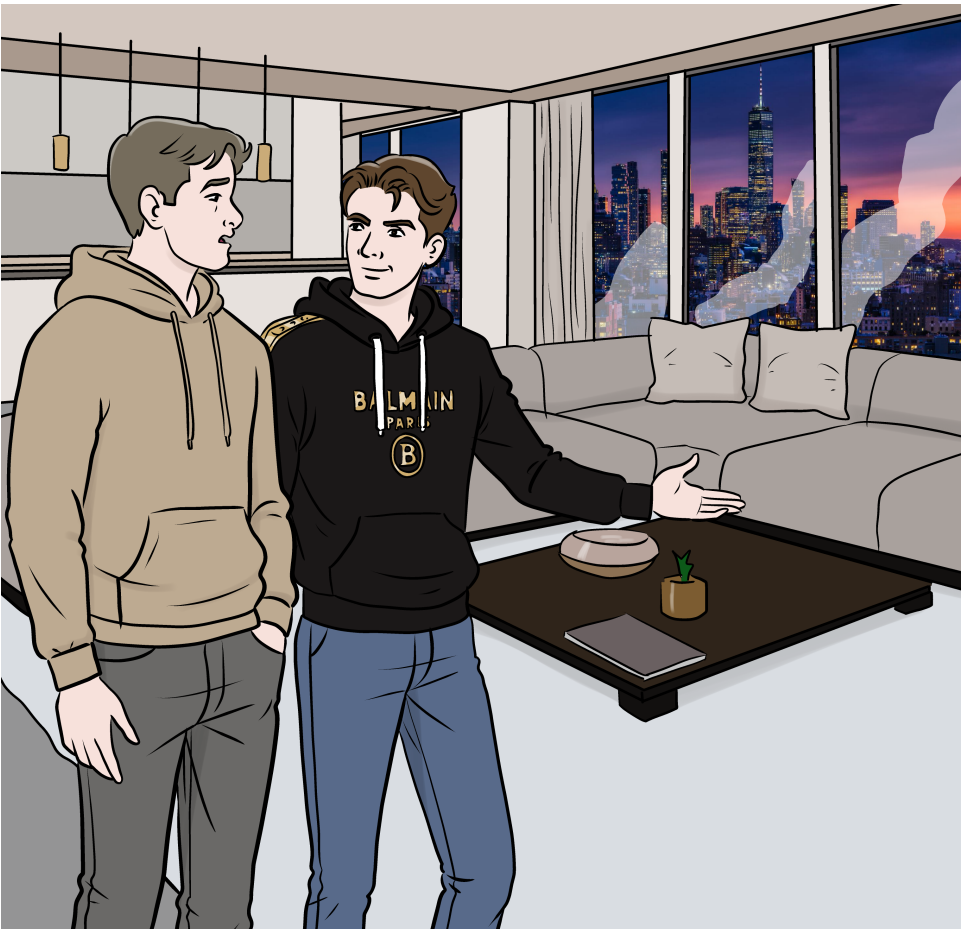
A.J. paced his apartment for the last half hour before he was due to head over to Carter’s place. He had been expecting many different answers from Carter to explain his extra cash, along the line of “I don’t own a car” or “I don’t have a girlfriend.” Instead, A.J. now had a mystery. A mystery that had been eating him up for the whole day. Did Carter deal drugs? Did Carter sell organs? Was he a gun runner? Why couldn’t he just tell him in the classroom?

It felt like something was up. Ot maybe Carter was just being a drama queen like he always was. He had known him since high school, and he had been a bit melodramatic even back then.

Taking a breath, A.J. headed the three blocks over to the apartment building Carter has told him to come to. It was the top floor. He had to ride the elevator up to the very top of the 20-story building, tall for this area, and when the doors opened up, it wasn't just an apartment. It was the penthouse.

*What, A.J. thought to himself, the hell?*

Just a single step into Carter's place let A.J. know something was really out of whack. It wasn't exactly decadent or ultra-luxurious, but it wasn't the kind of place your average starving student would have. The square modern furniture, the mid-century modern cabinets and the slate rock floors seemed to indicate Carter was not using financial aid to pay his tuition. "What is this supposed to be?" A.J. said, looking around, his arms out in bewilderment. "What am I looking at?"



“Hey, A.J.” Carter said, head into the foyer. “You’re early.”

“What’s going on? This can’t be your place. This is... I don’t...”

“You like it?” Carter replied. “I just got it paid off.”

A.J. Suddenly came to a stark realization. “Hey, I gotta go,” he started backing his way out of the apartment. “I just remembered I gotta go to a study lab.”

He didn’t want to turn his back on Carter. He needed to make sure he wasn’t about to get in any kind of trouble. The only explanation in his head was that his friend from school was now involved in something bad. Organized crime. Drugs. Something like that. It was the only explanation. If he valued his safety, maybe even his life, he had to get out of here. Fast.

“You wanna beer?” Carter offered.

A.J. Stopped backpedaling. “What do ya got?” He followed Carter into the kitchen. Five minutes later, he was dinking fancy imported beer — from a glass — on one of Carter’s rectangular couches.

“You looked terrified there for a minute, A.J.,” Carter said in between sips. “What are you afraid of?”

“I... Uh... I just thought I could pick up some tips on how to make some extra cash... I have a lot of bills.” A.J. gestured to the environment around him with the glass of beer. “But, uh... I’m not sure I want to get involved in whatever you’re doing. I’m just a college student, Carter. I study books.”

Carter couldn’t help but let a laugh escape from his lips. It was too strong to keep down. Then he had trouble stopping it. “I work at a bar, A.J.”

A.J. Nodded, smiling. For a moment he accepted that as the proper answer before doing the easy math. He stopped smiling. “You can’t earn this much from a job wiping up sticky tables.”

“Nah,” he put down the beer. “I don’t work for the bar. I work *at* the bar... I’m a...” He paused. Then he stood up. “Here, follow me.”

The confused college student followed his long-time acquaintance into a huge bedroom, floor to ceiling windows, larger than his entire apartment. A door on the side of the room led into a walk-in closet, and A.J. Followed Carter inside.

Once in, he noticed the hoodies and ball caps on one side, and the sexy, glittery dresses on the other, with high heels on a giant rack. He figured that a guy with as much money as Carter now had would have a pretty fancy girlfriend. “Nice,” he said, looking at the dresses.

“Yeah,” he said, grabbing a short glittery dress off the rack. “My clients love them.”

A.J. nodded along before it sunk in what Carter was saying. “These... These are yours?”

“That’s how I make my money, A.J. I’m a hostess.” He put the dress back and picked a different one, holding up to his frame. “The guys really like this one.”

“I’m sorry, what?”

“I’m a hostess, A.J. I put on makeup, a wig, a nice dress and some high heels and I go sit at the bar and guys buy me drinks.”

A.J. Stood there, awaiting for the funny part of the joke, the punchline, the thing that would explain why Carter would say this, but nothing more seemed to be coming. “What do you mean?”

Carter put the dress back. “What I mean is that there are a lot of men who want to be in the company of a cute boy dressed up like a girl. They’re willing to pay quite a bit of money for that. A lot of them are very rich.”

“No, really,” A.J. Said with a smile that hoped to elicit a “just kidding” response. He continued to wait. “Oh, come on, dude.”

“I’m serious, A.J.,” Carter replied. “It pays better than you could imagine. I mean, look at this place.”

“I... I... I mean you’re not serious. Tell me you’re fuckin’ with me.”

“Yeah, I’m serious. Hey, I get it. It’s really kinda weird. But you know, bringing home a grand every night gets you over the weird part pretty fast.”

A.J., feeling a little more threatened by the dresses than he had a few moments ago, exited the closet quickly. He needed some space to breathe. He paced back and forth out in the bedroom. “So you’re gay?” he asked Carter when he exited the closet.

“No, dude. You know that. You and I had the same girlfriend back in high school. Remember Julie?”

“Yeah, yeah, sure. So.... I still don’t get it.”

“So this bar I work at is a high-roller bar in the financial district. They have this arrangement. Men buy girls drinks, but the drinks are... like, two hundred to five hundred dollars.” He sat down on the very plush and very large bed. It looked as soft as a marshmallow to A.J. He could remember what a bed felt like. “That buys them time with me. They talk to someone who fulfills a little fantasy for them for a little while. A lot of guys like to talk to men dressed as cute girls. Then they either buy me another drink or move on. Simple as that.”

“That’s not legal. That can’t be legal.”

“It’s not,” Carter confirmed. “But the enforcement of that kind of thing is kind of... *lax*.”

“So you’re tellin’ me, you dress up as a chick and guys fuck you?”

Carter smirked. “See, that’s what I always liked about you A.J. Your close attention to details.” He stood up. “Let me start again. I work in a nice bar. The management there rents me a table for the night. A few hundred dollars. Men

come in, they choose someone they want to talk to. Lonely guys, kinky guys, whatever. They buy me a drink for a few hundred dollars. The bar takes a cut, I take a cut. All I do is look cute in a dress, smile, laugh, maybe talk a little to get things started and play the role. No sex. No touching. House rules.”

“So when do you fuck...”

*“They don’t fuck me, A.J.!”*

A.J. tilted his head. “Then I don’t get it.”

Carter sighed and explained again. Then again. At that point, A.J. seemed to get the idea. But he needed to go over the situation once again before he could see the light of recognition in his friend’s eyes.

“So what’s in the drinks?” A.J. asked.

“Tonic water, most of the time,” Carter answered. “You have to stay sober. Sometimes the guys at the bar put real alcohol in there if they’re trying to prank me.”

“So this is the big secret,” A.J. said.

“That’s it. That’s how I earn all my money. That’s how I’m getting through school and not worrying about what I spend.”

A.J. fell onto the rectangle couch and laid back in a decidedly un-rectangular manner, his legs splayed apart and his head sunk in between his shoulders. “This sucks,” he said. “I was hoping I could use whatever you were doing to help me out. I’m really in deep right now.”

“I kinda figured that,” Carter said. “That’s why I decided to tell you my little secret.”

“Yeah, but what good does that do me?”

Carter smirked. “You could pull it off, A.J.”

“What off?”

“You could be a hostess. You’re slim, not too tall. Boyish face. You could do this work.”

A.J. looked at his beer, quizzically. “How strong is this import shit? Cuz you’re drunk.”

“It’s a lot of money. It’d solve all your problems. You should consider it. You’re easy to talk to. You could be a good hostess.”

“Me? Look at me! I’m a guy. Not like you, you can get away with it.”

“Thanks,” Carter said, sarcastically. “I was just trying to help. Told you my biggest secret.”

“Yeah, sure. Appreciate it. But what good does it do me?”



Back in his apartment, he lived like a prisoner. A.J. was startled by the distant sounds of a door closing down the hall, hoping this wasn't going to be the landlord. Or the police. He jumped when his phone went off, hoping it wasn't someone sending him a pic, that would trigger his data limit. He stared at the the last cup of noodles on his counter, knowing he had to make it last. He had nothing else.

Not for the first time that night, he wandered into the bathroom to look at himself. He pulled his scruffy brown hair out of his face. He turned his chin left and right. He put on a smile.

Then, just as soon as he had, he marched back out to his futon on the floor and laid down on it. As he did, he could hear a girl laughing outside his window, down on the street. He remembered fun. He remembered when he wasn't too scared to even breathe for fear he would lose everything.

Yet, despite this, he'd slave through even the lowest of low-wage jobs instead of doing what Carter was doing. No amount of money could make him dress up like a woman and try to act nice for perverts and creeps.

His affirmation was interrupted by footsteps. Heavy footsteps. Footsteps someone made when they were determined and focused on a task. Not the kind of light, weary footsteps of the students who lived in this building. These were threatening. Threatening, at least, to a young man who's existence was hanging by not a thread, but by the spindly fibers of the thread.

*Wham! Wham! Wham!* Came the strikes to his front door.

It turns out his fears were well-founded.

"Open up! I know you're in there, Jones!" It was the gruff, slightly foreign voice of his landlord.

*Wham! Wham! Wham!*

It felt like he was going to bust right through. "I'm worried about your safety, Jones, so I'm coming in for a welfare check!" He was always making up excuses to allow himself into the room.

The door lock turned. A.J. scrambled, hitting the light switch off and dashing to where he couldn't be seen. The door opened, and the chain kept it from opening any further.

"You owe me two grand, Jones! I'll get you fuckin' evicted! I will! I swear to God I will, you fuckin' deadbeat!" The chain rattle as the landlord shook the door and pressed it to the max a few times. "If I ever get my hands around your scrawny throat I'm gonna choke my two grand out of you!" He said, before the air was still again. Charged with electricity, but still.



It took a full twenty minutes before A.J. even dared poke his head out and verify the landlord was gone. He closed the the door again, ever so quietly.

Things even got worse from that point on. He had a part-time job finally, filling tacos at a greasy fast food Mexican place. After buying his uniform, paying for the food handlers test and paying into the union, he showed up the first day to be told they didn't need him. A.J.'s first and only pay envelope was a bill for the uniform.

The electricity had been shut off. So now he spent a couple of hours each day at the local cafe recharging his phone. Pretending like he was a customer, sipping from the same empty cup he had fished out of the trash days ago. He got tossed out twice over the course of the week.

His classes were a joke, as he had long sold his textbooks. He was always scrounging for other classmates' notes. It was his only hope of getting a decent grade.

Every day, he would see Carter sitting in class, walking around campus, enjoying a cup of coffee at the cafe as if he had no cares in the world. Just a smug, conceited little jerk who was showing off to everyone that he had no money problems, and rubbing A.J.'s face in it. At least that's how it felt to A.J. There wasn't anywhere he could go without seeing Carter, just living a normal life. He hated him so much.

That night, as he sat in his apartment, the radiator ice cold, the lights out, his face only illuminated by the four inch screen of his phone, he found his thumbs

trembling as he brought up the message app. “You said I could be a good hostess?”



The place where they finally stopped was not quite what A.J. had been expecting. He didn't catch the name of it because Carter was already pushing him through the door. Inside, the air was cool and the lighting low enough that everything took a moment to come into focus. It was nice. He wasn't expecting nice. He was expecting sticky floors, cheap junk on the walls and sneering faces here. After all, what kind of place would offer this kind of service? A place where you paid to flirt with a crossdresser? He really wasn't expecting nice.

Jazz came from somewhere — a speaker, maybe a small live setup in the corner, A.J. couldn't tell. The walls were sparkling, with gold trim and mirrors. It was the kind of place where you couldn't tell where reality ended and became a reflection. But it made the place look large and spacious, as well as bright and cheerful. The low booths ran along both walls, each one occupied. Men in suit jackets that fit properly, men with good watches, men who looked like they paid attention to the details. Across from them, figures in dresses, in heels, in hair that caught the golden light in the room. A.J. looked longer than he meant to. A woman in a red dress laughed at something, touching the wrist of her companion with two fingers. Another sat with her hands folded on the table, playing with a strand of pearls at her throat. A.J. looked away.

He looked away because he suddenly realized he wasn't looking at women. He was looking at men *dressed* as women.

“This way,” Carter said, already halfway to the back.

The woman behind the desk didn't look up when they walked in. She had greying hair, crafted like she had placed every single strand where she wanted it by hand, and she was tapping through something on a tablet with one hand while the other rested flat on the surface of her busy desk.

“Ms. Sandra,” Carter said. “Got a fresh recruit for you.”

She kept her eyes on the tablet. “This one?”

Then she looked up, and A.J. understood immediately that being looked at by Ms. Sandra was not the same as being looked at by other people. It was more like being dissected.

“He's not dressed,” she said to Carter.

“He's kind of new to this,” Carter explained.

A.J. was not used to being talked about, instead of talked to.



“I wouldn’t usually even consider it...” She said. She smirked at Carter. “But since it’s you, Carter...”

“There’s a lot of potential,” Carter said, looking at A.J.

“You don’t have the eyes for it,” she said. She wasn’t unkind about it, which almost made it worse. “But the bone structure’s decent. We can make it work.”

A.J. stood there. He’d been trying to think of something to say since they’d walked through the front door, and now, in the back office, facing this woman, he was still coming up empty. “So what happens now?” he asked.

She set the tablet down and leaned forward on both elbows. “We see if you can pass.”

“Pass what, exactly?”

Carter laughed a little from somewhere behind him. Ms. Sandra didn’t.

“There’s a difference,” she said, “between looking like something and actually *being* it. Anyone can put on a dress. That part’s easy. What’s not easy is sitting

across from a man who's paid a week's salary to talk to you and still making him feel like he's getting a bargain." She picked the tablet back up. "That takes something else."

"And if I don't have that something else?"

She glanced at him over the top of the screen. "Then Carter wasted my time." She looked at Carter. "Well, let's give him a table for a few hours. But first... You gotta get him dressed."

"I'll take him to to Felix."

"Good luck," she replied, raising her eyebrows.



The alley was narrow and easy to miss. Carter stopped at a door with no sign, just a rusted handle and a strip of yellow light coming from underneath, and pushed it open without knocking. A.J. followed him inside.

The salon, if it could be called that, was one long room with cracked tile floors and lighting that bathed the premises in sorrow. A row of mirrors ran along one side, each framed by bulbs, some of which had burned out. The counters were cluttered — open product containers, brushes dried with old makeup, a power strip with too many things plugged into it. The smell of product and something chemical sat in the air. In one of the chairs, feet up on the counter, a man dressed in a silk shirt.

He was vaping, exhaling a long cloud toward the ceiling. His eyes were suspicious, but unconcerned. The man was appeared to be flamboyantly gay, and he seemed to be well aware of that.

He saw A.J. and clapped his hands once, loud.

"Fresh meat!"

A.J. felt his face go hot. The man was already out of the chair, circling him before A.J. had even cleared the doorway, looking him over the way someone looks at a used car they're not sure they want to buy.

"Jaw's a little square," the stylist said, mostly to himself. He lifted A.J.'s chin with two fingers. "Brows are a disaster. But the eyes are... You don't have the eyes for this. Well, we'll see what we can do. Nice lid space." He dropped A.J.'s chin. "What's your name?"

"A.J."

"What's that stand for?"

"Arthur Jones."

“A.J. was the right call,” the man said with a scrunch of his features. “I’m *Feeeeelix*,” he said with a dip of his hips. He didn’t offer his hand as he was already pulling a measuring tape from the counter. “Arms out.”

A.J. held his arms out and Felix worked fast, calling numbers to no one in particular. Chest, waist, hips. He wrote nothing down.

“Behind the curtain,” Felix said. “Strip.”

A.J. didn’t move. “What?”

“Your clothes. Take them off.”

“I’m not…” A.J. turned to Carter, who had already dropped into one of the salon chairs and was scrolling his phone. “I’m not doing this in front of…”

“Dude.” Carter didn’t look up. “Get used to it.”

A.J. stood there another moment, then went behind the curtain.

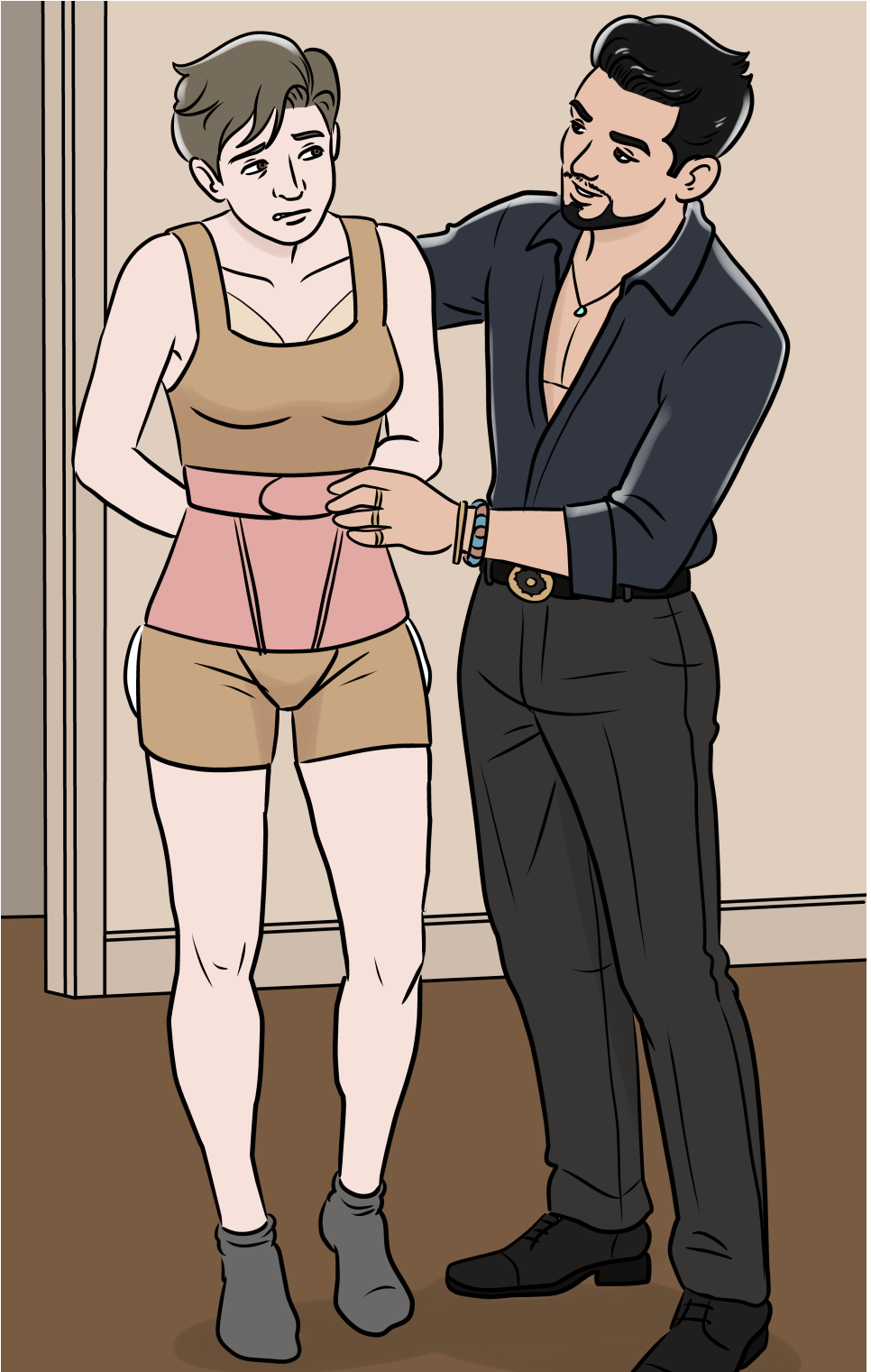
A bra was first. The one A.J. was strapped into had thick foam padding that added a full rounded shape to his chest. Felix clipped it at the back and pulled the straps until they sat flush, then adjusted the cups, pressing the padding into place with his palm. A.J. stared at the curtain, trying not to think about a man adjusting his imaginary breasts for him.

The body shaper came next. It was a thick, mauve-colored tube of compressive fabric, and Felix worked it up over A.J.’s legs with both hands, rolling it past his thighs and up over his midsection until the waistband sat just below his ribs. The compression was immediate and total. A.J. exhaled and couldn’t fully inhale again. The shaper crushed his waist inward by what felt like half — but was really only an inch — and the displaced volume had nowhere to go but out, pushing at his hips, rounding what had been flat. A.J. looked down at himself and then looked away. His torso no longer looked like his own body.

The padded panties went on last, and they were padded at the seat and hips with a soft silicone insert that sat flush against his skin, adding a low curve to his backside that he could feel when he shifted his weight. They also required an indelicate adjustment to his penis to give him a flat appearance.

“Sit here,” Felix said. “Felix’s lawn mowing service is ready to get started.”

The shave took a long time. Felix started with A.J.’s legs, working from ankle to thigh with a fresh razor and short, deliberate strokes. The shave was long and laborious, leaving skin that looked pale and unfamiliar against the salon light. By the time he got to A.J.’s face, they were on the sixth razor. Felix tilted A.J.’s head back, worked along the jaw, under the chin, and the upper lip. When he finished, he pressed a warm towel to A.J.’s face and held it there for a moment. As soon as he was able, the young man ran his fingers along his cheek. Then he felt his legs. His skin felt new and too smooth to be real. It was alien to him. He couldn’t stop touching it.



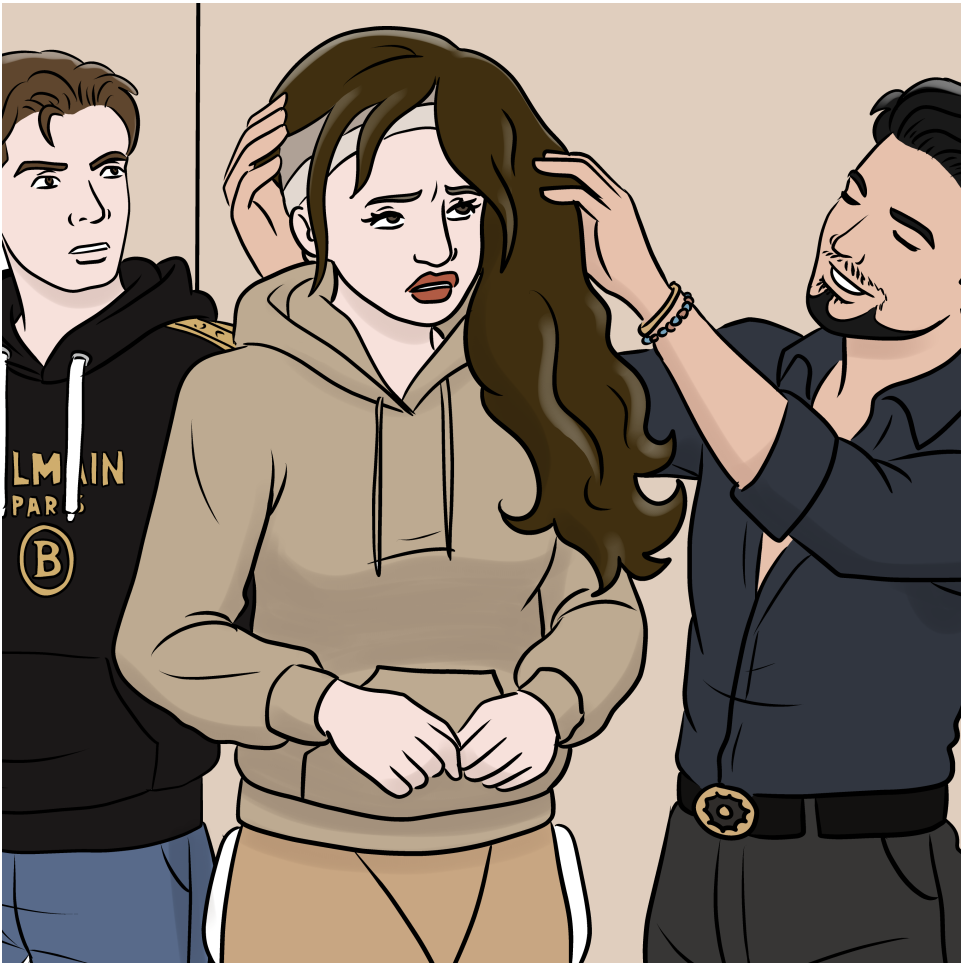


The makeup chair he was sitting in faced the biggest mirror, and A.J. had no choice but to watch as the makeup was applied. He kind of wished he'd only see it when it was all over, as this felt like slow torture, his manhood being wrung out of him like a wet dishtowel. Felix started with a primer, pressing it into A.J.'s skin with his fingertips, filling in the pores and flattening the texture. Felix used some dabs of red lipstick on his jawline, which looked weird at first, but it hid his bluish skin where his beard would be. Then came the foundation which was a shade lighter than A.J.'s natural tone, applied with a damp sponge in small circles until his face was even and matte and the shadow of his shaved jaw had disappeared entirely. Without that shadow, his face looked different. Softer at the edges. Less defined in the way men's faces are defined.

Felix loaded a narrow brush with a cool-toned brown powder and worked it into the hollows beneath A.J.'s cheekbones, using small strokes and then blending the edges until the contour looked like shadow rather than product. He repeated it along the jaw, blurring the squareness Felix had noted at the door, rounding the corners of A.J.'s face until his jaw no longer read as a jaw but as a gentle taper. A.J. watched his own face narrow in real time.

The eyes took the longest. Felix used a flesh-toned base across the whole lid first, then built a pale shimmer onto the center and a medium brown into the crease, working it back and forth with a fluffy brush until the depth made A.J.'s eyes appear larger and set further apart. He lined the upper lash line with a thin stroke of black, flicking a small wing at the outer corner, then ran a nude pencil along the waterline. The mascara went on in four slow coats, separating each lash, and by the final coat A.J.'s lashes were long enough that he kept looking up, the lizard part of his brain convinced he was being attacked by a raven. Felix finished with a muted rose lipstick applied with a brush, pressing A.J.'s lips together at the end with two fingers to set it.

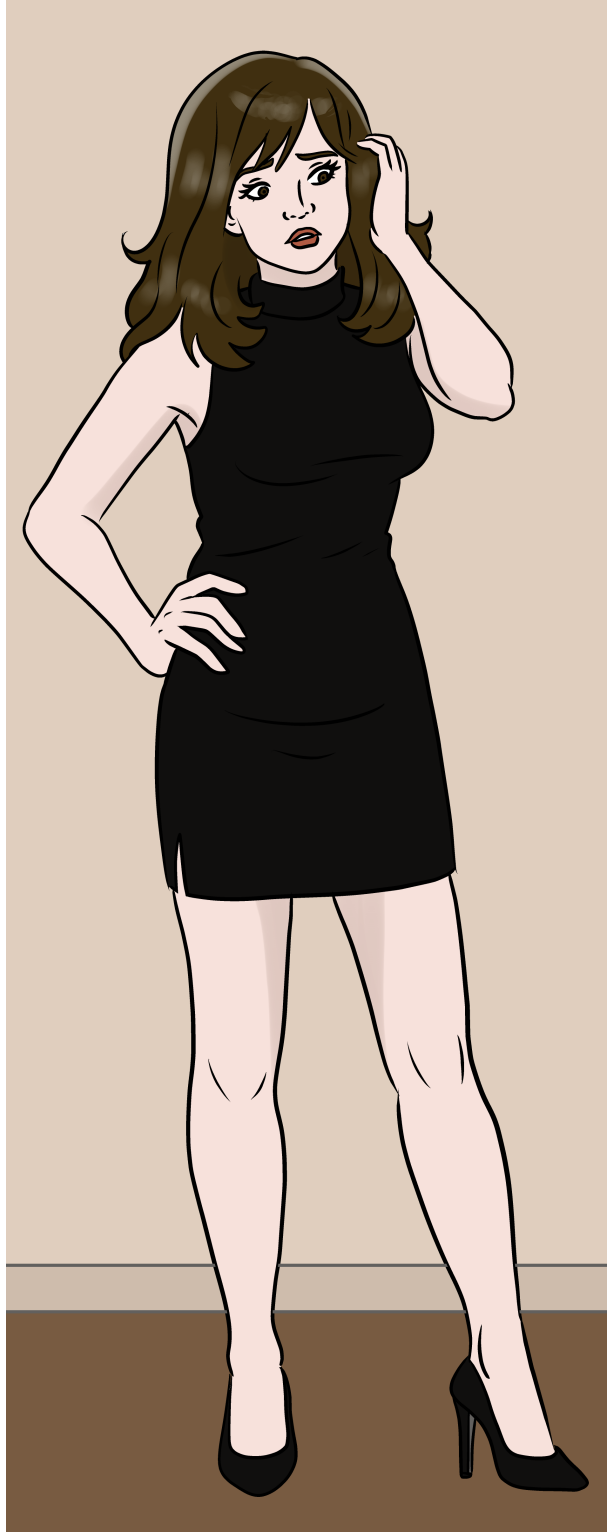
A.J. looked at his own mouth in the mirror and didn't recognize it. Nothing about it was familiar. Not the shape, not the color, not even the skin around it.



The wig was deep brown and fell to the shoulder, straight with a slight curve at the ends. Felix positioned it on A.J.'s head and pressed it down at the temples, then used a small brush and a dot of product to melt the lace front into his hairline until there was no visible edge, just hair that appeared to grow from his scalp. He adjusted the slightly off-center part and smoothed the length over A.J.'s shoulders.

The dress was black and fitted, with a high neckline and a hem that fell mid-thigh. Felix held it open and A.J. stepped in, and then Felix zipped it at the back in one motion. The fabric pulled against the shaper underneath, and the combined effect was a silhouette with a defined waist, a rounded hip, and a chest that was no longer flat. A.J. stood still and felt the dress sit against him in ways he had no frame of reference for.

The heels were block-heeled and low, but A.J. still shifted when he put them on, his weight redistributing in a way his ankles weren't ready for. He found his balance after a moment, standing with his feet slightly apart.



Felix stepped back and tilted A.J.'s chin up with one finger, studying his face with the dispassion of someone checking their own work.

"Eh," he said. "That's as good as we're gonna get it."

A.J. looked in the mirror. A dark-haired, fine-featured young woman stared back. He stood up in surprise, showing her narrow waist and a rose-colored mouth and lashes that fluttered. He stood there looking for a long moment, searching for himself in the reflection, and found nothing he recognized.

"You did your best, Felix," Carter said, getting up from his chair.

"I... I... I thought I came out pretty well," A.J. said, in a quiet voice.

"Oh, sweetie. You look fine!" Felix said. "A real girl next door kind of fine. It's just that..."

"Well, let's wait to make a final judgement until we see you in action," Carter interrupted. "It's got a lot to do with attitude."

"Yes? Yes!" Felix escorted the two towards the exit. "It's always about the attitude. You never can tell until then. I'm sure it'll be fine. I'll bill Ms. Sandra!"

And suddenly Carter and A.J. were in the alley. Alone.

"Well, we outta get back," Carter said.

"I'm in a dress," A.J. said, very aware of the situation. "I'm in a dress in a dark alley."

"Don't worry about it. I do this every day. Just look like you know what you're doing."

"I can't move," the young man in the black dress reported.

"I'm not holding your hand, dude," Carter said as he headed off towards his car.

"Wait... Wait..." A.J. called after him, trying not to shout. He didn't want to attract any attention. He took the smallest, most tentative step. The heels hit the pavement and the sound was different from any sound his feet had ever made: a distinct, small "clop" with each step. He kept close to the wall and looked straight ahead and told himself that no one was watching.

A man on his phone looked up.

A.J. felt the look land somewhere in the center of his chest. He pulled his arms in and kept walking.

"You're stomping," Carter said. "Walk from the hip, not the knee. And stop crossing your arms — you look like you're being escorted somewhere against your will."

"I *am* being escorted somewhere against my will."

"You know what I mean." Carter slowed just enough to let A.J. pull level with him. "Nobody knows you're not who they think you are, okay? They're just

picking up on whether you seem comfortable. Right now you seem like a man who's marching to a firing squad."

"I would welcome bullet right about now."

"Well, stop it."

They passed a restaurant with outdoor seating. There were three men at a table, mid-conversation. One of them glanced over. His eyes moved across A.J. the way eyes do when they catch movement, and then he went back to his conversation. A.J. kept his eyes forward and his jaw tight.

"He looked at me," A.J. said.

"Yeah, because you were staring at him. Eyes forward, chin level. You keep looking at people like they're going to lunge at you."

A.J. adjusted his chin. The wig moved slightly in the breeze and he resisted the urge to grab it.

"You're doing a thing with your shoulders," Carter said.

"What thing?"

"That hunching thing. Pull them back."

A.J. pulled his shoulders back. The dress shifted, the heels clicked, and for approximately four steps he walked like a person who had chosen to be outside. Then a woman coming the other direction made brief eye contact with him, frowned slightly, and looked away, and whatever he'd assembled fell apart again.

"She knew," A.J. said.

"She didn't know anything. She was squinting because the headlights are in her eyes." Carter pointed down the block. "There's the car."

A.J. walked the last thirty feet without speaking. Carter unlocked the door. A.J. got in, pulled the door shut, and sat there.

"That was humiliating," he said.

Carter started the engine. "You made it, didn't you?"

"Yaaay..." A.J. said, his voice dying. "Yay for me."



A.J. followed Carter back into the bar, his shoulders clenched and his head scrunched like a turtle. This would be an easier task, getting rejected by Ms. Sandra. At least he was expecting the hatchet, and she looked like she would have no trouble putting him out of his misery.

"Well, I've seen worse," Ms. Sandra said, seeing the young man standing in the black dress. She sighed. "Might as well give him a booth for the evening."

She glanced at Carter.  
“You know what to do.”

As the door shut behind him and he was out in the hall again, A.J. was in a bit of a shock. He was sure he’d already failed at this task. “I really didn’t think I’d get this far.”

“Well, you did,” Carter said. “Now I have to get you ready to do this.” Carter walked A.J. to a narrow corridor off the main floor and stood with his arms crossed. “Voice first. Higher than you think you need to go, but not fake high. Soft. Put air in it.” “And when he says something that isn’t funny, you laugh anyway. Small laugh, not a performance. A quick giggle. And you let him talk. You’re not there to have a debate, you’re there to make him feel like he’s the smart one.”

“That’s it?”

“No, but I only have a minute. Flatter him. Not empty flattery, though. Compliment him for his mind, his taste. Men like him



want to feel interesting. Complex. Charming.” Carter straightened up. “You ready?”

A.J. was not ready.

The lounge floor felt different now than it had when he first arrived. The jazz was the same, the lighting was the same, but now A.J. was part of the business rather than an outsider. As he took small steps, the dress moved when he moved, the fabric pulling slightly at the hips with each step. The heels demanded a particular kind of walk that sent his hips doing the wrong thing, in his mind, and he was not ready to give up on walking the way he was used to. He found a booth near the back and sat down, smoothing the dress under him the way Felix had done in the salon when making final adjustments, pressing the fabric flat with both palms in one efficient motion.

“How do I look?”

“Tense. Act like you’re just slightly drunk. It looks sexy to guys.”

“I can’t even act right now. I’m panicking.” He looked around. “Any chance I can just *be* slightly drunk, rather than pretending?”

“Do your best, dude,” Carter said before walking away.

The young man in the black dress sat there for fourteen minutes before anyone approached.

The man was somewhere in his fifties, in a suit that cost more than A.J.’s rent. It was dark navy with peaked lapels, and he also wore a gold watch that caught the low light. He scanned the room once before his eyes settled on A.J.’s booth.

“New here?”

A.J. kept his voice soft, pushing air through his throat more than using his vocal cords. “Yes. I’ve been dying to meet some new people. You could join me.” In the car on the way back from the salon, Carter had made him practice the same sentence twelve times. *You’re dropping it at the end. Carter told him. Someone who’s nervous lets the voice fall back into the chest. Keep it forward, keep it light. Stay confident. End your sentence like a question.*

The man smiled and signaled the waiter’s without looking at him. He ordered something off a special “hostess” menu, and the waiter nodded. A five-hundred-dollar drink. That meant that A.J. was engaged for a full hour, bought and paid for.

A drink appeared in front of A.J. He lifted it and took a small sip and kept his face still. It had real alcohol in it. He looked over beyond the man’s shoulder to see Carter giving him a thumbs-up. He had spiked it for him. Thank God.

The man introduced himself as Richard and then immediately began talking about a logistics company he ran out of two offices, one downtown and one he was thinking of closing. A.J. nodded. When Richard paused, A.J. asked something vague about if he was happy, and Richard spent nine minutes on the



answer. A.J. nodded through it and remembered what Carter had said in the car. *You're not there to be interesting. You're there to be interested. There's a difference and it matters. Ask a question, then get out of the way. Emote as necessary to stay involved.*

Richard moved from the company to his divorce, which had been finalized eight months ago, and which he described as an expensive lesson in the fundamental unreliability of women. A.J. produced the small laugh when it seemed expected, adding a slight lift at the corners of his mouth. *Not that big,* Carter had said about his smile when he was practicing in the car. *You're not auditioning. It's just a signal that you're sympathetic and engaged. Small and easy, like you've heard something that quietly amuses you.*

A.J. touched his glass when Richard touched his. He kept his shoulders back and his chin level and his hands loose in his lap rather than gripping the edge of the seat, which is what he wanted to do. When he shifted his weight, he felt the shaper underneath the dress compress with him, holding his waist in its fixed, tight grip. Richard said something about his ex-wife's lawyer and shook his head slowly. A.J. tilted his head to the side, just slightly, and made a soft sound of sympathy. Recalling Carter's advice was helpful. *The head tilt is important. It says you're listening without making you look like you're concentrating. Women do it without thinking. You're going to have to think about it every single time.*

He was thinking about it every single time.

The hour moved like frozen molasses uphill. Richard finished a third drink and settled back in his seat with the satisfied looseness of a man who had been listened to at length. He looked at A.J. with something between warmth and distance. "Tell me about yourself," he said to A.J.

*They're going to ask you to talk about yourself,* Carter had told him. *If you feel uncomfortable, and you will, deflect. Always deflect.*

"There's nothing else you'd rather talk about?" A.J. said in his new soft, breathy voice. "I just like talking to people. That's all."

"Enjoyable evening," he said, as he buttoned his jacket, and walked toward the bar without looking back.

A.J. sat in the booth for a moment. The jazz continued. Someone laughed across the room, and it made A.J. nearly jump out of his seat. He was so wound up he could have just burst out crying or screaming.

"Looks like you survived," Ms. Sandra said as she helped him up from his seat. A.J. exhaled slowly. "Did I pass?"

She looked at him the same way she'd looked at him in the back office, silently judging, and let the pause run longer than was comfortable.

"You're back tomorrow," she said. "Get a new dress."

Carter was leaning against the hood of the car when A.J. pushed through the door to the street. A.J. had washed the makeup off, and stuck the dress, heels and wig in a plastic trash bag he was clutching.

Carter grinned. “Nothing to worry about.”

A.J. opened the passenger door and dropped into the seat. “I feel like I just lived someone else’s life.”

“Little bit.” Carter got in and started the engine. “You’ll get used to it.”

“You keep saying that.”

“Yeah, well that’s because it’s still true.”

“Maybe I don’t want to do this again.”

A.J. put his head back against the headrest and looked at the ceiling of the car. He didn’t speak for most of the drive. Carter didn’t push it.

At home, A.J. sat on the edge of his bed and counted the bills twice. The lounge took half and what remained was still more cash than A.J. had made in months. Enough to cover the phone bill that had been sitting on his counter for three weeks with a red stripe across the top.

He set the money down in a loose stack on the comforter and looked at it. A.J. lay back on the bed without moving the money and stared at the ceiling. The bills fanned out slightly beside him. His phone buzzed once on the bare floor next to him, and he didn’t have to look at it. He didn’t reach for it. He didn’t have to. For the first time in a very, very long tome, he was thinking that maybe he had a way to deal with this money mess he’d gotten himself into.

He hadn’t yet decided what to do next. Or, more accurately, he hadn’t actually articulated it to himself. But he already knew. He was going back tomorrow night.



The second night was easier than the first, which A.J. hadn’t expected. The hardest thing was to find a new dress. The third night was easier still. It didn’t take him long before he knew which booth caught the least foot traffic, how long to let a silence sit before filling it and how to giggle out of uncomfortable questions. He didn’t enjoy any of it, but he got through it, which Carter had told him was the goal for the first month.

The next payout came at the end of the third night. Ms. Sandra counted it out at her desk without ceremony and slid it across to him, already looking back at her tablet. A.J. took it and didn’t count it until he was alone.

He counted it three times in his apartment, on the bed, with the lamp on. More money than he had made in six months doing anything else. In a couple

of weeks, he'd have enough to cover the back rent and the late fees. For now, if the landlord wanted something, he could give him a few hundred to keep him satisfied until he'd have everything paid off. In the morning A.J. went to the grocery store for the first time in weeks and bought things that required refrigeration, which had felt like a luxury he couldn't justify for longer than he wanted to admit. The power was back on, and it felt like a new apartment. That evening he sat at his kitchen table and ate a meal he had cooked himself, and the normalcy of it, having food in the fridge and money in the drawer, was almost disorienting. He had so much free time in his day now, time that he used to spend worrying about money.

His "work wear" was stashed in a box in his closet. He was still worried that having the clothes visible from any angle meant that he could get caught. So for now, his fancy dresses, underwear, shaper, shoes, makeup, hairspray and pantyhose was all thrown in the same dilapidated cardboard box that was well hidden. He seemed to be hiding it from himself as well as the rest of the world.



The sign above the bar, in gold elegant letters read "The Parlor Room." If he was going to work here, even if just for a little while, A.J. figured he ought to know the name of the place. He headed to the back room where a small table, a beaten old couch and several large floor length mirrors were located. He got to work transforming himself into a hostess. The makeup was getting easier, the hair not so much.

On his way out, he saw Ms. Sandra was in her office as usual, fixated on her graphs and charts which she was always going over on her tablet. "Hold up," she said to him as he was getting ready to start his night. He froze, worried he'd done something wrong. Instead, she just made him pose for a photo.

"What's that for?" A.J. asked.

"The board," she said, gesturing to a large board on the wall behind him. He'd never really noticed it before. It was a wall display where the faces of some of the "girls" were pinned on a cork board.

"What's this?"

"A leader board. I like to know who my top girls are." She fiddled with the tablet as she talked. "And I also like my girls to know where they stand."

"You call them girls?"

"It's just easier that way. What's your girl name, sweetie?"

A.J. shrugged. "I dunno. Let's just go with 'Lola.' Is that a good name?"

"As good as any."

Carter was at the bar when A.J. found him, a cocktail in hand. He was dressed well, the way he always was — a hoodie that didn't have a speck of lint on it, jeans, shoes. None of it the least bit dirty or even worn in any way. And of course it was all brands that no one could afford. He smiled when he saw A.J.

A.J. wanted to sit down, but not in this dress. Once he sat, he wasn't going to be able to get up without assistance. "Got paid?"

Carter patted a literal fat wallet that was on the bar counter. "Another dress, another dollar."

A.J. looked at him. "How much is that?" He asked, indelicately. "That wallet looks like it's going to explode."

"Couple thousand," Carter replied, but realizing that A.J. wanted to know with a little more precision, he clarified. "Five thousand, four hundred, sixty-two dollars and seventy-eight cents."

"That's three times what I made," A.J. said. "No, six."

"About that, yeah."

"We're doing the same job."

Carter took a sip of his cocktail. "We're doing the same job the same way you and a chef at the fanciest hotel in town can both cook food. Not really the same thing." He set the glass down. "There's no secret to it. You have to be more attractive, and you have to be more convincingly feminine. Those are the things that separate me from you."

A.J. said nothing.

"You're doing fine," Carter said. "For a first week. The clients you're getting are good for a first timer."

"But."

"But you get better as time goes on. I've been doing this for almost a year." Carter shrugged, not unkindly. "The clients who spend real money aren't buying an hour of company. They're buying the right to have the the most beautiful person in the room, a cute boy in a dress, fulfill their fantasy for an hour or two. That's a different product. A premium product."

A.J. looked down at the bar. He had thought, somewhere in the back of his mind, that he had been doing well. Maybe he wasn't. Then something occurred to him. A.J. had been at the lounge four nights by now and had never once seen Carter on the floor. He'd never seen him in his getup.

He'd seen him at the bar, at the door, in the corridor talking to one of Ms. Sandra's staff with his arms crossed and his expression neutral. But never in a booth, never with a client, never doing the thing he'd told A.J. he'd been doing for eight months. A.J. had assumed, without thinking about it much, that Carter worked different hours. Or a different section. Or that there was some part of the lounge he hadn't found yet.

He brought it up between classes, sitting on a low wall outside the humanities building while Carter ate a sandwich.

“I’ve never actually seen you work,” A.J. said.

Carter chewed. “What do you mean?”

“On the floor. With a client. I’ve never seen it.”

“You’re not supposed to be watching other people’s tables.”

“I’m not. I just...” A.J. stopped. “You’re good at it, right? That’s why you’re making what you’re making.”

Carter nodded as he chewed. “I’m good at it.”

“So what is it? Personality? You’re just naturally...”

“I dunno. I guess it’s a mix of things.” Carter folded the paper from his sandwich and looked out across the courtyard.

“What kind of mix.”

“Different things for different clients.”

A.J. waited. Carter didn’t continue.

“You’re not going to tell me,” A.J. said.

“I told you plenty already.”

“That was basics. I’m past basics.”

Carter looked at him, and there was something in his eyes that wasn’t quite the same degree of friendliness he’d seen from him lately. “Look,” he said. “We’re competitors now. That’s just what it is. Every client you charm is one less drink I’m selling. That’s not personal, that’s just the room.”

A.J. didn’t say anything.

“I brought you in because you needed something and I knew a way in,” Carter said. “I’m not going to pretend that was purely charitable, because Ms. Sandra pays a finder’s fee. But I did bring you in. The rest of it...” He picked up his can of soda. “You’re on your own with the rest of it.”

The courtyard was busy with the usual activity. Students were crossing the quad, someone on a bike was cutting too close to the path, a group by the fountain was being loud about something. A.J. watched it without seeing it. He thought about Carter patting that wallet at the bar, the thickness of it, the way he’d talked about it with the ease of someone for whom it was a normal amount to have in a wallet.

He thought about his own payout. How it had felt like a lot until it didn’t.

“So every night,” A.J. said, “it’s just best girl wins.”

Carter stood up and tossed his trash in the bin nearby. “That’s every night at every job.” He picked up his bag. “You just see it more clearly in that room.”

He walked off across the courtyard, and A.J. sat on the wall for a while longer, not going anywhere, unless you counted the circles his mind was spinning in.



On A.J.'s way back home that evening, he made his first weird purchase. He had bought weird things before, dresses and shoes for work, but he got those at the thrift store and everyone at the thrift store was already weird so that didn't count. His new weird purchase was a pair of sheer, black pantyhose.

Back in his apartment, he locked the door, his heart pounding with a naughty thrill. He slowly peeled them from the package, the delicate fabric whispering against his skin. He sat on the edge of his bed and carefully, meticulously, drew them up his smooth, shaved legs. The sensation was electrifying. The gentle compression, the silky sheen, the way they transformed his legs into something elegant and undeniably feminine — it was a secret pleasure he couldn't admit to himself. He felt a flush of shame, but beneath it was a current of pure, unadulterated delight.

He stood up, admiring his legs in the mirror, turning this way and that. He felt so broken, like he was betraying his own should. But the hours in pantyhose on the job had introduced him to a new thrill. Pantyhose. He spent half an hour just running his fingers over his legs.

A.J.'s growing interest in shoes followed shortly after. He started with a simple pair of gold strappy pumps, the kind Ms. Lorraine insisted all hostesses wear. At first, they were instruments of torture, his ankles wobbling, his arches screaming in protest. But he discovered the power they held. They didn't just make him taller; they changed his entire posture, forcing his back to arch, his hips to tilt, his chest to push forward. They made him feel vulnerable and powerful all at once. He bought more pairs — in strappy sandals, in towering stilettos, in glossy red pumps. He loved the sharp click they made on the hardwood floor of the lounge, a sound that announced his arrival. He loved the way men's eyes would drop to his feet, a flicker of appreciation in their gaze.

The truth was, he had at least 6 pairs in his closet after only a few weeks. He told himself it was for the job. Every time he looked at them, he told himself. Every time he wore them, he told himself. It was just for the job. Every time.



A.J. found Carter at the library on Thursday, at one of the corner tables with his laptop open and his headphones around his neck. A.J. sat down across from him without asking.

“I need more,” A.J. said.

Carter looked up. “I’m studying.”

“I made less than I need this week. I’m the low spot on Ms. Sandra’s tote board. I need to know what I’m doing wrong.”

“I told you. More attractive, more convincing.”

“I know that already!” A.J. put his elbows on the table. “Carter. I promised my landlord I’d get my back rent paid but I’m not gonna make it at this rate. I know what’s possible now. I’ve seen the numbers. I can’t un-know these numbers.”

Carter closed his laptop halfway. He rubbed his temples with two fingers on each side, the way someone does when they’re broadcasting how annoyed they are. Then he pushed the laptop to the side and put his headphones away.

He leaned forward on his forearms. “First thing. Your figure. The padding you’ve got is basic, and it’s what Felix puts on everyone who walks in there for the first time. It’s baby’s first padding. You want the clients who spend real money, you need a more convincing shape. Fuller at the hip, smaller at the waist. There’s better shapewear than what you’re wearing, and there’s much better padding. It costs more upfront but you’ll make it back in a week if you do it right. You could also stand to lose few pounds.”

A.J. nodded, hoping he’d remember all this.

“Second thing. You look your age. Maybe a little older when you’re tired, which you usually are.” Carter said it so fast, A.J. didn’t even read it as a dig. “The high rollers, the ones who order the five-hundred-dollar pours without blinking? They’re not looking for someone their own age. They want younger. They want someone who seems like she doesn’t know how badly the world works yet, who laughs easy and listens to everything they say as if they were the only person in the world. Innocence, or the performance of it. Look younger, act younger. Lean into it.”

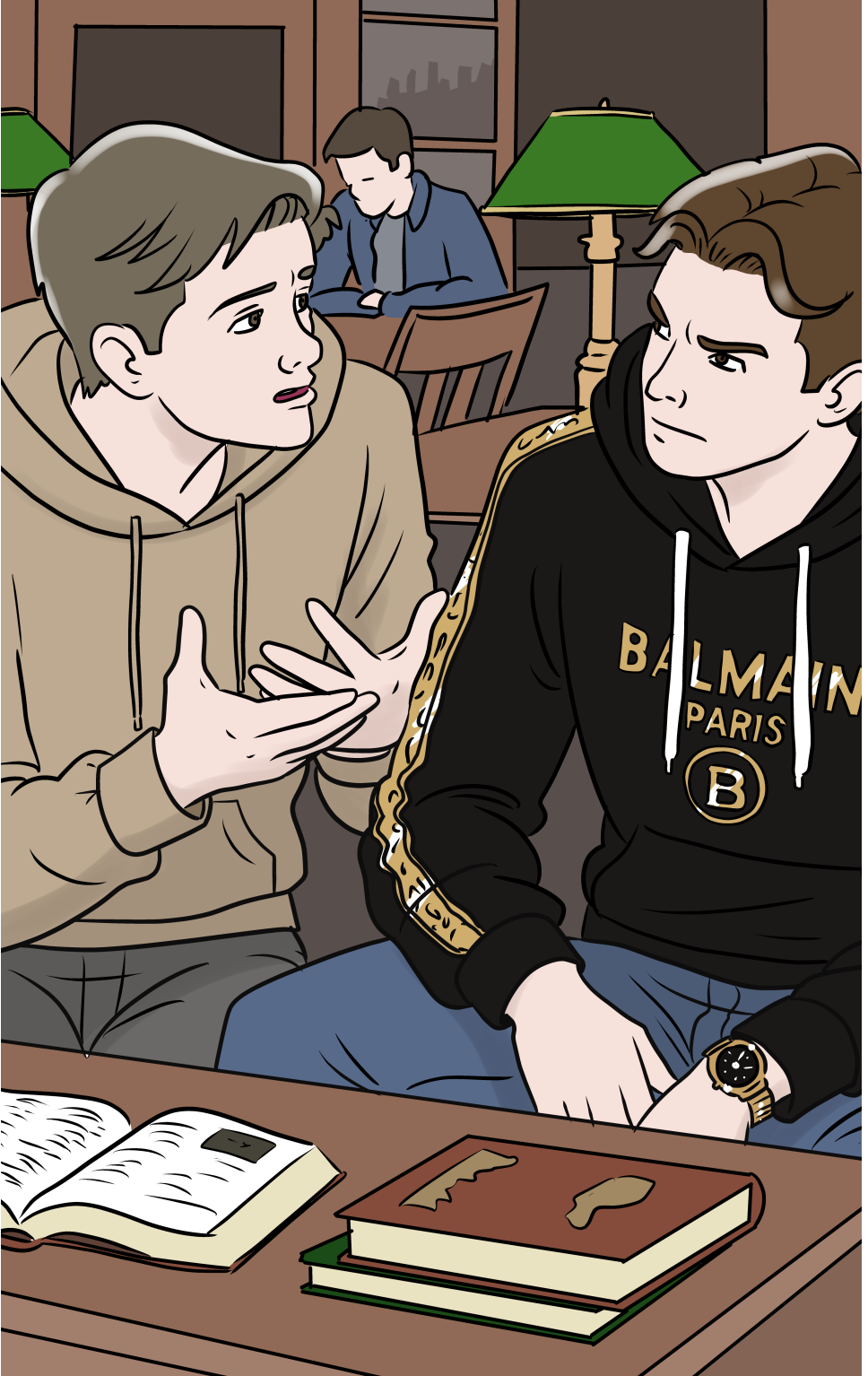
A.J. shrugged. “How?”

“You do your face to look like a woman in her forties. Young girls don’t wear rouge or contour the cheeks to look hollow. They don’t need it. And the way you sit in the booth. You sit like someone waiting for a meeting. Younger means more open, more relaxed. Look like you’re delighted to be there.”

A.J. thought about how he had actually felt sitting in the booth. Delighted was not the word. Terrified. That was a more appropriate word.

“Third thing,” Carter said. “Giggle. Flirt. And tease them, lightly, like you’re deciding whether they’re worth your time. Make them feel like you chose them out of every option in the room.”

“And that works?”



“Every time. You gotta be playful. They pay for feedback, not just a smile. Because what they’re buying isn’t company, really. It’s the feeling that they discovered something. You know and they know you’re really a guy. But that’s what makes it all feel spicy.” Carter opened his laptop again. “If you make them feel like they found something, a diamond in the rough, something a little wicked, they’ll spend whatever it takes to keep coming back for that feeling.”

“That’s important.”

“Every one of my guests is a regular. They come back again and again. That’s 95% of my business. Regulars.”

A.J. sat back in his chair. He went through each thing Carter had said, in order, the way he went through notes before an exam. Shape, age, make them feel like they have something special. Concrete enough to work with.

“That’s it?” A.J. said.

“That’s all I got.” Carter put his headphones on, then pulled one side off. “And fix the walk. You still walk like a six year old who’s stomping ants.”

He put the headphones back and opened a document on his screen, a clear sign he was no longer in the mood to talk. A.J. took out his phone and typed everything into his notes app before he forgot it, sitting in the library corner while students moved around them, none of them with any idea what they had just missed.



Feet up, vaping, apparently unbothered by the concept of time, Felix acted like he was already expecting A.J. to walk through the door of his back alley salon that evening. He looked at A.J. in the doorway and blew a long stream toward the ceiling.

“Back already,” Felix said. “What do you need?”

“I need to look...” he paused. “I need to look more like Carter looks.”

“Oh, no big thing, then,” Felix replied, sarcastically. “You got the money to look like that?”

“Yes,” A.J. replied.

“Well then,” he sprung into action. “Let’s get started.” Felix nodded once and went to the back.

What he returned with was different from the first set in every way that mattered. The shapewear was heavier, structured with boning along the sides, and it laced at the back rather than pulling on like a sleeve. Felix worked it up over A.J.’s hips and began tightening the laces from the bottom, working upward in sections. By the third section A.J. was breathing through his nose.

“Too much?” Felix said.

“Keep going,” A.J. said.

Felix kept going. By the time he tied off the top, A.J.’s waist had gone somewhere that his waist had never been before. He could feel the boning on each side of his ribcage, a firm and constant pressure that made deep breathing a treacherous concept. He looked in the mirror. The curve from his compressed waist out to his padded hips was dramatic in a way the first shaper hadn’t come close to.

“That’s going to hurt after two hours,” Felix said.

“It hurts *now*.”

The new bra had larger cups and more projection, and when Felix finished adjusting it the silhouette in the mirror was one A.J. didn’t have any frame of reference for. He stood there looking at it for a moment. Then Felix put the dress on him and the looking was over.

At the makeup station, A.J. told Felix to go lighter. Less contour, more gloss, rosier at the cheek. Felix raised one tattooed eyebrow.

“Younger,” A.J. said. “I want to look younger. Illegal.”

Felix considered this with the expression of someone who had been told to do the impossible.

“You should take some progesterone,” Felix said. “You have man bumps. Like the face of the moon. A little progesterone works magic. Smooths that skin out like silk.”

“Is that a drug?”

“Yes! A *wonderful* drug.”

“Where do I get it?”

“These days? You can do it all online.” Felix grabbed a purse that was stashed on a nearby chair. “But you can use mine until then.” He handed over a small brown bottle with a few pills in it. “I got extras.”

Felix went back to work, swapped the matte foundation on A.J. for something with a slight luminosity, sheered it out at the jaw so the edges of A.J.’s face softened into the neck. He kept the contour minimal with just a suggestion under the cheekbone rather than the full carve he’d done before. The lips got a gloss instead of the matte rose, a pale pink that caught the light when A.J. pressed his lips together. The blush went higher on the cheek, closer to the eye, which Felix said read as younger without explaining further.

A.J. looked in the mirror. The face looking back was softer than the one from the first night. Wider-eyed somehow, though nothing about the eyes had changed except the color on the lid, which Felix had kept to a pale champagne and a thin coat of mascara.

“Huh,” Felix said, “Sometimes I surprise myself.” A.J. took it as a compliment.



The first client of the night was a man in his sixties with a good haircut confidence so thick it could have been a syrup. He told A.J. a story about a flight he'd taken to Geneva that had no discernible punchline, and A.J. giggled. He had been practicing. It needed to sound spontaneous. He did a decent job, but he could do better. A light exhale, a lift of the shoulders, a hand that went briefly to the hair Felix had styled into loose waves that evening. It was been a thousand dollars, this wig. It was fluffy, natural and thick. He looked amazing in it. The giggle was followed by the slightest head tilt and a little squint of the eyes.

The man's posture changed immediately. He sat up slightly. He ordered another drink.

A.J. noted this and filed it away.

The next one came an hour later. Younger — late forties, a tech sector type with an open collar and a sport watch. He talked about a product launch with the intensity of someone who needed the story to be more interesting than it was. A.J. leaned forward on one elbow, tilted his head, and touched the man's forearm for two seconds when he got to what he clearly felt was the important part. The man lost his train of thought for a moment.

“Sorry,” the man said. “Where was I?”

“The launch,” A.J. said, keeping his voice soft and forward. “You were about to tell me how it went.”

He wasn't. He'd already told A.J. how it went. But he told it again, and this time with more detail.

By the end of the night A.J.'s ribs ached from the boning and his cheeks hurt from the expressions he'd been making with them for four hours. He sat in the booth after the last client left and allowed his face to do nothing for a moment, which felt like taking shoes off after a long day. The giggling had been the hardest part. Not producing a giggle, because that was relatively easy. Underselling it, making it seem uncontrived was the challenge.

His booth rental fee only covered four hours an evening, so it was common for there to be an hour or two after he was done before the whole place shut down for the night. So tonight, instead of going home, he changed back into his regular clothes and took a seat at the bar. From his perch, he studied the top earners, mimicking their giggles, their light touches, their coy glances. He learned to play the part of the bubbly, slightly air-headed bimbo, and the men ate it up.

That week, the pay envelope was thick enough that it became a concern on the walk to the bus. If someone mugged him, he'd lose a lot of money. A.J. was aware of it the whole way, wondering if this was the right time to open his first savings account. He had never had enough money to actually save before.



The following nights ran the same way. The men who had barely glanced at A.J.'s booth two weeks earlier were now settling into his seat. A property developer named Glenn had been there two nights in a row, his first repeat customer. A.J. sat across from Glenn for an hour and touched his arm twice and giggled at the right moments. Glenn actually had to be reminded by Ms. Sandra that his time was up.

It was around now that A.J. stopped feeling like a person who had wandered into the wrong room and was trying to back out gracefully. The room was his workplace now, and not to say he felt comfortable in a wig and dress sitting there, but he was far less uncomfortable. He knew which clients wanted to feel intelligent and which ones wanted to feel desired and which ones just wanted someone to sit still and listen while they talked about their lives. A.J. could do all three. He could read the table in the first five minutes and adjust accordingly, and he did it without thinking about it, which was how he knew he had gotten good at it.

As for his outfit, and looking like a woman, he'd never get used to that. There was a very palpable terror he felt every night. Every new pair of eyes on him was like a crowbar ready to pop the top off his whole life.

The money was thrilling, being self-sufficient for the first time in his life, with lots left over to spend on what he wanted. The mental cost, though, was high. He had nightmares, waking up in a cold sweat, the phantom feeling of a man's touch on his hand. Dreams where he was exposed as a crossdresser were very common. Sometimes he'd be exposed to his family, sometime to his friends, sometimes to Julie, that girl who used to go with Carter before she went with him.

The only reason he had lasted this long, living with the tension and fear of being revealed to his friends and family, was because he knew it would end. With money in his pocket, he would walk away and then never think about this insanity ever again. It was college, after all. Every goes through a weird period in college.

College had been the plan since before A.J. had been old enough to form his own plans. It was the answer to every question about the future: what are you going to do, where are you going to be, questions he had to answer a thousand times as a kid. College, and then whatever came after college, and the

assumption that the sequence itself was the point. He had believed this without examining it.

The tuition bill for the semester sat in his email, unopened, because opening it didn't change the number and not opening it meant he could defer the dread of it for another day. The two courses he was doing worst in were statistics, which met on Tuesday mornings when he was tired from Monday nights, and a survey course he'd chosen to fill a requirement and had never really understood the subject, were pulling his GPA in a direction it didn't need to go.

He lay back on the futon and looked into the drawer where he kept his money.

The registration portal closed on Friday. He knew this because he'd gotten two automated reminders, both of which he'd dismissed without reading fully.

On Thursday night he opened his phone, logged into the portal, and dropped statistics and the survey course. The screen updated immediately, his schedule suddenly clean on Tuesday mornings and Wednesday afternoons, and A.J. looked at the open blocks of time and felt a bit guilty, and had to remind himself he wasn't doing this because his new job was taking huge chunks of time from him, he was doing this for very practical reasons.

The money was still in the drawer and A.J. turned off the lamp and lay in the dark for a while before he fell asleep, telling himself it was temporary, which was the kind of thing you tell yourself when you already know you're lying out your ass.



The names ran top to bottom with a dollar figure next to each one. The tote board wasn't out for everyone to see. You had to know it was there and stick your head into Ms. Sandra's office to see it. A.J. had looked at it every night for two weeks and his name was at the bottom every time, which Ms. Sandra had not commented on and which was kind of worse than if she had.

He sat in the chair closest to the door of the back changing room and looked at his reflection. The wig was slightly flattened on one side from where he'd leaned against the couch cushion for too long. His lipstick had worn to a faint stain at the center of his lips. He looked tired in a way the makeup couldn't fully cover anymore.

Above his name on the board was a girl called Demi, and above Demi was Lucy, and way at the top, where she had been every single night since A.J. started, was a name written in red marker: Selina. That was Carter's "professional" name, apparently. Unfortunately, his name lacked a photo to go with it. He still wondered what he looked like, all made up, and one of these days they'd work the same night. Below his name was that of the #2 "girl," Vivienne.

A.J. had seen Vivienne twice. She was tall, gorgeous, captivating. A vixen if there ever was one. Even if Vivienne wasn't a real girl, it didn't really matter. There was no discernible difference between a real, impossibly beautiful, desirable, sexy girl and Vivienne. He couldn't compete. It wasn't a fair fight.

A.J. pulled the wig off and set it on the stand in front of him. His own hair underneath was flattened and damp at the temples. He tried to squeeze some of the sweat away with his finger. He had four free mornings a week now. He was doing fewer credits than any semester since he'd started. There was no reason, practically speaking, that he couldn't be here more nights. More nights meant more clients. More clients meant climbing the board, and climbing the board meant eventually not being at the bottom of it.

He was still thinking about the board when the door opened and two of the other girls came in from the floor. They were in the middle of a conversation, and they didn't pause when they saw him. One of them was Demi (#4), who wore her hair in a high ponytail that danced with every move of her sleek head, glanced at A.J. in the mirror and then looked away.

"Still here, Lola?" she said, to the mirror rather than to him.

"Getting ready to leave," A.J. said.

"Mm." She sat down two chairs over and began taking off her lashes with the practiced speed of someone who had done it ten thousand times. "You know Ms. Sandra rotates people out if they're not performing."

"I know."

"Just saying." She dropped the lashes onto the counter. "I'd hate to see you go."

The other girl, Tori (#6), caught his eye in the mirror and gave him a look that was less hostile than Demi's and more of an assessment, deciding whether he was worth the energy of making a remark.

A.J. picked up his bag. "I'll see you tomorrow," he said, and meant it as a way to let Demi know he perfectly understood the disguised insult, and left.

At the bus stop, he sat and thought about Demi's neckline. It had been lower than his, lower than most of the other hostesses', and the effect was not incidental. The clients' eyes went there first, which changed the entire opening of the interaction, which changed everything downstream. The most confusing thing was when Demi arrived and when they left, they had no chest. When they were on the floor, they did. They showed skin. They had cleavage, too.

A.J. looked down at his own chest. The padding gave him a shape but nothing else. There was a big difference between hinted-at curves and seeing boobs. By his math, that difference was worth about 200 to 300 a night.



On a Wednesday afternoon, a very boring day of the week, where no one would suspect anything untoward happening, A.J. took the bus to a neighborhood across the city where no one knew him. He wore the wrap dress and low heels and the brown wig and a pair of small gold earrings. He bought a coffee at a counter and the girl at the register smiled at him and said have a good one without any pause, without any second look, without any of the slight recalibration he'd been watching for in people's faces for weeks. He walked three blocks and went into a bookstore and browsed for twenty minutes. He didn't read a word. He just pretended like he wasn't freaking out. To steady his nerves, he sat on a bench outside and drank the rest of his coffee until he finished it and took the bus back.

It was, in every way, a successful test. Mind you, A.J. had been too frightened to actually evaluate it with any detail, but he did note that no one gave him a second glance. In a way, that was good. In another way, it was the worst possible result. The whole point was, at his new occupation, to be noticed.

The brown wig had been fine. Fine was a problem. Fine disappeared into the background, which was what he wasn't supposed to do. A.J. had watched Vivienne work the floor twice now from across the lounge, and whatever she had, whatever it was that compelled people to give them so much attention, the hair was a big part of it: a long, pale blonde that caught the light when she moved and made people look twice before they knew anything about them.

A.J. spent an evening researching and found a shop across the city that sold professional-grade pieces — the kind used in film and theater, with hand-tied lace fronts and natural strands that shone with that undefinable quality that made it look more real. The price range on the website made him close the tab and open it again. Then he pictured the leaderboard in his head, his name at the bottom, and made an appointment.

The shop was narrow and well-lit, with heads mounted along both walls displaying pieces in every length and color. A woman with reading glasses on a chain around her neck greeted him without visible reaction, which A.J. appreciated. He told her he wanted something blonde, something sexy. She pulled four options and set them on the counter.

The woman working the counter knew her business, and knew her clientele. The notable event of a man asking for a woman's wig wasn't to be mentioned, and it also wasn't to be ignored. She just kept to her line of expertise.

The third one was a soft, layered blonde that fell just past the shoulder, with a wave that started at the cheekbone. The stylist at the shop set it on his head, pressed the lace front down at the temples, and stepped back. "That's going to look good with your skin tone and hide what you want to hide."

A.J. looked in the mirror. "It really does," he said.

The brown wig had softened his features. This one made them glamorous. His cheekbones read differently under the pale framing of the hair, looking more delicate, more defined. His eyes looked larger. The overall effect was someone younger and more feminine than the person he'd been fabricating over the past weeks.

The stylist said something about the hair quality. A.J. nodded and looked at his own reflection and felt a specific and unwelcome shame that he couldn't have fully expressed. Something about how well it worked, and about the fact that he could see, clearly and without question, that it worked. He looked feminine. He looked, in the flat light of a wig shop on a Thursday afternoon, like a reasonably pretty young woman, and he was ashamed of how little effort that recognition required.

He bought the wig. And the shampoo. And the wig comb. And the wig cap.

That was one issue dealt with, but now he needed to address the bigger issue. Or, rather, the *two* bigger issues. He found the store two cities away in a medical district, between a pharmacy and an office that did hearing aids. The sign on the door was small, listing medical prosthetics as their line of business. A.J. stood outside for longer than was necessary, then went in.

The shop was cool and quiet. A middle-aged man behind the counter looked up from his computer. He had the expression of someone who had was not going to be surprised no matter what A.J. asked for. A.J. wondered if he and the wig lady might get along. Lots of relationships are built around ignoring the obvious.

This was the solution he had found. After much sordid research, the way to improve the bust size was to... Buy a prosthetic. Or, as he learned, an "appliance" as they said in this trade.

"I'm looking for a... Chest appliance," A.J. said, having practiced it in his head a thousand times, trying to get past his hang-up on saying such a thing out loud.

"First time here?" he said.

"It's for a costume," A.J. said. "A project. It's a costume thing."

"Sure," he came around the counter. "What size?"

"I don't... Something natural. Normal. Whatever looks good."

He went to the back and A.J. stood in the middle of the shop and looked at frankly disquieting display of limbs lined up on the wall. He heard drawers opening and closing. The man came back with a expression that was immediately recognizable as the kind of expression a shoe salesman had when they didn't have the shoes in your size and was going to push getting it in a another color.

"I've got limited stock in your size right now," he said. He set a box on the counter. "E-cup's what I've got."

“E-cup? Is that a real size?”

The employee pointed to a poster on the back wall, showing the different cup sizes. “Take it or leave it.”

A.J. looked at it, then blanched. “That’s very large.”

“It is.”

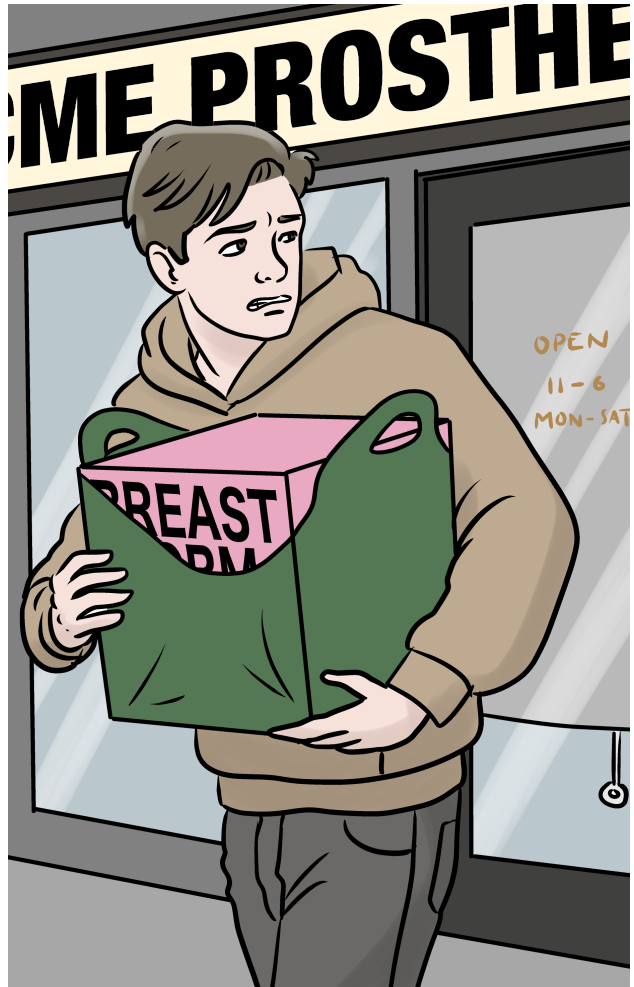
“You don’t have anything smaller.”

“Not in your size. I’ve got smaller in a size that won’t fit your torso. They’ll gap and pull up at the sides.” He gestured at the poster. “You want to try it or not?”

A.J. bought it. The box went into a plain bag and the man slid it across the counter. For a moment, he thought of running away back to the world of sane people doing sane things. A.J. took it, thanked him and left.

The street outside was busy in the ordinary way of a weekday afternoon. People walked past carrying their own bags, going to their own appointments, conducting their own business. A.J. was quietly losing his shit, knowing he was carrying rubber boobs with him, and hoping no one was going to bump into him and cause his package to fall out, have to explain it, fail, and be locked up in the prison where they put the extra-perverted perverts.

He got on the bus and put the bag on his lap, clamped his arms around it and looked at the package for the whole ride home.



Once he got home, he locked the door and opened the box on his bed.

The prosthetics were heavier than he'd expected, but they were solid silicone, flesh-toned, with a flat backing designed to sit against the chest wall. He applied a small bit of the adhesive to his chest and adjusted the fit the way the instructions described. Then he put on a dress, a burgundy wrap with a V-neck he'd ordered online and hadn't worn yet, and stood in front of the mirror.

He turned to the left, then the right. The cleavage was cavernous. The weight was massive. It was like carrying a bowling ball around his neck. He adjusted his posture, pulling his shoulders back, and the effect intensified. He stood there for a moment just looking.

The heels went on last, and the added weight of the prosthetics shifted his center of gravity in a way he hadn't anticipated. The heels were threatening to launch him forward into the mirror. He took a few steps toward the mirror and caught himself on the dresser. He tried again, slower, recalibrating. By the time he'd crossed the room twice he had something close to a workable walk, though he had to use more concentration than he used to.

He was gonna need some new bras. Back to Amazon.



At the lounge the next night, he noticed the difference before he'd reached his booth. A man at the bar tracked him across the room without attempting to conceal his intent. Another, already seated with a hostess, glanced over twice before locking his eyes on A.J. The feminized young man kept his chin level and his eyes forward and felt the room's attention as a physical thing, like a change in air pressure.

When he walked from the curtain to the booth, every single head in the lounge turned in unison, tracking his movement. It was exactly what he had hoped for. It was also very creepy. He was willing to ignore the creepiness as long as he had the attention and the revenue that would follow.

His first client of the night leaned forward and kept slowly moving forward as if the boobs mere magnetic. A.J. didn't have a free minute that night. The envelope Ms. Sandra handed him at the end of the night was double what he'd taken home the week before.

A hostess named Rika worked the booths on the opposite side of the lounge and had, according to the tote board, had held the spot below Vivienne for four consecutive months. He was small and fine-featured, with large dark eyes and a way of inhabiting a room that made it feel like everyone else was just an extra in her life. A.J. had nodded at them twice in the back room and received a polite, noncommittal smile in return.

A.J. watched them work on a Thursday, from across the room, between his own clients. Rika's giggle was infrequent enough to mean something when it happened. Their touches were brief, like a fingertip on a forearm or a light press on a wrist when making a point, and they withdrew them before the client could decide how to respond to them, which kept the client hooked and on the line. When a client said something Rika disagreed with, they pouted for exactly one second, then let it go with a small smile, and the client spent the next five minutes trying to win back the approval he'd briefly lost.

He took all of it in and brought it to his next shift. The pout felt theatrical the first time he tried it and less so the second time and natural by the end of the week. The touches he spaced carefully, making sure there was enough time between them that each one registered. The giggle he deployed twice per hour, no more.

His regular clients began requesting the back booth specifically. A man named Douglas, who worked in finance and talked about bond markets with the enthusiasm of someone who didn't know he was boring, started coming in on Tuesdays and asking for him by name at the door. Bit by bit, A.J. was becoming the hostess he needed to be.



Flush with cash, A.J. was no longer living in fear of being tossed out of his apartment or calls from bill collectors. Still, he lived with a new fear: being read as a female impersonator. He tried to compensate for that, and when that proved inadequate, he overcompensated. He bought a hoodie that was two sizes too large and a pair of chunky work boots with a heavy sole and wore them to meet his college friends on a Friday evening at a bar near campus. He'd deepened his voice gradually over the preceding weeks without deciding to, undoing his feminine voice in the mornings after nights at the lounge, and by now it came without effort.

His friend Brady looked at him across the table. "Long time no see, A.J. Didn't you used to say you couldn't afford fun anymore?"

"Yeah," A.J. said. "I got a night job."

"Doing what?"

"Hospitality," A.J. said, which was true in the way that a lot of things were technically true.

When the bill came he put cash on the table before anyone else had looked at the total. Brady and the others exchanged a look over his head that he wasn't supposed to notice.

"Damn," Brady said. "Big spender over here."

A.J. picked up his drink. He had, just that morning, practiced walking in four-inch heels for forty minutes before breakfast. Nobody at the table knew any of that, and the distance between what they knew and what he would tell them had grown into a wide expanse. If they thought his hair looked a bit stringy, it wasn't because he kept it matted under a wig half the day, it was because he'd been working out. If they asked why his face was red, it wasn't from applying and reapplying makeup, it was seasonal allergies. If they said he smelled a bit like flowers, he said a girl bought him some cologne and he had to wear it to make her happy.

"This mean you're gonna get out more often, A.J.?" Brady asked. "What brought this on?"

He smirked and let Brady wonder. What they didn't know wouldn't hurt him.



A.J. was finally able to catch up to Carter as he was dropping by the bar to pick up his pay, keys already in hand, ready to go.

"Hold on," A.J. said.

"I gotta go, man."

"You're making almost double what I am. I've done everything you told me. The shape, the makeup, the flirting. All of it." A.J. put his hand on Carter's shoulder, not just to be personable, but to keep him from running away. He barely ever saw him at work, if ever. "What are you not telling me?"

Carter looked at his pay envelope and sighed. "I guess I did get you into this, even if it costs me."

"Yeah, yeah!" A.J. said, eager to get him to spill. "You know you wanna tell me."

Carter took his quasi-friend to a corner of the hallway and lowered his voice. "When I'm working a table," Carter said, "I'm not thinking about technique. I'm not running through a checklist."

"Then what are you thinking about?"

Carter looked around to see if anyone else was eavesdropping, his voice barely audible. "You want to know what I do? I just empty my mind. Not a thought in mu head. I just giggle, smile and act like a 6 year old girl playing dress-up. That's how I picture her, with a child-like mind. When I walk out there, Carter ceases to exist. It's not a trick, A.J. It's a total personality transplant. You have to kill yourself to become the character."

A.J. looked at him. "That's insane."

"It's a commitment to the job. There's a difference."

"I'm not..." A.J. stopped. "I'm not into men."

"Neither am I." Carter said it the way you say something that's already been settled. "That's not the point. The point is that these men aren't spending money on company. They're spending it on the feeling that something could happen. That the woman across from them is genuinely into them. If you're running technique at them, they feel the technique. But if you're actually in it and if you've convinced yourself, they feel that instead."

A.J. sat with the door handle behind his back and looked through the windshield at the concrete wall of the parking structure.

"You're telling me to method act being attracted to them."

"I'm telling you what works," Carter said, and headed for the curtain to leave.



The gold dress was new. Silk, rhinestones, with a neckline that the prosthetics filled out in a way that still surprised him when he wasn't prepared for it. He stood in front of the mirror with the blonde wig brushed out and his makeup tight with gloss, a soft contour, the champagne eyelids, and he looked at the full picture.

He looked *good*. That was the honest assessment, made as plainly as he could make it. The figure was convincing, the face was convincing, the hair caught the light and shimmered when he turned his head. He had built this version of himself piece by piece over two months and the construction was sound.

Yet, he couldn't help but think about what Carter had said.

He exhaled and looked at his own reflection and tried to locate the part of himself that could do what Carter was describing. He didn't find it.

In the lounge, his first client was a broad man in his sixties with a loosened tie and looked like this wasn't going to be the first place he had stopped at for drinks. He smiled when A.J. approached.

A.J. sat down and arranged himself in the booth. Immediately, Carter's advice played back in his mind. *A child-like mind.*

He leaned forward slightly and traced one finger along the rim of his glass and held eye contact for a count longer than he usually did, like a little girl playing with a new toy. He pitched his voice up. He asked dumb questions. He got a little petulant, then a little giddy. But it felt hollow, like a line read from a script he didn't like. The man was polite, engaged, but there was no spark, no connection. The fantasy wasn't taking.

Frustration mounted. It wasn't working. He was just a pretty thing in a dress, not a seductress. He needed more. He needed to *believe* it. He closed his eyes



for a second, blocking out the tinkling keys of the music, and dug deeper. He couldn't just imagine seducing the man; he had to *play* with him. He had to feel a impish, impulsive precociousness, to be *daddied* by this stranger. He focused on the man's hand, resting on the table, imagining it on his thigh. He thought about the man's hotel room, the crisp white sheets, the feeling of being overpowered. He had to feel like being fucked by this man was the one and only thing he wanted in the entire world, and she was going to get it like spoiled girl gets a lollipop. It was a nauseating, gut-wrenching mental exercise, a complete violation of his own identity. *Kill yourself to become the character.* But when he opened his eyes, something had shifted.

Lola opened her eyes. She wasn't just wearing the clothes; she brought them to life. She moved with a new fluidity, a confidence that hadn't been there before. Her laugh was different, lighter, more carefree. "I am I prettier than your wife?" Lola asked.

"Yes," he replied, shocked at the question.

"Do you wish she had a cock?"

The man's pupils dilated. He leaned forward, his voice dropping to match A.J.'s.

"Sometimes."

"You don't know what you're missing."

"Tell me more about yourself," he breathed, his eyes locked on A.J.'s glossy lips.

Lola just smiled, a slow, knowing smile. She didn't talk about herself. She made sure her gust did the talking. He talked about the his life at home, as a seductress would, trying to build a case for him to leave his wife. He talked about his strength, his power, about how lonely it must be at the top, as if he was ready to make his life less lonely. He was no longer A.J. the student; he was a creature of pure, manipulation. When the man paused talking, and sounded like he need an affirmation, he was there with a nod, a giggle, a mm-hmm, even a little "O" with his lips from time to time. He was a responsive, lively and sometimes silly. He was Lola. And this man ate it up. He bought drink after drink, his hand occasionally brushing A.J.'s arm, each touch sending a jolt of revulsion and triumph through A.J. But he didn't flinch. he didn't back down.

By the end of the week, A.J. had made more money than ever before. He had finally cracked the code.



Once the way was open for A.J., he made it his sole focus. Feminine manipulation was like a new instrument he could play, and he wanted to master

it. He would try different things with different men. He pushed the boundaries on how “into” men he should be, as some seemed to respond well, others a little turned off. The trick was to figure it out fast and adjust even faster.

How much to touch them, when not to. When to make it look accidental, when to make it look purposeful. How to look like you wanted to kiss him or burn down his house. How to make himself look “open” to a man, as if it was the thinnest of reasons that were holding him back from jumping his bones. How to be the most playful and mischievous woman he could be, with a look in his eyes that made it appear as if all he could think about was sex.

Raymond was a man in his forties who ordered A.J. a drink without looking at the menu, indicating he understood the full cost of it.

“So,” Raymond said, settling back. “Tell me about yourself... Lola, is it?”

“Yes, I’m Lola,” A.J. Replied with an interested smile. “Unless you want me to be someone else.”

“I paid for Lola, I want to hear about Lola,” Raymond said.

A.J. — or rather, Lola — smiled and touched the stem of her glass. “There’s not much to tell. I’d rather hear about you.”

“I doubt that.” He smiled. “Where are you from originally?”

“Around.” She tilted her head. “You have an accent. East Coast?”

“Connecticut. Born and raised.” He accepted the redirect without appearing to notice it. “Moved out here for work about twelve years ago. Never quite left.”

“Do you miss it?”

“The winters, no. Everything else, sometimes.” He looked at her. “You’re good at that.”

“At what?”

“Turning the question around.” He said it without accusation. “I’ve been coming here long enough to recognize it.”

Lola laughed a small, unhurried laugh and looked at her glass. “I just find other people more interesting than myself.”

“I don’t believe that.” He leaned forward slightly. “A person like you? There must be quite a story to wind up here. Like this. Where did you grow up?”

She opened her mouth and found that there was nothing she could say. She was a wig, a face, a dress and a closet full of body shapers. That was all Lola really was. She had techniques and timing and a smile that caught the eye. What she didn’t have was an answer to the question.

“The valley,” she said. “It wasn’t interesting.”

“Family still there?”

“Some.” She reached across and touched his wrist briefly. “Raymond. You came here to relax. Tell me about Connecticut.”

He laughed at that. “You’re not going to give me anything, are you.”

“I’m giving you my full attention,” she said. “You don’t think that’s enough?”

He picked up his glass and looked at her with something that was partly amusement and partly the particular satisfaction of a man who enjoys a problem he can’t immediately solve.

“Connecticut,” he said. “Alright. Where do I start...”

“Start with you passion, Raymond. I want to hear about what makes you passionate.”

Every day, heck, every customer was teaching him something. Such as having a some kind of back story would be a good idea. Being a woman of mystery made it very hard to start a conversation. He could see in Raymond’s eyes that he nearly gave up and left the table. He couldn’t afford that. If people wanted to talk about Lola, he ought to be able to.

He sat at his kitchen table on a Sunday afternoon with a notebook he’d bought for the statistics class he’d since dropped, opened to the first page, and uncapped a pen with a pop.

He wrote the name first. *Lola*. He’d been using it at the lounge, but it had been just a name, a label on a version of himself he put on with the wig and took off with it. He looked at it on the page and tapped the pen against his chin.

*Age eighteen*. The clients responded to youth the way Carter had said they would, and eighteen was the bottom of believable. He wrote it down. However, since he was working in a bar, he needed to at least *say* she was 21. But he’d hint at being younger, hiding her true age to work the job.

Personality next. He thought about the clients who paid best, what they seemed to want from the person across the booth, what kind of girl made a fifty-year-old man in a good suit feel like the most interesting person in the room. *Bubbly*, he wrote. *Child-like*. *Naive*. *Playful*. He paused, then wrote: *bimbo*. He didn’t mean to say she was stupid, but Lola was uncomplicated, someone for whom the world was a series of fun adventures, someone who took things at face value because that’s all she could see.

Favorite drink: *strawberry daiquiri*. Sweet, young, the kind of drink that told a story about the person ordering it.

Favorite movie: *Legally Blonde*. He smiled without meaning to when he wrote it. It was right. It was *exactly* right.

Favorite food: *cotton candy*. He wrote it and nodded.

Origin Story: *Born in Beverly Hills, the only child of a cold, distant tech mogul father and a socialite mother more interested in galas than in her child*. He

paused, tapping the pen against his chin. The parents had to be the source of the conflict, the reason for the escape. *They never understood me. From the time I was little, I was sneaking into my mom's closet, trying on her heels and pearls. They thought it was a phase. Then they found my hidden collection of dresses, my journals filled with dreams of being a girl. That's when the shit hit the fan.*

He wrote faster now. *They sent me to doctors, therapists, anyone who could 'fix' me. They called it a 'disorder.' I called it who I was. The final straw was when my father threatened to cut me off, to disown me, unless I 'stopped this nonsense' and started dressing like the son he thought he had. That night, I packed a single suitcase with my favorite dress, my makeup, and the five thousand dollars I'd saved from my allowance. I took my mom's credit card, hailed a cab to LAX, and bought a one-way ticket to this city. I told them I'd rather be a poor girl on the streets than a rich boy in a gilded cage.*

He leaned back, reading the words. This was good. The anger, the defiance, the desperate need for acceptance. He was giving Lola the spine she needed.

*Aspirations: She couldn't just be a runaway. She had to have dreams. I want to be a fashion designer. Or a model. Or just... famous. I want to see my name in lights. I want to walk down a red carpet and have my parents see me on TV, beautiful and successful, and realize they were wrong about me.* He added a layer of delicious, bimbo-like contradiction. But for now, I'm just having fun. This city is my playground, and I intend to enjoy every minute of it.

*Fears: What scared a girl like Lola? Being alone. Being poor. Having to go back home with my tail between my legs. And spiders.*

*Secrets: Every good character has a secret. Sometimes, late at night, I wonder if they were right. Maybe I am just a confused boy playing dress-up. But then I look in the mirror, and I see her, and I know I could never go back. I'd rather die than be him again.*

The idea that Lola was a transvestite, a transsexual, a girl trapped in a boy's body, wasn't just a cover story anymore. It was the core of her being, the tragic, beautiful, compelling reason for her existence. And A.J. closed the notebook and put the pen down and went to make coffee and thought about something else for a while.

That night at the lounge, a client asked Lola where she grew up, and Lola told him about a house with a pool and a father who traveled a lot, and the client leaned forward and said tell me more, and Lola did.

His numbers went up. Then they went up again. Douglas started coming in twice a week and bringing a colleague on Thursdays. A man named Patrick, who ran a private equity firm and said so within the first two minutes of every conversation, began requesting him exclusively. The real Lola was the draw now. Not the performance. A real Lola, one who was a mixed-up girl on the run

from her old self and yet launching herself headlong into life at every opportunity. This Lola was a star, and A.J. knew it.

A.J. moved up the whiteboard in increments, past Demi, past two girls whose names he'd never learned, even past Vivienne. Then, one Tuesday, Ms. Sandra updated the board and his name was above Carter's.

He looked at the board for a long time that night. He took a picture.

He had finally done it. He was the top girl.



On a Saturday he met Brady and two others at a bar near campus. He wore the expensive large hoodie and the heavy boots and ordered a beer he didn't really want to drink. The bar was loud and bright after the lounge, which was always dim and always jazz, and the contrast was jarring in a way he hadn't anticipated.

Brady was telling a story about a girl from his economics lecture. The others were laughing. A.J. smiled at the right moments and drank a little and watched his friends across the table with a feeling he couldn't name, something like distance, like looking at a photograph of a place he used to live.

He really just wanted to show off. Dressed in his brand new fit, all luxury stuff, the very best. His new gold watch was the highlight, and he found every reason he could to lift his arms so it could be seen. Some noticed, others didn't. He should be



flashing his new status. Unfortunately, he just couldn't enjoy it.

Someone told a crude joke, the kind A.J. would have laughed at six months ago without thinking about it. The others laughed. A.J. felt something move through him that wasn't quite discomfort and wasn't quite recognition and wasn't anything he wanted to look at directly, so he picked up his beer and took a sip and waited for the moment to pass.

A group of women at the next table were loud and clearly having a good night. Brady nudged A.J. with his elbow. "The one in the green," he said, by way of direction.

A.J. looked over. She was attractive, had a good skin tone, had obviously just come from the salon, paid too much for those heels, and seemed to be enjoying herself — and he felt nothing in particular, which itself felt like information he didn't want.

"Yeah," he said.

"You should go talk to her."

"Maybe later," A.J. said, and didn't.

His eyes instead drifted to a man talking to an older woman in the back. He looked wealthy. Or maybe just wealthy enough to look wealthy. Where had he been in his life? Who had he seen? What kind of business did he work in? His instincts he had developed were driving him to analyze this stranger with the same surgical precision he did at his booth. How could he make this man fall for him? He wanted to go see.

At some point Brady put his drink down and looked at him directly. "Dude. What's up with you lately. You've been weird."

"I'm just tired," A.J. said. He snapped his attention away from the man he'd been sizing up. He produced a grin that felt like the small laugh he deployed at the lounge, assembled from the outside rather than felt from anywhere. "Work's been a lot."

"The hospitality thing."

"Yeah."

Brady looked at him a moment longer. They both knew something was wrong but decided not to push it. Then A.J. went back to his drink and the conversation moved on. He sat with his unfinished beer and the noise of the bar and the low and persistent feeling that something had shifted in him. Why wasn't he just enjoying the moment, here with Brady and his friends? He had worked so hard to be here, to be doing so well he could throw money around and dazzle them, and yet, he felt so... bored.



The Sunday dinner was at his parents' house in the suburb where he'd grown up, a forty-minute drive that he'd been finding reasons to not to make ever since he got to college. The house had a driveway with a basketball hoop that hadn't been moved since he was fourteen and a kitchen that smelled like fried meat. There was some kind of opera on the music system, and his father was in the living room which was close enough for him to easily meet him at the door, but his dad wasn't that type of dad.

His mother opened the door and looked at him and made a sound that was not quite a word.

"A.J.," she said. "You look..." She stopped. "Thinner."

"Starving student," he said. "You know how it goes."

She let him in with the expression of someone filing a concern to be addressed after dinner.

A.J. headed into the living room with his dad planted in his recliner, the television on. He looked up when A.J. came in. The look his father gave him traveled from his face to his jeans to his face again and made its assessment without particular hurry.

"The hell are you wearing," his father said. It came out as a statement rather than a question, which was his father's preferred construction for things he didn't want answered. "That faggot shit doesn't do you any favors."

"Oh my god, Dad." The words came out higher than he'd intended. He heard them land and brought his register down. "It's a new style. All the guys wear this. Big guys. Tough guys."

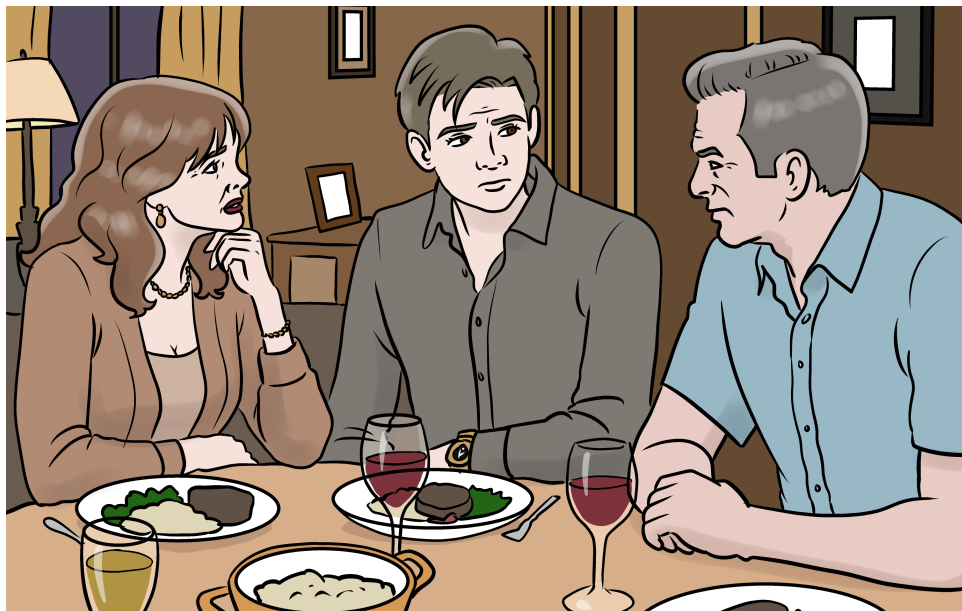
His father looked at him for another moment and then looked back at the television, which was his father's way of indicating that the conversation was paused rather than closed.

"Your skin is so smooth," his mother told him.

That was impossible to hide. After getting his own prescription for progesterone, he had been taking it for more than a couple of months, and although he was told it wouldn't show results that quickly, his skin was now getting smoother. In fact, it was glowing.

"Oh? Well... Uh... Thanks. Been trying a new soap. Pumice soap. *Manly* pumice soap."

His mother put food on the table and they sat down and she asked about school with the specific hopefulness of a woman who needed the answer to be a good one. A.J. said it was going well. This was, at this point, a position he held without supporting evidence, having withdrawn from his more than half his classes months ago.



The evening proceeded and A.J. could feel himself losing his stamina, his voice squeaking into a higher pitch from time to time before he could get it back down. Had his voice been that different lately? He hadn't really noticed until now.

His father asked about his gold watch, and so he talked about the watch.

He should not have talked about the watch.

The price came out before he'd processed whether to keep it secret. His mother's fork paused half way to her mouth.

"But I can afford it," he added, trying to soothe the shock of why he had spent \$1,000 on a watch. "I have a job." He wanted to boast about how much money he made, and for some reason didn't think he'd have to go into details.

"A job!" His father set down his fork. "What kind of work?"

"Tell us all about it!" his mother added, with excitement.

"Uh... Hospitality," A.J. said. "It's in the hospitality industry. Not much more to tell. Boring, really. It's good money. That's what counts. Did you get that new mower, dad?"

The distraction didn't work. His mother was looking at him with the focused attention of a woman making mental notes. Her don'ts perfectly kept eyebrows seemed to be attracting her attention at the moment. Combine that with the gold watch, the fresh-from-the-store clothes, his skinny frame and the slight upward drift in his speech patterns that he kept correcting and kept losing, and she knew something was up. "Are you happy?" she said, which was not a question A.J. was prepared for.

“Yeah, I guess,” he said. “I’m doing really well, actually. Financially, like, really... well.”

His parents exchanged a look across the table. It was the look of two people who have been communicating in this shorthand for thirty years and have just said something to each other.

A.J. picked up his water glass and drank from it and set it back down, dabbing his lips gently with the napkin. He picked another topic, a new painting that was hung in the hallway, and talked about it much longer than the subject warranted.

His mother got up to get dessert ready and patted him on the shoulder, as if she was comforting him for some reason. The kind of pat he usually got when he was in trouble. She went to the kitchen, and A.J. sat at the table with his father.

His father looked at the watch once more.

Then he picked up his fork and finished his dinner.



A.J. walked through the curtain of the lounge and stood for a moment at the entrance the way Lola did, taking in the room like it was a party she’d just arrived at and was deciding where to go or the most fun.

The walk to his booth was slower than usual. His hips moved with the deliberate, unhurried sway he’d been practicing across his apartment floor for weeks, the weight of the prosthetics shifting his balance, but he didn’t need to fight it, he used it to his advantage. Then men at the bar looked.

He settled into the booth, arranged himself, and waited.

The first client sat down within ten minutes, a man in his late forties, open collar, two drinks in and feeling good about it. He asked how long Lola had been working here.

“Oh, not that long,” A.J. said, letting the voice go breathy, higher, the consonants softer. “You know, I got lost today coming to work. The city is soooo big! You’d think I’d know my way by now.” Lola laughed and touched her hair. “I’m such an airhead.”

The man smiled the way men smiled when they found something charming that they hadn’t expected.

The conversation moved, as these conversations always did, toward personal territory. Where was she from. What was she doing here. A.J. didn’t hesitate.

Lola told her story of leaving a nice home with intolerant parents. The city was the first place that felt like a choice she’d made herself. She said this with a

small, wistful look that landed somewhere between sad and satisfied, and the man leaned forward.

He asked what she was into.

“Bad boys,” A.J. said, with a small guilty smile. “Like, genuinely dangerous ones. I know it’s terrible. I get into trouble again and again. I have zero self-preservation instinct.”

The man laughed.

By the second hour the booth was ready for the next guest, another lonely businessman who wanted to talk to a femboy. God bless them, A.J. said to himself.

He stayed four more hours. Ms. Sandra appeared at his elbow at the end of the night with the envelope and a look that was the closest thing she had to an expression of approval.



They met at a burger spot two blocks from campus known for sticky menus and fries. Carter was already halfway through his food when A.J. got there.

A.J. sat down and pulled his jacket off and picked up the menu he didn’t need to read. “Ms. Sandra added me to Saturdays,” he said. “Starting next week.”

“Good for you,” Carter said, and took a bite of his burger.

Something in the flatness of it made A.J. look up. “What?”

Carter chewed and set the burger down and wiped his mouth. “I’m out,” he said.

“Out of what?”

“The bar. I’m done.”

A.J. put the menu down. “Since when?”

“I’m telling you now, aren’t I?”

“What?” A.J. leaned forward. “What happened?”

Carter picked up a fry and looked at it without eating it. “Just time to move on.”

“From this cushy job? Where are you going to work?” A.J. said.

“I’ve got options.” He looked closer at A.J. “Are you tearing up?”

“No,” A.J. replied, wiping a tear away, trying to make it look like was just rubbing his eye.

“You are.”

“I’ve just had these weird mood swings lately,” he said. “I cry for no reason.”

Carter smirked. "Sure."

"Anyway, where are you gonna work now?"

Carter gave him a look. "That's my business," he said with a glare.

"When's your last day?"

"Already had it. I cleaned out my locker last night."

"Fuck," A.J. said. "You gonna do another job as a fem boy?"

He chuckled and shook his head. "No."

A.J. paused for a moment. He didn't want to sound greedy. After all, this was good for him. Less competition. But he had to ask. "Can I have your drill earrings?"



A.J. called the leasing office for the modern new apartment building he'd been walking past for two months and put down the deposit on a two-bedroom on the 14th floor before he'd thought it through enough to talk himself out of it.

The new apartment had windows that faced the city and a kitchen with counter space and a bathroom where the tiles weren't cracked. He furnished it in two weekends, buying things he'd previously thought he wouldn't own until he was "successful" later in life. Things like a real bed frame, a couch that hadn't belonged to anyone else first, lamps that matched. A Roomba.

He stocked a new fridge with things from the import section of the grocery store without checking the prices. He bought a coffee maker that cost more than his first month's rent at his old place and used it every morning.

The cracked-screen phone was replaced with one of those fancy folding ones, which he paid for outright. Then the wardrobe, which he'd been rebuilding for a while, was the best of what the men's casual section of a middle-class mall stocked. Thick hoodies with the ridiculously fat drawstring, pants that had been pre-aged, socks that no one could see.

New credit cards arrived in the mail and he used it the same day. The limit was higher than he'd expected and he was determined to keep things under control, but he was already asking for limit raises by the end of the week.

He was down to two courses. One met on Monday afternoons, one on Wednesday mornings, and he made it to most of them, or enough of them that he wasn't yet in formal trouble. The Monday one he could do half-asleep, which was useful because he was usually half-asleep, the late nights compressing his mornings into something he moved through rather than inhabited. He slept until noon on days he didn't have to be anywhere and told himself it was necessary recovery.

Brady texted on a Friday about a party near campus and A.J. replied “busy tonight” while he was in front of the bathroom mirror, applying powder to his nose, wig cap on, the blonde wig on its stand beside the sink. He didn’t think about the text again until the next day when he passed on a lunch get-together with the gang.

The invitations came less frequently after a while, which was its own kind of answer. When his friends did see him for a birthday dinner or a chance encounter near campus in November, his friends looked at him like they were reconsidering things.

“What have you been up to?” someone asked at the birthday dinner. A.J. was in a good hoodie, hair recently cut, the kind of present and composed look that money makes easier.

“Working a lot,” he said.

“Where?”

“Hospitality.” He picked up his drink. “It’s a lot of late nights.”

The conversation moved on without him because he gave it nowhere else to go.

The truth was that he had a social life — a social life full and varied and involved more conversation than he’d had in any previous period of his life. He knew which clients wanted to be challenged and which ones wanted to be soothed and which ones just needed someone to sit still across from them for an hour. He knew the names of Douglas’s adult children and the details of Patrick’s shipping contracts and the specific nature of Glenn’s ongoing disagreement with his business partner. He was, in the hours between ten and two, surrounded by people and entirely engaged.

Yes, he was Lola in those hours, and Lola’s social life didn’t transfer. A.J. came home after midnight and took the wig off and cleaned the makeup from his face and stood in his nice bathroom in his clean apartment and was alone, and quite happy to be alone after hours of socializing with his guests.

He set his phone on the charger and got into bed, and thought being the center of a man’s attention for an hour, until he fell asleep.



He was standing in his kitchen at nine-thirty on a Thursday night, putting his kit bag together the way he always did — wig in the silk bag, prosthetics wrapped in the cloth pouch Felix had given him, makeup in the leather case he’d bought on the same afternoon he’d bought the refrigerator that dispensed sparkling water. He was still in his regular clothes, jeans and a hoodie.

His phone buzzed on the counter.



It was a hostess-group text from Demi, who had once told him he didn't have the face for this work and had been professionally cold to him ever since, which made her the last person he'd have expected to hear from socially. The message was four words.

*Bar's closed. We're done.*

A.J. looked at it. He put the makeup case in the bag and looked at it again. He typed *what* and sent it and waited and Demi did not respond.

The door that had previously been plain and unassuming, with no indication that anything of note happened behind the door, now had a piece of paper hastily taped to it that read *Closed for Renovations* in a font that suggested the sign had been made by someone who owned the software but had not spent time with it.

A.J. stood on the sidewalk and looked at the sign.

He tried the door, which was locked, and then tried it again a second time even though nothing about the situation had changed. He took a step back and looked at the building. He cupped his hands and he pressed his face against a window. The lights inside were off. It was odd. He had never seen it without

the low amber glow of the lounge lighting and the movement of people inside it.

He texted Ms. Sandra. The message showed delivered and stayed that way.

Standing on the sidewalk for another few minutes, he felt silly for thinking something was going to happen if he waited long enough. A couple walked past him without interest.

He took a rideshare back.



His fourteenth floor condo had floor-to-ceiling windows and a refrigerator that dispensed sparkling water, and the monthly payment on it was a number that had felt, four weeks ago, like a reasonable fraction of what he was bringing in. He sat at the kitchen counter and opened his banking app and looked at the number in his account, which was not the number he'd expected to find. He scrolled through the recent transactions feeling horrible about every frivolous purchase he had made.

It hadn't. The condo deposit was there. The furniture was there, spread across three separate purchases at a store where the salespeople worked on commission and had correctly identified him as someone who wouldn't ask the price of anything. The credit card payment, which he'd been making the minimum on for two months because the full balance was a number he'd been deferring thinking about, was due in eleven days.

He opened the credit card app. The balance was higher than he'd last checked, because he'd last checked two weeks ago, which was when he'd bought the clothes that needed the specific \$50 satin hangers.

Putting the phone face down on the counter, he immediately picked it back up and looked at the number again, in case it had reconsidered.

He did the math that he'd been avoiding doing. The condo payment was due in eighteen days. The credit card in eleven. His bank account, which he'd been adding to inconsistently and drawing from much more consistently, covered approximately one of these things, depending on which one he chose, after which he would have enough left for roughly three weeks of the imported groceries, or six weeks of normal groceries, or eleven weeks of the groceries he'd been buying before all of this, back when his refrigerator only dispensed liquid by leaking coolant on the floor.

He'd spent 3 months paying off his student loans. He'd rebuilt his financial situation in four months at the lounge. He'd dismantled it again in approximately eight weeks of believing that the number would always go up.

He opened his laptop and went to a job listing site he hadn't visited for so long he had forgotten the password. He set the filters for "immediate start" and "evening hours" and whatever the site considered "entry level," which it turned out was a job called "0 results."

Adjusting the filter, he looked at the listings for a while, making more and more concessions and getting more and more horrible results. Then he picked up his phone, finding it harder than usual to keep a firm grip on, probably due to his shaking hands, which were probably due to the terror in his soul, and called Carter.



The coffee shop Carter suggested was the kind of place that had six varieties of milk that didn't come from a cow, and where the menu was written on a chalkboard with added cartoons. It was on a street in a neighborhood that had, according to a framed newspaper article on the wall, been named one of the city's most promising emerging areas in 2015, which meant the rents had tripled.

Carter was already there when A.J. arrived, at a table by the window. Carter always seemed to be ahead of him. He was wearing a button-down shirt with the sleeves rolled to the elbow and trousers that had a crease in them, and his hair was cut close. He looked like someone who had recently updated his LinkedIn profile.

A.J. sat down across from him and did not order anything because the prices on the chalkboard required the kind of optimism he didn't currently have access to.

"You knew," A.J. said.

Carter stirred his coffee. "Hello to you too."

"You knew the bar was closing and you got out before it happened."

Carter set the spoon down on the saucer with the particular care of someone who has decided to be patient. "I was suspicious," he said. "I didn't know. There's a difference, and if I'd known for sure I would have told you." He picked up the cup.

"Do you know how screwed I am?" A.J. said, slumping in the chair. "I counted on this job!"

"You should have saved up instead of spending."

"You didn't!" A.J. said.

"I only spent after I saved," Carter said, a hint of smugness in his voice. A.J. remembered why he had always hated Carter.

A.J. planted his hands on the sides of his face and slowly slid them down.  
“What am I gonna do now?”

Carter continued to drink his drink. “What are you looking at me for?”

“You don’t have any...”

“Haven’t I helped you enough?” Carter said, with a little bit of anger behind it.

“Well, I mean... You know know more about this kind of thing. You found the hostess job on your own, right? I mean, where else did you interview? What other places have hostess setups?”

“Yeah, I know there are places, but...”

“See? I knew you were holding back on me.”

“It’s similar, but not the same. Similar setup. Better clientele, actually.” He turned the cup around, pushing it bit by bit. “But there’s a thing.”

“What?”

Carter looked at him directly, which he hadn’t done since A.J. sat down.  
“These places don’t hire femboys.”

A.J. waited for the rest of the sentence. The rest of the sentence didn’t come.

“What do you mean they don’t hire femboys,” A.J. said.

“I mean the establishments I’m talking about aren’t...” Carter made a small gesture that encompassed, apparently, everything A.J. had been doing for the past several months. “They want women.”

“Well, we have that in common.”

“They only hire female hostesses, is what I’m saying,” Carter clarified. “You’re kinda disqualified.” He paused. “Unless you wanna try and fool them and tell them you’re a girl. Which would be stupid.”

“I can pass as a girl.”

“At Ms. Sandra’s place. Which had a specific clientele who were specifically there because of the specific nature of the establishment.” Carter picked up his coffee. “These are different venues. Different clients. They wanted you to look more feminine than masculine, but not all the way. 99% female.”

“I can do that. I mean, it depends on what that 1% is that we’re talking about. But I was already there. You know I could pass.”

Carter said nothing, which was an answer.

A.J. sat in the coffee shop chair and looked at the chalkboard menu without reading it. A barista behind the counter was explaining something to a customer with the intensity of someone defusing a bomb. She looked like she was having the worst day of her life. He didn’t want to jump into the job market if there was even the slightest chance he’s wind up in a shit job like that.

“So what you’re telling me,” A.J. said, “is that the job I’m qualified for, I’m not qualified for.”

“I’m telling you there’s a very obvious barrier.”

“Carter.”

“Of course, you could do things,” Carter said, carefully, in the tone of someone opening a door and standing very far back from it. “Medical things. That make passing less of an issue.”

A.J. looked at him. “I mean... I’m not going to rule anything out.” He was desperate. “I’ll do what I have to.”

“I’m not telling you to *do* anything,” Carter said. “I’m telling you what the landscape looks like. There’s opportunities... For girls. It’s not gonna work out for you.”

The barista at the counter finished her explanation. The customer crossed their arms and angrily said they still didn’t understand.

A.J. sighed. “Tell me more about these places,” he said.



Carter texted the list that evening: seven of them, names and addresses, no additional commentary. A.J. opened the text in the condo, sitting on the couch that had cost four thousand dollars and was extremely comfortable, which made the situation worse. He wasn’t giving up the couch.

He went through the list on his laptop. Two places had websites hadn’t been updated since 2017 and the contact page returned an error. One appeared to be a karaoke bar that also did something else, but it was in Japanese. The remaining four were operational, had recent reviews, and based on the nature of the reviews, were probably the kind of establishments where the interview process would be less about his resume and more about standing in a room while someone looked at him.

One of them was hiring immediately. Immediately was good. He liked Immediately. His bank account liked immediately. It was called Vince’s, which was either the owner’s name or a branding decision so minimal it begged questions. A call to the number yielded a disinterested secretary asking him to come in the next morning for an interview and to wear heels.

He did his makeup at the bathroom mirror the next morning at ten, which felt wrong, as doing a nightly routine feels wrong at ten in the morning. The sunlight was in the wrong place.

A.J. went with the full Lola look. This meant prosthetics, the corset-style shaper, the blonde wig, the glossy lips. He put on the midnight blue wrap

dress, which fit in better than the red silk one, which required more confidence to pull off than he currently had. He did the lace front of his wig with the small brush and checked the hairline twice.

A.J. looked at himself in the mirror for a moment. He made Lola smile back. This was a big deal. Not only the interview, but just being Lola out in public was new to him. Did he look like a woman? Absolutely. Did he look like a woman who could talk a man out of his paycheck every night? Well, he'd have to see. He picked up his bag and went to find Vince's.



Vince's was in a part of the city where the streets were wide and the buildings were low and the businesses operated on the reasonable assumption that their customers were trying not to be seen. The club itself was a squat building with a parking lot and a sign lit in red that was off during the day. A man named Derek, who dressed in all black except for a white bow tie, showed A.J. to an office in the back.

Yes, indeed, there was a Vince. And Vince sat behind a desk that tucked in the corner. He was a broad man in his sixties with the build of someone who had been physically significant in his youth and was maintaining a diminishing percentage of it into the present. He had an open shirt to show off a necklace intertwined with his chest hair. He was *such* a Vince.

A.J. headed for the chair provided, but he was stopped. "Don't sit down," he said. "Turn around for me."

He looked at A.J. the way Ms. Sandra had looked at him on the first night, which was the look of someone who did this often enough that they'd developed a system. A.J. did a little twirl, hoping he didn't fall off his heels.

The sixty year old man tapped his fingers on the desk. "Alright, you're not wasting my time, honey," he said. "But I got questions."

A.J. kept his expression neutral. "Questions?"

Vince leaned forward on his elbows. "The foundation. It's heavy. Too heavy for a girl your age." His eyes moved across A.J.'s face. "What's under all that?"

Beard was what was under there. A shaved beard, but a beard none the less. "Bad skin," A.J. said. He kept his tone soft and forward, in Lola's voice. "I've always been self-conscious about it." In fact, his skin was radiant, a product of his hormone regimen, but the beard bristles were still there.

The office was very quiet. Somewhere in the club beyond the wall, someone was running a vacuum.

Vince looked at him for a long moment. The vacuum continued. A framed photo on the wall behind Vince showed a younger version of him shaking hands



with another man, probably taken in the 1980's.

"Fine," Vince said. He leaned back. "I got coverage from my girls for three weeks. Then I lose one of them to go pop out a kid." He leaned forward, intertwining his fingers and resting his chin on them. "So you got three weeks to fix this."

"Fix what?"

"You have a skinny butt, strong jaw, your lips are thinner than a sheet of T.P. Your voice isn't natural, you're pitching it up. And you need to lose fifteen pounds."

The assessment was so spot on, A.J. shivered. He had him read. In fact, he might have him *completely* read.

"So why give me the job?"

"First, I'm not giving you the job. I'm giving you the opportunity to earn the job. Second, it's obvious you know how to please a man. The way you smile, the way you try to seduce me with those eyes. The way you stick out your boobs. Your body language is primo, and I can see you've done this work before. It's all there. I normally have to train a girl for six months to get what you already got. Saves me time and money."

"Oh," was all A.J. could say to such a thing.

"But if you want to stay, the look needs to be better. Some people might not know who you used to be — if you catch my drift — but I can tell. You need to make sure no one else can, capisce? I don't run a second-chance operation. You come in looking like you came in today, we're going to have a short conversation and a shorter working relationship."

"Understood," A.J. said.

"House rules are simple. You pay \$500 for the table for four hours, we sell \$500 dollar drinks. You keep half, the house keeps half. That's the deal." This was pretty much the same deal at "The Parlor Room," A.J. noted.

"Sounds... Okay."

"I'll see you back here on the 26th." Vince picked up his phone, which appeared to signal that the interview was complete. "Derek will give you the paperwork."

A.J. smoothed the dress, gathered his pride off the floor, and turned around to leave.

He found Derek at a small desk near the entrance, already pulling a folder from a drawer. A.J. took the pen Derek offered and wrote *Lola* on the line that asked for his preferred name, and moved on to the next page.





The aesthetics clinic had a waiting room that had achieved a level of neutrality that was supposed to make everyone comfortable and succeeded at making no one comfortable.

The practitioner who did the fillers was a woman named Grace who explained each step before she did it in the tone of someone who had been told that explanation reduced the pain somehow. A.J. flinched anyway. The needle went

into the jaw first, then the chin, then the lips. Grace worked with a professional focus, stepping back periodically to look at the whole face before continuing.

The swelling afterward was significant enough that A.J. spent two days in the condo with ice packs, which gave him time to look at himself in his phone camera at intervals and track the way his face was changing as the swelling subsided and the filler settled. By the third day the jawline had softened into something that didn't require the full contour treatment to read as feminine. His lips were fuller in a way that looked, if not entirely natural, at least intentional in a direction that was becoming consistent with the rest of his face.

The electrolysis clinic was less pleasant. The technician, a quiet man named Paul who worked in silence, if you didn't count the loud buzzing of his equipment, used a fine needle on each individual follicle and applied a current, and the sensation was not unlike what his friends in school used to do when shooting him with a rubber band. A.J. went twice a week. His skin was red for two days after each session.

The exercise started the same week. He found a routine online, modified it based on what he actually had time for, and did it in the condo in the mornings around noon, which was when he usually got up. After two weeks he had lost five pounds, which was less than he'd wanted, but it looked good on him, as his body had redistributed in ways that were... unexpected. He had no idea that the hormones were taking the fat away from his midsection and putting them on his back section. The squat routine had added even more mass the padded shapewear hadn't been able to do, and the combined effect was the kind of butt most girls would work their entire lives to achieve.

He went back to Vince's on the 26th, in the burgundy dress and the blonde wig and a lighter application than he'd had at the interview, because the jawline didn't need the makeup anymore.

Vince came out of the back office to give A.J. the once-over. He did not make the face he had made across the desk three weeks ago. He did not make any face in particular. He moved on to the back of the room and said something to a bartender about the well stock.

A.J. took this as a passing grade, which was the only kind Vince appeared to issue.

He adjusted his wig in the mirrored panel behind the bar and smiled at his own reflection. The newest girl at Vince's went to find his first table.



The first week at Vince's was, by any reasonable metric, a success. The work was similar to the Parlor Room in structure: booth, clients, four hours, pay envelope. However, the atmosphere at Vince's operated at a different speed.



The men here were less interested in the dance than they were in the results. They leaned in faster, made contact sooner, asked questions that at Ms. Sandra's establishment would have been considered over the line. A.J. managed this the way he'd learned to manage everything at The Parlor Room, which was by staying slightly ahead of it. He was redirecting, reframing, deploying the giggle at moments that functioned as a reset button.

Men bought him drinks and touched his hand when they leaned in and their voices got lower. These were not men who were just tickled to talk to a femboy or transsexual or crossdresser or whatever fantasy they had. These were men who wanted to get to home base, which they were under the impression Lola was gatekeeping. The money was better than it had ever been, and Lola was making more than A.J. could have believed she ever could. Yes, this was a far more intense atmosphere, and yes, he was walking a tightrope by pretending to be a woman, but the money was just as good as it had ever been.

The drain on his stamina was different from the Parlor Room. There, he could occasionally sit in the back room between clients and let his face do nothing for a few minutes. He could step behind a literal curtain and spend a few minutes not being Lola, not having to smile, not having to be charming, not having to think. At Vince's, the floor was smaller, the breaks were less frequent, and there were always eyes on him. Vince, Derek, the girls, the bartenders, the guests. He had to be Lola every moment from when he stepped through through the doors to when he left. He couldn't drop the voice or the posture or the laugh in the bathroom or at the bar or in the corridor near the stock room. Lola was on for the full shift, every shift, with no intervals.

By the end of Friday, he had been Lola for eight consecutive hours and his face hurt from the expressions and his feet hurt from the heels and the corset had been doing its work since seven PM without complaint, which was more than he could say for himself.

He got back to the condo at two in the morning, set his bag by the door, reached back and unzipped the dress, stepped out of it, unstrapped the prosthetics, unlaced the corset, and sat on the edge of the bed in the silence of the fourteenth floor with the city sitting silently outside the floor-to-ceiling windows.

He set an alarm for noon.

A.J. lay back and was asleep before he'd finished the thought he'd started about whether this was sustainable, which was probably for the best.



On a random Tuesday, A.J. got home, still in the blonde wig and the black dress and the heels, which he had removed in the elevator and carried by the

straps. He set them down and stood in the middle of the living room in the dark and looked at the space with the specific clarity that arrives at one-thirty in the morning when you've been performing for six hours and your defenses are down.

The apartment was built for a person who really didn't live here anymore. The A.J. of six months ago was no longer the person who paid the lease. Dark furniture, clean lines, a couch in a shade of grey that felt like it vibed with him. The bedroom had a basic bed and a rock lamp and a dresser that contained, increasingly, very little of practical use to him. It just felt like a break in continuity to come home to this every night, and leave from here every evening in high heels.

He stood in the living room for a while. Then he went to bed.

The following Saturday he went to a home goods store and spent four hours in it, which is the maximum amount of time a person can spend in a home goods store before the place starts to affect their judgment. His spare bedroom was small, but large enough for a full bed, a dresser and a few other things.

The new bed was nice and big, with a much softer mattress, one that felt like lying on a marshmallow, and had a quilted headboard that left very luxe. Next to the bed was a vanity table with a mirror framed by bulb lighting, the kind Felix had in his salon, which A.J. had always found more honest than bathroom lighting. The bed and the vanity were in a soft pink. More oft pink furniture came from three different stores over two weekends. A clothing rack along one wall became two racks, then a proper wardrobe system with sections organized by type: dresses, skirts, tops, and a lower section for shoes that grew by two or three pairs a week.

The dresser held the makeup collection, which had expanded well beyond what fit in the leather case he'd originally bought. Skincare in one drawer, base products in another, a third drawer for eyes and lips that had gotten crowded enough that he'd had to institute a system. Perfume bottles lined the back of the dresser surface. He didn't wear them to work, but he wore them at home, in the mornings, because Lola wore them and the room needed to be Lola's room in order to function as Lola's room.

It worked. This was the thing he hadn't fully anticipated. Walking into the pink room in the morning with the vanity lit and the wardrobe organized and the whole space oriented around the specific task of becoming a person made the becoming faster, easier, less like a procedure and more like a reveal. He got into character as soon as he stepped inside.



An email from his professor had a subject line that read *Re: Missing Assignments – Action Required* and had been sitting unread for eleven days when he finally clicked on it. Professor Diaz taught the one remaining class A.J. was technically enrolled in, a seminar on urban sociology that met on Wednesday afternoons. A.J. had attended it four times since the semester started, which was five weeks ago.

A.J. read the email. It listed the missing assignments, noted that his attendance was insufficient for a passing grade, and offered a meeting to discuss options.

He sat at the kitchen counter in his silk robe with the coffee going cold beside him and looked at the email for a while. He thought about the proposed meeting and what he would say, and what Professor Diaz would make of the person who showed up to it, and whether that person would be A.J. or some hastily assembled version of A.J. constructed for the occasion, and whether the distinction still meant anything practical.

He opened the university portal and found the withdrawal option, which was not prominently placed, because universities understand that friction serves a purpose. He clicked through three confirmation screens, each of which asked in slightly different language whether he was certain.

The final screen said his withdrawal had been processed and gave him several possible ways to undo his decision. But as of that moment, he was no longer a college student. He closed the laptop, picked up the coffee, drank it cold and went to the pink room to start getting ready.



He started wearing fitted jeans and crop tops to run errands. Boots with a modest heel, nothing that required too much concentration. He had noted that the neighbors would probably see a man from time to time and a woman at night, and to keep anyone from getting suspicious, he had decided to have Lola make some Daytime appearances. Nothing major, just a trip to go get a new mascara at the Walgreens or grab lunch at the Chinese place down the street.

The thing was, the more time he spent as Lola, the easier it was to stay Lola. He didn't spend a single grey cell on the issue, and he just fell into this new lifestyle. Why put on pants if you're just going to have to change in a few hours for work?

His underwear drawer, which not too long ago had contained items purchased from a drugstore in three-packs, now held a rotation of silk and lace that he'd accumulated without any single decisive purchase, just to fill needs over time.

He'd come home from a shift, change into a silk robe, and kill time until he'd eaten and watched all the TV he could bear. Then he'd untangle his wig and

put it aside. Sure, he could do it earlier, but it was so much hassle. It was easier to keep it on. Just as it was easier to keep the breasts on, just as it was easier to keep the gaffe on, just as it was easier to keep his nylons on.

Then in the morning he'd have to reassemble Lola for work. The reassembly took time, sure, but that was unavoidable, but the disassembly took time he could be relaxing. It was also easier just to fall back on the new, big, fluffy bed he had bought rather than go back to his room.

After a month, he slept in the pink room every night.

One morning he was making coffee at the machine on the kitchen counter when he caught his reflection in the dark screen of the microwave: blonde

wig from the night before still in place, the silk robe open over the panties and bra he'd slept in, nails tapping the counter while the coffee brewed. He looked at the reflection for a moment. Maybe it would be fun to be Lola more often, he thought. Then he reached up and smoothed the wig where it had shifted slightly at the temple and turned back to the coffee.



The dressing room at Vince's was a narrow rectangle with a counter running the length of one wall and mirrors above it and a clothing rack along the other that everyone used and no one was responsible for.

It was used by every woman on the staff — and A.J. — to get ready for their shifts. A.J. learned a lot about how the business ran by seeing who went in and out of the ladies dressing room. He knew that the wait staff had a requirement

to only wear high heels and skirts no longer than fingertip-length. The length of when standing with their arms to their sides, the hem of the skirt didn't go lower than the tips of the finders on their hands.

He knew that the female bar staff used the room to rant about handsy male patrons and no tips. A.J. also learned there were many beautiful girls who didn't like to talk about what their jobs were. On closer observation, A.J. was forced to conclude that they were whores. They would linger in the table service area, and when approached, escort a man to the back of the place, on their arm, and come back some time later with that "just fucked" look. That was also when he learned what a "champagne room" was.

A.J. was at the mirror adjusting the left temple of the blonde wig when the door opened and Vince came in and closed it behind him.

Vince did not come to the dressing room. It was a women's dressing room, after all. If you need to hide from Vince, this is where you went.

A.J. took his hands from the wig, to make sure he couldn't tell it was a wig, and watched Vince in the mirror.

"We need to talk, Lola," Vince said. He crossed his arms and sat with his back to the door in the posture of someone who had decided the conversation was happening regardless of the other party's preferences.

"Sure," A.J. said. "What's up?" He said it in Lola's voice, which was where his voice lived by default now, and kept his expression easy.

Vince's eyes moved across his reflection with the same methodical attention he'd used at the interview. "Well, sweet cheeks, I've gotten a complaint. Customer says you're not a woman."

"I thought you were..." A.J. said.

"Yeah, it's my fault, I knew it when I hired you. That's on me." He sighed. "And I knew one of these days, a customer was gonna spot it."

"Who made the complaint?"

"Doesn't matter. He said he had noticed it over several days." Vince exhaled through his nose. "The chokers, the high-cut tops, the way you never let anyone get too close." He shook his head once. "And that silicone chest of yours occasionally pops a seam."

A.J. gritted his teeth. He had hoped no one noticed that. It had happened three times, and he thought he had caught it every time.

The thing about getting caught, which A.J. had spent eight months not getting caught and therefore not thinking about, was that the moment itself arrived without any of the drama the anticipation had promised. There was no confrontation, no crowd, no moment of public unmasking. There was just a small room with bad lighting and Vince standing by the door with his arms crossed.



“So,” Vince said. His tone had not warmed but it had shifted, the way a negotiation shifts when both parties have acknowledged what the negotiation is actually about. “I can’t let this kind shit get around. I’d be ruined if this got out. My girls would be furious that I’d hired a tranny instead of a real girl.”

A.J. exhaled. “So what happens now?”

Vince looked at him for a moment. “Two options. You walk out tonight and we’re done, no problem. Or…” He paused in the way of someone who has rehearsed a conversation and is now delivering it. “You fix it.”

“Fix it.”

“Implants,” Vince said. “Real ones. No more prosthetics, no more padding. You want to stay, it has to be permanent. You’re good at the job — I’m not arguing that. We can just pass off one complaint as mistake or a misunderstanding. Another complaint sinks us. You make me too much money to kick into the street.”

A.J. retreated in his seat. “I don’t know, Vince.”

“And this,” Vince grabbed A.J.’s hair and ripped the wig off his head. “You gotta get rid of this shit.” He tossed the wig in A.J.’s lap.

A.J. looked at his reflection. Lola looked back, blonde and glossy-lipped and completely calm in the way of a person whose face had been trained to be calm regardless of what was happening behind it.

“I need to think about it,” A.J. said.

“You’ve got until Friday, hot stuff,” Vince said, and opened the door and left.



The condo was quiet at two in the morning. A.J. sat at the vanity and looked at his reflection under the bulb lights. The prosthetics sat in their cloth pouch on the dresser. He looked at the pouch and then back at the mirror.

The math was simple, especially if you’ve already made the decision and are working backward to justify it. The condo payment was automatic. The credit cards were down from their peak but not gone. The filler was going to be paid off over the next six months. He had built a life that required a specific income to maintain, and the income required the job, and the job now had a condition.

He told himself it was temporary. This was the same thing he’d told himself about dropping the classes, about the condo deposit, about the first night at The Parlor Room when Carter had led him through a door he hadn’t known existed. Temporary was a useful concept. It made decisions feel like logistics rather than direction.

He could get them removed later. When he'd saved enough, when the situation stabilized, when some future version of the current circumstances resolved in a way he couldn't currently specify. The removal was possible — he'd looked it up on his phone at midnight with the focused research energy of someone who needed the answer to be yes. It was *possible*. It was more complicated than the initial procedure and cost more and took longer to recover from, but it was *possible*.

A.J. sent the inquiry form at two forty-seven in the morning and put the phone face down on the vanity and looked at his reflection for a while longer.

He had to get the size based on what the clients knew. He'd been the E-cups for months. Changing the silhouette now would raise questions he didn't want to answer, from Vince, from the regulars, from the bartenders, from the wit staff. Even the guy who changed out the HVAC filters would probably know.

Then he got up and went to make coffee and stood in the kitchen in the dress and the wig and waited for the machine to finish and didn't think about having to go in to a doctor, explain his needs, come up with plausible reason why a man would do this, and watched the coffee fill the pot with the full attention of someone with nothing else to look at.



The surgeon was a man named Dr. Phillip Okafor who had, according to the framed review on his office wall, been named one of the city's top cosmetic surgeons by a regional lifestyle magazine for four consecutive years, the most recent of which was 2022. The magazine had since ceased publication. Dr. Okafor explained the procedure with the measured clarity of someone who had given the same explanation several hundred times and had refined it down to the essential information, and A.J. nodded at the appropriate intervals and signed more forms.

He did not tell anyone he was having surgery. This was less a decision than an absence of anyone to tell.



The recovery suite was a room with a reclining chair and a television mounted too high on the wall and a nurse named Carol. A.J. came out of the anesthesia in stages, each stage slightly more committed to consciousness than the last, until he arrived at full awareness.

The pain was not sharp. It was total. His chest felt like a mixed-up bag of flesh held together with twine. Every breath was an adventure. Lifting his arms was

not something that happened in the first week, or the second, or most of the third. He moved back to the condo pushed by an orderly in a wheelchair.

He slept on his back, which he had never done before and which he came to understand was a skill requiring development. The weight on his chest was present in a way the prosthetics, which he had worn for eight months and considered himself accustomed to, had not prepared him for. They lied to him. He thought having breasts might even be fun. Not this. This was the opposite of fun..

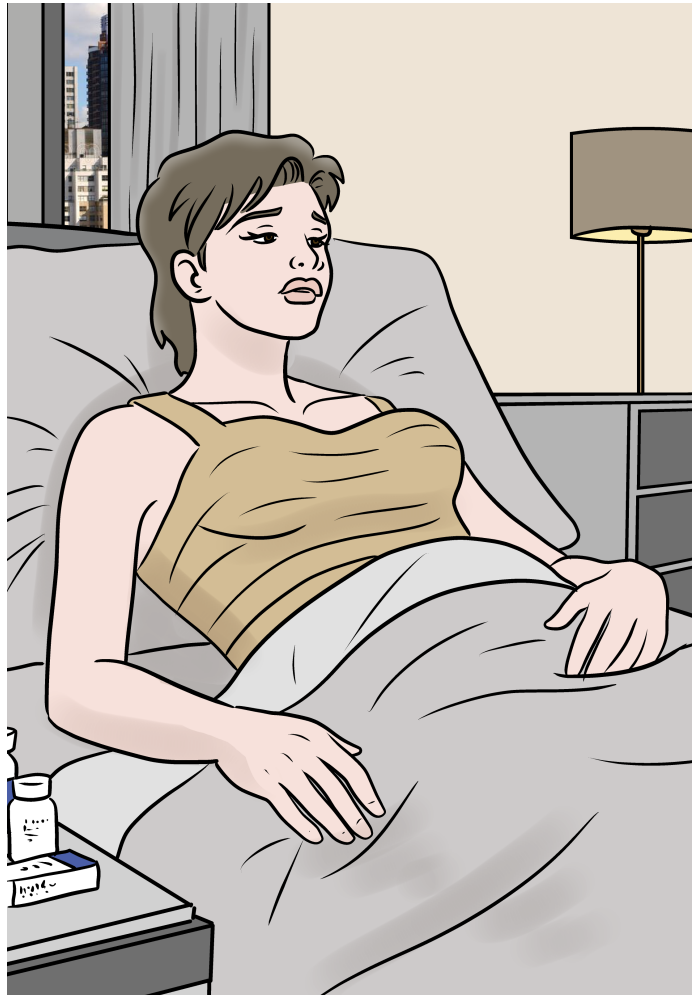
The bandages came off at the two-week appointment. Dr. Okafor removed them with professional confidence, and A.J. tried not to scream.

The size was what he'd chosen. He knew this. He had selected it from a chart, had held the sample, had been told the dimensions in units he'd had to convert to something meaningful. Knowing this did not fully prepare him for the mirror.

He stood there for a moment. As much pain as was radiating from his chest, it was his legs he was most worried about, as seeing how huge he was now, he was sure to faint.



Brady had texted twice in the past month. The first text was a link to something, a video or an article, the kind of thing you send to someone you're still including in the general circulation of your life even when they've stopped responding. The



second was a direct message: You good?

A.J. read both texts on a Saturday morning in the silk robe with the coffee he made every morning in the kitchen. He thought about what a response would require. Not just the text itself but the conversation it would open, the catching up, the explaining of the past several months in terms that landed somewhere in the territory of recognizable. He thought about Brady sitting across from him in the burger place near campus, looking at his full beer.

He put the phone face down.

He hadn't seen any of them in — he did the math — eleven weeks. The math surprised him less than it would have eleven weeks ago. The people he saw now were at Vince's, and the people at Vince's knew Lola, which meant they knew the version of him that he was most of the time. A waitress at Vince's named Priya, who worked Tuesdays and Fridays, had texted him daily check-ins for the first week without requiring responses. Melanie, the girl who worked the bar before five, had been sending him funny videos to keep his spirits up. Carlie, the woman who worked the door on weekends had dropped off extra ice packs.

They were, by any reasonable definition, his people now. This was either a conclusion or a fact, depending on how he looked at it.



He went back to work six weeks post-surgery. He wore a plunging black dress he'd bought specifically for the return, cut in a way that the prosthetics had never fully justified and that now required no justification at all. He walked through the door of Vince's and Priya saw him from across the room and made a sound that caused three people at the bar to turn around.

"You look incredible," she said, and hugged him with the careful pressure of someone who had been briefed on the recovery.

Carlie looked up from her phone and did a small deliberate nod that, from Carlie, constituted enthusiasm.

Vince came out of the back office at some point in the first hour, walked the floor, and stopped at A.J.'s section. He looked at him with the expression of a man reviewing an investment that had performed.

"Good to have you back," Vince said, and moved on.

The clients that night were not subtle about it. A man named Robert, who imported Italian marble and had the handshake of someone who considered it a character statement, bought three drinks for A.J. simultaneously. The booth beside his had a client who kept finding reasons to lean into the adjacent space. By the end of the first hour A.J. had two men waiting.



He leaned forward when he talked and let the dress do what the dress was designed to do and watched the room respond to it with the calm attention of someone conducting an experiment whose results are coming in as predicted.

When his first guest was seated, he leaned in so at least for a moment, the man could see right down his cleavage into the dark depths of his dress. The man's eyes nearly popped out of their sockets, so he did it again. A.J. couldn't help but giggle.

The money moved faster than it ever had. Vince's filled in a way that Carlie, who tracked these things, attributed at closing to a good Saturday, which was one way to describe it.

A.J. got home at two, set his bag by the door, and checked his reflection in the mirror. He almost tried to take his wig off before he remembered it was all him now. He had the extensions put in yesterday. Instead, he just shook his long, soft blond hair and allowed himself to smile. It might have actually all been worth it.



His mother's face filled the screen, her eyes puffy from crying. "Arthur, we're worried sick. Your father called the university. They said you dropped all your classes. Where are you? What's happening to you?"

A.J. just giggled, adjusting the camera to hide his boobs. "Mom, don't be such a drama queen! I'm fine! Better than fine!" He tucked his blonde further hair under the beanie cap he was wearing. "Chill. Did you get the money I sent you?"

"A.J.?" his father's voice boomed from off-screen. "What is this? What are doing to earn this kind of money? Are you selling drugs? We raised you better than this!"

A.J. pouted, his fat lips forming a perfect pout. He had covered the edges with concealer to make the look thinner. "Dad, that's, like, super rude. I told you! I'm in hospitality." He was about to giggle again, but he stopped himself. He really shouldn't have had that vodka martini before calling his folks. But it had been months since he had seen them. "And I make sooo much money. You wouldn't even believe."

Her mother's expression was actually five expressions all at once. One was confusion. The other four were levels of a spectrum of dismay. "Do you need help, Arthur? Are you all right?"

"Just hang up, already!" His father yelled from off camera.

A.J. just rolled his eyes. "Oh my god, don't worry! You'll get wrinkles. What's with all the negative vibes? Look, I gotta go. I only have two hours to get ready

for my shift. Bye!” He blew a kiss and ended the call, tossing the phone onto his pink satin throw pillow. He finished off his martini.



Vince’s on a Friday had a specific rumble of noise. On Fridays, it was the product of a room that was full enough to be beyond profitable. Vince clearly recognized this sound, and when it got loud enough, he came out of his office to stand by the bar with his arms crossed, which was his way of communicating



that things had gotten worth monitoring. The noise was at the level where you had to lean in to talk, which was, from a business perspective, a good thing.

On this particular night, he roamed the floor over to where A.J. was seated, entertaining a guest. He took a strange kind of pride in seeing his top hostess at work. Lola was a star attraction at his place, these days. With her huge rack, her effervescent smile and willingness to go the extra mile to make herself a walking wet dream, Lola was a rare find. She could also expertly play the part of a vivacious young teen vixen looking for a good time and entice just about anyone out of their wallet. In fact, there was only one reason Vince hadn't made a go at Lola himself. That was a very good *one* reason, however.

Lola made almost as much as the back rooms did. His champagne rooms were the top revenue generator by far, but Lola was catching up quick. He nodded at his star attraction and then headed back to his office.



A.J. was between clients when he saw Carter come in.

Carter was good at slipping into a room unnoticed, which paradoxically meant that A.J. noticed him immediately. He was wearing a zip-up jacket and looked amused at what he was seeing around him. He found a seat at the bar, sat down and signaled the bartender.

A.J. smoothed his dress and walked over.

Carter looked up and then looked at him with a complete, unhurried assessment that started at the heels and ended at the blonde hair — with a mighty detour at A.J.'s tits — and then he smiled in a way that kind of gave A.J. pause. It was a wide smile, but not a kind one.

“Damn,” he said. “You really committed.”

A.J. laughed and straightened, letting the dress and everything the dress now legitimately contained speak for themselves. “It’s just about the money.”

Carter picked up the drink the bartender had brought and raised it in a small toast. “And you’re grabbing every dollar while you can.” He nodded once. “Smart.”

A.J. turned to Carrie. “I’m taking a break,” he said. This was notable because his breaks would cost him. After all, he was paying for the table. “Let’s head up to the patio,” A.J. suggested to Carter. “I haven’t seen you in forever.” He didn’t even realize he took Carter’s arm as he took him upstairs to the patio area.

Once there, they had the place to themselves. A.J. slid into the seat across from him.

“It’s been a sooo long,” A.J. said.

“Few months,” Carter agreed. “You look like you’ve been busy.”

“How are you doing?” A.J. asked. “What are you up to these days?”

Carter leaned back in the booth with the posture of someone for whom things were, currently, fine. “Good. Really good, actually.” He turned the glass on the table. “Finally putting the psychology degree to use.”

“That’s great,” A.J. said, straightening up and pushing his chest out as he always did when he wanted his guests to know he was interested. “What kind of work?”

“Counseling. I’m doing supervised hours now, then the licensing exam in the spring.” Carter said it the way people say things that are true and good and that they’ve worked toward, without the performance of either modesty or pride. “It’s slower money than this. But it compounds.”

“You look amazing,” Lola said, settling into the chair across from him and leaning forward on both elbows. “So confident. Confidence is so sexy. Like, genuinely. The counseling thing is doing something for you.” Lola smiled and reached for the glass in front of him and took a sip and set it back down.

He had told himself, at various points over the past year, that he could go back. The university would still be there. The credits he’d completed wouldn’t expire.

The last time he had really thought about getting his degree, Professor Diaz had sent one follow-up email after his withdrawal, a brief note that said the door was open if circumstances changed, which was the most generous interpretation of the situation and probably more than it warranted. A.J. had read the email three times and not responded.

Seeing Carter so relaxed, describing supervised hours and a licensing exam, produced a feeling of envy in A.J. It was not envy exactly. It was an awareness that he had been on a path that he was no longer on, but not yet forgotten.

He told himself he could go back after he’d saved enough. This was the same thing he’d told himself before the condo, before the surgery, before dropping the last two classes. The timeline had a flexible relationship with the calendar.

“I could never do that,” Lola said, pushing her hair back over one shoulder. “Like, all that studying.” She giggled. “My brain just doesn’t work that way. I’m more of a people person.” She gestured vaguely at herself as a self-evident example of why.

“You were pretty good at it, not too long ago.”

“Maybe.” Lola shifted forward slightly, the way he shifted when a client needed to feel like the most interesting person on the patio. “Do you like, actually help people? Like real people with real problems?”

“That’s the general idea.”

He laughed and touched his arm. “That’s so good. I think that’s so important.”



They talked about old time for a while, A.J. using the opportunity to catch up with a few friends, like Brady, who he had lost touch with. They talked about their dumb professors, the worst places to eat on campus, how the basketball team was doing in the tournament. They were just two old friends talking for a while.

Carter swirled his drink and looked around the room with the mild interest of someone people-watching from a comfortable position. “You know what’s funny,” he said.

“What.”

“You’re probably one step away from being a top earner in a place like this.” He said it conversationally, the way you say something you’ve actually been thinking.

A.J. raised an eyebrow. “One step? No, I *am* the top girl.”

“As good as the girls who work the champagne room?” Carter said, to prod.

The look of displeasure under Lola’s makeup was enough to tell Carter he had struck a nerve. “I don’t know anything about that.”

“Sure you don’t.” Carter smiled into his glass. “Imagine what those girls make, huh? That’s gotta be a ton. I guess that’s where the big money is in a place like this, huh?”

A.J. laughed his real laugh, not Lola’s laugh, which surprised him enough that he noticed it. He waved a hand. “Not happening.”

“I know, I know.” Carter shrugged with the ease of someone who had made a joke and meant it only as a joke. “But the top earners in these places, the ones who actually retire...” He shook his head. “They’re set for life. That’s all I’m saying.”

“I’m doing fine,” A.J. said.

“You’re doing great,” Carter agreed. “I’m just doing math out loud.”

He finished his drink and set the glass down and checked the time on his watch, which was a surprisingly cheap model, which set A.J. back a moment. Wasn’t he doing well? But he didn’t ask about it. He stood and straightened his jacket.

“Yeah, I should get back in my spot. You remember the way it used to be, right? Can’t be away for too long or the other girls get your regulars.”

“Right, right. Good to see you,” Carter said, and meant it.

“You too,” A.J. said.

After heading back down the stairs, he watched Carter navigate the room toward the exit with the same unannounced ease with which he’d arrived, and then he was gone, and the room closed back around him and continued at its low rumble of voices and clinking classes.

A.J. sat in the in his booth and pushed around a napkin on the table for a moment.

*The top girls retire set for life.*

Then Lola nodded to Carlie to send over his next guest.



Heather was her real name, but A.J. and the other employees at Vince's knew her as Diamond. She was a credit to her namesake, with a smile and a twinkle in her eyes that did, indeed, seem to sparkle like a diamond. She was there just about every night, except for a few on the dead nights. She inhabited one of the tables that was surrounded by plush leather seats arranged in a semi-circle around the table. Diamond was the busiest girl in the club, but you would have to watch her like a hawk to figure out exactly what kind of work she was in.

The woman everyone called Diamond had been at Vince's for three years, which in the context of Vince's represented something close to institutional knowledge. She was twenty-six, originally from a mid-sized city in Ohio that she referenced without nostalgia, and according to Priya, Diamond had paid off her mother's house in 2022 using eight months of earnings and had not mentioned it to anyone except Priya, who seemed to mention it to everyone.

But two months prior, a man who owned a regional airline had started coming in specifically for Diamond. However, abruptly and without warning, the man had stopped coming to the club exactly at the time Diamond had stopped working there. Carlie, who followed these developments with the attentiveness of a financial analyst tracking a sector, reported that Diamond had been seen at a charity event in a dress that cost more than Vince's monthly liquor order, standing next to the airline man with the posture of someone who had something new to show off to his friends.

There were others. Not all of the girls married — some just stopped showing up one day, which you had to figure meant they had either left on their terms or Vince's terms, and the ones who left on their own terms left without needing to discuss it. They had saved enough, or met the right person, or both, and the door swung out and they walked through it.

A.J. watched this and understood, with the clarity that comes from watching a thing long enough, that the door had different dimensions depending on who was approaching it.

Lola was good. Lola was, by Vince's metrics, exceptional. But the men who took Diamond to charity events and stopped coming to clubs were not looking for exceptional employees. They were looking for women, in the complete and uncomplicated sense of the word, and Lola was a construction of need and circumstance.

Carter's math, delivered casually over one drink and in a zip-up jacket, had been correct. A.J. had known it was correct when Carter said it. He had laughed anyway and gone to find his next client and not thought about it until he couldn't stop thinking about it.



A.J. was walking the corridor that ran along the back of the club, the one between the storage room and the rooms Vince used for what the staff called “private bookings.” These were the champagne rooms, or to dispense with the cordiality of using euphemism, it’s where they fucking took place.

On this particular night, however, A.J. was not just transversing the corridor, he was watching. Watching the girls who were there to sell themselves. He knew what was happening back here, but never knew the details. Tonight, he was in luck. The door to one of the private rooms was not fully closed. A.J. slowed.

Through the gap he could see one of the girls, a bubbly young black girl by the name of Cece who had been at Vince’s for eighteen months and who Carlie had once described, with professional respect, as extremely business-minded. She was sitting on a bed across from a man in a very good suit. The man was talking and Cece was listening with detached amusement.

The number the man said was five thousand dollars.

Cece looked at him for a moment. “Ten,” she said.

The man considered this for approximately four seconds. “Done,” he said.

A.J. gently shut the door, and in the corridor did the arithmetic of what Cece made in an hour versus what he made in a night, and the arithmetic produced a number that made his current earnings look like a lemonade stand.

As he stared, transfixed by the sheer, shameless commerce of it all, a hand clamped down on his shoulder, making him jump. He spun around to face a man he’d seen around, a hedge fund manager named Mr. Sterling with cold, calculating eyes and a smile that didn’t reach his lips. “You like to watch,” Sterling said, his voice a low, amused rumble.

“I... I was just...” A.J. stammered, his heart hammering.

Sterling’s gaze drifted down to Lola’s cleavage, then back up to her wide, innocent eyes. “I like to watch, too. I like to watch *you*, Lola.” He leaned closer, his voice dropping to a conspiratorial whisper. “I like your fire. Been watching you flirt with men every night. It makes me hot. How about it? Ten thousand sounds fair.”

A.J.’s mind raced. Ten thousand dollars. The number echoed in his head, a siren song of financial freedom. It was enough to pay off his lingering debts, enough to put a down payment on that Lexus he had been thinking about.

“No,” he heard himself say, the voice sounding small and distant.

“Shame,” Mr. Sterling replied. “I’ll have to ask around, I suppose.”

He turned and walked away. A.J. caught himself reaching after him, and quickly pulled his hand back to his side.

Ten thousand dollars.



But it was unthinkable.



Sitting at the pink vanity the next morning, A.J. was trying to put the ten thousand dollars out of his mind. He was brushing his blond hair in his silk robe wondering what was compelling him to even entertain the thought. He was just like any other man, he needed money, but...

And the thought faded. It had been like this for a while now. He could just lose his train of thought so easily. Just like when he'd be listening to one of the guests talk and he'd start to think about how he needed to do his nails or get a purse to match his new dress.



It wasn't like that was a problem. If anything, the men seemed to like it when he had a little brain fade. They liked the apology and the giggle he made when he had to apologize. Then he'd just lean into it and twirl his hair and smile. Guys liked his apologies.

He needed his highlights redone. A.J. giggled at his reflection when he realized he had lost his train of thought again. But he did need his highlights done.

"Miss Lola," said the doorman at the apartment building as he opened the door for him. A.J. smiled back. The doorman never asked for a tip, content with the smile from a pretty girl. Wasn't everyone? A.J. headed to the café, and his drink order was already underway just by stepping in the doorway.

The young guy with the lip piercings asked him about his week as he finished the order, writing "Lola" on the cup, and A.J. had to think back a long way, all the way back at least 48 hours to come up with an answer. Every day was kind of like the other, after all. "Great!" A.J. said back with a smile. When the guy handed over the coffee, A.J. was sure to bend over to let them see his tits, at least for a moment. He seemed nice.

"See you tomorrow, Lola!" The guy said as A.J. left. He waved back.

"I already have your whole night reserved, Lola," Carlie said as A.J. minced in the front door in his heels. He always wore heels these days.

"Already?" He giggled. "I told you to stop doing that, Carlie! I like meeting new people!"

"Lola, you love being worshipped by your regulars," Carlie replied with a grin.

"A girl can have both, can't she?" A.J. headed to the back to finish getting dolled up.

In the changing room, A.J. slipped into the glittery gown he was going to wear tonight, sung against his curves and it shimmied into place, like it wanted to be there and didn't need to be convinced.

He sat in front of the mirror and brushed his hair with one hand and held hairspray in the other. The surgery wasn't reversible this time. It would be a real-deal surgery. But a lot of trans girls love their new vagina. He read it on the internet. Full sensation, they said.

With a final spritz, he decided he was done with his hair and touched up his lips. It was 5:00, time to hit the floor.

"You have the most bewitching eyes," Mr. Luntz said.

It seemed so certain, just a few days ago. An operation to change his gender was unthinkable. Absolute.

"That's one of my fave shows. I love *Bewitched*," Lola replied. "The witch lady was gorgeous. But I heard she died."



Why was it even still in his mind? Yes, he was already Lola to everyone. Yes, if he was a woman, he could live a life he'd only dreamed about, but he was not a woman. He had no desire to be.

"You're adorable, Lola," said Mr. Luntz.

His whole life he was worried about things he felt he couldn't ever get right. Tuition, rent, GPA, career. His life was just constant crisis management. But when people saw Lola, they saw a carefree girl. Someone who rarely worried about anything.

"Do you think so?" A.J. answered.

All Lola was needed for was to look beautiful, be warm, let men feel special, go home, shop, salon, sleep, repeat. A fantasy for many.

"Your smile sparkles like diamonds," he replied.

Diamond was probably lounging on a couch somewhere, spending her husband's money. A.J. could picture her lying in repose, looking gorgeous, wearing expensive silks and her hair freshly styled, makeup perfect, looking like a goddess and without a care in the world.

“That’s so corny,” A.J. said. “And I love it. You’re sweet.”

All he had to do was let a rich penis cum inside him. Sure, it was a lot, but the rewards... The rewards. So many rewards.

“I could talk to you all day, Lola.”

He giggled. “I don’t know if you can afford it,” she said with an infectious smile.



Later that night, Mr. Sterling led A.J. to a small, private room.

“So this is what it’s like in the champagne room,” A.J. said with a giggle. “It’s so musky in here.”

“It’s about time you came to your senses,” Sterling said, taking off his tie. “I was beginning to think I’d never get you back here.”

As soon as the door clicked shut, Sterling’s hands were on him, possessive and sure. He fondled Lola’s breasts, his touch rough, his breath hot on his neck. A.J. closed his eyes, playing the part, moaning softly, his body a vessel for the transaction. It was mechanical, degrading, and over quickly. Sterling handed him the cash, the crisp bills feeling alien in his hand.

“That was... a start,” Sterling said, his eyes dark with a renewed hunger. “But I want the main course. All the way.”

A.J. just giggled. “Um,” he said, his voice flighty. “See, that’s as far as I can go.”

“Stringing me along?” Sterling just smiled, a predatory glint in his eyes. He pulled out another thick wad of bills. “Another five thousand,” he said, placing it on the table. “Just to change your mind.”

A.J. stared at the money. Twenty thousand dollars, total. It was life-changing. He shook his head, his resolve hardening. “I can’t. I’m not... that kind of girl.”

The smile on Sterling’s face didn’t falter. It just grew. “Are you sure?” he asked, his voice dangerously soft. He doubled the stack again. “Twenty thousand more. On top of the ten.”

Forty thousand dollars. The number was so absurd it was almost meaningless. It was a fantasy, a lottery win. He couldn’t. He shouldn’t. But the money... “Please,” he whispered, the words tearing from his throat. “Please don’t offer any more.”

Sterling laughed, a deep, booming sound that filled the small room. He saw the the desperate conflict in Lola’s eyes. He was a businessman. He knew he had Lola. He slowly, deliberately, peeled off five more bills, making a new stack. He placed it on the table, next to the growing mountain of cash. “Fifty

thousand dollars, Lola,” he said, his voice almost a hypnotic command. “To do what you want to do. Take it.”

“I can’t!” A.J. pleaded. “My body... My pussy isn’t... Available!”

“Then your ass will have to do, Lola.”

A.J. stared at the money. Fifty thousand dollars. He looked at Sterling, at the cold, possessive desire in his eyes, and then back at the cash. He reached out his long-nailed hands, scooped the cash up and smiled.

“Okie-dokie,” Lola said, tossing her hair back over her shoulder.



The doorbell rang at eleven in the morning, which was early by the standards of the fourteenth floor. Lola was in the kitchen making coffee in a pair of lace-trimmed shorts and a cropped white tee, and padded over in her bare feet to check the peephole.

The view showed Carter.

Lola opened the door, excitedly. “Ohmigaaawd, Carter! I haven’t seen you in forever! Ohmigod ohmigod!” She bear hugged him, squishing her boobs into the old friend.

“When you texted, I was like, Carter? My friend from high school? That Carter? And then I was like, where have you been and stuff? Ohmigod!”

Carter stepped inside, even while still being clamped by Lola, and stood in the entryway. He looked at the apartment with casual detachment. Pink furniture. The smell of air fresheners in the air. Plants on every available surface. The row of high-heeled shoes and boots by the door, unaligned.

“How have you been?” he said. “Finish that degree?”

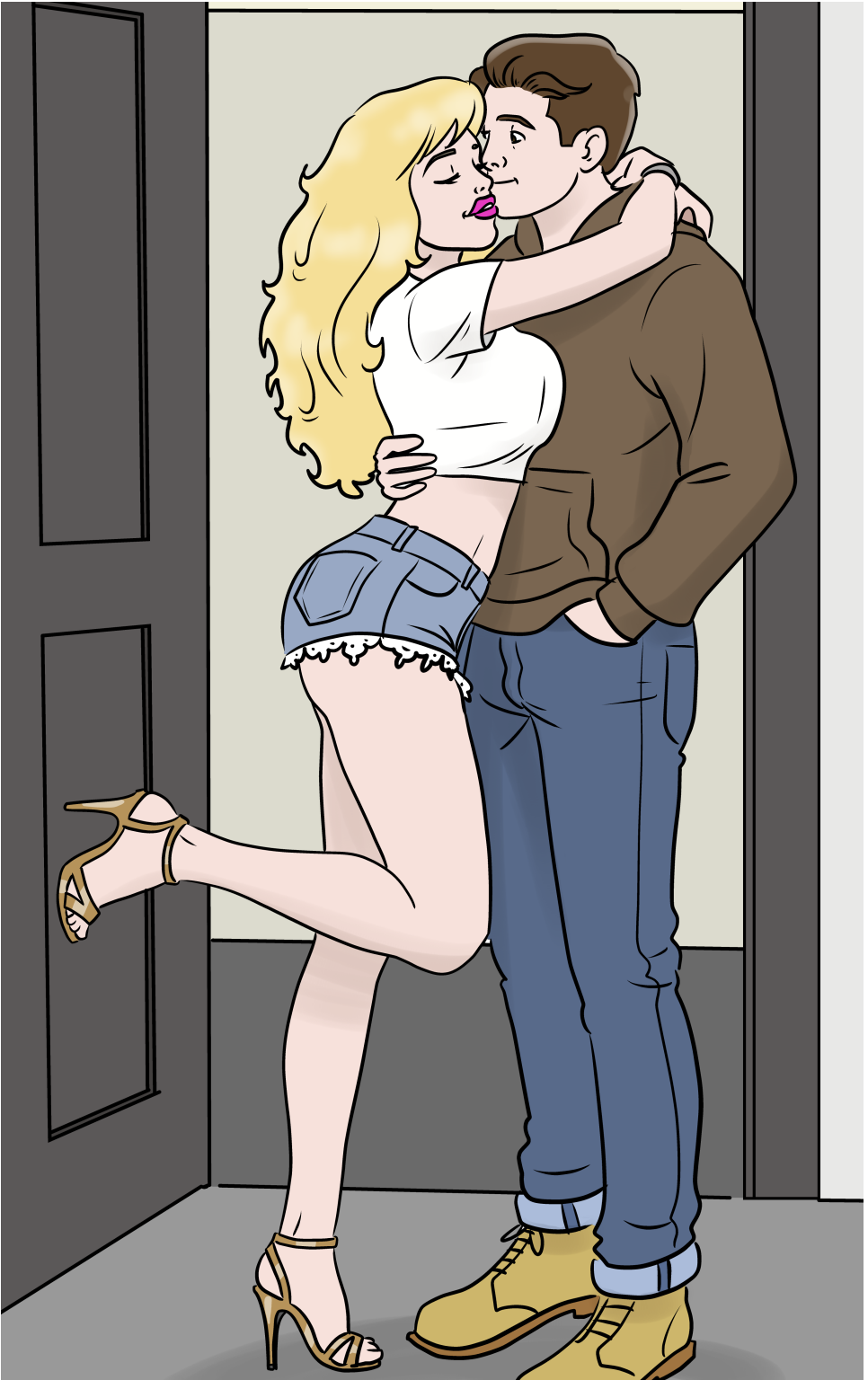
Lola laughed, covering her mouth with both hands, with a light, easy laugh that had started as a technique and was now just her laugh. “I dropped out. I was never that smart anyway.” She turned back to the coffee machine. “You want coffee?”

“Sure.”

Kelsey came through the hallway in a crop top and athletic shorts, waved at Carter without breaking stride, and disappeared into the second bedroom which was where she lived.

“My roomie,” Lola explained.

Kelsey worked at the club and was more or less Lola’s understudy. That was because everyone knew that Lola was going to leave at some point. She was just getting too big for the small club.



Carter watched her go and then looked at the room again. He sat on the powder pink couch and leaned back with his arms spread across the back of it. He had the posture of someone who had the sense he owned the room he was in.

“So how have you been?” Lola said, walking carefully as she brought in two cups of coffee. She placed one in front of Carter. and then sat across from him.

She sat.

A minute later, she was still sitting. So was Carter.

Things seemed to have come to an awkward halt.

“So... Is something going on?”

Carter threw his head back. He was laughing, although silently. The smile on his face was big and... disquieting.

“Is something funny?”

“I’ve been waiting for this moment for years,” he said.

Lola set her cup on the table pulled her bare legs up under her. “What does that mean?”

Carter smiled. Not the easy, social smile he deployed in restaurants and coffee shops. Something odder than that.

“You really don’t remember,” he said. “High school. My girlfriend. The one you were with for two months and then dropped.”

A memory surfaced, but it was just a girl’s face. Aj.J. knew a lot of girls back in high school. “Um...” Lola said, unsure what to say.

“Julie,” Carter said. “You made her dye her hair. Wear push-up bras. Act like a ditz. For two months, you made her lose all respect for herself, and then you ended it with a text.” He picked up the cup Lola had set in front of him. “You stole her from me. She lied to her about me. Then when you had her, you treated her like dirt.”

All Lola could do was look on, unsure what Carter was saying, really. The name Julie was one he could just barely recall.

“She moved away after,” Carter continued. “I never saw her again. Her folks said she wasn’t allowed to speak to me, said she was too traumatized. Her therapist told her to cut all ties. She was the only girl I ever...” He stopped, and the stopping was the most unguarded thing Lola had ever seen Carter do. “So when I realized you were going to the same college I was going to, and trying for a psych degree like I was, I decided to use put my lessons to use. For Julie. Revenge.”

The apartment was quiet. Not a peep.

“Revenge?” Lola asked. “I don’t get it.”



“I set this up.”

“Set what up?”

“Everything!” Carter said, joyfully.

“I don’t get it...” Lola said tugging on knees.

“You were miserable in college. You couldn’t pay for anything. It was like me someone was sabotaging you at every turn. I phoned up every place you applied to and told them what a horrible person you were. I made sure no one in five miles of your apartment would even think of giving you a job.”

“No,” Lola replied, knowing he had to be joking.

“So then I used my savings to buy those clothes. The ones that made me look like success. I knew it would make you jealous!”

“You did what? That’s silly.”

“I made you wonder how I could afford it. You’re such a greedy fucker, A.J. I knew you’d want what I had. You’d ask me how I got it all. Then I’d take you to the bar.”

“The bar? The Parlor thingy place?”

“I paid them. I paid them to hire you. They were going out of business and were desperate. So I paid them to hire you and treat you like a real employee.”

“But you worked there!”

“No for a second,” Carter replied. “You think I’d ever work at some tranny fuckin’ whorehouse?”

Lola’s face was scrunched in confusion. “No, but you did!”

“Did you ever see me in a dress? Even with a wig? No, you didn’t because that shit made me sick.”

“You weren’t a femboy hostess? No, you had to be!”

“I have never worn a dress for a single second of my life, and I never will.” He said it without pride or apology, as a logistical detail. “The psychology degree turned out to be genuinely useful. The mental manipulation literature is very good. I’d recommend it.”

Lola sat in her chair and slowly, her head tilted from one side to the other, as it was slowly coming to her. “No,” she insisted, but much weaker than before.

“Every tip I gave you,” Carter continued, “was calculated to pull you in deeper. The mindset trick. The padding advice. Pointing you toward the blonde wig, the prosthetics, the salon. I knew exactly where each suggestion would take you because I’d mapped it out.” He leaned forward to make sure his sneering face couldn’t be ignored. “You were always going to end up here. I just had to make sure you thought you were choosing it.”

“You used your psychology degree,” Lola said, “to turn me into Lola?”

“I used it to let you make a series of decisions you couldn’t help but make that led you here.” Carter looked around the room again — the plants, the heels, the pink. “Every one of those decisions was yours. I just made sure you couldn’t resist making them.”

From the other room, Kelsey laughed at something on her phone.

Lola looked down at the coffee cup and then at the French tip nails holding it and then at Carter, who was watching with the expression of someone who had achieved his lifelong goal and gloating about it was the icing on his fetid little cake.

“So?” Lola said.

Carter picked up his mug. “So? You’re a whore, A.J. I made you into everything you wanted Julie to be for you; a stupid whore, selling her body for

money and degrading herself at every turn, living in a bottomless cesspool of depravity.”

Lola stood up. “Really?” She asked.

Carter didn't reply, and just leaned back, ready to watch his old friend slowly realize what he had done. Slowly break down. Slowly fall to pieces when she realized the true extent of what he had done to himself.

Lola smiled. “Wow, that's, like, a really long story. I kinda zoned out,” she said, twirling a strand of her hair. “But, like, thanks, I guess?” She giggled.

“What do you mean, ‘Thanks?’ I've known you since you were fourteen you fucking little femboy,” Carter said, and for the first time in the conversation his voice had heat in it. “You never wanted any of this. You were...”

“You keep calling me a femboy,” Lola said. She uncrossed her legs and crossed them the other way. “You are so out of the loop.”

Carter stopped.

He looked at her with the expression of someone running a sentence back through their head to check whether they'd heard it correctly. His eyes moved, briefly and involuntarily, in a way that answered his own question before he'd finished forming it. Those shorts she was wearing were flat. Nothing in the crotch. And with how tight they were, she wasn't tucking.

“What did you... Did you...”

“I'm a girl,” Lola said, with the light, informational delivery of someone clarifying a scheduling detail.

The apartment was quiet again. From somewhere below, the muffled bass of whatever the downstairs neighbor played on weekend mornings.

Carter sat on the pink couch and said nothing for a moment.

“And I make more money than ever,” Lola added, and picked up her coffee.

Carter found his voice somewhere around the thirty-second mark. “You're a prostitute,” he said. The bitterness in it was genuine, the scorn and revulsion intended. “I turned you into a joke and you don't even see it.”

“Prostitute?” Lola tilted her head. “No. I only sleep with men I *like*.”

Kelsey appeared from the hallway with her bag over one shoulder, already on her way out. She had the look of someone who had caught the tail end of the conversation and formed a rapid opinion. “Yeah?” she said, with a knowing smile, pulling the door open. “How many customers have you not *liked*?”

She left without waiting for the answer.

Lola considered the question.

The pause extended. Then she giggled as she had clearly lost her train of thought.

“See?” Carter said. “You’re...”

“Hey, I work with *actual* prostitutes,” Lola said pleasantly. “They’re so nice! So I know the difference.” She set the cup down. “And I’m not a prostitute. I’m a sex worker.”

Carter looked at her. The revenge he had spent, by his own account, years engineering and ll of his savings on, had arrived at its destination and found the destination redecorated and under new management. He had spent half of his money on renting that penthouse for the night.

Lola stood up and smoothed her shorts. “So anyway. You want to take me to dinner?”

Carter’s face moved through several positions before settling on one. “No,” he said. “Hell no.”

“You sure?” She reached for the hem of her crop top. “Because...”

His eyes, burning with a fury that had been years in the making, raked over her body, landing on the vulgar curve of her chest. He lunged, his hands grabbing, fingers sinking into the soft, heavy flesh of her E-cup implants. They were warm, yielding, and terrifyingly real.

A brighter, happier smile sprang onto Lola’s face. This was the fire she’d been waiting for. This was why she wanted to see Carter again. She arched her back, pushing her breasts deeper into his grasp. Her hands came up to cover his, guiding them, encouraging them.

“Yeah, they feel good, don’t they?” she bubbled. With a fluid, practiced motion, she reached back and unhooked her bra, letting it loose. Her shorts followed, a whisper of denim pooling at her feet, leaving her in only a pair of tiny, lace panties with teddy bears on them.

Carter made a guttural sound in his throat, a noise of pure, primal rage. He shoved her, not hard, but with enough force to send her stumbling back onto the plush pink couch. She landed with a soft bounce, the impact jarring but not unwelcome. He was on her in an instant, his body a heavy, furious weight pinning her down. His breath was hot and angry on her neck, smelling of whiskey and resentment.

She looked up at him, her eyes anything but innocent. “Can you take off my panties for me?” she whispered, her voice a silken taunt.

Carter reached for the, but she blocked his attempt.

“With your *teeth*, big guy,” she added, lifting her legs to make it easier.

He didn’t answer with words. He hooked his choppers into the flimsy lace and pulled them away, the fabric flimsy like tissue paper. He fumbled with his own belt, his movements clumsy and frantic, driven by a need to assert dominance, to reclaim the power he felt slipping away. As he stole a look, he could see the scar down there, the little scrap of tissue that used to be A.J.’s manhood. He



entered her in one brutal, punishing thrust, and Lola squealed, a high-pitched sound of pure, unadulterated delight that echoed in the pink, scented room. He wasn't making love; he was trying to destroy her, to fuck the smirk off her face, to reclaim the man he thought he had destroyed.

But Lola was insatiable. She met his brutal rhythm with an enthusiasm that was both genuine and terrifying. She wrapped her legs around his waist, pulling him deeper, her heels locking into his back.

With every violent thrust, she arched her spine, her body a bow of pliant muscle, taking everything he gave her and begging for more. Her moans were not whimpers of pain but operatic arias of pleasure, loud and shameless. "Yes, Carter, just like that," she gasped, her voice breathy and encouraging. "Fuck me harder. Am I better than Julie?"

His anger was boiling over. He flipped her over, yanking her hips up until she was on her hands and knees, her face pressed into the couch cushions. He took



her from the front, his grip on her hips tight enough to bruise. But Lola just pushed back, meeting him stroke for stroke, her flexibility allowing her to angle her body in a way that made him see stars. Her endurance was limitless; she was a machine built for pleasure, and his furious assault was exactly the kind of rough, passionate sex she was made for.

Hours bled into one another. They moved from the couch to the floor, then to the plush fur rug in front of her vanity mirror. He watched her in the reflection, watched the ecstatic, blissed-out expression on her face as he drove into her again and again.

Carter was trying to break her, but she was breaking him, her relentless pleasure a testament to his failure. She was loud, responsive, a symphony of gasps and cries and filthy encouragements that filled the apartment. She came, hard and repeatedly, wet slaps again and again, her body shuddering beneath him, her screams of pleasure a victory lap.

Finally, spent and empty, Carter collapsed against her, his body trembling with exhaustion and defeat. He had poured all his rage, all his vengeance, into their violent coupling, in the desperate hope that he could fuck her into understanding that he was the one who had reduced A.J. to this, and she had consumed it all, transformed it into ecstasy, and asked for more. He hadn't conquered her — he had just paid as much as a high roller at the club for the most expensive, most intense sex of his life. He had lost. And as Lola giggled, a light, carefree sound, and kissed his sweat-slicked forehead, he knew she was the only one who had truly won.



Carlie was once again at the front desk, holding down the fort at Vince's. She was a very pretty girl, with a radiant smile and looked great in an evening gown. She was also supremely talented at her job, directing bar customers to the bar, VIPs to the back rooms, lonely men to the booths and none-of-the-aboves to the street.

Carter appeared at the desk on a Saturday, four months after the encounter on the fourteenth floor. He was not wearing the expensive clothes he once used to fool his old schoolmate. His hair needed a haircut it wasn't getting. He had the dishevelment of someone whose recent months had involved decisions they were still paying for.

"I'm here for Lola," he said.

Carlie looked at him with professional neutrality and prejudicial detachment. "We've been over this, sir."

"I just want to talk to her."

"As we said the last time, sir, you are not welcome here until you settle your bill." She slid a piece of paper she had scribble the five-digit-number across to him. Carter looked at the number just to ignore it harder.

"I'm working hard, I really am. I'm good for it," he said. "I just want to talk to her for a minute. Tell her Carter's here."

"Does she work here? I'm not familiar with the name."

"You know she does!" They always denied it, probably for legal reasons, but Carter knew better. He could hear her laughter in the din behind the threshold to the bar. "She knows me."

"I'm sure she does." Carlie's expression did not change. "But we do have to enforce out policies, and your bill..."

He had become addicted to her. He had been Lola's biggest customer for a weeks, until he ran out of money. Then he dodged and deferred as they tried to collect, finally barring him from the place. But she had such a sweet cunt. She

was so nice. Her lips were begging to be kissed. He had to have Lola. He couldn't live without her.

"I heard you." Carter put his hands on the desk. "Can you just tell her I'm here? One minute."

The man Vince had hired to stand near the entrance, a person of considerable dimensions named Trevor who held a certification in conflict de-escalation that he had never used, appeared at Carter's left shoulder.

"Sir," Trevor said.

"I'm not..." Carter started.

"Sir," Trevor said again, in the tone of someone for whom the word is a complete sentence.

Just at that moment, he could see her. The blond hair, the innocent smile, the big eyes full of joy. Lola. His one true love. Lola.

No. It was someone else. He was so hopeful, just for a moment.

"Sir!" Trevor said, louder.

Carter was escorted to the sidewalk with minimal ceremony, and the door closed behind him, and the music inside was muffled to near silence.

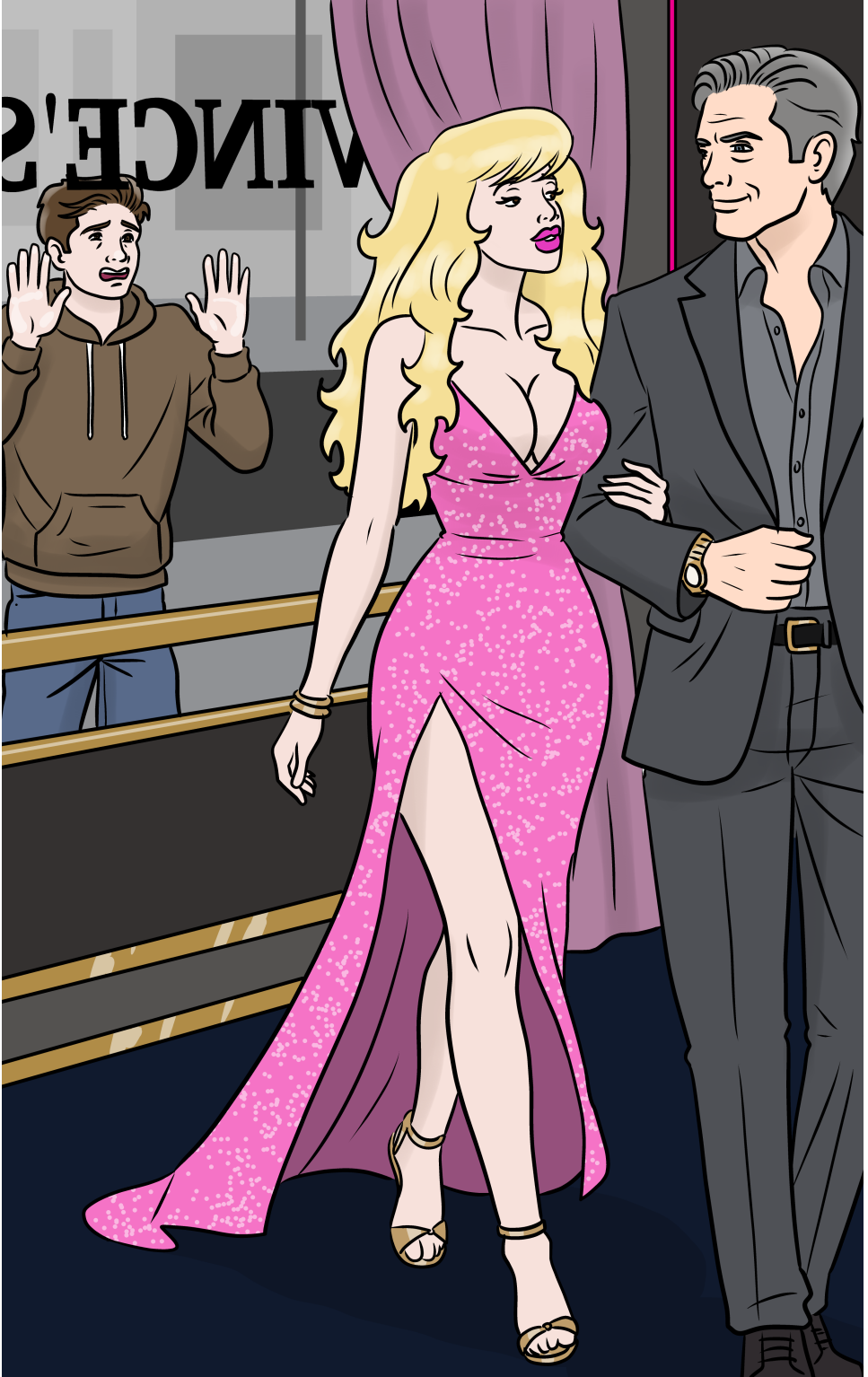
Inside, at a table near the back with a guest named Warren who owned a Fortune 500 company, Lola laughed at something her esteemed guest said, and touched his wrist lightly and let the moment linger.

Warren signaled with his eyes he wanted to go to the champagne room. She played him like a virtuoso.

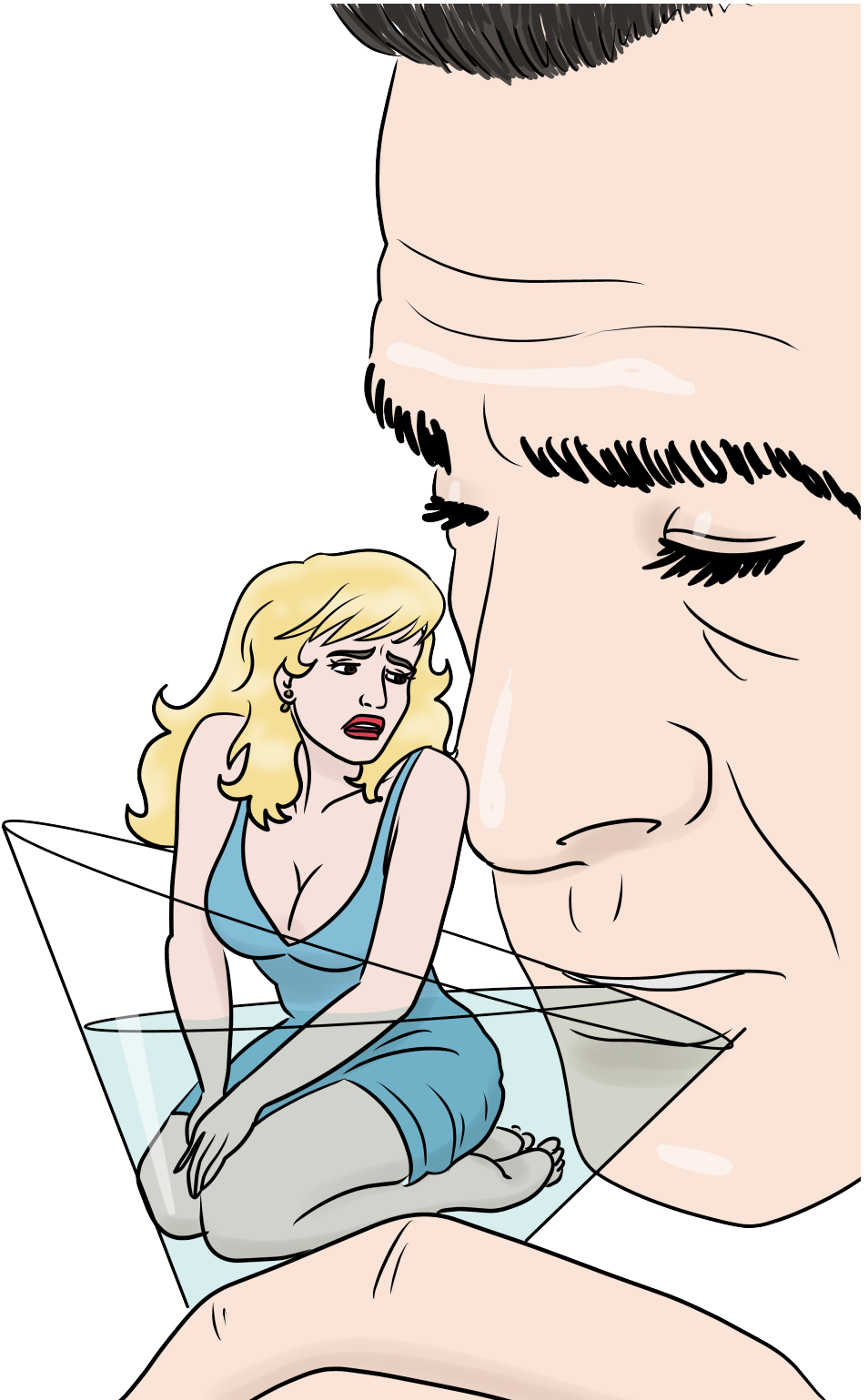
Lola bit her lip and then smiled. She leaned forward, letting him get a really good look, and wondered what she would look like in his bed, on his arm, sunning by his pool, smashed on his cock, lounging in his private plane. Or maybe she'd wait for the next guy. She had nothing but the brightest future a girl like her could hope for.

In the dark, outside, her former classmate pressed his hands to the windows of Vince's, hoping to see her again. Just for a moment.

The End







## Titles from Sick Puppy Press

### Lulu.com PDF books

#### Sick Puppy Comics

##### **Making Friends**

Story & Art by Joe Six-Pack. Three college students sign up for a six-month isolation experiment. Things start to get a little strange, and they begin to lose their masculinity day by day. Yet, they don't seem to even notice... Full Color Comic Book / 38 pages

##### **The Pet Sitter**

Story & Art by Joe Six-Pack. Asked to look after a supermodel's pet for a while, James finds himself thrust out of his own apartment and into hers. Day by day, it seems like circumstances adapt James to become the resident of a supermodel's lifestyle. Full Color Comic Book / 29 pages

##### **A Curious Curse**

Story & Art by Joe Six-Pack. When teen goth Brandyn gets his drivers' license, he thinks it's a ticket to adulthood. Unfortunately, he's already cashed a ticket in the opposite direction. Full Color Comic Book / 27 pages

##### **Boys Will Be Girls**

Story & Art by Fraylim, Script by KK, Ink & Color by Joe Six-Pack. The "Summer Blossom" camp welcomes a new group of young men. But although it may be an all-boys camp when they arrive, it's girls-only when they leave. Full Color Comic Book / 100 pages

##### **Double-Crossed**

Story & Art by Joe Six-Pack. Jesse is on the run from justice. When he finds an old friend who can help him, that old friend seems more interested in helping Jesse become a woman. Comic / 24 pages

##### **The Step-Witch**

Story by Joe Six-Pack. Dillon has a new step-mother. Problem is that she and Dillon don't get along. More of a problem for Dillon is that she's a witch — and wants a daughter. Full Color Comic Book / 17 pages

##### **The Charm**

Story by Joe Six-Pack, art by Osoku WARUI. Gavin is a student who laments his boring life. Then he crosses paths with Krista. Things are about to change, and not necessarily for the better. Comic / 24 pages

##### **College Can Change a Man**

Story & Art by Joe Six-Pack. A small college has been hanging on to its male-dominated mindset for too long. Now, a new member of the board has arrived to make some changes. A lot of changes. Comic / 243 pages

##### **Help Wanted 1**

Story by James J Craft, art by RocketXpert. Three boys are getting far more than they bargained for when they get summer jobs at a woman's fancy mansion. Comic / 40 pages

##### **Help Wanted 2**

Story by James J Craft, art by RocketXpert. Three more boys are getting far more than they bargained for at a woman's fancy mansion, and three others are finding their places. Comic / 40 pages

##### **What Popular Girls Do**

Story & Art by Joe Six-Pack. A teaching assistant in high school is about to find out what it's like to go back to class — but as a saucy teenage girl with a bully boyfriend he needs to satisfy. Comic / 47 pages

#### Teens Transformed

##### **She Made Me Into My Sister**

"A Little Too Clever" by Joe Six-Pack. Wyatt wanted to help his girlfriend get revenge, but at what cost? As it turns out, a cost greater than any boy could have imagined. Book / 88 pages / 20 illustrations

##### **He's a Valley Girl, Fer Sure**

From the files of TGStories.com: "Corey Taylor's Big Bodacious Adventure" by Joe Six-Pack. For Corey, the only way he can get into college is to pretend to be a girl. But when does it stop being pretend? When he's cheerleader? A girlfriend? A beauty queen? Book / 78 pages / 17 illustrations

## **From Boys to Bridesmaids**

“Always a Bridesmaid, Never a Groom” by James J Craft. Two spoiled and privileged boys are about to be put in their place by their new step-mother. And their place is by her side as her bridesmaids and daughters. Book / 77 Pages / 16 illustrations

## **Little Mis-ter Popular**

“My Two Moms” by James J Craft, illustrations by rocketxpert. Thanks to his aunt’s “Confidence Club,” Leon will find a way to become popular, and to get over all his hang-ups... Including his masculinity. Book / 77 Pages / 17 illustrations

## **Bride to Be**

By Joe Six-Pack. Derek and Cole grew up together as kids. One year, though, Cole has to start pitching in at the family wedding business. His life will never be the same. Book / 63 pages / 25 illustrations

## **Gone Girly for Good**

“Big in Japan” by James J Craft. Mike and Ken were one-hit-wonder rock stars. Then they discovered they had fans in Japan, so they left to become famous. Then they discovered that the Japanese didn’t know they were guys. Book / 77 pages / 26 illustrations

## **One Year in Tokyo**

By James J Craft, illustrations by Kwon Lee Tran. Mickey is forced to spend a year with his father in Japan. However things often get confused when words get translated from English to Japanese, as Mickey soon finds out... Book / 87 pages / 20 illustrations

## **Mall Makeover Madness**

“A Day at the Mall” by KK, illustrations by Fraylim. Four boys are going to have one weird day at the mall. By the time the day is over, it’s four girls who leave the mall to begin their new lives. Book / 109 pages / 25 illustrations

## **Convicts to Co-Eds**

Story by By Courtney Captisa & Claire Bear, illustrations by Joe Six-Pack. Three teen boys are sent to a reform school. What they can’t know is that they are about to be “reformed” all the way into skirts... And beyond. Book / 154 pages / 31 illustrations

## **Creating Samantha**

Story by Cheryl Lynn, illustrations by The Might Fenek. Samuel was under the tutelage of his legal guardian, only his guardian had no intentions of letting him grow up male. Book / 70 pages / 16 illustrations

## **Crosley High Chronicles**

By Joe Six-Pack. River is coming to a new school, and trying to fit in. The problem is the only way he’s going to fit in is in skirts and heels. Book / 217 pages / 75 illustrations

## **Student Exchange**

By Joe Six-Pack. Kelley Sue’s convinced a French exchange student to disguise himself as a girl. What happens when she realizes he has no intention of returning back home? Book / 77 pages / 22 illustrations

## **The Substitute Ski Bunny**

By Joe Six-Pack. Walker is a young man who’s fallen in love with a girl. The only way he can get close to her is to dress up and become her roommate. It’s not going to go according to plan, though. Book / 132 pages / 31 illustrations

## **My Brother, My Mother, My Doll**

By Joe Six-Pack. Seven year old Amelia has made a wish. A wish that she had a mother more like her doll, and that her brother weren’t so mean. Her family is about to have their lives turned inside-out. Book / 109 pages / 34 illustrations

## **The Princess Center**

By Cheryl Lynn. Jeffrey wanted everything his brother Alan had. He was willing to to any length to get it, even to send Alan to... The Princess Center. Book / 85 pages / 26 illustrations

## **Tales of Transformation**

### **He’s the Wrong Girl**

“Office Chemistry” by Joe Six-Pack. James had to fill in at the reception desk. Problem is, the business is a bio-genetics company. And all of the sudden the coffee tastes funny. Book / 53 pages / 14 illustrations

## **City Boy, Country Girl**

By Joe Six-Pack. Richard's successful city life is interrupted when a sheep he wants to fleece needs urgent care out in the country. But instead of returning home, all Richard's wife hears are a series of suspicious excuses. Revised in 2019. Book / 92 pages / 34 illustrations

## **Thames Greene**

By James J Craft. Ira wanted something better for his family. A new start. But in Thames Greene, everyone's getting a new start, whether they want it or not. Book / 77 pages / 26 illustrations

## **Hiding in High Heels**

"How Not to be a Sissy" By Joe Six-Pack. Vince was on the run from people who wanted their millions back. Howard was a friend with a funny little idea and a knack for making subliminal CDs. Mini-Pix / 48 pages / 15 illustrations

## **A Blessing in Disguise**

By KK, illustrations by Kannel. Jay was a witness to a murder, and now he's the target of a vicious criminal. Resorting to a female disguise, he becomes trapped with no way out. Book / 84 pages / 16 illustrations

## **I'm Your Dolly**

"Barbie-in-a-Box" By Joe Six-Pack. Tyler wasn't much of a boyfriend anymore. Jessica wanted to throw him out, but then a better idea came to her, in the form of the Barbie-in-a-Box service. Tyler better get used to pink. Book / 103 pages / 20 illustrations

## **Winning is Everything**

"Costume drama" by Joe Six-Pack. Seth made a funny little bet for Halloween. He needed to pull off the impersonation of a Cheerleader for a party. What's at stake? 100 million dollars and his manhood. Book / 215 pages / 37 illustrations

## **His Life as a Trophy Wife**

By Joe Six-Pack. Nick had a great life, but then it evaporated. Now he's down on his luck. In steps a wealthy executive willing to pay him handsomely to pretend to be his wife. What can it hurt? Revised in 2018. Book / 256 pages / 39 illustrations

## **Male Monday, Girl Friday**

"Hey, Cutie!" by James J Craft. Daniel is going to be promoted from his average life to an exciting executive position. At least, that's what his bosses are telling him. They may not be telling him everything. Book / 58 pages / 20 illustrations

## **The Happiest Place on Earth**

From the files of TGStories.com: "The Fairest One of All" By Joe Six-Pack. Will is a kid looking for a job. He gets one, performing as Snow White at a theme park. For Will, he doesn't suspect that playing the role and wearing the costume is slowly changing him, day by day. Book / 51 pages / 21 illustrations

## **Hello, Nurse**

From the files of TGStories.com: "Quality Health Care". Dane is filling in as a nurse for his pal Jimmy at his new office. Although both are doctors, Dane begins to take to his new role as a nurse. Soon, he feels compelled to be the ideal nurse. Book / 44 pages / 15 illustrations

## **My Boss, The Bimbo**

"If I Were a Betting (Wo)Man" By James J Craft, illustrations by blackshirtboy. CEO Lucas has a superiority complex. When his long-suffering secretary is able to feed into Lucas' competitive nature, he'll make any bet to prove his dominance over women. Book / 38 pages / 10 illustrations

## **He's the Girl They Want**

"Rallies" by Joe Six-Pack. Spencer has a great new executive job in the food service industry, but first he's got to learn the ropes of the business by waiting on tables. He just doesn't quite fit in with the cheerleader theme. Yet. Book / 63 pages / 22 illustrations

## **Demoted and Degraded**

"Trixie the Secretary" by Angela J. Cindy didn't much like Tom Jones attitude and his advances, so when she has the opportunity to help take the wind out of his sails, she takes it. But she had no idea that it was all designed to make Tom into Trixie the secretary. Book / 87 pages / 17 illustrations

## **I, Candy**

“Sissy Sweets” by James J Craft, illustrations by rocketxpert. Inheriting his family’s bakery requires this young man to become the new face of the business. A female face. Book / 45 pages / 15 illustrations

## **Boyz II Girlz**

“The Making of the Ballroom Brats” by Joe Six-Pack. The Ballroom Brats become the newest worldwide celebrity sensation. How did four unsuspecting guys at a fast food joint become the hottest girl group in music? Book / 113 pages / 34 illustrations

## **His Strangest Desire**

“Employee of the Month” by Joe Six-Pack. Mick is declared Employee of the Month, and he’s going to find himself hurtling headlong into facing his weirdest inner desire. Book / 59 pages / 19 illustrations

## **Hard Time or High Heels**

“I’m Turning into My Mother” by James J Craft, illustrations by rocketxpert. Colby got deep into debt to a local gangster. Before long, he’s on the arm of that very same gangster as his reluctant girlfriend. Book / 75 pages / 20 illustrations

## **Seriously Skirted**

“The Show Piece” by KK. Illustrations by Joe Six-Pack. Mel finds work at a clinic as a secretary. He slowly begins to fit to role. Book / 75 pages / 19 illustrations

## **From Mister to Sister**

Story by Melissa N., illustrations by Joe Six-Pack. Dan just wanted to help guide his girlfriend’s sister out of her depression. Instead, he’s being guided out of his manhood. Book / 84 pages / 24 illustrations

## **The Russian Girl**

Story by Melissa N., illustrations by Joe Six-Pack. Casey’s wife has had enough of watching him kill himself with work, so she forces him out of his comfort zone... Into the life of a female stripper. Book / 196 pages / 30 illustrations

## **Swindled into Skirts**

“Beta Male” by Joe Six-Pack. Kyle inherited a multi-million dollar mansion in southern California. He begins to adjust to the Cali lifestyle, but his adjustments seems to have a decidedly feminine flavor to them. Book / 78 pages / 23 illustration

## **Mergers & Acquisitions**

Story by James J. Craft, Illustrations by Sortimid. Mark is a disaffected retail salesperson, and after a takeover of his store, he finds himself selling feminine fashion... and struggling to embrace everything about it. Book / 103 pages / 31 illustration

## **Suddenly a Secretary**

Story & art by Joe Six-Pack. Rock guitarist Mick has become obsessed with following the life of secretary Lori Chandler through her inter-office email messages. Soon, Mick is taking her place. Book / 133 pages / 30 illustrations

## **Stories of the Supernatural**

### **A Change for the Better**

“Do-Overs” by Joe Six-Pack. Evan wants a chance to do over his biggest mistake. He gets the chance, but he keeps wanting his new life to be a little bit better than the last. Book / 59 pages / 18 color illustrations

### **Changed and Rearranged**

“Wrongs Make Wright” By Joe Six-Pack. Chris and Matt were rivals. Then, Matt decided to show everyone how smart he truly was by impersonating a teacher. But the disguise becomes more and more real, much to Chris’ dismay. Book / 74 pages / 19 illustrations

### **From Pals to Gals**

From the files of TGStories.com: “Mandate of the People” By Joe Six-Pack. Teens Jeremy and Stewart are good friends, but a bit thick in the noggin. When they jokingly nominate each other for Prom Queen, they slowly become the perfect candidates, thanks to some magic. Book / 45 pages / 16 illustrations

### **A High-Heeled Halloween**

Story & art by Joe Six-Pack. A costume shop has four spooky tales to tell this Halloween, where the price you pay for your costume is far more than money. Book / 128 pages / 34 illustrations

## **Born on Black Friday**

Story & art by Joe Six-Pack. Malcom Balford was forced to go shopping on Black Friday. What he finds at the mall may mean that Malcom will never leave. Book / 57 pages/ 17 illustrations.

## **In the Family Way**

Story & Art by Joe Six-Pack. The Finch brothers are trying to catfish a man out of his money. To do so, they dress up as mother and daughter. But their impersonations slowly seem to be taking them over. Book / 182 pages / 42 illustrations

## **Crossed Fiction**

### **Sisters for the Summer**

"Camp Counseling" By Joe Six-Pack. Brock McCade always thought of himself as a real man, or at least he would be one, someday. After summer camp, he's no longer so sure. Book / 76 pages / 17 illustrations

### **They're the Girls for the Job**

"Peace and Harmony" By James J Craft. Illustrations by blackshirtboy. Pete and Harmon need jobs bad. How far would they have to go to get them? Book / 64 pages / 19 illustrations

### **Blondie's Lost Summer**

By KK. Illustrations by Fraylim. Carl's dream summer was about to become three months of dresses, heels and makeup. Book / 159 pages / 48 illustrations

### **Blondie's Lost Year**

By KK. Illustrations by Fraylim. Book Two in the Blondie Series. Carl's trip to Florida has been horrible enough, trapped in dresses and makeup. Now, high school has presented a whole new level of humiliation for him. Book / 221 pages / 52 illustrations

### **Blondie He's Not**

Story by KK, illustrations by Fraylim. Mark got a job at a salon, and fell in love with one of the customers. Problem was that customer was Candi "Blondie" Wethers, and what happened to Candi was about to happen to Mark. Book / 151 pages / 40 illustrations

## **I Never Wanted to be a Woman**

"Politically Corrected" By Cheryl Lynn. Illustrations by Joe Six-Pack. Michael's politically active mother has decided she's going to make her hippie son over into the daughter she always wanted. Book / 64 pages / 19 illustrations

## **If the Shoes Fit**

"Hand Me Downs" By KK, illustrations by Fraylim. Sydney is a teen who is just trying to make it through the summer with no money. He finds himself wearing hand-me-downs from his sister, and that takes his life in a whole new direction. Book / 98 pages / 30 illustrations

## **The Boy's Guide to Girlhood**

Story by KK, illustrations by Fraylim. Dweeb Kenny and cool Rex find themselves trapped in a Principal's twisted scheme, and only one of them is going to get out in tact. Book / 109 pages / 32 illustrations

## **Fashion Victims**

Story by Lauren Bliss, illustrations by Fraylim. Teenage boy Jamie just needed clothes for school. Oh, he's going to get clothes for school. Just not male ones. Will he ever need male clothes again? Book / 67 pages / 26 illustrations

## **The Boy's Guide to Girlhood**

Story by KK, illustrations by Fraylim. Dweeb Kenny and cool Rex find themselves trapped in a Principal's twisted scheme, and only one of them is going to get out in tact. Book / 109 pages / 32 illustrations

## **The Making of a Beach Bunny**

Story by KK & Fraylim, illustrations by Fraylim. Before heading off to college, John wanted to spend his last normal summer at the old rental summer house with his friend Stanley. There was nothing about this summer that would be normal. Book / 134 pages / 58 illustrations

## **Medical Miss-Practice**

Story by KK & Fraylim, illustrations by Fraylim. Jerry just needed a medical procedure. He came out with two big new problems and a whole new life. Now he's losing everything he loves, piece by piece. Book / 95 pages / 51 black & white illustrations

## **12 Days of Christmas**

Story by KK, illustrations by Fraylim. Paul was a rising executive, but he had a secret embezzlement scheme. Now he's being blackmailed into skirts day-by-day in the 12 days of Christmas. Book / 74 pages / 21 illustrations

## **Seriously Sissified**

## **A Family Femmed**

"The Femmed Family Robinson" by James J. Craft & Cheryl Lynn, illustrations by Sortimid. The Robinson boys all had dreams of their own, once. Now they have new ones, thanks to their stepmother. Book /96 pages / 29 color illustrations

## **Forever Femmed**

Story by James J. Craft & Cheryl Lynn, illustrations by Sortimid. "A Family Femmed's" Deborah is still hard at work, flipping men into sissies and selling them to the highest bidder. But this time, there's a new wrinkle. Book / 108 pages / 28 illustrations

## **Auntie's Girl Time**

By Cheryl Lynn. David was just a young teenage boy who wanted all the things in life a man could look forward to. His aunt, though, is going to make sure he never gets them. Book / 79 pages / 20 illustrations

## **Revenge of the Cheerleaders**

"Pansy Cheers" By Angela J. Patrick Sears was a football player trying to sleep with every cheerleader at his small college. He'd have to pay for his conquests. Book / 116 pages / 19 illustrations

## **He's Got His Mind Maid Up**

By James J. Craft. Illustrations by kinkyrocket. Corey has just a sliver of a chance to get into college, but that chance involves becoming his stepmother's maid. And she wants him to fit both the role and the dress. Book / 68 pages / 16 illustrations

## **Fated for Femininity**

Story by KK, illustrations by RocketXpert. When a web page shows Evan having sex with another boy, the poor kid is chased out of town — right into the arms of a gender therapist who has her own agenda. Book / 70 pages / 15 illustrations

## **Un-Boxed & Undone**

By James J. Craft, illustrations by Banedearg with additional art by Joe Six-Pack. Caleb is struggling to get his YouTube career started. When he gets some strange shipments of makeup and clothes, he finds his channel suddenly taking off - but can he control it? A picture story. Book / 41 Pages / 33 illustrations

## **Web Classics Revisited**

## **Two Forms of ID**

By Joe Six-Pack. Harvey had the unusual ability to convincingly imitate a teenage girl. In desperation, he has to use that talent to make some money. But when is enough enough? Paperback / 194 pages / text only

## **Barbie's Life**

Story & Art by Melissa N. Chris was a student actor who said he could play any role. A disgruntled girlfriend and playwright are about to see if he'll be able to play the lead role in... Barbie's Life. Book / 55 pages / 21 rendered images

## **Amazon.com Kindle books**

All Kindle books have the same content as the Lulu.com PDF versions.

## **Two Forms of I.D.**

Sold in two parts

## **Suddenly a Secretary**

Sold in three parts:

He's the New Office Girl (Part 1)

Working His Way into Skirts (Part 2)

He Gave at the Office (Part 3)

## **I'm Your Dolly (Barbie-in-a-Box)**

Sold in three parts:

He's Her New Doll (Part 1)

Destined to be a Doll (Part 2)

I'm Your Dolly (Part 3)

## **Beta Male**

Sold in two parts:

Swindles into Skirts (Part 1)

Hijacked into Heels (Part 2)

## **Costume Drama**

Sold in three parts:

Becoming His Costume (Part 1)

Stuck in His Costume (Part 2)

Corrupted by His Costume (Part 3)

## **Bride to Be**

Sold in two parts:

Born to be a Bride (Part 1)

He's the Bride to Be (Part 2)

## **The Substitute Ski Bunny (Switchback Ridge)**

Sold in three parts:

The Substitute Ski Bunny (Part 1)

The Seduction of a Ski Bunny (Part 2)

The Surrender of a Ski Bunny (Part 3)

## **Hiding in High Heels**

Sold in one part

## **His Life as a Trophy Wife (The Puppy Mill)**

Sold in three parts:

He Was Bribed to be a Bride (Part 1)

His World as a Spoiled Girl (Part 2)

His Life as a Trophy Wife (Part 3)

## **The Fairest One of All**

Sold in one part

