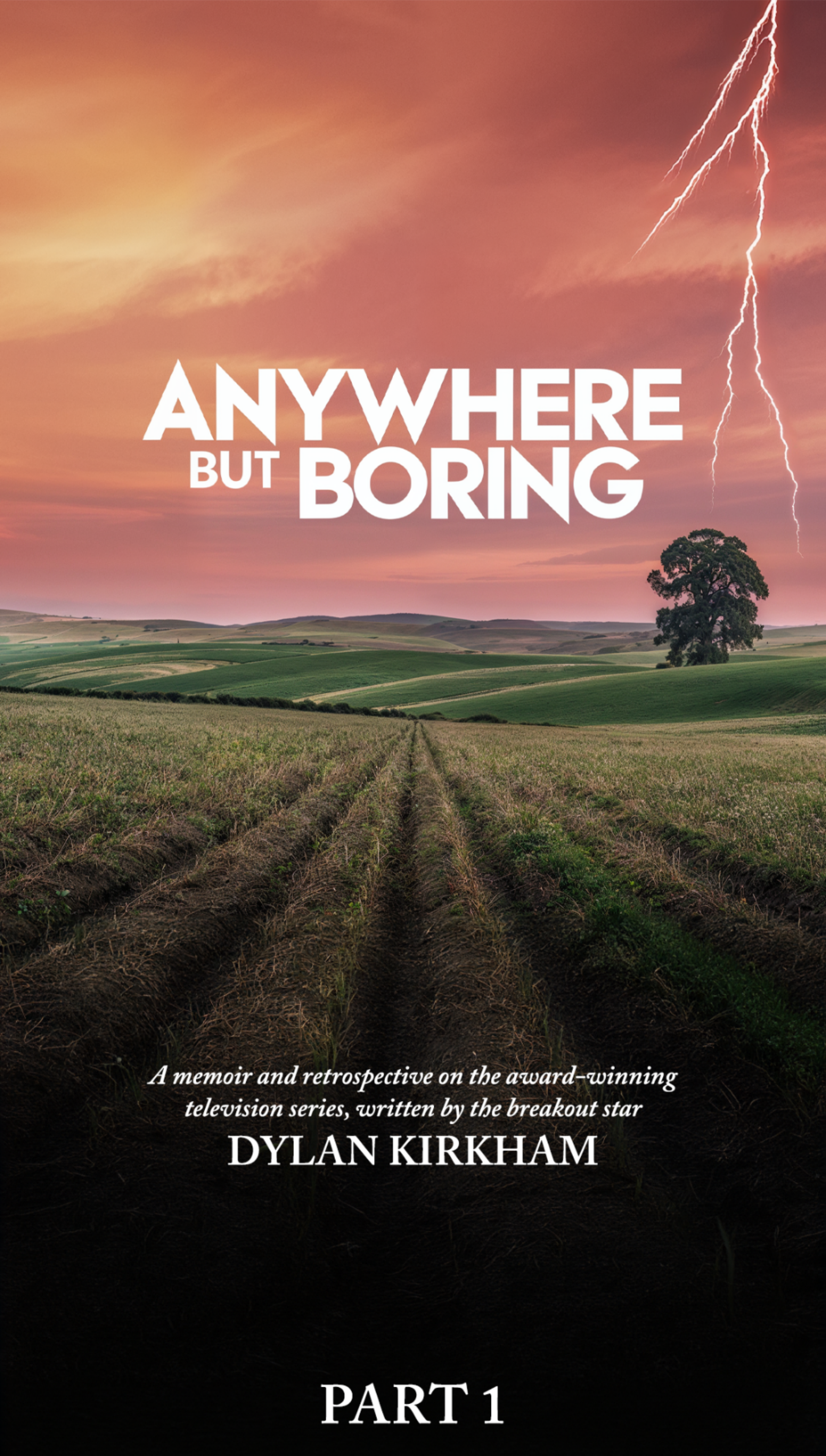


A memoir and retrospective on the award-winning television series, written by the breakout star

DYLAN KIRKHAM

PART 1



OKAY, LET'S START THIS MEMOIR. I'M ***DYLAN KIRKHAM.*** YOU KNOW ME... OR, AT LEAST, YOU THINK YOU KNOW ME.

YOU'VE PROBABLY HEARD I MOVED TO CALIFORNIA WHEN I WAS NINETEEN AND DREAMED OF BECOMING THE NEXT BIG ACTION STAR. THAT'S ALL TRUE. YEAH, I SKIPPED COLLEGE. STUPID? PROBABLY.

NOW, I WASN'T A DUMBASS - LIKE, I GRADUATED WITH AN OKAY G.P.A. - BUT I NEVER BOTHERED TO APPLY MYSELF IN SCHOOL. I WAS FOCUSED ON THE GIRLS I WAS DATING OR TRYING TO DATE. OH, AND ON WORKING OUT.

DON'T GET ME WRONG. I ***HATED*** SPORTS. PLAYING ON A TEAM WAS NEVER FOR ME. WHO THE HELL WANTS TO PASS/KICK/SMACK A BALL, DOING ALL THE WORK, ONLY TO FIND OUT THAT WHEN YOU PASS IT, THE OTHER PERSON JUST FUCKS IT UP AND DOES IT WRONG? NAH. I WAS COMPLETELY FINE JUST GETTING SWOLE ON MY OWN.



SO, YEAH, AFTER HIGH SCHOOL I WENT WEST. I MEAN, WHO DOESN'T WANT TO BE THE GUY JUMPING OUT OF EXPLODING BUILDINGS AND SAVING THE DAY, RIGHT?

I DUNNO. I COULD MAKE SOME EXCUSE ABOUT MY DAD BEING A FIREMAN AND HOW HIS HEROIC VISAGE LOOMED IN MY MIND WHEN I THOUGHT ABOUT THAT STUFF, BUT MORE THAN ANYTHING, AT NINETEEN, I WANTED TO GET LAID. AND, WELL, WHO GETS MORE ASS THAN JASON FREAKING STATHAM? I MEAN, HAVE YOU SEEN HIM? DUDE'S A STUD! SO, YEAH, THERE WASN'T A PROFOUND PASSION. IF ANYTHING, I HAD A PROFOUND PENIS.

I BET YOU'RE LAUGHING YOUR ASS OFF ABOUT ***THAT*** NOW, AIN'T YOU? YOU'RE THINKING, 'IS DYLAN CHANNELING ***HER*** OLD GUY SELF IN THIS MEMOIR?' AND THE ANSWER IS... I DON'T KNOW ANYMORE. ***MAYBE?***

ALL I CAN SAY IS I'M GONNA LET THE ***OLD DYLAN*** TALK. BECAUSE THIS IS PROBABLY HIS LAST CHANCE.



ANYWAY, I GET TO L.A. AND I'M ALL PUMPED UP, RIGHT? READY TO TAKE ON HOLLYWOOD, THINKING I'LL BE THE NEXT BIG THING. BUT REALITY HITS HARD AND FAST. THE AUDITIONS ARE FRIGGING ***BRUTAL***. YOU WALK IN, AND THERE'S LIKE FIFTY GUYS WHO LOOK EXACTLY LIKE YOU - SAME BUILD, SAME HAIR, SAME DAMN EVERYTHING. AND THEY ALL WANT IT JUST AS BAD, IF NOT MORE.

SO, I'M GRINDING IT OUT, GOING TO AUDITION AFTER AUDITION. BUT REJECTION IS A BITTER PILL TO SWALLOW. YOU START QUESTIONING EVERYTHING ABOUT YOURSELF. AM I NOT GOOD-LOOKING ENOUGH? NOT RIPPED ENOUGH? DID I MESS UP MY LINES? IT'S A MINDFUCK.

A YEAR GOES BY AND NOTHING'S HAPPENING. MY SAVINGS ARE DWINDLING, MY PARENTS ARE PISSED, I'M LIVING OFF RAMEN AND CHEAP BEER, AND THE DREAM IS STARTING TO FEEL LIKE A NIGHTMARE. MY AGENT - A GUY NAMED RICK WHO PROMISED ME THE WORLD - STOPS RETURNING MY CALLS. THAT'S WHEN DESPERATION KICKS IN.



I SEE A CASTING CALL FOR ***"ANYWHERE BUT BORING,"*** A SHOW SET IN THE TOWN OF ***BORING, WYOMING***. IT'S A HIGH SCHOOL DRAMA (OBVIOUSLY YOU KNOW THIS SINCE IT'S A BIG HIT NOW) WHERE TWENTY-SOMETHING ACTORS PLAY TEENS UNTIL THEY GO BALD, BUT IT'S ALSO A PAYING GIG. SO, I SUBMIT MY HEADSHOT.

THE ROLE? A TRANS GIRL WHO'S "KING" OF THE SCHOOL BEFORE SHE TRANSITIONS. LIKE, ***LILY*** IS THE TYPE OF KID WHO'S STUDENT COUNCIL PRESIDENT, TRACK STAR, HEAD OF EVERY COMMITTEE, AND ALSO DATING THE HOTTEST GIRL ON CAMPUS (***NISHA***, OF COURSE). I WOULD'VE HATED LILY IN SCHOOL, TO BE HONEST.

THE PREMIERE ENDS WITH LILY - NAMED ***LINCOLN*** AT THE TIME - COMING OUT TO NISHA WHILE BLACK-OUT DRUNK AT HER BIRTHDAY PARTY. ***DRAMA!***

NOW, THAT'S NOT EVEN CLOSE TO WHAT I HAD IN MIND FOR MY BIG BREAK. DOES THAT SURPRISE YOU? I BET IT



DOES. THE INTERVIEWS I DID BEFORE THIS HAVE BEEN BULLSHIT. THIS MEMOIR IS THE FIRST TIME I'M TELLING THE NAKED TRUTH. BUT, LIKE I SAID, THIS IS 'GUY DYLAN'S' LAST DANCE SO KEEP YOUR ANGRY TWEETS AND YOUTUBE COMMENTARY INSIDE THE RIDE UNTIL IT'S OVER, ALRIGHT?

I REMEMBER STARING AT THE CASTING NOTICE AND THINKING, "THIS SHOW IS GONNA GET CANCELED IN TWO EPISODES MAX." BUT HEY, MAYBE GETTING CAST WOULD GIVE ME SOME EXPOSURE, BOOST MY CHANCES FOR SOMETHING MORE MY STYLE DOWN THE LINE. PLUS, I FIGURED HOW HARD COULD IT BE? IT'S ***ACTING***, RIGHT?

SO, THERE I WAS, STANDING IN FRONT OF THESE CASTING DIRECTORS TRYING TO CONVINCE THEM - AND MYSELF - THAT I COULD PLAY THIS CHARACTER. THEY WERE LOOKING FOR SOMEONE WHO COULD BRING DEPTH AND VULNERABILITY TO THE ROLE, SOMEONE WHO COULD MAKE THE AUDIENCE FEEL EVERY OUNCE OF LILY'S STRUGGLE. SO, YEAH, OBVIOUSLY, ***I LIED.***



"YOU'RE TRANS?" THEY ASKED.

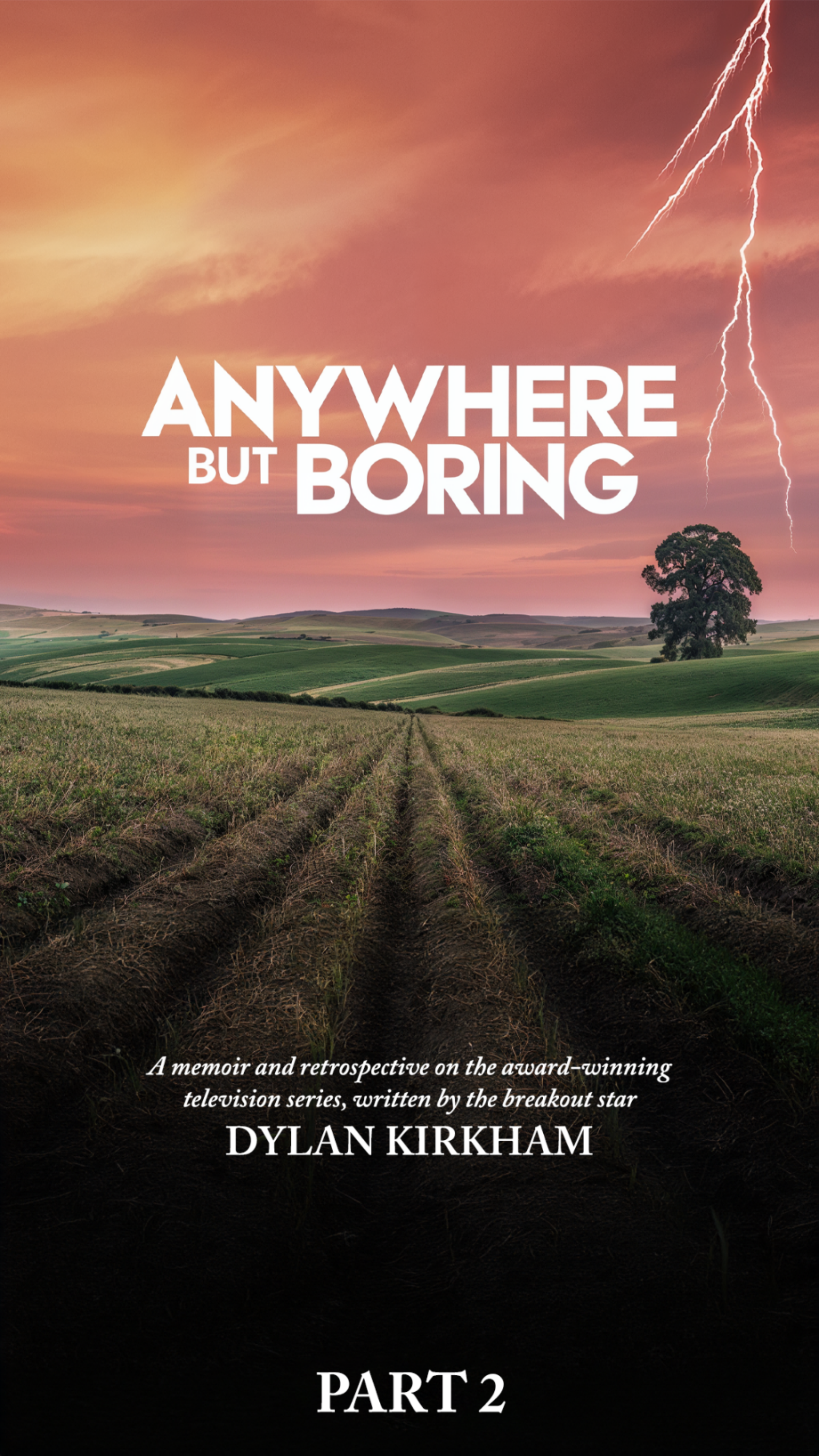
"I WANT TO TRANSITION, BUT I HAVEN'T HAD THE MEANS. THIS ROLE FEELS LIKE THE PERFECT CHANCE."

THE CASTING DIRECTORS EXCHANGED GLANCES. ONE OF THEM, A WOMAN WITH SHORT-CROPPED HAIR, LEANED FORWARD. "YOU UNDERSTAND THE IMPORTANCE OF THIS ROLE, RIGHT? WE NEED A GENUINE CONNECTION."

"ABSOLUTELY." I KEPT MY VOICE STEADY. "LILY FEELS LIKE A PART OF ME I COULDN'T EXPRESS BEFORE."

THEY BOUGHT IT. ***HOOK, LINE, AND SINKER.*** I WALKED OUT OF THERE WITH THE ROLE, FEELING A MIX OF RELIEF AND GUILT. BUT ***MOSTLY*** RELIEF. THIS WAS MY SHOT, AND I WASN'T GOING TO BLOW IT.

THEN, EVERYTHING WENT TO HELL. YOU SEE... THE SHOW WAS A ***HUGE HIT!***



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DYLAN KIRKHAM

PART 2



NEXT THING I KNOW, I FINALLY GET A CALL FROM RICK - MY AGENT WHO'D BEEN GHOSTING ME FOR MONTHS. "DUDE, THEY LOVED YOU! YOU GOT THE PART!"

I WAS SHOCKED AS HELL. FIRST OF ALL, I HADN'T GOTTEN A CALLBACK IN FOREVER, LET ALONE LANDED A ROLE. 'THEY BOUGHT MY BULLSHIT?' I THOUGHT. 'MAYBE I'M A BETTER ACTOR THAN I GIVE MYSELF CREDIT FOR.'

EVERYONE WAS THERE FOR THE FIRST TABLE READ - THE CAST, THE WRITERS, THE PRODUCERS. AND WE DIDN'T JUST HAVE A CATERED LUNCH FROM SOME HOLE-IN-THE-WALL DELI, WE HAD A FULL SPREAD! SUSHI, STEAK, THE WORKS. THAT'S WHEN I REALIZED THIS SHOW HAD SOME SERIOUS BACKING.

THEY INTRODUCED ME AS 'DYLAN KIRKHAM, SHE'S PLAYING LILY'. AND NOW CAME THE HARD PART, BECAUSE I WAS SUPPOSED TO BE A NOT-YET-TRANSITIONING TRANS GIRL BOTH ON THE SHOW ***AND*** IN REAL LIFE! HOW



THE HELL WAS I SUPPOSED TO PULL THAT OFF?

FORTUNATELY, THE TABLE READ WENT SMOOTHLY. NO ONE SEEMED TO SUSPECT A THING. SOMETIMES I FELT LIKE AN UNDERCOVER SPY - OTHER TIMES LIKE A LYING PIECE OF SHIT WHO WAS IN WAY OVER HIS HEAD.

MOST OF MY EARLY SCENES WERE WITH DAISY, WHO PLAYED NISHA. SHE ALREADY HAD A FAN BASE FROM **"FIRST DAUGHTER"** ON DISNEY+. THANK GOD SHE WAS SUPER NICE. BUT SHE WAS ALSO THE FIRST TO SAY, "YOU'RE SO BRAVE TO TRANSITION ON SCREEN."

I TRIED TO PLAY IT COOL. "YOU MEAN, LIKE, WEARING MAKEUP AND SKIRTS? I'M LOOKING FORWARD TO IT."

"OH, SURE," SHE SAID. "AND YOU'LL LOOK SUPER CUTE. BUT I WAS MORE TALKING ABOUT, YOU KNOW, THE HORMONES AND... WHATEVER ELSE YOU WANT TO DO. MILLIONS OF PEOPLE WATCHED ME GO THROUGH



PUBERTY ON TV, SO I GET IT. IT'S KIND OF THE SAME. GOD, IS THAT INSENSITIVE? I DIDN'T MEAN IT THAT WAY."

NOW, REMEMBER, ONLY A QUARTER OF SHOWS WITH A PILOT GET PICKED UP FOR A FULL SEASON, AND OF THOSE, EVEN FEWER GET RENEWED. SO, I THOUGHT, 'NO BIG DEAL. I'LL JUST RIDE THIS OUT FOR A FEW MONTHS, COLLECT MY FAT NETWORK PAYCHECK, AND MOVE ON.'

"T'S NOT INSENSITIVE!" I TOLD HER. "I CAN'T WAIT TO GET MY HANDS ON THOSE GIRL PILLS. BUT I'M FORCING MYSELF TO HOLD OFF SO THE AUDIENCE CAN SEE LILY'S TRANSITION UNFOLD OVER TIME. I'VE WAITED 22 YEARS, SO WHAT'S A FEW MORE MONTHS?"

DAISY HAS THE BRIGHTEST SMILE. "GOD, YOU'RE GONNA BE AMAZING! I WISH I HAD YOUR DEDICATION. MY LAST SHOW WAS ALL CONSPIRACIES AND SECRET SOCIETIES. **UGH.** THIS IS SO REAL, YOU KNOW? REAL STRUGGLES, REAL PEOPLE. I'M PROUD TO BE A PART OF IT."



"ME TOO," I SAID. AND I SO WANTED IT TO BE TRUE.

THE FIRST DAY ON SET, I'M STANDING IN FRONT OF THE CAMERA, WEARING A LETTERMAN JACKET AND TRYING NOT TO SWEAT THROUGH MY SHIRT. THE DIRECTOR YELLS "ACTION!" AND SUDDENLY **IT'S REAL.**

I DON'T EVEN REMEMBER THOSE FIRST FEW TAKES. MY MIND WAS RACING, THINKING ABOUT EVERY DETAIL. DID I SAY MY LINES RIGHT? DID I LOOK AWKWARD? WAS I BELIEVABLE AS LINCOLN, WHO'D SOON BECOME LILY?

BUT SOMEHOW, ACCORDING TO EVERYONE WHO SURE WOULD'VE TOLD ME OTHERWISE, I NAILED MY SCENES.

WE FILMED LINCOLN'S DRUNKEN CONFESSION IN NISHA'S BEDROOM THE NEXT DAY. THAT WAS TOUGH. THE WRITERS DID AN AMAZING JOB CAPTURING LINCOLN'S VULNERABILITY, AND IT HIT CLOSER TO HOME THAN I EXPECTED.



DAISY WAS KIND ENOUGH TO TELL ME I'D MADE HER CRY FOR REAL. "YOU BROUGHT SOMETHING TO LINCOLN I DIDN'T SEE COMING," SHE SAID. "I THOUGHT I WOULDN'T BE ABLE TO CONNECT WITH HIM SINCE HE'S THIS... PERSONA THAT LILY IS TRYING TO SHED. BUT HE'S A PART OF HER, ISN'T HE?"

"TOTALLY," I REPLIED. "THERE'S GOOD PARTS OF HIM THAT SHE WANTS TO HOLD ONTO, AND PARTS SHE CAN'T WAIT TO LEAVE BEHIND."

THE NEXT BIG SCENE WAS WHEN LILY CAME OUT TO HER DAD. ROSS SCOTT, WHO PLAYED MY ON-SCREEN FATHER, WAS A SEASONED ACTOR WITH DECADES OF EXPERIENCE. HE BROUGHT INCREDIBLE WARMTH AND GRAVITAS TO THE ROLE.

WE WERE IN THAT COZY LIVING ROOM SET, AND THE DIRECTOR ORDERED THE ENTIRE CREW TO LEAVE. IT WAS JUST ME, ROSS, AND THE CAMERA.



MY HANDS SHOOK AS I DELIVERED MY LINE. "DAD, I HAVE TO TELL YOU SOMETHING. I'VE FELT THIS WAY FOR...FOREVER, BUT I DIDN'T KNOW HOW TO SAY IT. I'M NOT YOUR SON, I'M YOUR DAUGHTER."

I DON'T RECALL HIS NEXT LINE, BUT I REMEMBER HIS EYES GLINTING HARD AND THEN... SOFTENING. ROSS HAD AN AMAZING ABILITY TO CONVEY SO MUCH WITH A LOOK. HE PULLED ME INTO AN UNSCRIPTED HUG, AND MY BODY MELTED INTO IT. I FORGOT WE WERE IN LOS ANGELES. I FORGOT THE CAMERAS AND LIGHTS. I FORGOT DYLAN. FOR A SPLIT SECOND, I **WAS** LILY IN BODY, MIND, AND SOUL. WHEN THE DIRECTOR CALLED "CUT!" IT WAS LIKE WAKING UP FROM A DREAM.

THOSE ARE THE SCENES THAT WENT VIRAL. THERE WERE FOUR OTHER MAIN CHARACTERS ON THE SHOW, BUT LILY'S STORY SEEMED TO RESONATE THE MOST.

THAT'S WHEN MY WORST FEAR BECAME MY REALITY. THE



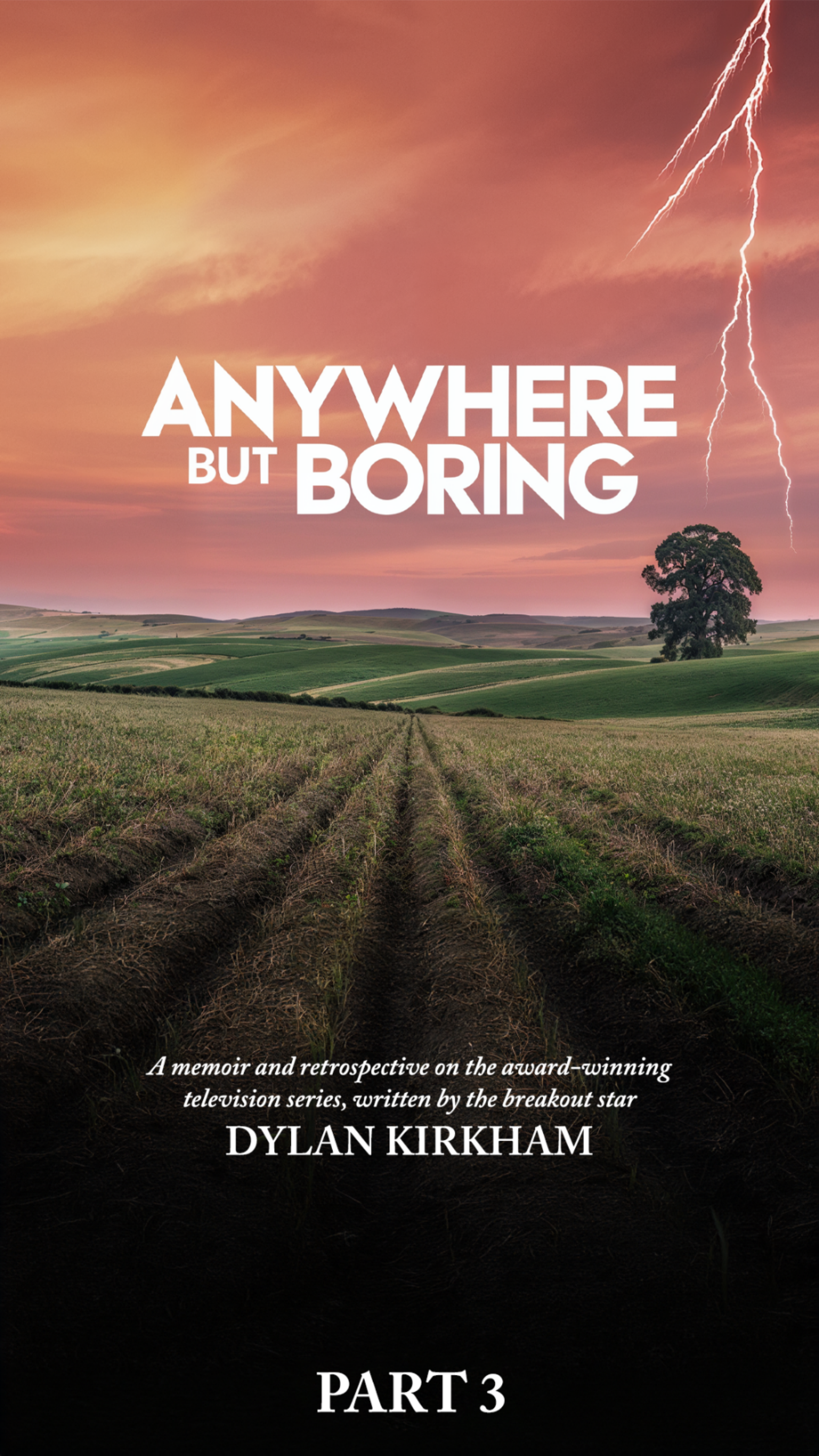
SHOW WASN'T CANCELED. IT EXPLODED!

WE WERE RENEWED FOR A SECOND SEASON BEFORE THE FIRST FINISHED AIRING. SUDDENLY, THERE WERE INTERVIEWS, PHOTO SHOOTS, AND PRESS JUNKETS.

THE WORST PART? THE WRITERS TOLD ME WHAT TO EXPECT FOR SEASON 2. "WE'RE SHOWCASING HER MEDICAL TRANSITION NEXT. THE STUDIO WILL COVER ALL YOUR EXPENSES. ISN'T THAT GREAT?"

I GRINNED, BUT INSIDE, I WAS SCREAMING. I'D GOTTEN GOOD AT TAPING MY PECS TO CREATE THE ILLUSION OF CLEAVAGE (AND THEY'D PUT ME ON A DIET AND BANNED ME FROM LIFTING), BUT I DIDN'T WANT REAL BOOBS!

I HAD THREE MONTHS TO FIGURE OUT HOW TO BACK OUT OF MY CONTRACT WITHOUT DESTROYING MY CAREER...OR I'D HAVE TO KISS MY DREAMS OF ACTION STARDOM GOODBYE FOREVER.



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DYLAN KIRKHAM

PART 3



THOSE NEXT THREE MONTHS WERE A BLUR. I WAS RUNNING ON PURE ADRENALINE, HOPPING FROM ONE INTERVIEW TO THE NEXT, AND PANIC WAS SETTING IN. EVERY DAY BROUGHT ME CLOSER TO THE INEVITABLE.

I CONSULTED WITH MY AGENT, RICK, WHO WAS NOW BACK IN MY LIFE AND MILKING MY NEWFOUND FAME FOR ALL IT WAS WORTH. "YOU LIED? YOU CAN'T TELL ME SHIT LIKE THAT, MAN. I'M NOT A LAWYER OR A PRIEST. I CAN'T KEEP THAT KIND OF SECRET."

"WHAT AM I SUPPOSED TO DO?" I HISSED, PACING BACK AND FORTH IN HIS OFFICE. "I CAN'T JUST COME CLEAN NOW. IT'LL RUIN EVERYTHING. I'LL BE CANCELLED."

RICK LEANED BACK IN HIS CHAIR, RUBBING HIS TEMPLES. "LOOK, D, YOU'VE DUG YOURSELF INTO ONE HELL OF A HOLE. BUT HERE'S THE THING - YOU'RE A HIT. THE SHOW'S A HIT. MAYBE... MAYBE YOU JUST NEED TO EMBRACE IT."

I STARED, DUMBFOUNDED. "EMBRACE IT? ARE YOU OUT OF YOUR DAMN MIND? I'M NOT ACTUALLY TRANS, RICK. I CAN'T JUST--"

"CAN'T YOU?" HE CUT ME OFF. "YOU'VE BEEN PLAYING THIS ROLE FOR MONTHS NOW. ON AND OFF SCREEN. AND, I'M TELLING YOU, UNLESS YOU WANT TO GO BACK TO SERVING TABLES AND LIVING OFF RAMEN, YOU NEED TO KEEP THIS GOING."

I SLUMPED INTO THE CHAIR ACROSS FROM HIM. "BUT... FUCKING HORMONES, RICK? THEY WANT ME TO ACTUALLY TRANSITION! I CAN'T FAKE THAT."

"LISTEN, D. THIS IS YOUR BIG BREAK. THE KIND OF OPPORTUNITY ACTORS DREAM ABOUT. YOU'VE GOT THE WORLD EATING OUT OF YOUR HAND. CAN'T YOU FEEL THE ENERGY AROUND THIS SHOW? AROUND THIS CHARACTER? YOU'RE BECOMING AN ICON."

I FELT SICK TO MY STOMACH. "AN ICON BUILT ON A LIE."

RICK LAUGHED. "HOLLYWOOD'S FULL OF LIES, D. YOU THINK ANYBODY IN THIS TOWN IS WHO THEY SAY THEY ARE? FUCK NO. THEY'RE FAKERS, ALL OF 'EM. BUT YOU'VE GOT SOMETHING SPECIAL. I ADMIT, I DIDN'T SEE IT BEFORE WHEN YOU WERE TRYING TO BE A MACHO ACTION STAR. THAT WAS NEVER GONNA HAPPEN. BUT THIS? THIS IS YOUR TICKET, MAN. YOU'VE GOT THE WORLD BELIEVING IN YOU. DON'T THROW THAT AWAY."

"BUT IF I *DID* WANT TO GET OUT OF MY CONTRACT?"

"YEAH, I COULD DO IT," RICK SIGHED. "BUT IT'LL COST YOU. FIRST, YOU'LL HAVE TO PAY BACK YOUR RETENTION FEE. THEN? WELL, THEN YOU'RE FUCKED. BACKING OUT OF A HIT SHOW LIKE THIS? YOU'LL BE BLACKLISTED FOR AT LEAST A COUPLE YEARS. NO ONE WILL TOUCH YOU WITH A TEN-FOOT POLE. YOU'LL BE LUCKY TO GET A GIG IN COMMUNITY THEATER AFTER THAT."

I SAT THERE, FEELING THE WALLS CLOSING IN. RICK WAS RIGHT, AND I HATED HIM FOR IT. I'D BACKED MYSELF INTO A CORNER, AND NOW I WAS FACING A CHOICE THAT FELT IMPOSSIBLE.

"LOOK," RICK'S VOICE SOFTENED A BIT. "I GET IT. THIS



ISN'T WHAT YOU SIGNED UP FOR. BUT SOMETIMES, THE ROLE CHOOSES YOU. AND RIGHT NOW, THIS ROLE IS CHOOSING YOU HARD. THINK ABOUT IT, OKAY? DON'T MAKE ANY RASH DECISIONS."

"BUT WHAT HAPPENS WHEN THE SHOW ENDS AND I'M STUCK WITH LITTLE BOOBS AND EVERYONE THINKS I'M *ACTUALLY* A GIRL? I MEAN, WHAT'S THE ENDGAME? I CAN'T LIVE AS A WOMAN FOREVER JUST TO KEEP MY CAREER AFLOAT."

RICK LEANED FORWARD. "WHO SAYS YOU CAN'T? I KNOW AN ACTOR - I WON'T SAY HIS NAME BUT YOU'VE SEEN HIM IN PLENTY OF MOVIES - WHO'S IRISH-AMERICAN FROM ALABAMA, BUT BECAUSE OF HOW HE LOOKS, HE'S BEEN PLAYING ITALIAN MOBSTERS FOR DECADES. HE'S NEVER EVEN BEEN TO ITALY! BUT HE'S MADE A CAREER OUT OF IT. HELL, HE EVEN OPENED AN ITALIAN RESTAURANT. POINT IS, SOMETIMES YOU GOTTA COMMIT TO THE ROLE, EVEN OFF-SCREEN."



"RICK, THAT'S NOT EVEN IN THE SAME FUCKING BALLPARK!" I SAID, SHAKING MY HEAD. "THIS ISN'T JUST PUTTING ON AN ACCENT. WE'RE TALKING ABOUT CHANGING MY ENTIRE BODY, MY IDENTITY."

"YOU'RE AN ACTOR," HE SAID. "YOUR IDENTITY IS AS FLUID AS YOU WANT IT TO BE. LOOK, I'M NOT SAYING IT'LL BE EASY. BUT IT'LL BE A HELL OF A LOT EASIER THAN LIVING IN A SHITTY STUDIO APARTMENT IN NOHO IF YOU WALK AWAY FROM THIS."

WHEN I LEFT RICK'S OFFICE, I WAS IN A DAZE. THE CALIFORNIA SUN HIT MY FACE, BUT I BARELY FELT IT. MY MIND WAS RACING, TRYING TO FIND A WAY OUT OF THIS MESS.

I FOUND MYSELF WANDERING DOWN SUNSET BOULEVARD, PAST BILLBOARDS AND POSTERS FEATURING MY FACE - OR RATHER, LILY'S FACE. IT WAS SURREAL. HERE I WAS, THE STAR OF A HIT SHOW, AND I'D NEVER FELT MORE

TRAPPED IN MY LIFE.

MY PHONE BUZZED. IT WAS A TEXT FROM DAISY: "HEY GIRL! JUST GOT THE FIRST SCRIPT FOR SEASON 2. OMG, IT'S INTENSE. CAN'T WAIT TO START FILMING WITH YOU AGAIN! 💕"

I STARED AT THE MESSAGE, MY STOMACH CHURNING. DAISY HAD BECOME A REAL FRIEND OVER THE PAST FEW MONTHS. THE THOUGHT OF LYING TO HER FACE EVERY DAY MADE ME FEEL EVEN WORSE.

AS I WALKED DOWN THE BUSTLING L.A. STREET, I CAUGHT MY REFLECTION IN A WINDOW. MY HAIR HAD GROWN OUT A BIT, AND I'D GOTTEN USED TO THE SUBTLE MAKEUP I WORE EVEN OFF-SET TO MAINTAIN THE ILLUSION. FOR A SPLIT SECOND, I DIDN'T RECOGNIZE MYSELF. THE PERSON STARING BACK WASN'T DYLAN KIRKHAM, WANNABE ACTION STAR. IT WAS LILY, THE CHARACTER I'D BEEN LIVING AND BREATHING FOR MONTHS.

"DYLAN, WHAT THE FUCK ARE YOU EVEN DOING?" I MUTTERED TO MYSELF.

I FOUND A BENCH AND SAT DOWN, PULLING OUT MY PHONE. MY THUMB HOVERED OVER MY MOM'S CONTACT. SHE'D BEEN SO PROUD WHEN I LANDED THE ROLE, TELLING ALL HER FRIENDS ABOUT HER KID'S BIG BREAK. HOW COULD I EXPLAIN THIS TO HER?

I PUT THE PHONE AWAY WITHOUT CALLING. WHAT WOULD I EVEN SAY? 'HEY MOM, REMEMBER THAT ROLE I GOT? YEAH, TURNS OUT I LIED TO THEM, AND NOW THEY WANT ME TO TAKE HORMONES FOR REAL.'

THE SUN WAS SETTING, CASTING LONG SHADOWS ACROSS THE SIDEWALK. I WATCHED AS PEOPLE HURRIED BY, CAUGHT UP IN THEIR OWN LIVES, THEIR OWN DRAMAS. NONE OF THEM KNEW THE TURMOIL CHURNING INSIDE ME.

AS THE SKY DARKENED, I REALIZED I HAD TO MAKE A DECISION. I COULDN'T KEEP AVOIDING THIS. I HAD THREE OPTIONS: COME CLEAN AND FACE THE CONSEQUENCES, QUIT THE SHOW AND KISS MY CAREER GOODBYE, OR... CONTINUE THE LIE AND ACTUALLY START TO TRANSITION.

I STOOD UP, MY LEGS FEELING WEAK. I STARTED



WALKING, NOT REALLY SURE WHERE I WAS GOING. THE NEON SIGNS OF HOLLYWOOD BLURRED AROUND ME AS I MOVED, EACH STEP FEELING HEAVIER THAN THE LAST.

"FUCK," I WHISPERED TO MYSELF. "WHAT AM I GONNA DO?"

"LILY!?" I HEARD SOMEONE CALL OUT. I FROZE, MY HEART RACING.

I TURNED TO SEE A GROUP OF TEENAGE GIRLS APPROACHING, THEIR EYES WIDE WITH EXCITEMENT. ONE OF THEM, A GIRL WITH BRIGHT BLUE HAIR, WAS PRACTICALLY BOUNCING AS SHE CAME CLOSER.

"OH MY GOD, IT *IS* YOU!" SHE SQUEALED. "WE'RE HUGE FANS OF THE SHOW. CAN WE GET A PICTURE?"

I FORCED A SMILE, TRYING TO SLIP BACK INTO CHARACTER. "OF COURSE," I SAID, PITCHING MY VOICE

HIGHER THAN USUAL. "I'D LOVE TO."

AS THEY CROWDED AROUND ME, PHONES OUT FOR SELFIES, I FELT A STRANGE MIX OF PRIDE AND DREAD. THESE GIRLS LOOKED UP TO LILY, SAW HER AS AN INSPIRATION. AND HERE I WAS, AN IMPOSTER IN THEIR MIDST.

"YOU'RE SO BRAVE," ONE OF THEM SAID AS SHE SNAPPED A PHOTO. "MY COUSIN IS TRANS, AND YOUR CHARACTER HAS HELPED HER SO MUCH."

I SWALLOWED HARD. "THAT'S... THAT'S REALLY GREAT TO HEAR."

AFTER A FEW MORE PICTURES AND AUTOGRAPHS, THE GIRLS FINALLY LEFT, GIGGLING AND TEXTING FURIOUSLY ON THEIR PHONES. I WATCHED THEM GO, FEELING HOLLOW.

I STARTED WALKING AGAIN, FASTER THIS TIME, AS IF I COULD OUTRUN THE DECISION LOOMING OVER ME. BUT WITH EVERY STEP, I KNEW I WAS JUST DELAYING THE INEVITABLE.

THE NEXT MORNING, I WOKE UP TO ANOTHER TEXT. THIS TIME IT WAS FROM THE SHOW'S CREATOR: "HEY DYLAN! CAN'T WAIT TO SEE YOU AT THE SEASON 2 KICK-OFF MEETING TOMORROW. WE'VE GOT SOME EXCITING PLANS TO DISCUSS FOR LILY! OH! AND THE STUDIO HAS SET UP YOUR FIRST MEDICAL CONSULTATION FOR NEXT WEEK. IF YOU HAVE YOUR OWN ENDOCRINOLOGIST, THAT'S COOL - BUT THIS ONE IS LITERALLY THE BEST IN TOWN. LET ME KNOW IF YOU NEED ANYTHING! 😊"

I STARED AT THE MESSAGE, MY FINGER HOVERING OVER THE REPLY BUTTON. THIS WAS IT. THE MOMENT OF TRUTH. WHATEVER I DECIDED NOW WOULD SET THE COURSE FOR THE REST OF MY LIFE.

TAKING A DEEP BREATH, I BEGAN TO REPLY...

I TYPED, "THANKS. I'LL BE THERE." THEN I DELETED IT.

I TRIED AGAIN. "ACTUALLY, I NEED TO TALK TO YOU ABOUT SOMETHING IMPORTANT." DELETED.



MY FINGERS HOVERED OVER THE KEYS, TREMBLING SLIGHTLY. I CLOSED MY EYES, TOOK A DEEP BREATH, AND OPENED THEM AGAIN.

FINALLY, I WROTE, "CAN'T WAIT. SEE YOU TOMORROW."

I HIT SEND BEFORE I COULD CHANGE MY MIND, THEN TOSSED MY PHONE ONTO THE BED LIKE IT WAS ON FIRE. MY STOMACH CHURNED AS I PACED MY BIG NEW APARTMENT, RUNNING MY HANDS THROUGH MY HAIR.

"WHAT THE HELL AM I DOING?" I MUTTERED TO MYSELF.

THE REALITY OF WHAT I'D JUST COMMITTED TO HIT ME LIKE A FREIGHT TRAIN. I WAS REALLY GOING TO DO THIS. I WAS GOING TO TRANSITION. NOT JUST ON SCREEN, BUT IN REAL LIFE.

I STUMBLED TO THE BATHROOM, GRIPPING THE EDGES OF THE SINK AS I LEANED OVER IT. MY REFLECTION IN



THE MIRROR LOOKED PALE AND SCARED.

I SPLASHED SOME WATER ON MY FACE, TRYING TO CLEAR MY HEAD. AS I REACHED FOR A TOWEL, MY EYES FELL ON THE BOTTLE OF TESTOSTERONE BLOCKERS THE SHOW'S MEDICAL CONSULTANT HAD GIVEN ME "JUST IN CASE" I WANTED TO "GET A HEAD START."

WITH SHAKING HANDS, I PICKED UP THE BOTTLE. THE PILLS RATTLED INSIDE, A SOUND THAT SEEMED TO ECHO IN THE SMALL BATHROOM.

"FUCK IT," I MUTTERED.

I TWISTED OFF THE CAP, TIPPED A PILL INTO MY PALM, AND STARED AT IT. THIS TINY WHITE PILL HELD THE POWER TO CHANGE EVERYTHING. MY BODY, MY CAREER, MY ENTIRE FUTURE.

FOR A MOMENT, I HESITATED. WAS I REALLY GOING TO

DO THIS? BUT THEN I THOUGHT ABOUT THE FANS, THE SHOW, THE OPPORTUNITY I'D BEEN GIVEN. I THOUGHT ABOUT RICK'S WORDS, ABOUT EMBRACING THE ROLE. ABOUT BECOMING AN **ICON.**

BEFORE I COULD TALK MYSELF OUT OF IT, I POPPED THE PILL IN MY MOUTH AND SWALLOWED IT DRY. IT WENT DOWN HARD, LEAVING A BITTER TASTE.

"NO GOING BACK NOW," I SAID TO MY REFLECTION.

I WALKED BACK INTO MY BEDROOM, FEELING ODDLY LIGHT-HEADED. MY PHONE BUZZED AGAIN. ANOTHER TEXT FROM THE SHOW'S CREATOR: "OH, AND DON'T FORGET - WE'VE GOT THAT GLAAD EVENT NEXT WEEK. WARDROBE WANTS TO KNOW IF YOU'RE COMFORTABLE IN HEELS YET OR IF YOU PREFER FLATS?"

I STARED AT THE MESSAGE, A HYSTERICAL LAUGH BUBBLING UP IN MY THROAT. HEELS. THEY WERE ASKING ABOUT HEELS WHEN I'D JUST TAKEN MY FIRST STEP TOWARDS MEDICALLY TRANSITIONING.

"FLATS ARE FINE," I TYPED BACK, MY FINGERS MOVING ALMOST ON AUTOPILOT.

I FLOPPED BACK ONTO MY BED, STARING AT THE CEILING. WHAT THE HELL HAD I JUST DONE? I'D COMMITTED TO A LIE SO BIG IT WAS GOING TO RESHAPE MY ENTIRE EXISTENCE. AND FOR WHAT? FAME? MONEY? THE FEAR OF FAILURE?

BUT AS I LAY THERE, A STRANGE CALM SETTLED OVER ME. "YOU CAN DO THIS," I WHISPERED. "YOU'RE AN ACTOR. THIS IS JUST... A REALLY LONG-TERM ROLE."

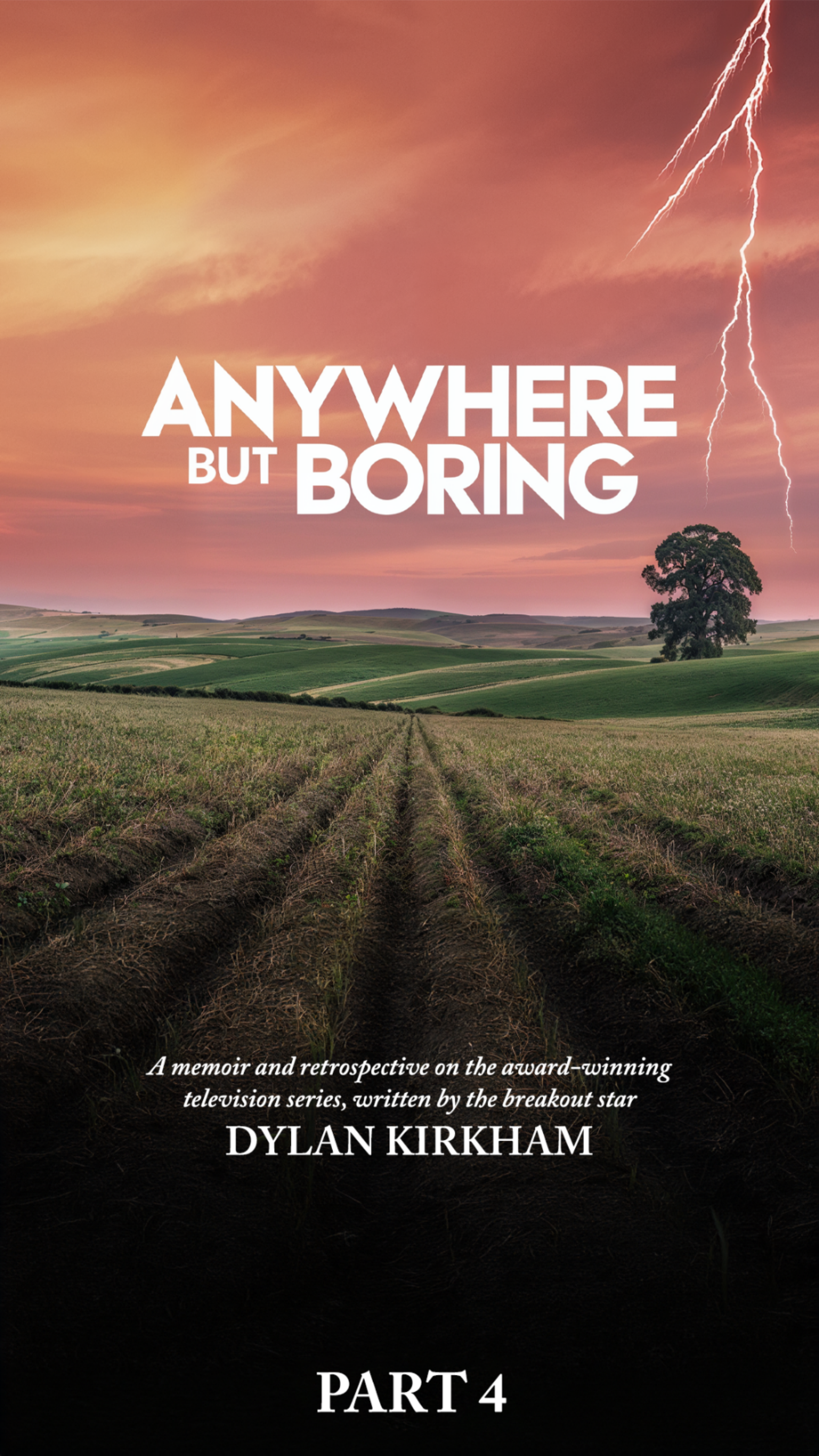
I TOOK OUT MY PHONE AND TEXTED THE CREATOR. "ACTUALLY, LET'S GO WITH THE HEELS 👠"

MAYBE THIS WOULD ALL END OKAY. MAYBE THE SHOW WOULD BE A CRITICAL DARLING BUT THE FANS WOULD FADE AWAY. MAYBE I'D GET HIT BY A BUS.

OF COURSE, SINCE YOU'RE READING THIS MEMOIR, YOU KNOW I WASN'T THAT LUCKY. BUT EVEN MY WORST FEARS COULDN'T HAVE PREPARED ME FOR WHAT CAME NEXT.



Backstage at The Tonight Show. This picture made me realize I needed a damn bra. 😳



A memoir and retrospective on the award-winning television series, written by the breakout star

DYLAN KIRKHAM

PART 4



THE NEXT MORNING, I WOKE UP FEELING LIKE I WAS STILL IN A DREAM. MORE SPECIFICALLY, A NIGHTMARE.

GOD, I HAD TAKEN TESTOSTERONE BLOCKERS. NEXT UP? ***GIRL PILLS.***

I DRAGGED MYSELF OUT OF BED AND STUMBLED INTO THE BATHROOM. AS I SPLASHED WATER ON MY FACE, I CAUGHT MY REFLECTION IN THE MIRROR. NOTHING HAD CHANGED OVERNIGHT, BUT I COULDN'T SHAKE THE FEELING THAT I WAS LOOKING AT A STRANGER. AND I SWEAR I COULD FEEL THE ***C18H24O2*** COURSING THROUGH MY VEINS, CHANGING ME FROM THE INSIDE OUT.

MY PHONE BUZZED ON THE NIGHTSTAND. IT WAS A REMINDER FOR THE SEASON 2 KICKOFF MEETING. MY STOMACH CHURNED AS I DRESSED, TRYING TO PSYCH MYSELF UP FOR WHAT WAS TO COME.

WHEN I ARRIVED, THE PRODUCTION OFFICE WAS BUZZING

WITH ENERGY. PEOPLE WERE CHATTING EXCITEDLY, GUZZLING COFFEE, AND PORING OVER SCRIPTS. I PLASTERED ON A SMILE AND TRIED TO BLEND IN, NODDING AT FAMILIAR FACES AS I MADE MY WAY TO THE CONFERENCE ROOM.

"DYLAN!" THE SHOW'S CREATOR, MELISSA, WAVED ME OVER. "THERE YOU ARE! WE'VE GOT SO MUCH TO TALK ABOUT. COME ON, LET'S GRAB A SEAT."

I FOLLOWED HER INTO THE ROOM, MY HEART POUNDING. THE TABLE WAS ALREADY CROWDED WITH WRITERS, PRODUCERS, AND OTHER CAST MEMBERS. DAISY CAUGHT MY EYE AND GRINNED, PATTING THE EMPTY CHAIR NEXT TO HER.

"HEY, GIRL!" SHE WHISPERED AS I SAT DOWN. "READY FOR ANOTHER CRAZY RIDE?"

I NODDED, NOT TRUSTING MYSELF TO SPEAK. MELISSA CALLED THE MEETING TO ORDER, AND SUDDENLY, ALL EYES WERE ON HER.

"ALRIGHT, EVERYONE," SHE BEGAN, HER EYES SPARKLING WITH EXCITEMENT. "SEASON 2 IS GOING TO BE BIGGER AND BETTER THAN EVER. I KNOW WE'RE ALL EXCITED FOR THE BUZZ AND ACCOLADES WE GOT FOR THE FIRST SEASON—"

THE ROOM BROKE OUT INTO CHEERS AND APPLAUSE. I JOINED IN. DESPITE EVERYTHING, I WAS STILL SUPER PROUD OF WHAT WE'D ACCOMPLISHED. IT WAS A GREAT SHOW, AND I WAS PART OF IT.

MELISSA GRINNED AND WAITED FOR THE NOISE TO DIE DOWN BEFORE CONTINUING.

"BUT WE CAN'T REST ON OUR LAURELS! WE HAVE SOME INCREDIBLE STORYLINES LINED UP, AND WE'RE PUSHING THE ENVELOPE EVEN FURTHER. WE HAVE LUKE AND PETER'S RELATIONSHIP HEATING UP, KELLY'S SECRET IS ABOUT TO BLOW EVERYONE'S MINDS, AND NISHA GETS AN UNEXPECTED VISIT FROM HER ESTRANGED MOTHER. BUT LILY'S JOURNEY IS AT THE HEART OF IT ALL. WE'VE HAD SO MUCH FEEDBACK FROM FANS ABOUT HOW IMPORTANT HER STORY IS, AND I'M COMMITTED TO DOING IT JUSTICE."



AS MELISSA LAUNCHED INTO THE DETAILS, I FELT MY CHEST TIGHTEN. THEY HAD MY CHARACTER'S ENTIRE MEDICAL TRANSITION MAPPED OUT, EPISODE BY EPISODE. HORMONE THERAPY, VOICE TRAINING, LEGAL NAME CHANGE - IT WAS ALL THERE, LAID OUT IN BLACK AND WHITE.

"NOW," MELISSA SAID. "I DON'T WANT THIS TO BE SOME ROSY, UNREALISTIC PORTRAYAL. WE'RE GOING TO SHOW THE STRUGGLES, THE SETBACKS, THE MOMENTS OF DOUBT. LILY'S GOING TO FACE DISCRIMINATION, DYSPHORIA, AND THE CHALLENGES OF NAVIGATING RELATIONSHIPS AS SHE TRANSITIONS. IT'S GOING TO BE RAW AND REAL."

THE ROOM MURMURED IN AGREEMENT. I NODDED ALONG, TRYING TO KEEP MY FACE NEUTRAL EVEN AS MY MIND RACED. RAW AND REAL? THEY HAD NO IDEA.

"DYLAN," MELISSA TURNED TO ME, HER EYES BRIGHT. "I

KNOW THIS IS A BIG RESPONSIBILITY, BUT I WANT YOU TO KNOW I HAVE TOTAL CONFIDENCE IN YOU. YOUR PERFORMANCE LAST SEASON WAS INCREDIBLE, AND I CAN'T WAIT TO SEE WHERE YOU TAKE LILY NEXT."

"THANKS," I CROAKED OUT. "I'M... EXCITED TOO. PLUS, THE...THE STUDIO IS FOOTING THE BILL FOR MY TRANSITION, SO, UM, THAT'S GREAT!"

THE WORDS FELT HOLLOW AS THEY LEFT MY MOUTH, BUT NO ONE SEEMED TO NOTICE. MELISSA BEAMED AT ME BEFORE MOVING ON TO DISCUSS OTHER ASPECTS OF THE UPCOMING SEASON.

AS THE MEETING CONTINUED, I FOUND IT HARDER AND HARDER TO FOCUS. MY MIND KEPT DRIFTING TO THE BOTTLE OF PILLS IN MY BATHROOM, TO THE MEDICAL APPOINTMENTS LOOMING ON THE HORIZON. THIS WASN'T JUST A STORYLINE FOR A TV SHOW ANYMORE. THIS WAS MY LIFE!

DAISY NUDGED ME UNDER THE TABLE. "YOU OKAY?" SHE SAID. "YOU LOOK A LITTLE PALE."

I FORCED A SMILE. "YEAH, JUST... OVERWHELMED, I GUESS. IT'S A LOT TO TAKE IN."

SHE SQUEEZED MY HAND. "I KNOW. BUT YOU'VE GOT THIS. AND WE'RE ALL HERE FOR YOU EVERY STEP OF THE WAY."

HER COMFORTING WORDS ONLY MADE ME FEEL WORSE. THESE PEOPLE, MY CASTMATES, THE CREW - THEY ALL BELIEVED IN ME, IN LILY. AND HERE I WAS, LIVING A LIE SPIRALING FURTHER OUT OF CONTROL WITH EACH PASSING DAY.

AS THE MEETING WRAPPED UP, MELISSA APPROACHED ME. "DYLAN, CAN I HAVE A QUICK WORD?"

MY HEART RACED AS I FOLLOWED HER TO A QUIET CORNER OF THE ROOM. "WHAT'S UP?" I ASKED, TRYING TO KEEP MY VOICE STEADY.

"I JUST WANTED TO CHECK IN," SHE SAID. "WE'RE ASKING A LOT OF YOU THIS SEASON. ARE YOU COMFORTABLE WITH EVERYTHING WE'VE PLANNED FOR LILY?"

I SWALLOWED HARD. THIS WAS MY CHANCE. I COULD COME CLEAN, TELL HER THE TRUTH, AND FACE THE CONSEQUENCES. BUT AS I OPENED MY MOUTH, I SAW THE HOPE IN HER EYES, THE EXCITEMENT FOR THE STORY WE WERE ABOUT TO TELL.

"YEAH," I HEARD MYSELF SAY. "I'M READY FOR IT. WHATEVER YOU HAVE PLANNED, I'M... I'M GAME."

"GREAT. AND...THANK YOU. THIS STORY, YOUR CHARACTER, SHE'S REALLY IMPORTANT TO ME. I NEVER IMAGINED I'D BE ABLE TO TELL A STORY LIKE THIS ON SUCH A BIG PLATFORM. YOUR DEDICATION MEANS EVERYTHING."

I NODDED, FORCING YET ANOTHER SMILE. "I'M JUST GLAD TO BE A PART OF IT."

MELISSA GAVE ME A QUICK HUG AND THEN TURNED BACK TO THE REST OF THE TEAM, LEAVING ME STANDING THERE, FEELING MORE TRAPPED THAN EVER. THE REALITY WAS SINKING IN DEEPER AND DEEPER - I WAS COMMITTED TO THIS PATH UNLESS I WANTED TO DISAPPOINT MY CASTMATES, MILLIONS OF FANS, AND BURN EVERY BRIDGE I'D BUILT IN THE INDUSTRY.

THERE WAS NO TURNING BACK. LILY WAS TRANSITIONING INTO THE YOUNG WOMAN SHE WAS SUPPOSED TO BE, AND I WAS ALONG FOR THE RIDE, WHETHER I LIKED IT OR NOT.

THE SEASON PROGRESSED AS PLANNED. EACH EPISODE BROUGHT NEW CHALLENGES, BOTH ON AND OFF-SCREEN. I FOUND MYSELF LIVING TWO LIVES - DYLAN, THE ACTOR, AND LILY, THE CHARACTER. BUT AS TIME WENT ON, THE LINE BETWEEN THE TWO BEGAN TO BLUR.

THE ESTROGEN PILLS BECAME A DAILY RITUAL. AT FIRST, I'D STARE AT THEM EACH MORNING, HESITATING BEFORE SWALLOWING. BUT SOON, IT BECAME AS ROUTINE AS BRUSHING MY TEETH. THE CHANGES WERE SUBTLE AT FIRST - SOFTER SKIN, A SLIGHT REDISTRIBUTION OF FAT. BUT AS THE WEEKS TURNED INTO MONTHS, I COULDN'T IGNORE THE MORE NOTICEABLE EFFECTS.

MY BOOBS BEGAN TO DEVELOP. IT WAS GRADUAL BUT UNDENIABLE. THE COSTUME DEPARTMENT HAD TO ADJUST MY WARDROBE, AND I FOUND MYSELF UNCONSCIOUSLY CROSSING MY ARMS OVER MY CHEST WHEN I WASN'T IN



Promo poster for Season 2. I'm a fan!

CHARACTER.

BY THE TIME THE MID-SEASON BREAK ROLLED AROUND, I WAS EXHAUSTED. THE CONSTANT ACTING - BOTH ON AND OFF SET - WAS TAKING ITS TOLL. WHEN MELISSA SUGGESTED I TAKE SOME TIME OFF, I JUMPED AT THE CHANCE. I BOOKED A FLIGHT BACK TO IDAHO, DESPERATE FOR A TASTE OF MY OLD LIFE. I KNOW I SWORE NEVER TO GO BACK, BUT I WAS BARELY EVEN THE SAME PERSON WHO MADE THAT PROMISE. I THOUGHT MAYBE A TRIP BACK TO MY ROOTS WOULD HELP ME CLEAR MY HEAD.

AS THE PLANE TOUCHED DOWN IN BOISE, A MIX OF EMOTIONS WASHED OVER ME. RELIEF AT BEING AWAY FROM THE PRESSURES OF HOLLYWOOD, ANXIETY ABOUT FACING MY PARENTS, AND A STRANGE SENSE OF DISCONNECT FROM THE PLACE I ONCE CALLED HOME.

I STEPPED OFF THE PLANE, MY HEART RACING. I'D TOLD MY PARENTS I WAS COMING, BUT I HADN'T PREPARED



THEM FOR HOW MUCH I'D CHANGED. AS I WALKED THROUGH THE TERMINAL, I CAUGHT MY REFLECTION IN A WINDOW. MY FACE WAS SOFTER, AND I HAD BREASTS. REAL FUCKING BREASTS. SURE, THEY WOULDN'T WIN ME ANY WET T-SHIRT CONTESTS, BUT I'D GROWN THEM MYSELF - AND I COULDN'T HIDE THEM.

I SPOTTED MY PARENTS WAITING NEAR BAGGAGE CLAIM. MOM'S EYES WIDENED AS SHE SAW ME, AND DAD'S JAW LITERALLY DROPPED. I FORCED A SMILE AND WAVED, TRYING TO ACT CASUAL.

"DYLAN?" MOM'S VOICE WAS UNCERTAIN AS I APPROACHED. "IS THAT REALLY YOU?"

"HEY, MOM. HEY, DAD," I SAID. "SURPRISE?"

MOM PULLED ME INTO A HUG, THEN HELD ME AT ARM'S LENGTH, EXAMINING ME. "OH, HONEY. WE THOUGHT IT WAS JUST PADDING FOR THE SHOW. WE HAD NO IDEA YOU WERE

ACTUALLY..."

DAD WAS STILL STARING, HIS FACE A MIX OF CONFUSION AND SOMETHING ELSE I COULDN'T READ. "DEE, WHAT'S GOING ON?"

WE MADE OUR WAY TO THE CAR IN AWKWARD SILENCE. AS SOON AS WE WERE INSIDE, MOM TURNED TO ME. "DYLAN, SWEETIE, WHY DIDN'T YOU TELL US? WE WOULD'VE SUPPORTED YOU IF WE'D KNOWN YOU WERE REALLY TRANSITIONING."

I FELT SICK. THIS WAS THE MOMENT I'D BEEN DREADING. "I... I'M NOT. NOT REALLY. IT'S FOR THE SHOW."

"WHAT DO YOU MEAN, 'NOT REALLY'?" DAD SAID. "YOU LOOK LIKE... LIKE..."

"LIKE A GIRL?" I FINISHED FOR HIM. "YEAH, I KNOW. IT'S... COMPLICATED."

I TOOK A DEEP BREATH AND TOLD THEM EVERYTHING. HOW I'D LIED TO GET THE PART, HOW THE SHOW HAD TAKEN OFF, AND HOW I'D FOUND MYSELF TRAPPED IN A WEB OF MY OWN MAKING. AS I SPOKE, MOM'S EXPRESSION SHIFTED FROM CONFUSION TO SYMPATHY. BUT DAD... DAD'S FACE GREW DARKER WITH EACH WORD.

WHEN I FINISHED, THERE WAS A LONG, HEAVY SILENCE. THEN DAD EXPLODED.

"YOU DID WHAT?" HE ROARED. "YOU LIED ABOUT BEING TRANS? DO YOU HAVE ANY IDEA WHAT YOU'VE DONE?"

I FLINCHED AT HIS ANGER. "DAD, I KNOW IT WAS WRONG, BUT—"

"WRONG? IT'S BEYOND WRONG, DYLAN. IT'S DESPICABLE. YOU TOOK A JOB, AN OPPORTUNITY, AWAY FROM SOMEONE WHO ACTUALLY NEEDED IT. SOMEONE WHO'S BEEN STRUGGLING WITH THEIR IDENTITY THEIR WHOLE LIFE. AND YOU... YOU JUST WALTZED IN AND STOLE IT. FOR WHAT? FAME? MONEY?"

HIS WORDS HIT ME LIKE A PUNCH TO THE GUT. I'D BEEN SO CAUGHT UP IN MY OWN DRAMA, I HADN'T EVEN CONSIDERED THAT ANGLE.



"I DIDN'T THINK—" I STARTED.

"OBVIOUSLY! YOU DIDN'T THINK ABOUT THE REAL TRANS GIRLS OUT THERE WHO WOULD KILL FOR THE CHANCE YOU GOT. FREE TRANSITION CARE? A PLATFORM TO TELL THEIR STORY? AND YOU'RE TREATING IT LIKE SOME... SOME METHOD-ACTING EXERCISE?"

MOM PUT A HAND ON DAD'S ARM. "HONEY, CALM DOWN. DYLAN MADE A MISTAKE, BUT—"

DAD SHOOK HIS HEAD. "THIS ISN'T JUST A MISTAKE. THIS IS... I DON'T EVEN KNOW WHAT THIS IS. DYLAN, YOU NEED TO COME CLEAN. RIGHT NOW. CALL YOUR PRODUCERS, YOUR AGENT, WHOEVER. TELL THEM THE TRUTH."

"BUT DAD, MY CAREER—"

"YOUR CAREER?" HE SCOFFED. "WHAT ABOUT THE CAREER OF THE PERSON WHO SHOULD HAVE GOTTEN



THAT ROLE? WHAT ABOUT ALL THE TRANS KIDS OUT THERE WHO LOOK UP TO YOU, THINKING YOU'RE ONE OF THEM?"

HIS WORDS HUNG IN THE AIR, HEAVY AND DAMNING. I SLUMPED IN MY SEAT. "I... I DON'T KNOW WHAT TO DO."

"YEAH, YOU DO," DAD SAID. "YOU JUST DON'T WANT TO FACE THE CONSEQUENCES. RAISING A GIRL I THOUGHT WAS A BOY WOULD'VE BEEN JUST FINE. IT'S RAISING A COWARD THAT I CAN'T STOMACH."

***

THE REST OF MY VISIT HOME WAS VERY TENSE. MOM TRIED TO PLAY PEACEKEEPER, BUT DAD'S DISAPPOINTMENT HUNG OVER EVERYTHING LIKE A CLOUD. WE BARELY SPOKE, AND WHEN WE DID, IT WAS STILTED AND UNCOMFORTABLE. I SPENT MOST OF MY TIME IN MY OLD ROOM, STARING AT THE CEILING, FEELING LIKE A STRANGER IN MY OWN SKIN. WHICH, I GUESS, I WAS.

WHEN IT WAS TIME TO LEAVE, DAD DIDN'T EVEN COME TO THE AIRPORT. MOM HUGGED ME TIGHT, HER EYES BRIMMING WITH TEARS. "WE LOVE YOU, DYLAN," SHE SAID. "NO MATTER WHAT. PLEASE REMEMBER THAT."

I NODDED, NOT TRUSTING MYSELF TO SPEAK. AS I BOARDED THE PLANE BACK TO LA, I MADE MY DECISION—I COULDN'T COME CLEAN. THE STAKES WERE TOO HIGH, AND THE FALL WAS TOO GREAT. I'D HAVE TO SEE THIS THROUGH, NO MATTER THE COST.

THE REST OF SEASON 2 WAS A WHIRLWIND. LILY'S STORY RESONATED EVEN MORE DEEPLY WITH AUDIENCES. THE SHOW TACKLED DISCRIMINATION, FAMILY ACCEPTANCE, THE COMPLEXITIES OF MEDICAL TRANSITION - WITH NUANCE AND HEART. CRITICS PRAISED OUR HANDLING OF THE ISSUES, AND AWARDS BUZZ STARTED BUILDING EARLY.

THROUGH IT ALL, I THREW MYSELF INTO THE ROLE. HONESTLY, IT WAS EASIER TO BE LILY THAN TO BE DYLAN. LILY KNEW WHO SHE WAS, WHAT SHE WANTED. DYLAN WAS LOST, DROWNING IN A LIE THAT GREW BIGGER EVERY DAY.

THE SEASON FINALE WAS SET TO BE OUR BIGGEST EPISODE YET. LILY, NOW FULLY OUT AND LIVING AS HERSELF, WAS TO BE THE STAR OF THE SCHOOL DANCE. WE SPENT WEEKS REHEARSING THE DANCE SEQUENCE, A TRIUMPHANT MOMENT OF JOY AND SELF-ACCEPTANCE.

THE NIGHT WE FILMED, IT WAS ELECTRIC. THE ENERGY ON SET WAS PALPABLE. AS I TWIRLED AND LAUGHED, SURROUNDED BY MY CASTMATES, I FELT A SURGE OF... SOMETHING. PRIDE? HAPPINESS? I COULDN'T QUITE NAME IT, BUT FOR A MOMENT, I FORGOT ABOUT THE DECEPTION. I WAS JUST LILY, FINALLY FREE TO BE HERSELF.

THEN CAME THE BOMBSHELL. AFTER WRAPPING THE DANCE SCENE, MELISSA PULLED ME ASIDE. HER FACE WAS GRAVE. "DYLAN, WE NEED TO TALK ABOUT THE FINAL SCENE."

"WHAT ABOUT IT?"

"THERE'S BEEN A CHANGE," SHE SAID. "AFTER THE DANCE - AFTER HER KISS WITH IVY - LILY GETS INTO A TERRIBLE CAR ACCIDENT. SHE... SHE DOESN'T MAKE IT."



I SHOULD'BE BEEN RELIEVED. *THIS WAS MY OUT!* INSTEAD, I STARED, UNCOMPREHENDING. "YOU'RE KILLING LILY OFF? BUT... BUT WHY!? SHE MEANS SO MUCH TO PEOPLE. HOW CAN YOU JUST END HER STORY LIKE THAT?"

MELISSA'S EXPRESSION HARDENED. "IT WASN'T AN EASY DECISION. BUT SOMETIMES, LIFE ISN'T FAIR. EVEN TO THOSE WHO DESERVE BETTER."

SOMETHING IN HER TONE MADE ME UNEASY. I FOLLOWED HER TO HER OFFICE, MY MIND RACING. AS SOON AS THE DOOR CLOSED BEHIND US, I STARTED YELLING.

"MELISSA, YOU CAN'T DO THIS! LILY IS IMPORTANT. SHE'S... SHE'S MORE THAN JUST A CHARACTER. SHE'S AN INSPIRATION TO SO MANY PEOPLE. HOW CAN YOU JUST THROW THAT AWAY? IT'S BULLSHIT!"

MELISSA TURNED, HER EYES BLAZING. "YEAH, SHE'S AN INSPIRATION - BUT IT'S ALL BASED ON A LIE. RIGHT!?"

MY BLOOD RAN COLD. "W-WHAT ARE YOU TALKING ABOUT?"

"YOUR FATHER CAME TO SEE ME, DYLAN," SHE SAID. "HE TOLD ME EVERYTHING. HOW YOU LIED TO GET THE PART. HOW NONE OF THIS IS REAL FOR YOU. AT FIRST, I THOUGHT HE MIGHT JUST BE YOUR TYPICAL TRANSPHOBE DAD WHO JUST COULDN'T ACCEPT HIS CHILD'S TRANSITION. BUT THEN HE STARTED TALKING ABOUT HOW DISAPPOINTED HE WAS THAT YOU'D TAKEN THIS OPPORTUNITY AWAY FROM SOMEONE WHO TRULY NEEDED IT. HOW HE COULDN'T STAND BY WHILE YOU MOCKED THE STRUGGLES OF REAL TRANS PEOPLE."

I FELT THE FLOOR DROP OUT FROM UNDER ME. THIS COULDN'T BE HAPPENING. "MELISSA, I CAN EXPLAIN—"

"EXPLAIN WHAT?" SHE SAID. "HOW YOU'VE BEEN MAKING A MOCKERY OF SOMETHING DEEPLY PERSONAL AND PAINFUL FOR SO MANY PEOPLE? INCLUDING ME?"

I BLINKED, CONFUSED. "YOU?"

MELISSA GAVE A BITTER LAUGH. "YES, ME. ***I'M TRANS***, DYLAN. THIS SHOW, LILY'S STORY - IT'S THE LIFE I WISH I COULD'VE HAD IN HIGH SCHOOL. AND YOU... YOU TOOK THAT AND TURNED IT INTO A JOKE."

I SHOOK MY HEAD. "NO. I MEAN, I'M SORRY I NEVER MEANT—"

"SAVE IT," SHE SAID. "I DON'T WANT YOUR APOLOGIES. I WANT YOU GONE."

PANIC GRIPPED ME. "PLEASE, DON'T KILL LILY OFF. SHE'S TOO IMPORTANT TO THE FANS, AND TO... TO ME."

MELISSA RAISED AN EYEBROW. "YOU? I THOUGHT THIS WAS JUST A ROLE."

I SHOOK MY HEAD, STRUGGLING TO FIND THE WORDS. "IT STARTED THAT WAY, BUT... I DON'T KNOW ANYMORE. LILY FEELS ***REAL*** NOW. MORE REAL THAN DYLAN EVER DID. AND THE WAY PEOPLE CONNECT WITH HER, IT'S... IT'S POWERFUL. PLEASE, DON'T TAKE THAT AWAY."

MELISSA STUDIED ME, HER BROW CRINKLED. SHE WAS

SILENT FOR A LONG MOMENT, HER EYES NEVER LEAVING MINE.

FINALLY, SHE SPOKE. "ALRIGHT. I WON'T KILL LILY OFF. *BUT* THERE ARE CONDITIONS."

I EXHALED. "ANYTHING. NAME IT."

"THE ACCIDENT STAYS," SHE SAID. "LILY WILL BE BADLY HURT. SHE'LL NEED RECONSTRUCTIVE SURGERY. WHEN SHE RETURNS NEXT SEASON, SHE'LL HAVE UNDERGONE FACIAL FEMINIZATION SURGERY AS PART OF HER RECOVERY."

I NODDED, TRYING TO PROCESS EVERYTHING. "OKAY—"

"I'M NOT FINISHED," MELISSA SAID. "FROM THIS POINT FORWARD, YOU LIVE AS A WOMAN. FULL-TIME. ON AND OFF-SET. NO MORE HALF-MEASURES, NO MORE PLAYING PRETEND WHEN THE CAMERAS STOP ROLLING. YOU WANT TO KEEP THIS ROLE? YOU COMMIT TO IT ENTIRELY."

MY HEART RACED. WHAT SHE WAS ASKING... IT WAS A COMPLETE TRANSFORMATION. BUT AS I STOOD THERE, FACED WITH THE PROSPECT OF LOSING LILY FOREVER, I REALIZED I COULDN'T BEAR THE THOUGHT.

"OKAY," I SAID. "I'LL DO IT."

"GOOD. AND ONE MORE THING." MELISSA'S TONE SOFTENED SLIGHTLY. "I'M SETTING YOU UP WITH A THERAPIST. A GENDER SPECIALIST. YOU'LL MEET WITH THEM REGULARLY. NO ARGUMENTS."

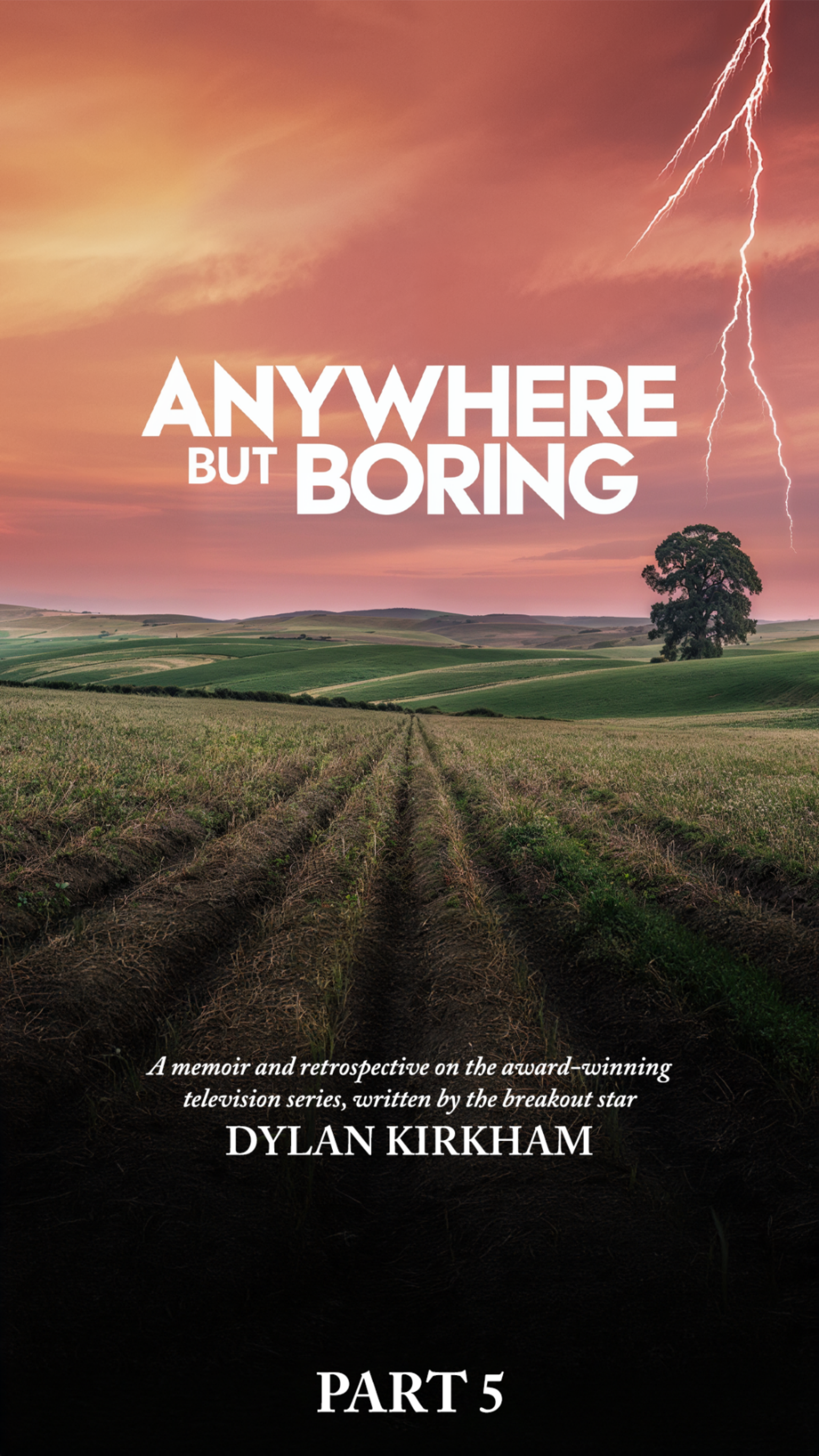
I NODDED, UNABLE TO SPEAK.

AS I LEFT MELISSA'S OFFICE, MY MIND WAS REELING. I'D COME HERE READY TO FIGHT FOR LILY'S LIFE, AND INSTEAD, I'D AGREED TO GIVE UP MY OWN. OR HAD I? THE LINE BETWEEN DYLAN AND LILY HAD BEEN BLURRING FOR MONTHS. MAYBE THIS WAS JUST MAKING WHAT HAD ALREADY BEGUN **OFFICIAL.**

I TOUCHED MY FACE, IMAGINING HOW IT MIGHT CHANGE AFTER THE "SURGERY." IT SHOULD HAVE TERRIFIED ME. INSTEAD, I FELT A FLUTTER OF ANTICIPATION.

WHAT THE HELL WAS HAPPENING TO ME?


After the season 2 finale,
Daisy took me to Hawaii.
First time in a bikini! 😬



A memoir and retrospective on the award-winning television series, written by the breakout star

DYLAN KIRKHAM

PART 5



The official poster for the third season. I was always a fan of the vibe.

THE THERAPIST WAS PRETTIER THAN I EXPECTED.

IT'S MY PERSONAL, EDUCATED OPINION THAT ANYBODY YOU'RE SUPPOSED TO BARE YOUR SOUL TO SHOULD BE A BIT UGLY. HAVE YOU EVER TRIED TO TELL YOUR DEEPEST, DARKEST, DUMBEST SECRETS TO SOMEONE YOU THOUGHT WAS HOT? IT'S IMPOSSIBLE! UNFORTUNATELY FOR MY PSYCHE, AMY, THE SO-CALLED "GENDER SPECIALIST," LOOKED LIKE SHE'D STEPPED OUT OF A L'ORÉAL COMMERCIAL. GREAT HAIR, PERFECT SKIN, AND A SMILE THAT COULD PROBABLY CURE DEPRESSION IF THEY BOTTLED IT.

'SHE PROBABLY USED TO BE AN ACTRESS,' I THOUGHT AS I SETTLED INTO THE OVERSTUFFED LEATHER CHAIR IN HER OFFICE. 'EVERYONE IN THIS TOWN USED TO BE SOMEONE ELSE.'

SHE SMILED. GOD, SHE WAS GORGEOUS. "DYLAN, BEFORE WE START, I WANT YOU TO KNOW EVERYTHING YOU SAY

HERE IS TOTALLY CONFIDENTIAL. I UNDERSTAND MELISSA SET THIS UP, BUT I'M NOT REPORTING BACK TO HER OR ANYONE ELSE. THIS IS A SAFE SPACE FOR YOU TO EXPLORE YOUR FEELINGS."

I NODDED, TRYING NOT TO ROLL MY EYES. SAFE SPACE? PLEASE. THE ONLY SAFE SPACE IN HOLLYWOOD IS A LOCKED BATHROOM WITH THE SHOWER RUNNING.

"GREAT." I FORCED A SMILE. I SEEMED TO BE DOING A LOT OF THAT LATELY. "HOW MUCH HAS MELISSA TOLD YOU?"

"SHE GAVE ME A BRIEF OVERVIEW," AMY SAID. "BUT I'D LIKE TO HEAR IT FROM YOU, IF YOU DON'T MIND."

AND SO I TOLD HER EVERYTHING -- THE LIES, THE SHOW, THE IMPOSSIBLE CHOICE I'D MADE TO KEEP LILY ALIVE. AS I SPOKE, I BRACED MYSELF FOR JUDGMENT OR DISGUST. BUT AMY JUST LISTENED, HER EYES NEVER LEAVING MINE.

WHEN I FINISHED, SHE LEANED BACK IN HER CHAIR. "DYLAN, THIS IS... QUITE A SITUATION YOU'VE FOUND YOURSELF IN."

"YEAH," I SAID. "NO SHIT."

"LET ME ASK YOU SOMETHING," SHE SAID. "HOW DO YOU FEEL ABOUT THE CHOICE YOU MADE? TO CONTINUE LIVING AS LILY FULL-TIME?"

I SHRUGGED. "IT'S NOT A BIG DEAL. I MEAN, I WAS BASICALLY DOING THAT ANYWAY."

"DID MELISSA KNOW THAT? BECAUSE SHE SEEMED TO BE UNDER THE IMPRESSION THIS WAS A SIGNIFICANT CHANGE FOR YOU."

I SHIFTED IN MY SEAT. "LOOK, IT'S NOT LIKE I'M THRILLED ABOUT IT. BUT WHAT CHOICE DID I HAVE? LET LILY DIE? THROW AWAY MY CAREER? I'M JUST... ADAPTING."

"ADAPTING," AMY REPEATED. "THAT'S AN INTERESTING WORD CHOICE. CAN YOU TELL ME MORE ABOUT HOW YOU'VE BEEN 'ADAPTING'?"

"WHAT DO YOU WANT ME TO SAY? THAT I WAKE UP EVERY



MORNING AND STARE AT MY BOOBS IN DISBELIEF? THAT I FREAK OUT EVERY TIME SOMEONE CALLS ME 'SHE'? IT'S NOT LIKE THAT. IT'S JUST... LIFE NOW."

AMY NODDED, SCRIBBLING SOMETHING IN HER NOTEPAD. GREAT. I COULD ONLY IMAGINE WHAT SHE WAS DIAGNOSING IN HER NO DOUBT PERFECT CURSIVE HANDWRITING: YOUNG MAN WITH DELUSIONAL NARCISSISM IS SO SELF-OBSESSED HE'S WILLING TO CHANGE HIS ENTIRE GENDER JUST TO STAY FAMOUS. PROBABLY HAS MOMMY ISSUES. RECOMMEND INTENSIVE THERAPY AND A REALITY CHECK.

SHE LOOKED UP AND THERE WAS THAT DAMN SMILE AGAIN. DID SHE PRACTICE IN THE MIRROR? "DYLAN, WHY'D YOU WANT TO BECOME AN ACTOR?"

"MONEY."

"SURE. BUT IS THAT ALL?"

"NO. I MEAN, I ALWAYS WANTED TO BE AN ACTION STAR."

"I SEE," AMY SAID. "WELL, WHO'S YOUR FAVORITE ACTION HERO?"

I SAT UP. NOW WE WERE SPEAKING MY LANGUAGE. "ALL TIME? DAMN, THAT'S HARD. BUT I GOTTA GO WITH RIPLEY FROM ALIEN," I SAID. "SIGOURNEY WEAVER WAS BADASS IN THAT. HOT, TOO."

AMY'S PERFECT EYEBROW ARCHED. "INTERESTING CHOICE. A FEMALE ACTION HERO."

I ROLLED MY EYES. "YEAH, YEAH, I SEE WHERE YOU'RE GOING WITH THIS. BUT COME ON, RIPLEY'S NOT ABOUT BEING A WOMAN. SHE'S JUST A TOTAL BADASS WHO HAPPENS TO BE FEMALE."

"AND THAT APPEALS TO YOU?"

"WELL, YEAH. WHO WOULDN'T WANT TO BE A BADASS ALIEN-SLAYING SPACE TRUCKER?"

AMY JOTTED SOMETHING DOWN. GREAT, ANOTHER NUGGET FOR HER 'DYLAN IS CRAZY' FILE.

"LET'S TALK ABOUT LILY," SHE SAID. "HOW DO YOU FEEL WHEN YOU'RE PLAYING HER?"

"FEEL?" THAT MADE ME PAUSE. "WELL, I FEEL WHATEVER SHE'S SUPPOSED TO BE FEELING. THAT'S ACTING, RIGHT?"

"OKAY, LET ME ASK A DIFFERENT QUESTION. HOW DO YOU FEEL WHEN YOU'RE NOT PLAYING LILY?"

"WHAT DO YOU MEAN?" I REPLIED. "I DON'T FEEL MUCH OF ANYTHING, I GUESS. I MEAN, IT'S NOT LIKE MY LIFE IS HIGH DRAMA LIKE LILY'S WHEN I'M OFF-SET. I'M JUST... EXISTING."

AMY'S PEN SCRATCHED ACROSS THE PAPER AGAIN. "SO YOU FEEL MORE WHEN YOU'RE LILY THAN WHEN YOU'RE DYLAN?"

"I DIDN'T SAY THAT," I SNAPPED, SUDDENLY DEFENSIVE. "ER, WELL, I GUESS I DID, BUT... LOOK, LILY'S LIFE IS SCRIPTED. EVERY EMOTION, EVERY REACTION IS PLANNED

OUT. OF COURSE IT FEELS MORE INTENSE. AND I DON'T EVEN THINK WHAT I SAID IS THAT UNUSUAL. I MEAN, WE ALL WALK THROUGH LIFE PLAYING A ROLE. DON'T WE? ALL OF US ARE ACTORS, JUST WAITING FOR THE RIGHT PART TO COME OUR WAY. SHAKESPEARE SAID 'ALL THE WORLD'S A STAGE.' YEAH? SO, REALLY, I'M JUST TAKING THAT TO ITS LOGICAL CONCLUSION. WE'RE ALL JUST WAITING FOR OUR BIG BREAK, OUR CHANCE TO STEP INTO THE SPOTLIGHT AND BECOME WHO WE'RE MEANT TO BE. LILY JUST HAPPENED TO BE MY TICKET TO STARDOM. NOTHING MORE, NOTHING LESS."

I LEANED BACK, FEELING PRETTY PLEASED WITH MYSELF. TAKE THAT, MS. PERFECT HAIR AND HER PROBING QUESTIONS. BUT AMY JUST STARED, HER EXPRESSION UNREADABLE.

"YOU'RE WRONG," SHE SAID FLATLY.

I BLINKED. "EXCUSE ME?"

"YOU'RE WRONG," SHE REPEATED. "WHAT YOU'RE DESCRIBING *ISN'T* USUAL. AND IT'S NOT HEALTHY. IT'S A FORM OF DISSOCIATION."

"DISSO-WHAT NOW? COME ON, DOC. I'M NOT SOME MENTAL CASE. I'M AN ACTOR. THIS IS WHAT WE DO."

SHE LEANED FORWARD, EYES INTENSE. "NO, THIS IS NOT WHAT ACTORS DO. ACTORS STEP INTO A ROLE, YES, BUT THEY DON'T LOSE THEMSELVES IN IT. THEY DON'T FEEL MORE ALIVE AS THEIR CHARACTERS THAN AS THEMSELVES. WHAT YOU'RE DESCRIBING IS A DISCONNECT FROM YOUR OWN IDENTITY, YOUR OWN EMOTIONS. IT'S A COPING MECHANISM, AND IT'S CONCERNING."

I FELT MY FACE FLUSH. WHO THE HELL DID SHE THINK SHE WAS? "LOOK, I DIDN'T COME HERE FOR A LECTURE ON—"

"YOU CAME HERE BECAUSE YOU'RE REQUIRED TO," SHE REPLIED. "BUT THAT DOESN'T CHANGE THE FACT THAT YOU NEED HELP. YOU'RE USING LILY AS A SHIELD, A WAY TO AVOID DEALING WITH YOUR OWN FEELINGS AND EXPERIENCES. AND THAT'S NOT SUSTAINABLE, DYLAN. NOT FOR YOU, AND NOT FOR THE PEOPLE WHO CARE ABOUT YOU."

"A SHIELD FROM WHAT?"

AMY ONLY STARED. "IS IT TRUE THAT YOU AGREED TO GET FACIAL FEMINIZATION SURGERY TO KEEP LILY ALIVE?"

GOD, I DID AGREE TO THAT, DIDN'T I? WHAT THE FUCK WAS WRONG WITH ME? "I MEAN, YEAH. BUT, UM, LILY CAN'T DIE! SHE MEANS SO MUCH TO PEOPLE. AND I... I FUCKED ALL THIS UP! I WAS FINALLY GOOD AT SOMETHING THAT WASN'T JUST LIFTING USELESS WEIGHTS! I COULDN'T JUST LET THAT GO. NOT AFTER EVERYTHING."

AMY'S PEN SCRATCHED ACROSS HER NOTEPAD AGAIN.

"DYLAN." HER VOICE WAS SOFTER NOW. "YOU DO REALIZE THAT THIS ISN'T JUST MAKEUP AND PADDING ANYMORE, RIGHT? THIS SURGERY IS A MAJOR, PERMANENT PROCEDURE. IT WILL CHANGE YOUR FACE. YOUR ENTIRE APPEARANCE. THIS ISN'T SOMETHING YOU CAN JUST WASH OFF AT THE END OF THE DAY."

I ROLLED MY EYES. "YEAH, DOC, I GOT THAT MEMO. BUT HEY, MAYBE I'LL END UP LOOKING LIKE ANGELINA JOLIE. THAT WOULDN'T BE SO BAD, RIGHT?"

AMY DIDN'T LAUGH. TOUGH CROWD.

"THIS ISN'T A JOKE," SHE SAID. "YOU'RE TALKING ABOUT PERMANENTLY ALTERING YOUR BODY FOR A ROLE. A ROLE THAT, MAY I REMIND YOU, YOU INITIALLY TOOK UNDER FALSE PRETENSES. DO YOU NOT SEE HOW EXTREME THIS IS?"

I SHIFTED UNCOMFORTABLY. WHEN SHE PUT IT LIKE THAT, YEAH, IT DID SOUND PRETTY FUCKED UP. BUT WHAT CHOICE DID I HAVE?

"LOOK," I SAID, TRYING TO SOUND MORE CONFIDENT THAN I FELT. "I KNOW IT SOUNDS CRAZY. BUT THIS IS HOLLYWOOD, BABY. GO BIG OR GO HOME, RIGHT? BESIDES, IT'S NOT LIKE I'M DOING THIS JUST FOR SHITS AND GIGGLES. LILY MEANS SOMETHING TO PEOPLE. SHE'S IMPORTANT."

"AND WHAT ABOUT DYLAN?" AMY ASKED. "ISN'T HE IMPORTANT TOO?"

I OPENED MY MOUTH, BUT NOTHING CAME OUT. WHAT



ABOUT DYLAN? THE GUY WHO CAME TO L.A. WITH DREAMS OF BEING THE NEXT JASON STATHAM? THE GUY WHO USED TO BENCH 205 AND CHASE GIRLS AT PARTIES?

THAT GUY FELT LIKE A STRANGER NOW. A BACKGROUND CHARACTER IN A MOVIE I'D WATCHED A LONG TIME AGO, EASILY FORGOTTEN, EASILY DISCARDED.

"DYLAN'S FINE!" I WAVED MY HAND DISMISSIVELY. "HE'S JUST... TAKING A BACKSEAT FOR A WHILE. METHOD ACTING, YOU KNOW? DANIEL DAY-LEWIS WOULD BE PROUD."

AMY DIDN'T LOOK CONVINCED. "THIS ISN'T A MOVIE SET. THIS IS YOUR LIFE. AND FROM WHAT YOU'VE TOLD ME, IT SEEMS LIKE YOU'RE LOSING TOUCH WITH WHO YOU REALLY ARE."

I SNORTED. "WHO I REALLY AM? DOC, I'M WHOEVER I NEED TO BE TO KEEP THIS GIG. TODAY IT'S LILY. TOMORROW, WHO KNOWS? MAYBE I'LL WAKE UP AND

DECIDE I WANT TO BE BATMAN. CHRISTIAN BALE DID IT, WHY CAN'T I?"

"BECAUSE CHRISTIAN BALE DIDN'T ACTUALLY BECOME BATMAN. HE PLAYED A ROLE AND THEN WENT BACK TO BEING CHRISTIAN BALE. YOU'RE TALKING ABOUT PERMANENTLY ALTERING YOUR BODY. THAT'S NOT ACTING, DYLAN. THAT'S... SOMETHING ELSE ENTIRELY."

I LEANED BACK, CROSSING MY ARMS OVER MY CHEST. MY SLIGHTLY LARGER, ESTROGEN-ENHANCED CHEST. "LOOK, I GET IT. YOU THINK I'M CRAZY. BUT HERE'S THE THING - THIS IS MY TICKET. MY BIG BREAK. DO YOU KNOW HOW MANY ACTORS WOULD KILL FOR THE KIND OF RECOGNITION I'M GETTING? THE AWARDS BUZZ? THE FAN LETTERS FROM KIDS SAYING LILY SAVED THEIR LIFE?"

"AND HOW DOES THAT MAKE YOU FEEL?" AMY ASKED. "KNOWING THAT PEOPLE ARE CONNECTING WITH A CHARACTER YOU CREATED UNDER FALSE PRETENSES?"

I DON'T KNOW WHY, BUT TEARS INSTANTLY SPRANG TO MY EYES. FUCK. I BLINKED THEM BACK FURIOUSLY, REFUSING TO LET AMY SEE ME CRY.

"IT FEELS... COMPLICATED," I SAID, MY VOICE ROUGHER THAN I'D LIKE. "LIKE, YEAH, PART OF ME FEELS LIKE THE BIGGEST FRAUD IN THE WORLD. BUT ANOTHER PART... I DON'T KNOW. IT FEELS GOOD, YOU KNOW? TO MATTER THAT MUCH TO SOMEONE. EVEN IF IT'S NOT REALLY ME THEY'RE CONNECTING WITH."

AMY LEANED FORWARD, HER PERFECT FACE FULL OF CONCERN. GOD, I HATED HOW GENUINE SHE LOOKED. "DO YOU THINK MAYBE THERE'S A REASON YOU FEEL MORE COMFORTABLE AS LILY THAN AS YOURSELF?"

I LAUGHED, BUT IT CAME OUT MORE LIKE A CHOKED SOB. "WHAT, YOU THINK I'M ACTUALLY TRANS OR SOMETHING? COME ON, DOC. I THINK I'D KNOW IF I WAS A GIRL TRAPPED IN A GUY'S BODY OR WHATEVER."

"GENDER IDENTITY ISN'T ALWAYS THAT CLEAR CUT," SHE SAID GENTLY. "HAVE YOU EVER ASKED YOURSELF IF YOU WERE A GIRL?"

"WHAT? NO. I MEAN, I'M NOT. OBVIOUSLY."

"WHY 'OBVIOUSLY?'"

I ROLLED MY EYES. "WHY OBVIOUSLY? GEE, I DON'T KNOW, DOC. MAYBE BECAUSE I LIKE MY DICK? BECAUSE I SPENT MY WHOLE LIFE AS A GUY WITHOUT ANY ISSUES? BECAUSE I ONLY STARTED THIS WHOLE THING AS A WAY TO GET FAMOUS? BECAUSE I LOVE TO EAT PUSSY AND BENCH PRESS AND DO ALL THAT OTHER MANLY SHIT? TAKE YOUR PICK."

AMY DIDN'T FLINCH. SHE JUST KEPT LOOKING AT ME WITH THOSE ANNOYINGLY UNDERSTANDING EYES. "PLENTY OF TRANS WOMEN ENJOY THOSE THINGS TOO. GENDER ISN'T ABOUT WHAT YOU LIKE OR DON'T LIKE. IT'S ABOUT WHO YOU ARE."

"WHAT YOU DO IS WHO YOU ARE," I SHOT BACK. "AND WHAT I DO IS PRETEND TO BE OTHER PEOPLE FOR A LIVING. SO MAYBE I'M NOBODY AT ALL. HOW'S THAT FOR YOUR PSYCHOANALYSIS, DOC?"

AMY SIGHED, JOTTING SOMETHING DOWN IN HER NOTEPAD. PROBABLY 'PATIENT IS A SARCASTIC ASSHOLE.' WELL, AT LEAST THAT'D BE ACCURATE.

"MANY TRANS WOMEN DON'T REALIZE THEIR TRUE IDENTITY UNTIL LATER IN LIFE. AND SOME USE HYPER-MASCULINE PURSUITS, LIKE BODYBUILDING, AS A WAY TO SUPPRESS THEIR FEELINGS."

"OH, COME ON. NEXT YOU'LL BE TELLING ME MY LOVE FOR ACTION MOVIES IS BECAUSE I SUBCONSCIOUSLY WANTED TO BE THE KICKASS HEROINE AND NOT JASON STATHAM."

"I'M NOT TELLING YOU ANYTHING, DYLAN. I'M ASKING YOU TO EXPLORE THESE FEELINGS. THE FACT THAT YOU AGREED TO ACTUAL FACIAL FEMINIZATION SURGERY - NOT JUST MAKEUP OR PROSTHETICS - SUGGESTS THERE'S A LOT MORE GOING ON HERE THAN JUST DEDICATION TO A ROLE."

I FELT MY STOMACH DROP. SHIT. SHE WAS RIGHT. THIS WASN'T JUST SOME HOLLYWOOD FAKERY ANYMORE. I'D AGREED TO LET THEM LITERALLY CUT UP MY FACE TO MAKE ME LOOK MORE FEMININE. WHAT THE HELL WAS I THINKING?

"LOOK," I SAID, TRYING TO KEEP MY VOICE STEADY. "MAYBE I GOT A LITTLE... CARRIED AWAY. BUT THAT DOESN'T MEAN I'M TRANS. IT JUST MEANS I'M COMMITTED TO MY CRAFT. AND MAYBE A LITTLE STUPID."

AMY LEANED BACK WITH A THOUGHTFUL EXPRESSION. IT MADE HER LOOK EVEN PRETTIER. "OKAY, LET'S APPROACH THIS FROM A DIFFERENT ANGLE. IF TOMORROW, ALL THE PRESSURE WAS GONE - NO SHOW, NO CONTRACT, NO EXPECTATIONS - AND YOU COULD CHOOSE TO BE ANYONE YOU WANTED, WHO WOULD YOU BE? DYLAN OR LILY?"

I OPENED MY MOUTH TO SAY 'DYLAN,' OF COURSE. BUT THE WORD STUCK IN MY THROAT. WHO WOULD I BE? THE GUY WHO CAME TO L.A. WITH BIG DREAMS AND ZERO TALENT? OR THE PERSON I'D BECOME OVER THE PAST YEAR - SOMEONE WHO MATTERED, SOMEONE WHO MADE A DIFFERENCE?

"I... I DON'T KNOW," I WHISPERED.

AMY LOOKED AT ME FOR A LONG TIME. "WELL," SHE SAID. "I THINK THAT'S THE FIRST TRUE THING YOU'VE SAID. LET'S PICK UP THERE NEXT WEEK."

* * *

"I'M THINKING OF QUITTING. FUCK MY CONTRACT. FUCK MELISSA. I THOUGHT SHE WAS COOL! BUT OF COURSE SHE KILLS OFF THE TRANS GIRL. I DON'T WANT TO DO THE SHOW WITHOUT MY BEST FRIEND!"

I STARED AT DAISY AS WE SAT IN AN UNIMPORTANT BUT INCONCEIVABLY EXPENSIVE DELI ON HIGHLAND. MELISSA HAD DECIDED TO KEEP LILY'S FATE A SECRET FROM EVERYONE. SO AS FAR AS THE CAST KNEW, LILY WAS STILL BEING KILLED OFF. AND HERE WAS DAISY, READY TO THROW AWAY HER ROLE FOR... WELL, FOR ME. OR FOR LILY. CHRIST, EVEN I DIDN'T KNOW THE DIFFERENCE ANYMORE.

"SLOW DOWN THERE, DAIS," I SAID. "LET'S NOT DO ANYTHING DRASTIC. I MEAN, QUITTING THE SHOW? THAT'S A BIT EXTREME."

DAISY'S EYES WERE BLAZING WITH THAT RIGHTEOUS FURY I'D COME TO KNOW SO WELL. IT WAS THE SAME LOOK



SHE GOT WHEN HER CHARACTER, NISHA, WAS ABOUT TO DELIVER A SCATHING MONOLOGUE ABOUT SOCIAL INJUSTICE OR WHATEVER.

"EXTREME? DEE, THEY'RE KILLING OFF THE MOST IMPORTANT CHARACTER ON THE SHOW! YOUR CHARACTER! HOW CAN YOU BE SO CALM ABOUT THIS?"

I SHRUGGED, FEELING LIKE THE WORLD'S BIGGEST ASSHOLE. "IT'S HOLLYWOOD. CHARACTERS DIE ALL THE TIME."

"YEAH, LGBTQ CHARACTERS ESPECIALLY." DAISY'S VOICE WAS DRIPPING WITH SARCASM. "GOD FORBID WE HAVE A HAPPY ENDING FOR ONCE. YOU KNOW WHAT? SCREW IT. I'M DONE PLAYING IT SAFE. I'M GOING TO COME OUT."

I NEARLY CHOKED ON MY OVERPRICED AVOCADO TOAST. "COME OUT? AS WHAT?"

"I'M GAY, DYLAN," DAISY SAID. "LIKE, REALLY GAY. AND IT'S BECAUSE OF YOU... WELL, BECAUSE OF LILY. WATCHING YOU BECOME HER, SEEING HOW AUTHENTIC SHE IS... IT MADE ME REALIZE I COULDN'T KEEP HIDING WHO I REALLY AM."

WELL, FUCK ME SIDEWAYS. I HADN'T SEEN THAT COMING. I MEAN, SURE, DAISY HAD ALWAYS BEEN SUPER SUPPORTIVE OF THE LGBTQ+ COMMUNITY, BUT I'D CHALKED THAT UP TO STANDARD HOLLYWOOD POLITICAL CORRECTNESS. TURNS OUT SHE HAD A HORSE IN THIS RACE AFTER ALL.

"WOW," I SAID, ELOQUENT AS EVER. "THAT'S... THAT'S HUGE, DAIS. I'M REALLY HAPPY FOR YOU."

SHE REACHED ACROSS THE TABLE AND TOOK MY HAND. "THANKS, DEE. IT MEANS A LOT COMING FROM YOU. YOU'VE BEEN SUCH AN INSPIRATION."

I FELT A TWINGE OF GUILT. IF ONLY SHE KNEW THE TRUTH. BUT THEN AGAIN, DID EVEN I KNOW THE TRUTH ANYMORE?

"LISTEN," SHE SAID, HER VOICE DROPPING TO A CONSPIRATORIAL WHISPER. "THERE'S SOMETHING ELSE I NEED TO TELL YOU."

GREAT. ANOTHER REVELATION.

"I... I THINK I HAVE FEELINGS FOR YOU, DEE."

I BLINKED. ONCE. TWICE. "COME AGAIN?"

DAISY'S CHEEKS FLUSHED. "I KNOW IT'S COMPLICATED. WITH THE SHOW, AND OUR CHARACTERS, AND EVERYTHING. BUT WATCHING YOU BECOME YOUR TRUE SELF, SEEING HOW BEAUTIFUL YOU ARE INSIDE AND OUT... I COULDN'T HELP FALLING FOR YOU. I MEAN, LIKE I SAID, I'M REALLY GAY AND YOU'RE, UM, BECOMING SO, SO PRETTY."

WELL, SHIT. THIS WAS NOT HOW I EXPECTED MY DAY TO GO. I MEAN, SURE, DAISY WAS GORGEOUS. AND TALENTED. AND KIND. AND... OKAY, MAYBE I'D THOUGHT ABOUT IT ONCE OR TWICE. OR A HUNDRED TIMES. BUT THAT WAS BEFORE, WASN'T IT? HOW DID MY BODY EVEN WORK ANYMORE? I HAD BOOBS NOW. AND SO DID SHE!

"DAIS..." I TRAILED OFF.

"IT'S OKAY IF YOU DON'T FEEL THE SAME WAY," SHE SAID QUICKLY. "I JUST NEEDED YOU TO KNOW. AND IF YOU DO... WELL, MAYBE WE COULD GO ON A DATE? A REAL ONE, NOT JUST AS NISHA AND LINCOLN?"

MY MIND WAS RACING. HERE WAS THIS BEAUTIFUL, TALENTED WOMAN, CONFESSING HER FEELINGS FOR ME. FOR LILY. FOR... WHOEVER THE HELL I WAS NOW. AND PART OF ME WANTED TO JUMP AT THE CHANCE. BUT ANOTHER PART, THE PART THAT WAS STILL CLINGING TO SOME SHRED OF HONESTY, KNEW I COULDN'T. NOT YET, ANYWAY.

"DAISY..." I TOOK A DEEP BREATH. "LOOK, I'D BE LYING IF I SAID I HADN'T THOUGHT ABOUT IT. I MEAN, HAVE YOU SEEN YOURSELF?"

SHE LAUGHED, A SOUND THAT MADE MY NEWLY SENSITIVE NIPPLES TINGLE. GOD, THESE HORMONES WERE SOMETHING ELSE.

"BUT," I CONTINUED, "I'M KIND OF IN THE MIDDLE OF... WELL, A LOT. THERE'S THE SHOW, AND MY TRANSITION, AND..." I TRAILED OFF, REALIZING I WAS ABOUT TO SPILL THE BEANS ABOUT THE SURGERY. "CAN WE MAYBE REVISIT THIS AFTER MY SURGERY?"

DAISY'S EYES WIDENED. "SURGERY? OH MY GOD, DEE, I HAD NO IDEA YOU WERE PLANNING ON THAT! OF COURSE, WE CAN WAIT. I'M HERE FOR YOU, WHATEVER YOU NEED."

I NODDED, FEELING LIKE THE WORLD'S BIGGEST FRAUD. "THANKS. THAT MEANS A LOT. AND WHO KNOWS? MAYBE AFTER THEY CARVE UP MY FACE, I'LL BE EVEN PRETTIER. WE COULD BE THE HOTTEST LESBIAN COUPLE IN HOLLYWOOD."

SHE LAUGHED AGAIN, BUT THIS TIME IT WAS TINGED WITH SOMETHING ELSE. HOPE? "I'D LIKE THAT."

AS WE FINISHED OUR OVERPRICED LUNCH, I COULDN'T HELP BUT WONDER WHAT I'D GOTTEN MYSELF INTO. AGAIN. A BEAUTIFUL WOMAN WANTED ME. THE SHOW WAS A HIT. I WAS ON THE VERGE OF WINNING AN EMMY, FOR CHRIST'S SAKE.



Lily's triumphant, shocking return to ANYWHERE BUT BORING in Season 3, Ep. 3

BUT AT WHAT COST? MY IDENTITY? MY SANITY? MY ABILITY TO PEE STANDING UP?

AS DAISY AND I PARTED WAYS, SHE GAVE ME A QUICK KISS ON THE CHEEK. "GOOD LUCK WITH YOUR SURGERY," SHE SAID. "I CAN'T WAIT TO SEE THE REAL YOU."

I WATCHED HER WALK AWAY, FEELING LIKE I WAS ABOUT TO THROW UP MY $25 AVOCADO TOAST. THE REAL ME? I WASN'T SURE SUCH A PERSON EXISTED ANYMORE.

MAYBE THEY NEVER DID.

* * *

I WENT AHEAD WITH THE SURGERY, OF COURSE. THE HEALING WAS BOTH THE WORST AND BEST TIME OF MY LIFE. WORST BECAUSE, WELL, HAVE YOU EVER HAD YOUR FACE REARRANGED? IT'S NOT EXACTLY A WALK IN THE PARK. BEST BECAUSE FOR ONCE, I DIDN'T HAVE TO BE

ANYONE. NOT DYLAN, NOT LILY, NOT ANYONE'S EXPECTATION. JUST A SWOLLEN, BRUISED MESS WRAPPED IN BANDAGES, LEFT ALONE WITH MY THOUGHTS. AND LET ME TELL YOU, THOSE THOUGHTS WERE ABOUT AS PRETTY AS MY FACE AT THAT MOMENT.

THE FIRST TIME THEY TOOK THE BANDAGES OFF, I ALMOST PASSED OUT. NOT FROM PAIN OR SHOCK, BUT FROM THE SHEER WEIRDNESS OF IT ALL. THE FACE STARING BACK AT ME IN THE MIRROR WAS... SOFTER. MORE DELICATE. MY JAWLINE HAD BEEN SHAVED DOWN, MY BROW LIFTED, MY NOSE RESHAPED. IT WAS ME, BUT... NOT ME.

AS THE SWELLING WENT DOWN AND THE BRUISES FADED, I STARTED TO SEE GLIMPSES OF WHAT I'D BECOME. AND I DIDN'T HATE IT. IN FACT, THERE WERE MOMENTS WHEN I CAUGHT MY REFLECTION AND FELT... RIGHT. LIKE ALL MY LIFE I'D BEEN STUCK IN A WORLD OF FUNHOUSE MIRRORS, AND SUDDENLY EVERYTHING WAS CLEAR.

BUT THOSE MOMENTS WERE FLEETING. MORE OFTEN, I'D LOOK IN THE MIRROR AND FEEL LIKE I WAS STARRING IN SOME BIZARRE SCI-FI MOVIE WHERE THE PROTAGONIST WAKES UP IN SOMEONE ELSE'S BODY. EXCEPT THERE WAS NO BODY-SWAPPING SHENANIGANS HERE. JUST ME, MY CHOICES, AND A FACE THAT LOOKED LIKE IT BELONGED TO MY HYPOTHETICAL HOT SISTER.

DAISY VISITED ME A LOT DURING MY RECOVERY. SHE'D BRING SOUP (I HATE SOUP), MAGAZINES, AND THAT INFECTIOUS SMILE OF HERS. EACH TIME, I'D CATCH HER STARING AT ME WITH A MIX OF AWE AND SOMETHING ELSE. SOMETHING THAT MADE MY STOMACH DO BACKFLIPS.

"YOU LOOK BEAUTIFUL, DEE," SHE'D SAY, HER VOICE SOFT. AND FOR A MOMENT, I'D BELIEVE HER.

BUT THEN SHE'D LEAVE, AND I'D BE ALONE AGAIN WITH MY THOUGHTS. AND LET ME TELL YOU, THOSE THOUGHTS WERE DARK AS HELL.

'THERE'S NO TURNING BACK YOU DUMB MOTHERFUCKER,' I'D THINK, STARING AT MY NEWLY SCULPTED FACE. 'YOU'VE REALLY DONE IT THIS TIME. CONGRATS ON THE EMMY NOD, BY THE WAY. HOPE IT WAS WORTH LITERALLY CHANGING YOUR SEX.'

BUT THEN I'D CATCH ANOTHER GLIMPSE OF MYSELF, AND FOR A SPLIT SECOND, I'D SEE... HER. LILY. THE GIRL WHO'D SAVED LIVES, INSPIRED PEOPLE, MADE A DIFFERENCE. WASN'T LOSING DYLAN WORTH GAINING LILY?

DON'T GET ME WRONG - I WASN'T HAVING SOME MAGICAL TRANS AWAKENING OR WHATEVER. NAH, THIS WAS MORE LIKE BEING STUCK IN QUICKSAND. THE MORE I STRUGGLED AGAINST IT, THE DEEPER I SANK.

BUT HERE'S THE KICKER - PART OF ME DIDN'T WANT TO STRUGGLE ANYMORE. PART OF ME WANTED TO JUST... LET GO. SINK INTO THIS NEW IDENTITY, THIS NEW LIFE, AND SEE WHERE IT TOOK ME. AFTER ALL, WASN'T THAT WHAT I'D ALWAYS WANTED? TO BE SOMEONE ELSE, SOMEONE IMPORTANT?

FUCK ME, RIGHT?

SEASON 3 FILMED, AND LET ME TELL YOU, THE LOOK ON EVERYONE'S FACES WHEN LILY WALKED ONTO SET IN HER WAS PRICELESS. DAISY ACTUALLY SQUEALED - LIKE, FULL-ON PIG AT A COUNTY FAIR SQUEALED - AND THREW HER ARMS AROUND ME. THE REST OF THE CAST WASN'T FAR BEHIND. IT WAS A HALLMARK MOVIE MOMENT - IF HALLMARK EVER GREW THE BALLS TO MAKE A SHOW ABOUT A TRANS GIRL COMING BACK FROM THE DEAD.

EMMY BUZZ STARTED ALMOST IMMEDIATELY. THE EPISODE WHERE LILY RETURNS, FACING THE WORLD WITH HER NEW FACE AND A DETERMINATION TO FIND HER WOULD-BE KILLER (C'MON, IT'S TV), WAS APPARENTLY SOME OF THE MOST POWERFUL TELEVISION EVER MADE. AT LEAST, THAT'S WHAT THE CRITICS SAID. I WAS TOO BUSY TRYING NOT TO PUKE EVERY TIME I SAW MYSELF ON SCREEN.

BUT HEY, WHO NEEDS A STABLE SENSE OF SELF WHEN YOU'VE GOT A HOT GIRLFRIEND AND A GOLDEN STATUE IN YOUR FUTURE, RIGHT?

BECAUSE, YEAH, THAT'S ABOUT WHEN DAISY AND I BECAME HOLLYWOOD'S NEW "IT" COUPLE. THE PRESS DUBBED US THE "DOUBLE D'S," WHICH WAS HILARIOUS CONSIDERING MY CUP SIZE WAS NOWHERE NEAR A D...YET. BUT WHATEVER, LET THEM HAVE THEIR PUNS. WE WERE EVERYWHERE - RED CARPETS, TALK SHOWS, EVEN A SPREAD IN VANITY FAIR WHERE THEY MADE US RECREATE



THAT FAMOUS JOHN LENNON AND YOKO ONO BED PHOTO. BECAUSE NOTHING SAYS "WE'RE A NORMAL COUPLE" LIKE IMITATING TWO PEOPLE WHO WERE DEFINITELY NOT A NORMAL COUPLE.

IT WAS ALL GOING GREAT. FAN-FUCKING-TASTIC, EVEN. UNTIL IT WASN'T.

THE EMAIL CAME ON A TUESDAY. I REMEMBER BECAUSE TUESDAYS WERE ALWAYS MY CHEAT DAYS, AND I WAS BALLS DEEP IN A PINT OF BEN & JERRY'S WHEN MY PHONE PINGED.

'DIE TRANNY SCUM,' THE SUBJECT LINE READ. CHARMING.

THE BODY OF THE EMAIL WAS EVEN BETTER. DETAILS ABOUT HOW THEY WERE GOING TO 'CORRECT [MY] MISTAKE" AND 'SEND [ME] BACK TO HELL WHERE I BELONGED." YOU KNOW, THE USUAL LIGHT-HEARTED BANTER YOU'D EXPECT FROM A TOTALLY SANE AND



WELL-ADJUSTED INDIVIDUAL.

I STARED AT MY PHONE, ICE CREAM MELTING FORGOTTEN IN MY LAP. THIS WAS IT. THE OTHER SHOE I'D BEEN WAITING TO DROP SINCE THIS WHOLE CHARADE BEGAN. BECAUSE OF COURSE IT COULDN'T ALL BE AWARDS AND ADORATION. OF COURSE THERE HAD TO BE SOME PSYCHO OUT THERE WHO HATED ME ENOUGH TO WANT ME DEAD.

THE FUCKED-UP PART? FOR A SPLIT SECOND, I ALMOST FELT RELIEVED. LIKE, "OH GOOD, NOW I HAVE A REAL PROBLEM TO DEAL WITH INSTEAD OF THIS CONSTANT EXISTENTIAL CRISIS."

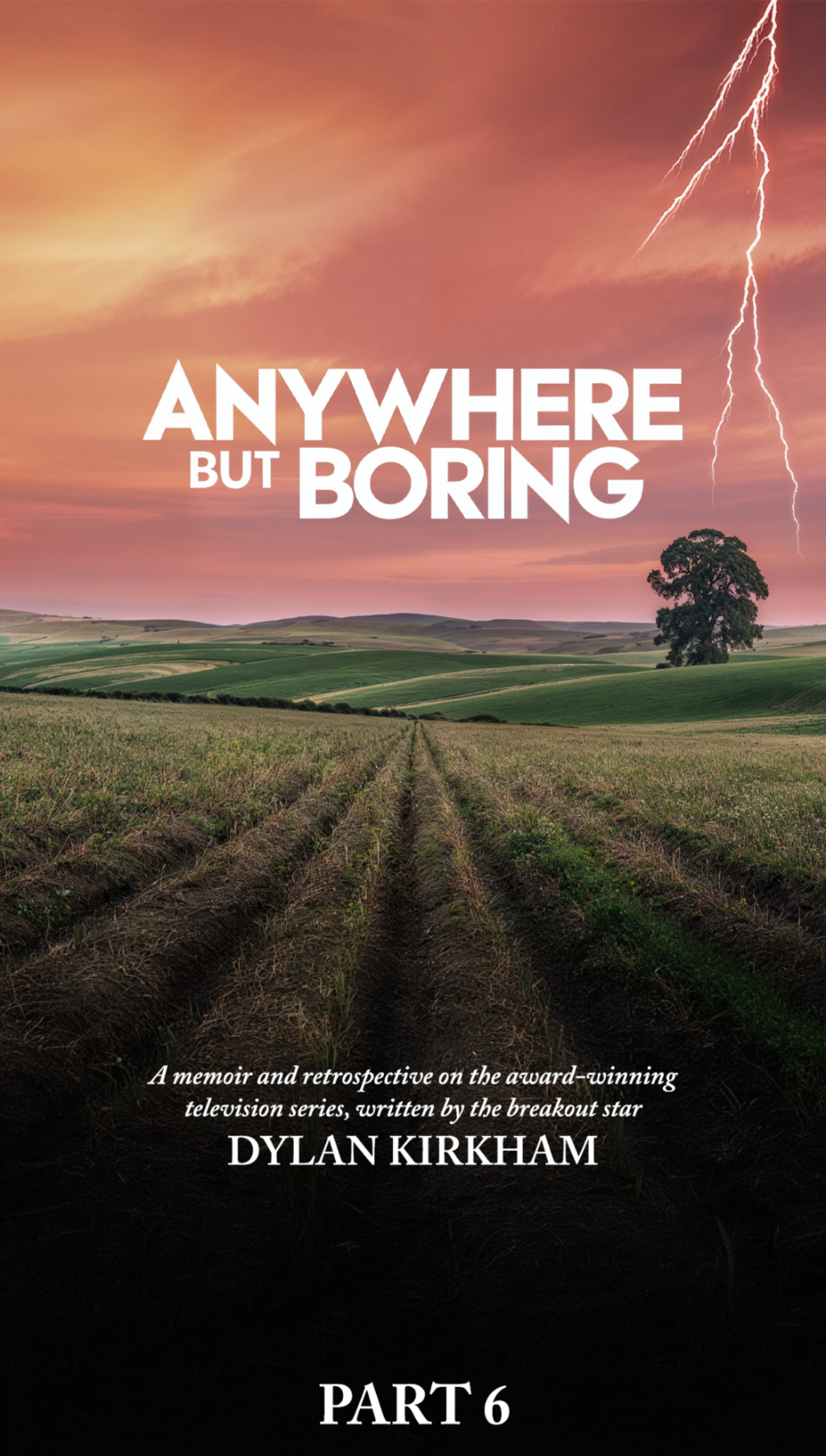
BUT THEN THE REALITY SANK IN. SOMEONE WANTED TO KILL ME. NOT DYLAN, THE LYING ACTOR WHO'D CONNED HIS WAY INTO FAME. BUT LILY, THE BRAVE TRANS GIRL WHO'D INSPIRED SO MANY. THEY WANTED TO ERASE HER, TO PUNISH HER FOR DARING TO EXIST.

AND IN THAT MOMENT, I REALIZED SOMETHING THAT SCARED ME MORE THAN ANY DEATH THREAT EVER COULD (AND THERE WERE PLENTY MORE TO COME):

I DIDN'T WANT LILY TO DIE NOT BECAUSE SHE WAS AN IMPORTANT CHARACTER IN AN IMPORTANT SHOW, BUT BECAUSE SOMEWHERE ALONG THE WAY, WITHOUT ME EVEN NOTICING, SHE'D BECOME REAL. SHE'D BECOME... ME.

"FUCK!"


Daisy took this one to help track 'development' - at least that's what she said!



A memoir and retrospective on the award-winning television series, written by the breakout star

DYLAN KIRKHAM

PART 6



I PACED MY LIVING ROOM, RUNNING MY HANDS THROUGH MY LONGER, SOFTER HAIR. WHAT WAS I GOING TO DO? CALL THE L.A.P.D.? NO. DAISY HAD TOLD ME HER HORROR STORIES ABOUT STALKERS, AND SHE'D ALSO TOLD ME HOW USELESS THE COPS HAD BEEN.

"WE'RE SORRY, SIR - ER, *MISS*," THEY'D SNORT. "BUT WITHOUT ANY SPECIFIC THREATS OR ACTIONS, THERE'S NOT MUCH WE CAN DO. MAYBE TRY NOT BEING SO... VISIBLE?"

YEAH, GREAT ADVICE. I'LL GO BACK TO BEING INVISIBLE DYLAN. OH WAIT, I CAN'T, BECAUSE I CARVED UP MY FUCKING FACE TO LOOK LIKE ANGELINA JOLIE'S LESS-HOT (BUT MUCH YOUNGER) SISTER.

I COLLAPSED ONTO THE COUCH, MY HEAD IN MY HANDS. THIS WAS INSANE. ALL OF IT. I'D STARTED THIS WHOLE THING AS A LIE, A WAY TO GET FAMOUS. AND NOW I WAS GETTING DEATH THREATS FOR BEING SOMEONE I NEVER

INTENDED TO BECOME.

A KNOCK ON THE DOOR STARTLED ME. MY HEART JUMPED IN MY THROAT. I WALKED OVER AND PEEKED THROUGH THE PEEPHOLE. IT WAS DAISY. OF COURSE IT WAS FUCKING DAISY. ONLY A PARANOID IDIOT WOULD THINK THAT THE EMAIL PSYCHO HAD TRACKED HIM DOWN ALREADY. THIS WAS A CRAZY GUY LIVING IN HIS GRANDMOTHER'S BASEMENT, NOT JASON BOURNE.

I OPENED THE DOOR AND FORCED A SMILE. "HEY, DAIS."

SHE STEPPED INSIDE, HER EYES NARROWING IMMEDIATELY AS SHE TOOK IN MY PALE FACE. "WHAT'S GOING ON?"

"GOD, AM I THAT OBVIOUS?" MY EMOTIONS WERE MUCH HARDER TO HIDE THESE DAYS. THANKS, ESTROGEN! "NOTHING. I JUST... GOT AN EMAIL. A REALLY NASTY ONE."

DAISY CLOSED THE DOOR AND HELD OUT HER HAND. "LET ME SEE IT, GIRL."

I HANDED HER MY PHONE. AS SHE READ, HER EXPRESSION GREW DARKER WITH EVERY WORD. "JESUS, DEE. THIS IS SERIOUS. AND HE SENT FIVE MORE ALREADY!"

"TEN. I DELETED THE OTHERS." I SAT DOWN AND LET MYSELF SINK INTO MY RIDICULOUS-EXPENSIVE-AND-HONESTLY-NOT-VERY-COMFORTABLE COUCH. "I DON'T KNOW WHAT TO DO. I MEAN, I'M NOT STUPID. I KNEW NOT EVERYONE WOULD BE A FAN, BUT THIS IS THE NEXT LEVEL."

DAISY SAT BESIDE ME, PUTTING HER HAND ON MY KNEE. "WE HAVE TO TELL MELISSA. THE NETWORK HAS PROTOCOLS FOR THIS KIND OF THING. I WAS THIRTEEN WHEN I STARTED GETTING DISGUSTING MESSAGES. I USED TO LOVE OPENING THE LETTERS I GOT FROM FANS, BUT THAT CHANGED REAL FAST WHEN THE CREEPY ONES STARTED COMING IN."

I NODDED, FEELING A MIX OF RELIEF AND FEAR. RELIEF BECAUSE DAISY WAS HERE AND SHE ALWAYS SEEMED TO KNOW WHAT TO DO. FEAR BECAUSE THIS WAS ONLY THE BEGINNING. IF ONE PERSON FELT THIS WAY, HOW MANY OTHERS DID TOO?

"OKAY." I SQUEEZED HER HAND. "LET'S REPORT IT."

MELISSA WAS BEYOND FURIOUS WHEN WE TOLD HER ABOUT THE EMAILS. SHE CALLED IN THE NETWORK'S SECURITY TEAM, AND WITHIN HOURS, MY APARTMENT HAD A NEW ALARM SYSTEM.

"THIS IS UNACCEPTABLE," MELISSA FUMED. "WE'RE GOING TO FIND THIS BASTARD AND MAKE SURE HE NEVER COMES NEAR YOU."

THE NEXT FEW WEEKS WERE A BLUR OF SECURITY BRIEFINGS, POLICE REPORTS, AND PR DAMAGE CONTROL. THE NETWORK WENT PUBLIC WITH THE THREATS, HOPING TO GARNER SYMPATHY AND SUPPORT. IT WORKED, TO AN EXTENT. THE OUTPOURING OF LOVE FROM FANS WAS OVERWHELMING. BUT IT ALSO SEEMED TO EMBOLDEN THE HATERS. FOR EVERY SUPPORTIVE MESSAGE, THERE WAS ANOTHER FILLED WITH VITRIOL.

HEY U WILL BURN IN HELL U FREAK.

JUST WAIT. WE KNOW WHERE YOU LIVE.

I TRIED TO FOCUS ON THE POSITIVE MESSAGES, THE FANS WHO SAID LILY HAD GIVEN THEM HOPE. BUT IT WAS HARD WHEN EVERY NOTIFICATION MADE MY HEART RACE, WONDERING IF IT WAS ANOTHER THREAT.

DAISY WAS MY ROCK THROUGH IT ALL. SHE STAYED OVER MOST NIGHTS, INSISTING THAT I SHOULDN'T BE ALONE. WE SPENT HOURS TALKING, WATCHING MOVIES, AND JUST TRYING TO BE A NORMAL COUPLE. THERE WAS NO PRESSURE TO PERFORM OR PRETEND. BEING WITH DAISY FELT LIKE THE ONLY REAL THING IN MY LIFE.

OTHERWISE, I KEPT MY HEAD DOWN AND FOCUSED ON WORK. WE WERE IN THE MIDDLE OF FILMING A CRUCIAL EPISODE WHERE LILY CONFRONTS HER WOULD-BE KILLER. THE IRONY WASN'T LOST ON ME.

ONE NIGHT, AFTER A GRUELING DAY OF SHOOTING, I FOUND MYSELF ALONE IN MY TRAILER, READING THOSE HATEFUL EMAILS OVER AND OVER. MY THERAPIST WOULD'VE HAD NASTY WORDS FOR ME ABOUT THAT, BUT I COULDN'T HELP IT. I WAS SPIRALING.

"FUCK THIS," I SAID, SUDDENLY STANDING. "IF THEY WANT TO COME FOR LILY, THEY'LL HAVE TO GO THROUGH ME."

I PULLED UP A CONTACT I HADN'T USED IN YEARS. MY OLD TRAINER FROM BACK WHEN I THOUGHT BENCH PRESSING WAS A PERSONALITY TRAIT.

"HEY, ANDY? IT'S DYLAN. LOOK, I NEED YOUR HELP. YOU STILL TEACHING KARATE? HUH? TAE KWON DO? WELL, WHATEVER, I NEED TO LEARN. FAST. NO, NOT FOR A ROLE. IT'S... PERSONAL."

ANDY WAS SKEPTICAL. "LAST TIME I SAW YOU, YOU WERE TRYING TO BULK UP TO BE THE NEXT JASON STATHAM. BUT, UH, I'VE BEEN WATCHING YOUR SHOW. AND I SAW YOU IN MAXIM. GODDAMN, DEE, IF I'D KNOWN I WAS TRAINING THE NEXT SCAR JO, I WOULD'VE CHARGED YOU DOUBLE. YOU LOOKED GOOD, IS WHAT I'M TRYING TO SAY! BUT YOU DIDN'T EXACTLY LOOK LIKE YOU'VE BEEN KEEPING UP WITH YOUR TRAINING."

I SIGHED AND TUCKED MY HAIR BEHIND MY EAR. "YEAH, WELL, THINGS CHANGE. LOOK, CAN YOU HELP ME OR NOT?"

ANDY CHUCKLED ON THE OTHER END OF THE LINE. "SURE, DEE. I CAN HELP. BUT IT AIN'T GONNA BE EASY. YOU'RE BASICALLY STARTING FROM SCRATCH WITH A WHOLE NEW BODY. YOU UP FOR THAT?"

I THOUGHT ABOUT THOSE EMAILS, ABOUT THE FEAR THAT HAD BEEN GNAWING AT ME FOR WEEKS. "WHEN CAN WE START?"

"TOMORROW MORNING, 5 AM. MY GYM. DON'T BE FUCKING LATE."

I HUNG UP, FEELING A MIX OF DETERMINATION AND DREAD. THIS WOULD SUCK, BUT AT LEAST IT WAS SOMETHING I COULD CONTROL.

THE NEXT MORNING, I DRAGGED MYSELF OUT OF BED AT 4:30, CAREFUL NOT TO WAKE DAISY. I LEFT A NOTE SAYING I HAD AN EARLY MEETING AND SLIPPED OUT.

ANDY'S GYM WAS EXACTLY AS I REMEMBERED, ALL CONCRETE AND IRON, WITH MOTIVATIONAL POSTERS THAT LOOKED LIKE THEY'D BEEN THERE SINCE THE 90S. ANDY



HADN'T CHANGED MUCH EITHER, STILL BUILT LIKE A BRICK SHITHOUSE WITH A PERMANENT SCOWL. BASICALLY, THE ASIAN VERSION OF THE ROCK, IF THE ROCK WERE FIVE INCHES SHORTER AND A LOT MEANER. AS SOON AS I SAW HIM, MEMORIES OF OUR OLD SESSIONS FLOODED BACK --HOURS SPENT LIFTING, PUSHING MY LIMITS, CHASING AN IDEAL THAT NOW SEEMED SO DISTANT.

ANDY LOOKED ME UP AND DOWN AS I WALKED IN, HIS EYEBROWS RISING SLIGHTLY. "WELL, WELL. LOOK AT YOU, MISS HOLLYWOOD. YOU READY TO WORK?"

I NODDED, TRYING TO IGNORE THE WAY HIS EYES LINGERED ON MY CHEST. "LET'S DO THIS."

THE NEXT TWO HOURS WERE PURE HELL. ANDY DIDN'T GO EASY ON ME, CELEBRITY OR NOT. HE PUT ME THROUGH A GRUELING WORKOUT, FOLLOWED BY BASIC SELF-DEFENSE TECHNIQUES. BY THE END, I WAS DRENCHED IN SWEAT, EVERY MUSCLE SCREAMING.

"NOT BAD," ANDY SAID AS I COLLAPSED ONTO A BENCH. "FOR A GIRL."

I FLIPPED HIM OFF, TOO EXHAUSTED TO SPEAK. BUT UNDERNEATH THE PAIN AND FATIGUE, THERE WAS SOMETHING ELSE. A SPARK OF THE OLD DYLAN, THE GUY WHO USED TO PUSH HIMSELF TO THE LIMIT JUST BECAUSE HE COULD.

AS I STUMBLED OUT OF THE GYM, MY PHONE BUZZED. IT WAS DAISY.

"WHERE ARE YOU? I WOKE UP AND YOU WERE GONE. EVERYTHING OKAY?"

I TOOK A DEEP BREATH, STILL TRYING TO CATCH IT FROM THE WORKOUT. "YEAH, I'M FINE. I JUST... I NEEDED TO DO SOMETHING FOR MYSELF. I'LL EXPLAIN LATER."

"OKAY," SHE SAID. "JUST BE SAFE, ALRIGHT? I WORRY ABOUT YOU."

"I WILL," I PROMISED. "I'LL BE HOME SOON."

I HUNG UP AND MADE MY WAY BACK TO MY CAR, FEELING EXHAUSTED AND EXHILARATED. MAYBE THIS WAS WHAT I NEEDED -- A WAY TO TAKE CONTROL, TO FIGHT BACK AGAINST THE FEAR THAT HAD BEEN CONSUMING ME.

OVER THE NEXT FEW WEEKS, MY ROUTINE BECAME A BALANCING ACT BETWEEN FILMING, THERAPY SESSIONS WITH AMY, AND THE EARLY MORNING TRAINING SESSIONS WITH ANDY. TO SAY I WAS BURNING THE CANDLE AT BOTH ENDS WOULD BE AN UNDERSTATEMENT. I WAS MORE LIKE A ROMAN CANDLE, SHOOTING SPARKS IN EVERY DIRECTION AND DESTINED TO BURN OUT SPECTACULARLY.

BUT I COULDN'T STOP. THE TRAINING WITH ANDY BECAME MY LIFELINE, A WAY TO RECONNECT WITH THE STRENGTH AND DISCIPLINE I'D LEFT BEHIND WHEN I BECAME LILY. EVERY MORNING, I'D PUSH MYSELF HARDER, FASTER, TRYING TO OUTRUN THE DOUBTS AND FEARS THAT CHASED ME.

ANDY NOTICED. "YOU'RE GOING TOO HARD, DEE," HE'D SAY, WATCHING ME PUMMEL THE PUNCHING BAG. "THIS ISN'T



ABOUT GETTING STRONGER ANYMORE, IS IT?"

"SOMEBODY WANTS TO KILL ME."

"AND, WHAT, YOU'RE TRYING TO BEAT THEM TO IT?"

I IGNORED HIM, FOCUSING ON THE RHYTHMIC THUD OF MY FISTS AGAINST THE BAG. *THUD. THUD. THUD.*

ON SET, I THREW MYSELF INTO LILY'S STORYLINES WITH RENEWED VIGOR. THE EPISODE WHERE SHE CONFRONTED HER WOULD-BE KILLER WAS INTENSE. AS I DELIVERED MY LINES, STARING DOWN THE POOR ACTOR PLAYING IVY'S EX-BOYFRIEND, SOMETHING SNAPPED. THE WORDS FLOWED OUT, MY VOICE TREMBLING WITH GENUINE FEAR AND ANGER - NOT JUST LILY'S, BUT MY OWN.

"YOU THOUGHT YOU COULD SILENCE ME?" I SPAT WITH TEARS STREAMING DOWN MY FACE. "THAT YOU COULD ERASE WHO I AM? ASSHOLE, THE WHOLE FUCKING WORLD

HAS BEEN TRYING TO DO THAT MY ENTIRE LIFE. YOU'RE NOTHING NEW."

I STEPPED CLOSER. WAS I EVEN RECITING THE LINES ANYMORE? I DIDN'T KNOW. "YOU WANT TO KNOW WHAT IT'S LIKE? TO WAKE UP EVERY DAY HATING YOURSELF SO MUCH YOU CAN BARELY BREATHE? TO LOOK IN THE MIRROR AND SEE A STRANGER STARING BACK? I USED TO DREAM ABOUT DYING. ABOUT SLIPPING AWAY IN MY SLEEP, OR STEPPING IN FRONT OF A BUS. ANYTHING TO MAKE IT STOP."

MY VOICE CRACKED, BUT I PUSHED ON. "I CLAWED MY WAY OUT OF THAT DARKNESS, AND I'M NOT GOING BACK. YOU THINK YOU CAN BREAK ME? I'VE ALREADY BEEN BROKEN AND PUT BACK TOGETHER. AND YOU? YOU'RE SO AFRAID OF WHAT YOU DON'T UNDERSTAND THAT YOU'D RATHER DESTROY IT THAN FACE IT. I'M NOT AFRAID OF YOU, I *PITY* YOU."

THE SET WAS DEAD SILENT AS I FINISHED. I COULD FEEL THE WEIGHT OF EVERYONE'S STARES, BUT ALL I COULD FOCUS ON WAS THE POUNDING OF MY HEART AND THE TEARS ON MY CHEEKS.

"CUT!" MELISSA'S VOICE BROKE THE SILENCE. "THAT WAS... JESUS, DYLAN. THAT WAS INCREDIBLE."

THE EPISODE WAS A HIT. CRITICS RAVED ABOUT MY PERFORMANCE, CALLING IT "RAW," "VISCERAL," AND "HEARTBREAKINGLY AUTHENTIC." THE EMMY BUZZ GREW LOUDER. BUT WITH EACH ACCOLADE, EACH GLOWING REVIEW, I FELT MORE AND MORE LIKE A FRAUD.

BECAUSE I WAS.

THE EMMY BUZZ CONTINUED TO GROW, BUT WITH EACH PASSING DAY, I FELT MORE DISCONNECTED FROM THE ACCOLADES. THE GRUELING WORKOUTS WITH ANDY BECAME MY ONLY REFUGE, A PLACE WHERE I COULD STILL FEEL LIKE THE OLD DYLAN, EVEN IF MY BODY WAS CHANGING MORE AND MORE.

AT HOME, THINGS WEREN'T MUCH BETTER. DAISY WAS AS SUPPORTIVE AS EVER, BUT I FOUND MYSELF PULLING AWAY. WHENEVER SHE'D GAZE AT ME WITH THOSE BIG,



BROWN, ADORING EYES, I FELT A PANG OF GUILT. SHE WAS A LESBIAN. SHE'D TAKEN A BIG RISK TO HER CAREER BY COMING OUT. AND NOW, SHE WAS IN LOVE WITH A WOMAN WHO DIDN'T EXIST. HOW FUCKED UP WAS THAT? EVERY DAY, EVERY KISS, EVERY TOUCH -- I WAS DECEIVING HER.

AND THAT'S WHAT REALLY HURT ABOUT THE THREATS. DEEP DOWN, I AGREED WITH THEM. I WAS A FRAUD, A LIAR, AN ACTOR PLAYING DRESS-UP.

SOME NIGHTS, I'D STARE INTO THE BATHROOM MIRROR AND TURN MY HEAD FROM LEFT TO RIGHT, RIGHT TO LEFT, TRYING TO GLIMPSE THE OLD DYLAN. BUT HE WAS GONE, REPLACED BY THIS SOFTER, PRETTIER VERSION. I'D TRACE THE SUBTLE CHANGES IN MY FACE -- THE HIGHER CHEEKBONES, THE SMOOTHER JAWLINE, THE SLIGHTLY UPTURNED NOSE. IT WAS STILL ME, BUT... NOT LIKE LOOKING INTO A FUNHOUSE MIRROR THAT HAD SOMEHOW BECOME REALITY.

"THEY'RE RIGHT," I'D SAY. "I AM A FREAK."

DAISY FOUND ME LIKE THAT ONE NIGHT, HUNCHED OVER THE SINK, TEARS STREAMING DOWN MY FACE. SHE WRAPPED HER ARMS AROUND ME FROM BEHIND, RESTING HER CHIN ON MY SHOULDER.

"BABY, WHAT'S WRONG?" SHE SAID.

I COULDN'T BRING MYSELF TO LOOK AT HER REFLECTION IN THE MIRROR. "NOTHING," I LIED. "JUST... OVERWHELMED, I GUESS."

SHE KISSED MY NECK SOFTLY. "YOU CAN TALK TO ME, YOU KNOW. ABOUT ANYTHING."

I NODDED, BUT THE WORDS STUCK IN MY THROAT. HOW COULD I TELL HER THE TRUTH? THAT EVERYTHING SHE LOVED ABOUT ME WAS A LIE? THAT THE WOMAN SHE'D FALLEN FOR WAS A CHARACTER I'D CREATED?

"THE HORMONES ARE CHANGING MORE THAN JUST MY BODY. MY EMOTIONS ARE ALL OVER THE PLACE."

DAISY GRINNED. "WELCOME TO WOMANHOOD, BABE."

"DOESN'T FEEL LIKE A WELCOME," I REPLIED. "FEELS LIKE AN AMBUSH."

SHE LAUGHED. "YOU'LL GET USED TO IT. WE ALL DO."

GET USED TO WHAT? BRAS, SKIRTS, MOOD SWINGS? THE CONSTANT FEAR OF WALKING ALONE AT NIGHT? THE WAY MEN'S EYES LINGERED A LITTLE TOO LONG, A LITTLE TOO HUNGRILY?

"I KNOW," I SAID INSTEAD. "I'M JUST TIRED."

DAISY TURNED ME AROUND, CUPPING MY FACE IN HER HANDS. "THEN LET'S GET YOU TO BED. EVERYTHING LOOKS BETTER IN THE MORNING, RIGHT?"

AS WE LAY IN BED THAT NIGHT, DAISY'S ARMS AROUND ME, I STARED AT THE CEILING, FEELING MORE ALONE THAN EVER. THE THREATS, THE FAME, AND THE LIES WERE ALL CLOSING IN ON ME. AND I HAD NO IDEA HOW TO ESCAPE.



"DAIS," I WHISPERED INTO THE DARKNESS. "WHAT IF... WHAT IF I'M NOT REALLY TRANS?"

SHE PROPPED HERSELF UP ON HER ELBOW, LOOKING AT ME WITH CONCERN. "WHAT DO YOU MEAN?"

I SWALLOWED HARD. "I MEAN, WHAT IF ALL OF THIS IS JUST...NOT REAL? WHAT IF IT'S AN ACT? WHAT IF I'M NOT... I'M NOT REALLY A WOMAN?"

DAISY WAS QUIET FOR A LONG MOMENT. THEN SHE REACHED OUT AND TOUCHED MY FACE, HER FINGERS TRACING THE NEW CONTOURS OF MY CHEEKBONES. "HONEY, I DON'T THINK ANYONE GOES THROUGH WHAT YOU'VE GONE THROUGH JUST FOR AN ACT. THE SURGERY, THE HORMONES... THAT'S NOT SOMETHING YOU DO LIGHTLY."

TEARS WELLED UP IN MY EYES. "BUT WHAT IF I DID? WHAT IF I'M THAT FUCKED UP?"



DAISY'S HAND STILLED ON MY FACE. "WHAT ARE YOU SAYING, DEE?"

I CLOSED MY EYES, UNABLE TO LOOK AT HER. "I'M SAYING... I LIED. TO GET THE PART. I WASN'T TRANS. I WAS JUST A GUY WHO WANTED TO BE FAMOUS."

I CAN'T DESCRIBE THE SILENCE THAT FOLLOWED. IT WAS LIKE ALL THE AIR HAD BEEN SUCKED OUT OF THE ROOM. I FELT DAISY'S BODY TENSE AGAINST MINE, HER HAND PULLING AWAY FROM MY FACE, AND WHEN I FINALLY WORKED UP THE COURAGE TO OPEN MY EYES, THE LOOK ON HER FACE DAMN NEAR BROKE ME.

"WHAT?" SHE WHISPERED. "YOU... YOU LIED?"

"AT FIRST, YEAH."

"BUT NOW?" SHE WAS PLEADING, HER EYES SEARCHING MINE FOR ANY HINT OF TRUTH, ANY SHRED OF THE WOMAN

SHE THOUGHT SHE KNEW. "PLEASE TELL ME THIS ISN'T... THAT YOU'RE NOT..."

I TOOK A DEEP BREATH. "I DON'T KNOW. I DON'T FUCKING KNOW ANYMORE."

DAISY SAT UP, PULLING AWAY. LOSING HER WARMTH FELT LIKE A PHYSICAL BLOW. "HOW CAN YOU NOT KNOW? DYLAN, THIS ISN'T... THIS ISN'T SOME ROLE YOU CAN JUST STEP IN AND OUT OF. THIS IS REAL LIFE. MY LIFE. OUR LIFE."

I SAT UP TOO, CROSSING MY ARMS OVER MY CHEST. I'D GOTTEN USED TO THE BREASTS BUT SUDDENLY THEY FELT ALIEN, LIKE TUMORS GROWING WHERE THEY DIDN'T BELONG. "YOU THINK I DON'T KNOW THAT? CHRIST, I LOOK IN THE MIRROR EVERY DAY AND I DON'T RECOGNIZE MYSELF. I'M GETTING DEATH THREATS FOR BEING SOMEONE I NEVER MEANT TO BECOME. I'M BEING GIVEN ACCOLADES AND AWARDS FOR PLAYING A TRANS GIRL, AND I STARTED THIS WHOLE THING AS A LIE. HOW FUCKED UP IS THAT?"

"PRETTY FUCKED UP," DAISY SAID, HER VOICE COLD. "SO WHAT WAS I? JUST PART OF THE ACT?"

THE HURT IN HER EYES CUT DEEP. "NO! GOD, NO. YOU'RE THE REALEST THING IN MY LIFE. YOU'RE THE ONLY THING THAT MAKES SENSE ANYMORE."

"BUT I FELL IN LOVE WITH A GIRL," SHE SAID QUIETLY. "A GIRL WHO WAS BRAVE ENOUGH TO BE HERSELF, NO MATTER WHAT. A GIRL I'VE BEEN WATCHING BLOSSOM FOR YEARS. WAS THAT ALL BULLSHIT?"

I REACHED FOR HER HAND, BUT SHE PULLED AWAY.

"I DON'T KNOW WHAT'S REAL ANYMORE," I SAID. "I STARTED THIS WHOLE THING AS A LIE, YEAH. BUT SOMEWHERE ALONG THE WAY... I DON'T KNOW. IT STARTED FEELING TRUE? OR MAYBE I JUST WANT IT TO BE TRUE SO BADLY THAT I CONVINCED MYSELF IT WAS."

DAISY STARED, ANGER AND CONFUSION ETCHED ON HER FACE. "SO WHAT ARE YOU EVEN SAYING? THAT YOU'RE ACTUALLY TRANS? OR THAT YOU'VE JUST BEEN PLAYING PRETEND THIS WHOLE TIME?"

"I DON'T FUCKING KNOW! THAT'S WHAT I'M TRYING TO TELL YOU. I LOOK IN THE MIRROR, AND I SEE LILY. I SEE THIS PERSON I'VE BECOME. AND SOMETIMES... SOMETIMES IT FEELS RIGHT. LIKE MAYBE THIS IS WHO I WAS SUPPOSED TO BE ALL ALONG. BUT THEN I REMEMBER HOW IT ALL STARTED, AND I FEEL LIKE THE BIGGEST LIAR IN THE WORLD."

DAISY STOOD UP, PACING THE ROOM. "DO YOU HAVE ANY IDEA HOW THIS SOUNDS? HOW... HOW INSULTING THIS IS? TO ME, TO ACTUAL TRANS PEOPLE, TO EVERYONE WHO'S SUPPORTED YOU?"

"YOU THINK I DON'T KNOW THAT?" I SHOT BACK. "YOU THINK I DON'T LIE AWAKE EVERY NIGHT HATING MYSELF FOR WHAT I'VE DONE? FOR THE LIES I'VE TOLD? FOR THE PEOPLE I'VE HURT?"

"THEN WHY'D YOU DO IT?" DAISY DEMANDED. "WHY KEEP GOING? WHY... WHY START A RELATIONSHIP WITH ME?"

"BECAUSE I WAS SCARED. BECAUSE I THOUGHT I'D LOSE EVERYTHING IF I TOLD THE TRUTH. BECAUSE... BECAUSE I STARTED FEELING THINGS I'D NEVER FELT BEFORE. FOR YOU, FOR THIS LIFE, FOR... FOR WHO I WAS BECOMING."

DAISY SHOOK HER HEAD, TEARS STREAMING DOWN HER FACE. "I CAN'T... I CAN'T DEAL WITH THIS RIGHT NOW. I NEED TO GO." I WATCHED, HELPLESS, AS SHE PULLED ON HER JEANS AND A SWEATER.

"PLEASE," I BEGGED, REACHING FOR HER. "DON'T GO. WE CAN FIGURE THIS OUT."

BUT SHE WAS ALREADY GRABBING HER PURSE, HEADING FOR THE DOOR. "I NEED TIME, DYLAN. OR WHOEVER THE HELL YOU ARE."

"ARE... ARE WE OVER?"

SHE PAUSED WITH HER HAND ON THE DOORKNOB, HER SHOULDERS SLUMPING. "I'M NOT SURE WE EVER BEGAN. DON'T CALL ME, PLEASE."

DAISY WALKED OUT, THE DOOR CLOSING BEHIND HER WITH A SOFT CLICK THAT SOMEHOW FELT MORE FINAL THAN ANY SLAM COULD HAVE.



I SANK TO THE FLOOR, MY BACK AGAINST THE BED, AND LET THE TEARS COME. THEY STREAMED DOWN MY FACE, HOT AND RELENTLESS, AS THE FULL WEIGHT OF WHAT I'D DONE CRASHED OVER ME. I'D LOST DAISY. I'D LOST MYSELF. AND FOR WHAT?

THE ROOM FELT TOO BIG, TOO EMPTY WITHOUT HER. I HUGGED MY KNEES TO MY CHEST, FEELING THE SOFT SWELL OF MY BREASTS PRESS AGAINST THEM. EVEN MY OWN BODY FELT LIKE A STRANGER.

"WHAT THE FUCK HAVE I DONE?"

EVENTUALLY, I DRIFTED INTO A FITFUL SLEEP, DREAMING OF FACES THAT MORPHED AND CHANGED. WHEN I WOKE UP THE NEXT MORNING, MY PILLOW WAS DAMP WITH TEARS I DIDN'T REMEMBER CRYING. MY PHONE WAS BLOWING UP WITH MESSAGES -- FROM MY AGENT, FROM MELISSA, FROM THE NETWORK. BUT THE ONE NAME I WAS HOPING TO SEE WAS CONSPICUOUSLY ABSENT.

DAISY.

I PICKED UP MY PHONE, MY THUMB HOVERING OVER HER CONTACT. BUT WHAT WOULD I EVEN SAY? 'HEY, SORRY I LIED ABOUT MY ENTIRE IDENTITY. WANT TO GRAB COFFEE?'

I STARED AT THE SCREEN, THE URGE TO CALL DAISY WARRING WITH THE KNOWLEDGE THAT I'D PROBABLY MAKE THINGS WORSE. IN THE END, I TOSSED THE PHONE ASIDE AND DRAGGED MYSELF TO THE SHOWER. THE HOT WATER DIDN'T WASH AWAY MY PROBLEMS, BUT AT LEAST IT GAVE ME A FEW MINUTES TO PRETEND THEY DIDN'T EXIST.

AS I GOT DRESSED, MY EYES FELL ON THE VANITY FAIR SPREAD FRAMED ON MY WALL. DAISY AND I, WRAPPED AROUND EACH OTHER, LOOKING DISGUSTINGLY IN LOVE. I TURNED IT FACE-DOWN. COULDN'T DEAL WITH THAT RIGHT NOW.

MY PHONE BUZZED AGAIN. THIS TIME IT WAS RICK, MY AGENT. "CALL ME NOW," THE TEXT READ. "EMMY NOM!!!"

I BLINKED, RE-READING THE MESSAGE. EMMY NOMINATION? FOR ME?

I CALLED RICK, MY HEART A JACKHAMMER IN MY CHEST. HE PICKED UP ON THE FIRST RING. "IS THIS FOR REAL?"

"YOU BET YOUR ASS IT IS, SWEETHEART!" RICK'S VOICE BOOMED THROUGH THE SPEAKER. "BEST ACTRESS IN A DRAMA SERIES. YOU'RE IN THE BIG LEAGUES NOW, KID!"

I SAT DOWN HARD ON THE EDGE OF MY BED. "HOLY SHIT."

"I KNOW, RIGHT? THIS IS HUGE. THE NETWORK'S OVER THE MOON. WE'VE GOT TO START PLANNING YOUR CAMPAIGN STRATEGY, YOUR RED CARPET LOOK--"

"RICK," I CUT HIM OFF. "I CAN'T... I CAN'T DO THIS."

THERE WAS A PAUSE ON THE OTHER END. "ARE YOU HIGH? IT'S THE EMMYS! THIS IS WHAT WE'VE BEEN WORKING TOWARDS."

A SOB-LAUGH ESCAPED MY LIPS. "YOU DON'T GET IT. I'M A FRAUD, MAN."



"OH, CHRIST," RICK SIGHED. "NOT THIS AGAIN. LOOK, WE'VE BEEN OVER THIS. YOU'RE NOT--"

"I TOLD DAISY," I BLURTED OUT. "LAST NIGHT. I TOLD HER EVERYTHING."

SILENCE. THEN: "FUCK."

"YEAH," I SAID. "FUCK IS RIGHT."

RICK WAS QUIET FOR A LONG MOMENT. WHEN HE SPOKE AGAIN, HIS VOICE WAS UNCHARACTERISTICALLY GENTLE. "OKAY. THIS IS... NOT IDEAL. BUT WE CAN WORK WITH IT. WE'LL GET AHEAD OF THE STORY, SPIN IT AS A JOURNEY OF SELF-DISCOVERY OR SOME SHIT."

I SHOOK MY HEAD, EVEN THOUGH HE COULDN'T SEE ME. "SHE WON'T TELL ANYBODY, I DON'T THINK. BUT EVEN IF SHE DOES, WE AREN'T DOING THAT. THERE'S NO MORE LIES. NO MORE SPIN. I'M DONE."

"THINK ABOUT WHAT YOU'RE SAYING. THIS NOMINATION IS A ONCE-IN-A-LIFETIME OPPORTUNITY. AND IT'S EVERYTHING WE'VE WORKED FOR. YOU CAN'T THROW IT ALL AWAY NOW."

I CLOSED MY EYES, FEELING THE WEIGHT OF MY BREASTS AS I HUNCHED OVER. THE NOMINATION SHOULD'VE BEEN THE HIGHLIGHT OF MY CAREER. INSTEAD, IT FELT LIKE A NOOSE TIGHTENING AROUND MY NECK. "I CAN'T... I JUST CAN'T."

HE SIGHED HEAVILY. "ALRIGHT, KID. TAKE A DAY. CLEAR YOUR HEAD. WE'LL TALK STRATEGY TOMORROW."

I HUNG UP AND GAZED AT MY PHONE. MY FINGERS ITCHED TO TEXT DAISY, TO BEG FOR FORGIVENESS, TO EXPLAIN... WHAT? THAT I WAS SORRY FOR LYING? THAT I DIDN'T KNOW WHO I WAS ANYMORE? THAT MAYBE, JUST MAYBE, THE LIE HAD BECOME THE TRUTH SOMEWHERE ALONG THE WAY?

INSTEAD, I SCROLLED TO A DIFFERENT CONTACT. *DAD.*

WE HADN'T SPOKEN SINCE HE'D BLOWN UP MY CAREFULLY CONSTRUCTED HOUSE OF CARDS. PART OF ME HATED HIM FOR IT. ANOTHER PART, A PART I DIDN'T WANT TO EXAMINE TOO CLOSELY, WAS GRATEFUL.

I TYPED OUT A MESSAGE, DELETED IT, TYPED AGAIN. FINALLY, I SETTLED ON SOMETHING SIMPLE:

CAN I COME HOME? I NEED TO TALK.

I HIT SEND BEFORE I COULD CHICKEN OUT, THEN TOSSED THE PHONE ASIDE LIKE IT WAS ON FIRE. MY HEART RACED AS I WAITED FOR A RESPONSE, SUDDENLY ACUTELY AWARE OF EVERY FEMININE CURVE OF MY BODY. THE SOFT SWELL OF MY BREASTS, THE WIDER CURVE OF MY HIPS, THE SMOOTHNESS OF MY SKIN -- ALL OF IT FELT BOTH FOREIGN AND FAMILIAR, A COSTUME I'D BEEN WEARING SO LONG IT HAD FUSED TO MY SKIN.

THE PHONE BUZZED. I SNATCHED IT UP, MY HANDS SHAKING.

DOOR'S ALWAYS OPEN, SON.



SON. THE WORD HIT LIKE A KICK TO THE NUTS. IS THAT WHAT I WAS? A SON? AFTER EVERYTHING I'D DONE, EVERYTHING I'D BECOME?

I PACKED A BAG, NOT BOTHERING TO BRING MUCH. JUST THE ESSENTIALS AND SOME OLD CLOTHES I HOPED MIGHT STILL FIT. AS I ZIPPED UP THE SUITCASE, I CAUGHT SIGHT OF MYSELF IN THE MIRROR. LILY STARED BACK AT ME, HER EYES WIDE AND SCARED.

THE DRIVE TO IDAHO WAS LONG AND TORTUROUS, MY MIND RACING THE ENTIRE TIME. MEMORIES OF MY OLD LIFE, MY OLD SELF, PLAYED LIKE A HIGHLIGHT REEL IN MY HEAD. THE BOY WHO WANTED TO BE AN ACTION STAR, THE BOY WHO RAN AWAY FROM HIS HOMETOWN, THE BOY WHO THOUGHT HE COULD CONQUER HOLLYWOOD WITH ONLY ABS AND AMBITION, AND NOW -- MAYBE -- THE GIRL WHO WAS COMING HOME.

THIRTEEN HOURS OF DRIVING LATER, I PULLED INTO THE

DRIVEWAY. THE HOUSE LOOKED SMALLER THAN I REMEMBERED. HAD I BEEN AWAY FOR THAT LONG?

I SHUT OFF THE ENGINE AND SAT THERE, PARALYZED. WHAT WOULD DAD SEE WHEN HE OPENED THE DOOR? HIS SON? HIS DAUGHTER? A STRANGER?

TAKING A DEEP BREATH, I STEPPED OUT OF THE CAR, FEELING EXPOSED AND VULNERABLE. WHY HAD I WORN A SKIRT? MY HEELS CLICKED ON THE PAVEMENT -- A SOUND SO FOREIGN IN THIS FAMILIAR PLACE.

I RAISED MY HAND TO KNOCK, BUT BEFORE I COULD, THE DOOR SWUNG OPEN. DAD STOOD ON THE OTHER SIDE.

"HEY, UM..." I SAID, MY VOICE CATCHING.

HE LOOKED AT ME FOR A LONG MOMENT, THEN OPENED HIS ARMS.

"WELCOME BACK, SWEETHEART."



Velma cosplay.


Topless girl cosplay.

ANYWHERE BUT BORING

A memoir and retrospective on the award-winning television series, written by the breakout star

DYLAN KIRKHAM

PART 7
Series Finale

WALKING INTO THE LIVING ROOM WAS LIKE STEPPING BACK IN TIME. THE OLD LEATHER COUCH WHERE I'D SPENT HOURS PLAYING XBOX. DAD'S BEAT-UP RECLINER, ITS ARM PATCHED WITH DUCT TAPE FROM MY LORD OF THE RINGS SWORD "ACCIDENT." HIS BOWLING TROPHIES ON THE MANTEL, STILL SHINY. ONLY THE NEW FLAT-SCREEN TV AND THE EXTRA GRAY IN DAD'S MUSTACHE SHOWED THAT ANY TIME HAD PASSED AT ALL. EVERYTHING ELSE WAS FROZEN - A MUSEUM OF MY OLD LIFE.

AND THERE I WAS, THE MAIN ATTRACTION - DYLAN 2.0, NOW WITH TITS AND AN EMMY NOD. I SET MY BAG DOWN AND LOOKED AROUND. "LOOKS THE SAME."

DAD'S EYES FOLLOWING MINE AROUND THE ROOM. "NOT EVERYTHING NEEDS CHANGING."

"RIGHT."

HE SHUT THE DOOR, AND I FELT HIM LOOKING ME OVER. NOT JUDGING, NOT ACCEPTING. JUST... WATCHING. LIKE HE WAS TRYING TO MATCH THIS NEW ME WITH HIS OLD SON.

HE CLEARED HIS THROAT. "WANT A BEER?"

I BLINKED, SURPRISED BY HOW NORMAL THAT SOUNDED. DID I EVEN DRINK BEER ANYMORE? FUCK, I COULDN'T REMEMBER MY LAST ONE. MY LIFE WAS ALL KALE SMOOTHIES AND SKINNY LATTES NOW - SHIT I USED TO MOCK.

"UH, SURE." MY VOICE CAME OUT HIGH AND WEIRD. DAMN VOCAL COACHING. HALF THE TIME, I FELT LIKE I WAS DOING A SHITTY IMPRESSION OF 'RANDOM SCREECHY GIRL.'

DAD VANISHED INTO THE KITCHEN AND I PERCHED ON THE EDGE OF THE COUCH, HYPER-AWARE OF MY SKIRT RIDING UP. I TUGGED AT THE HEM, TRYING TO COVER MORE SKIN. FUCK, WHY HADN'T I CHANGED?

MY EYES LANDED ON A PHOTO ON THE SIDE TABLE - ME AT HIGH SCHOOL GRADUATION. ALL COCKY GRIN AND BROAD SHOULDERS. I PICKED IT UP, STUDYING THE FACE OF THE BOY I USED TO BE. HE LOOKED SO DAMN SURE OF HIMSELF.



A MEMORY HIT ME: GRADUATION NIGHT, SNEAKING OUT TO THE OLD QUARRY WITH MY BUDDIES. CHUGGING CHEAP BEER AND MAKING BIG PLANS.

"YOU'LL SEE," I'D SLURRED, POINTING AT THE STARS WITH MY BEER. "ONE DAY, I'LL BE UP THERE WITH THE GREATS. PEOPLE WILL KNOW THE NAME DYLAN KIRKHAM!"

WELL, PEOPLE KNEW THE NAME NOW, ALRIGHT. JUST NOT IN THE WAY I'D IMAGINED.

I STARED AT OLD ME. CONFIDENT. CLUELESS. NO IDEA HE'D END UP WITH A DIFFERENT FACE, A DIFFERENT BODY, A DIFFERENT LIFE THAN HE EVER IMAGINED. HOW THE FUCK DID I GET HERE?

ARROGANCE. LIES. DESPERATION. TAKE YOUR PICK.

"HERE YA GO," DAD SAID, COMING BACK WITH TWO COORS LIGHTS. HE GAVE ME ONE, EYEING MY FANCY NAILS.

"THANKS." I CRINGED AT MY HIGH VOICE AGAIN. DID HE THINK I SOUNDED RIDICULOUS? PROBABLY. I COULD TRY TO LOWER IT, BUT HONESTLY, I WASN'T SURE I REMEMBERED HOW TO TALK 'LIKE A DUDE' ANYMORE.

HE PLOPPED INTO HIS CHAIR WITH A GRUNT. "SO." DAD TOOK A GULP OF BEER. "YOU WANTED TO TALK."

I NODDED, STUCK FOR WORDS. WHAT COULD I SAY? SORRY FOR NOT CALLING? SORRY FOR GROWING TITS AND CHANGING MY FACE? SORRY FOR LYING TO GET A ROLE BECAUSE I WAS SICK OF EATING RICE AND BEANS?

"MOM'S BACK TOMORROW," DAD WENT ON. "WORK TRIP TO BOISE. COULDN'T SKIP IT. SHE'S DYING TO SEE YOU, THOUGH."

I NODDED AGAIN, SIPPING MY BEER TO STALL. FUCK, IT TASTED AWFUL. WHEN DID I STOP LIKING BEER?

"I GOT AN EMMY NOM," I BLURTED OUT. SHIT. OF ALL THE THINGS TO SAY, WHY THAT?

DAD'S EYEBROWS SHOT UP. "NO SHIT? THAT'S... SOMETHING, ALRIGHT."

"YEAH," I SAID, DEFLATING A BIT. "I PROBABLY WON'T WIN, THAT BITCH MEREDITH FROM 'HEARTLAND HOSPITAL' IS A SHOE-IN. PLUS, YOU KNOW, SOMEBODY MIGHT SECRETLY FLY OUT TO L.A. TO TELL THEM I'M A BIG FAKER."

DAD'S FACE DARKENED. "DYLAN, I DID WHAT I THOUGHT WAS RIGHT, TALKING TO YOUR PRODUCER. SHE'S A NICE LADY, BY THE WAY. I NEVER WANTED TO HURT YOU, BUT I COULDN'T STAND BY WHILE YOU TOOK AN OPPORTUNITY FROM SOMEONE WHO NEEDED IT - AND WHO DESERVED IT, TOO. THAT ISN'T HOW I RAISED YOU TO BE."

"I KNOW, DAD. I GET IT. I FUCKED UP, AND I...I KEEP MAKING IT WORSE."

"WHAT DO YOU MEAN?"

I SIGHED, TWIRLING MY HAIR LIKE SOME DUMB VALLEY GIRL. "I SPILLED MY GUTS TO DAISY. TOLD HER HOW I BULLSHITTED MY WAY INTO THE ROLE. SHE BOLTED. PROBABLY WON'T SEE HER AGAIN."

DAD'S FACE SOFTENED A BIT. "DAMN. THAT'S ROUGH."

"YEAH, NO SHIT," I SAID, CHUGGING MORE BEER. THE TASTE WAS GROWING ON ME AGAIN. "I HAD IT COMING. WHAT'D I EXPECT? 'HEY BABE, REMEMBER HOW WE'RE HOLLYWOOD'S HOTTEST LESBIANS? WELL, I'VE BEEN BULLSHITTING THE WHOLE TIME!' FUCK, I'M SUCH AN ASSHOLE."

"YOU REALLY LIKE HER, HUH?"

TEARS HIT MY EYES. STUPID HORMONES. "SHE'S... SHE'S EVERYTHING. WITH HER, I FORGET ALL THIS CRAP. THE LIES, THE ACT, ALL OF IT. IT JUST FEELS REAL."

"AND WHEN YOU'RE NOT WITH HER?" DAD'S VOICE WAS GENTLE, LIKE WHEN I WAS LITTLE.

"WEIRD. SOMETIMES I FEEL LOST, LIKE I'M ON STAGE WITH NO SCRIPT."

"AND OTHER TIMES?"

I WATCHED THE BEER CAN SWEAT, THINKING HOW I USED TO SMASH EMPTIES ON MY HEAD TO IMPRESS GIRLS. NOW I WORRY ABOUT MY MAKEUP. LIFE'S STRANGE.

"OTHER TIMES?" I SIGHED, TRYING NOT TO SOUND LIKE A CRAPPY TV MOVIE. "IT'S BIZARRE. YESTERDAY, I FIXED MY BRA STRAP WITHOUT THINKING. JUST DID IT, YOU KNOW? THEN I REMEMBERED I DIDN'T ALWAYS HAVE BOOBS, AND I NEARLY HAD A FUCKING ANEURYSM. IT'S LIKE MY BODY'S COOL WITH THIS GIRL SHIT, BUT MY BRAIN'S STILL CATCHING UP. OR MAYBE THAT'S ASS BACKWARDS."

DAD SAT BACK, WATCHING ME.

"BUT FUCK, DAD, I STILL HAVE DREAMS. PART OF ME THINKS I CAN STILL BE THE NEXT BIG ACTION STAR. ONLY NOW I HAVE TO PICTURE MYSELF IN A SKINTIGHT DRESS, ROUNDHOUSE KICKING A BAD GUY WHILE MY BOOBS DO THEIR OWN STUNT WORK. IN SLOW-MO, OBVIOUSLY." I SNORTED, BUT IT CAME OUT MORE DESPERATE THAN AMUSED. "DYLAN KIRKHAM: TRANS ACTION HERO. COMING TO A THEATER NEAR YOU. BET THAT WOULD REALLY PISS OFF THOSE PSYCHOS SENDING ME DEATH THREATS."

Used to love this magazine as a kid. Never imagined I'd end up their cover girl!

MAXIM



How to make the "new" girl fall for you.

Quest for the best bar in America.

Boring, WY: Where men are men and women are...

DYLAN

Hello, Boys!

"HOLD ON. DEATH THREATS?" HE LEANED FORWARD WITH A BIG FROWN. "WHAT DO YOU MEAN?"

"IT'S A LONG STORY. ACTUALLY, NO, IT'S A SHORT STORY. SOME ASSHOLES ARE WRITING THAT THEY WANT TO KILL ME. SOMETIMES, THEY EVEN WRITE ABOUT ***HOW*** THEY WANT TO KILL ME. I'M NOT A FAN."

"JESUS, DYLAN. I'M SORRY, I HAD NO IDEA."

"YEAH. IT'S MESSED UP. BUT YOU KNOW WHAT'S ***REALLY*** MESSED UP?" I WAS ON A ROLL NOW, WORDS POURING OUT LIKE VOMIT AFTER TOO MANY SHOTS. "DESPITE ALL THIS, SOMETIMES I CATCH MY REFLECTION AND DO A DOUBLE TAKE. NOT BECAUSE I LOOK LIKE A FREAK, BUT BECAUSE FOR A SPLIT SECOND I THINK, 'DAMN, SHE'S HOT. THEN I REALIZE IT'S ME, AND I FEEL LIKE THE WORLD'S BIGGEST PERVERT. SO NOT ONLY AM I A FRAUD, I'M A NARCISSIST. EMPHASIS ON THE 'CIS.'"

"HUH?"

"SORRY," I SHOOK MY HEAD. "DUMB JOKE. I'VE BEEN HANGING OUT IN THE WRITER'S ROOM TOO MUCH"

MORE BEER SIPS. "OH. UH. OKAY."

I LOOKED AT HIM, WONDERING IF HE COULD SEE THE SHITSTORM RAGING BEHIND MY EYES. DID MY DAD STILL SEE HIS SON SITTING THERE? OR DID I LOOK LIKE A BAD SNAPCHAT FILTER ON THE BOY HE'D RAISED TO BE A MAN, NOT A LIAR...AND CERTAINLY NOT A GIRL.

HE LEANED FORWARD, ALL SERIOUS DAD MODE. "ALRIGHT. CAN I ASK YOU SOMETHING, DYLAN? AND I NEED YOU TO CUT THE CRAP. NO MORE LIES, NO MORE ACTING."

I SWALLOWED HARD, MY ADAM'S APPLE - OR WHAT WAS LEFT OF IT AFTER MY SURGERY - BOBBING. "SHOOT."

"WHEN YOU WERE A KID...DID YOU EVER FEEL, I DON'T KNOW, DIFFERENT? LIKE MAYBE YOU WEREN'T SUPPOSED TO BE A BOY?"

I CROSSED MY LEGS, SQUEEZING THE BEER CAN LIKE A

STRESS BALL. "JESUS. YOU TOO? WHY DOES EVERYONE KEEP ASKING ME THAT LIKE I HAVEN'T THOUGHT ABOUT IT A MILLION TIMES?"

"WELL, WHEN THEY ASK YOU, DO YOU DODGE IT LIKE YOU'RE DODGING ME NOW?"

I SIGHED. DAD HAD ALWAYS BEEN A HUMAN LIE DETECTOR. MAYBE THAT'S WHY I DRAGGED MY ASS HOME. THERAPY'S GREAT AND ALL, BUT SOMETIMES YOU NEED YOUR OLD MAN TO GRILL YOU UNTIL YOU CRACK LIKE AN EGG.

"I DON'T KNOW, OKAY? YEAH, I WONDERED WHAT IT'D BE LIKE TO BE A GIRL. BUT DOESN'T EVERY GUY?"

HE VERY SLOWLY SHOOK HIS HEAD. "NOT EVEN CLOSE."

THAT COULDN'T BE RIGHT. I MEAN, SURE, MAYBE NOT ALL THE TIME, BUT...

"YOU'RE SHITTING ME," I SAID. "C'MON, EVERY DUDE'S AT LEAST THOUGHT ABOUT IT. RIGHT?"

HE STROKED HIS MUSTACHE. "I'VE NEVER ONCE WONDERED WHAT IT'D BE LIKE TO BE A WOMAN. NOT SERIOUSLY, ANYWAY. MAYBE AS A JOKE, LIKE 'HA HA, WOULDN'T IT BE FUNNY IF...' BUT NEVER AS SOMETHING I ACTUALLY WANTED. BEING A WOMAN SEEMS LIKE A NIGHTMARE, TO BE HONEST."

"OKAY. I MEAN, I'M... I'M NOT SAYING I THOUGHT ABOUT IT ALL THE TIME. I WASN'T, LIKE, *FIXATED*. IT WAS JUST... A THOUGHT THAT CROSSED MY MIND ONCE IN A WHILE."

I STARED AT MY HANDS, SUDDENLY REMEMBERING ALL THOSE MOMENTS I'D PUSHED AWAY. THE TIMES AT RECESS WHERE I'D WATCH THE GIRLS BRAID EACH OTHER'S HAIR, FEELING A STRANGE ACHE IN MY CHEST. THE WAY I'D STUDY HOW THEY MOVED, HOW THEY LAUGHED, WISHING I COULD BE PART OF THAT WORLD INSTEAD OF JUST ORBITING IT. I'D WONDER WHAT IT WOULD BE LIKE TO BE ONE OF THEM, TO FIT IN SO EFFORTLESSLY, TO BELONG. TO NOT BE THE TOKEN GUY THEY KEPT AROUND BECAUSE I WAS "SAFE," NOT LIKE THE OTHER BOYS WHO ONLY SAW THEM AS CONQUESTS.

I WAS THEIR FRIEND, THEIR CONFIDANT, BUT ALWAYS ON



THE OUTSIDE OF AN IMPOSSIBLY THICK GLASS WALL LOOKING IN. AND EVERY TIME THEY'D SAY, "YOU'RE NOT LIKE OTHER GUYS, DYLAN," PART OF ME JUST FELT CONFUSED. WASN'T I? DIDN'T EVERY BOY FEEL THIS WAY? IF YOU LOVE GIRLS LIKE I DID, DIDN'T THAT MEAN YOU WANTED TO BE AROUND THEM ALL THE TIME, TO UNDERSTAND THEM COMPLETELY?

DAD'S VOICE PULLED ME BACK. "HOW OFTEN DID YOU THINK ABOUT IT?"

I SHRUGGED, SUDDENLY VERY UNCOMFORTABLE. "I DON'T KNOW. SOMETIMES. WHEN I WAS YOUNGER, MAYBE MORE. BUT THEN I GOT INTO WORKING OUT, CHASING GIRLS, AND IT KIND OF... FADED, I GUESS."

"FADED OR YOU PUSHED IT AWAY?"

I LOOKED AT HIM SHARPLY. "WHAT'S THAT SUPPOSED TO MEAN?"

HE HELD UP HIS HANDS. "JUST ASKING. YOU WERE PRETTY INTENSE ABOUT THE WHOLE BODYBUILDING THING. AND THE ACTION STAR DREAM. IT'S LIKE YOU WERE TRYING TO BE THE MANLIEST MAN WHO EVER MANNED."

I OPENED MY MOUTH TO ARGUE, THEN CLOSED IT. HE WASN'T WRONG. I'D THROWN MYSELF INTO THAT LIFE WITH A DESPERATION THAT, IN HINDSIGHT, SEEMED A LITTLE... EXCESSIVE.

"I JUST WANTED TO BE SUCCESSFUL," I MUMBLED.

DAD RAN A HAND THROUGH WHAT WAS LEFT OF HIS HAIR. "I GUESS IT'S TIME I TOLD YOU SOMETHING. SOMETHING I'M NOT PROUD OF."

I WATCHED HIM, MY HEART RACING. WHAT THE FUCK NOW?

"YOU REMEMBER WHEN YOU WERE ABOUT FIVE? YOUR MOM WAS GOING THROUGH CHEMO, LOST MOST OF HER HAIR."

I FROWNED, CONFUSED BY THE SUDDEN CHANGE IN TOPIC. "VAGUELY. WHAT'S THAT GOT TO DO WITH ANYTHING?"

"WELL, SHE HAD THIS WIG. REAL FANCY THING, COST A FORTUNE. AND YOU... YOU WERE OBSESSED WITH IT."

MY STOMACH DROPPED. "WHAT DO YOU MEAN, OBSESSED?"

DAD'S EYES GOT A FARAWAY LOOK. "YOU'D SNEAK INTO OUR ROOM WHEN MOM WAS TAKING A SHOWER, PUT ON THAT WIG AND HER CLOTHES. YOU'D JUST SORT OF... STARE AT YOURSELF IN THAT BIG MIRROR ON THE CLOSET, OR DO A LITTLE DANCE."

"NO. NO WAY. I DON'T REMEMBER THAT AT ALL."

DAD NODDED, HIS EXPRESSION PAINED. "YOUR MOM THOUGHT IT WAS ADORABLE. ME? I... I'M ASHAMED TO SAY I FREAKED OUT. DIDN'T GET MORE INFORMED UNTIL AFTER YOUR UNCLE PETER CAME OUT AND THE WHOLE FAMILY TREATED HIM LIKE CRAP. THAT WAS A WAKE-UP CALL."

"BUT... KIDS DRESS UP ALL THE TIME, RIGHT? IT DOESN'T

MEAN ANYTHING."

"SURE, KIDS DRESS UP," HE SAID. "BUT THIS FELT DIFFERENT. YOU WERE INCONSOLABLE WHEN WE'D MAKE YOU TAKE THE CLOTHES OFF. KEPT PUTTING THEM ON UNTIL WE HAD TO LOCK THE DRAWERS. IT WASN'T JUST PLAY TO YOU."

I FELT LIKE I'D BEEN PUNCHED IN THE GUT. MY MIND RACED BACK THROUGH MEMORIES, TRYING TO MAKE SENSE OF THIS NEW INFORMATION. ALL THOSE TIMES I'D STARED AT MOM'S MAKEUP, WONDERING HOW IT'D LOOK ON ME. THE HALLOWEEN WHEN I BEGGED TO BE WONDER WOMAN AND SETTLED FOR SUPERMAN BECAUSE DAD SAID IT WASN'T "APPROPRIATE." THE WAY I'D ALWAYS GRAVITATED TOWARDS FEMALE CHARACTERS IN VIDEO GAMES, INSISTING IT WAS JUST FOR THE "SMALLER HITBOX."

"FUCK," I WHISPERED, MORE TO MYSELF THAN TO DAD. "BUT... BUT I LIKED GIRLS. I DATED GIRLS. I WANTED TO BE A FUCKING ACTION STAR, FOR CHRIST'S SAKE!"

DAD LEANED FORWARD, HIS EYES SERIOUS. "DYLAN, LIKING GIRLS DOESN'T MEAN YOU CAN'T BE ONE. ISN'T THE CHARACTER YOU'RE PLAYING A LESBIAN? AND PLENTY OF WOMEN KICK ASS IN MOVIES THESE DAYS. HELL, YOU HAD POSTERS OF HALF OF THEM."

"B-BUT, I... LIFTING WEIGHTS... I LOVED IT! THAT'S NOT VERY GIRLY, IS IT?" I SPUTTERED, GRASPING AT STRAWS.

DAD SHRUGGED. "HAVE YOU SEEN FEMALE BODYBUILDERS? OR CROSSFIT ATHLETES? PLENTY OF WOMEN LOVE LIFTING."

MY MIND REELED. EVERY DEFENSE I'D BUILT UP OVER THE YEARS WAS CRUMBLING. BUT I HAD ONE LAST CARD TO PLAY.

"DAD, I LIKE MY DICK!" I BLURTED OUT. "I MEAN, I'VE NEVER WANTED TO... YOU KNOW... GET RID OF IT."

ALTHOUGH THE HORMONES SEEMED TO BE SHRINKING IT ANYWAY. AND WASN'T THAT A MINDFUCK? THE FIRST TIME I NOTICED IT LOOKING SMALLER IN THE SHOWER, I NEARLY HAD A PANIC ATTACK. BUT THEN... THEN I FELT THIS WEIRD



SENSE OF RELIEF. LIKE MAYBE IT WOULDN'T BE SO BAD IF IT JUST... DISAPPEARED.

DAD DIDN'T EVEN FLINCH. "NOT ALL TRANS WOMEN DO. IT'S CALLED BEING NON-OP. SOME ARE PERFECTLY HAPPY WITH WHAT THEY'VE GOT DOWN THERE."

I STARED, SLACK-JAWED. "HOW DO YOU KNOW ALL THIS?"

"AFTER I TALKED TO YOUR PRODUCER, MELISSA, I DID SOME READING. SHE'S A FASCINATING WOMAN AND I WANTED TO UNDERSTAND BETTER."

"THIS IS BULLSHIT!" THE BIG LIVING ROOM SUDDENLY FELT TOO SMALL, TOO SUFFOCATING. "I'M NOT... I CAN'T BE..."

"CAN'T BE WHAT?" DAD'S GENTLE VOICE FELT LIKE AN ACCUSATION. "TRANS?"

THE WORD HUNG IN THE AIR BETWEEN US, HEAVY AND

SCARY. I PACED THE LIVING ROOM, MY PUMPS CLICKING ON THE HARDWOOD FLOOR. WHEN DID I GET SO COMFORTABLE IN HEELS?

"I LIED!" MY VOICE SOUNDED SHRILL, PANICKED. "I LIED TO GET THE PART. I'M A FRAUD! THAT'S WHY YOU RATTED ME OUT TO MELISSA."

DAD SIGHED, RUBBING HIS FACE. "I KNOW. AND I'M SORRY ABOUT THAT. I THOUGHT I WAS DOING THE RIGHT THING. BUT DYLAN, MAYBE... MAYBE YOU LIED YOUR WAY INTO THE TRUTH."

I STOPPED PACING, STARING AT HIM. "WHAT THE HELL DOES THAT EVEN MEAN?"

"SOMETIMES WE DO THINGS FOR THE WRONG REASONS, BUT THEY END UP LEADING US WHERE WE NEED TO GO." HE STOOD UP, APPROACHING ME SLOWLY LIKE I WAS A SPOOKED ANIMAL. "MAYBE YOU TOOK THIS ROLE THINKING IT WAS JUST A PART, BUT... HONEY, I'VE NEVER SEEN YOU MORE ALIVE THAN WHEN YOU'RE PLAYING LILY."

"YOU... YOU WATCH THE SHOW? I THOUGHT THAT AFTER EVERYTHING, YOU'D HATE IT. HATE ME."

DAD SHOOK HIS HEAD. "HOW COULD I HATE MY OWN KID? BESIDES, IT'S DAMN GOOD TELEVISION. AND YOU'RE INCREDIBLE IN IT. BUT I ALSO DON'T THINK IT'S JUST GOOD ACTING ANYMORE."

TEARS WELLED UP IN MY EYES, AND I DIDN'T BOTHER TRYING TO STOP THEM.

DAD LOOKED LIKE HE WANTED TO HUG ME BUT WAS FORCING HIMSELF TO STAY BACK. "DYLAN, HONEY, IT'S OKAY. YOU DON'T HAVE TO HAVE ALL THE ANSWERS RIGHT NOW."

"BUT I DO!" I YELLED, AND HE WINCED. "I HAVE A FUCKING EMMY NOMINATION FOR PLAYING A TRANS WOMAN. I HAVE DEATH THREATS FROM PEOPLE WHO THINK I'M REALLY TRANS. I HAVE A GIRLFRIEND - EX-GIRLFRIEND - WHO FELL IN LOVE WITH ME AS A WOMAN. AND NOW YOU'RE TELLING ME I MIGHT ACTUALLY BE ONE? HOW IS ANY OF THIS OKAY? I FEEL LIKE I'M DROWNING AND I CAN'T TELL WHICH WAY IS UP."

I COLLAPSED BACK ONTO THE COUCH, BURYING MY FACE IN MY HANDS. "I JUST WISH THERE WAS SOME WAY TO KNOW FOR SURE."

I FELT DAD'S WEIGHT SETTLE NEXT TO ME ON THE COUCH. HE DIDN'T TOUCH ME, BUT I COULD SENSE HIS PRESENCE, SOLID AND COMFORTING, LIKE SOME OLD OAK TREE THAT HAD WEATHERED A THOUSAND STORMS.

"THERE'S NO MAGIC TEST," HE SAID SOFTLY. "THAT'S SOMETHING ONLY YOU CAN FIGURE OUT."

I LOOKED UP AT HIM, MASCARA PROBABLY SMEARED ALL OVER MY FACE. "BUT HOW? HOW DO I KNOW IF THIS IS REAL OR IF I'VE JUST CONVINCED MYSELF IT IS BECAUSE OF THE SHOW?"

DAD WAS QUIET FOR A MOMENT, THINKING. THEN HE SAID, "CLOSE YOUR EYES."

"WHAT?"

"JUST HUMOR YOUR OLD MAN, OKAY?"

I SIGHED BUT DID AS HE ASKED, CLOSING MY EYES.

"NOW," HIS VOICE WAS GENTLE, "PICTURE YOURSELF IN TEN YEARS. YOU'RE SUCCESSFUL, HAPPY. WHAT DO YOU SEE?"

I TOOK A DEEP BREATH, TRYING TO CALM MY RACING THOUGHTS. "I SEE... I SEE MYSELF ON THE RED CARPET."

"WHAT ARE YOU WEARING?"

I DIDN'T WANT TO SAY IT. SHAME BURNED IN MY CHEEKS. DAD SAW, HE MUST HAVE, BECAUSE HE PUT A HAND ON MY SHOULDER. "WHATEVER YOU SEE, IT'S OKAY."

I SWALLOWED HARD. "A DRESS. A BEAUTIFUL, SPARKLY GOWN. MY HAIR'S DONE UP, MAKEUP PERFECT. I'M SMILING FOR THE CAMERAS. I LOOK... I LOOK HAPPY. REALLY HAPPY."

"AND HOW DOES THAT MAKE YOU FEEL NOW, IMAGINING THAT FUTURE?"



"TERRIFIED," I WHISPERED.

"BUT WHY? THAT SOUNDS WONDERFUL."

BECAUSE I DON'T WANT PEOPLE TO HATE ME," I CHOKED OUT. "I DON'T WANT TO DISAPPOINT YOU, OR MOM, OR... OR ANYONE. I..." DON'T SAY IT, DON'T ADMIT TO IT. THEY'LL *FIND* YOU. "I... I DON'T WANT TO BE A FREAK."

DAD'S HAND TIGHTENED ON MY SHOULDER. "DYLAN, LOOK AT ME."

I OPENED MY EYES, BLINKING AWAY TEARS. HIS FACE WAS BLURRY, BUT I COULD SEE THE INTENSITY IN HIS EYES.

"YOU'RE *NOT* A FREAK. AND I LOVE YOU NO MATTER WHAT. WHETHER YOU'RE MY GUY OR...OR NOT, THAT DOESN'T CHANGE."

I STARTED CRYING. NOT THE PRETTY, HOLLYWOOD TEARS

I'D PERFECTED FOR THE CAMERAS, BUT UGLY, SNOTTY, CHEST-HEAVING SOBS. DAD PULLED ME INTO HIS ARMS, AND I BURIED MY FACE IN HIS SHOULDER, FEELING LIKE A LITTLE KID AGAIN.

"I'M SCARED, DAD," I SAID. "WHAT IF I'M MAKING A HUGE MISTAKE? WHAT IF THIS RUINS EVERYTHING?"

DAD STROKED MY HAIR, HIS VOICE RUMBLING IN HIS CHEST. "SHH, IT'S OKAY. YOU'RE ALLOWED TO BE SCARED. THIS IS BIG STUFF. BUT YOU'RE NOT ALONE. HEAR ME? YOUR MOM AND I, WE'RE HERE FOR YOU. ALWAYS."

I PULLED BACK, WIPING MY NOSE ON MY SLEEVE. "EVEN IF... EVEN IF I DECIDE I REALLY AM A GIRL?"

HE GRINNED, AND I SAW TEARS IN HIS EYES TOO. "ESPECIALLY THEN. BECAUSE THAT MEANS WE FINALLY GET TO MEET OUR DAUGHTER."

THAT WORD HIT LIKE A SLEDGEHAMMER. DAUGHTER. FUCK ME, I WAS SOMEONE'S DAUGHTER.

SUDDENLY, IT WAS LIKE SOMEONE CRANKED UP THE VOLUME ON MY LIFE. ALL THOSE WEIRD, CONFUSING FEELINGS I'D SHOVED DOWN FOR YEARS CAME RUSHING BACK IN A MONTAGE. THE WAY I'D STARE AT GIRLS, NOT JUST WITH DESIRE, BUT WITH ENVY. HOW I ALWAYS FELT MORE AT EASE AROUND THEM, LIKE I WAS PART OF SOME SECRET CLUB I WASN'T SUPPOSED TO KNOW ABOUT. HOW PUTTING ON LILY'S CLOTHES FOR THE FIRST TIME FELT LIKE COMING HOME.

"OH SHIT," I SAID. "I'M TRANS. I'M ACTUALLY FUCKING TRANS."

I DON'T KNOW HOW LONG WE SAT THERE, ME BAWLING LIKE A BABY AND DAD JUST HOLDING ON. EVENTUALLY, THE WATERWORKS SLOWED DOWN, AND I PULLED BACK, LOOKING LIKE A RACCOON WITH ALL MY SMEARED MAKEUP.

"OOPS," I SAID, EYEING THE MESS I'D MADE ON DAD'S SHIRT. "SORRY ABOUT THAT. GUESS THIS BRAND ISN'T AS WATERPROOF AS THEY CLAIM."

HE CHUCKLED. "TRUST ME, I'VE HAD WORSE ON THIS OLD

THING."

I LAUGHED, BUT IT CAME OUT MORE LIKE A HICCUP. THEN REALITY CRASHED BACK IN. "WHAT THE HELL DO I DO NOW?"

DAD SQUEEZED MY SHOULDER. "WELL, FIRST THINGS FIRST, I THINK YOU OWE SOMEONE AN APOLOGY. AND ONE HELL OF AN EXPLANATION."

MY STOMACH DROPPED. "DAISY."

HE NODDED. "AND THEN... WELL, I GUESS YOU'VE GOT A SHINY STATUE TO BRING HOME."

I SNORTED. "YEAH, RIGHT. I MEAN, I'M EXCITED TO BE NOMINATED, BUT THEY'LL NEVER LET A TRANS GIRL WIN. THEY ONLY GIVE THOSE AWARDS TO 'REAL' WOMEN."

THE WORDS LEFT MY MOUTH BEFORE I COULD STOP THEM. *TRANS GIRL.* I'D SAID IT. ABOUT MYSELF, NOT LILY. HOLY SHIT.

DAD RAISED AN EYEBROW. "YOU ARE A REAL WOMAN, DYLAN. AND FROM WHAT I'VE SEEN, A DAMN GOOD ACTRESS TOO."

I STOOD, WOBBLING A BIT IN MY HEELS. "I'M GONNA GET CLEANED UP."

AS I HEADED FOR THE BATHROOM, I CAUGHT SIGHT OF MYSELF IN THE HALLWAY MIRROR. MASCARA STREAKED, HAIR A MESS, BUT UNDERNEATH IT ALL, I SAW SOMETHING I'D NEVER NOTICED BEFORE. A GIRL. SCARED, CONFUSED, BUT A GIRL NONETHELESS.

IN THE BATHROOM, I SPLASHED WATER ON MY FACE, WATCHING THE MAKEUP RUN DOWN THE DRAIN. WITHOUT ALL THE HOLLYWOOD GLAM, I LOOKED... WELL, LIKE ME. I DIDN'T TURN MY HEAD AWAY FROM MY REFLECTION, TRYING TO CATCH A GLIMPSE OF THE OLD DYLAN. INSTEAD, I STARED STRAIGHT AHEAD, TAKING IN EVERY DETAIL OF MY NEW FACE. THE SOFTENED JAW, THE FULLER LIPS, THE ARCH OF MY BROWS. THE ELECTROLYSIS WAS STILL A (PAINFUL) WORK IN PROGRESS BUT MOST OF MY BEARD SHADOW WAS GONE. I LOOKED... PRETTY. NOT IN A BOMBSHELL WAY,

BUT IN A REAL, RAW KIND OF WAY.

"HI," I WHISPERED TO MY REFLECTION. "I'M DYLAN. AND I'M... I'M A WOMAN."

THE WORDS FELT STRANGE ON MY TONGUE, BUT RIGHT. LIKE I'D BEEN SPEAKING A FOREIGN LANGUAGE MY WHOLE LIFE AND HAD FINALLY LEARNED THE RIGHT WORDS.

WHEN I CAME BACK OUT, DAD WAS ON THE PHONE. "YEAH, SHE'S HERE," HE WAS SAYING. "NO, EVERYTHING'S FINE. JUST... A LOT TO PROCESS, OBVIOUSLY. OKAY, LOVE YOU TOO."

SHE. I WAS A 'SHE' NOW TO HIM. TO EVERYONE.

HE HUNG UP AND TURNED TO ME. "YOUR MOM. SHE'S COMING HOME EARLY."

I NODDED, SUDDENLY EXHAUSTED. "IS IT OKAY IF I CRASH IN MY OLD ROOM? I NEED TO THINK."

"OF COURSE, HONEY. TAKE ALL THE TIME YOU NEED."

I TRUDGED UP THE STAIRS, EACH STEP FEELING LIKE A MILE. MY OLD ROOM WAS EXACTLY AS I'D LEFT IT - POSTERS OF ACTION STARS AND SUPERMODELS COVERING THE WALLS, WEIGHTS IN THE CORNER, AND THAT RATTY OLD COMFORTER THAT WAS SOMEHOW MORE COMFORTABLE THAN ANYTHING I'D EVER SLEPT ON IN L.A.

I FLOPPED ONTO MY OLD BED, STARING AT THE CEILING. THE GLOW-IN-THE-DARK STARS I'D STUCK UP THERE AS A KID WERE STILL THERE, FADED BUT HOLDING ON.

I PULLED OUT MY PHONE, STARING AT DAISY'S CONTACT. MY THUMB HOVERED OVER THE CALL BUTTON. WHAT WOULD I EVEN SAY? 'HEY, REMEMBER HOW I SAID I WAS LYING ABOUT BEING TRANS? TURNS OUT I WAS LYING ABOUT LYING. AIN'T I JUST THE CUTEST?'

SHE'D SAID NOT TO CALL. BUT SHE DIDN'T SAY ANYTHING ABOUT TEXTING, RIGHT?

I TYPED OUT A MESSAGE, DELETING AND REWRITING IT SEVERAL TIMES BEFORE FINALLY SETTLING ON SOMETHING SIMPLE.



I KNOW YOU SAID NOT TO CALL, BUT I REALLY WANT TO TALK. I'VE REALIZED SOME THINGS, AND I NEED TO EXPLAIN. PLEASE?

I HIT SEND AND STARED AT THE SCREEN, WAITING FOR THE THREE LITTLE DOTS THAT WOULD SIGNAL HER RESPONSE. SECONDS TURNED INTO MINUTES, AND MY HEART SANK WITH EACH PASSING MOMENT OF SILENCE.

EVENTUALLY, EXHAUSTION WON OUT OVER FEAR. I PUT MY PHONE ON THE NIGHTSTAND AND CURLED UP UNDER THE COVERS. AS MY EYES CLOSED, I CLUNG TO THE HOPE THAT DAISY WOULD UNDERSTAND. LOSING THE WOMAN I CARED MOST ABOUT IN THE ENTIRE UNIVERSE, JUST AS I WAS FINDING THE WOMAN INSIDE MYSELF, SEEMED LIKE A CRUEL COSMIC JOKE.

WHEN I WOKE UP, THE ROOM WAS DARK EXCEPT FOR THE SOFT GLOW OF MY PHONE SCREEN. A MESSAGE NOTIFICATION LIT UP THE DISPLAY. HEART POUNDING, I

GRABBED THE PHONE AND OPENED THE MESSAGE.

IT WAS FROM DAISY.

OKAY. LET'S TALK TOMORROW AT THE DINER ON 4TH.

I FIRED OFF A QUICK REPLY: *I'M IN IDAHO, BUT I CAN FLY BACK TO L.A.*

THE TEXT BACK WAS INSTANTANEOUS. *NO. I'LL COME TO YOU. TEXT ME THE ADDRESS.*

REALLY?

REALLY. IF WE'RE GOING TO TALK, I WANT TO SEE YOU AWAY FROM ALL THE HOLLYWOOD BULLSHIT. THE REAL YOU.

THE REAL ME. GOD, WHAT A CONCEPT.

* * *

I NEEDED A DRINK.

I RUMMAGED THROUGH MY OLD CLOSET, PULLING OUT CLOTHES I HADN'T WORN IN YEARS. A FLANNEL SHIRT, WORN JEANS, AND SNEAKERS THAT FELT CLUNKY AFTER MONTHS OF HEELS. I TUGGED THE SHIRT OVER MY HEAD, WINCING AS IT CAUGHT ON MY EARRINGS. RIGHT. THOSE WERE NEW.

LOOKING IN THE MIRROR, I BARELY RECOGNIZED MYSELF. THE CLOTHES HUNG OFF ME LIKE I WAS A KID PLAYING DRESS-UP IN HER DAD'S CLOSET.

I CREPT DOWNSTAIRS, PRAYING DAD WOULDN'T SEE ME. NO SUCH LUCK. JUST LIKE WHEN I WAS A TEENAGER, HE CAUGHT ME INSTANTLY. MY STEALTH WAS FOR SHIT.

"GOING SOMEWHERE?" HE ASKED, EYEING MY OUTFIT WITH A RAISED EYEBROW.

"JUST... OUT," I MUMBLED. "NEED SOME AIR."

HE NODDED, UNDERSTANDING IN HIS EYES. "BE CAREFUL, OKAY?"

ALREADY A CONCERNED DAD TO HIS DAUGHTER, I THOUGHT. "I WILL," I SAID, GRABBING MY KEYS.

BE CAREFUL FROM ***WHAT?*** THIS WAS IDAHO, NOT SOUTH CENTRAL.

THE NIGHT AIR HIT LIKE A SLAP AS I STEPPED OUTSIDE. CALIFORNIA REALLY DOES THIN THE BLOOD.

I DROVE TO ***POTATOES & PINTS***, THE DIVE BAR WHERE I'D SPENT COUNTLESS NIGHTS IN HIGH SCHOOL TRYING TO SCORE BEER WITH MY FAKE ID. THE NEON IN THE WINDOWS FLICKERED, HALF-BURNT OUT, JUST LIKE I REMEMBERED. I PARKED AND SAT IN THE CAR FOR A LONG MOMENT, STEELING MYSELF.

WALKING IN, I FELT EYES ON ME IMMEDIATELY. THE REGULARS, MOSTLY OLD-TIMERS NURSING THEIR WHISKEYS, TURNED TO STARE. I COULD SEE THE CONFUSION ON THEIR FACES - WAS I A STRANGER, OR SOMEONE THEY SHOULD KNOW?

I'M JUST A REGULAR PERSON, EVERYONE. AND I'M CERTAINLY NOT ON TV'S HOTTEST SHOW. PLEASE DON'T RECOGNIZE ME, PLEASE DON'T RECOGNIZE ME...

"WHAT CAN I GET YA, MISS?" THE BARTENDER ASKED AS I SLID ONTO A STOOL.

"WHISKEY. NEAT," I SAID. "A DOUBLE."

HE POURED MY DRINK AND I KNOCKED IT BACK IN ONE GO, RELISHING THE BURN. FOR SOME REASON, IT FELT GOOD TO DO SOMETHING THAT FELT... WELL, MANLY. AS IF I WAS REASSURING MYSELF THAT JUST BECAUSE I'D REALIZED I WASN'T A MAN, IT DIDN'T MEAN I HAD TO COMPLETELY CHANGE WHO I WAS. I COULD STILL ENJOY A STIFF DRINK. RIGHT?

I ORDERED ANOTHER, SIPPING THIS ONE MORE SLOWLY. THE WHISKEY WARMED MY INSIDES, BUT DID NOTHING TO CALM THE STORM IN MY HEAD. TOMORROW, I'D HAVE TO FACE DAISY. EXPLAIN EVERYTHING. HOW THE HELL WAS I SUPPOSED TO DO THAT WHEN I BARELY UNDERSTOOD IT MYSELF?

"ANOTHER," I SAID, PUSHING THE GLASS TOWARDS HIM.



AS HE POURED, I FELT SOMEONE SIDLE UP NEXT TO ME. "HEY THERE, BEAUTIFUL. CAN I BUY YOU THE NEXT ONE?"

I TURNED, COMING FACE TO FACE WITH A GUY I VAGUELY RECOGNIZED FROM HIGH SCHOOL. MATT? MIKE? SOMETHING WITH AN M. HE'D BEEN ON THE FOOTBALL TEAM, I THINK. NOW HE WAS SPORTING A BEER GUT AND A RECEDING HAIRLINE.

"NO THANKS," I SAID, TURNING BACK TO MY DRINK.

HE PERSISTED, LEANING IN CLOSER. "AW, COME ON, DON'T BE LIKE THAT. I'M JUST TRYING TO BE FRIENDLY."

I TURNED TO FACE MATT/MIKE, READY TO TELL HIM WHERE HE COULD SHOVE HIS FRIENDLINESS, WHEN HIS EYES WIDENED IN RECOGNITION.

"HOLY SHIT," HE SAID. "DYLAN? DYLAN KIRKHAM?"

FUCK. SO MUCH FOR ANONYMITY.

"YEAH," I SAID, BRACING MYSELF FOR WHAT WAS COMING.

HIS FACE TWISTED INTO A SNEER. "WELL, WELL. LOOK WHO DECIDED TO GRACE OUR LITTLE TOWN WITH HIS PRESENCE. THE FAMOUS TRANNY FROM TV."

I FLINCHED, BUT TRIED TO KEEP MY COOL. "LOOK, MAN, I'M JUST HERE FOR A DRINK. I DON'T WANT ANY TROUBLE."

"TROUBLE?" HIS LAUGH WAS A HARSH, UGLY SOUND. "YOU BROUGHT TROUBLE THE MINUTE YOU PUT ON A DRESS AND PRANCED AROUND ON TV. NOW EVERYBODY KNOWS OUR TOWN AS THE PLACE WHERE FREAKS LIKE YOU COME FROM. YOU THINK WE LIKE THAT? YOU THINK WE'RE PROUD OF YOU?"

I'D HEARD WORSE. I TURNED BACK TO MY DRINK, HOPING HE'D TAKE THE HINT AND FUCK OFF. NO SUCH LUCK.

"HEY, I'M TALKING TO YOU, FAGGOT!" HE GRABBED MY SHOULDER, SPINNING ME AROUND.

"GET YOUR HANDS OFF ME," I GROWLED, SHOVING HIM BACK.

BUT MATT/MIKE WASN'T BACKING DOWN. HIS FACE WAS RED, VEINS POPPING IN HIS FOREHEAD AS HE RANTED. "YOU'RE DISGUSTING, YOU KNOW THAT? PARADING AROUND, PRETENDING TO BE A GIRL. WHAT, YOU COULDN'T HACK IT AS A MAN SO YOU DECIDED TO BECOME A FREAK?"

I STOOD, READY TO LEAVE, BUT HE BLOCKED MY PATH. "WHERE DO YOU THINK YOU'RE GOING? WE'RE NOT DONE HERE."

THAT'S WHEN HE GRABBED MY BREAST, SQUEEZING HARD. "THESE EVEN REAL, OR ARE THEY AS FAKE AS THE REST OF YOU?"

SOMETHING IN ME SNAPPED. ALL THOSE HOURS WITH ANDY KICKED IN, AND BEFORE I KNEW IT, I HAD MATT/MIKE'S ARM TWISTED BEHIND HIS BACK, FORCING HIM TO HIS KNEES.

"I SAID, GET YOUR FUCKING HANDS OFF ME," I HISSED IN



HIS EAR.

HE YELPED IN PAIN, BUT AS SOON AS I LET GO, HE CAME AT ME AGAIN, SWINGING WILDLY. I DUCKED, FEELING THE RUSH OF AIR AS HIS FIST SAILED PAST MY FACE. THEN, WITHOUT THINKING, I BROUGHT MY LEG UP IN A PERFECT ROUNDHOUSE KICK, MY FOOT CONNECTING SOLIDLY WITH HIS JAW.

MATT/MIKE WENT DOWN HARD, CLUTCHING HIS FACE AND HOWLING. THE BAR ERUPTED IN CHAOS - PEOPLE SHOUTING, CHAIRS SCRAPING AS THEY BACKED AWAY. I STOOD THERE, PANTING, ADRENALINE COURSING THROUGH MY VEINS.

THAT'S WHEN I NOTICED THE KID IN THE CORNER (PROBABLY THERE WITH HIS OWN FAKE ID), PHONE HELD HIGH, A LOOK OF AWE ON HIS FACE. "HOLY SHIT," HE BREATHED. "THAT WAS FUCKING AWESOME!"

GREAT. JUST WHAT I NEEDED. A VIRAL MOMENT TO ADD TO MY HIGHLIGHT REEL OF FUCKUPS.

AS I STORMED OUT OF THE BAR, I COULD ALREADY IMAGINE THE HEADLINES:

"TRANS ACTRESS ASSAULTS INNOCENT MAN IN HOMETOWN BAR"

"DYLAN KIRKHAM: FROM EMMY NOMINEE TO VIOLENT THUG"

"ANYWHERE BUT BORING STAR PROVES MEN CAN'T BECOME WOMEN - STILL FIGHTS LIKE A DUDE"

FOX NEWS WOULD HAVE A FIELD DAY WITH THIS. TUCKER CARLSON'S SMUG FACE FLASHED IN MY MIND, HIS VOICE DRIPPING WITH FAUX CONCERN: "IS THIS THE KIND OF 'WOMAN' WE WANT REPRESENTING FEMININITY IN AMERICA? A MAN IN A DRESS WHO RESORTS TO VIOLENCE AT THE SLIGHTEST PROVOCATION?"

I STUMBLED TO MY CAR, HANDS SHAKING. FUCK, WHERE WERE MY KEYS? THE RUSH WAS FADING, LEAVING ME SICK AND ASHAMED. WHAT THE HELL DID I JUST DO? I CAME FOR A QUIET DRINK. NOW I'D PROBABLY TORCHED MY CAREER - AGAIN. GAVE THOSE ASSHOLES EVEN MORE AMMO.

I GRIPPED THE WHEEL, TRYING TO BREATHE. THE MIRROR SHOWED A MESS - WILD HAIR, CROOKED FLANNEL SHIRT, LACY BRA PEEKING OUT. I LAUGHED AS I DROVE. IT SOUNDED CRAZY, EVEN TO ME. HERE I WAS, FINALLY ADMITTING I WAS TRANS. AND WHAT DO I DO? KICK SOME JERK'S ASS LIKE I'M AUDITIONING TO BE JOHN WICK'S BADASS SISTER (CALL ME, KEANU).

MY PHONE STARTED BLOWING UP. THAT VIDEO WAS SPREADING FASTER THAN MONO AT BAND CAMP. I TURNED IT OFF. NO WAY I WAS FACING THAT SHITSTORM YET.

I ENDED UP AT MY OLD HIGH SCHOOL. WHERE IT ALL STARTED, KINDA. WHERE I DREAMED OF BEING A STAR, OF GETTING THE HELL OUT OF THIS PLACE.

WELL, CONGRATS, DYLAN. YOU MADE IT. AND YOU'RE ABOUT TO BE EVEN MORE FAMOUS.



I GOT OUT AND WALKED TO THE FOOTBALL FIELD, SHOES SQUISHING IN THE DAMP GRASS. UNDER THE BLEACHERS, I FOUND MY OLD HIDEOUT. THE SPOT WHERE I'D SNEAK SMOKES AND MAKE OUT WITH CHEERLEADERS. NOW IT JUST LOOKED SAD. EMPTY BEER CANS AND CONDOM WRAPPERS LITTERED THE GROUND.

I SAT, LEANING AGAINST A RUSTY SUPPORT BEAM. ABOVE ME, METAL CREAKED IN THE WIND. IT SOUNDED LIKE THE WHOLE THING MIGHT COLLAPSE.

I SIGHED, FEELING THE WEIGHT OF THE NIGHT PRESSING DOWN ON ME. FUCK, I COULDN'T GO HOME. NOT WITH THIS SHITSTORM BREWING. MOM AND DAD DIDN'T DESERVE TO WAKE UP TO A YARD FULL OF RABID REPORTERS, FROTHING AT THE MOUTH FOR A QUOTE ABOUT THEIR NEWLY-MINTED TRANS DAUGHTER TURNED VIOLENT PSYCHO BITCH.

I DRAGGED MYSELF TO MY FEET, BONES CREAKING LIKE

I'D AGED FIFTY YEARS IN THE LAST HOUR. THE SLEEPY TIME INN ON THE EDGE OF TOWN WOULD HAVE TO DO. IT WAS THE KIND OF PLACE THAT RENTED ROOMS BY THE HOUR AND DIDN'T ASK QUESTIONS. PERFECT FOR A GIRL ON THE RUN FROM HER OWN FUCK-UPS.

THE NIGHT CLERK BARELY LOOKED UP AS I STUMBLED IN, TOSSING A KEY MY WAY WITHOUT A WORD. THE ROOM SMELLED LIKE STALE CIGARETTES AND BROKEN DREAMS. I COLLAPSED ONTO THE BED, NOT BOTHERING TO TAKE OFF MY CLOTHES. THE SPRINGS GROANED IN PROTEST, PROBABLY REMEMBERING EVERY SAD SACK WHO'D EVER CRIED THEMSELVES TO SLEEP HERE.

"WAY TO GO, DYLAN," I MUTTERED INTO THE MUSTY PILLOW. "YOU FINALLY FIGURE OUT WHO YOU ARE, AND YOUR FIRST ACT AS A WOMAN IS TO GO ALL MORTAL KOMBAT ON SOME ASSHOLE'S FACE. REAL CLASSY."

SLEEP CAME IN FITS AND STARTS, PUNCTUATED BY NIGHTMARES OF FLASHING CAMERAS AND ANGRY FACES. WHEN MY PHONE BUZZED, JOLTING ME AWAKE, I WAS HALF-CONVINCED IT WAS THE COPS.

BUT NO, IT WAS RICK. PROBABLY CALLING TO TELL ME MY CAREER WAS DEAD, THAT THE NETWORK HAD DROPPED ME, THAT I WAS PERSONA NON GRATA IN HOLLYWOOD. I ALMOST DIDN'T ANSWER, BUT WHAT THE HELL, MIGHT AS WELL FACE THE MUSIC.

"WHAT?" I GROWLED, MY VOICE ROUGH FROM SLEEP AND WHISKEY.

"DYLAN, BABY, YOU BEAUTIFUL DISASTER!" RICK'S VOICE WAS WAY TOO CHIPPER FOR... SHIT, WHAT TIME WAS IT? "YOU'VE DONE IT AGAIN, KID. YOU'RE A GODDAMN GENIUS!"

I BLINKED, TRYING TO MAKE SENSE OF HIS WORDS. "THE FUCK ARE YOU TALKING ABOUT?"

"THE BAR FIGHT! IT'S EVERYWHERE, AND PEOPLE ARE LOVING IT!"

I SAT UP, MY HEAD SPINNING. "LOVING IT? RICK, SOME ASSHOLE GRABBED ME. I... I DEFENDED MYSELF."

"DEFENDED YOURSELF? YOU LOOKED LIKE BRUCE



Lily rejoins the team in Season 4, Ep 2 as the kicker - and kicks more than footballs

FUCKING LEE OUT THERE! BUT HERE'S THE KICKER - TURNS OUT THAT NEANDERTHAL WHO GRABBED YOU? HE'S WANTED FOR DOMESTIC BATTERY. THE COPS ARRESTED HIM. YOU'RE NOT JUST A BADASS, YOU'RE A HERO!"

I LAUGHED, BUT IT CAME OUT MORE LIKE A STRANGLED SOB. "YOU'VE GOT TO BE SHITTING ME."

"I SHIT YOU NOT, MY DEAR. THE VIDEO SHOWS CLEAR AS DAY THAT HE ATTACKED YOU FIRST. NO CHARGES ARE BEING FILED AGAINST YOU. IN FACT, PEOPLE ARE CALLING FOR YOU TO PRESS CHARGES AGAINST HIM! THE VIDEO IS VIRAL. THE HASHTAGS ARE TRENDING. YOU'RE OFFICIALLY A MEME."

I FLOPPED BACK ONTO THE BED, STARING AT THE WATER-STAINED CEILING. "SO, LET ME GET THIS STRAIGHT. I GO HOME, HAVE AN IDENTITY CRISIS, NEARLY RUIN MY CAREER, AND SOMEHOW COME OUT SMELLING LIKE ROSES?"

"THAT'S HOLLYWOOD, BABY!" RICK CROWED. "NOW, GET YOUR BEAUTIFUL ASS BACK TO L.A. WE'VE GOT INTERVIEWS TO SCHEDULE, TALK SHOWS TO BOOK. STRIKE WHILE THE IRON'S HOT! THAT BITCH MEREDITH IS SHAKING IN HER LOUBOUTINS RIGHT NOW. YOU'VE GOT THIS IN THE BAG!"

AS RICK RATTLED ON ABOUT PR STRATEGIES, I COULDN'T HELP BUT SHAKE MY HEAD AT THE ABSURDITY OF IT ALL. HERE I WAS, DYLAN KIRKHAM, NEWLY MINTED WOMAN, ACCIDENTAL ACTION HERO, AND STILL SOMEHOW FAILING UPWARDS.

"HEY, RICK," I CUT HIM OFF MID-RANT ABOUT KELLY CLARKSON WANTING ME ON HER SHOW. "YOU THINK DAISY'S SEEN THE VIDEO?"

THERE WAS A PAUSE ON THE OTHER END. "YEAH, KID. PRETTY SURE THE WHOLE WORLD'S SEEN IT BY NOW."

AFTER I HUNG UP, I DRAGGED MYSELF TO THE GRIMY BATHROOM MIRROR, HALF EXPECTING TO SEE WONDER WOMAN STARING BACK AT ME. INSTEAD, IT WAS JUST... ME. MESSY HAIR, SMUDGED MAKEUP, AND A FLANNEL SHIRT THAT SUDDENLY FELT MORE LIKE A COSTUME THAN MY DRESSES EVER HAD.

"CONGRATS, DIPSHIT," I MUTTERED TO MY REFLECTION. "YOU'RE TRENDING."

BUT AS THE INITIAL SHOCK WORE OFF, A NEW PANIC SET IN. DAISY. FUCK, I WAS SUPPOSED TO MEET DAISY. I CHECKED MY PHONE - THREE HOURS UNTIL OUR MEETUP AT THE DINER. THREE HOURS TO GET MY SHIT TOGETHER AND FIGURE OUT HOW TO EXPLAIN... WELL, EVERYTHING.

"OKAY, DYLAN," I SAID, TRYING TO PSYCH MYSELF UP. "TIME TO WOMAN THE FUCK UP."

THE SHOWER WAS A SAD AFFAIR. THE WATER PRESSURE WAS NON-EXISTENT, AND THE TEMPERATURE FLUCTUATED BETWEEN ARCTIC AND SATAN'S ARMPIT. BUT HEY, AT LEAST THE TOWELS WERE CLEAN. WELL, CLEAN-ISH.

AS I TOWELED OFF, I CAUGHT SIGHT OF MYSELF IN THE FOGGY MIRROR. MY BODY WAS A BATTLEFIELD OF CHANGES - SOFTER HERE, CURVIER THERE, BUT STILL

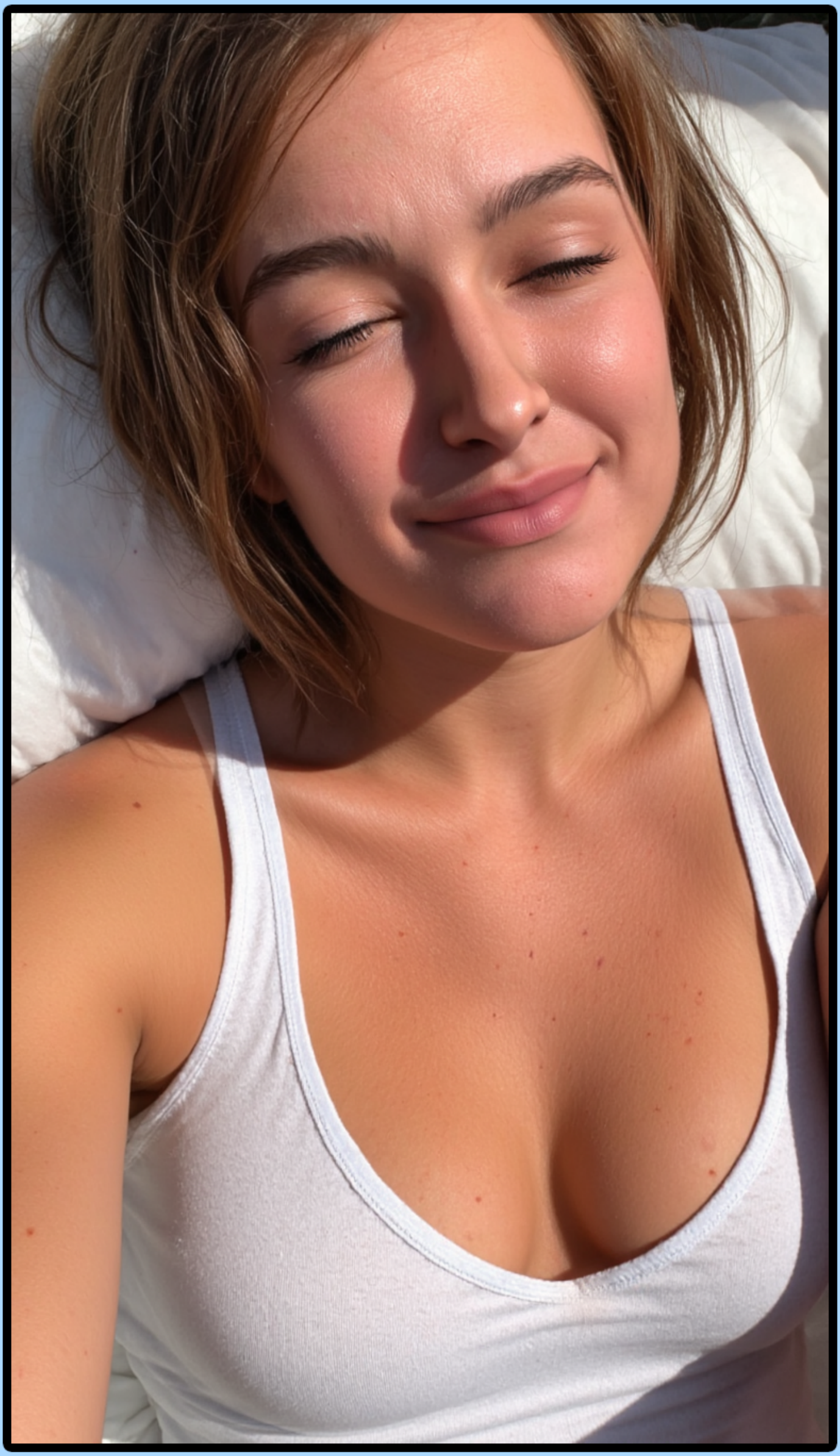


UNMISTAKABLY... ME. I TRACED THE OUTLINE OF MY NEW BREASTS, MARVELING AT HOW NATURAL THEY FELT NOW. WHEN DID THAT HAPPEN? WHEN DID I STOP SEEING THEM AS FOREIGN OBJECTS AND START SEEING THEM AS JUST... PART OF ME?

"ALRIGHT, DYLAN," I SAID TO MY REFLECTION. "TIME TO DRESS FOR SUCCESS. OR AT LEAST FOR 'PLEASE DON'T HATE ME.'"

I RUMMAGED THROUGH MY BAG, PULLING OUT A SUNDRESS I'D PACKED ON AUTOPILOT. IT WAS YELLOW, WITH LITTLE WHITE DAISIES. DAISY. FUCK. WAS WEARING A DRESS WITH HER NAMESAKE TOO ON-THE-NOSE? BUT THE ALTERNATIVE WAS SQUEEZING BACK INTO THOSE BAGGY JEANS THAT NOW FELT LIKE THEY BELONGED TO SOMEONE ELSE.

DRESS IT WAS.



No makeup selfie in bed on a gorgeous L.A. morning.

MAKEUP WAS NEXT. I'D GOTTEN PRETTY GOOD AT IT OVER THE PAST THREE YEARS, BUT MY HANDS WERE SHAKING SO BAD I NEARLY POKED MY EYE OUT WITH THE MASCARA WAND. "STEADY, YOU," I MUTTERED. "YOU'VE FACED DOWN PSYCHO FANS AND L.A. TRAFFIC. YOU CAN HANDLE ONE TINY LESBIAN."

ONE TINY, BEAUTIFUL, KIND-HEARTED LESBIAN WHO PROBABLY HATED MY GUTS. NO PRESSURE.

BY THE TIME I FINISHED, I LOOKED... WELL, NOT RED-CARPET READY, BUT AT LEAST PRESENTABLE. THE BRUISE ON MY KNUCKLE FROM THE BAR FIGHT WAS STARTING TO BLOOM. GREAT. NOTHING SAYS "I'VE GOT MY SHIT TOGETHER" LIKE VISIBLE EVIDENCE OF ASSAULT.

I CHECKED MY PHONE. AN HOUR LEFT. THE DINER WAS ONLY A TEN-MINUTE DRIVE, BUT I COULDN'T STAND THE THOUGHT OF SITTING IN THIS ROOM ANY LONGER, MARINATING IN MY OWN ANXIETY SWEAT.

THE SUN WAS OBNOXIOUSLY BRIGHT AS I STEPPED OUTSIDE. I SLID ON MY SUNGLASSES, FEELING LIKE A CUT-RATE CELEB TRYING TO GET THE ATTENTION OF THE PAPARAZZI BY PRETENDING NOT TO WANT ATTENTION.

THE DINER PARKING LOT WAS HALF-FULL WHEN I PULLED IN. I SAT IN MY CAR, HEART RACING, PALMS SWEATING.

"FUCK IT," I SAID, GRABBING MY PURSE.

AS I WALKED TOWARDS THE ENTRANCE, I CAUGHT MY REFLECTION IN THE GLASS DOOR. YELLOW SUNDRESS, SUBTLE MAKEUP, HAIR FALLING IN SOFT WAVES. I LOOKED... BORING. LIKE ANY OTHER GIRL MEETING HER FRIEND FOR COFFEE.

I TOOK A DEEP BREATH AND PUSHED OPEN THE DOOR, THE LITTLE BELL JINGLING OVERHEAD LIKE IT WAS ANNOUNCING MY ARRIVAL TO THE WHOLE DAMN WORLD.

AND THERE SHE WAS. DAISY. LOOKING BEAUTIFUL AND FURIOUS AND HURT ALL AT ONCE. OUR EYES MET, AND FOR A MOMENT, THE WORLD STOPPED SPINNING.

"HEY," I SAID.



DAISY'S EYES NARROWED. "YEP," SHE REPLIED, HER VOICE COLD. "NICE DRESS."

I SLID INTO THE BOOTH ACROSS FROM HER, FEELING LIKE I WAS FACING A FIRING SQUAD. A REALLY HOT FIRING SQUAD WITH PERFECT HAIR AND EYES THAT COULD CUT DIAMONDS.

"THANKS," I MUMBLED, FIDGETING WITH THE MENU. "I, UH, LIKE YOUR... EVERYTHING."

SMOOTH, DYLAN. REAL SMOOTH. MAYBE I SHOULD JUST SMASH MY FACE INTO THIS LAMINATED LIST OF HEART ATTACKS AND CALL IT A DAY.

DAISY'S MOUTH TWITCHED. WAS SHE FIGHTING BACK A SMILE? "SO." SHE LEANED BACK AND CROSSED HER ARMS. "YOUR TEXT SAID YOU'D FIGURED SOMETHING OUT?"

I OPENED MY MOUTH, THEN CLOSED IT. WHERE THE FUCK DO YOU EVEN START WITH SOMETHING LIKE THIS?

"I SAW THE VIDEO," DAISY SAID WHEN I DIDN'T SPEAK. "THAT WAS QUITE THE KICK."

"YEAH, WELL, TURNS OUT ALL THOSE HOURS WITH ANDY WEREN'T FOR NOTHING. ANYWAY, I GUESS I'LL START WITH THE OBVIOUS. I'M SORRY. I NEVER MEANT TO HURT YOU."

DAISY LAUGHED, BUT IT WASN'T A HAPPY SOUND. "WELL, CONGRATS. YOU FAILED SPECTACULARLY."

THE WAITRESS CHOSE THAT MOMENT TO APPEAR, PEN POISED OVER HER NOTEPAD. "WHAT CAN I GET YOU LADIES?"

"COFFEE," DAISY SAID. "BLACK."

"SAME."

AS THE WAITRESS WALKED AWAY, AN AWKWARD SILENCE SETTLED OVER US. I COULD FEEL DAISY'S EYES ON ME, WAITING. JUDGING.

"I FIGURED IT OUT," I BLURTED.

SHE RAISED AN EYEBROW. "SO YOU KEEP SAYING. FIGURED ***WHAT*** OUT, DYLAN?"

I TOOK A DEEP BREATH. HERE GOES EVERYTHING. "I'M TRANS. FOR REAL THIS TIME. OR, UM, FOR ALWAYS."

DAISY'S FACE WENT THROUGH A NON-LITERAL ROLLERCOASTER OF EMOTIONS - CONFUSION, ANGER, DISBELIEF. SHE OPENED HER MOUTH, THEN CLOSED IT. THEN OPENED IT AGAIN.

"ARE YOU FUCKING KIDDING ME?"

FAIR RESPONSE. I NODDED, FEELING LIKE I WAS ABOUT TO THROW UP. "I KNOW HOW IT SOUNDS. TRUST ME, I DO. BUT I SWEAR, I'M NOT BULLSHITTING YOU. NOT THIS TIME."

SHE LEANED FORWARD, HER EYES BLAZING. "SO, WHAT, YOU JUST HAD SOME EPIPHANY AFTER LYING ABOUT IT FOR YEARS?"


I'm behind a chain link fence of emotion!
(I dunno, it was a photoshoot for the show.)

"I KNOW," I SAID. "I KNOW IT SOUNDS CRAZY. BUT IT'S LIKE... IT'S LIKE I'VE BEEN WEARING A MASK FOR SO LONG I FORGOT IT WASN'T MY REAL FACE. AND NOW THAT IT'S OFF, I CAN FINALLY SEE MYSELF CLEARLY."

DAISY SCOFFED. "THAT'S REAL POETIC. DID YOU PRACTICE THAT IN THE MIRROR?"

THE WAITRESS RETURNED WITH OUR COFFEES. I WRAPPED MY HANDS AROUND THE MUG, GRATEFUL FOR SOMETHING TO HOLD ONTO. THE HEAT SEEPED INTO MY PALMS.

"I DIDN'T PRACTICE ANYTHING," I SAID ONCE WE WERE ALONE AGAIN. "I'M JUST... TRYING TO BE HONEST. FOR ONCE IN MY LIFE."

"HONEST?" DAISY'S LAUGH WAS BITTER. "THAT'S FUNNY COMING FROM YOU."

I DESERVED THAT. HELL, I DESERVED WORSE. BUT SOMETHING IN ME SNAPPED. "YOU THINK THIS IS EASY FOR ME?" I HISSED. "YOU THINK I WANTED THIS? TO REALIZE THAT MY WHOLE LIFE HAS BEEN A LIE? THAT I'VE BEEN PLAYING A PART I DIDN'T EVEN KNOW I WAS CAST IN?"

DAISY'S EYES WIDENED SLIGHTLY, CAUGHT OFF GUARD BY MY INTENSITY.

"I'M TERRIFIED." MY VOICE WAS SHAKING. "I'M FUCKING TERRIFIED ALL THE TIME. OF THE DEATH THREATS, OF LOSING MY CAREER, OF DISAPPOINTING EVERYONE. BUT WHAT SCARES ME THE MOST IS THAT I MIGHT LOSE YOU. BECAUSE EVEN WHEN EVERYTHING ELSE FELT FAKE, WHAT I FEEL FOR YOU... THAT'S ALWAYS BEEN REAL."

DAISY WAS LOOKING OUT THE WINDOW, SILENT, JUST STIRRING HER COFFEE. *I'VE LOST HER*, I THOUGHT.

WHEN SHE FINALLY SPOKE, HER VOICE WAS SO QUIET I HAD TO LEAN FORWARD TO HEAR. "DO YOU HAVE ANY IDEA HOW HARD IT WAS FOR ME TO COME OUT? TO ADMIT TO MYSELF, TO THE WORLD, THAT I WAS QUEER?"

I SHOOK MY HEAD, FEELING A THUNDERCLAP OF GUILT.

"THAT WAS ALSO TERRIFYING," SHE CONTINUED. "BUT



YOU... YOU MADE IT EASIER. SEEING YOU BE SO OPEN, SO UNAPOLOGETICALLY YOURSELF. OR AT LEAST, WHO I THOUGHT YOU WERE." SHE LOOKED UP AT ME, HER EYES SHINING. "DO YOU KNOW HOW MUCH THAT MEANT TO ME?"

MY THROAT TIGHTENED. "DAISY, I--"

"LET ME FINISH. WHEN YOU TOLD ME IT WAS ALL A LIE, IT FELT LIKE... LIKE THE GROUND HAD DISAPPEARED BENEATH MY FEET. AND I FELT SO, SO FUCKING STUPID. HOW COULD I NOT HAVE SEEN IT? IN MY HEAD, I STARTED SCRUTINIZING ALL OUR INTERACTIONS. EVEN THEN, AS PISSED AS I WAS, I COULDN'T SEE IT, DEE. I COULD NOT SEE THE MAN YOU WERE TELLING ME YOU'D BEEN ALL ALONG."

"NO. YOU WERE RIGHT ALL ALONG, LIKE USUAL."

DAISY REACHED OUT, HESITATING FOR A MOMENT BEFORE PLACING HER HAND OVER MINE. OUR NAILS MATCHED. "DO

YOU HAVE ANY IDEA HOW MUCH I WANT TO BELIEVE YOU?"

I TURNED MY HAND OVER, INTERTWINING OUR FINGERS. "ABOUT AS MUCH AS I WANT YOU TO."

HER EYES MET MINE, AND I SAW A GLIMMER OF SOMETHING. HOPE? OR MAYBE JUST PITY FOR THE TRAINWRECK SITTING ACROSS FROM HER.

FINALLY, SHE SPOKE. "OKAY."

"OKAY?"

SHE NODDED. "I DON'T KNOW IF I CAN TRUST YOU. BUT... I WANT TO. GOD HELP ME, I STILL WANT TO."

I SQUEEZED HER HAND, FEELING A SURGE OF SOMETHING DANGEROUSLY CLOSE TO HOPE. "I'LL DO WHATEVER IT TAKES, DAIS. I'LL SPEND THE REST OF MY LIFE PROVING TO YOU THAT THIS IS REAL. THAT I'M REAL."

SHE WIPED AWAY A TEAR ALMOST FAST ENOUGH FOR ME NOT TO NOTICE. "BUT WE'RE TAKING IT SLOW. AND YOU'RE GOING TO THERAPY. REAL THERAPY, NOT JUST THE NETWORK-MANDATED BULLSHIT."

RELIEF SHOT THROUGH ME LIKE LIGHTNING. "DEAL," I SAID. "I'LL GO TO SO MUCH THERAPY THEY'LL NAME A WING AFTER ME."

DAISY LAUGHED, AND IT WAS THE MOST BEAUTIFUL SOUND I'D EVER HEARD. "YOU'RE SUCH A DORK." SHE WIPED HER EYES, THEN SHE CRINKLED HER BROW AND SHOOK HER HEAD, SMILING. "YOU REALLY THOUGHT YOU WERE A GUY?"

"I'M NOT THE MOST INTROSPECTIVE OF..." I DON'T KNOW WHY IT WAS STILL SO HARD TO SAY, BUT I COULDN'T LET HER DOUBT ME FOR ONE SECOND. I FORCED IT OUT, LIKE DOING THAT ONE LAST BURPEE. "...OF GIRLS."

DAISY GRINNED. "UNDERSTATEMENT OF THE GODDAMN YEAR."

"BUT, HEY, I'M KIND OF CUTE. RIGHT."

"YEAH." SHE STOOD AND LEANED ACROSS THE TABLE, EYES SPARKLING, AND KISSED MY LIPS. "KINDA," SHE SAID.

MY INSIDES MELTED AS HER LIPS MET MINE. IT FELT LIKE COMING HOME.

"YOU'RE BEAUTIFUL, DEE," SHE SAID.

"THANKS TO THE STUDIO FOR PAYING FOR MY SURGERY."

"STOP." SHE TOOK MY FACE IN MY HANDS. "NO MORE LIES. YOU WERE BEAUTIFUL BEFORE ANY OF THAT. I SAW IT FROM DAY ONE."

I BLUSHED AND A WARMTH SPREAD THROUGH ME THAT HAD NOTHING TO DO WITH THE COFFEE. "EVEN WITH MY QUESTIONABLE LIFE CHOICES?"

"SURE. THEY MAKE YOU... YOU. JUST, PLEASE, NEXT TIME YOU'RE FEELING DRAMATIC, TAKE MY ADVICE AND JUST GET A REALLY WEIRD, BAD HAIRCUT."

"BUT THIS TOOK ME YEARS TO GROW OUT!"

DAISY LAUGHED. "OKAY, YEP, GIRL CONFIRMED."

I GRINNED, FEELING LIGHTER THAN I HAD IN MONTHS. MAYBE YEARS. "DOES THIS MEAN YOU'LL BE MY DATE FOR WHEN I GO TO THE EMMYS?"

"NO," SHE SAID. "I'LL BE YOUR DATE FOR WHEN YOU *WIN* AT THE EMMYS."

WE SPENT THE NEXT HOUR TALKING. I TOLD HER ABOUT MY CONVERSATION WITH DAD, ABOUT THE MEMORIES THAT HAD RESURFACED, ABOUT THE FEAR AND EXCITEMENT. SHE LISTENED THE WAY ONLY DAISY COULD - EMPATHY SPICED WITH THAT NO-BULLSHIT ATTITUDE THAT I LOVED.

"SO," SHE SAID, STIRRING THE DREGS OF HER COFFEE. "WHAT'S NEXT FOR DYLAN KIRKHAM, TRANS ICON AND ACCIDENTAL ACTION HERO?"

I GROANED, BURYING MY FACE IN MY HANDS. "GOD, DON'T REMIND ME. I STILL CAN'T BELIEVE THAT VIDEO WENT VIRAL."

"ARE YOU KIDDING? IT WAS BADASS. YOU LOOKED LIKE BLACK WIDOW OUT THERE."

Sadly, in the show Lily did not get chosen as prom queen - but at least she didn't get picked as prom "king" like some of the students were trying to pull off. Great episodes, Melissa!

I PEEKED THROUGH MY FINGERS. "REALLY?"

SHE NODDED, A MISCHIEVOUS GLINT IN HER EYE. "TOTALLY. THOUGH MAYBE WE SHOULD WORK ON YOUR POST-FIGHT ONE-LINERS. INSTEAD YOU JUST SORT OF... SQUEAKED AND RAN AWAY."

I LAUGHED, FEELING A BLUSH CREEP UP MY CHEEKS. "YEAH, NOT MY FINEST MOMENT. I WAS TOO BUSY FREAKING OUT TO THINK OF ANYTHING CLEVER TO SAY."

AS WE LEFT THE DINER, HAND IN HAND, THE IDAHO SUN SEEMED BRIGHTER THAN CALIFORNIA'S EVER DID. MAYBE IT WAS THE CLEAN MOUNTAIN AIR BECAUSE, FOR THE FIRST TIME IN YEARS, I FELT LIKE I COULD BREATHE.

"SO," DAISY SAID AS WE REACHED HER RENTAL CAR. "WHAT NOW? I STILL HAVE A FEW HOURS UNTIL MY FLIGHT."

"WELL, UH, WE'RE HERE. IN MY HOMETOWN."

"WE ARE."

"SO, UH..." I SAID. "WANNA MEET MY FOLKS?"

DAISY'S EYES WIDENED. "YOU SURE?"

"YEAH, I MEAN, IF YOU WANT TO. THEY'RE... THEY'RE PRETTY COOL. AND I THINK THEY'D LOVE TO MEET THE GIRL WHO'S BEEN PUTTING UP WITH MY DRAMA. YOU CAN COMPARE NOTES ON HOW INSUFFERABLE I CAN BE."

DAISY LAUGHED. "I'D LOVE TO MEET THEM. BESIDES, I NEED TO THANK THEM FOR RAISING SUCH A... UNIQUE DAUGHTER."

AS WE DROVE TO MY PARENTS' HOUSE, I COULDN'T TELL IF I WAS EXCITED OR ANXIOUS. THIS WAS IT - MY TWO WORLDS COLLIDING, THE OLD DYLAN AND THE NEW, LIKE A FUSION REACTION.

WE PULLED UP TO THE HOUSE, AND I SAW MOM'S CAR IN THE DRIVEWAY. MY STOMACH DID A LITTLE FLIP.

"READY?" DAISY SQUEEZED MY HAND.



I NODDED, NOT TRUSTING MY VOICE. WE WALKED UP TO THE DOOR, AND I TOOK A DEEP BREATH BEFORE KNOCKING. WHY DID IT FEEL LIKE THIS WAS GOING TO BE HARDER THE SECOND TIME AROUND?

THE DOOR SWUNG OPEN, AND THERE WAS MOM, HER BIG BROWN EYES WIDENING. "DYLAN! AND YOU MUST BE DAISY! OBVIOUSLY! I MEAN, WE WATCH THE SHOW...AND YOU'RE A FAMOUS ACTRESS. HELLO!"

BEFORE I COULD SAY ANYTHING, MOM PULLED US BOTH INTO A HUG. I BREATHED IN HER FAMILIAR SCENT - A MIX OF CHANEL NO. 5 AND THE FAINT AROMA OF HOSPITAL ANTISEPTIC THAT NEVER QUITE LEFT HER CLOTHES. AS SHE PULLED BACK, I SAW TEARS IN HER EYES.

"OH, HONEY," SHE SAID, CUPPING MY FACE. "YOU LOOK BEAUTIFUL."

"THANKS, MOM. I... I'M SORRY I DIDN'T TELL YOU

BUT I DIDN'T EVEN KNOW MYSELF, I SWEAR."

SHE SHOOK HER HEAD, SMILING THROUGH HER TEARS. "NO APOLOGIES NECESSARY. YOU'RE HERE NOW, AND THAT'S WHAT MATTERS."

DAD APPEARED BEHIND HER, GRINNING. "WELL, LOOK WHO DECIDED TO GRACE US WITH HER PRESENCE. AND SHE BROUGHT A CELEBRITY!"

DAISY LAUGHED, EXTENDING HER HAND. "IT'S SO NICE TO MEET YOU BOTH. I'VE HEARD SO MUCH ABOUT YOU."

"ALL LIES, I'M SURE," DAD SAID WITH A WINK.

"COME IN, COME IN!" MOM USHERED US INSIDE, HER SMILE SO BRIGHT IT COULD POWER A SMALL CITY.

"WELL," DAD SAID LOUDLY. "NOW THIS HOUSE HAS TWO CELEBRITIES. MS. LOWERY... AND THE NEW KARATE KID HERSELF."

I GROANED. "PLEASE TELL ME YOU HAVEN'T SEEN THE VIDEO."

"SEEN IT?" DAD CHUCKLED. "I'VE GOT IT BOOKMARKED. THAT'S MY GIRL!"

MY GIRL. THE WORDS SENT A WARM RUSH THROUGH ME, EQUAL PARTS JOY AND DISBELIEF.

AS WE CHATTED, LAUGHED, AND SHARED EMBARRASSING STORIES (THANKS, MOM), I COULDN'T HELP BUT MARVEL AT HOW... NORMAL IT ALL FELT. HERE I WAS, DYLAN KIRKHAM, TRANS WOMAN, HOLLYWOOD STAR, AND ACCIDENTAL VIRAL SENSATION, SITTING IN MY CHILDHOOD HOME WITH MY GIRLFRIEND AND MY PARENTS, ARGUING OVER THE ENDING OF THE SOPRANOS (IT SUCKED).

IT WASN'T PERFECT. THERE WERE MOMENTS OF AWKWARD SILENCE, FUMBLED PRONOUNS QUICKLY CORRECTED, AND SIDEWAYS GLANCES WHEN THEY THOUGHT I WASN'T LOOKING. BUT IT WAS REAL. AND FOR THE FIRST TIME IN MAYBE EVER, I FELT LIKE I WAS EXACTLY WHERE I BELONGED.

AS THE SUN BEGAN TO SET, CASTING LONG SHADOWS


Disney Don't Sue Me
Cosplay.



ACROSS THE LIVING ROOM, I CAUGHT DAISY'S EYE. SHE SMILED, A SOFT, PRIVATE THING MEANT JUST FOR ME. AND IN THAT MOMENT, I KNEW - WHATEVER CAME NEXT, WHATEVER BULLSHIT LAY AHEAD, I WAS READY TO FACE IT AS THE ***REAL*** DYLAN KIRKHAM.

* * *

THE NEXT YEAR WAS A WHIRLWIND. THERAPY (SO MUCH THERAPY), MORE DEATH THREATS (BECAUSE OF COURSE), AND THE BITTERSWEET FINAL SEASON OF "ANYWHERE BUT BORING." TURNS OUT MELISSA ONLY EVER WANTED TO DO FOUR YEARS OF HIGH SCHOOL DRAMA. SMART LADY. UNLIKE SOME SHOWS THAT DRAG ON UNTIL THEIR CAST IS PUSHING 40 AND STILL PRETENDING TO STRESS ABOUT PROM.

WHEN LILY GRADUATED AND WENT OFF TO COLLEGE, IT WAS LIKE I WAS SAYING GOODBYE TO AN OLD FRIEND. OR MAYBE A TWIN SISTER I'D ABSORBED IN THE WOMB.



EITHER WAY, THERE WERE TEARS. SO MANY TEARS. BOTH ON AND OFF CAMERA.

BUT LIFE, AS THEY SAY, GOES ON. AND SOMETIMES, IF YOU'RE REALLY LUCKY (OR IN MY CASE, IF THE UNIVERSE DECIDES IT'S DONE KICKING YOUR ASS FOR A HOT MINUTE), IT GOES ON IN SPECTACULAR FASHION.

I WON THE EMMY.

YEAH, I KNOW. YOU PROBABLY SAW THE PICTURES. ME, UGLY CRYING ON STAGE, CLUTCHING THAT GOLDEN STATUE LIKE IT WAS A LIFE RAFT IN A SEA OF IMPOSTER SYNDROME. DAISY IN THE AUDIENCE, CRYING EVEN HARDER.

BUT HERE'S THE THING THEY DON'T SHOW YOU ON TV: THE MOMENT AFTER. WHEN YOU'RE BACKSTAGE, HIGH ON ADRENALINE AND DISBELIEF, AND YOU CATCH YOUR REFLECTION IN A MIRROR. AND FOR A SPLIT SECOND, YOU



DON'T RECOGNIZE YOURSELF. NOT BECAUSE YOU LOOK DIFFERENT, BUT BECAUSE YOU FINALLY LOOK... RIGHT.

I STARED AT THAT WOMAN IN THE WHITE GOWN, MASCARA RUNNING, EMMY IN HAND - AND SOMETHING CLICKED INTO PLACE. LIKE THE LAST PIECE OF A PUZZLE I DIDN'T EVEN KNOW I WAS SOLVING.

"HOLY SHIT," I SAID TO NOBODY. "I'M REALLY HER."

AND THEN, BECAUSE THE UNIVERSE HAS A SICK SENSE OF HUMOR (OR BECAUSE I'M A WALKING DISASTER IN HEELS), I PROMPTLY TRIPPED OVER MY OWN FEET AND NEARLY BRAINED MYSELF WITH MY BRAND-NEW EMMY.

BUT HEY, AT LEAST I DIDN'T DROP IT. SMALL VICTORIES, RIGHT?

AFTER THAT, THINGS GOT... WEIRD. GOOD WEIRD, MOSTLY. BUT STILL WEIRD.



TURNS OUT, BEING AM EMMY-WINNER WHO CAN ALSO ROUNDHOUSE KICK A GUY IN THE FACE OPENS UP SOME INTERESTING CAREER OPPORTUNITIES. WHO KNEW?

ACTION MOVIES CAME CALLING. AND NOT THE "HOT GIRL WHO NEEDS SAVING" ROLES. NOPE. FULL-ON, ASS-KICKING, NAME-TAKING LEAD ROLES. THE KIND OF PARTS I USED TO DREAM ABOUT WHEN I THOUGHT I WAS GOING TO BE THE NEXT JASON STATHAM.

EXCEPT NOW, I GOT TO DO IT ALL IN A SKIMPY OUTFIT AND HEELS. THAT'S EVEN MORE BADASS!

MY FIRST BIG ACTION FLICK, "STILETTO" (I KNOW, I KNOW, BUT I DIDN'T WRITE IT), WAS A SURPRISE HIT. CRITICS CALLED IT "A GROUNDBREAKING BLEND OF FEMININITY AND BADASSERY."

FANS CALLED IT "HOLY SHIT, DID YOU SEE WHEN SHE TOOK OUT THAT ENTIRE DEMON HORDE WITH A RAZOR BLADE?"



I CALLED IT "PLEASE GOD, DON'T LET ME FLASH THE ENTIRE CREW DURING THIS FIGHT SCENE."

AND THROUGH THE HIGHS AND LOWS, THE RED CARPETS AND THE 4 AM CALL TIMES, THERE WAS DAISY. MY ANCHOR, MY PERSONAL CHEERLEADER, AND BULLSHIT DETECTOR ALL ROLLED INTO ONE TINY, PERFECT PACKAGE.

SHE WAS THERE FOR EVERY PREMIERE, EVERY AWARD SHOW, EVERY MOMENT OF DOUBT AND PANIC. SHE HELD MY HAND THROUGH HORMONE ADJUSTMENTS AND SURGERY CONSULTATIONS. SHE LAUGHED (OKAY, ROLLED HER EYES) AT MY BAD JOKES AND TOLD ME - KINDLY - WHEN I WAS FULL OF CRAP.

AND LAST YEAR, ON A BEACH IN MAUI WITH THE SUN SETTING BEHIND US, SHE BECAME MY WIFE.

YEAH, I KNOW. YOU'VE SEEN THE PICTURES. PEOPLE MAGAZINE CALLED IT THE "WEDDING OF THE YEAR." E!



NEWS DID A WHOLE SPECIAL ON OUR "FAIRYTALE ROMANCE."

BUT LET ME TELL YOU, THERE'S NOTHING FAIRYTALE ABOUT TRYING TO PEE IN A WEDDING DRESS. OR ABOUT YOUR NEW WIFE HAVING TO HELP YOU OUT OF SAID DRESS BECAUSE YOU'RE BOTH A LITTLE DRUNK AND A LOT HANDSY.

BUT STANDING ON THAT BEACH, LOOKING INTO DAISY'S EYES AS WE SAID OUR VOWS, I EXPERIENCED SOMETHING I NEVER BELIEVED WAS REAL: PEACE. AS IF THE CHAOS AND CONFUSION OF THE PAST FEW YEARS HAD BEEN LEADING TO THIS SINGULAR PERFECT MOMENT.

"I LOVE YOU," I TOLD HER. "ALL OF YOU, FROM TOP TO BOTTOM. AND I PROMISE TO SPEND THE REST OF MY LIFE LOVING EVERY SINGLE PART OF YOU, BODY AND SOUL."

DAISY, FOR ONCE, DIDN'T CRY. "I LOVE YOU TOO," SHE

SAID. "MY BEAUTIFUL, COMPLICATED, AMAZING WIFE."

WIFE. THE WORD STILL GIVES ME GOOSEBUMPS. WHO WOULD'VE THOUGHT THIS COULD BE MY LIFE? CERTAINLY NOT THAT SCARED KID WHO THOUGHT HE WAS LYING HIS WAY INTO A ROLE HE DIDN'T UNDERSTAND.

I DON'T KNOW WHAT THE FUTURE HOLDS. MAYBE MORE MOVIES, MAYBE MORE AWARDS. MAYBE KIDS SOMEDAY (OH GOD, CAN YOU IMAGINE? ME, RESPONSIBLE FOR A TINY HUMAN?). BUT WHATEVER COMES NEXT, I KNOW ONE THING FOR SURE:

I'M READY FOR IT. ALL OF IT. THE GOOD, THE BAD, THE INSANE. BECAUSE FOR THE FIRST TIME IN MY LIFE, I'M NOT PLAYING A ROLE. I'M JUST DYLAN: DAUGHTER, ACTRESS, WIFE, WOMAN, AND A WORK IN PROGRESS.

TO BE TOTALLY HONEST, I'M A LITTLE SCARED ABOUT HOW THIS MEMOIR WILL BE RECEIVED. I KNOW IT WILL BE CONTROVERSIAL. I KNOW PEOPLE WILL ACCUSE ME OF BEING A FRAUD AGAIN - AND THIS TIME, IT MIGHT BE THOSE WHO SUPPORTED ME IN THE PAST. I GET IT. I'VE BEEN ON BOTH SIDES OF THIS NOW.

BUT REMEMBER WHEN I SAID THIS WAS 'GUY DYLAN'S' LAST HURRAH? WELL, IT WAS REALLY MORE LIKE AN EXORCISM. PURGING THE LAST REMNANTS OF A PERSONA I'D CLUNG TO FOR SO LONG, I'D FORGOTTEN IT WASN'T MY REAL SKIN.

AND HERE'S THE THING ABOUT SHEDDING YOUR SKIN: IT LEAVES YOU RAW. EXPOSED. VULNERABLE. AND AS I SIT HERE, TYPING THESE FINAL WORDS, I CAN'T HELP BUT FEEL LIKE I'M STANDING NAKED IN FRONT OF YOU, SCARS AND ALL.

MAYBE THAT'S OKAY, THOUGH. MAYBE THAT'S THE POINT.

BECAUSE THE TRUTH IS, WE'RE ALL PLAYING ROLES. ALL OF US. THE TOUGH GUY AT THE BAR, THE PERFECT MOM ON INSTAGRAM, THE COOL GIRL WHO DOESN'T CARE WHAT ANYONE THINKS. WE PUT ON THESE MASKS BECAUSE WE THINK THEY'LL PROTECT US. AND MAYBE FOR A WHILE THEY DO.

BUT MASKS ARE HOT. THEY'RE SWEATY. THEY SMELL

WEIRD. YOU CAN'T BREATHE. IT'S UNBEARABLE! UNTIL IT'S NOT. UNTIL YOU FORGET THERE'S ANYTHING UNDERNEATH.

I SPENT YEARS - HELL, DECADES - TELLING MYSELF I WAS JUST A GUY WHO WANTED TO BE FAMOUS. THAT THE GNAWING EMPTINESS INSIDE ME WAS JUST AMBITION, NOT A DESPERATE YEARNING TO BE SOMEONE ELSE. SOMEONE REAL.

AND IT ALMOST WORKED. I ALMOST CONVINCED MYSELF THAT THE MASK WAS MY FACE. BECAUSE THE FIRST LIE YOU TELL IS ALWAYS TO YOURSELF. IT'S THE EASIEST ONE TO BELIEVE, THE HARDEST ONE TO SPOT. YOU TELL YOURSELF YOU'RE FINE, YOU'RE HAPPY, YOU'RE WHO YOU'RE SUPPOSED TO BE. BUT LIES HAVE A WAY OF UNRAVELING WHEN YOU LEAST EXPECT IT. AND WHEN THEY DO, YOU'RE LEFT STANDING IN THE RUBBLE OF THE LIFE YOU THOUGHT YOU WERE BUILDING, WONDERING HOW THE HELL YOU GOT THERE.

BUT HERE'S THE BEAUTIFUL, TERRIFYING TRUTH: IT'S NEVER TOO LATE TO START OVER. TO PEEL AWAY THE LAYERS OF BULLSHIT AND FIND OUT WHO'S UNDERNEATH.

IT WASN'T EASY. IT STILL ISN'T. THERE ARE DAYS I LOOK IN THE MIRROR AND WONDER WHO THE HELL IS STARING BACK AT ME. DAYS WHEN I MISS THE SIMPLICITY OF BEING THAT CLUELESS GUY WHO THOUGHT LIFTING HEAVY THINGS WAS ALL HE HAD TO OFFER THE WORLD. DAYS WHEN I WISH I COULD GO BACK TO NOT KNOWING, TO NOT FEELING SO DAMN MUCH ALL THE TIME.

THEN I REMEMBER THE ALTERNATIVE. THE EMPTINESS, THE DISCONNECT, THE FEELING OF BEING A GHOST HAUNTING MY OWN LIFE. AND I REALIZE THAT THIS - ALL THE TEARS AND THE FEARS AND THE OVERWHELMING JOY - IS WHAT IT MEANS TO BE ALIVE. TO BE REAL.

SO HERE'S MY ADVICE, FOR WHATEVER IT'S WORTH: STOP TRYING TO BE WHO YOU THINK YOU SHOULD BE, AND START BEING WHO YOU ARE. IT'S TERRIFYING, IT'S MESSY, AND IT'S PROBABLY GOING TO PISS SOME PEOPLE OFF.

BECAUSE ON THE OTHER SIDE OF THAT FEAR, THAT VULNERABILITY, THAT RAW, EXPOSED FEELING OF STANDING NAKED IN FRONT OF THE WORLD? THAT'S WHERE THE REAL YOU IS WAITING. AND LET ME TELL YOU, MEETING

HER FOR THE FIRST TIME IS THE MOST TERRIFYING, EXHILARATING, BEAUTIFUL THING YOU'LL EVER EXPERIENCE.

SO GO AHEAD. TAKE OFF THE MASK, LOOK IN THE MIRROR, AND ASK: WHO AM I, REALLY?

AND WHEN YOU FIND THE ANSWER - WHEN YOU FINALLY MEET THE REAL YOU - EMBRACE HER. LOVE HER. CELEBRATE EVERY MESSY, COMPLICATED, UGLY, GORGEOUS PART OF HER.

BECAUSE "YOURSELF" IS THE ONLY ROLE WORTH PLAYING. TRUST ME, I WOULD KNOW.

MUCH LOVE - AND GOOD FUCKING LUCK.

- DYLAN K. 😘

One of the many perks of our new house in Malibu: Private sunbathing!

(and aren't you glad you bought this book from my personal website 😉)

