

# HIGH-TOPS

to High Heels

A smug basketball jock loses a bet with his ex-girlfriend and she turns him into a high school hottie!



**Written and Illustrated by KK**



It was the biggest basketball game of the season: the Jefferson High Tomcats versus the St. Ceylan's Sprites. The bleachers were packed with students from both schools, along with what seemed like half the town, and the noise was deafening as the game reached its final moments. Fans were hollering and the cheerleaders were jumping up and down. There was good reason for all the excitement -- St. Ceylan's was leading 98-97, time was winding down, and the ball was in the hands of Jefferson High's star athlete, Bobby Vickerson.

The crowd's cheering reached a fever pitch as Bobby brought the ball across half-court, surveying the floor, a look of determined concentration on his handsome face. He was the smallest player on the Tomcats' roster, but easily the most talented. His ability to weave through the defense with his dribbling, and to hit shots in the biggest moments, was already the stuff of high school legend.

As seconds ticked off the clock, Bobby signalled for a pick, dribbling hard to the left to make St. Ceylan's defenders rotate. He had the match-up he wanted: Josh Delacroix, the Sprites' star center. Six inches taller than Bobby, far bigger and stronger, unguardable anywhere near the basket and a shot-blocking menace. The two of them had been trading buckets all night. But at the moment, they were nowhere near the basket -- they were out at the three-point line, where Bobby thrived.

"Ready to take another L, Delacroix?" Bobby grinned, dribbling the ball between his legs.

"Not tonight, Vickerson," his rival growled. "I'm locking you up."

"Lock this!" Bobby said, and hit his opponent with a cross-over move so fast the ball became a blur. As Josh scrambled to recover, Bobby stepped back behind the three-point line, rose up, and shot the ball.

The entire gym watched breathlessly as the ball left Bobby's fingertips, arcing high through the air. It splashed down into the opposing basket, hitting nothing but net, just as the buzzer sounded!

Bobby was immediately swarmed by his overjoyed teammates. Jefferson High students were screaming his name, leaping out of the stands and onto the court in their excitement, chanting the "We Love Bobby" cheer that seemed to erupt every other game. Even the cheerleaders from the opposing team couldn't help but swoon a little bit as Bobby Vickerson, hero yet again, flashed his perfect white grin and flexed his biceps for the crowd, basking in the glory of victory.

God, Kimberly hated him. She had known the ball was going in from the second it left Bobby's hand -- she had seen it a dozen times before, after all, what with being a cheerleader for the Tomcats, and had already tossed her pom-poms to the floor in frustration.

Just once, it would have been nice to see the great Bobby Vickerson taken down a notch. To see him lose a bit of that macho swagger he used to compensate for his height. To see him embarrassed the way he had embarrassed her three months ago, by dumping her in the middle of the cafeteria, when he had called her a dumb blonde airhead and said he'd be better off dating a Barbie doll.

Kimberly Quinn may have been blonde, but she was far, far from an airhead. She acted the part, that's all, the same way Bobby acted the part of charming, dashing athlete when he was really just a cocky asshole. And as she watched her ex-boyfriend soak up the adulation, she decided she was going to prove just how smart she was -- by finding a way to ruin Bobby Vickerson's perfect life.

The truth was, she'd actually liked Bobby, back when they first started dating. She and her mom had recently moved from California to Green Lake, a nondescript town in the Midwest, where her mom was opening an upscale salon to bring a little glamor to the truly boring place. The only even remotely exciting thing at Kimberly's new high school was Bobby Vickerson. Sure, she'd had popular jocks at her old school, and even dated a few, but Bobby was on another level -- for some reason, people seemed to just worship him.

Part of it was that he was handsome. There was no denying the fact that he looked like a boy-band heart-throb: great hair, soulful eyes, a flawless white grin. He wasn't a square-jawed muscle-bound kind of jock, though, and maybe that was why his excellence on the basketball court made him everybody's hero. He was small, and skinny, and looked like a bit of a pretty boy compared to his much bigger and hairier teammates, yet he still made fools of every opponent he went up against.

And boy, was he ever cocky. Kimberly had to admit his confidence had turned her on at the start. He was always so sure of himself, in whatever he did or said, and was always surrounded by admirers desperate to agree with him. The whole cheerleading squad fawned over him. But Kimberly Quinn, being the hot new blonde from Cali, was the one who got him. They had hooked up at a party against her better judgment, and, to her surprise, the sex was pretty fantastic.

That, plus the fact that dating Bobby Vickerson instantly made her the queen bee of her new school, was enough to persuade her. She used a few tricks from the hard-to-get playbook, and before long they were a Facebook-official couple, strolling hand-in-hand through the halls. Bobby was a great basketball player, but the world's best boyfriend he was not. Once the charm wore off, he was sexist, misogynistic, more concerned with his friends' opinions than hers, and generally a huge asshole. He even told her, to her face, that her only job was to shut up and look pretty.



And for a little while, since she was in a new town with no friends and totally isolated from her old life, she tried to do just that: wear sexy outfits for Bobby, join the cheerleading squad for Bobby, ooh and aah over Bobby like every other brain-washed kid at Jefferson High. He was still insatiable when it came to sex, but it wasn't hot anymore -- he was getting demanding and piggish about it, to the point where she was giving him blowjobs every other day and getting no satisfaction in return.

She finally decided enough was enough. She had seen the real Bobby Vickerson, the wannabe tough guy, macho, prick, who hid his insecurities through his play on the basketball court and took out his frustrations on whatever girl was unlucky enough to date him.

But of course, because he was Bobby Vickerson, the day before she was planning to break up with him he dumped her in the middle of the cafeteria. In front of half the school. So, yeah. Bobby Vickerson officially had it coming. Kimberly needed to humiliate him the way he had humiliated her, and she wasn't going to let anything stop her.

#

The first step in any plan of attack was research, of course, and that meant scouring Bobby's socials for flaws and weaknesses. Kimberly knew this was classic jilted ex behavior, spending hours scrolling through his Instagram and Facebook photos, but she was doing it with a purpose. God, it was excruciating seeing so many photos of his smug grin: at parties with his basketball teammates, at the beach, at the mall.

There were action shots of him in games, all of which were drowning in "hearts" and "likes" from his many admirers, and his status updates were always some stupid, faux-inspirational line with a dumb hashtag, usually #STRIVE4GREATNESS. The most painful photos were of them together, of course. Bobby hadn't bothered to delete or untag any of them, instead choosing to let them get slowly crowded out by photos of him with other girls, one of whom would surely be his new girlfriend soon. Yes, Bobby Vickerson was heartless, callous, and could apparently do no wrong.

But then she found exactly what she was looking for. It was a tagged Facebook photo, uploaded not by Bobby, but by his mother -- which was honestly a bit of a surprise. At Jefferson High, Bobby was the undisputed main attraction, no questions asked, but in the Vickerson household, there was another one, and her name was Serena. Kimberly had never actually met Bobby's older sister, who now lived mostly in either Paris or New York, but she had heard the name plenty, and Bobby's mom had posted enough photos of her to emblazon the pouty brunette fashion model firmly into her memory.

Being the best high school basketball player in Green Lake was one thing, but being an up-and-coming model who had already done her first spread for Gucci was another. Plus, Bobby's basketball talent had only really taken off in the past few years, while Serena had seemed destined for stardom from an early age. Both of Bobby's parents obsessed over Serena's modeling career, and even now that she was out of the house, she usually took priority -- in fact, they were currently in NYC to support her at one of her shows, meaning they'd missed the St. Ceylan's game completely.

That was why at first, Kimberly figured this particular photo was a typical boomer screw-up, and Bobby's mom had been meaning to tag her daughter, not her son. The photo showed an extremely pretty little girl, maybe nine or ten years old, wearing a powder blue princess-style dress and smiling nervously for the camera with a look in her eyes that made it clear she would rather be just about anywhere else in the world.

Kimberly looked down at the caption and her heart leapt. Bobby's mom had captioned it as follows: "Halloween 2013, put him in Serena's old pageant dress, oh my gaaaawd they grow up too fast!! Love u Bobby, my lil' prince(ss). LOL."

And just like that, Kimberly had a plan.

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When she showed up to school the following Monday, Kimberly was dressed to kill: low-cut halter top, short skirt, "Instagram baddie" makeup, the works. She would be the first to admit she'd let herself go a little after Bobby dumped her, in the sense that she'd worn leggings, sweatshirts, and a pony-tail way too many days in a row. But for what she had in mind, she needed to be using every advantage she had over her ex, and one of those advantages was still her sex appeal.

Sure enough, when she sauntered up to Bobby's locker after math class, Jefferson High's finest did the same double-take as all the other guys she'd caught ogling her. "Hey, Kimmy," he said, still casually using the nickname he'd come up with when they were dating -- God, did she ever hate that. "Looking hot today."

"I'm enjoying being single again," Kimberly said acidly. "Good game on Friday, by the way."

Bobby gave a boyish shrug. "What can I say? I don't lose."

"You probably should have, with all those free-throws you missed in the third quarter," Kimberly said. "You were one for six, right? Yikes."

Bobby rolled his eyes. "Just an off night at the line," he said. "Yesterday in practice I sank a hundred in a row. I probably won't miss another all season."

"A hundred in a row? You really expect me to believe that?" Kimberly asked in a saccharine tone. "There's no way you can even make fifty in a row."

Bobby smirked, shutting his locker and leaning against it. "You want to bet on it?"

These were the exact words Kimberly had been hoping for. During the three months they dated, it had become a running theme -- Bobby loved betting, and almost always won. He usually chose the prizes. Kimberly would have to wear a sexy outfit for him, or give him a lap dance, or make him a sandwich, or something of that sort. Now, seeing his ex all dolled up and looking hot again, he was right back in the same mindset.

"Sure," Kimberly purred. "Fifty free throws in a row. In the school gym. With witnesses."

"Piece of cake," Bobby said. "But we need to decide what's at stake, first."

“You know my mom’s salon?” Kimberly asked. “Well, for my birthday she gave me a voucher for a total makeover, all expenses paid.”

“Yeah, I’ll pass,” Bobby said, making a face.

“Or I can take the cash value, which is fifteen hundred dollars,” Kimberly added casually. “My birthday, my choice.”

Bobby blinked. “Whoa. Fifteen hundred? I know you said business was good, but…”

“You’d be able to buy those Lakers tickets you’re always dreaming about,” Kimberly pointed out. “Pretty good seats, too. Weren’t your parents supposed to take you to a game last summer?”

“Went to fashion week in Milan, instead,” Bobby muttered. He had a far-away look in his eye, no doubt fantasizing about seeing his favorite team. Then he shook himself, returning to reality. “Look, Kimmy, there’s no way I lose that bet,” he said. “We both know that. But I also can’t pony up fifteen hundred for it to match the stakes, so it wouldn’t be a real bet anyways, and that wouldn’t be fair.”

Kimberly was a little taken aback by the integrity on display, until she reminded herself that it was just part of Bobby Vickerson’s “perfect” act. “That’s not a problem,” she said slyly. “See, if I win, you still get the prize. Except it’s the makeover. I take you to the salon, and then out on a date.”

“So you want to get a pedicure, couple’s massage, and go out for lunch?” Bobby raised one eyebrow. “Is this some weird attempt to get back together, Kimmy? Because I really wish you all the best, ‘namaste’ and whatever, but we were…”

“Oh, no, not that kind of salon visit,” Kimberly said. “I mean you’re going to get a full makeover, as a girl, and wear whatever I pick out for you. Like my own personal Barbie doll. You know?”

Bobby momentarily paled, no doubt having Halloween flashbacks, before he regained his confident swagger. “What, is that some kind of kinky fantasy for you?” he demanded. “You secretly into chicks, Kimmy?”

“You taking the bet or not, Bobby?” Kimberly demanded. “I mean, if you don’t think you can win, we might as well not bother.”

“Fifty free-throws for fifteen hundred bucks?” Bobby smirked. “You’re just giving it away. You got yourself a bet.” He looked her up and down again, with the old salacious glint in his eye. “By the way, did you gain some weight? It looks good on you. That ass is *thick*.”

Kimberly smiled at him through gritted teeth. “Friday. School gym. Fifty free-throws.”

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As soon as she got home, Kimberly booted up her MacBook Air and made a brand new LiveJournal account, using the carefully-chosen name “bboy2003.” This was possibly the most important part of the plan, and she had to make sure she did it right. She had read through hundreds of Bobby’s status updates on Facebook to get a good feel for how he wrote, and now she was going to put it to use. Deciding the first entry was the most important, she labored over it for almost an hour, making numerous versions. After a few final tweaks, she sat back, satisfied, and read it over.

“I can’t believe I’m doing this, but I feel like if I don’t express myself somewhere I’m literally going to explode, so here it goes... My life is probably one most people would trade for in a hot second. I’m one of the popular kids at school, I won’t say which school. I’m an all-star athlete and team captain, I won’t say which sport. I’ve dated some of the hottest girls in my grade, I won’t name names. But the thing is, it’s all a lie.

Even with all that cool stuff going on in my life, my happiest memory, like, maybe my only happy memory, is this one Halloween when I was ten. Why? Because I got to dress up like a princess. Yeah, I pretended I totally hated it. But on the inside, I was in heaven. I loved being pretty. I loved being girly. I loved being MYSELF, because on the inside, for as long as I can remember, that’s been the real me.

For as long as I can remember, I’ve also been so scared people are going to find out -- that’s why I always have to act tough, why I always have to dominate in sports, even just in gym class, why I always have to be chasing girls. It sucks so much, living this total lie, pretending to be a tough manly jock when I wish I was a cute sexy cheerleader, but at least here I can be myself. My secret diary... #BOY2BABE #PRINCESSINHIDING #STRIVE4REALNESS.”

It was perfect. Kimberly cracked her knuckles, punched the enter key on her keyboard, and sat back in her chair. Now she just had to make sure Bobby lost the bet.

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Thanks to the power of social media and Jefferson High’s obsession with all things Bobby Vickerson, by the time the final bell rang on Friday, every single person in school had heard about the bet. That meant a sizable crowd was already waiting in the gym when Kimberly arrived, phones out and ready to put the whole thing on Instagram. Bobby showed up a few minutes later, accompanied by his usual circle of teammates and suck-ups. When he saw how many people had showed up to watch, he broke out in a huge grin and started handing out high-fives and fist-pounds immediately.

“Alright, let’s do this thing!” he whooped. “Who wants to see me win a ton of money off a crazy ex?”

“Big talk for someone who choked at the line last game,” Kimberly said primly. “Fifty free throws in a row, starting with your first basket made. I’m sure your adoring fans can keep track.”

She pulled a basketball out of her bag and tossed it over, trying to look casual. Bobby caught it easily and immediately made a face.

“Nice try, Kimmy,” he said. “What are you trying to pull? This is covered in freaking Vaseline.” He held up his shiny fingers as proof. “You think I’m that dumb? I get to pick my own ball.”

Kimberly pursed her lips, trying to look disappointed. She had done her homework prior to arranging the bet -- not her actual homework, naturally, but her “revenge on Bobby Vickerson” homework -- but in a few minutes things would be out of her hands, and she would just have to hope her plan worked. DeShawn Baker, Bobby’s power forward teammate, was already wheeling the big container of basketballs out of the gym storage room.

Bobby wiped his hands off on his jersey, then made a big show of carefully selecting a ball, nose wrinkling slightly from the strong smell of Axe -- clearly somebody had set off another “body-spray bomb” in the locker room. He picked out a Vaseline-free basketball, spun it on his finger, and gave a nod of satisfaction.

“Well, here we go,” he said. “Just to restate the terms of the bet, like, for the Instagram... If I win, I get fifteen hundred bucks. Correct?”

“Correct,” Kimmy said. “And if you lose, you get a full makeover and wear whatever I decide, from the skin out, for a date at the mall. If you try to go back on the bet, you owe me the money.”

“Perfect,” Bobby said, mugging for the dozen phones recording him. “Let’s do this thing.”



He took his stance at the free throw line, dribbled the ball twice, licked his fingers for grip, as was his routine, and splashed the first one home touching nothing but net. DeShawn, who was grabbing rebounds for him, passed the ball back. Bobby turned to Kimberly with a smirk, and shot the second one: another swish. Everybody in the gym was murmuring excitedly, growing louder as he sank shot after shot. Kimberly watched with an increasing anxiousness as his perfect form remained perfect. But on the twenty-second shot, she noticed one tiny difference: before Bobby took the shot, he scratched his neck.

Another swish, but Bobby was making a strange face, moving his tongue around his mouth, as he prepared the twenty-third shot. This time he caught a tiny bit of the back rim, but the ball still

dropped through cleanly. Kimberly could see him frowning, trying to maintain his concentration. By shot number thirty, he was sniffing and his eyes were watering slightly. By shot number thirty-five, he kept having to clear his throat every few seconds.

After shot number forty swirled around the rim and down, he shot a suspicious glance at her which Kimberly carefully ignored, pretending to be entirely focused on the hoop. Forty-one, forty-two, and forty-three were all swishes again, as Bobby regained his composure. His face was red and his eyes were watering more than ever, but he clearly wasn't going to stop. Forty-four, forty-five, forty-six -- each shot was perfect.

"Come on, bro, you got this," DeShawn called from behind the net, passing the ball out to his point guard once again.

Kimberly was clenching her fists so hard that her knuckles were turning white. Bobby coughed before he shot number forty-seven, and it bounced on each side of the rim, teetered dangerously, and...

Fell through the basket, shot made.

He looked at her again and winked. She glared back at him. No matter what, Bobby Vickerson somehow always managed to come out on top. In three more shots, she was going to have to somehow scrape together fifteen hundred bucks, and suffer another humiliation at his hands. Jefferson High was going to be talking about it for the rest of the school year, how Bobby's jilted ex ended up paying for his Laker tickets after some weird attempt at revenge backfired on her...

Forty-eight swished through the net. She couldn't bear to watch her defeat, so she shut her eyes. The gym sounded just about ready to explode. She could hear the chatter growing louder, a few people already starting the stupid "We Love Bobby" cheer. And then...

Nothing. Nothing but stunned silence. She opened her eyes in time to see the basketball rolling away under the net, but DeShawn was too shocked to grab it. Everyone was staring, open-mouthed, at Bobby. Bobby was staring, open-mouthed, at the rim.

Kimberly grabbed the phone of the person beside her and dragged the video backward. Shot number forty-nine: Bobby took his two dribbles, licked his fingers, and missed the rim entirely, just barely grazing the net.

Bobby was still staring at the hoop, red in the face. "What. The. Fuck!" he screeched. He grabbed the basketball off the floor and hurled it angrily at the wall. "This is bullshit!" he shouted. "This is total bullshit! Fuck!"

Kimberly exhaled. She couldn't believe it. She'd won the bet -- certainly not fair and square, but hey, against someone like Bobby Vickerson, you had to play dirty.

He was one of those people who never got cavities, never got pimples, never broke bones, et cetera. In fact, Kimberly didn't know if he'd ever been to a doctor -- he had a weird mistrust of modern medicine. But she knew that his mom made an elaborate coconut cream cake for Serena's birthday each year, even now that she wasn't in Green Lake, and she knew that Bobby never ate a bite, because he was *very* allergic to coconut.

She had snuck into the gym storage room during her study block with a huge bottle of coconut oil, covering every basketball she could find, before setting off the "body-spray bomb" of Axe to hide the smell. She had then slathered the first ball with Vaseline, to ensure that every time he licked his fingers between shots he would taste that, instead of the coconut. Subtle, evil, and it had actually worked -- Macchiavelli, eat your heart out.

"See you tomorrow, Bobby," she called over her shoulder as she strutted out of the gym. "Or should I say, 'Barbie?'"

She was so thrilled that she couldn't even wait until she got home to enact the next part of her plan. She pulled out her phone on the bus and scrolled to her newest contact, a certain basketball player from a certain Catholic school, to make sure he was still free for a date tomorrow.

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When Kimberly got to the Papillon Salon bright and early on Saturday, Bobby was already waiting, looking around sullenly with his hands stuffed in his pockets. He was honoring the terms of their bet -- it would have been impossible not to, what with how many people had it on video -- but he was clearly not happy about losing out on Lakers tickets in favor of an involuntary makeover. Kimberly, on the other hand, was in the best mood she'd experienced in quite some time.

"Okay, let's get this over with," her ex muttered. "How long is this going to take?"

"Three to four hours, I would guess," Kimberly said. "That's why we're here so early."

Bobby groaned. "Alright. Fine. Whatever."

They stepped through the glass doors of the salon and were immediately greeted by Pam, an attractive red-head who managed the salon for Kimberly's mom. She had already been in contact via email, explaining the situation in detail. Well, explaining a made-up situation in detail. She had told them she was transferring her mom's full makeover offer to a friend, a deeply, deeply closeted friend, who had dreamed of such a thing since he was a little boy, had confided in her, and was now battling a serious case of cold feet, to the point where she had agreed to pretend the whole thing was just the product of a lost bet.

“Kimberly! Always so nice to see you,” Pam exclaimed. “And this must be the poor sucker who lost the bet, right? Bobby?” She gave Kimberly a knowing wink over his head. “This must be *torture* for you.”

“Got that right,” Bobby said blithely. “Can I at least get a massage from some cute Asian chick?”

“I’m afraid our *masseur* is from Brazil,” Pam said. “And he’s quite a hunk. Not that you would care, of course.” She gave another exaggerated wink, making Kimberly wince -- a born actor, this woman was not. “Shall we get started?”

“You have the list, right?” Kimberly asked, referring to the detailed list of everything she, or according to the email, Bobby, had requested.

“I sure do,” Pam said. “Oh, he’s going to be such a doll. I can already tell. Amazing bone structure.”

“It really is,” Kimberly said, with just a twinge of jealousy. “Okay, I’m off to do some shopping. I’ll be back by noon, Bobby. Relax and enjoy yourself, okay?”

“Wait, you’re leaving?” Bobby yelled.

“Yep,” Kimberly said. “See ya.”

As much as she wanted to see Bobby’s masculinity removed step by step, she had a few more things she needed to prepare while her ex was occupied. Besides, one of the estheticians had volunteered to film the whole thing for her.



As soon as she was out of the salon, she high-tailed it back to her mom's borrowed car and started for the other side of town. She crossed the railroad tracks, pulled into the parking lot of a seedy-looking motel, and made sure the windows were rolled up while she texted another new contact in her phone, a drug dealer who went by the truly lame nickname "Skeeter."

She was so busy watching the motel doors that she didn't even notice when a small blue Prius had pulled up beside her until it honked. A bespectacled man in a button-up shirt was waving at her. Wondering if he needed directions or something, she rolled her window down.

"Hey, Kimberly," he said. "You got the money?"

Kimberly blinked. "Uh, yeah," she said. "You got the stuff?"

"I sure do." The man, who could be none other than Skeeter, produced a bulging grocery bag from his glove box. "You're lucky too much stuff fell off the truck. This is one hell of a discount I'm giving you. But also, I feel like I'm doing my duty as a progressive, open-minded kind of criminal, you know? Money."

Kimberly handed him the envelope of money she had emptied her savings account for, and he handed her the bag at the same time. She checked inside and grinned.

“Your transition is going beautifully, by the way,” Skeeter said, briefly counting the bills. “I would never have guessed. Now, that stuff is the ultra-powerful, non-FDA approved, Chinese laboratory stuff, not your average estrogen pills. So, do your research about dosage. With great power, great responsibility, et-kuh.”

“Et-kuh?” Kimberly echoed.

“Et-kuh,” Skeeter said, frowning. “You know, so on, so forth, et-kuh. It should last you a few months. If you need more, you know who to call. Later days.”

He rolled his window back up and peeled out of the parking lot, leaving Kimberly with the next phase of her diabolical plan sitting in her lap. Reaching into the backseat, she pulled out one of Bobby’s prized possessions: the massive jar of protein powder he kept in his gym locker for pre and post-workout shakes. As Skeeter had so recently suggested, Kimberly had done her research.

Getting the great Bobby Vickerson all dolled up as a girl and putting it all over the internet would probably be enough revenge for the typical revenge seeker, but Kimberly was aiming much, much higher. She started crushing the pills and measuring them out carefully into the protein powder.

“Striving for greatness,” she muttered. “Striving for greatness...”

#

Kimberly had high hopes for “Barbie’s” debut, both because of how adorable a princess Bobby had been on Halloween six years ago and because of how his close-up Instagram selfies looked when run through a gender swap filter -- she figured it was the best way to get a preview. He was small, with narrow shoulders and a generally slender body, and, like Pam had noticed, amazing bone structure. She was expecting him to make a surprisingly pretty, passable girl, even if he couldn’t compete with big sister Serena.

When she re-entered the salon just before noon, loaded down with shopping bags, she realized her expectations had been hopelessly off-base. The fidgeting high-schooler being subjected to a final makeup inspection was not a pretty, passable girl. She was fucking *goals*.

Kimberly just stood there for a few seconds, her brain and her eyes in total disagreement as she took in the sight. Bobby’s hoodie and skinny jeans had been swapped for a short pink robe, exposing a pair of long, slender legs that were much too sexy to belong to a guy: sleek, smooth, and sun-kissed. Full-body waxing had been the first thing on her list, and as much as she regretted not witnessing it in person, seeing the result was almost as good. The quick trip to the tanning booth had obviously been worthwhile too, as his exposed skin had a definite “beach babe” glow.

But they had done so much more than that. The sparkly pink pedicure made his small feet seem almost dainty in their chunky white flip-flops, while the matching manicure, square-cut half-inch talons selected by Kimberly herself, transformed his hands into fluttery emblems of femininity and somehow even made his tanned arms seem more slender.

Most arrestingly, his former dark brown undercut had been replaced by a gorgeous mane of tumbling Barbie-blonde waves, long enough to be piled up on his head in an elegant twist while also spilling down both shoulders. Kimberly knew it was a wig -- human-hair, front lace, to be precise -- but it looked amazing, and his own hair hadn't been long enough for extensions. And, if her eyes weren't mistaking her, she could see the gleam of small silver keepers in his pierced earlobes.

As for his face? Unrecognizable. All traces of masculinity had been replaced by flawless foundation, contouring and highlights to emphasize his cheekbones, fluttery black false eyelashes, and an expert blend of shadows that gave him a sensuous, smoldering stare. They had plucked and pencilled his eyebrows into perfect feminine arches, which must have drawn a few protests, and they had even done the collagen treatment on his lips.

Those pouty, pillowy lips, so swollen he couldn't quite close them over his whitened teeth and painted a poppy matte pink, were currently being coated in a shiny liquid gloss by Pam's expert hand.

"Kylie Jenner, eat your heart out," she announced, stepping back. "Girls, I think our work here is done." She caught sight of Kimberly, who was still speechless, but now more delighted than stunned. "Welcome back! What do you think?"

Kimberly couldn't think of an adequate descriptor for Bobby Vickerson's stunning transformation from all-star jock to bleached-blonde bimbo. "Uh, not bad," she said.

"Uh, I probably look like a freaking fairy," Bobby said, ruining the illusion. "This is, without a doubt, the gayest thing I have ever done."

"I love how you're reclaiming that word, hon," Pam said brightly. "So fierce! Ready to see the new you?"

"Whatever," Bobby sighed, the sound of his voice still totally incongruous with the blonde beauty it was coming from.

"Yep, super fierce," Kimberly said, shooting Bobby a glare in case he was thinking of "reclaiming" any other homophobic slurs. "Let's go have a look, shall we?"

Pam ushered him over to the three-way mirror, trailed by the beautician who was still dutifully filming the makeover on her phone. He seemed totally oblivious to the attention he was getting from the other customers, most of whom had heard his yowling during the bikini wax and were

now stunned by the final product. In his deluded mind, he probably thought there was no way he could look like a girl, and that the stares were because he looked ridiculous -- as the loser of a bet was supposed to look.

When he reached the mirrors, Kimberly got to watch his glossy lipsticked mouth fall open in utter shock. For a moment he was totally frozen, then he spun from one mirror to the next, as if hoping it was some kind of trick. As the fact that it was really him sank in, he started blushing under his makeup, and a tremor went through his waxed-smooth legs.



“Talk about an after!” the beautician manning the phone camera exclaimed. “Can I get a nice big smile? We need a few shots for the salon’s Instagram account.”

Bobby, still completely dazed, looked around. The beauticians who had worked on him were all crowded in to admire Pam’s makeup job, and they, in turn, had drawn the attention of several curious customers -- a mix of hot trophy wife types and pretty girls closer to his own age. He was used to being surrounded by an adoring audience, and by attractive members of the opposite sex, but this was something he had never experienced in his life.

On what looked to Kimberly like autopilot, Bobby slowly parted his glossy lips and smiled for a camera. A nervous laugh even escaped, just briefly, sounding almost giddy. Then he caught sight of her, and his pretty blue eyes filled with fury. He was still smiling through gritted white teeth, trying to be a good sport for the camera and pretend he didn’t care he had just been transformed into not just a girl, but a gorgeous one. But she could see the anger and embarrassment in his eyes, and it was satisfying as hell.

“Perfect,” the beautician beamed. “This is definitely going on the before-and-after wall.”

“Agreed,” Pam gushed. “We love showing off our satisfied customers! I mean, um, our customers who lost a bet and totally don’t love looking pretty...”

“That’s not the boy who came in earlier, is it?” one of the trophy wives blurted. “No way!”

Kimberly watched Bobby’s throat bob up and down as he gulped, realizing photo evidence of his makeover would be joining the legion of “before-and-after” photos in the Papillon Salon lobby. She waited for him to explode, make a vehement argument against it, and definitely call Pam, and possibly everyone else there, a “crazy bitch.” But Bobby was not used to disappointing an audience, and he was clearly still stunned by the reflection in the mirror. She had to take advantage of it while she could.

“Come on, Barbie,” Kimberly said sweetly, grabbing him by the arm and nodding toward the curtained-off changing area. “Let’s get you dressed and get out of here.”

#

Even if the rest of the plan fell apart completely, Kimberly felt like she could die somewhat happy just having seen Bobby Vickerson swish across the salon parking lot in high heels and a miniskirt. He was managing both about as well as could be expected, but when he stumbled she was quick to let him know about it.

“Heel toe, one foot directly in front of the other, remember?” she said. “Roll your hips! Come on, I thought you were an athlete. Where’s the body control?”

Under normal circumstances, Bobby would have fired back, probably with something demeaning and incredibly sexist, then laughed at his own wit. But these were very abnormal circumstances, and all Kimberly got was a glare, which wasn't particularly intimidating since it came through several layers of expertly-applied makeup as well as spiky black eyelash extensions.

She relished the silence: the beauticians had giggled endlessly over his sullen, teenage boy voice coming out of an ultra-girly package, and Pam had assured him that if he wanted to "pass" he was going to have to speak in a much more feminine voice. The result was that she could tease her ex all she wanted, getting the last word she never got while they were dating, and Bobby had to keep his lipsticked mouth shut or risk exposure.

Of course, he was a little exposed no matter what, thanks to his outfit. Kimberly had taken no small delight in picking out her ex-boyfriend's clothing. He had always pestered her to wear sexy lingerie for him, so she had made a little stop at Victoria's Secret to find the sexiest black push-up bra she could find.

It was dripping in lace and had gel-padded cups to give him the appearance of having a bust, and it was adorable watching him struggle to do up the clasp with his newly-long nails. Bobby had whined and complained, but she'd reminded him the bet was "skin out," even showing him the video proof, and he'd toned it down to a sulk.

The sexy bra was paired with a lacy black thong, naturally, and when Bobby insisted there was no way he would be able to wear it without "flopping out" all over the place, Kimberly had just grinned and held up a roll of special adhesive tape. It was, weirdly, probably the most intimate they had been since breaking up. Using YouTube know-how, she'd helped him force his testes back into his body cavity and tape his willy back between his butt-cheeks, so tightly she could see tears smarting his eyes.

She couldn't lie: for some reason, it was incredibly hot. So was watching him observe his flat, feminine crotch in the mirror afterwards with a stunned, slightly fearful look on his face. Once she was satisfied that the thong would wedge itself sexily between his cheeks with each step, and that the bra was just a little too tight for comfort, it was time to get him dressed.

She had magnanimously chosen a navy blue Nike tank top for him to wear, since Nike was his favorite brand of sports equipment, but there was one little difference -- this was a girl's crop top, designed to end just below the ribcage, exposing plenty of toned, tanned midriff. She enjoyed the irony of having him wear his precious Nike brand as a girl, especially since the rest of his outfit would make any kind of athletics totally out of the question.

She had quickly introduced him to his very first miniskirt, an extremely short, pleated white number designed to contrast his tanned legs and swish flirtatiously around his thighs, giving him a hippier appearance at the same time. A sexy skirt like that required heels, of course, so she

helped him strap his feet into a pair of cute cork-wedge sandals with a chunky three-inch heel and one-inch platform, open-toed to display his glittery pink pedicure.

As a finishing touch, she replaced the studs in his ears with big golden hoops and put a gold choker-style necklace of tiny linked hearts around his slender neck, then added a few bangles to his wrists for good measure, ensuring he would tinkle prettily with every motion.

As fun as it was watching him stumble around the salon, knock-kneed like a drunk girl leaving a nightclub, she eventually started giving him tips on how to move in his new footwear, walking heel-toe with his hips swaying naturally from side to side. Once she was satisfied Bobby could navigate without falling flat on his face, she had him thank each of the beauticians with a dainty air-kiss, then dragged her new creation out into the real world.

It was amazing how his new feminine appearance forced him to adopt a femmy body language as well: the restriction of a short skirt and high heels made him take tiny, mincing steps, the claw-like manicure meant he could no longer clench his fists and so was more likely to hold his wrists limp and fan out his pretty fingers, and the novelty of his long hair meant he was constantly touching it unconsciously, not to mention toying with his large hoop earrings, all of which gave him the appearance of a fussing, primping young lady.

In short, it was a dream come true. He was clearly terrified to be out in public like this, even just for a trip across the parking lot: his eyes were darting in all directions, and when a woman heading to the salon gave him a curious glance he nearly fainted on the spot, probably mistaking her appraisal of his makeover for suspicion of his gender. With the sunlight gleaming on his blonde hair, his bracelets tinkling, and his heels clapping noisily on the tarmac parking lot, he drew several more looks by the time they arrived at the car.

“Get in butt-first, and keep your knees together unless you want people to see that lacy black thong,” Kimberly advised, opening the car door for her ex.

“I know how to get into a freaking car, Kimmy,” Bobby whispered, glowering.

Kimberly got her phone out just in time to record him tumbling headfirst into the passenger seat with all the grace of a dying goose. “Barbie’s first time in high heels and a mini,” she sang. “It’s a learning process, right?”

She tagged Bobby, added a few choice hashtags, and posted it to her Instagram story. The likes and incredulous comments immediately started flooding in, most of them demanding to know if the hot blonde was really Bobby Vickerson.

“Come... See... For yourself...” she muttered, tapping out a reply.

“Who are you talking to?” Bobby demanded.

“Nobody,” Kimberly said sweetly. “Let’s hit the mall, cutie.”

#

The Green Lake mega-mall was the pride and joy of the town, proof, once again, of how utterly boring a place Green Lake was. That meant on a Saturday noon, it was absolutely packed with shoppers: moms and daughters, families with small screaming children, lost and bewildered boyfriends, and, of course, droves of teenagers from Jefferson High and other schools. It was understandable that Bobby was a little reluctant to get out of the car.

“I can’t do it, Kimmy,” he said, shaking his head furiously, making his hoop earrings swing. “I can’t do it, I’m seriously freaking out. This is cruel and unusual, you know that? It’s, like, it’s...”

“Part of the bet,” Kimberly said. “Here’s the way I see it, Bobby. You look hot. Face facts. You look like a hot girl, and it’s freaking you out. You know who gets even more attention than a hot girl? A hot girl freaking out or acting like a guy in drag. So if you want the medium humiliation instead of the extra spicy humiliation, your best option is to shut up, smile, and look pretty.”

Looking vaguely like he was going to be sick, Bobby nodded. Satisfied, Kimberly reached into the backseat and pulled out a white designer purse she had already loaded with the essentials, and added Bobby’s phone, keys, and wallet to it. She also tugged the corner of the blanket hiding his protein powder back into place, glad her ex was much too distracted to notice.

Once they were out of the car, she gave him one final inspection, tugging on his top, adjusting his miniskirt, and untangling a tendril of long blonde hair from one of his hoop earrings. As an unnecessary but emasculating last touch, she had him add a little more gloss to his lips with the help of his phone screen. She could see the fright in his pretty blue eyes as he adjusted the sit of the purse strap on his slender shoulder, and it was adorable.

Without further ado, Kimberly linked arms with her ex and marched him inside the mall. Almost as soon as they passed through the doors, she could hear Bobby’s breathing quicken, and for good reason -- two attractive blondes walking arm in arm drew a lot of eyes no matter what, and the noisy clapping of his high-heeled sandals did the rest. Kimberly was used to getting checked out, but Bobby had never experienced the male gaze from this side of the tracks before.



“Remember to smile,” she said, elbowing him.

What she got was more of a grimace, but with his ultra-pouty lips and perfect makeup just about any facial expression was alluring. By the time they got to the food court, there was absolutely no trace left of Bobby Vickerson’s patented cockiness or macho swagger -- he was way too overwhelmed, not to mention terrified, by the lustful stares he was getting from horny frat boys, horny teenaged delinquents, horny dads, horny ten-year-olds... Basically, any male who was into females and had two eyes in their head.

He was so busy blushing and fiddling with his hair and clothes that he didn’t realize he was swishing his way into a trap until it was too late. The food court table outside Orange Julius was currently occupied by none other than Jefferson High’s entire cheerleading squad, drawn to Kimberly’s Instagram story and invitation like moths to a porch light.

“Oh. Em. Ef. Gee.”

Beverly, the cheer captain and one of Bobby’s former hook-ups, had been the first to look up from her smoothie, and the pretty brunette’s mouth was now hanging open. Bobby was staring back with an expression of equal alarm. Kimberly was officially on Cloud Nine, possibly even Cloud Ten.

“Ladies, may I introduce the new, and improved, *Barbie* Vickerson?” she said sweetly, reaching for Bobby’s arm to prevent him from making a run for it. She pulled him forward into full view,

nearly toppling him by accident. As he regained his balance on the high heels, the noise level suddenly went from 0 to 100 as stunned silence gave way to a chorus of incredulous squeals. The phones were out, and from the look on Bobby's face he would have probably preferred the girls were holding switch-blades.

"Hey, come on!" he blurted, momentarily forgetting his "shut up and look pretty" policy. "I don't want this all over my socials!"

"Oh, my god, it is way too late for that," Beverly giggled. "I cannot believe this! All I need is a hashtag... How about 'Tomcat to minx?' Or 'he's a bad bitch?' Oh, my god, I can't believe how good he looks! Is that lace front, like, real hair?"

"Yep," Kimberly said proudly. "No expense spared, remember? When my idiot ex agrees to a full makeover, he goes all out."

"Oh my god, he looks like a Sephora model!" Ally chimed in. "Like, maybe there are two models in the family now? Whoever did his makeup is a serious *artiste*."

All the excited squealing was turning heads throughout the food court, and Kimberly could see Bobby's panic increasing by the second. Normally her ex loved being the center of attention, but it was clear this particular spotlight was killing him: his shoulders were rounded, as if he could make himself disappear by sheer will power, his made-up eyes were blinking rapidly, and his hands kept fluttering from the hem of his skirt to the bottom of his crop top, desperately trying to hide at least a sliver of his new appearance but unable to decide on what.

"Keep it down!" he snapped. "I don't want the whole mall knowing I'm..."

Two middle-aged soccer moms walking past with their trays suddenly did a double-take at hearing Bobby's voice. "Wait, is that a *boy*?" one of them demanded in a much-too-loud whisper.

The cheerleaders broke into fresh peals of laughter as the two women frowned and moved away, shaking their heads, no doubt wondering how they were ever going to explain such a thing to their poor children, and whatever happened to family values, et cetera. Bobby's face turned bright red and his gaze dropped to the floor, unable to meet anybody's eyes.

"You're not doing yourself any favors talking like that," Ally gasped, still recovering from her laughter. She put on a gruff parody of a man's voice and barked, "I don't want the whole mall knowing I'm a guy!"

"One of these things is not like the other," Beverly agreed. "But if he doesn't open his mouth, wow. I mean, those lips? Hot." She leaned in for a closer look. "Were they always that pouty? How did I never notice?"

Kimberly could tell that Bobby wanted, desperately, to blame the collagen injection. However, he was equally desperate to avoid detection as a guy and causing another minor scene, so his jaw remained clenched shut.

“And those cheekbones!” Daphne exclaimed. “How did I never realize how pretty he was? I mean, not just pretty boy pretty, but like, *pretty pretty*.”

Bobby could only stand there blushing as the girls oohed and aahed, marveling over every detail of his transformation to ultra-girly blonde bombshell, and Kimberly was loving every second of it. Judging by their reactions, not a single one of them had seen the feminine potential hiding behind Bobby’s swaggering macho athleticism -- even Kimberly had to admit she hadn’t expected him to look *this* hot -- but now, they would never be able to unsee it.

All the girls who once thought of Bobby as a stud were now busy cooing over his flawless makeup, giggling over his impractical heels and claw-like manicure, and admiring his slender, coltish legs and taut tummy, and she could see each compliment take another chunk out of her ex’s male ego. He was half-heartedly trying to hide his face from the camera phones with one manicured hand, while the other was still tugging nervously at his skirt.

In one masterful stroke, she had turned Jefferson High’s most eligible bachelor into the equivalent of a fellow cheerleader, or at best a swishy gay best friend in drag, totally desexing him. Not a single girl in town would view him the same way after this, especially not with what came next...

Right on cue, her phone buzzed.

“Josh Delacroix just texted me,” she announced, waving her phone. “He’s on his way to meet ‘Barbie’ up for their first date!”

The girls gasped, then broke into peals of laughter. “Oh my God, this is too much!” Beverly exclaimed. “This is amazing!”

“Wait, Josh is on this, too?” Bobby demanded, too shocked to remain silent. “Josh Delacroix? That’s my date? I thought you meant me and you!”

“As if,” Kimberly said. “I’m not into girls, and obviously neither is ‘Barbie’ -- she only dates studs. Big, manly studs. And you’d better work on your voice if you don’t want the whole mall listening in...”

Bobby glanced around wildly, making his hoop earrings dance, then lowered his voice to a whisper, doing his best to raise the pitch at the same time. “But Josh is my rival!” he sputtered. “My nemesis! He’s Moby Dick, and I’m the guy who, like, stabs him with the spear thing and uses his blubber for lamps. I can’t be seen in public like this with *Josh Delacroix*.”

Kimberly raised her eyebrows. "One, I'm impressed you actually read Moby Dick..."

"Sparknotes," Bobby muttered. "Had to do a report last year."

"And two, what kind of bet would it be if the loser got to decide his own punishment?" Kimberly smirked. She swiped Josh's message away so she could send a quick reply to a certain "deshawnesome39," then opened her camera. "Now, let's send Josh a hot selfie so he can see what he has to look forward to!"

Bobby crossed his arms. "Yeah, miss me with that," he said, in a breathy falsetto that was obviously his idea of a normal female timbre -- it was more like a kid imitating a sex phone operator, but she wasn't about to correct it. "I'm not going on a date with a dude, even as a joke, and especially not with Josh."

"So, you want to go back on the terms of the bet?" Kimberly asked. "Which means, you know, owing me fifteen hundred bucks?"

Beneath his perfect makeup, Bobby's face paled.

#

A few blocks away, Josh Delacroix was having a pretty great day. His dad had let him borrow the convertible for the weekend, and it was top-down kind of weather. The sunshine was warm, the breeze was ruffling his hair, and he was humming along to the radio as he drove towards the Green Lake Shopping Center. He was planning to go shoot hoops later, get a work-out in, maybe swing by a Saturday night house-party.

Oh, and he was currently on his way to take Bobby Vickerson out on a date as some kind of extended YouTube prank. He had seen a video of the bet on his feed, fifty free throws in a row, loser got a makeover, something goofy like that, and hadn't thought much of it. Bobby was a baller, he could admit that much, but the little guy also let himself get distracted by too much off-court drama.

Josh was more a fan of keeping his head down -- the hard work, even keel, slow-and-steady approach. He had dreams of playing college ball and then pro, of course, but he was also realistic: if it didn't work out he could always fall back on getting a computer sciences degree. No, Josh wasn't about drama.

But Bobby's ex, Kimberly Quinn, that cute blonde cheerleader, had begged him to get just a tiny bit involved in this particular instance. He had to admit that last week's loss to Jefferson High still stung, especially with the memory of all Bobby's trash-talking, so he had agreed. He figured it would be at least somewhat satisfying to see the ultra-cocky Bobby Vickerson in drag.

As he pulled up to a red light, his phone buzzed. Checking around surreptitiously for cops, he held it up and pushed the new message notification. Kimberly had sent him a video. He pushed play on the blurry thumbnail image, only mildly curious.

The video had been taken in the bathroom, the time-honored favorite setting of girls taking selfies, and it was probably the mall bathroom, judging by the big mirrors and bright lights. But the Instagram baddie holding the phone was not Kimberly Quinn. She was blonde, and she was hot, clad in a midriff-bearing Nike top and flouncy little miniskirt, but she was definitely not Kimberly.

“Hi, I’m Barbie Vickerson!” the girl said, in a high-pitched breathy kind of voice girls always put on when they were trying too hard to be sexy. She played with her blonde hair, cocking her head to the side and pouting her puffy, gloss-coated lips. “And I’m about to go on my first date! Wish me luck! Kisses!”

The girl blew a kiss to the mirror, and just before the video ended Josh heard an eruption of female laughter from off-screen. Unable to believe what he had just seen, Josh played the video again. And again. And one more time, for good measure.

HOOOOONK!

Josh nearly jumped out of his seat. The light in front of him was green; the car behind him was none too happy with him. He tossed his phone onto the passenger’s seat and gave an apologetic wave as he hit the gas, but he couldn’t keep his eyes from straying downwards every few seconds to the picture of the stunning blonde frozen on display.

#

Kimberly showed the cheerleaders the video of Bobby’s makeover while he sulked at the other end of the food court table. His gaze was fixed firmly on the table and he hadn’t spoken since being goaded into shooting the bathroom video -- he had cracked under the pressure of seven attractive girls begging him to do it, but clearly regretted it now. As for the not talking, it was probably half anger and half anxiety over his voice. Kimberly had assured him his ridiculous “sexy girl” impression was spot-on, but her laughter had probably given him suspicions.

Since he wasn’t talking, however, his body language was twice as loud, and Kimberly was delighted to see Bobby’s nervousness actually helping to unwittingly reinforce “Barbie’s” image. Overwhelmed by the barrage of new, very foreign feminine sensations, he was constantly playing with his bracelets, frowning poutily at his claw-like nails, tossing his hair out of his eyes, fingering the big gold hoops in his ears, tugging at his top and adjusting his skirt. A guy doing those kinds of things did them out of nervousness, but a girl as aggressively hot as “Barbie” only did them for one reason: getting attention.

Every time he touched his hair, it screamed “I just came from the salon, look at me.” Every time he played with his jewelry, it screamed “My boyfriend is rich and he just keeps *buying* me stuff, and you should look at me.” Every time he checked out his nails, it screamed “These are so not practical, but they’re sexy, and you should definitely look at me.”

Tugging at his top? “I’m a gym bunny and my tummy is so much flatter than your girlfriend’s, go ahead, check me out.”

Adjusting his skirt? “My legs are gorgeous, and I wax, and you should be drooling over them.”

Constantly fluttering his false eyelashes and wearing a permanent pout? “I’m 90% sure I’m a goddess, but it would help me know for sure if you, like, looked at me? Pretty please?”

She could see why he was so intent on his nails, since every time he so much as glanced up, his ego was blasted by the fact that every straight male in the food court was ogling him. Normally Bobby Vickerson got attention for what he actually *did*, for his exploits on the basketball court, but all of a sudden he had been reduced to eyecandy. Grade A eyecandy, sure, but eyecandy none the less.

In fact, since entering the food court, she had already seen five guys completely miss their mouths with their forks, two guys walk obliviously into chairs and try to play it off, three guys trail off mid-sentence and completely fail to find their way back... Well, you got the picture. To the uninitiated observer, the Orange Julius had been graced by a whole pack of hotties, and “Barbie” was the queen bee, a flawless blonde beauty so obsessed with her appearance that even an afternoon outing to the mall required professional-quality makeup and hair, sexy jewelry, a revealing outfit, and head-turning high heels.

Kimberly had magnanimously bought Bobby a mango smoothie, his favorite flavor, to help calm him down. After all, if he hyperventilated, passed out, and got rushed to the hospital, he wouldn’t be able to squirm with the humiliation of going on a date dressed as a girl with his biggest cross-town basketball rival.

She watched him sweep a tendril of blonde hair out of his eyes with one glittery pink claw as he sucked away at his orange straw. He definitely looked the part, but she realized now that looking so hot might actually be to his detriment. A lot more attention meant a lot more scrutiny, and the little things were bound to give him away. For instance, he had already poked himself with his new nails a half-dozen times.

Kimberly checked her phone -- Josh should be showing up any second now. In fact, that guy jogging up the escalator looked to be wearing a Saint Ceylan’s track suit.

“Hey, Kimberly!” Yep, it was Josh Delacroix, right on time. “Hey, ladies.”

The cheerleaders immediately perked up. Josh was the tall, dark and handsome type, and Kimberly had to admit she had checked out his bulging biceps more than a few times during the games. Whereas Bobby was scrawny, Josh was big and muscular already -- part of the reason she had picked him, besides the whole rival thing. She loved that he was even wearing his Saint Ceylan's track suit.

"Hey, Josh," Kimberly said. "Did you come from the gym? You're a little flushed."

"And buff," Ally added in a stage whisper. "Like, really buff."

"Oh, yeah, straight from the gym," Josh grunted, wiping his forehead. "Sorry. So, uh, where's Bobby?"

Kimberly pointed over to where Bobby was hunched over his mango smoothie, and looking like he might take the lid off and attempt to drown himself in it. At the sight of his rival all dolled up like a blonde Barbie doll, Josh's jaw went momentarily slack. Kimberly didn't blame him -- she knew the little video they'd sent Josh didn't compare to the real deal by a longshot.

"Barbie, come say hi to your date," Kimberly said. "You agreed no complaining, remember?"

With the expression of someone on their way to the electric chair, Bobby got off the stool, bracelets tinkling prettily as he fought back his miniskirt's latest attempt to ride even up on his tanned thighs. He stared down at the floor of the mall through his fluttery black false eyelashes, unwilling to meet his rival's stare.

"Sup," he muttered.

"Dude," Josh said. "Whoa. Uh, I thought the video was all filter. You look, uh... Uh..."

"Hot?" Beverly supplied, smirking. "Especially when he's sucking on that straw, right?"

Blushing furiously, Bobby immediately turned over his shoulder, and hurled the smoothie into the nearest trash receptacle -- even with long nails, he still had a shooter's touch. For a brief moment he had the old Bobby Vickerson look of triumph on his prettily made-up face, but then, remembering his current situation, he adjusted his skirt, folded his arms, and returned to glaring at the floor of the food court as if it had personally wronged him.

"Ooh, nice shot," Daphne teased. "Just think, if you'd managed to shoot like that for the bet, you wouldn't be Josh's little Barbie doll right now."

"Maybe he missed that one on purpose," Ally added.

Kimberly nearly choked, but managed to keep a straight face, noting with no small satisfaction that the other cheerleaders were taking another, more critical look at Bobby, wheels turning in

their heads as they considered the possibility of Jefferson High's star point guard losing the bet intentionally. Deciding to twist the knife even more, Kimberly gave Bobby a little push in Josh's direction.

"Barbie, your date thinks you look hot," Kimberly said. "What do you say?"

Bobby gritted his teeth, still unable to make eye contact. "Thank you."

"Girl voice!" Kimberly reminded him. "Do you *want* people to read you as a guy in drag?" she added, a little more loudly than necessary.

"Thank you," Bobby said, glaring daggers at her but this time in a slightly-improved version of his breathy girl voice, obviously judging the embarrassment of speaking this way to Josh less than the embarrassment of anybody else in the food court realizing he was a guy. "That's so sweet, or whatever."

Interestingly, Josh Delacroix was blushing even harder than Bobby was. She had assumed he was used to being around hot girls, what with being a basketball star, but maybe he still got nervous going on dates, and "Barbie" was triggering his hot girl panic button despite him knowing who it really was.

"Well, as soon as my date shows up, we can get out of here," Kimberly said sweetly. "I know it might seem a little weird double-dating with an ex, but I think we've both moved on. Right, Barbie?"

"Wait," Bobby squeaked, narrowing his eyes. "If I'm Josh's date, who's your date?"

"Bro! Holy shit, look at you, bro!" DeShawn Baker, Jefferson High's starting power forward and Bobby's teammate, came bounding up to the table. "I mean, I thought the video was all filter, you know, bro?"

DeShawn had been a late addition to the plan, but she had realized, while missing Bobby's makeover at the salon, that there was no way she could miss watching Bobby's date with Josh and still live with herself. So, she'd made it a double-date, courtesy of DeShawn, who was pretty loyal to Bobby but still thought the whole thing was hilarious. He had also been sending her thirsty messages on Instagram ever since she and Bobby broke up, which might just come in handy later.

"You're in on this, too, bro?" Bobby groaned, momentarily forgetting his "girl voice."

"Hey, no way," DeShawn said. "I'm just here for moral support, and making sure this St. Ceylan's dude doesn't get fresh with my sexy point guard, you know?" He offered a fist-pound, which Bobby, tucking his glittery talons under his hand, grudgingly did his best to return. "Bro, you sure that's you? You look fire, girl. Bro."

Kimberly smirked. “Barbie, DeShawn thinks you look fire. What do you say?”



#

Once they bid adieu to their adoring audience, who were taking plenty of last-second photos for Snapchat and Instagram, Kimberly led the way to the third level of the mall, where she had booked them a game of mini-putt. She had chosen the stage for Bobby’s humiliation intentionally: their very first date had been here at the Go-Go Green Lake Mini-Putt. And, as she later discovered, so had his very first date with every other girl.

Of course, the dramatic irony was probably lost on Bobby, who had a thousand-yard stare as he walked along with his date's big strong arm wrapped around his little waist. Kimberly had let him choose between that and holding hands, claiming it was for the sake of realism: "You want to look like a normal girl on a normal date and not draw any attention to yourself, right? Plus, this way you don't have to worry about other guys hitting on you."

It probably helped that Josh, rather than gloating, looked almost as nervous and embarrassed as he did. Misery loved company, and Bobby was clearly not a fan of the idea of getting hit on by another unwitting male, so he had submitted to having his rival's hand resting on his bare lower back as they walked along, complaining only occasionally, in a whisper, about his "clammy freaking hands." DeShawn was only too happy to follow suit and put his arm around Kimberly's shoulders, which she accepted with her sexiest smirk in Bobby's direction.

Watching her ex mince along on another guy's arm, managing his high-heeled cork wedge sandals and flouncy miniskirt and designer purse and long blonde hair, was everything she'd hoped it would be. She could see his male ego getting eaten away a little bit more each time his hoop earrings brushed his pretty cheeks, his skirt rode up his thighs, his bra straps tugged at his shoulders... Oh, and definitely every time Josh gently steered him by the small of his back, unconsciously treating him like a real girl.

"Bro, I just gotta say it, Kimberly did some *work* on you," DeShawn said. "I mean, you if I didn't know better, I would think you were actually a..."

"Shh!" Bobby put a furious finger to his collagen-plumped lips, nearly stabbing himself yet again with his manicure. "Jesus, DeShawn!" he squeaked in his ridiculous falsetto.

"Right, right, sorry, bro," DeShawn said, lowering his voice as they approached the mini-golf ticket booth. "I mean, bro-ette?" He looked around, puffing out his chest. "Man, I am having a blast on this totally normal double-date!"

The greasy-haired college kid in the booth raised an eyebrow. "Uh, cool. You guys book ahead, or...?"

Kimberly took one last glance at her ex, who was fidgeting in his high heels while also glaring daggers at his power forward, then confirmed her booking and grabbed putters and golf balls for everybody. Naturally, she selected Bobby a bright pink one that was just a little on the short side. When she came out, DeShawn was still talking to the mini-golf attendant, while Josh and Bobby looked almost equally mortified.

"Kimberly's a girl, Barbie's a girl, me and Josh are guys!" DeShawn said, pointing to each of them in turn. "Two dudes and two chicks! *Classic* double-date."

"Uh, yeah, cool," the college kid said, bewildered. "First hole is right over there."

“Not that there is anything wrong with non-heteronormative double-dates!” DeShawn added as they walked away, still at volume for anyone listening in. “Just this particular date, it’s that *classic* variety! You know?”

Kimberly patted his arm. “Great cover, DeShawn,” she said, giving Bobby another smirk. “Keep that up. Definitely keep that up.”

#

Normally Bobby was the best at everything sports-related, mini-putt included, but from the very first hole it was clear things were going to be different this particular afternoon. The three-inch perch of his wedges, combined with the slightly-too-short putter, ensured that he had to bend down and shoot from an incredibly awkward angle. The first time he attempted it, he managed to flip his miniskirt up and expose a flash of lacy black underwear to Josh, whose eyes immediately bulged.

“Shit!” Bobby muttered, watching his ball careen off the first obstacle, totally oblivious to the “show” he had given his date. “I mean, uh, shit,” he corrected, in a girlier register.

“Hey, no worries,” Josh said. “It’s a par two, right?” He stepped up, and immediately sank a hole in one, which made Bobby’s expression go from “spurned prom queen” to “killer prom queen.” It didn’t help matters when DeShawn and Kimberly each got the hole in one in quick succession. Glaring at the pink golf ball, Bobby leaned forward to try again. This time, both Josh and DeShawn got a peek.

“Barbie, your skirt?” Kimberly said primly. “People can see your thong.”

Bobby blushed furiously under his makeup, straightening up so fast he nearly toppled over. When he tried again it was with his knees bent, waxed-smooth legs held carefully together. She could see him struggling to get a comfortable grip on the putter without his long nails getting in the way, and every time he hinged forward at the waist his blonde hair fell into his face. Bright red, he lined up his shot and tried again.

The little pink golf ball flew past the hole, bounced over the kerb, and rolled into the grass.

“Bro!” DeShawn was guffawing. “Par two, bro!”

Wearing a miniskirt or not, Bobby’s competitive nature was now fully engaged. He grabbed the ball out of the grass and took it back to the line to try again. Six putts later, by this time completely flustered and looking like he just might break down in tears and ruin all that expensive eye makeup, Bobby finally managed to get it into the hole.

“Good job, Barbie!” Kimberly said, in as saccharine a voice as possible. “I knew you could do it! But on the next hole, maybe we can just start you a little closer, okay?” She gestured to the dad and his two kids who had been watching the last few minutes of Bobby’s struggles. “There are people waiting behind us.”

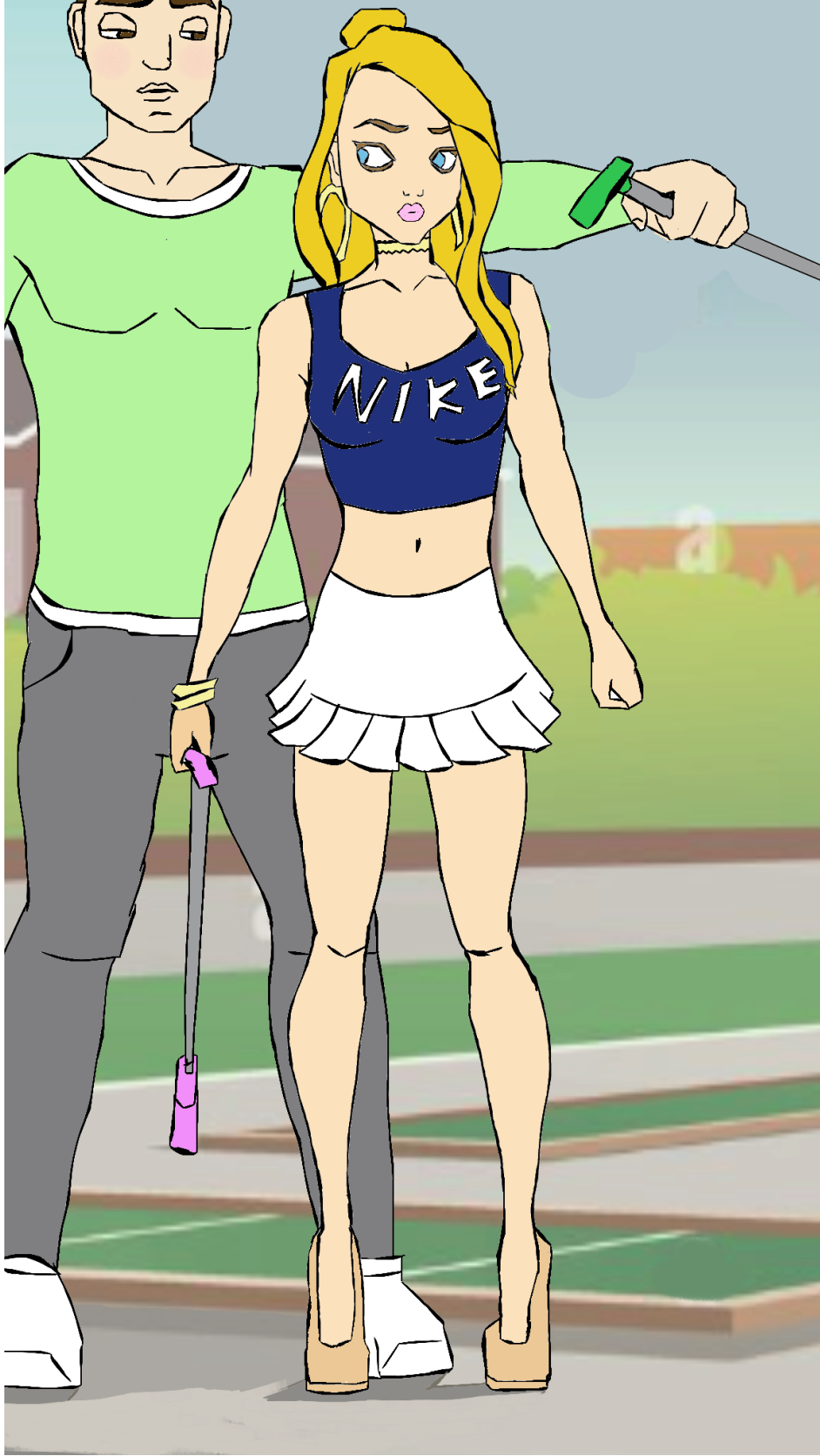
“Oh, hey, it’s no trouble,” the dad said, flashing a friendly grin -- he had clearly been enjoying all the pouting and bending over. “We don’t mind.” He patted his daughter on the head. “Go ahead, sweetie. Remember to line it up with your toes.”

The little girl, who looked to be around six, skipped up to the hole with a grin. “You’re so pretty!” she beamed. “Are you really named Barbie?”

Bobby flushed an even deeper shade of red. “Uh-huh,” he squeaked.

The little girl gave a squeal of delight. “Barbie is my favorite!” she shouted. “Okay, gotta line it up with my toooooes...” She set her ball down, gave it a thwack, and made a perfect hole in one. “Woo!” she beamed. “Don’t worry, Barbie, my daddy can give you help if you like!”

It was all Kimberly could do to keep from busting her gut laughing. Bobby moved onto the next hole in mortified silence, too humiliated to meet Josh or DeShawn’s eyes, and things didn’t get any better from there. Watching her ex wiggle around the mini-putt course, missing shot after shot, at one point so frustrated he stomped his high-heeled foot like a beauty queen throwing a tantrum, was absolutely priceless.



She had been hoping Josh would loosen up and start having some fun at Bobby's expense, what with all the times Bobby had taunted him on the basketball court, but for some reason the Saint Ceylan's star seemed uneasy about the whole thing. Those forgiving, kind-hearted, do-no-harm types were no fun at all, but Kimberly was still getting her money's worth. DeShawn had gone from amused to baffled by Bobby's difficulties, and, along with a well-intentioned Josh *and* the single dad trailing behind them, started trying to give him advice.

"Bro, I mean, Barbie, you gotta use less backswing, bro!"

"Are you breathing out at the same time you hit it?"

"I think if you bent more from the waist, less from the knees..."

For the first time Kimberly could remember, mansplaining was music to her ears. Bobby was quavering under the pressure, overwhelmed by the barrage of conflicting tips and not willing to jeopardize his disguise in front of the dad and kids by telling everybody to shut the hell up. His hands were trembling as he gripped the putter. She knew he was close to either hurling it into the bushes and storming off, or possibly breaking down in tears. She preferred the latter, but either one would be pretty great.

Another miss. Bobby was now exactly 38 over par.

"Maybe sports just aren't your thing, Barbie," Kimberly said, poking the bomb. "But don't worry! You're good at sooo many other things. Like shopping! You always find the cutest outfits. Doesn't she, guys?"

DeShawn stifled his laugh, while Josh gave a helpless grin and shrugged. Super-Dad behind them, however, went above and beyond by deciding to really try his luck. "Look," he said. "How about I help you take a putt, so you can feel what it's like to make a smooth stroke? I golfed semi-pro back in my college days, and I'm a pretty good coach."

Kimberly blinked. Sometimes, the universe just seemed to bend to her will. "Great idea," she said. "Barbie, I know you're getting upset, so why don't you let him show you what to do, okay, sweetie? That would be the *girlish* thing to do. You don't want to act like a *boy*, right?"

"Well, that seems a bit sexist," the dad said. "But yeah, I'm happy to help."

This was it. The moment of truth. Bobby glared daggers at her through his fluttery black eyelashes, padded chest heaving with stress. Then, slowly, he turned and bared his perfect white teeth in what was probably meant to be a smile.

"Okay," he said, in barely a whisper. "Uh, sure."

Kimberly beamed, while the guys could only look at each other in shock as Bobby Vickerson, all-star athlete, got a mini-putt lesson. The dad walked up behind him, placing his much larger hands over Bobby's dainty, manicured ones, and adjusted his grip on the putter.

"Could you move your hair a little?" the dad asked, apologetically. "I can't quite see."

Blushing furiously, Bobby brushed his long blonde tresses around to one side of his neck, an inadvertently very sexy gesture that made one hoop earring bounce against his cheek. The dad sidled up behind him, leaning forward so Bobby was forced to lean with him. Kimberly could see the look of resigned misery on her ex's face get replaced by sheer horror. Bobby leapt forward and spun around, impressively agile despite his high heels, and bellowed, at the very top of his lungs, in a voice that was no way feminine:

"YOU HAVE A FUCKING HARD-ON?"

Stunned silence fell over the entire Go-Go Green Lake Mini-Putt facility. Every single head, from the birthday party on Hole #3 to the stoned college kids on Hole #18, was turned in Bobby's direction, trying to make sense of a guy's voice coming out of a hot blonde's mouth. DeShawn and Josh both looked ready to cut bait and make a run for it.

Wordlessly, the dad reached into his pocket and took out a bulky, old-fashioned cell phone. "I should, uh, probably upgrade," he said.

But the damage was done. The mini-putt attendant was already running up to them. "Not cool, guys," he said. "No profanity and no hard-ons are permitted at Go-Go Green Lake Mini-Putt. I'm going to have to ask you to leave."

"That's totally understandable," Kimberly said, beaming. "Don't worry, we'll still leave a great review. We got *exactly* what I came for."

#

After the mini-putt disaster, Josh and DeShawn were quick to take off, and Kimberly, sensing she had reached the limits of Phase One -- pushing Bobby any further was likely to result in a homicide -- took her ex to the nearest bathroom to help start the "de-girlifying" process. The handicapped bathroom had a lock on the inside, which would prevent anybody walking in, and as soon as they were inside he kicked the high-heeled sandals off his feet.

"Watch it!" Kimberly snapped. "Those are expensive!"

"They banned me for life!" Bobby snapped back. "That was my number one date spot, and now I'm banned for life, and the staff all think I'm some kind of transvestite, Kimmy!"

"Kimberly," Kimberly corrected. "Now, do you want my help, or not?"

Bobby gave a sulky nod. He was still shaking with rage and embarrassment as she helped him remove his wig, fake nails, and false eyelashes. It was a little depressing watching him wipe away the makeup, helping her own personal Barbie doll go back to boyhood, but she comforted herself with the knowledge that it was a temporary break. Phase One had been a smashing success, and Phase Two was going to be even better. Besides, she would still see some very visible traces of "Barbie" until the collagen injection wore off and his tweezed eyebrows grew back in.

Irrationally, but perhaps not surprisingly, Bobby was redirecting most of his ire towards Josh. "I am going to freaking destroy him next time we play Saint Ceylan's," he fumed, scrubbing the last of the eyeshadow away with way too much remover. "Acting all innocent! He was loving every second of that, believe you me. Being nice, that's his way of rubbing it in. Fucking asshole!"

Kimberly had seen nothing of the sort, of course. Josh Delacroix was, unlike Bobby, a genuinely nice guy, so it made sense Bobby hated him. She figured there might be some underlying jealousy going on, as well. Bobby got the best of Josh on the court, but Josh looked the part of basketball star in a way Bobby never would -- while Bobby had to prove himself in the gym, people took one look at big tall muscle-bound Josh and assumed he was a big deal.

But maybe she could take advantage of that. "Can you imagine if Josh lost a bet like that?" she asked innocently, removing the first of his hoop earrings. "He would look completely ridiculous. He's way too buff to look like a girl."

Bobby jerked backwards, sending the earring flying. "I'm buff!" he snapped. "I mean, I'm not *bulky*, obviously, I'm more *cut*..."

"Yeah, I was actually talking to him about his work-out regimen before he met us at the mall," Kimberly lied. "He says he used to be pretty skinny, but he takes protein powder every day and hits the gym every second day, and I guess it's worked out pretty well for him, you know?"

"I don't need big muscles to kick his ass on the court," Bobby snapped.

"Oh, I agree," Kimberly said. "Besides, this weight looks good on you. I mean, you must be like, a size zero? If you were big and buff, you wouldn't be able to wear that cute top and miniskirt."

Bobby went back to inarticulate fuming as he took his clothes into the stall. The top, skirt, and underwear came flying over the top a few moments later, and a minute later he emerged, dressed once again in his hoodie, sneakers, and skinny jeans. He pulled the hood down as far as he could, trying to hide his brows, and stared at himself in the mirror. No doubt he, like Kimberly, was still seeing traces of "Barbie."

"You know, up until the cell-phone hard-on, you were being a pretty good sport about all this," Kimberly said. "You sure you didn't enjoy any of it? At least a little? I mean, all the hot beauticians fawning over you, come on..."

Bobby turned around with dead certainty on his face. "No, Kimberly, I did not freaking enjoy it. I'm a freaking guy. Hope you had your fun, because I'm not getting within ten miles of a salon ever again. I don't care if I have, like, fatal toenail fungus. Speaking of which, how do I get this polish off my toes?"

"I forgot to bring remover," Kimberly said with a shrug.

"Yeah, I bet," Bobby snorted. "You driving me home, or what?"

She had actually been telling the truth: in all the excitement of turning Bobby into "Barbie," she hadn't been thinking about undoing it all. But she certainly didn't mind leaving her ex with one more reminder of his big day, and the idea of him having to go buy nail polish remover at the drugstore or rummage through his mom's bathroom cabinet gave her a sneaky thrill.

As they stealthily exited the bathroom and made their way out of the mall, Kimberly noticed that, even back in his boy clothes, Bobby was totally unable to meet anybody's eye. The cheerleaders had left to Beverly's house, to steal liquor from her step-mom's secret cupboard, but Kimberly had already gotten several messages from them demanding to know what exactly had happened at mini-putt -- word got around fast in Green Lake.

Bobby stewed the whole way home, vowing he was going to burn the Go-Go Green Lake mini-putt to the ground, put up fifty points next time Jefferson High played Saint Ceylan's, and freeze out DeShawn on every single play as a penalty for witnessing his humiliation. Kimberly found herself slipping back into her old role of nodding, agreeing, and nodding some more. It was a little disturbing to her, actually, how normal it felt. "Barbie" was gone, and Bobby was back to his usual dickish ways.

"Your Mom and Dad aren't back yet?" Kimberly asked as they pulled onto the empty driveway -- she could see the mail piling up on the porch, which Bobby never bothered to bring inside when his parents were away.

"Still in New York," her ex muttered. "Reminds me, I need them to put more grocery money on my account." He yanked out his phone, and his eyes bulged. "Fuck, I'm still getting tagged and retweeted left and right. I'm *in* the freaking video, why are people trying to show it to me? Bunch of idiots..." He scrolled downward, and his eyes bulged. "Are you kidding me?" he said faintly. "She can't even 'like' the clip of my game-winner, but she comments on *this*?"

Kimberly could guess that "she" was another of Bobby's old flames, brought out of the woodwork by the "Barbie" video and looking for a chance to get in on the embarrassment. Her

ex had an almost wistful expression on his face for a moment, then, seemingly remembering where he was, he regained his earlier snarl.

“Well, I hope that was everything you hoped it would be, Kimmy,” Bobby snapped, getting out of the car. “Because people are going to forget about this dumb Barbie shit in a week. Okay, a month.” She could hear the confidence returning to his voice as he pumped himself up. “All I have to do is hit a few more big shots, and I’m Jefferson High’s big hero again. That’s the Bobby Vickerson experience, baby.”

He slammed the door and headed up the steps to his house, already walking with his old swagger. It was almost impressive how fast he seemed to have shaken the whole thing off, but Kimberly was going to make sure it came back with a vengeance. As soon as she was home, she flipped open her MacBook and logged into the LiveJournal account she’d made as “bboy2003.”

“Today was literally like a dream come true... I can’t give any specifics, or post any photos, even though I wish sooo bad I could, but basically I got the chance to go out in public, as a girl, and it was freaking amazing! Just like on Halloween, I had to pretend I was hating it, but let’s just say I didn’t miss by accident, haha.

The coolest thing is, I passed! I mean, my voice really needs work, and I probably should stick with flats instead of heels until I practice more, but if I didn’t talk at all people actually thought I was a regular girl at the mall, and some people (boys!) were actually checking me out, I swear to God. Unless they could tell? Oh, frick, now I’m scared they could tell. No, no, they were definitely checking me out.

I know this is crazy, but today gave me such a huge confidence boost I think it’s time to take the next step. I’m going to start taking hormones! My friend helped me get my hands on some, and I’m so excited I can hardly stand it. I know it’s going to make it harder for me to stay “undercover,” but maybe that’s a good thing? #BOY2BABE #MINIGOLFMINKIRT #STRIVE4REALNESS.”

Satisfied, Kimberly pressed enter and watched another piece of the plan fall into place.

#

Despite Bobby’s bold words on the driveway, he missed school for the next few days pretending to be sick, no doubt trying to let the buzz die down. When he finally did return, arched brows hidden under a fitted baseball cap, he couldn’t walk five steps without someone playing the video of him primping in the bathroom as “Barbie” or having the wax ripped off his legs at the Papillon Salon. He did his best to laugh along -- and there was a lot of laughing -- but Kimberly could see it was not the welcome back he’d imagined.

She also noted, with some irony, that if he had come back to school right away to head things off, Jefferson High's obsession with the result of the lost bet might not have gotten so out of hand. But his absence had added to everyone's fascination, spawning several rumors that he had skipped town to avoid the fall-out, and a particularly wild one that he was getting a boob job and re-enrolling in an all-girls Catholic school. Bobby's most loyal sycophants had defended him in his absence, pretending it had all been one hilarious prank, and mostly Bobby's idea, but it wasn't their opinions that mattered.

People were a lot more inclined to listen to the cheerleaders, who were happily sharing photos of Bobby's mall adventure left and right. On his first day back at school, they swarmed his locker -- but not in the adoring groupie way Bobby was accustomed to. Rather, they were eager to show him that Papillon Salon had made his "before-and-after" a feature on their website, delightfully swiping back and forth on the photo to change it from a sullen dark-haired teenage boy to a gorgeous blonde with a nervous smile.

Kimberly did her best to blend into the background of it all, but she couldn't resist joining the new trend of "accidentally" calling Bobby by his feminine moniker whenever possible. It was clear that Bobby Vickerson, all-star jock, had been replaced in the popular girls' minds by Barbie Vickerson, cute crossdresser. She figured even Bobby had to notice that their interest was no longer sexual in the slightest -- instead, they were all badgering him to get dressed up again for the next school dance!

With his female public having undergone such a radical change, it made sense for him to take refuge where he always had: with the jocks. But even as an outside observer, Kimberly could see that things had changed there, too. The football players were usually quietly resentful of Bobby, since the success of Jefferson High's basketball team and long overshadowed their rather pathetic football program, but now they finally had a chance to take the cocky basketball star down a peg, hooting over the video of "Barbie" introducing "herself" in the hallways and even papering the locker room with a print-out of one of his post-makeover photos.

But surely his basketball team would stay loyal, right? After all, he was their captain. Well, Kimberly sensed some things shifting there, too. DeShawn had a big mouth, and had told the mini-putt story about a dozen times already. Bobby tried to laugh along, but the fact that he had rubbed his butt up against some pro golfer and given him a huge erection (yes, the story was changing) was just too much for a lot of his teammates. 21st century or not, having the captain of your basketball team come out of the closet could cause some uncomfortable tension in the locker room.

It was obvious to Kimberly, and probably to Bobby as well, that his only hope for salvation lay in absolutely destroying the Midtown Mohawks that Friday. It would shut up the football players, who always lost to Midtown, and quell any rumors in the Tomcats locker room -- after all, would a closeted cross-dresser be able to drop thirty points on the opposition and rip their hearts out with trash-talk, to boot? In Bobby's limited worldview, no, and Kimberly had to admit that a lot of his teammates probably shared the same opinions. He probably even thought that seeing him in

action again would remind the cheerleaders he was all man, no matter what the Papillon Salon put on their website.

But when Friday rolled around, for the first time since anyone could remember, Bobby Vickerson played like total crap. The saga of the lost bet had not been contained to Jefferson High, and when the Tomcats rolled into the Mohawks' arena, they were greeted with huge cut-out pictures of their captain pouting his gloss-coated lips, wide blue eyes framed by long black lashes, blonde hair tumbling around his slender tan shoulders. Kimberly and the other cheerleaders got a close-up view of Bobby's face turning beet red. It didn't help matters that Bobby's dad made one of his rare appearances, and was clearly bewildered by the whole thing.

From the tip-off, Bobby was off his game. Kimberly could guess exactly what kind of trash talk he was getting -- probably asking if he was wearing lingerie under his jersey, if Josh Delacroix was picking him up after the game, if he wanted to use a women's ball... She saw more than a few opposing players blow kisses at him, and some of the Mohawks fans on the end-line were wearing cheap blonde wigs to throw him off even further.

Kimberly could see that all the "Barbie" stuff, combined with his dad watching -- well, half watching, half talking on his Bluetooth, likely arguing about something with Serena's agent -- had Bobby unfocused and distracted. He turned the ball over four times in a row, missed a layup, lost track of time and made a shot clock violation, got into a shoving match with the Mohawks' outdated and vaguely offensive mascot, and finally, for the first time in Tomcats history, was ejected from the game. Kimberly caught a glimpse of Bobby's dad shaking his head as he followed his son, who was collecting boos from the Mohawks' fans, out of the gym.

Afterwards, Bobby posted an Instagram selfie of himself angrily working out, "clearing his head" and, of course, #STRIVING4GREATNESS. Kimberly felt no small satisfaction when she noticed his protein shake clearly displayed in the background.

#

The next two basketball games were equally disastrous for Bobby, and his failures on the court, together with his increasingly strained relationships with his teammates, had the interesting effect of driving him to work out more and more often. Kimberly saw a new post work-out selfie every day, and without fail, the protein shake made an appearance, too.

His original declaration, that everyone would forget the "Barbie shit" in a month's time, proved overly optimistic. Teams that the Tomcats normally trampled over were getting the best of them, thanks in large part to Bobby's poor play, and everyone had clued in to the fact that "Barbie" was the key to getting under the Jefferson High point guard's skin.

Opposing fans took it to new heights, having their burliest male students swishing around the stands in Tomcats colors, wearing blonde wigs and padded bras, acting way more effeminate than Bobby ever had with their limp wrists and campy cheering. They got a lot of laughs from

their classmates, but also from Jefferson High's students, which Kimberly could see drove Bobby crazy. But as the weeks passed, Kimberly realized his struggles on the court weren't all mental. Just as Skeeter had predicted, the estrogen pills were taking effect *fast*.

She noticed it in the work-out selfies first: no matter what angle Bobby used, she could see that his attempts to bulk up were backfiring spectacularly. In fact, any muscle he'd managed to build in the weight room over the past season seemed to be disappearing, leaving his small shoulders and slender arms perfectly dainty-looking. He seemed to also be losing definition to his abdomen: where he'd once had the suggestion of a six-pack, he now merely had a flat, toned, swimsuit-model type midriff. And his pecs looked soft and almost, dare she say it, puffy?



By the six-week point following “Barbie”’s debut, Bobby had stopped taking selfies entirely -- his Instagram was strangely dead -- and Kimberly knew it was because his appearance was changing in ways he did not care for. When she saw him from behind in the hallway wearing tight warm-up pants, for a full second she assumed the taut butt belonged to a girl on the volleyball squad. Watching DeShawn give him a playful slap on the ass made it that much better, especially since instead of returning the gesture or barking at him, Bobby looked totally mortified.

Of course, dosing him with super-powerful estrogen was only part of Phase Two. Kimberly was hard at work writing constant LiveJournal entries for “Barbie’s” secret diary, carefully using details from Bobby’s real life to make sure everything corresponded. For example, on the day she saw how nice and girly his butt was getting, she wrote:

“Still taking the hormones, still haven’t told anyone except you guys. It feels so right, and I’m finally seeing results. Like, I’m seriously going to have boobies before long, and my butt is getting *cute*. I’m going to have to be more careful with what I wear. I’m terrified of people noticing the changes. But also, at the same time, I super want people to notice? I don’t know. I’m all confused. One of my teammates slapped my butt today, and I swear it jiggled. I don’t know if he noticed, but I couldn’t stop blushing after. The weirdest part is, I kind of liked it? #BOY2BABE #BOOTYINCOMING #STRIVE4REALNESS.”

That latest update got more likes than any single post to date. Kimberly was surprised but pleased by how many followers the LiveJournal had managed to amass in such a short time. People were getting really into it. They loved the idea of a macho athlete secretly wishing he was a girl, and were even more intrigued by the idea of him starting to “transition” in plain sight, before even coming out of the closet. Most of the comments were incredibly supportive, and several people were already trying to guess Bobby’s identity, while others scolded them and typed long messages about respecting “her” privacy.

It was all going to come to a head soon, and Kimberly had to be sure Bobby was completely outmaneuvered when that happened. She needed him to trust her. Confide in her, even. She had stayed out of his way for the past six weeks, and now it was time to get back in his good books.

#

The next day, Kimberly waited around after the Tomcats’ basketball practice to catch Bobby leaving. Six weeks ago he would have been the last one out, surrounded by his faithful gang of followers, but today she was barely rounding the corner into the gym hallway when he shot out of the locker room door like a bat out of hell. He had a panicked look in his eye and was clutching his backpack as if he feared someone might try to steal it from him at any second. He was so distracted, in fact, that he ran right into her.

“Hey, watch where you’re going, Bobby!” Kimberly exclaimed, barely managing not to drop the smoothies she was holding.

“Sorry, sorry,” Bobby muttered. “I’m in a hurry, I got stuff to bra at home, I mean, to do at home...” He seemed to notice who he was speaking to for the first time, and suddenly his harried expression gained a note of suspicion. “Wait a minute,” he said, hefting his backpack. “Was this you, Kimmy?”

“Was what me?” Kimberly asked, genuinely confused.

“This!” Bobby hissed, yanking his backpack open.

Kimberly could see the bubble-wrapped package from Amazon inside, the kind that usually held clothes ordered online, and it had a Victoria’s Secret tag. Someone, probably one of the football players, had bought Bobby some very sexy lingerie. Kimberly did her best to hide her smirk.

“It wasn’t me,” she said. “I swear. It was probably...”

“The football team,” Bobby finished, gritting his teeth. “Screw those guys.”

“Look, that’s kind of the reason I’m here,” Kimberly said. “Can we talk?”

Bobby glanced back over his shoulder. “Whatever. Just walk. I need to get out of here, Chet already waved the bra around the whole locker room and everybody’s gonna be talking about it...”

Kimberly fell into step beside Jefferson High’s star point guard, who now looked totally terrified of his own basketball team. He didn’t relax or slow down until they were out of the school and on the way back to his house. She took the opportunity to finally hand him one of the smoothies she had been carrying around.

“Here,” she said. “It’s mango, your favorite.”

Bobby stared down at the smoothie with a look of suspicion, and for a split second Kimberly wondered if he could somehow tell it was loaded with crushed-up hormone tablets -- she figured he would give up on the protein powder soon, and she needed to establish a new delivery system. But when he took a long suck from the straw, he made a small sigh of contentment.

“Yeah, mango is the bomb,” he said. “But don’t think I’m going to forget you’re the one responsible for all this bullshit.” He gestured to the backpack. “You know what my life has been like lately?”

“I have some idea, yeah,” Kimberly said. “That’s why I wanted to apologize. I went too far with that whole makeover thing. I wanted to humiliate you, you know? Like when you dumped me?”

"I dumped you?" Bobby took another suck from the smoothie. "Oh, right, yeah. The cafeteria. Well, you got what you wanted, Kimmy."

"Kimberly," Kimberly corrected.

"Whatever," Bobby said. "My life blows right now. Ever since that bet, I can't go a day without people calling me 'Barbie.' And we lost to the freaking *Mohawks*."

"I was there," Kimberly said dryly. "I saw your dad showed up. Guess he picked the wrong game to come see."

Bobby's face went red. "He didn't even know we lost," he snapped. "He was talking to Serena the whole time. You know, most dads, they give a shit about sports, but he doesn't notice if I'm putting up thirty or if I'm getting ejected for fighting a mascot. Who had it coming, by the way."

Normally her ex didn't talk much about his dad -- or even his mom, for that matter -- and it was clearly getting him worked up. Kimberly decided to change topics.

"Look," she said. "I know it's been a tough couple weeks. You're kind of a social pariah right now, and that's weird for you, but I went through the same thing when I first moved here and didn't know anybody. Dating you helped me make friends, so now I want to help you out in return, and be your friend. Maybe it'll make up for what I did. Okay?"

"I get it," Bobby said, suddenly calm again. "You want a friends-with-benefits kind of arrangement, right?" He shrugged, looking down at his phone. "Missed the Bobby Vickerson D."

"Yeah, sure," Kimberly said dryly. "That's it exactly."

Abruptly, Bobby's eyes widened. He was looking down at his phone with an expression of outright shock. Maybe the lingerie in the locker was already trending on social media? Without warning, he took off running. "Gotta run," he shouted over his shoulder. "I'll think about the FWB thing! Dress hotter, maybe?"

Kimberly gritted her teeth. God, she couldn't wait to get him back in high heels and a skirt.

#

Despite Bobby's initial indifference, it was clear that he wasn't in much of a bargaining position when it came to friends these days. He seemed constantly nervous and agitated, and it repulsed his old crowd the way his confidence used to attract them. The whole lingerie locker room fiasco was part of it: a lot of rumors were circulating, and it seemed like about half of Jefferson High was willing to believe he'd bought the lingerie himself.

With his teammates and pals becoming increasingly distant with him, Kimberly managed to make herself indispensable, partly by bringing him a mango smoothie every single morning. Since the rest of the girls in school had written him off, he was desperate for attention from an attractive female, even if it was his ex, and Kimberly knew he probably hoped people would see them around the halls together and assume they were hooking up again.

Bobby was going to need an ego boost from anywhere he could get it, what with the latest news. The Tomcats' head coach had held out longer than Kimberly anticipated, but after two more losses in a row, the inevitable happened: Bobby lost his starting point guard position to one of the freshmen. With his demotion to the bench, and in the aftermath of the locker room lingerie incident, it was decided that Bobby wasn't cut out to be team captain anymore, either.

The news that Jefferson High's star athlete had lost his starting position and his captain status in one go spread through the school at the speed of light, as did a rumor that when the coach gave Bobby the news during morning practice he shoved over a rack of basketballs, hurled one at the newly installed Jumbotron screen, and ran away crying. That part seemed almost too good to be true.

Kimberly spent all day looking for him, and finally managed to catch up to him at his locker at the final bell. The great Bobby Vickerson's locker had once been a hang-out spot all on its own, since he was usually surrounded by friends and admirers, but now he was totally alone, ignored by his classmates hurrying for the exit.

She took a moment to observe just how different Bobby looked these days: he had totally abandoned his old skinny jeans and tight warm-ups, in an attempt to hide his blossoming curves, and now wore formless baggy sweatpants and oversized hoodies -- not so different, she noted with irony, from the ones that she'd worn for a week straight after he dumped her.

But it wasn't just his fashion sense that had changed, it was his body language, too. Bobby had always been small, but he had never *seemed* small. He had that charisma and presence that actors strived for, always the center of attention, and that used to make him seem like the biggest man in the room.

Now, however, it was totally the opposite. He seemed to have shrank into himself, his movements were small and timid, and his eyes were downcast. In fact, the word "demure" popped into Kimberly's head looking at him now.

"Hey, Bobby," she said softly. "I heard the news."

Bobby turned around, and she noted again how well the hormones were working. The shape of his face was changing subtly, and his skin was incredible -- so smooth she was jealous, in fact.

"Everybody heard," he said miserably. "DeShawn is probably going to be captain now, and I'm riding the bench like a nobody. I haven't been benched since I was, like, six."

He rubbed the back of his neck, and Kimberly noticed something strange: it seemed like he had small daubs of concealer on his earlobes. She was sure the holes from his piercings would have healed up by now. Was that some weird side effect of the hormones? Something to Google later, no doubt.

“How about I come over to your place tonight and cheer you up?” she asked sweetly.

“What, like, a blowjob?” Bobby sighed. “I guess that might help.”

“We’re just friends, now, remember?” Kimberly asked pointedly. “I’ll come over and we’ll watch a movie or something.”

“I guess I could use some company,” Bobby said, looking wistfully toward the exit where a bunch of his teammates were laughing and joking together. “Yeah. All right. Let’s hang out. My life is ruined anyways.”

“I’ll come over at seven,” Kimberly said. “And your life is *not* ruined, Bobby.” She gave him a comforting pat on the arm, then walked away with a sly smile on her face. “Not yet, that is,” she murmured. “But it’s in progress.”

“What’s in progress?”

Kimberly jumped -- she hadn’t seen Beverly coming out of the bathroom. “Oh, hey, Bev,” she said. “You know, life.”

“Yeah?” the head cheerleader shot a look back toward Bobby, who was now slinking away from his locker. “You and Bobby are friendly again, I noticed. You’re not, um, dating again? Are you?”

Kimberly knew that Bobby and Beverly had briefly been at it, but, like with most girls he dated, Bobby had unceremoniously told her he didn’t want to get “tied down” -- never mind that Beverly was one of the hottest and most popular girls in school. Kimberly hadn’t been surprised by Beverly’s eagerness to get in on her ex’s embarrassment at the mall. In fact, just about every girl on the cheerleader squad had either dated or been spurned by Bobby Vickerson at some point.

“Oh my god, no,” Kimberly said. “Just friends. I don’t know what I ever saw in him, to be honest.”

“Thank god,” Beverly said. “I’ve honestly been thinking the same thing? He seemed so different when we dated. He was just, like, so confident. And strong. And hot. And now, he’s just...” She shook her head. “Is he gay? I mean, he was pretty great in bed, but now I just keep wondering if he was thinking about some football player the whole time...”

"I haven't asked," Kimberly said primly. "But he invited me to his place tonight to do spa stuff and watch a chick flick, so, connect the dots?"

"Wow," Beverly muttered. "Well, whatever. I hope he finds, like, happiness? I'm kind of starting to feel sorry for him, to be honest."

"Yeah, right," Kimberly said skeptically. "He was almost as big an asshole to you as he was to me. You're loving this."

Beverly frowned. "Loving this?" she demanded. "Me and Bobby were forever ago. How petty do you think I am?" The brunette suddenly had a suspicious look on her face. "So you aren't trying to be friends with Bobby out of sympathy. *You* like seeing him turn into some weirdo loser, and you wanted a front-row seat."

Kimberly momentarily flushed, speechless. Somehow Beverly, despite being one of Jefferson High's worst students, had seen right through her -- the nerve of the bitch. Kimberly opened her mouth, searching for a retort, but her fellow cheerleader wasn't done.

"I'm over Bobby being an asshole to me," Beverly said. "I have been for ages." Beverly shook her head, actually looking *sad* for her. "But his life being in the dumps won't make yours any better, Kimberly. It won't make you, like, happy. Sorry."

"You don't have a clue what makes me happy!" Kimberly snapped, losing her temper completely. "You don't have a clue about anything! So how about you keep your psychotherapy bullshit to yourself, bitch?"

Kimberly clenched her fists as she stormed off. She could feel herself shaking, and her face was burning hot. Underneath all the anger, she had a terrible, sickening feeling that Beverly might just be right. But it didn't matter. Who cared about happiness? This wasn't about her being happy. This was about justice being served. Bobby Vickerson had it coming, and she was going to deliver, no matter what.

#

Kimberly put the conversation with Beverly out of her mind before she showed up to Bobby's house, dressed as casually as possible, bearing snacks and some "spa" stuff, just as if he was a female friend instead of a horny ex. To her surprise, she was greeted at the door by both of Bobby's parents. It was rare for them to be home at the same time, and last time she checked, it didn't take two people to answer the door.

"Hey," Mr. Vickerson said. "Kimberly, right?"

"Of course it's Kimberly," Mrs. Vickerson scolded. "They dated all last year, you've met her before... Oh, wait, unless that was Beverly? Sorry, dear. Bobby loves his cheerleaders."

"I'm Kimberly," Kimberly said through her teeth. She had met Bobby's parents on several occasions, of course, but usually in a brief coming-or-going situation. They were both tall, good-looking, and well-dressed people, who usually exuded confidence -- a more tempered version of Bobby's old cocky bravado, actually. But tonight, for the first time she could remember, both of them seemed a little awkward.

"Of course, of course," Mr. Vickerson said. "Bobby mentioned you were coming over." He glanced over his shoulder, then lowered his voice. "Can we talk in the kitchen for a second?"

Kimberly blinked, then nodded wordlessly, unsure where this new development might lead. She followed Bobby's parents to the kitchen, and, at Mrs. Vickerson's gesture of invitation, pulled up a stool. "Uh, what do you want to talk about?" Kimberly asked. She could guess the basics.

"It's about Bobby," Mrs. Vickerson sighed.

"What isn't?" Kimberly joked, with a fake smile. Bobby's parents didn't seem to get it -- they looked at each other in confusion.

"Uh, well, I'm sure you've noticed that he's having some problems," Mr. Vickerson said. "His grades are even worse than usual, and he's spending a lot of time... Home." He scratched his head, as if it was an unfathomable concept. "He used to always be out with his basketball buddies, or girlfriends."

"We're very concerned about him," Mrs. Vickerson said. "It's just coming at a bad time, is all. Serena has a show coming up in Rio, and we're flying down to attend."

"Do you know what's going on with him?" Mr. Vickerson pressed. His face turned slightly red. "I think he was involved in some sort of prank, a little while ago? The whole crossdressing thing?"

"He really did look gorgeous in those salon shots," Mrs. Vickerson said, smiling off into space. "Not the same attitude as Serena, not the same poise, but..."

"Anyways, Bobby's behavior has been a little strange since then," Mr. Vickerson interrupted. "I don't know what's going on with him. Do you?"

Kimberly gave him her most wide-eyed, innocent stare. "I really don't," she said. "Not entirely. But I think the most important thing, like, the best thing you guys can do for him? Is just give him space. Let him figure it out. Don't try to talk to him about it, don't do the "we love you no matter what" spiel -- he'll get freaked out. Just act like everything is normal." She gave a beatific smile. "That's what we learned on LGBTQ day."

Her phone buzzed, and she saw a message from Bobby: *You here yet or what?*

"I better go upstairs," Kimberly said, hefting her spa kit to make it as obvious as possible. "See you guys!"

Mr. Vickerson was slightly pale in the face, while Bobby's mom, on the other hand, looked slightly intrigued. Kimberly did her best not to look too gleeful as she entered Bobby's room. He was lying on the bed, wearing his usual baggy sweats and hoodie, but he sat upright the second she shut the door.

"You weren't talking to my parents, were you?" he asked suspiciously.

"Your mom wouldn't shut up," Kimberly lied. "She wants me to join her hot yoga class."

Bobby rolled his eyes, and grabbed the remote to set up Netflix. As they settled in on the bed, he initially protested the facial masks and nail kit, saying she'd done enough damage to his masculinity already -- if only he knew. But once he was engrossed in an Adam Sandler comedy, she took advantage of his distraction to start buffing and filing his nails, something she'd done now and then while they were dating, before applying a pink-tinted varnish to each one. He only noticed when she snapped a photo with her phone.

"Hey, what are you doing?" he demanded, jerking his hand away. "I didn't say you could paint my nails!"

"It's just a varnish," Kimberly said. "I took a photo to compare before and after. It's just your hand, see? Nobody would even recognize it, so who cares?"

"Whatever," Bobby said, returning his attention to the movie, but keeping his hands nervously clenched into fists. Maybe she had overstepped a little bit, reminding him too much of the whole makeover thing, but she had taken the photo for a reason. As soon as Bobby left to go to the bathroom, she opened up her MacBook Air and posted the photo on the LiveJournal account of "bboy2003."

"Doing my nails today, still too nervous to grow them long though. What would my teammates say? But still, I love the pink. What do you guys think? First photo, haha. #BOY2BABE #NAILSDID #STRIVE4REALNESS."

The most important part, of course, was the fact that Bobby's Tomcats team jacket was in the background, with the team name in plain view. Another breadcrumb for the curious people in the comment section, and another piece of evidence in the case of Barbie vs. Bobby Vickerson.

"Ready to do this thing?" Bobby asked, returning from the bathroom with his dick hanging out of his pants.

"Nope, so put that little thing away," Kimberly said. "And I mean now."

Bobby groaned, but he stuffed it back in his pants. Kimberly had to admit she was a little impressed. With all the female hormones in Bobby's system, his male sex drive was probably cut in half, and she knew that the estrogen pills would be making it harder and harder for him to get, well, hard. Even so, he had a decent erection.

"Got any more pillows?" she asked, getting comfortable on the bed again.

"Dunno," Bobby said sulkily. "Check the closet."

She rolled her eyes and got up, walking over to the walk-in closet. As usual, it was a disaster zone. Clothes were thrown everywhere, and there were definitely no pillows. She did notice a big plastic box she'd never seen before.

"Jeez, would it kill you to use a hanger?" she demanded. "This closet is a freaking mess. And what's in the box, pornos?"

"Hey, wait, don't look in there!" Bobby shouted, flying off the bed with surprising speed.

"In here?" Kimberly asked innocently, lifting the lid.

She was fully expecting to see a bunch of old Sports Illustrated issues, particularly the Swimsuit Edition kind with stuck-together pages, so what she saw instead left her momentarily speechless: an assortment of MAC makeup products, an expensive-looking blonde wig, a pair of high heels, and several bra-and-panty sets -- including the hot pink Valentine's Day lingerie from Victoria's Secret that he'd pulled out of his locker last week.

"Bobby, what the fuck?"

#

Kimberly stared down into the box, at a discovery that defied all explanation. She had definitely considered planting some incriminating things in Bobby's room, but it seemed Bobby had gone ahead and done that himself. Was it possible that losing the bet and getting made over as a girl had shaken his confidence so badly he was questioning his sexuality? Were the hormones she was sneaking into his protein powder somehow affecting his brain, as well as his body? Was this the weird behavior his dad had been talking about?

"Okay, what's going on?" Kimberly asked, too flabbergasted to even fake a concerned voice. "I mean, seriously?"

"It's not what it looks like," Bobby snapped, shutting the lid. "I can't believe I invited you over for sex when this whole thing is your fault. You're the one who started all this."

For possibly the first time in his life, Bobby was correct. She had started all this, but now, clearly, somehow, it had taken on a life of its own. As she inspected Bobby's face a little closer, an incredulous grin spread across her face.

"I thought you weren't sleeping well, but that's mascara!" she exclaimed. "Did you try to take it off with soap, or something? Try actual makeup remover next time, it'll go a lot better."

"What? No! Why would I wear mascara?" Bobby shouted, completely flustered as he rubbed at his eyes. Suddenly, all the fight went out of him and he slumped onto the bed with a groan. "Aw, screw it," he said. "Okay, I'll tell you what's going on, but you can't breathe a word of this to anybody."

"Scout's honor," Kimberly said, since she had never been in the Girl Scouts, putting her hand on her heart with exaggerated solemnity.

"I wasn't kidding about it all being your fault," Bobby said. "It's that freaking video. You know, of me. Where I'm like..."

"Hi, I'm Barbie Vickerson, and I'm going on my first date," Kimberly quoted. "Wish me luck! Kisses!"

Even though he was probably hearing it for the millionth time, Bobby's face went red. "Yeah," he muttered. "That one. Before you took it down, some perv found it on YouTube, and I guess he liked it. A lot. He freaking hacked me, Kimmy."

Kimberly was too taken aback to even object to the use of her nickname. "Hacked you?" she demanded. "How so?"

"I dunno," Bobby said. "Computer savvy? But he got into all my accounts, like, all my socials, and even my school email. He could prove it, too. The worst part is, he hacked my webcam and saw me, uh, you know. Spanking the monkey? Taming the one-eyed snake? And he threatened to send the video to everyone I know. Friends and family." Bobby winced. "It was to a picture of one of Serena's model friends, except Serena is in it, too. I covered her up, I swear, but that would *not* go over well."

"Okay, one, that's gross," Kimberly said. "Two, this guy is blackmailing you for what, exactly? It's not like you have money." She glanced at the box in the closet, and it dawned on her. "Oh, wow. Seriously?"

"Nothing sexual!" Bobby blurted. "But this guy was obsessed with the Barbie video, Kimmy. He keeps sending me this shit in the mail, like, from Amazon, and I have to watch the porch like a hawk to make sure I pick it up before my dad does. Then he wants me to send him little videos of me, you know, dressing up. Doing my makeup. Walking around in the high heels. He even sent me a freaking dress."

Kimberly was doing all she could to contain her sheer delight. "I don't believe it," she said. "Show me!"

"The dress?" Bobby asked quizzically. "I stuffed it in the bottom of my laundry hamper. The creep said it was expensive and not to wrinkle it, and screw him, right?"

"Not the dress," Kimberly sighed. "This whole blackmail business. Where's your laptop?"

"Why do you care?" Bobby demanded. "Haven't you done enough damage already? If it wasn't for you, that Barbie video wouldn't exist, and this wacko never would have found it."

"As far as I'm concerned, this "wacko" is just a convenient excuse for you to get dressed up," Kimberly said, though she was desperately hoping otherwise. "You loved it all along! Admit it!"

"Hell, no!" Bobby snapped. "You think I'm doing this because I want to? Are you nuts? Here, I'll prove it, I'm already logged in..." He passed her his MacBook and flopped back on the bed miserably. "This is the reason I've been playing like crap lately," he said. "I'm freaking out about this whole thing. I keep thinking he's going to send the jerk-off video to my grandma, or something."

Kimberly let Bobby ramble on while she read through his emails. The most recent message from his secret "admirer," whose email address was "mountaindeew18@yahoo.com," was right at the top of his inbox. With a strange mixture of excitement and indignation -- who did this anonymous weirdo think he was, trying to get in on the girly Bobby Vickerson game without her permission? -- she clicked on it.

*Hey beautiful, I loved your last video you sent me, you're so gorgeous and you can really work those high heels now lol, I love it, but your makeup is still a B-, needs improvement lol, so I want to see you practicing, here are some tutorials to help out... Oh, and remember beautiful, SMILE for me this time or your whole contact list is gonna get a BIG surprise ;)*

The email was accompanied by links to several popular MUA channels on YouTube, full of high school girls showing, in detail, how to achieve "Smoldering Bedroom Eyes" or "The Perfect Date Night Glam Look." Kimberly couldn't help but get a little thrill at the mental image of hotshot Bobby Vickerson locking himself in his room with a makeup tutorial and a mirror, desperately trying to figure out the difference between bronzer and foundation, or choose the right shade of lipstick to complement his skin tone, but she was even more intrigued to see the video Bobby had sent that elicited such a reply.

"So that lingerie in your locker was from him?" Kimberly asked, putting two and two together. "I thought it was a prank by one of the football players!"

“Yeah, no, it was Mister Perv,” Bobby sighed. “His first “present,” actually, so I didn’t realize what it was. Just saw it on the porch as I was heading to school. It was addressed to me, so I stuffed it in my backpack and forgot about it until practice. When we were getting changed I opened it to see what was inside, and Chet looked over and saw the Victoria’s Secret tag, and, well...” He trailed off, grimacing. “Then when you were talking to me, I got the first blackmail message on my phone. That’s why I took off running.”

Kimberly scrolled down to the next email in the chain and opened the video attachment. It was obviously filmed on webcam, showing Bobby’s room, floor surprisingly clean, from a low angle. The picture was a little grainy, but even so, Kimberly’s stomach gave a flutter of delight as a pair of dainty feet clad in strappy high heels appeared in the frame. A pair of tan, slender legs came next as Bobby walked backward to get in the picture, stepping with surprising ease despite the four-inch heels. Whoever this guy was, he had made Bobby shave his legs, and for that he deserved some credit.

Bobby was now fully in view of the webcam, and grainy picture or not, Kimberly could hardly believe how good he looked. The dress his admirer had bought him was neon pink, clingy, and incredibly short, forcing Bobby to tug nervously at the hem as he checked his image in the webcam, and it made the work of the hormones clear as day in a way sweatpants and hoodies never could, showing off his rounded booty, dainty waist, and, unless Kimberly’s eyes were deceiving her, a hint of honest-to-God cleavage. He had done his best to brush out the wig, which fell in blonde waves around his face, and his natural beauty was enhanced by mascara -- a little clumpy, admittedly -- and a sticky pink lip gloss. He even had a pair of large silver hoops in his ears. As he grimaced at the webcam, still tugging at his sky-high hem, he looked for all the world like a hot, pouty blonde dissatisfied with a new dress.

“So this is why you kept your ear piercings?” Kimberly demanded, utterly delighted.

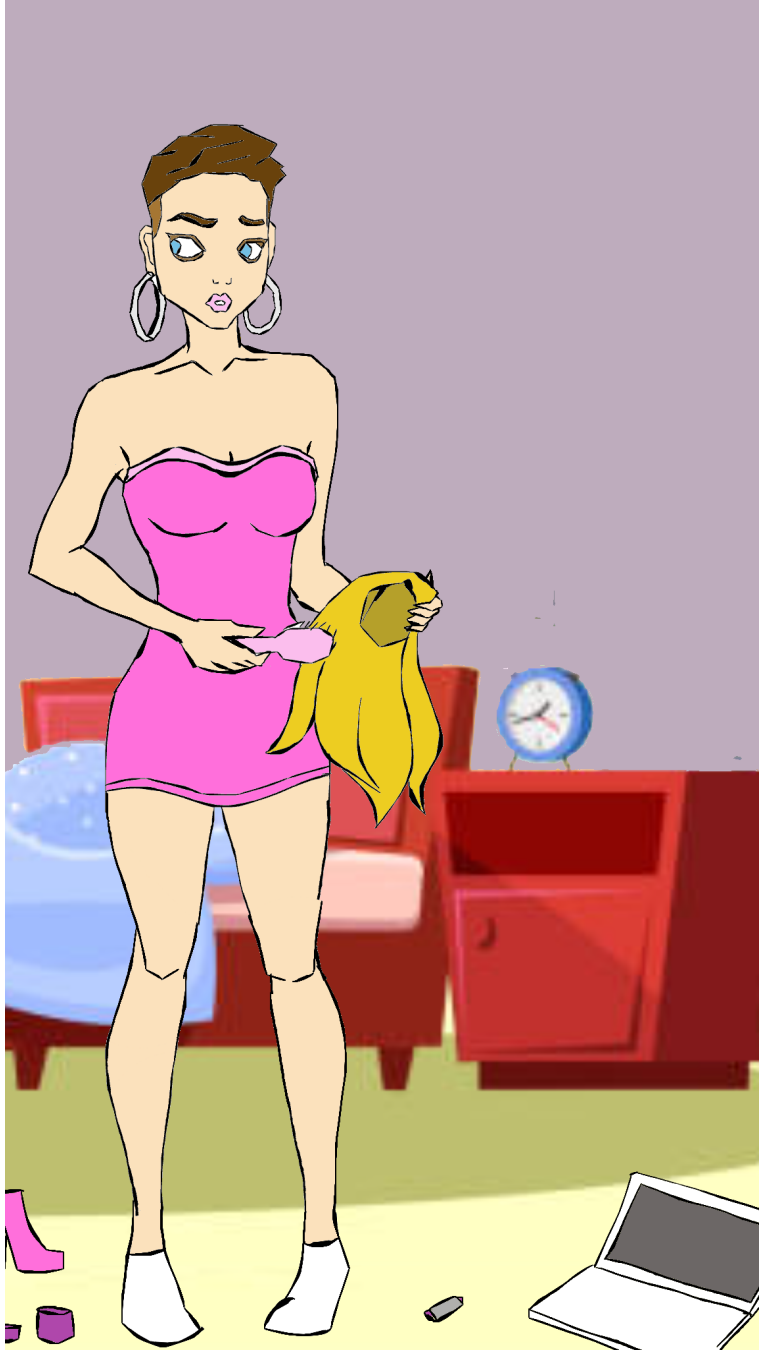
Bobby flushed. “I’ve been covering the holes with liquid foundation,” he groaned. “He insisted the earrings stay.”

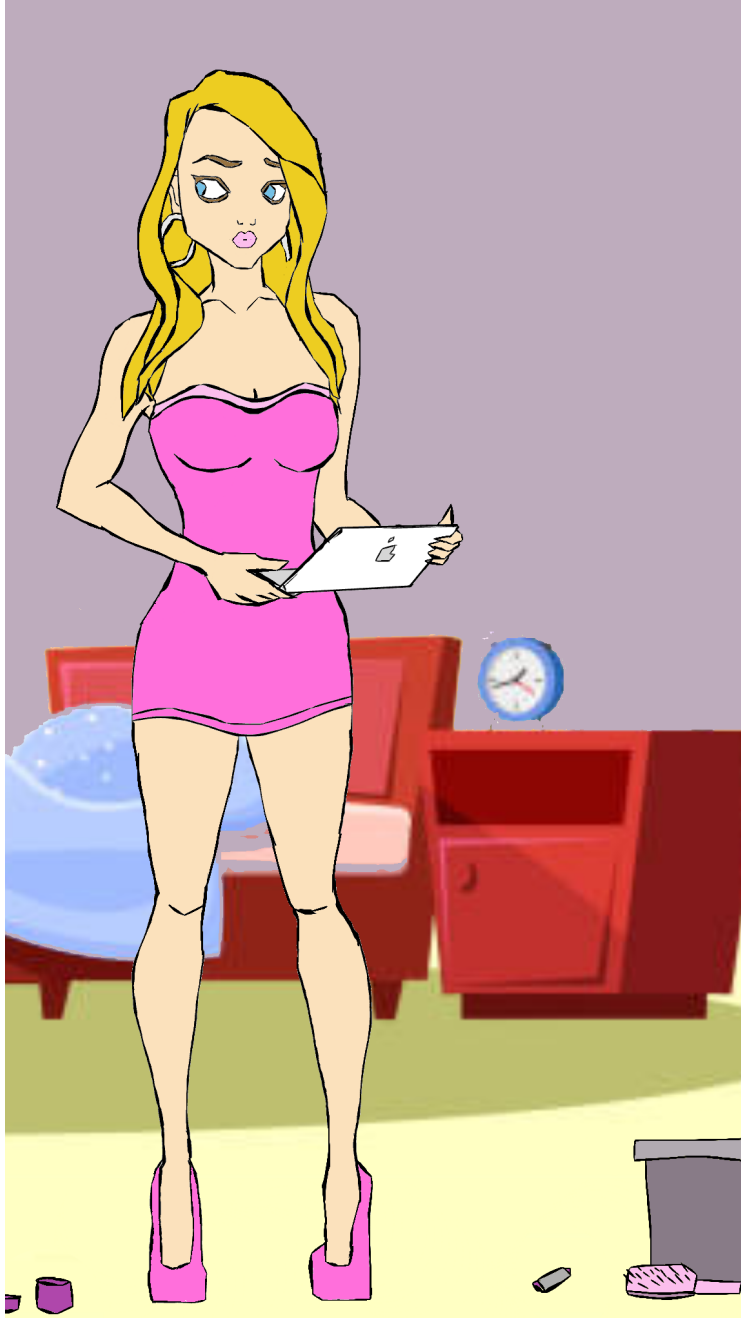
Kimberly kept watching the video, transfixed as Bobby strutted away from the camera, placing each high-heeled pump directly in front of the other, hands on his rolling hips. At the far end of his room, he made a clumsy pirouette, tossed his hair, and came strutting back with an aggrieved “shoot me now” expression that actually only added to the fashion show vibe. Whoever this guy was, he had been making Bobby practice walking in heels, to the point the former jock was now sashaying like a beauty queen. It was incredible. Maybe Bobby had subconsciously picked up a few things from watching so many of Serena’s shows.

And no wonder her ex hadn’t been going to any parties -- he had been spending his weekends home alone learning how to be girly for his secret “admirer.” She realized she had been giving herself too much credit. Bobby’s decline on the basketball court and collapsing social status at school weren’t just the product of her makeover scheme and hormone campaign. Bobby was

getting hammered from two separate fronts at the same time. For a minute, Beverly's words came back to her, and she almost felt sorry for him.







“Yeah, I know, it’s super gay,” Bobby sulked, watching himself swish and prance on the webcam. “I don’t know how girls stand all that dumb shit. Guess it’s genetic.”

And just like that, the feeling sorry for him thing was gone again. It was amazing how he could do that. Ignoring her ex, Kimberly swiftly forwarded herself the whole email chain, so she would be able to study it further later. Bobby was right about one thing: whoever was blackmailing him was definitely a huge perv. And huge pervs were often susceptible to blackmail themselves, so if she could figure out who was behind it, maybe she could use them as another way of getting at Bobby.

“First thing’s first, we need to find out who this guy is,” Kimberly said. “And I know just how to do it.”

“How?” Bobby asked. “He’s a hacker. They’re all freaking geniuses. They, you know, cover their tracks or whatever.”

“He might be a genius,” Kimberly admitted. “He’s definitely horny for you.”

Bobby dry-heaved.

“Or for “Barbie,” whatever makes you feel better,” she said, rolling her eyes. “The point is, horny makes smart people stupid. I’m thinking a honeypot, sting operation kind of thing. You’re the honeypot, obviously.”

“And he’s what, Winnie the Pooh?” Bobby asked glumly.

“Sure,” Kimberly said. “Except, you know, horny.”

“Forget it,” Bobby said. “I’m not going to do some dumbass Mission Impossible honey sting whatever and risk pissing off the perv who can give my grandma a heart-attack with one click, okay?”

Kimberly ignored him, instead focusing on the email server’s chat function, where she could see, in plain sight, that “mountaindew18@gmail.com” was currently online. Frowning, she tapped out a message:

*Can we talk?*

The reply was almost instantaneous: *Sure beautiful, what’s up? Turn the webcam on lol I want to see your pretty face ;)*

Thinking quickly, she responded: *I don’t have my makeup on yet and I don’t want you to see me without it... I want to look pretty for you, haha.*

There was a long pause as Bobby’s blackmailer, obviously confused, typed and backspaced several messages. *Very funny lol, but seriously, put it on, then we can talk.*

“Hey, what are you doing?” Bobby demanded, grabbing the laptop. “You’re freaking chatting with him? What the hell, Kimmy?”

“What, you’ve never seen To Catch a Predator?” Kimberly demanded. “This is how it works, Bobby. We have to gain this perv’s trust.” She snatched the laptop back. “Look, do you want this

hanging over your head for the rest of your life? Or do you want to go back to being Bobby Vickerson, superstar asshole extraordinaire?"

Bobby grimaced. "I'm still a superstar," he muttered sulkily. "I'm just coming off the bench, that's all."

"Let me catch this creep for you," Kimberly persuaded. "Like you said, this whole thing is my fault, right? So let me help fix it." She grabbed the old stand-alone webcam from Bobby's desk. "Look, I'll sync the video chat to this instead of the laptop cam. That way I can do the typing off-screen, while you sit in front of the webcam. Easy."

A new message appeared from the blackmailer: *Bra and panties too please ;)*

Bobby's face paled. "No," he said. "Screw this."

"What's the big deal?" Kimberly demanded, knowing full well what the issue was -- if Bobby took off his baggy sweats and hoodie, he would be showing her exactly how badly his work-out regimen had gone. "I've seen you in a bra and panties before, remember? At the salon? Heck, I've seen you naked."

Bobby swallowed. She could see the conflict on her ex's face, pride warring with his desire to be free of the blackmailer, embarrassment over his rapidly developing curves fighting his need to tell somebody about it and get it off his chest. He grimaced, sighed, and rubbed the back of his head.

"There's something else going on, too," he said. "You know in the video, with me in the dress, I look kind of..."

"Curvy," Kimberly supplied.

Bobby flushed. "It's not padding," he said in a small voice. "I've got this, uh condition. Totally normal, for guys going through puberty." He took a deep breath. "I'm growing boobs. There. I said it."

"You're not growing boobs," Kimberly said, trying to contain her delight. "That's crazy. I mean, maybe you're gaining weight from stress. Who wouldn't, with all this blackmail stuff going on?"

Bobby scowled. "I'm hardly gaining at all, but my butt got bigger somehow," he admitted. "I think I've been doing too many squats at the gym, and not enough bench. But the main problem is the boobs. It's called..." He frowned. "Guy, knee, coma... Something."

Kimberly swallowed. If Bobby had gone against his usual doctor distrust, and taken a blood test, some very strange results were sure to show up. "Have you, uh, sought medical attention?" she asked, crossing her fingers behind her back.

“Why would I?” Bobby asked scornfully. “I have the internet right here.”

Kimberly breathed a sigh of relief. “Yeah,” she said. “Web MD always knows best.”

“Exactly,” Bobby said. “I’m not going to go get felt up by a doctor who will tell me shit I already know.” He held up his phone. “Here. It’s called gynecomastia. And it says nearly *all* cases go away on their own.” He gritted his teeth. “I just have to hang in there, and not let anybody see me shirtless, that’s all.”

“Then we better deal with your blackmailer before he gets any more demanding,” Kimberly pointed out, redirecting her ex’s attention. “Come on, Bobby, let’s bust this guy. I’ll turn around while you get changed, okay? And I promise I won’t laugh.”

Bobby hemmed and hawed, but in the end he sighed, closed his eyes, and gave a curt nod. “Alright,” he said, opening them again. “Screw this perv. Let’s catch a predator.”

Kimberly smirked. “That’s the spirit, Barbie.”

#

As agreed, Kimberly turned around while Bobby changed, and the anticipation was kind of killing her. She wasn’t sure why, but the whole thing -- Bobby being blackmailed, Bobby growing boobs without knowing why, Bobby agreeing to put on lingerie for the webcam -- was really, really hot. In a weird way, yes. But still hot.

No matter what she saw when she turned around, though, she reminded herself that she needed to downplay her reaction. The more Bobby freaked out about his body, the more likely he was to get an actual doctor’s opinion, and she had no idea how she was going to handle that particular can of worms.

“Okay,” her ex said at last. “Ready.”

But when she turned around, she completely failed to suppress her gasp. She probably should have paid “Skeeter” twice what she had for the hormone pills, because they were going above, and beyond, the call of duty. Bobby Vickerson was a bombshell. He was wearing the Valentine’s Day set from Victoria’s Secret, and she had to deal with the very real possibility that he might be pulling it off better than she ever could.

His growing boobs couldn’t be bigger than an A-cup, but the hot pink bra’s gel padding and underwire trickery made the most of them, molding them into a tempting little rack of cleavage. The matching bikini-cut panties hugged his girlish hips and bulge-free crotch, and when he turned she got an eyeful of curvy butt that was in no way male. To top it all off, his tiny waist and flat stomach still didn’t have an ounce of extra fat on them -- it was almost infuriating.

“Oh, my God,” she said, completely forgetting to downplay her reaction. “Uh, Bobby? What do you do in the locker room?”

He heaved a deep sigh, making his boobs quiver, just slightly, in their silky cups. “I’ve been showing up early to change, and leaving late,” he said in a tiny voice, staring at the floor. “Nike makes these awesome compression shirts, and they work pretty well to keep everything, uh, flat. You know, when I’m actually playing.” He grimaced. “But I think people might be starting to notice. Chet was looking at my chest funny the other day.”

“Yeah, I don’t doubt it,” Kimberly said, blinking. “And, um, your crotch?”

Bobby flushed deeply. “The creep sent me a YouTube video, like, how to ‘tuck.’ Same thing you did with that tape.”

“Well, you did a great job,” Kimberly said, clearing her throat. “But you know, now that I’m looking at your chest up close, it’s really mostly the push-up bra,” she lied. “Seriously, I’ve seen bigger mosquito bites. I think half of it’s in your head. Here, let me help with your makeup.”

Bobby nodded glumly, taking out his array of cosmetics and donning the wig with surprising ease. Clearly he had been forced to learn by trial and error, but watching the intense focus on his face as he adjusted the lace front, the same kind of focus he’d once applied to his basketball drills, was oddly titillating. She took over on the makeup front, applying some eyeliner and mascara, using a pencil on his brows, and coating his lips in a coral pink lipstick. Nothing too advanced, since that would look suspicious, but it was a lot faster than letting Bobby do it all himself.

“Quit fidgeting,” she ordered, as her ex flinched away from the mascara brush. “Keep your head still and your hands in your lap, okay?”

Blushing furiously, Bobby reluctantly did as he was told, folding his hands on his smooth thighs. Wearing sexy lingerie in front of her was obviously not doing much for his macho pride, and even as he kept his head still his eyes kept darting nervously towards the webcam he would soon be put on display for.

“Did you sneak this stuff from Serena’s room?” Kimberly asked, as the thought suddenly occurred to her.

“Are you kidding?” Bobby scoffed. “Some of it I got from my mom’s bathroom, some of it the creep sent me. Serena’s room is the freaking Ark of the Covenant. You open it, you get your face melted off by my mom. Everything has to be perfect for the ten days a year she’s actually here.”

“Your mom’s kind of obsessed, isn’t she?” Kimberly asked conversationally.

“They both are,” Bobby muttered. “Always have been. You know, the only time my mom ever even...” He trailed off. “Never mind.”

“Spill,” Kimberly said. “Girls actually share their feelings, remember? You need to get into character.”

“Forget it,” Bobby snapped.

“Fine,” Kimberly said, giving his blonde waves a final fluff-out. “Okay, done. Just sit there, look pretty, and pretend to type once in a while. Make sure the sound is off, and that you keep your hands off-screen so he thinks you’re on the laptop. I’ll be over here typing the whole time, but don’t look at me, or it’ll be suspicious. Got all that?”



“Got it,” Bobby muttered sulkily, maybe chafing at the realization that his only part in the plan was to, once again, shut up and look pretty. He took the webcam and set it in front of him on the bed, unconsciously flicking his blonde hair out of his face with a very feminine gesture. Kimberly stationed herself out of sight and used Bobby’s laptop to start the video chat, careful to select the right webcam.

*I did my best, she typed. What do you think?? Haha.*

The blackmailer had obviously been waiting with bated breath for “Barbie” to make “her” appearance, because the reply was instant: *Wow you look so sexy, you really did a great job, I’m happy lol. Pout those lips for me, beautiful! Please ;)*

“He’s a fan,” Kimberly said. “Bobby, pout your lips for him, then give him a smile.”

A brief expression of revulsion crossed her ex’s face, then he reluctantly made his best “duckface,” fluttering his eyelashes at the same time.

The blackmailer was struck dumb for a second, then typed: *Nice lol. What did you wanna talk about, beautiful? Better not be trying to wiggle out of our little arrangement ;)*

Kimberly cracked her knuckles. Time to put her scheming brain to good use. *I have to confess something, she typed. I actually like getting dressed up for you... I know I act like I hate it, but it’s because I’m not “out” yet... You saw me as Barbie and somehow you knew right away it was the real me, even though nobody else saw it. That’s, like, amazing... I wish you had just messaged me instead of blackmailing me, tho.*

There was a long, almost unbearable pause. Bobby, blissfully unaware of what was being said, started toying idly with a strand of his wig, looking for all the world like a hot blonde all dolled up for a webcam date with her sugar daddy.

The reply came in a rush: *I KNEW IT! Wow this is so great, beautiful, this makes me so happy, for real :D You’re taking hormones, aren’t you? Not that you weren’t perfect before lol.*

Kimberly gritted her teeth. She had to steer the conversation away from hormones -- if it came up again in his messages to Bobby, the jig might be up. *Yes, but please please please don’t even type that word, she typed. I didn’t get them legally and I don’t want to get in trouble if the FBI or something finds out. Just pretend I’m blossoming... Like any other girl... Please? Haha.*

*Lol my lips are sealed, beautiful, came the reply. I’m so so sorry I blackmailed you, I knew it was wrong but I just wanted to see you be yourself so badly :( I knew Barbie was the real you! I knew it!*

*You’re the only one who did, Kimberly typed. That’s why I always want to look my prettiest for you haha.*

*You're not mad lol?* came the blackmailer's reply. *Really?*

Kimberly glanced over at Bobby, who was awkwardly adjusting the straps of his bra with a slightly pained expression on his face. "Pretend to type, dumbass!" she hissed. He flushed, but quickly lowered his hands off-screen again. As soon as he did, she played her masterstroke.

*I was at first haha, she typed. But it was also kind of sexy? I keep wondering who you are and what you look like... Don't worry if you're not, like, super handsome, I don't care about that stuff, haha. I just keep thinking about us actually meeting. Can we do that? Like, a date? Haha, only if you want...*

The reply was not the instantaneous one she was hoping for. Instead, as Kimberly watched, the blackmailer wrote and backspaced what seemed like a dozen messages. Finally, a response appeared: *Starbucks beside the bank this Sunday, 3:00 PM. I'll be the guy in the red hat. Wear something sexy for me? Lol.*

"Big smile, Bobby," Kimberly said. "Big smile. This is it." Bobby parted his pink lips and grinned as widely as he could. "Less big," she ordered. "You look demented."

*You bet, haha, she typed. Oh my god, I can't believe we're doing this. This is so cool, haha. See you there, handsome ;) I have to go plan my outfit. Later!*

"Blow him a kiss!" Kimberly ordered. "Quick!"

Bobby groaned, but did as requested, pouting his lips together and fluttering his fingers. Flushed with victory, Kimberly ended the video chat and turned off Bobby's webcam. She deleted the chat history, to make sure Bobby never saw the word "hormones" and got curious, and closed the laptop. She had done it. The blackmailer might be able to cover his tracks electronically, but if they got him out in the open, in real life, he wouldn't be able to hide his identity for long. All she would have to do is get her hands on his ID, and then the blackmailer blackmail could begin.

"Well?" Bobby demanded, folding his arms protectively across his boobs with a shudder. "What happened?"

"We've got him right where we want him," Kimberly said. "You were a perfect little honeypot, Barbie. He thinks you're meeting him at Starbucks this Sunday, and we're going to nail him."

"Okay, cool," Bobby said, clearly excited despite himself. "So we watch from a distance, wait for him to show up, and what? Call the cops on his pervy ass?"

"I'll watch from a distance," Kimberly corrected. "This guy might be lovestruck, but that doesn't mean he's a complete idiot. If he shows up and doesn't see you, he'll know something is going on. You're the honeypot, remember?"

Bobby blanched. "Wait. You mean I'm supposed to actually go meet him? As Barbie?"

"That's what you agreed to," Kimberly said. "Come on, Bobby. We're in too deep now to back out without pissing him off. And if we piss him off, you know what happens, right? Not only does he send the jerk-off video around, but he'll probably send every single video you sent him as "Barbie," too. It would ruin your reputation, like, for life."

Bobby gave a low moan. "No skirt," he said. "I'm not wearing a freaking skirt again."

"No skirt," Kimberly agreed. "Scout's honor."

#

That following Sunday afternoon, Green Lake's least-frequented Starbucks location was graced by a brand new customer. Since Kimberly had shown up a half-hour early to scout the place for potential pervs in red hats, she got to witness the barista spill almond milk all over himself as the automatic doors breezed open and a stunning blonde breezed inside. Tanned, slender legs, flawless figure, prettily made-up face -- all the "hot girl" boxes were instantly checked in the brain of every guy in the vicinity.

Kimberly felt so proud. She had forced Bobby to shave fresh, legs and armpits, handing him the Venus disposable razor through the shower curtain and refusing to give him any clothing until he complied. It was necessary, since the outfit she'd bought for him showed a lot of skin. True to her word, no skirt was involved: instead, her ex was clad in an adorable, ultra-feminine, off-the-shoulder romper. She'd hunted high and low for the perfect garment, holding his new, hormone-enhanced measurements in hand, and she was pretty sure she had found it.

The romper's poofy sleeves, elastic hidden under girlish ruffles, made it look like it was on the verge of slipping right off Bobby's slender shoulders and necessitated a strapless push-up bra. Meanwhile, the peek-a-boo cut-out showed off a tempting slice of tan midriff, and a big floppy bow at the bust drew attention to his latest "developments." It also happened to show more leg than any miniskirt could have, and, to top it all off, the baby blue pinstripes really brought out Bobby's pretty eyes.

Naturally, her ex had absolutely hated it from the moment he saw it, which was a large part of the appeal. But it looked adorable on him, especially paired with the four-inch cork wedge sandals currently showing off his sparkly silver toenails. She had given him press-ons in the same glittery shade for his fingers, and while she wasn't quite on Pam's level when it came to beauty skills, his hair and makeup were absolutely on point.

She had decided to bust out the false eyelashes again, making them a part of “Barbie”’s standard look, and further enhanced his baby blues with liquid liner and a dusting of slightly-sparkly shadow. His lips didn’t have the collagen advantage this time around, so she’d made up for it by using lip-liner and painting them in extra full, dusty rose pink, and slathering on the gloss. She’d even manage to clean up his brows, not quite to the extent of Pam’s tweezing, but definitely enough to restore some feminine precision.

His wig, meanwhile, had been properly brushed and treated, now spilling in a glamorous blonde cascade down his tanned shoulders -- it was definite shampoo model hair, especially because it wasn’t really his. Jewelry completed the look: swinging drop earrings that clicked occasionally against the expensive AirPods in his ears, bracelets and a couple rings that highlighted his slender wrists and manicured hands, and a gold pendant necklace that gleamed at the perfect height to draw eyes both to his flawless collarbones and to what lay further south.

If any of the customers happened to have been at the Green Lake mall seven weeks earlier, they might have recognized the memorable blonde beauty, but also noticed a few differences. For one thing, the girl from seven weeks ago had been a blushing, wobbling mess. This time around, though she still had a look of utter distaste on her pretty features, she strode confidently in her high heels, lending her hips a sensuous sway with each clopping step. The designer purse on her shoulder looked less like a foreign object and more like a comfortable accessory.

Perhaps even more noticeable, at least to male observers, her romper was now hugging a much curvier butt, and she had added two brand new weapons to her arsenal. Peeking over the floppy feminine bow, modestly-sized, but unmistakable: boobs. “Barbie” officially had cleavage, and there was no way Kimberly was going to let her ex get away without displaying it, no matter how much he’d whined and complained upon seeing himself in the mirror.

Now, watching him swish his way to the counter and snap just about every neck on the trip there, she was almost in awe of her own creation -- right up until his wedge caught the edge of a floor tile, and he nearly fell flat on his face. So much for athletic poise. He stumbled forward, steadied himself on the nearest table, and straightened up with a terrific blush. A blonde tendril of hair caught on his sticky lip gloss, and he had to delicately pull it to the side with one claw-tipped nail, eyelashes fluttering as he gave several nervous blinks.

“Hey, you okay?” asked the male occupant of said table, a good-looking guy in his thirties. The female occupant, who was clearly his date, chose to treat Bobby to a catty stare instead.

“Fine!” Bobby blurted, in his somewhat-improved “girl voice.” It was still breathy and a little too high-pitched to sound natural, but it was no longer “ten year old boy imitating a sex operator” bad. “Um, how about you?”

“Pretty good,” the guy said, exchanging an awkward glance with his date. “Thanks?”

“Real smooth, Barbie,” Kimberly said into her phone in a low voice. They were already on the call: Bobby’s phone, stuffed in his purse, was synced to his AirPods. At her comment, his eyes darted around the coffee shop, and he glared when he caught sight of her sitting in the corner with her MacBook, partially disguised by big sunglasses and a ball cap. “Don’t look, dummy,” Kimberly hissed. “Mission Impossible, remember?”

Her ex grimaced, made a surprisingly graceful pirouette, and finished his walk up to the counter. The feminine swish he leant to his hips was apparently magnetic: Kimberly watched the guy on the date, who was now blowing any shot he’d had with her, almost pull an “Exorcist” trying to follow Bobby’s strut.

“You said I had to act more polite,” Bobby hissed. “You know, “girls are more socially aware,” or whatever. I was being polite!”

“Just order your drink, then take the middle table,” Kimberly said. “I hope this guy doesn’t show up in a MAGA hat. Like, that only just occurred to me.”

“Are you trying to say mega-hat?” Bobby whispered. “What the hell does that even mean? Like, it’s extra big?”

Kimberly’s eyes nearly rolled out of her head, but she was spared from having to explain by the interjection of the barista, who had managed to clean the almond milk off his apron. “Hey, welcome to Starbucks,” he said. “What can I get started for you today, miss?”

“Mango smoothie, mega size,” Bobby said brusquely, though still affecting his falsetto.

“Uh, do you mean “grande” size?” the barista asked, eyes fixed firmly on Bobby’s sliver of exposed cleavage. Kimberly perked up. She was about to witness a very important “first” in Bobby’s life -- someone talking to his chest instead of his face. She waited for her ex to notice, but he was obviously scanning the menu behind the counter.

“Whatever, Starbucks guy,” Bobby sighed breathily, and Kimberly’s eyebrows shot up involuntarily. Bobby had never been respectful to people in the service industry, but now, being disrespectful while also clutching a designer purse, he had made the transition from “entitled jerk” to “basic bitch.” It was sort of amazing.



“Name?” the barista asked, in a much less friendly way, obviously cooled off a little by the attitude.

“Barbie,” Bobby said, suddenly much quieter -- obviously he still hated the name.

“What’s that?” the barista frowned.

Bobby blushed. “*Barbie*,” he repeated, choosing to lean forward instead of raising his voice. It was the wrong choice. The blush and the timid whisper, together with his posture, made it look like he was being flirtatious, intentionally giving the barista a peek at his cleavage. The barista clearly interpreted it as such, because his expression suddenly changed from put-upon service worker to wannabe Lothario.

“I think I saw your car in the parking lot,” the barista said, already grinning at his own wit. “The pink Jeep, right?”

His eyes darted down to Bobby’s bust again, and this time Kimberly got what she’d been waiting for: Bobby noticed exactly where the guy was looking. She saw horror, indignation, and disgust flash across her ex’s face in the span of a single second. But to her utter delight, rather than trying to tell the guy off in his quavery “girl voice” or simply march away in a huff, Bobby froze like a deer in the headlights.

It seemed his male ego was unable to process the fact that another male, the kind he once denigrated and made fun of for working dead-end jobs despite the fact that he’d never had a job in his life, was busy enjoying the sight of his push-up bra enhanced cleavage. Maybe her ex had noticed a few guys eyeing his chest at the mall, but he would have been able to comfort himself with the knowledge that they were staring at padding, nothing more.

Now, however, they were undeniably real boobs, and they were *his* boobs. Kimberly watched Bobby’s face turn bright pink under his makeup, and to make matters worse, the blush was quickly spreading all the way to the tops of his breasts.

“You know, I’m a “grande” myself,” the barista said, pushing his luck but tempering the remark with a cheesy wink. “Cash or card, cutie?”

Bobby Vickerson once would have socked any guy who called him “cutie” in the nose, but times were a-changing. Now Kimberly watched in incredulous delight as her ex, still blushing furiously, fumbled in his purse like a flustered airhead until he finally found a twenty-dollar bill. The barista took it and made change, still eyeing Bobby admiringly but clearly trying to gauge if he had a shot or not with such a hot blonde. Throwing caution to the wind, the guy kept the change in his cupped palm instead of dumping it onto the counter -- Kimberly had been subjected to this move before. When Bobby reached for his change instinctively, he found his soft manicured hand enclosed by the barista’s.

“Nice nails,” the guy said. “Salon, or you do them yourself?”

God, Kimberly wanted a snapshot. Her macho, pig-headed ex, all-star athlete Bobby Vickerson, slightly off-balance in his pretty cork-wedge sandals, leaning forward just enough to exaggerate the camber of his bare back and make his hormone-plumped buttocks strain invitingly against the fabric of his ruffly blue romper. Blonde hair tumbling around his made-up face, pendant necklace dancing teasingly in front of his boobs, dainty hand caught in the grasp of another guy who clearly *wanted* him. And the best part was, Bobby still had no idea how to deal with it.

“My friend did them,” he squeaked, casting a glance in Kimberly’s direction which she was careful to ignore.

“I think long nails are really sexy on girls,” the barista said, now drawing an irritated glance from his female co-worker. “What do you think?”

“Uh...” Bobby tugged his hand free. “Yes?”

Clearly thinking he had things in the bag, the barista scrawled a phone number on the receipt and handed it over with a wink. “Well, I don’t mind a little scratching,” he said. “Call me.”

Not meeting the guy’s eyes, Bobby took the receipt and his change and minced to the other end of the counter to await his mango smoothie. The girl who was making it for him gave him a look of disdain for what she had obviously interpreted as bimbo-esque flirting. Bobby blushed and looked away. He was refusing to meet Kimberly’s eyes, too, for which she couldn’t really blame him. Getting hit on by a horny barista in front of an ex had to be a little embarrassing, but if she wanted this Mission Impossible to go off without a hitch, she couldn’t rub it in. She needed to keep him focused on the plan.

“You did good,” she said. “I mean, he definitely thought you were a girl.”

Bobby looked momentarily stricken, then plastered a fake smile to his face. He picked up his smoothie and carried it past her on his way to the most central table. She couldn’t help but notice that they’d gotten the name wrong, as per usual. The girl had written “Bobbi” on it. Kimberly could only smile. Just another one of life’s little ironies.



#

The stage was set. Kimberly was tucked away in her corner, pretending to be totally absorbed watching something on her laptop, and the coffee shop had gotten pretty empty otherwise. The couple on the date had left, separately, and now it was just her, “Barbie,” two old men reading newspapers, and a hipster guy with a moustache playing on his phone in the opposite corner.

There was no way the blackmailer could miss his date, since Bobby was sitting right in the middle of the coffee shop, sucking away at his mango smoothie, legs crossed prettily at the thigh and one foot bobbing up and down in a nervous gesture turned incredibly feminine, drawing attention to his sparkly toenail polish and stylish sandals. He seemed to be recovering from the barista’s attentions -- the guy had been reprimanded by his manager shortly afterwards and sent to the back to stock shelves, which probably helped. Mango smoothies also seemed to have a calming effect where Bobby was concerned.

The automatic door breezed open. Kimberly subtly turned her head, saw a flash of red, and zeroed in. Her heart sped up with the thrill of the hunt. There he was: the blackmailer. Kimberly wasn’t sure what she had been expecting, but it definitely wasn’t someone so normal looking. The guy was probably in his early twenties, a college student, in decent shape and possessing a nicely-trimmed beard, dressed in a casual plaid shirt and black jeans. As promised, he was wearing a bright red beanie hat.

Looking back to Bobby, who had also caught sight of the guy, Kimberly could see absolute rage about to break the surface. Her ex’s fists were clenched so tight his sparkly claws were in danger of snapping off, his teeth were clearly gritted behind his glossy lips, and he was breathing so hard his chest was heaving, which had the likely-undesired effect of making his breasts actually jiggle, just slightly, behind the low cut of his top. She could already picture him ruining everything, either by getting up and trying to deck the guy, or, if his female disguise was still important to him, throwing the smoothie in the guy’s face and then scratching his eyes out. The barista would probably be next.

“Hey, deep breaths,” Kimberly whispered. “You can’t blow this, remember? I know you hate this guy, but “Barbie” doesn’t. “Barbie” is curious about him, and a little scared of him, and a little attracted to him. Got it? I know you can act, you did it the whole first month we dated, so *act*.”

The speech seemed to shake Bobby’s head clear. She could see him draw a deep breath, composing himself and inadvertently making his cleavage a target yet again -- the blackmailer’s eyes took an immediate sight-seeing detour, though he seemed more surprised than lecherous. As the guy sat down, Bobby managed to greet him with a pained smile.

“Hi!” he chirped, “girly voice” activated. “You know, I totally love Starbucks! Great choice!”

“Uh, yeah,” the blackmailer said, sitting down. In contrast to Bobby’s falsetto, he seemed to be trying to make his voice as deep and macho as possible. “Nice to meet you in person, beautiful. I’m Mike.”

“Nice to meet you in person, *Mike*,” Bobby said, emphasizing the name in case his AirPods hadn’t picked it up loudly enough for Kimberly to hear.

“Ask him if it’s short for something,” Kimberly whispered. “Don’t ask him his last name, it’ll spook him. Oh, and be flirty when you do it. Play with your hair.”

The prospect of flirting with his blackmailer was clearly a painful one, but Bobby followed orders, clumsily twirling a lock of his blonde wig between two fingers. “Is that, like, short for something?” he asked. “Michael? Michelangelo?”

Mike the Blackmailer hesitated for a second before responding, still in the same deep baritone. “Just Mike. You look really sexy, by the way. Cute outfit. Totally adorbs. Uh, adorable. I’d like to just tear it off you right here.” Mike’s eyes traveled up and down Bobby’s feminized body, and he gave an exaggerated grunt of approval, adding something she couldn’t quite make out.

Kimberly watched her ex’s face go red, but she couldn’t fully enjoy Bobby’s humiliation because this interaction was weird on *multiple* levels. Something was definitely off about this Mike guy. She knew some people had a big contrast between their real-life and online personas, but he didn’t seem like some nerdy hacker type thrust into sunlight for the first time. He seemed almost like he was playing a role, the same way Bobby was.

“Get closer,” Kimberly ordered. “I didn’t hear the last thing he said.”

Bobby looked like he would rather get close to a basket of venomous snakes, but he leaned forward to get his AirPods a little nearer to Mike’s mouth, placing both elbows on the table and inadvertently framing his cleavage in a very eye-catching way. This had been Kimberly’s ulterior motive, and, to her bafflement, Mike the Perv didn’t seem to even notice.

“So what school do you go to?” Bobby asked breathily. “You look, um, older than me?”

Bobby was pushing for information way too quickly, and also probably didn’t realize he sounded like complete jail-bait trying to seduce an older guy. But Kimberly was more interested in the way Mike’s answer, yet again, came with a strange delay.

“I go to Green Lake College,” he said gruffly. “I’m a theatre major.” He cocked his head to the side. “Uh, I mean, football major. I play football.” He pulled his beanie cap up slightly, to scratch his neck in an oddly nervous gesture, and Kimberly saw a flash of white.

“Oh, look, we both have AirPods,” Bobby chirped. “Cool!”

Kimberly’s eyes narrowed. Mike was wearing AirPods, concealed under his beanie, and was acting really, really weird. It could only mean one thing. She started scanning the coffee shop, but was jerked back to the conversation when Mike slammed his hand on the table.

“Look, beautiful, I’m going to stop blackmailing you,” he announced abruptly. “I feel bad about it. I’m going to delete all that stuff I got off your laptop, get off your socials, and stop messaging you. I know you felt like we had a connection, but…” Mike paused, then, as if warming to what he was saying, continued with a bolder voice. “I’m just not the one for you, beautiful. You should be with someone your own age. You know, a high-schooler. Someone you have shared interests with. Sometimes, the right person is under our noses all along! Me, I once dated a guy, I mean, a girl, who I used to absolutely *hate*. She and I had this sort of rivalry going on, but it turned out she was actually an amazing person once I set all that aside.”

Bobby’s look of hatred had been replaced by sheer puzzlement. Kimberly couldn’t blame him. She was totally baffled as Mike stood up, putting his hand on his heart dramatically.

“I truly believe you can find that same kind of connection, beautiful,” he said. “Just give it a chance. Also, Catholic guys aren’t *all* repressed. Some of them are really open-minded.” He scratched his head. “I just had to get that off my chest,” he added lamely. “There is absolutely too much anti-Catholic rhetoric in Starbucks stores across America. Anyways, good luck finding that guy, beautiful. Later.”

With that, he bounced out of the coffee shop with a slight prance in his gait that was definitely more theatre major than football player. Bobby was sitting there stunned, pretty pink mouth hanging open, looking for all the world like a spurned hot girl who had just been dumped in public. Kimberly didn’t have time to enjoy it. She was too busy staring at the hipster sitting in the opposite corner of the Starbucks. He was wearing a golf hat and big wire-frame glasses, and his bristly red moustache covered his mouth, but all the same…

She grabbed her phone, scrolled through her contact list, and selected Josh Delacroix’s number. *Hey there, mountaindew18*, she tapped out. *You and I need to talk*.

Across the store, the hipster jerked backwards from his phone as if it was suddenly venomous. Then, with one last glance towards the hot blonde in the middle of the coffee shop, he got up, revealing himself to be suspiciously tall, and sneaked out the door. Kimberly could hardly believe what she had just discovered. Her mind was racing with possibilities, potentially good ones, potentially disastrous ones, for the “girlify Bobby Vickerson” master plan.

“Kimmy?” Bobby whispered. “Yo, Kimmy! What the hell just happened?” He was looking over at her corner, and now wiggled his manicured fingers in a wave to get her attention.

“I guess he wants you to meet a nice Catholic boy,” Kimberly said, not bothering to correct her ex’s use of her nickname. “I think we’re in the clear now. Mission Impossible over, or whatever.”

With a grimace, Bobby plucked the AirPods from his ears and dropped them into his purse. Kimberly watched her ex slide off his chair, still a little awkwardly, and walk over. He was definitely better at the strutting part than the sitting part -- she guessed Mister Perv, AKA Josh

Delacroix, hadn't been making him practice that. She was still reeling from the revelation, but whatever she did with the information, she wasn't about to hand it over to her ex.

"Well, we know his first name and his school," Bobby said, a little scratchily, obviously tired of using his "girl" register. "And he's on the football team. Probably, like, third-string. So we should be able to reverse blackmail him, right? That's the plan?"

In Kimberly's opinion, it was a lot more likely that "Mike" -- probably not the guy's real name -- was a gay theatre student who had agreed to participate in a really weird, AirPods-directed improv skit for twenty bucks. But she wasn't sharing that particular opinion with Bobby.

"It sounded like he was telling the truth," Kimberly said, trying to sound pensive. "He got pretty into it at the end, there. I think we should sit tight, and see what happens. Sometimes these things really do just go away on their own."

Bobby looked less than convinced. But before he could argue, in an exhibit of things that didn't just go away on their own, the barista came sauntering over, untying his apron. "Still hanging around for me?" he asked jokingly. "That's cute, but you should know it comes across as a little clingy."

Kimberly watched her ex turn red yet again. She wanted to ruin Bobby's life, sure, but that didn't mean she couldn't allow him a few small victories here and there. In fact, it was probably better for the plan in the long run, especially now that she was entering the uncharted territory of Phase Three featuring Josh Delacroix the secret perv. She pushed her still mostly-full, mostly-cold coffee across the table to him, even going so far as to remove the lid.

"Do it," she said. "It's the ultimate female power move."

Bobby stared at her in confusion for a second, then, realizing what she was proposing, grabbed the foam cup and hurled its contents directly into the barista's grinning face. Kimberly had to give credit where credit was due: girlfied or not, her ex's aim was still pretty damn accurate.

#

The following day at school, Bobby, for the first time in recent memory, seemed happy. It was a little depressing to Kimberly, especially since he was back to his usual sweatpants, sneakers, and hoodie instead of swishing around in high heels and a cute, sexy outfit -- the contrast between yesterday's flawless "Barbie" and his current appearance was unsettling. She kept wanting to whip out her mascara wand and some lip gloss to pretty him back up, even as she nodded along to his latest news.

"So he even disappeared from my contacts, and all his messages are gone, too," Bobby finished, with a look of great satisfaction. "I think that pervy nutcase was telling the truth. Ha! I'm home free! I can go back to jacking off with my laptop!"

“Uh huh,” Kimberly said, checking her phone and seeing a new message from Josh Delacroix. “Great. Great. Look, I have study hall, so I’ll see you later, okay?”

She took off, waving to Ally and Daphne on the way down the hall, but kept right on going out the doors into the parking lot. She had arranged a sit-down meeting with Josh, this time at Green Lake’s *second*-least frequented Starbucks location. She had a feeling the barista at the other place might still be nursing a grudge.

When she pulled up to the coffee shop ten minutes later, she could already see Josh sitting at a table inside, moustache-free and wearing his usual Saint Ceylan’s Sprites track suit. He had already ordered what looked like a vitamin water -- athletes -- and so Kimberly didn’t bother heading to the counter herself. She walked in, bee-lined to his table, and cut right to the chase.

“Okay, Josh, spill,” she said, sitting down across from him. “What’s going on? What’s with this pervy blackmail bullshit?”

The Saint Ceylan’s basketball star looked around, wincing, and lowered his voice. “Look,” he said. “I know it was wrong. It was just, like, once I started I couldn’t *stop*. Ever since the first time I saw her, it’s like...” He trailed off. “I know it’s crazy, but I’m in love.”

Kimberly blinked. “You’re in love with Bobby.”

Josh’s face went red. “With *Barbie*,” he corrected. “I thought it would go away, but even after the mini-putt thing I couldn’t stop thinking about her. I watched that video of her over and over, but it wasn’t enough. Just thinking about never being able to see her again, and only ever seeing Bobby? It drove me nuts. So, I hacked her.”

Kimberly had about a million questions, but she chose to lean back and give Josh an impenetrable glare instead. The basketball star grimaced, and started to speak a little faster and more frantically, unloading what was clearly a guilty conscience.

“I know it was weird, and pervy, and immoral, and illegal,” he said. “But it was the only way I could see her again! And I was right, wasn’t I? That girl I saw in the video, that girl I met in the mall and played mini-putt with, that gorgeous, perfect, flawless...” He swallowed. “That girl was the real her! Not Bobby Vickerson the trash-talker. That guy is just her cover, you know? So when Barbie confessed to me about, you know, transitioning? And taking hormones?” Josh sighed and rubbed his temples. “It confirmed all my suspicions,” he said. “But it also meant I had to find a way to get her *and* me out of the whole blackmail mess. So I hired that actor off Fiverr, Mike, and got him to pretend to be the blackmailer, and break it all off.” Josh gave a resigned shrug. “He’s not a great actor.”

Kimberly pursed her lips, weighing her options. She could let Josh keep believing his little fantasy, about Bobby secretly wanting to be a girl, but that would mean juggling yet another lie.

The alternative was hedging on Josh's clear obsession with "Barbie" -- and if that didn't work, she had copies of all the messages he'd sent to Bobby, so reverse blackmail was still on the table.

"Turn your phone off," Kimberly said. "I'm about to share some sensitive information. I know you like stealing people's personal info, and I don't want you recording this."

"I'm not," Josh protested, but he took his phone out of his pocket and turned it off.

"There's just one problem with your plan," Kimberly said. "That confession was made-up. Bobby's not "transitioning." At least, not on purpose."

It was Josh's turn to blink stupidly. "Are you kidding?" he frowned. "You saw how she looks in a bra and panties, right?"

"Oh, Bobby's taking hormones," Kimberly continued. "He just doesn't know it. Let me fill you in a little bit..."

Taking a deep breath to brace herself, Kimberly told him the whole story. She started at the beginning, with Bobby dumping her, calling her a dumb blonde bimbo and saying the words she wanted to haunt him forever: that he would be better off dating a Barbie doll. She explained about finding the Halloween photo and getting the idea for the makeover bet. She even showed Josh the meticulous entries she had been making on his fake LiveJournal, charting his progress from "boy to babe," and told him about the high-powered hormones she'd bought from Skeeter. But at this point in the story, she made an important change.

"I thought I would just dose him for a couple weeks, and maybe it would give him ED, or something," she said. "And I figured the LiveJournal would be embarrassing, but he would be able to claim it was a prank. But after that day at the salon, and seeing him at the mall, and the mini-putt, I knew I had to go all in." She looked away, putting a guilty expression on her face. "It's like you said, Josh. He was just so gorgeous. Perfect. Flawless. I couldn't stop thinking about "Barbie." Not in like, the romantic way. That's all yours. But Bobby was such a perfect girl, I couldn't help but think it was just... Meant to be."

Josh's mouth was hanging open. "Yes!" he exclaimed, in a hushed voice. "Exactly!"

"It was like a beautiful butterfly was stuck in this cocoon," Kimberly continued, laying it on even thicker. "This ugly, macho, sexist cocoon. And I had to help that butterfly be free, you know? Even if Bobby doesn't know it, we're doing this for his own good."

"We're doing this?" Josh echoed.

"That's right," Kimberly said. "You and I can help each other, Josh. We can make sure "Barbie" becomes a permanent fixture. Sure, you got a little carried away, but you're not a bad guy. Your

heart is in the exact right place, and you saw exactly what I saw: a beautiful girl trapped living a boy's life, pretending to be some big basketball star, when she should actually be a cheerleader. *Your cheerleader.*"

The Saint Ceylan's star sat back in his seat, looking stunned. She had hit him with every trick in the book, and she could see his sense of morality warring with his desire for "Barbie." She could see him justifying it to himself, piece by piece.

"We're doing this," Josh repeated, this time not in question form. "And it's for her own good. She'll see that eventually, right?" He took a deep breath. "So what's next?"

Hook, line, and sinker. Kimberly grinned. "Next," she said, "is a little thing I call Phase Three."

#

For a week, it looked like Bobby Vickerson's social standing might actually be on the mend. It was clear that getting out from under his blackmailer had lifted a massive weight from his shoulders, and Kimberly saw sparks of Bobby's old confidence returning here and there, just in the way he held his head or the way he guffawed at a YouTube prank video on his phone. He was more at ease than he had been in ages, and people noticed.

It even extended onto the basketball court: when Jefferson High played against Portman Polytechnic that Thursday, Bobby, despite coming off the bench, shot lights out. He was getting tossed around on the defensive end, and definitely ran a little different than he used to, but his shooting streak was so hot that the coach kept him in. The opposing fans were chanting "Barbie sucks" at him, and a few cheap blonde wigs were in the crowd, but ever since Bobby had lost his starting position, the jeering had tailed off.

By the end of the night, Jefferson High's former star point guard was actually getting his old "We Love Bobby" cheer from the crowd, tallying 25 points and sealing the victory with a vintage Bobby Vickerson three-ball. Kimberly could see his teammates looking at him with rediscovered respect, and even caught Ally looking a little wistful as he jogged past the cheerleaders -- it made her blood boil, but it was all going to be rectified soon.

Jefferson High was playing again on Saturday, with their next opponent being none other than the Saint Ceylan's Sprites. Since Bobby had just put on a heck of a performance the previous night, the Tomcats' coach agreed to reinsert him into the starting line-up for their big rivalry game. Kimberly heard the news from Beverly, not from Bobby, who hadn't bothered to message her for the past week now that his blackmail problem was solved.

Saturday night was a home game, played in Jefferson High's gymnasium to a large crowd -- the cross-town rivalry always brought out plenty of fans, though neither of Bobby's parents were in the bleachers. Idly waving her pom-poms as she watched the team warm up, Kimberly couldn't help but think she had entered some kind of time warp and gone back exactly eight weeks.

Bobby was confidently swishing shot after shot, and was even joking around with DeShawn. With his blossoming curves hidden under a compression shirt, baggy shorts, and oversized jersey, if she squinted he looked exactly like the old Bobby Vickerson.

On the other side of the court, where the Sprites were getting warmed up, she could see Josh Delacroix doing his best to not so much as glance over at the opposition. He was working on his free-throws instead, sinking one after another with a look of pure focus on his face. Preparing for this particular game had involved a lot more work than usual, very little of it basketball-related, but the dominos were all in place now, ready to fall. Kimberly just hoped they fell the right way.

As the Tomcats ran back to the locker room for their final huddle, she caught her ex's eye. "Hey, good luck," she said. "Really. No matter what, I'll be right here cheering if you need help."

"No need, Kimmy," Bobby said, with all the cocky arrogance of eight weeks ago. "I don't miss. How about we celebrate after the game? You know, the blowjob you keep mentioning?" He winked at the other cheerleaders. "Keep shaking those asses, ladies."

Kimberly felt her face grow hot as Bobby swaggered past -- anger, not embarrassment, but it still meant that he could still get under her skin. It was incredibly, really. With the blackmailer gone, all it took was one good game, 25 points on the Jumbotron screen, to make Bobby insufferable again. Her ex disappeared into the locker room, and Beverly, shaking her pom-poms, turned to Kimberly with a skeptical look.

"Guess who's back to being an asshole," she said. "You know, he'd deserve it if -- "

"If he had to grow big boobs and wear stiletto heels for the rest of his life," Kimberly mumbled furiously to herself. "Yep. Yep. Agreed."

"Huh?" Beverly frowned. "I was going to say if Josh Delacroix shuts him down tonight. Why do you always have to make things weird, Kimberly?"

Kimberly winced. "Uh, just kidding?" she offered, giving a weak wave of the pom-poms. "Go Tomcats!"

When the home team stormed back onto the court a few minutes later for tip-off, Kimberly saw the conspicuous absence she had been hoping for. Despite his re-insertion into the starting line-up, despite the fact that he was playing against his hated rival Josh Delacroix, Bobby Vickerson was nowhere to be seen. Five seconds later, Kimberly's phone buzzed with a new message from her ex.

*Meet me in the teachers' bathroom NOW, it read. This is an EMERGENCY!!!*

Tossing her pom-poms to the floor, Kimberly took off without so much as a goodbye to her fellow cheerleaders. Her heart was racing as she hurried down the hallway to the teachers' bathroom, the only one with a lock on the inside. She rapped her knuckles against the door. The first domino had just tipped over.

"It's me!" she hissed. "Open up!"

Her ex yanked the door open, pulled her inside, and slammed it shut once again. He was still wearing his Tomcats jersey and shorts, but the look of absolute panic on his face made it clear he was in no way ready to play a basketball game. Kimberly's eyes were immediately drawn to the large black garbage bag sitting on the tiled floor, mostly because she could see a small plush teddy bear poking out of the top.

"The creep is back," Bobby groaned, shoving his phone at her. "Shit! Shit, Kimmy, I'm in trouble! Look what he messaged me!"

"Calm down," Kimberly said automatically, reading the first text. It was from "mountaindeew18" again, and it was a doozy.

*Hey beautiful, I'm sorry about what I said in Starbucks lol, I take it all back :( I want us to be together, I was crazy to think otherwise. It's a Saturday night and I need to see my girl, I know you're busy with the basketball game but you can sneak away at halftime lol, meet me in the gym hallway ;)*

"Holy shit," Kimberly muttered, scrolling to the second message.

*Oh and I know you don't have lots of time to get ready but don't worry, this morning I had some free time so I went and got your stuff from your house and put it in your school locker, plus arranged a little surprise present for you lol :D*

"Did you read it?" Bobby demanded, gripping his head with both hands. "Did you read the part where he was in my freaking house? He was in my room! He was actually in my room! I'm freaking out, Kimmy!"

"Deep breaths," Kimberly ordered, scrolling to read the third and final message.

*And NO COLD FEET ALLOWED! If I don't get a selfie of you wearing your new dress and getting all pretty for me in 15 MINUTES, I'll be super mad, and I know where you live beautiful lol*

The text was accompanied by a picture of the blackmailer himself, still wearing his red beanie, standing on the porch of Bobby's house holding up a large bouquet of roses.

"Oh my god," Kimberly muttered. "This guy is a lunatic."

“What do we do?” Bobby groaned. “I’m supposed to be kicking Saint Ceylan’s asses right now! I can’t deal with this psycho stalker shit!”

“We get you into that dress ASAP,” Kimberly said decisively, discreetly switching Bobby’s phone to silent and sliding it into her purse. “Then we start stalling, and then we call the cops on his pervy ass.” She put both hands on her ex’s shoulders, the picture of a supportive friend. “Don’t worry, Bobby. We *will* get you out of this.”

Bobby stared at the garbage bag, gritting his teeth. “I hate this,” he muttered. “I hate horny Winnie the Pooh so freaking much. I’m going to get this asshole if it’s the last thing I do.”

“Good,” Kimberly said. She pulled the plush bear out of the bag and set it in the corner of the sink countertop, then pulled out the blonde wig. “Now hurry up and get the dress on.”



#

Josh Delacroix was having a pretty bad game, by his standards. Even though the Tomcats' main three-point threat, Bobby Vickerson, was out with a last-minute bout of food poisoning, Josh still got caught out on the arc a few times and wasn't able to stop his man from scoring. On the offensive end, he was racking up a decent number of points, but had also let a few nice passes slip right through his hands and even missed what should have been a point-blank dunk.

His head just wasn't in the game. For the first time in his life, he was more eager and excited for halftime than he was for the actual match. About three minutes away from the break, he got his

first indication that Phase Three was in motion. Most people in the stands were still following the action, but an awful lot of them seemed to suddenly be more invested in their phones. As soon as the whistle blew, Josh ran to the bench and picked up his iPhone -- usually he didn't even bring it to games, since social media was a distraction, but this particular game was different.

Right on time, Bobby Vickerson's Facebook profile was updating. He had put a timer delay on the edits he'd made, to make sure they coincided with the game, but now anyone who clicked through to Bobby's profile found "Barbie Vickerson" instead, whose main picture was a stunning post-Papillon photo of her touching her perfect blonde hair and smiling, a little nervously, for the camera. The latest status update was brief, but memorable:

*Okay, I'm finally doing this... Lots of you already have guessed anyways, haha. I'm Barbie, now and always. I'm a girl. I'm a hottie. I'm kind of a princess. Please forget about "Bobby" and meet the real me today at halftime of our game. THANK YOU, Jefferson High, for agreeing to play my video. OMFG, I'm sooo nervous haha. Kisses! #BOY2BABE #OUTNPROUD #STRIVE4REALNESS*

Josh's heart was pounding for reasons that had nothing to do with the basketball game, and he quickly checked Bobby's other socials to make sure the same message was being posted on Instagram, Snapchat, even Twitter. He could see from the rapid accumulation of likes and comments that the social media blitz was working. His own teammates were completely ignoring the coach's speech, staring at their phones and muttering to each other in amazement.

Josh had emailed the Jefferson High administration from Bobby's school email, explaining the situation and asking for permission to do a little "halftime presentation." The school principal had been a little surprised by the news, but several staff members had already seen the signs, and, since it was a great way to bolster their reputation as a tolerant, caring environment, they had agreed.

The stands were buzzing with conversation, excited whispers and disbelieving scoffs. But as a sappy pop song started to play through the Jumbotron speakers, and the first picture of Bobby as a rambunctious little boy appeared on the screen, everybody fell silent. Josh couldn't take full credit for the masterpiece -- Kimberly Quinn had done her fair share, too, trawling through all of Bobby's photos to find the right ones: wearing pink T-shirts, hugging his mom, or just looking particularly boyish but simultaneously sad or upset. And, of course, the Halloween photo where he was dressed as a princess, which drew a chorus of squeals from the girls in the audience.

Josh caught sight of Bobby's parents -- he knew them from photos, not real life -- staring at the screen in total shock. The slideshow shifted to Bobby as a teenager, mostly in black and white to give it a moody atmosphere, accompanied by more somber music. Then, with an explosion of color and a cheery, upbeat Taylor Swift song, came what everybody had been waiting for: "Barbie" standing in the salon, looking incredulously at the mirror, "Barbie" in the mall bathroom, primping for the perfect selfie, "Barbie" sitting in the food court, surrounded by fellow hotties.

Next came the videos that social media had never seen: Bobby pouting nervously in his room as he applied lipstick, clumsily blotting it with a tissue, Bobby traipsing up and down in high-heeled pumps, working on his strut, Bobby fully made-up, wearing a sexy push-up bra, blowing a kiss to the camera -- that last one elicited a few gasps from the crowd. There was even a shot of him wearing his romper, standing in front of the mirror while he adjusted the sit of his pendant necklace, critically eyeing his own cleavage with a wistfulness that, to someone who didn't know better, might have expressed a longing for his boobs to grow just a little faster.

The narrative was crystal clear, even without the captions Kimberly had painstakingly typed up that charted Bobby's "realization" he had been living a lie, and was only happy when he was in heels and makeup, and never wanted to go back to boyhood. Then, as an absolute master-stroke, the video went live. Bobby was standing in one of the school bathrooms, fidgeting nervously as his ex-girlfriend, now girl *friend*, made last-minute check-ups to his hair and makeup.

For the members of the Jefferson High student body who hadn't realized exactly what Bobby's baggy sweats and hoodies had been hiding for the past several weeks, seeing it in the flesh was enough to make a few of them audibly lose it. Josh heard a chorus of "no way" and "holy shit" from the crowd. He didn't blame them in the slightest, as he was equally transfixed by the beautiful blonde in the red minidress and stilettos.

There was no sound, but Bobby was clearly agitated, arms folded anxiously, while Kimberly was the perfect picture of a supportive friend giving him an encouraging speech. A caption appeared on the bottom of the video:

*Getting ready for you guys, sooo nervous... I'm not your basketball star anymore, but can you cheer for me?*

#

"Where is this freaking perv?" Bobby demanded, pacing back and forth in the mincing stride required by his tight dress and high-heeled pumps. "Seriously, what is he playing at?"

"Relax," Kimberly said. "I'm sure he's going to show up any second now. As soon as he does, you keep him talking while I dial 911. This has to be attempted kidnapping, nevermind all the blackmail stuff."

They had managed to sneak, unseen, from the teachers' bathroom to the gym hall. Normally students filtered out of the gymnasium during halftime to get snacks or use the washroom, but not tonight. Kimberly knew exactly why. Her phone was blowing up with messages about it, though she kept half her attention on Bobby while she sifted through them. Her ex was stressed out and flustered, but even stressed out and flustered, she'd made him look hot.





Working with limited makeup and hair products had been a challenge she'd overcome with ingenuity: she would have loved to put some waves in his hair, but since that was out of the realm of possibility she chose instead to pile it into a sexy-messy updo, leaving a few graceful blonde tendrils free to frame his face. She'd applied the "less is more" philosophy with the makeup, using only a little bit of eyebrow pencil, liner, and a double coat of mascara, letting Bobby's lips steal the show.

The fire engine red lipstick was almost aggressively sexy, and it perfectly matched his dress. When Josh had sneaked through Bobby's window to get the stuff from his closet, he'd also raided the Forbidden Room. Serena's closet was loaded with expensive dresses from countless pageants and photoshoots, and Kimberly could see why Josh had picked this one: it hugged every possible curve, ended barely mid-thigh, and had a low-cut sweetheart neckline that made the most of her ex's cleavage. Together with the four-inch stiletto pumps, press-on claws, and big silver hoop earrings, it was almost *too* much, but Bobby's innocent blue eyes and nervous pout offset things just enough.

She wanted people to see him as a gorgeous girl experimenting with her newfound beauty, not an over-the-top sexpot. And at this point, she just really wanted people to see him, period. The notifications on her phone were reaching a fever pitch, and she realized that her hands were actually trembling a little. This was it. The dominos were all falling. She could already hear the chanting, but Bobby, in his distraction, took a few extra seconds to notice. A frown crossed his pretty face.

"Hey, do you hear that?" he asked. "Shit, they're cheering for me! They're doing the "We Love Bobby" thing." He tugged at the hem of his dress, groaning softly. "I should be in there soaking it up, not trying to entrap some freaking football player perv from Green Lake College."

Kimberly swallowed. "Are you sure they're saying "Bobby" and not...?"

Her ex minced closer to the gymnasium side door, pressing his ear against it to listen and inadvertently making his silver hoop earring clink against the metal. She watched as his expression changed to one of utter bafflement.

"They're saying "We Love Barbie,"" he muttered. "But, like, everybody is saying it. Not just those dicks from Saint Ceylan's. The whole crowd is chanting it." Suspicion flickered in his blue eyes. "Hey, where's my phone? You grabbed it when we left the bathroom, right?"

"Yeah," Kimberly said. "Yeah, here it is." She pulled Bobby's iPhone out of her purse and passed it over. As soon as he took it, his eyes widened. She watched him scroll frantically through his notifications, long nails clicking awkwardly against the screen. Was he going to realize what was going on? Was he going to pin it on the right person? For the first time in a long time, she thought she was just as nervous as her ex.

“Oh, my god,” Bobby gasped. “My Insta... My Facebook... He posted this, this *video*, and everybody thinks that I’m...” He was hyperventilating, breasts bobbing prettily as he pressed the heel of his hand against his forehead, avoiding the sharp nails for once. “My mom commented on it,” he said in a whisper. “So did my dad. Oh, my god. They think I planned this!”

Kimberly could see tears welling in in her ex’s bright blue eyes, and it almost made her feel sorry for him. She had never seen him cry before. But then she thought of all the times he’d made her cry, made her feel totally lost and confused and pathetic, and she knew she was giving the great Bobby Vickerson exactly what he deserved.

“I have to set them straight,” he whispered. “I have to go in there right now, before it gets any crazier, and tell them this is all bullshit. Mister Perv must have been planning this all along.”

He reached up for the blonde wig, and Kimberly held her breath, waiting to see it flutter to the floor as he marched into the gym and, in total Bobby Vickerson fashion, made a mess of her plans. But then his eyes widened, staring over Kimberly’s shoulder, and instead of tearing it off, he only adjusted a stray strand of hair.

She turned around. Bobby’s parents were standing there in the hallway, still clutching their phones, but their gaze was fixed on their only son, as if they were seeing him for the very first time. Mr. Vickerson looked stunned, while Bobby’s mom, normally so composed, had tears running down her face.

“Mom,” Bobby croaked. “Dad. This was all a huge mistake, please, you have to believe me, it’s all a big sick joke, I didn’t mean... I thought you guys were packing for Rio, why are you even here, I...”

Bobby’s mom walked closer, heels clicking against the polished floor with each step. Bobby kept babbling right up to the moment she hugged him, pulling him into the tightest embrace possible, and a second after that his dad was awkwardly hugging both of them, patting his son’s bare back. Kimberly watched Bobby’s expression of panic turn to one of absolute shock, and, for just the briefest moment, a hint of child-like bliss, something Kimberly wasn’t sure she’d ever seen before, crossed her ex’s face.

“Barbie,” Bobby’s mom said, stepping back, taking both her son’s manicured hands in hers. “My god, honey, you’re gorgeous.” She gave him a teary smile. “You make that dress look better than Serena ever did.”

Bobby’s lipsticked mouth fell open. He seemed to have completely forgotten Kimberly was there. His eyes, still full of fear and confusion, were now overflowing with tears.

“I’m so sorry I didn’t see it,” his mom said. “I should have known. I should have realized. Can you ever forgive me, Barbie?”

“But it’s all fake,” Bobby whispered, unconsciously adjusting his hair, straightening his dress.

“Absolutely not,” his mom said. “You don’t look fake in the least.” She shot a look at her husband. “I can’t believe it. We had two beautiful daughters all along, and we never realized.”

Mr. Vickerson was still red in the face, but he was looking at his feminized son with a clinical eye. “You look, uh…” He paused. “You look gorgeous, Barbie. We have to get a portfolio going. We can use this buzz to push for something big, maybe a collab with your sister, even…”

“Not the time,” his wife scolded, taking a wipe from her purse.

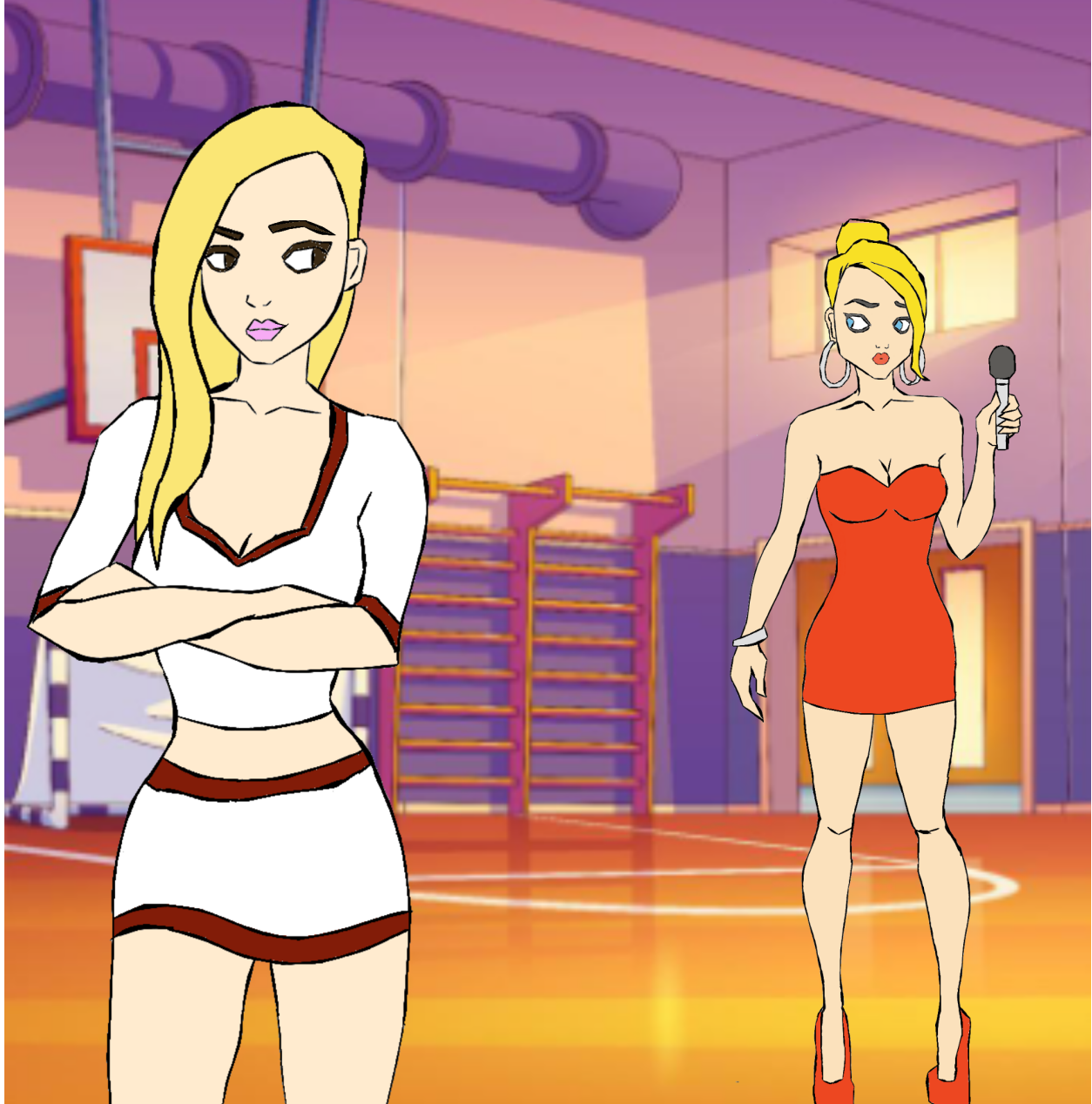
Kimberly watched as Bobby’s mom started fixing her son’s smeared makeup with practiced motions. He was too overwhelmed to reply, frozen in the headlights just like he’d been in the Starbucks, but this was for a totally different reason. For the first time Kimberly could remember, his parents were looking at him the way they always looked at photos of Serena. It was for the good of the plan, but it almost made her angry, seeing that admiration, that love Bobby in no way deserved.

Bobby’s mom squeezed his trembling hands, then adjusted the bodice of his dress, ensuring it framed his cleavage just so. “Kimberly, do you have Barbie’s lipstick in your bag?” she asked.

Kimberly handed it over, and Bobby obediently pouted his lips. His mom smoothed on a fresh coating of the bright red color, put the tube away, and linked arms with him. The chanting inside the gymnasium was reaching its crescendo.

“Come on, Barbie,” Bobby’s mom said. “The Vickersons never disappoint an adoring audience.” She pushed the door open and gently pulled Bobby through behind her, leaving Kimberly and Mr. Vickerson to trail behind after them into the gymnasium.

The instant Jefferson High caught sight of their feminized idol, the volume doubled. Bobby looked around in a total daze, combing a stray tendril of blonde away from his face. His mom gave him one final squeeze as someone scurried forward to put a microphone into his manicured grip, then stepped back.



Bobby's hoop earrings gleamed and twinkled in the bright lights, his dress pushed his new curves to their limits, and as he sashayed forward his stilettos clopped noisily against the hardwood, echoing all the way to the ceiling. Kimberly saw Josh Delacroix on the end of the visitors bench with his jaw hanging open -- some things never changed.

Bobby Vickerson, who eight weeks ago had swaggered up and down this same court after hitting the game-winning shot against Saint Ceylan's, now swished his way to center court to deafening applause. His graceful wiggling walk screamed "female." His curvy butt, dainty waist, and burgeoning boobs screamed "female." His fluttering hands, pouting lips, and dipping

eyelashes screamed “female.” Everything about him confirmed the story up on the Jumbotron screen. The crowd went silent as he raised the microphone in his slender hands.

“H-hi, Jefferson High,” he said hoarsely. “Um... I don’t know who put that video together...”

There was a round of appreciative laughter. Kimberly held her breath. This was the moment of truth. Bobby could still deny everything. He could still rip off the wig, hurl accusations, and tell the world he was the victim of a perverted blackmailer. Jefferson High’s adoration was important to him, but not more important to him than his masculinity. But she had realized that the love he got from his classmates was just a poor substitute for something he wanted much, much more. She watched as his eyes locked onto his sniffling parents.

Bobby stood up a little straighter, pushing out his bust. His voice raised in pitch. “But it’s, um, really nice?” he continued, blushing furiously. “Thank you, everybody, for being here. And cheering. And stuff.”

The crowd whistled and clapped, and his dad put an arm around his mom, who was choking up again.

“So, this might not be, um, a permanent change?” Bobby said, clearing his throat. The crowd fell into confused whispers, and a couple people booed. Kimberly saw Mr. Vickerson raise one eyebrow. “But it might be!” Bobby quickly added. “I’m just, you know, striving.” He smiled through gritted teeth, flashing his pearly whites. “For realness.”

The crowd went absolutely wild. Just like eight weeks ago, Bobby was mobbed, but this time it was by the cheerleaders first, who were hugging him and squealing and jumping up and down in delight, while other students circled around to congratulate him on his “coming out” and his teammates, baffled but moved by the whole thing, offered awkward handshakes or fist-pounds. Halftime had gone way past its allotted time, but the Tomcats’ coach was too stunned by his former star point guard’s transformation into a blonde bombshell to complain, and the Sprites’ coach looked a little teary-eyed with emotion.

But Bobby had eyes only for his parents, who were watching proudly from the sidelines, phones out to record it just like they had recorded every moment of Serena’s pageants and fashion shows, and when the crowd thinned they came through to hug their son again. He was still in a sort of daze, but Kimberly saw the smallest hint of a smile on his painted lips as his mother, cooing and clucking, started fixing his newly-streaky makeup.

Kimberly applauded along with everyone else, unable to contain her happiness. She knew the high was going to wear off, and Bobby would need further “steering” to ensure things stayed on course, but for now, she felt like she had just won the biggest game of her life. She locked eyes with Josh Delacroix, who was surrounded by teammates prodding him to go congratulate his one-time rival, and smirked.

Barbie Vickerson was now out and proud, and that would be awfully tough to come back from.

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Perhaps not surprisingly, Bobby was on social media shutdown following the events of Saturday night, so the next day Kimberly had to actually go over to his house in person to sort through the aftermath. When she rang the doorbell, there was a long delay before Bobby's mom opened the door. She was on her Bluetooth, as usual, but she put whoever it was on hold when she recognized Kimberly.

"Barbie!" she called back over her shoulder. "Beverly's here!"

Maybe "recognized" was a strong word. "Kimberly," Kimberly hastily corrected. "Kimberly's here."

Bobby's mom put her hand over her mouth. "Oops, sorry," she said. "Barbie! Kimberly's here, not Beverly!" There was no response, to which Bobby's mom merely shrugged. "Come on in, she's probably got her AirPods in."

Kimberly followed Mrs. Vickerson inside, intrigued by the pronoun switch -- obviously Bobby hadn't tried to deny everything and pin last night on the blackmailer yet, but that probably just meant he was holed up in his room, watching his reputation as a macho basketball star get completely obliterated by the whims of the internet. Several cuts of the video she and Josh had made were floating around YouTube, racking up the hits, and tons of people had recorded Bobby's impromptu speech.

The whole thing was unbeatable click-bait: a former star athlete transitioning while still in the closet, then making a dramatic coming out announcement at the halftime of a basketball game "he" was supposed to be playing in, and doing it while looking like a sexy blonde babe? Cat videos just couldn't compete. Kimberly had gotten to watch the story go viral, even getting picked up by small news bloggers and BuzzFeed-style websites.

"Oh, I just got a message telling me to tell you she's not home," Bobby's mom said, tapping at her smartphone as they entered the living room. "Barbie!" she shouted. "Come on, it's Kimberly! Your best friend? I think?"

This time there was a rustling of fabric, and Kimberly had to do a double-take as Bobby appeared at the top of the staircase in one of Serena's old prom dresses. His mom had obviously helped him get prettied up: Bobby's blonde wig was styled in a flawless cascade down one shoulder, and his makeup was impeccable. He made the navy blue dress look as good as any prom queen could ever hope to, even as he fiddled nervously with the thigh-high slit, inadvertently flashing a lot of tanned leg.

She'd been expecting her ex to be holed up in his room wearing sweatpants again, not prancing around all dolled up in an evening gown. This was intriguing, to say the least. Realizing her mouth was hanging open, she quickly shut it.

"Hey, Barbie," she said.

"Hi," he said sheepishly. "We were, um, taking some photos."

"I thought we should start building Barbie's portfolio," Bobby's mom said matter-of-factly. "The modeling agency is already screaming for headshots and I'm in the middle of setting a date for an actual photoshoot, maybe a car show gig..."

"Mom!" Bobby whined.

"When you're ready, dear, of course," his mom said blithely, then, returning to her call, "Can we get anything sooner than Tuesday?"

Bobby still had a bit of the shell-shocked expression from the previous night, and Kimberly could see why. "Um, come on up," he said vaguely. Then, in a slightly-more-familiar grumble, "I'm not doing the stairs in these heels again."

"Practice makes perfect!" his mom sang from the kitchen.

Kimberly hurried up the stairs, following Bobby's swishing butt past Sabrina's room, the door to which was thrown open for the first time she could remember. She caught a glimpse of a vast array of feminine finery strewn across the bed and floor before Bobby led her inside his own room and shut the door. He sank onto his bed with a sigh, massaging his feet -- it looked like his mom had him in five-inch stilettos for their little "photoshoot."

"So, yesterday was pretty crazy," Kimberly said bracingly. "And I guess today is, too?"

Bobby blushed, brushing a strand of blonde hair back into place. "Yeah," he said. "Dad went ahead to Rio, but Mom stuck around to, uh, be supportive. Which I guess means trying on every freaking thing in Serena's closet."

"Any word from the creep?" Kimberly asked.

"He disappeared again," Bobby said, tapping his phone with one manicured nail. "All his messages are erased. I should've taken a screenshot, or something, but now..."

"That's the reason I came," Kimberly said softly. "I figured with your feed all clogged up with 'Barbie' you wouldn't have seen *this*." She pulled up a news article on her phone and handed it over. "That's why he didn't show up for your 'date,'" she said. "And why he hasn't messaged you again since last night. He got busted."

Bobby stared down at the article, headlined by *NOTORIOUS HACKER ARRESTED SATURDAY NIGHT IN GREEN LAKE*. Kimberly and Josh had written it together, cobbling together several real articles about hackers getting arrested by the FBI, and the really important part was the photo that showed the young man Bobby knew as Mike, his own personal tormentor, wearing handcuffs.

“Shit,” Bobby muttered, scrolling through the article. “He wasn’t just blackmailing me. He was like, robbing banks and stuff.”

“I think the FBI is going to want their turn with him before you get yours,” Kimberly said. “You can tell people he was behind it all, but now...” She trailed off, doing her best to look both pained and sympathetic. “If you try to pin it on this famous hacker who just got arrested, honestly? People will think you just read about him in the news, got cold feet about being “Barbie” full-time, and tried to use him as an excuse to back out, and that means -- ”

“I don’t care,” Bobby said abruptly.

“You don’t care?” Kimberly echoed in confusion.

She’d been ready to go all out, to paint a picture of exactly how trapped he was: there was no way he could go back on “Barbie” without everybody thinking the whole thing had been some kind of sick joke or desperate grab for attention. She’d been ready to describe to him how everyone would hate his guts, how he would be a pariah, a laughingstock, an outcast, unless he actually became the blonde bimbo everyone thought he wanted to be.

But her ex had gotten there without her. He had a mournful expression on his face, staring off into space. “It was Halloween, when I was nine,” he said. “You asked me about it before, so I’m telling you. It was Halloween, and usually Serena’s costume was the big deal on Halloween, but that was the year she said she was too old for trick-or-treating and snuck off to some party.” Bobby paused and took a deep breath. “Mom was bummed, and of course she didn’t give a shit about my costume, even though I was freaking Darth Vader and it was awesome. But I got this dumb idea. I was nine, you know? I went and grabbed one of Serena’s old pageant dresses, took it to mom, and told her I wanted to be a princess for Halloween instead.”

Kimberly blinked. “Wait, what?” she demanded, remembering the sour look on nine-year-old Bobby’s face in the photo -- she’d assumed his mom had dressed him up as a joke, or maybe even Serena had bullied him into it. “Why?”

Bobby stared straight ahead. “So she would pay attention to me for once,” he muttered. “And you know what? She did. I hated the dress. I hated the wig. Going out was embarrassing as hell, and like, seriously cold. But she paid attention to me, so it was worth it.” He shrugged. “Serena knew exactly why I did it. She saw the photos the next day, acted all giggly and proud. Then as soon as Mom left the room, she just stared at me. And she was like, ‘I hope you

enjoyed that. I hope you enjoyed pretending to be me for a day, because now you're right back to being invisible, how it's supposed to be."

Kimberly could see a glimmer of tears in Bobby's eyes; he sniffed angrily and wiped at them with the heels of his hands. He tossed his phone onto the bed and stood up, pacing over to the basketball trophies on his wall. He stared at them for a moment, then shook his head.

"Coach called me and told me I'm off the team," he said. "He said he wishes me all the best in my 'journey' and gave me the email for the girls' team's coach. Just like that, after all the buzzer-beaters I hit for that asshole. Do you know how freaking hard I worked to be good at ball? How many hours I put in at the gym? How many shots I took?" He was breathing hard, on the verge of sobs. "And it was all for nothing." He sniffed. "I don't know what to do. Basketball was my life, Kimmy."

"Screw your coach," Kimberly said. "Honestly, screw basketball. It never got you what you really wanted, did it?"

"Of course it did," Bobby muttered. "Everyone freaking loved me."

"Everyone?" Kimberly asked skeptically. "Your parents barely came to your games. They barely paid attention when they *did*. Now look! Your mom is going through all Serena's stuff to find you clothes, and your dad is already trying to get you a modeling contract." She walked closer. "And you know what else? Serena Vickerson has never, ever trended on Twitter. You did. Last night. Boy to babe, princess in hiding, all those hashtags. Don't tell me you didn't see it."

"I saw it," Bobby said in a small voice. "My followers went through the roof."

"So basketball didn't work out," Kimberly said. "You put everything you had into it, and got nothing. Meanwhile, all Serena had to do was bat her freaking eyelashes, and she got your parents fawning over her. So maybe it's time to try it her way."

"What do you mean?" Bobby asked, quavering.

Kimberly could see the confusion on her ex's face. He looked lost, dejected, almost desperate. He was practically begging her to tell him what to do. Now was the time to seal the deal.

"Serena was popular without playing sports," Kimberly said. "Remember what the video said? 'I'm a girl, I'm a hottie, I'm kind of a princess.' That's what people are expecting tomorrow, and that's what you're going to give them. You can make everybody pay attention to you again, and this time, your mom and dad will, too."

Bobby's pretty pink mouth fell open for a moment, then he closed it and gave a nervous swallow. "So you think..." He trailed off. "Just for a while, right?"

“Just for a while,” Kimberly said, stepping forward. She guided him to the full-length mirror, confronting him once more with his beautiful feminine reflection. Bobby’s gorgeous face was a picture of total misery. “Look at you,” she said, more softly now. “Serena had it easy this whole time. She doesn’t know how to work for stuff, but *you* do. You’re going to be the hottest girl at Jefferson High, hands down. You’re going to be perfect. Barbie, everybody, and I mean *everybody*, is going to *adore* you.”

She saw a tiny flicker of hope in his blue eyes as he processed her words. She knew he was going to hate every minute of being “Barbie,” just like he hated it on Halloween, and at the salon, and the mall, and the mini-putt, and the Starbucks, and last night. But if he believed it would all be worth it, she had him right where she wanted him.

“Yeah?” Bobby said faintly.

“I guarantee it,” Kimberly said, wrapping her arms around him from behind, the first embrace she’d given him since they broke up. “And don’t worry. I’m going to be with you every step of the way.” She smiled. “I owe you that much, don’t I?”

Kimberly watched the struggle on her ex’s face. Her conversation with Beverly was drifting through her head, and in some crazy alternate universe she knew that this was the time she confessed to everything, and apologized, because nobody deserved to be forced into living a lie. But that was some other universe. She didn’t feel fulfilled, seeing Bobby’s life in ruins, but maybe that just meant she hadn’t gone far enough yet.

“Okay,” Bobby finally murmured. “Screw it. I’m a girl, I’m a hottie, I’m kind of a princess.”

“Damn straight,” Kimberly said firmly. “Jefferson High won’t know what hit them.”

A small, sad smile appeared on Bobby’s glossy pink lips for a moment. “Yeah,” he said. “Yeah.” He took a deep breath. “That’s the Barbie Vickerson experience.”



THE END

