



“And of course, we can’t talk enough about this kid Bobby Vickerson, warming up right in front of us now. He’s come out of nowhere to lead the NCAA in scoring and assists, really an incredible story...”

“Absolutely, Jack. He played his high-school ball in Green Lake, Wyoming -- you ever heard of the place? Me neither. Anyways, unrecruited, made the team here as a walk-on, worked his way up to starting point guard, and he has been on a *tear* ever since.”

“Extremely manly, too. Have to point that out -- just the sheer masculinity of this kid.”

Bobby Vickerson tuned out the chatter coming from the commentators table as he limbered up, preparing himself to lead his team to yet another victory. The stadium was packed, as always, and he could see his adoring parents in the front row of the crowd, furiously waving their home-made signs. A bevy of attractive female fans weren't far off, all of them screaming his name. He gave them a dismissive wave.

“Are you prepared for this test?” his coach, a moustached man in a sweater vest, demanded.

Bobby snorted. Of course he was prepared. He'd gotten them this far, hadn't he? All his teammates had to do was give him the ball, and the wins would keep coming.

“What were the three main causes of the Industrial Revolution?” his coach asked. “Barbie? Are you paying attention? Barbie!”

Bobby Vickerson snapped back to reality. He was in Mr. Wilson's high school history class, not in some college gymnasium. He wasn't even a member of the Jefferson High basketball team anymore, nevermind leading a university squad to the NCAA championship. And worst of all, due to a combination of bad luck, a psychotic hacker-slash-blackmailer, and a dumb bet with his ex girlfriend, Kimberly Quinn, he now went by “Barbie.”

“Um, the three main what of what?” Bobby asked, raising the pitch of his voice as high as he could manage without sounding like a cartoon character.

God, he hated having to talk like a chick.

Of course, he wasn't too big on the rest of it, either: the blonde wig always getting in his face, the coating of makeup he had to constantly check up on, the eyelash extensions fluttering around whenever he blinked, the sticky pink lipgloss he was somehow supposed to remember to reapply, the claw-like fake nails that made everything take twice as long as it should...

“The three main causes of the Industrial Revolution,” Mr. Wilson sighed.

Bobby swallowed. “Uhhh...”

And the clothes were even worse -- his beloved T-shirts, hoodies, skinny jeans and sneakers were long gone. Today he was wearing a black long-sleeved crop top that not only left his taut midriff exposed, but also had a scoop neckline designed to draw attention to his seemingly still-growing boobs, and the top was paired with a tiny black-and-white checked miniskirt that ensured he spent most of his time trying not to display his panties.

He had never realized how freaking cold the air-conditioning in this school was. Kimmy kept telling him that showing skin was expected, especially from girls as hot as “Barbie,” and that he had to dress extra-girly if he wanted everyone to believe he was actually trans. He sure didn’t see many other girls going around in bright pink pumps with a four-inch heel, but apparently that was the price he had to pay.

Bobby squirmed under Mr. Wilson’s glare, inadvertently making his miniskirt ride up a little higher on his thighs -- a fact that did not go unnoticed by his male classmates, even though they knew full well that the blonde hottie in the back row had been their star point guard just a few fateful months ago. Bobby flushed as he realized the guy seated on his left was blatantly checking out his legs.

“I think the three main reasons were...” Bobby’s high-heeled foot bounced anxiously under his desk. He looked the other way, only to realize the guy on his right was staring at his chest. “Uhhh...”

The old Bobby would have made some kind of wisecrack by now, or just sullenly shrugged off the question, but now, with the eyes of the whole class watching him, he was totally flustered.

Bobby took a deep breath. “Capitalism... Sewing machines... And, um, Microsoft?”

Someone on the other side of the classroom guffawed, and in the front row a nerdy-looking girl with glasses leaned over to whisper what sounded like “such an airhead” to her equally nerdy friend. Mr. Wilson, meanwhile, had shut his eyes with the expression of someone on the verge of quitting the teaching business once and for all.

“Some things never change,” he muttered. “Barbie, please get somebody to help you study for Monday’s test. For your sake, and the sake of my own sanity.”

“Sure thing,” Bobby said weakly. The bell rang, saving him from further embarrassments. He gathered up his books, pens, and little pink designer purse, then swished off to his next class as quickly as he could.



#

Kimberly was pretty sure that most evil masterminds would be taking a victory lap by now -- after all, her big scheme to ruin Bobby Vickerson had gone off without a hitch. As far as Jefferson High and the world at large was concerned (including, most importantly, Mr. and Mrs. Vickerson), "Barbie" was openly trans. As far as Bobby himself knew, he had been conned and coerced by an anonymous blackmailer, and his increasingly feminine body was the result of a natural hormone imbalance.

Only Kimberly and Josh Delacroix, Bobby's former basketball rival, knew the full truth, and she intended to keep it that way. Which meant no victory lap -- not yet. She had some loose ends to tie up first. It was for that reason she was spending lunch hour parked outside an extremely sketchy-looking motel in the dingiest part of town.

She was kind of glad she had Josh along. He was the star center for St. Ceylan's, Jefferson High's biggest rival, and he had always been about twice as big as Bobby, his main competition for best basketball player in Green Lake.

"So the drug dealer's name is Skeeter?" Josh asked skeptically.

"I know," Kimberly muttered. "He's not exactly Narcos material."

Josh wasn't just brawn, though. He had brains, too. He was the one who'd gotten control of Bobby's social media accounts and blackmailed him into dressing up as "Barbie" in secret. They'd then used the accumulated material to "out" Bobby to the world, making it look like he had been in the closet all along, desperate to reveal his true, female self.

Yep, Josh was every bit as responsible for Bobby's current predicament as she was, and just as morally bankrupt -- even if he wouldn't admit it.

Kimberly's phone buzzed. She snatched it out of the cup-holder and thumbed the screen. "Ugh."

"Is it Skeeter?" Josh asked. "Did he cancel, or something?"

Kimberly just showed him her phone. It was a message from Bobby: *Where TF are you? I can't eat lunch solo, Kimmy!*

"He was never this clingy when we dated," Kimberly muttered, tapping out a response. "Go... Sit... With Bev... And the cheerleaders..."

"*She*, you mean," Josh corrected. "And why's she still "Bobby" in your phone, anyway?"

“Because I haven’t had time to change it yet,” Kimberly said, rolling her eyes. “Don’t jump down my throat, lover boy.”

Josh flushed slightly. “Okay, okay. You sure I can’t message her yet?”

Kimberly grimaced. “It’s been less than two weeks since Phase Three,” she said. “She’s still adjusting to girlhood, remember? So, no. Absolutely not. It’s going to take time.”

Kimberly and Josh’s goals were similar, but their motivations were very, very different. Kimberly had always been out for revenge, but ever since Josh saw “Barbie” for the first time, he had been totally infatuated. Nothing would give Kimberly a bigger thrill than seeing her misogynistic ex become another guy’s hot blonde trophy girlfriend, but it wasn’t going to be easy to pull off.

The more immediate concern was the hormone pills. For the past two months, Kimberly had been pumping Bobby full of dubiously legal high-powered hormones from some lab in China, first by spiking his protein powder, more recently his daily mango smoothies. Her ex’s pathological distrust of doctors had come in handy there -- he’d refused to go see a medical professional about his “condition,” instead choosing to believe Web MD and hoping it would go away on its own.

Now that Bobby was out and proud, however, it was only a matter of time before his parents or some other concerned party brought up the subject of hormone replacement therapy. Which would mean bloodwork. Which would mean Bobby, dim as he was, would realize somebody had been dosing him with female hormones without his knowledge -- unless Kimberly got out in front of it somehow.

“That’s him,” Kimberly announced, watching a small blue Prius pull into the motel parking lot. “That’s Skeeter.”

“He looks like an accountant,” Josh said, peering through the window. “I’m serious. He looks like the guy who does my dad’s taxes.”

“Maybe your dad’s in the mob.”

The Prius backed into the spot beside them and the drug dealer rolled down his window. “Hey, Kimberly,” said the balding, middle-aged man in a polo shirt. “Who’s your friend?”

“Jerry,” Josh said quickly. “Jerry Garcia.”

“I’m guessing you were between that and Fakey McFakeName,” Skeeter said. “What’s this about, Kimberly?” He looked her up and down. “Huh. Those pills usually work miracles, but I guess you maxed out on the chest development already.”

“They worked fine,” Kimberly said, through gritted teeth -- she’d let Skeeter assume she was trans, and that the pills were for her. “In fact, I want to recommend you to a friend.”

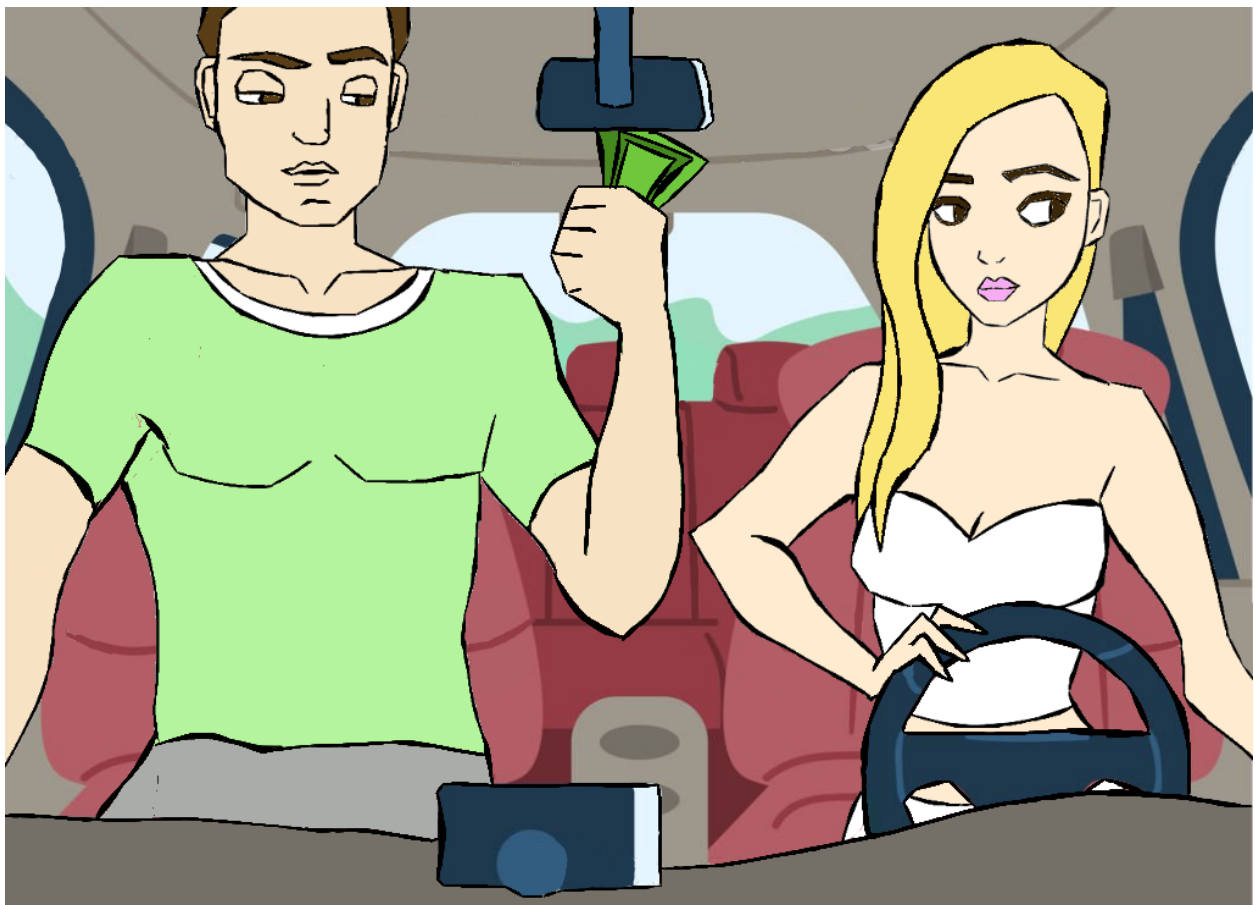
“Then just send me her number,” Skeeter sighed. “Don’t drag me out here in the middle of the day. I’ve got a Gilmore Girls marathon to get back to.”

“There’s sort of a catch,” Kimberly said. “We can’t let her find out, under any circumstances, that you and me did business. Uh, have you ever impersonated a doctor before?”

Skeeter narrowed his eyes. “You’re wasting my time,” he said. “And I really don’t like having my time wasted. I’m a dealer, not an actor. Peace out, Kimberly. Jerry Garcia.”

He was about to roll up his window when Josh pulled out the thick wad of cash he’d emptied his savings account for. He waved it meaningfully in the air. “Maybe Benjamin Franklin could persuade you otherwise?” he asked. “Him and forty-nine friends. Who are also Benjamin Franklin.”

“We give you half now, half after,” Kimberly clarified. “Plus, you get a new client out of it.”



Skeeter rolled his eyes, but held out his hand for the cash. He thumbed through the bills, then grunted. "You kids are lucky the turf war got rescheduled," he said. "I'm free this weekend. Send me the details by tonight. Later days."

Kimberly and Josh watched as he peeled out of the parking lot.

"You think he was kidding about the turf war?" Josh asked. "He had to be kidding, right?"

"I can never really tell with that guy," Kimberly admitted.

#

Part Two

Meanwhile, on the complete opposite side of town, Bobby was carrying his prepackaged salad into the Jefferson High cafeteria with all the enthusiasm of someone entering a shark tank. Pre-"Barbie," he had pretty much ruled the cafeteria, usually swaggering inside with his teammates and lackeys surrounding him. Following his humiliating lost bet to Kimberly, he had been relegated to the outskirts of his old circle, and once he lost his position on the basketball team he had started avoiding the cafeteria entirely.

Now that everybody thought he actually wanted to be "Barbie," things had changed yet again. In fact, he might as well have landed on an alien planet. As he minced through the doors, high heels clattering on the tiles, it felt like every single head in the cafeteria instantly turned his way.

There were the geeks in the corner, obsessed with anime or Reddit memes or other nerdy shit. A few months ago they wouldn't dare to even look up, for fear of getting picked on, or having French fries thrown at them all lunch hour, but now they were unabashedly ogling him. Bobby regretted the miniskirt more than ever.

There were the artsy-slash-druggy kids, with whom he normally only deigned to interact with if he wanted weed. A few of the emo-looking girls had invited him to join a LGBTQ student meeting the other day, and one now gave him a friendly wave he pretended not to see. Just because he was "Barbie" now didn't mean he was going to hang out with a bunch of fives and sixes. Maybe sevens, without the weird makeup.

There were the overachievers, those boring clean-cut kids who tried entirely too hard at everything, but mostly academia. Most of those girls had once secretly or not-so-secretly obsessed over him, but now they were looking at him as disdainfully as possible -- he remembered the "airhead" remark in history class, which made his blood boil all over again.

Bobby realized his feet were carrying him instinctively towards his old kingdom, the center table where the jocks ruled. Once he could have dived right in, giving out fist-pounds and high-fives, laughing and joking with his basketball teammates or razzing the football players. But as he got

closer, hips swaying, blonde hair bouncing, he only got an awkward head nod from DeShawn and a whole lot of furtive glances at his legs. He *really* hated this skirt.

All that left him with one option: the table just off the center, where the most popular girls in school staked their claim, occasionally interacting with the jock table but also focused intently on their phones and dissecting the school's most recent gossip. These were the hotties, the cheerleaders Bobby used to have eating out of the palm of his hand back when he was Jefferson High's star athlete. Now, as Kimberly kept reminding him, they were the girls he had to emulate if he wanted to be popular again.

"Hey, girl!" Beverly chirped. "Kimberly said you might join us. Hot skirt! We should *definitely* take a selfie together for Snapchat."

Bobby grimaced. Ever since his "coming out" had gone viral, he had been inundated with new online followers, and his real-life gal pals, several of whom were trying to be Instagram models or YouTube influencers, were well aware they could get a social media boost by linking themselves to the whole thing.

The selfies were endless. Beverly was definitely going to tag him, and most likely get a little more mileage out of #Boy2Babe, #PrincessInHiding, and all those other stupid-ass hashtags. It was humiliating, but it kept the cheerleaders on his side -- he didn't have his teammates to support him anymore, so this was the next best thing.

Usually Kimberly was around to help him navigate the hostile waters of girlhood, but since she was off on some mysterious lunch date, he was entirely on his own. He knew it was essential everyone kept believing he really wanted to be "Barbie" -- otherwise, things would get really messy, really fast -- so he did his best to fake some enthusiasm.

"Oh my God, yes, please," Bobby chirped back. "Selfies! So fun!"

"Then come get your cute butt in here!" Beverly ordered.

Bobby set his salad down and was immediately maneuvered into frame, putting his made-up face beside Beverly's on the screen of her iPhone. She was an expert in the art, already cocking her head to one side, tossing her hair, and effortlessly switching between poses. Bobby, by comparison, just pouted his puffy pink lips together and hoped for the best.

"I'm hashtagging it "besties," okay?" Beverly said, preparing the photo. "Oh my God, you look adorable. Your cheekbones are to die for, bitch."

"Um, thanks, bitch," Bobby said hesitantly.

The cafeteria was supposedly pest-free, but Bobby could have sworn there was a cricket infestation in the silence that followed. The cheerleaders all looked at each other. Beverly's perfectly sculpted eyebrow was raised.

"What?" Bobby demanded, turning red.

"Oh, wow," Ally said. "Barbie, it just sounds, like, different when you say it."

Bobby grimaced. "Let's, uh, take another selfie?" he suggested. "Anyone? Selfie?"

#

Kimberly made it back to school in time for her cosmetology class, an elective she now shared with Bobby. Jefferson High's administration was still trying to figure out exactly how to handle their first openly trans student -- God, if they only knew the truth -- so they had pulled him from his all-male gym class but were still debating whether or not to let him join the girls' class. In the meantime, they had stuck him in cosmetology.



“Where were you all lunch hour?” her ex demanded as they walked inside. “I was sweating bullets! Ally asked me who my celebrity crush was and I couldn’t think of a single actor’s name except Christopher freaking Walken, and now they all think I have a thing for older men with crazy eyes.”

“Next time say you meant Channing Tatum,” Kimberly said blithely. “I was busy.”

“Are you banging some dude from another school?” Bobby asked, frowning. “You can tell me, Kimmy. I don’t care. I’m the one who dumped *you*, remember?”

Kimberly gritted her teeth. “Oh, I remember,” she said. “And it’s not your business.”

"It's somebody gross, isn't it," Bobby said. "Oh, shit. It's a sugar daddy, right? Some old guy."

"That's your thing, remember?" Kimberly said sweetly, taking her seat.

"Very funny." Bobby made to slump down beside her, but remembered his miniskirt just in time. He paused, smoothed it against his butt, and wiggled into his seat with the caution of someone who had probably unintentionally flashed his panties earlier today. "So, what are we learning today?" he asked glumly. "Perm theory? Graduated layers? How to commit suicide with a hair-dryer?"

"Look who read the workbook," Kimberly remarked, genuinely surprised.

"My mom saw it in my bag," Bobby sighed. "She said it's important for me to know the basics, even if there are hair and makeup people on set to do all that stuff. So, you know, I studied up a little."

Kimberly blinked. She had never, not once in her life, heard her ex admit to studying. But if anyone could make him do it, it was his mom, whose newfound affection for "Barbie" had seemingly made her second born the center of her universe for the time being -- a spot usually occupied by his world-class fashion model older sister, Serena. Ever since Bobby's "coming out," Kimberly knew his parents had been trying to steer him down the same path.

She would be lying if she said she didn't love the idea of her formerly-macho ex swishing down a runway or shivering through some sexy lingerie shoot in a fancy hotel room, but the more pressure Bobby was under -- and a burgeoning modeling career was definitely pressure -- the more likely he was to snap and confess that the whole "Barbie" thing had never even been his idea, nevermind his secret lifelong dream. She would have to keep an eye on that.

"So, your mom booked a date for your first photoshoot?" she asked casually, as the teacher started talking about scalp analysis.

Bobby blushed. "Yeah," he said in a small voice, adjusting his wig. "Don't remind me."

"Hey, maybe it'll be fun," Kimberly said. "When is it?"

"This Sunday," Bobby said. "Like, all day. I wanted to kick back and watch some basketball, but no, I'm going to be prancing around in some dumb freaking outfit while some weirdo takes photos of me. Unless I find some way to get out of it."

Kimberly nodded slowly, lips pursed. "Well," she said. "You could always tell her you don't want to do it."

"I already told her I really, really *want* to do it," Bobby sighed. "She was excited about it. About me."

“What if you wanted to do it, but you got sick?” Kimberly asked. “Like, with a sick note? From a doctor?”

Bobby folded his arms. “You know I don’t like doctors, Kimmy.”

“There’s this private physician my mom goes to sometimes,” Kimberly said. “I bet he would write you a sick note forbidding you from doing any kind of physical activity, no questions asked. He’s kind of, uh, anti-establishment.”

Bobby still looked skeptical, but his frown softened. “Okay, okay. What’s his name?”

And at that moment, Kimberly’s devious, brilliant, Machiavellian mind went totally, completely blank. “It’s, um, Doctor... Skee...” She cursed internally. “Toe?”

“Doctor Skito?” Bobby echoed. “Like, what, he’s a mosquito?”

“It’s Japanese,” Kimberly said lamely. “I’ll ask my mom if she has his card.”

“Whatever,” Bobby said. “Pipe down. I’m trying to learn about follicle density.”

#

Bobby Vickerson had always lived for the sound of the final bell, since it used to mean either heading off to basketball practice or to hang out somewhere with his buddies, but that Friday, after a solid week of being “Barbie” -- managing his makeup and clothes, avoiding female faux pas, being stared at like a circus act or a piece of meat, and suffering the attentions of his new clique -- that bell was a heavenly freaking choir.

He escaped the cheerleaders as quickly as he could, giving out the customary air kisses that were now expected from him, and actually managed not to bash his nose into anybody this time. Once all the close-up views of their cleavage would have been incredibly arousing, but now it barely got a twitch out of him -- maybe because he was growing boobs of his own? It was still agonizing, spending all day surrounded by hot girls who now had zero interest in him as anything other than a dress-up doll or selfie companion.

But now he was free. He took the school bus home, slipping his AirPods and turning up his music to ward off any would-be conversation starters, and when it reached his street he wiggled his way up the sidewalk to his house as quickly as he could. His mom’s car was gone, and she had messaged him to say she wouldn’t be back until seven or so. That meant he had at least three hours, three precious, precious hours, of not being “Barbie.”

Bobby swished his way up the steps, still clutching the railing for balance, and unlocked the door. As soon as he was inside, he pulled the blinds, kicked off his high heels, and bolted up the

stairs to his room. He wriggled out of his skirt, unbuttoned his top and tugged it up over his head, and, with dexterity he had to admit had much improved over the past weeks, undid the clasps of his bra. He let out a soft groan of contentment, rubbing the red indents left on his shoulders, then held up the frilly feminine contraption and glared at it.

Once upon a time, having a piece of sexy lingerie in his room would have meant another successful conquest of one of the girls at school, but now the lacy black bra was a reminder of just how far he'd sunk. And he had about a dozen more of the things, too -- his mom had taken him underwear shopping. He flung it onto his bed, then, finally, shucked off his matching panties and freed himself from the "tuck job" that kept his balls crammed up inside him all day.

"Oh, hell, yeah," Bobby sighed out loud, back to his regular voice. "That's better. You dudes okay? Keep hanging in there. Ha, hanging, get it?"

It was time for the best part of his ritual. With a furtive glance over his shoulder, he went to his closet and found his secret stash, hidden in the very back where his mom wouldn't see them: a pair of raggedy old boxer shorts, his Jefferson High Tomcats-branded sweatpants, and his favorite Lakers jersey. Underneath them, an assortment of SLAM and Sports Illustrated issues. He got changed, picked out a magazine for later, and left the closet.

Humming to himself, he sat down at his vanity -- another new addition to his room, ordered from Ikea in "dusty rose" pink -- and started removing his false eyelashes. Next he attacked his makeup job with wipes, getting all the gunk off his face at last. He had been dutifully practicing his makeup skills under his mom's tutelage, but she was still helping him with it every morning before school, to make sure "Barbie" looked "her" best.

Even without the makeup, he was disturbed by how feminine his face was. His skin seemed smoother and softer than it used to be -- probably all the moisturizing masks his mom had gotten him -- and even without the false eyelashes his blue eyes seemed bigger. Maybe it was the plucked brows, or maybe it was just hard to look masculine with a blonde wig on.

It was a much more expensive one than the wig his blackmailer had sent him to wear, and he'd gotten it applied at the salon, which meant an adhesive good for up to four weeks. As much as he would have loved to take it off, it just wasn't worth the hassle. Instead, he gathered it back into a pony-tail -- he'd learned at least that much -- and secured it with a purple scrunchy.



His phone buzzed and he grabbed for it, hoping his mom hadn't changed her plans. But it was a message from Kimberly, containing a link to the website of that private physician she'd mentioned. He scrolled through, frowning. As far as doctors go, he didn't look so bad. Apparently he worked mostly with athletes -- there was a photo of him with Klay Thompson from the Warriors, which he had to admit was pretty fucking cool -- and now he specialized in "hands off" medical examinations and same-day services.

Bobby's mom had always doted on Serena like crazy if she had so much as a sniffle. If he could get his sick note before Sunday, then act really regretful and upset about missing the photoshoot, he might get to spend the whole day getting the same treatment. He was "Barbie," now, after all. He couldn't help but get a dreamy smile on his face thinking about how miffed his big sister would be to know Mom was spoiling him rotten.

He checked out the online appointment form, and sure enough, there was an opening on Saturday afternoon. Kimmy would probably be willing to help him pull off his deception -- it had been her idea, after all. He figured he would start acting a little sick tonight, head over to his ex's house tomorrow, and get a ride over his appointment from there. Easy.

Satisfied with his plan, Bobby made the appointment, then crossed the room to head downstairs. As he did, he caught his reflection in the full-length mirror and had to grimace. The sweatpants were much tighter on his butt than they had any right to be, the jersey was practically sliding off his slender shoulders, and there were undeniably feminine mounds where his breasts were tenting the fabric.

Even as de-girlified as possible, he looked like a cute cheerleader who had playfully dressed up in her boyfriend's clothes for a lazy afternoon together. In fact, he could remember Beverly stealing his hoodies for just that purpose back when they dated. Trying to put the image out of his mind, Bobby padded downstairs, resolving to find some food that wasn't a freaking salad.

After that, it was time to hit the couch, turn on Sports Center, and manspread for all he was worth.

#

Even after two weeks of Bobby being "out of the closet," it was still a little surreal for Kimberly to look over at the passenger's seat and see her once-macho ex applying mascara with a compact mirror, glossy pink lips set in a pout of concentration. She had drilled it into his head, over and over, that the only surefire way to make people forget about "Bobby" and accept him as "Barbie" was to be the girliest girl possible: full makeup and perfect hair every day, skirts and heels instead of jeans and flats, and absolutely no hint of masculine behavior.

It looked like Bobby had taken it to heart. Even though they were on their way to an appointment with a made-up doctor, he was wearing a bright white A-line skirt, a cute pastel-purple crop top, and strappy peep-toe sandals with a chunky three-inch heel. His hair was a perfect cascade of

blonde waves -- she suspected his mom was responsible -- and his makeup wasn't too shabby either.

"You're getting pretty good with that mascara wand," she said innocently. "I remember when you used to think they were dangerous."

"It would be easier if you would drive better," he grumbled. "Seriously, you don't get points for hitting potholes."

"It was a speedbump," Kimberly shot back, pulling into the parking lot. "And I told you it was coming. You wanted to get here on time, and look, here we are. On time."

The past week had been a very, very busy one for Kimberly and Josh. They'd pulled several all-nighters creating the website for "Dr. Skito," tailored specifically to make him sound like Bobby's ideal physician, and searched high and low until they found a day office they could rent by the hour. Last night had been spent rehearsing Skeeter's lines with him over video chat. She could only hope he was somehow better under pressure. She had busted her ass to pull all this together, and if it didn't work...

"Kind of a shitty-looking building," Bobby remarked, staring out the window.

"*You're* kind of a shitty-looking building," Kimberly snapped.

Bobby raised one carefully-sculpted eyebrow -- God, was he copying that look from Beverly already? "Ooh-kay," he said. "Are you feeling alright? Maybe you should see the doctor, not me."

Kimberly swallowed. "Just kidding," she said. "Ha! Let's, uh, head on in."

Bobby got out of the car far more gracefully than most teenaged boys ever would, managing both his short skirt and high heels like a pro, then promptly managed to snag the strap of his purse in the door. She let him struggle with it while she sent a final message to Skeeter, letting him know they had arrived.

They made it to the office without incident, other than a passing white-collar type doing an almost comical double-take to check out Bobby's swishing butt, and Kimberly let her ex do the knocking. She realized she was sweating, which only happened when she was very, very nervous. While they waited, Bobby inspected the label on the door, which read "Dr. Skito" in a font she and Josh had argued over for hours.

"You know, he doesn't look Japanese at all," he remarked. "I looked at some photos on his website." He started picking at the label with one long nail. "Jeez, I thought doctors were supposed to have, like, plaques. Or at least something fancier than a sticker."

The door swung open and Bobby jumped backward with a small yelp of surprise. Skeeter, wearing a large fake moustache, oversized glasses, and a white coat, stared at them without speaking. Bobby stared back, perturbed. Kimberly's mouth went dry. Skeeter had seriously forgotten his first freaking line?

She cleared her throat. "Hi," she said. "Are you Dr. Skito?"

Skeeter shook himself, then suddenly snapped into character. "That's right!" he beamed, speaking in a Southern drawl she'd begged him not to do. "I'm Dr. Skito. My apologies for the temporary office -- my clinic is getting fumigated this weekend. Come on in, come on in. Now, which one of you young ladies is Miss Barbie Vickerson?"

Bobby's eyes were narrowed suspiciously as they walked inside, but he raised his hand. "Um, that's me," he said, using his girl voice. "I was hoping to get a sick note."

"That's one of my specialties," Skeeter said. "Have a seat, Barbie. And you too, Kim... Oh... Sabe. Kemosabe. Like in The Lone Ranger. I'm a big Western fan. As you can tell from my accent. I..."

Kimberly made a curt chopping gesture with her hand while Bobby, focusing on keeping his skirt under his butt as he sat down, couldn't see it.

"Sick note," Skeeter said. "Right. What are your symptoms?"

Fortunately, Bobby was nervous, too. His pathological dislike of doctors was probably part of it, while trying to pass as a girl to a stranger was another. He squirmed in his seat and blinked. "Um, stomachache?" he suggested. "And headache?"

"The old double whammy ache," Skeeter remarked, taking a seat behind his desk. "That's the medical term. Well, the one we use down in Texas. So, the way I see it, you're trying to get out of a prior engagement. Work? School? It'll help me make the note more applicable."

Bobby shot an incredulous look over at Kimberly, who did her best to shrug nonchalantly. "You weren't kidding," he muttered. "This guy rules." Then, sitting up straight and addressing "Dr. Skito," added, "Work, I guess?"

"What sort of work?" Skeeter asked, tapping away at his laptop.

Bobby blushed slightly. "I'm trying to get out of doing a photoshoot," he admitted.

"Fashion model, huh?" Skeeter remarked, taking a closer look at his patient. "Should've guessed. You know, you look a little familiar. You're not famous or anything, are you? Are you on billboards? In magazines? I swear I've seen you in a magazine."

Bobby grimaced. "Um, nope. First photoshoot."

"Really?" Skeeter demanded. "Oh, I know who I'm thinking of. There's this famous model, Serena something. You look a little bit like her. Blonder. Prettier, too, in my humble opinion. What was her name? Let me Google it really quickly, I bet you'll see the resemblance..."

"Sick note!" Bobby yelled. "Let's do the sick note thing instead!"

"Yeah," Kimberly jumped in, reasoning it was the right time. "We're kind of in a hurry, Dr. Skito."

"It'll just take a second," Skeeter reassured them, tapping away. "Serena... Vickerson!" He stared at Bobby over his laptop, then adjusted his glasses. "Oh, my word," he said, his Southern drawl getting even more over-the-top. "I saw a news story about you, Miss Barbie! You're the 'princess in hiding' girl, aren't you? From Jefferson High? Basketball star to prom queen, that sort of thing?"

Bobby's face went bright red. "Look, I'm just going to go," he muttered, rising from his chair. "I really don't want to..."

"Miss Barbie, I just wanted to say that you are an absolute inspiration," Skeeter said.

Bobby stopped in his tracks. "Um, what?"

"You're a beacon of hope to young trans women everywhere," Skeeter said. "I would be honored to write you a sick note." He rummaged through the stack of papers on his desk. "What would you like? Influenza? Strep throat?"

Bobby looked over at Kimberly, who was doing her best to look just as bewildered as he was. "Strep throat sounds good," he said in a small voice.

"Strep throat it is," Skeeter said. "Now, judging from your figure, I assume you're already seeing a doctor in regards to your, ahem, transition?"

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

"Well, your breast development would indicate that you're either taking female hormones, or..." Skeeter paused, and Kimberly knew he was racking his brain for the correct pronunciation. "Suffering from a case of gynecomastia."

To Kimberly's surprise, Bobby's expression was one of delight. "I knew it!" he exclaimed. "I mean, I was 90% percent sure. I looked it up on Web MD."

"Ah, yes, Web MD," Skeeter said, nodding wisely. "I use it myself, you know. Well, I think most trans girls would consider themselves quite lucky to end up with such an advanced case."

Normally, I'd prescribe male hormone pills to counteract it, but since you *want* to have breasts..."

Bobby flushed. "Look, Doctor Skito..." He bit his lip, then leaned forward conspiratorially. "We have doctor patient confidentiality, right? My parents can *not* know about this."

"Don't worry, Barbie, I help a lot of troubled kids on the down low," Skeeter said, leaning forward himself. "I'm seeing you right now without a parental guardian, aren't I?"

Kimberly put on a concerned face. "*Barbie*, are you sure you want to..."

"I think maybe this whole transition thing was a mistake," Bobby blurted. "I mean, I only got the idea..." He glanced over at Kimberly. "Because of this gynecomastia thing! Yeah! I thought, hey, if life gives you lemons, or, like boobs, why not make the most of it? But now I think it was a big, big mistake. So, if there's a way to undo it..."

Skeeter stroked solemnly at his moustache. "Really? You want *male* hormone pills? You're sure?"

"I'm sure," Bobby said. "Absolutely sure." He turned to Kimberly. "Look, I can't keep this act up forever, okay? If my body goes back to normal, I can tell people that, I don't know, that "Barbie" just wasn't meant to be. I can go back to being *me*."

"I get it," Kimberly said. "Doctor Skito, do you have any pills in that desk drawer of yours that would do that?"

Skeeter blanked for a moment, then opened the drawer again, this time retrieving a very familiar-looking bottle of pink pills -- the very same ones Bobby had been unwittingly taking, crushed up into his protein powder or mango smoothies, for almost two months.

"Right, so these are *male* hormone pills that should counteract your gynecomastia," Skeeter explained haltingly. "Now, these work a lot slower, and you might even see the gynecomastia get worse for a little while, as your hormone balance, uh, stabilizes. But if you take these daily, your condition should reverse itself."

Bobby broke into a grin. "Hell, yeah," he said. "I'll take everything you've got."

"Terrific," Skeeter said, clearly relieved. "I mean, I can only give you thirty at a time, but just come back when you run out."

Kimberly gritted her teeth. There was no way she was renting this office out every month. "It would be really convenient if there was a way to mail away for these pills," she said slowly. "So we don't have to come back here and go through this *all over again*. Don't you think?"

“That’s what I meant to say,” Skeeter said quickly. “Just contact the office, and we’ll mail the pills right to your door. How about that?”

“Great,” Bobby said. “You know, for a doctor, you’re not bad.” He paused. “Uh, can I still get the sick note?”

“No problemo,” Skeeter said. He scribbled a signature on the form Josh had printed off the internet and handed it over. “That’s Japanese for ‘no problem.’ I forgot to mention I’m Japanese on my father’s side.”

Kimberly took a deep breath and tried to fake a smile. “How about that.”



#

Part Three

For the first time in what seemed like forever, Bobby was actually feeling pretty good. All it took was one look at the doctor's note and a little coughing, and his mom had immediately gone into doting mode, postponing the photoshoot and staying home with him all day Sunday to make sure he was taken care of properly. He had seen his parents go to any lengths to baby Serena when she was sick, but for him it had usually been a couple Tylenol and a reminder that moaning and groaning didn't help anything.

Now, as "Barbie," he was finally getting the Serena treatment -- and it was amazing. Sure, he could have done without the fuzzy pink pajamas, facial, and manicure, but that was a small price to pay to have his mom's undivided attention. All he had to do was clear his throat, and she was instantly there bearing drinks, a combination of healthy and not-so-healthy snacks, or a damp cloth to wipe his forehead with. She had even gone to three separate grocery stores searching for mango-flavored Vitamin C supplements.

Even better, his dad was on his flight back from Rio at last, which meant he would soon have two parents to spoil him. Yes, it would be a little weird acting like "Barbie" around his father, who he'd always tried to live up to as a macho athlete. But now there was a timer on the whole thing, anyways.

So long as he was taking the little pink pills Dr. Skito had prescribed him -- the color choice was clearly a bad call on the pharmaceutical company's part -- he could rest assured that things were on their way back to normality. Heck, since they were male hormones, maybe they would even give him a little boost. He sure wouldn't mind a bit of a growth spurt, and putting on some muscle would be a bonus. Just enough to make sure nobody would ever look at him and think he would fill out a dress.

For now, he resolved to get what he could out of the situation. In this case, it was being treated like the favorite child for once. Bobby was curled up on the couch watching Netflix when his mom announced she was heading to the airport to pick up his dad. She refilled his orange juice, plumped his pillows, and gave him a peck on the cheek before leaving. She was being so nice that Bobby almost felt bad for faking sick.

Maybe the photoshoot wouldn't have even been that terrible -- dress up in some dumb outfits, do some dumb poses, whatever. Serena did it all the time. He was almost drifting off in front of the television when he heard the sound of his mom's Range Rover in the driveway. He listened as she and his dad came inside, talking excitedly, and for some reason it sounded like there was a third voice, too...

“Barbie, I found your father,” his mom sang. “And guess who he brought home from Rio with him? Honestly, you should have *told* me, I would have picked up a bottle of that nice Merlot we had last time you visited.”

“Oh, it’s no problem, mom,” came the voice Bobby had despised for most of his entire life. “I wanted it to be a surprise.”

Bobby’s stomach plummeted. He was so surprised he could barely think, let alone move, as his older sister Serena swept into the living room, just as tall and beautiful as ever, wearing a chic leather jacket and fashionably torn skinny jeans. She plucked a pair of sunglasses from her head and smiled down at him with absolutely no hint of warmth.

“So here’s my new little sister,” she said. “I’ve been hearing so much about the new you, Barbie. I just couldn’t stay away. Not when I could be here to... Support you.” She looked him up and down, studying his body with a clinical air, and Bobby could feel himself flushing with embarrassment. “And you’re wearing my old pajamas,” she said through her teeth. “So cute.”

“This is going to be just lovely,” Bobby’s mom said, coming into the living room with his dad’s arm wrapped around her. “Both our daughters under the same roof! How long can you stay, Serena?”

Serena was still staring down at him with an expression of ice-cold hostility. “Oh, who knows?” she said sweetly. “As long as it takes to really get to know the real Barbie, I guess! I feel like we have so much to talk about.”

“And what better way to bond than over Barbie’s first shoot?” Bobby’s dad said, grinning. “The agency thinks she has real potential. With a Vickerson sisters collaboration, we could really get the hype train rolling.”

For the first time, Serena’s perfect smile faltered a bit. “That would be great,” she said. “Dad, can you run my stuff up to my room? I’m a little tired.”

“Sure thing, honey,” Bobby’s dad said, grabbing her suitcase by the handle.

“I’ll get fresh sheets on your bed,” his mom added. “Barbie, are you feeling any better?”

Bobby nodded weakly, still not trusting himself to speak. His parents bustled up the stairs, leaving him alone with his sister. She was still inspecting him, her gaze lingering on his long blonde hair, his glittery pink talons. Her lip curled.

“Halloween all over again, huh?” she asked, in a soft, dangerous tone. “Except this time, you went big. All my friends were asking about you. I had freaking *strangers* asking me about you. Striving for realness! Boy to babe! Jesus Christ, Bobby.” She shook her head. “You might have Mom and Dad fooled with this bullshit, but not me. I see right through you, and it’s pathetic.”

Pretending to be trans? Taking freaking hormones?" She narrowed her eyes. "I don't know if it's funny or just sad, honestly. But I'm not letting you just waltz in here and take the spotlight. This charade is over, got it?"



Bobby's mouth fell open. He felt like he was ten years old again, wearing one of Serena's old prom dresses so his mom would take him trick-or-treating, then being totally humiliated when his big sister saw through his ruse and reminded him his parents would never care about him as much as they cared about her. He could feel his face flushing red. But he was not a ten-year-old anymore, and there was no freaking way he was going to let Serena push him around.

“You think I did this to get attention?” he asked scornfully, using his very best version of his girl voice. “Wow, Serena. That’s really, really ignorant of you.”

Serena glared at him. “Oh, you do not want to play this game with me, Bobby,” she said.

“It’s Barbie,” Bobby corrected. “And I’m not going anywhere, big sis.” He smirked. “You know, maybe being my sister will get you some extra followers. If you want me to retweet you or anything, just hit me up. I know you’ve never trended on Twitter before.”

Serena’s face twitched for a split second, then her flawless smile returned. “Okay, little sis,” she said. “If you want to be Barbie, I’m here to support you, one hundred percent. Let’s see how much ‘Barbie’ you can handle.”

Bobby knew his older sister had him outmatched when it came to brains, charm, and sheer vindictiveness, but he had never been one to back down from a challenge. “Can’t wait,” he said. “These pajamas are super comfy, by the way. Where’d you get them?”

He reached for a carrot from the snack tray and used it to scoop out a big glob of hummus, then slowly, deliberately, dropped it onto his fuzzy pink pajama top.

“Oh, you little shit,” Serena breathed. “You’re going to regret that.”

Bobby clapped a manicured hand to his cheek in mock horror, fluttering his eyelashes. “Oops!”

#

Kimberly was kicked back in a late-night bubble bath, surrounded by scented candles, enjoying some much-needed R&R. She had pulled it off. Bobby was now eagerly taking Skeeter’s high-powered female hormones of his own volition, thinking they were *male* hormones designed to reverse his feminine development, and if any well-meaning busy-body asked him about HRT he would happily tell them he was already being treated by “Doctor Skito.”

She had already relayed the good news to Josh, accompanied by a cute candid photo of Bobby perched in the passenger’s seat fixing his makeup -- she knew he could never get enough of “Barbie,” so it was a good way to keep him invested. Their third partner in crime, Skeeter, had told her he’d actually had the time of his life pretending to be a half-Japanese doctor from Texas, but Kimberly could only hope she wouldn’t have to call on his acting skills ever again. Some people were better off sticking to drug dealing.

She was feeling drowsy and content, and considering adding a little more hot water, when Bobby’s ringtone went off. She opened her eyes with a slight groan. Hopefully her ex was just panicking over an invitation to a slumber party, or something. She reached down and put her phone on speaker.

“Hey, Barbie,” she said. “What’s up?”

“Serena’s back and she knows the truth,” Bobby blurted -- she couldn’t tell if he was doing his girl voice or was just panicked.

Kimberly swallowed. “Uh, the truth?” she echoed. “Which truth?”

“That I’m not actually trans,” Bobby hissed, whispering now. “She thinks I’m just doing all this for attention. Can you believe that? Like I’d be a chick just for attention!”

Kimberly sat upright in the bubble bath, heart pounding. If Bobby admitted that he wasn’t really “transitioning,” and told his sister about the blackmailer, her whole plan was in jeopardy. “What did you tell her?” she demanded.

“I told her to get bent,” Bobby said, slightly indignant. “Did you think I was going to admit I got duped by some perv on the internet into telling the world I wanted to be a girl? I told her I’m ‘Barbie,’ and she’ll just have to get used to Mom and Dad paying attention to me more than her for a change.”

Kimberly sank back into the tub with a smile growing on her face. She had never exactly understood the rivalry between Bobby and his big sister, but she knew Serena had always been the favorite -- in fact, finally winning his parents’ affections was one of the things currently keeping her ex in skirts. That meant Serena’s return could actually be a good thing for the “girlify Bobby Vickerson” mission.

“If she’s suspicious, that means you’re going to have to work extra hard to sell the story to everybody else,” Kimberly said. “What did she say? Did she back off?”

“She said she’s going to ‘support’ me,” Bobby snorted. “But, you know, she said it in the bad way? While trying to murder me with her eyes?”

Kimberly considered that for a second, then her smile got even bigger. She knew the simplest way to expose Bobby would be to get him to incriminate himself, just by making his life as “Barbie” too humiliating and miserable to justify carrying on the deception. If Serena was even half as smart as Kimberly was, she had to know it, too.

“Well, you can’t let her win,” Kimberly said decisively. “You have to just keep pretending ‘Barbie’ is the real deal until she gets fed up and leaves. You’re taking those male hormones now, right? So in a few months, you’ll be able to quit on your own terms. *Not* because Serena makes you.”

“Yeah,” Bobby said, but he sounded slightly nervous. “You’ll help me, right?”

“Of course,” Kimberly said. “What are girl friends for? I’ll see you in school tomorrow, Barbie.”

She hung up the call, then, with a contented sigh, started adding more hot water to her bath. For now, it looked like her and Serena had the same general goal: make Bobby's life terrible by pushing "Barbie" to the limit. She just had to somehow work Josh Delacroix into the picture, too...

#

Bobby took his time getting ready for school the next morning, consulting Kimberly via Snapchat for help picking an outfit, then plunking down in front of the vanity to follow a YouTube makeup tutorial featuring an almost-painfully bubbly fourteen-year-old girl. She knew her stuff, though, and Bobby needed all the help he could get. He ended up having to completely redo his eyeshadow twice, but by the time he was finished he had to admit he was impressed with his own handiwork. He brushed out his blonde tresses and added some hair spray for volume, then went to the full length mirror to inspect himself.

Since he needed to show Serena he wasn't messing around, he'd put on his highest heels, a pair of strappy, five-inch stilettos, and paired them with a pretty much indecently short denim mini. He hated the way the shoes made him wiggle -- the guys at school were going to be staring at his butt all day -- and he knew his feet were going to be killing him by the time he got home. But Kimberly had persuaded him it was worth it to send a message to his sister.

At least his stripy pink top actually covered his midriff for a change, though the stripes also had the effect of making his bustline look bigger -- and he wasn't a fan of how the thin stretchy fabric showed the outline of his bra underneath, either. He wasn't sure, but he thought it might have been Serena's top at one point. His closet was now overflowing with so many clothes that he couldn't differentiate between the stuff from his sister's room and the stuff from shopping with his mom.

Bobby made a final adjustment to his hair, then snapped a selfie to send to Kimberly for approval. He winced looking down at the image on his phone -- as much as it killed him to admit it, he was easily as hot as any of the Instagram thots he used to jerk off to. It was a disturbing thought, but it also gave him an idea. Ever since his "coming out" had blown up his socials with new followers, he'd been avoiding Instagram entirely, preferring to just not think about the fact that hordes of people all over the internet had seen him in a sexy red cocktail dress.

But if there was anything that could get under Serena's skin, it was the fact that those hordes of people, at least for the moment, were more interested in Barbie Vickerson, trans teenager, than they were in Serena Vickerson, fashion model.



Kimberly's reply appeared on his iPhone screen: *Perfect! See you at school.*

Bobby went to his Instagram account, ignoring the legion of waiting DMs, and prepared to post the selfie. He debated internally for a moment, weighing his desire to piss off Serena against his desire to not attract any more online attention -- the last thing he needed was another psycho hacker to deal with. All it took to make up his mind was picturing his sister's sneering face.

Grinning slyly, Bobby tapped out a caption, posted the selfie, and headed downstairs for breakfast. His mom and sister were seated at the kitchen counter, while his dad was busy making blueberry pancakes -- something he only ever did when Serena was home. His eyes bulged slightly at the sight of his son mincing into the room in a skirt short enough to stop traffic, but he recovered quickly.

"Good morning, Barbie," he said. "We were just talking about you."

For a split second, Bobby was stunned and delighted. His parents, talking about him, when Serena was home? But then he saw the triumphant look on his sister's face, and the feeling of delight took a nosedive into dread.

"Um, what about?" Bobby asked, smoothing his skirt as he took a seat at the counter, crossing his legs with girlish grace.

"Hi, sweetie," his mom said, leaning across for an air kiss. "Don't you look adorable this morning! I'm so glad you're feeling better. Here, I made you a smoothie."

She handed him a glass. Despite the fact that Serena was out to get him, despite the fact he was stuck trying to convince the world he wanted to be a blonde bimbo named "Barbie," Bobby felt a wave of sheer happiness.

"It's...mango," he said, tears of emotion welling up in his eyes.

"Isn't that your favorite?" his mom asked, looking slightly puzzled.

Bobby just nodded, not trusting himself to speak, and took a gulp of his smoothie.

"Serena had a look at your headshots," his dad said, over the sizzle of the frying pan. "She's as good a judge of talent as anyone, and she saw what we saw. You've got real potential, Barbie."

"So much potential," Serena said brightly. "You just need someone to help bring it out."

"Serena's agreed to help coach you," Bobby's mom explained. "Think of it as modelling bootcamp. Every day after school, from three to six, she'll be teaching you the ropes. Isn't that exciting, sweetie?"

Bobby glared at his sister suspiciously. "What do I have to learn, exactly?" he asked. "I mean, don't people just take photos of me?"

Bobby's dad chuckled, his sister looked revolted, and his mom briefly closed her eyes with a pained expression. "Oh, Barbie, there is a *lot* more to it than that," she said. "But you get to learn from the best!"

"It'll be so fun," Serena said, with a wicked smile. "I'm already thinking up all kinds of little exercises for you." Her iPhone suddenly buzzed, and she picked it up. Her mouth fell open momentarily, then she snapped it shut and narrowed her eyes. "Cute selfie," she said.

"Thanks," Bobby said defiantly. "I figured it was time to start posting on Insta again."

Completely oblivious to the cut-it-with-a-knife tension hanging between her two children, Bobby's mom reached for her own phone. "Oh, I love it!" she exclaimed. "I'm so excited for you two to really bond. As sisters."

She slid her phone across the counter to show Bobby's dad the Instagram post, and Bobby caught another glimpse. The photo showed a typical pouty blonde hottie in front of the mirror, long tanned legs on full display, but the caption was the important part: *Wearing some of big sis's things... Hope @officialserenavickerson doesn't mind ;) #BOY2BABE #LEGS4DAYS #JUSTSISTERSTUFF*



barbievickerson



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barbievickerson

wearing some of big sis's things...hope
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5 DAYS AGO

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“Well, it all starts today after school, right, little sis?” Serena asked, with about ten layers of menace beneath her cheerful tone.

Bobby swallowed nervously, but put on an equally false smile. “Can’t wait,” he chirped.

#

Kimberly had to hand it to her ex: his passive-aggressive Instagram post, complete with a tag to Serena’s own account to ensure cross-traffic, was a thing of beauty. In most areas Bobby wasn’t the brightest, but after a childhood spent living in Serena’s shadow he obviously knew how to push his older sister’s buttons. The selfie had already accumulated several hundred “likes” -- she was checking in on it as they walked towards the cafeteria.

“These shoes are killing my calves,” Bobby grumbled. He was still sashaying along in his stilettos, causing several cases of whiplash on the way down the hall. The clatter gave guys a nice excuse to look up, and once they did Kimberly noticed it seemed pretty hard for them to look away.

“Think of it as leg day,” Kimberly quipped.

A couple football players openly ogled said legs as they passed by, making Bobby turn bright red. Instead of barking at them, Kimberly was amused to see him nervously touch his hair and look down to avoid their gaze, eyelashes fluttering. One of the football players wolf-whistled loudly. Bobby looked physically pained.

“Guess they approve,” Kimberly smirked.

“Assholes,” Bobby muttered. “Nobody even watches the football games.”

He ducked his head and quickened his stride, which only managed to exaggerate the swing of his hips even more, as they entered the cafeteria. Beverly and the other cheerleaders were already waiting at the usual table, but as soon as they saw “Barbie” their eyes lit up. Kimberly suspected why -- Ally had already messaged her to confirm the rumor that Serena was visiting.

“Hey Kimberly, hey Barbie,” Beverly said. “Those shoes are so girl boss.” She exchanged a look with Ally. “Are you, like, practicing for the runway already?”

“The runway?” Bobby echoed -- Kimberly had spent enough time around him to know he was currently visualizing a plane landing.

“I saw your post with Serena,” Beverly said. “Sister stuff. So cute. That’s really cool that you guys are getting along, finally.” She smiled a little too brightly. “Serena’s in town to visit, right?”

“Yep,” Bobby said, looking wistfully down at his yogurt cup. “She sure freaking is.”

“Well, introduce me, bitch!” Beverly said, probably sounding more playful in her head than she did in reality. “We *need* a selfie together.”

“We just took one in math class,” Bobby protested.

Beverly rolled her eyes. “I mean with Serena,” she said, to which Bobby looked almost hurt. “Come on, she’s an actual fashion model. She’s also really, like, inspirational. I read an interview with her in Elle...”

“I read that one, too!” Ally chirped. “She’s so cool, but also super down-to-Earth? And that shoot with Jan Van Antwerp was sex.”

Bobby now had the look on his face of someone who’d just swallowed glass. “Serena is a total bitch,” he said flatly. “And not in, like, the fun way you say it. I mean the bitch way.”

Beverly frowned. “Are you sure you’re not just jealous of her?” she asked skeptically. “Like, growing up together would have been tough, since I know you wanted to be a girl, and she’s basically perfect...”

Normally, this would be the point where Kimberly jumped in and defused the situation. As fun as it was to watch him flounder into the deep end, pissing off Beverly would just make life more complicated than necessary -- the girl hadn’t gotten to be head cheerleader by being nice. But maybe she could play it another way.

“I’m not jealous of Serena!” Bobby snapped, his “girl voice” breaking slightly. “Who said I was jealous of her?”

“It’s pretty freaking obvious,” Beverly snapped back. “Oh, my God, I just wanted an introduction? I’ve been trying to help you fit in, and figure yourself out, and all this shit I read online about, like, affirming your identity, and you can’t even do one nice thing for me because deep down you’re still a selfish prick, Bobby!”

The table went silent. Beverly clapped her hand over her mouth, realizing what she’d said, and blushed bright red. Kimberly was taken aback herself -- normally Beverly’s composure never slipped, even when she was verbally destroying someone for messing up a cheer routine or wearing a hideous outfit.

For a moment it looked like the head cheerleader was going to apologize, but instead she took a deep breath, turned to Ally, and started chatting about the next pep rally as if nothing had happened. Bobby, meanwhile, was sitting there stunned, his pretty pink lips parted in surprise. Then he abruptly stood up, gathered his purse, and stalked out of the cafeteria, stilettos clicking.

Rather than running after him to reaffirm her role as his one true friend and confidante, Kimberly stayed right where she was.

Beverly shot her a suspicious look. "Well? Aren't you, like, attached at the hip to her?" She enunciated the "her" very carefully.

Kimberly took a large bite of her sandwich, chewed, and swallowed. "I'm honestly getting a little sick of her," she said. "And that skirt is way too short."

"Oh, my God, yes," Ally chimed in. "Thank you! She looks like a freaking slut."

Kimberly didn't need to say anything more. The other cheerleaders immediately jumped in with a categorical list of every single one of "Barbie's" flaws. She listened with a smile on her face as she finished her sandwich, sending a quick message to her ex to assure him she was still behind him, one hundred percent, and was trying to cool Beverly off.

Serena was turning up the pressure at home, and now Kimberly was going to turn it up at school, too. If she could keep Bobby high on stress and low on friends, it would be that much easier to drive him right into the well-defined arms of a certain Saint Ceylan's basketball star.

#

Part Four

Bobby wasn't as thrilled as usual to get home from school that afternoon. Yes, it was a relief to get away from the stupid female drama that had blown up with Beverly in the cafeteria, but he suspected whatever Serena had planned for him might be worse. He'd told Kimberly about the "modelling bootcamp" thing, and she'd agreed that his sister's goal was most likely to pressure him into dropping his "Barbie" act, confessing to their parents that he'd made the whole thing up.

Well, there was no freaking way he was going to do *that*. His parents would be horrified, everyone else would assume he was some kind of pervert or nutcase, and he wouldn't have any way to redeem himself -- his old life as a basketball star was off limits until he got his gynecomastia under control.

Bobby braced himself as he clicked his way up the steps to the front door, the sight of his long tanned legs flashing beneath his skirt inadvertently making the neighbor across the street run his lawnmower right into a tree. He took a deep breath, making his growing breasts bob slightly on his chest, then walked inside.

His mom was out, but he could hear his dad upstairs talking on his Bluetooth. Serena, meanwhile, was sitting in the living room with her MacBook, wearing a pair of sweatpants -- Bobby felt a twinge of resentment looking down at his miniskirt. She wasn't looking particularly

diabolical, but when he tried to sneak upstairs she snapped her fingers without so much as glancing up from the screen.

“Nuh-uh,” she said. “You’re mine from now until six, little sis.”

“I have to go to the bathroom,” Bobby protested.

“Sometimes having your hair done for a shoot takes three hours all by itself, and you can’t just toddle off to the bathroom without totally wrecking it,” Serena said casually. “First things first, take those shoes off.”

Bobby lowered himself onto the couch, frowning suspiciously, but he was more than happy to comply. Spending all day in stilettos was no joke. He undid the straps and slipped his feet free. He couldn’t suppress a sigh of contentment as he wriggled his toes in the carpet. It was cut short, however, as Serena reached down and produced a pair of what could only be described as stripper heels.

“I thought we would work on your walk today,” she said innocently. “Poise and balance are very important.”

Bobby blanched. She knew full well he’d just spent the whole school day wearing his highest heels, and now she expected him to practice on what were practically stilts? He was about to tell her exactly where she could stick those pointy shoes when his dad came down the stairs, fiddling with one of his DSLR cameras.

“Hey, girls,” he said, glancing at the high heels dangling from Serena’s fingers. “Poise and balance today, huh, sweetie? Good thinking. Always start with the foundations.” He waved the camera. “Don’t mind me, okay, Barbie? I’m just going to be taking a few photos here and there, trying to get you comfortable in front of the camera, and if we get a few usable shots, all the better for your portfolio.”

Bobby smiled through gritted teeth. “Great idea, Dad,” he said.

Serena threw an arm around their father’s shoulders and grinned. “Oh, Barbie, having Daddy do the photography was *my* idea,” she chirped. “And you can call him Daddy, too, now. You know that, right?”

To his credit, Bobby’s dad looked slightly perturbed for a moment, but then he nodded. “Absolutely,” he said. “I’ve got two little princesses now, don’t I? Now, enough chit chat.” He pointed down the hall with his thumb. “I cleared out the old studio for us to work in.”

Bobby grabbed the heels out of Serena’s hand with a grimace. She had him right where she wanted him, and with his dad there he didn’t have any way out of it. All he could do was play along, so he buckled his feet into the shoes and followed his dad and sister down the hall.

Back in Serena's pageant days, his parents had remodelled the spare bedroom into a miniature dance studio with hardwood floors and a mirrored wall -- it would have been great for practicing his dribbling, but naturally it had been declared off-limits. Until now, of course, that he was going to be prancing around in what he'd definitely heard the cheerleaders call "Fuck Me Pumps."

Bobby minced inside the studio with a sense of dread. Each step clicked loudly against the hardwood floor, while the wall-length mirror threw his reflection back at him in painful clarity -- was his skirt really that short? He remembered Serena working on her "walk" in here, back when she was first starting out, and now it was his turn. The only difference was, he had absolutely no interest in being any kind of model, much less a female one.

"Let's start with the basics," Kimberly said. "End to end. Stop, pose, turn. Remember to roll those hips, okay?"

Bobby blushed. It was the same kind of crap his anonymous blackmailer had him doing in his room back when all this "Barbie" stuff first started, strutting and posing, but doing it in front of his dad, with Serena there loving every second of it, made it a thousand times worse. He traipsed back and forth while she handed out advice: isolate his hip motion, control his breathing, imagine a thread lifting him into the sky by the top of his head, et cetera.

It was physically strenuous in six-inch heels, and boring to boot, but he would have gladly kept doing it for the full three hours had he known what was coming next.

"Just how long have you been sneaking into my closet, Barbie?" Serena asked in mock anger. "You're a natural in heels, little sis. But you're not just getting from point A to point B anymore, okay? You need to do it with attitude. Right, Daddy?"

"Absolutely, sweetie," Bobby's dad said, snapping several photos in quick succession.

"I think you're still a little nervous, so how about we loosen you up with some music?" Serena suggested innocently. "Remember, this is supposed to be fun. You should feel flirty, and confident, and girly, and sexy." She smiled at him sweetly. "I'll give you a little example, and you just copy me, okay?"

She connected her phone's Bluetooth to the studio's speaker, and suddenly the room was filled by thumping house music that wouldn't have been out of place in a night club -- or maybe even a strip club. Bobby watched in horror as Serena "turned it on," swishing from one end of the studio to the other with an exaggerated bounce to her hips, an ultra-femmy walk that somehow made her butt move in a figure eight. She made a graceful pirouette, shaking her hips.

"Your turn," she said, raising an eyebrow.

Bobby's dad raised his camera, and Bobby couldn't help but think back on all the times he'd imagined looking up into the stands and seeing his dad furiously snapping away with his camera, capturing action shots of his son dominating on the basketball court -- usually when his parents had attended games, they'd spent the whole time on the phone.

Now he finally had his dad's undivided attention, and Bobby absolutely hated it. Blushing furiously, he did his best to imitate his sister's walk, crossing one foot in front of the other to lend his hips an exaggerated sway. Serena harangued him on each trip down the studio floor, critiquing every wiggle until he was swinging his hips and ass in time to the music, grinding out an over-the-top sexy strut that was perfectly designed to draw male attention.

As the music got louder, Serena's shouted instructions got even more humiliating: she was giving him poses to try at the end of each "walk," having him shimmy his shoulders, cock his hips, arch his back... Every time, he was forced to look at himself in the mirror as he struck the pose, confronted by a sexy blonde all dolled up like a Barbie doll and preening like a stripper. Every time, his dad was there to capture it on camera.

"Now grip your heel with your right hand and put your left hand on your hip, okay?" Serena directed. "Tilt your head back... Push those boobs out, Barbie, there you go... Isn't she adorable, Daddy?"

"You're doing great, sweetie," his dad said awkwardly, snapping a photo.

Bobby flushed. He would have once killed to hear his dad's approval, but he was getting it for primping in front of the camera like some dumb bimbo. In the mirror his tired and breathless expression, eyes half-lidded and lips parted slightly, was starting to look like something totally different, almost like a seductive "come hither" pout.

"Very sexy," Serena added wickedly. "This time throw in that spin I showed you, to give everyone the full view of that cute little butt."

With all the swishing and twirling, Bobby was using muscles he'd never used as a basketball player, and before long they were burning and aching from the strain. His face, meanwhile, was flushed hot with embarrassment. He could feel a sob building up in his throat, which made him even angrier -- since when did he start crying so easily?

"Now try putting one leg forward, to give them a really good look, and bend over," Serena said. "When you come up, toss your hair... That's it! Oh, my God, Barbie, you're just a natural boy magnet, aren't you?"

"Really great work, sweetie," his dad added, but as Bobby straightened up he could see that his father, for the first time, looked uneasy, clearly embarrassed to see his only son pull off a move that definitely belonged in a strip club. "Maybe we should work on some more technical stuff, Serena? Talk about angles, symmetry?"

“Daddy, not now,” Serena chided. “Can’t you see Barbie’s finally tapping into that sexy, feminine confidence? Do your little shoulder shimmy again, Barbie. So cute!”

Completely flustered by the clicking camera and Serena’s ever-changing directions, Bobby had an almost out-of-body experience, as if he was watching himself from a distance. He didn’t look like some elegant fashion model, which would have been bad enough. He looked like a complete skank, some girl who, judging by the length of her skirt, was the school slut, and knew exactly how to present her assets to all the horny boys.

Panicky thoughts started running through his head: Was this how he’d looked at school today, swishing out of the cafeteria? Was that why those football players had wolf-whistled at him? Did people think he was a skank?





“Once you have all these moves mastered, you’ll even be able to look hot in sneakers,” Serena said, turning the music down slightly and breaking him from his thoughts. “Trust me, a couple weeks of practice and we’ll have this walk totally ingrained. From now on, you need to treat the whole world like your runway, okay?”

Bobby swallowed. He remembered a time when Serena, just starting out with her modelling, had worn ridiculously high heels for about a month straight. At the time, he’d found it kind of funny, mostly because she tripped on the stairs now and then. Now, realizing he was about to get the same treatment, he felt sheer terror.

“You are going to be such a little sexpot,” Serena cooed. “In fact, let’s work on that a little. I want you to really seduce the camera for this one. Now, picture one of those cute boys from your old basketball team, and imagine he’s across the room.”

Bobby’s dad paled slightly. “Serena, sweetie, isn’t that a little much?”

“Oh, Daddy, it’s the same kind of advice you always gave me,” Serena said innocently. “You wouldn’t treat Barbie any differently, would you? Just because she’s, you know...”

“Of course not!” their dad blurted, flushing. “Go ahead.”

Bobby could feel his face burning up. Try as he might, he couldn’t help but imagine what his former teammates would think if they could see him like this.

“Oh, little sis is blushing,” Serena said. “So cute! You must have some very *specific* boy in mind.” She clucked sympathetically. “You know, I was thinking about that. It must have been so tough for you to act all straight and macho when you were completely surrounded by *real* guys. Tall, ripped, athletic... How did you keep from drooling in the locker room?”

Bobby opened his mouth, but all that came out was a squeak of indignation.

“Anyways, picture that cute guy,” Serena continued blithely. “He’s so hot, all you can think about is getting him to come over, sweep you off your feet, and stick his tongue down your throat. How do you make him do that with just your eyes?”

Bobby glared at his sister with all the hatred he could muster.

“Great intensity,” his dad remarked, wincing. “But it looks less seductive and more, uh... Murderous?”

“Put your finger in your mouth,” Serena said, smiling wickedly. “It’ll help you, you know, visualize?”

His dad's eyes bulged momentarily, but he raised his camera. Overwhelmed, humiliated, and exhausted, Bobby swallowed the last of his pride and hooked one manicured fingertip inside his puffy pink lips. His reflection in the mirror showed a sultry, pouting bombshell, practically begging for a guy to tear his clothes off. He was about to burst into tears when his dad's phone started buzzing.

"Six o'clock already!" his dad exclaimed, clearly relieved. "Barbie, you better go see if your mom needs help with dinner. Serena, I wanted to talk about the shoot prep a little bit..."

"You can run along, Barbie," Serena said brightly. "Good work today. But the heels stay on until bedtime, got it?"

Suddenly released from his private hell, Bobby felt almost dazed. He nodded, then headed for the door without looking his big sister in the eye, but as he did so he realized he was walking in the same shameless strut she'd been drilling into his muscle memory for the past three hours. Blushing brightly, he scurried away towards the living room to retrieve his phone -- Serena had insisted he have no distractions during the "bootcamp."

A huge mass of notifications, along with a missed call from Kimberly, were awaiting him. He went to their conversation on automatic, still feeling numb from humiliation. The latest message was not a promising one: *Ally's been sending this EVERYWHERE.*

It was accompanied by a short video clip. With a sense of foreboding, Bobby pushed play and was met by the sight of himself in the girls' bathroom at Jefferson High, standing in front of the mirror. Judging by the camera angle, someone had been filming from one of the toilet stalls, pressing their phone up to the crack.

Bobby recognized his outfit, the fuzzy pink sweater and tiny pleated miniskirt he'd worn on his second or third day as "Barbie." Now, watching the video, he saw himself glance around the bathroom furtively before yanking up his shirt, adjusting the position of his boobs in his bra cups, and letting out a distinctly masculine groan of discomfort.

With his "Barbie" body language totally abandoned in what he'd thought was the privacy of the bathroom, he stomped over to the paper towel dispenser, scratching idly under one armpit. The camera shook with silent mirth, and a caption appeared at the bottom of the shot: *She's a lady?*

Bobby realized his hand was trembling. Those stupid, skanky, airheaded bitches had been completely in love with "Barbie" twenty-four hours ago, and now they had turned on him. Combined with the misery he'd just endured in the studio, it was too much for him to handle. Before he knew it, he was hiccuping, tears streaking down his face as he sobbed out his feelings, blubbering just like a girl.

"I wasn't kidding when I said 'good work,' you know," came the last voice on Earth Bobby wanted to hear at that moment. "All it took was three hours, and you're already working that

'fuck me' strut that'll have every guy in your school drooling after you. If I didn't know better, I'd think this was the real you."

Serena had followed him to the living room, like a shark who'd just smelled blood at last. She gave his tears a dispassionate look, then retrieved her own phone and scrolled through her notifications.

"Wow, look at that," she said mildly. "One of your little school friends just stabbed you in the back. Welcome to girl world, Barbie." She glanced up. "I think I'll just give this a little signal boost. Unless, of course, you want to go tell Dad you're not actually trans."

Bobby seized a tissue from the box on the coffee table and dabbed angrily at his tears. He was tired, shaking, and miserable, but he wasn't going to let his sister win that easily. "Screw that," he said through gritted teeth. "I already told you, I'm not going anywhere."

Serena gave him an angelic smile. "I was secretly hoping you'd say that. See, little sis, I'm just getting started."

#

Meanwhile, on the other side of town, Kimberly was running a bootcamp of her own in Josh Delacroix's well-furnished living room.

"Okay, pretend I'm Barbie," she said. "We're at the same party. I'm not thrilled to see you, but I *did* see you defended me online from a pack of rabid cheerleaders. So I feel kind of indebted to you, but also I'm suspicious of your motives. Got all that?"

Josh rubbed the back of his head. "Yeah, I think so," he said, frowning. "I wish you hadn't had to use that video. I can't even imagine how embarrassing that must be for her."

"Empathy!" Kimberly said. "Great. Use that. I'm Barbie, I'm at the party. What do you say?"

Josh shot her a look. "Do we really have to role play this?" he asked. "It's not like I've never picked up a girl at a party before."

"You've never picked up a girl like 'Barbie' at a party before," Kimberly pointed out.

Josh shrugged. "Hey, Barbie," he said. "You look really good tonight."

Kimberly rolled her eyes. "Okay, first things first," she said. "No compliments. Seriously. No calling him 'beautiful' or 'cute' or anything like that."

"*Her*," Josh corrected sulkily. "Okay, fine. No compliments." He cleared his throat. "Hey, Barbie. You see the Lakers game last night?"

“There you go,” Kimberly said, snapping her fingers. “Keep it light, and keep it normal. Every single guy she knows is either weirded out by her or trying to get into her panties on the down low. So you have to be the total opposite of that.”

Josh nodded. “I get it,” he said. “In theory. It’s just hard, because, you know, she’s just so…” He trailed off, looking off into the distance.

Kimberly sighed. “No staring at her boobs,” she said. “Or her butt. Or anywhere but her face.” She rummaged in her purse and pulled out a small spray canister. “Here’s your secret weapon,” she said. “You know what this stuff is, right?”

Josh looked at the bottle of IcyHot. “Yeah, sure,” he said. “Coach sprays it on ankle sprains. It does this freezy, tingly burning thing and…” He blinked. “Why is this my secret weapon, exactly?” he asked suspiciously.

Kimberly gave a significant glance towards his crotch.

“No way,” he said. “No way am I doing that.”

“Hey,” Kimberly said, shrugging. “I’m just trying to help.” Her phone buzzed; she picked it up and saw a reply from Bobby. “Good,” she said. “She saw the video. Let’s start coming up with your post. Remember, you have no romantic interest in Barbie. Like, at all. You’re just stepping in and telling Bev and Ally to knock it off, because it’s not cool. And you know what’s cool and not cool, because you’re cool. Got it?”

“Got it,” Josh said, a look of determination on his handsome face. He cracked his knuckles, inadvertently flexing his impressive shoulder muscles in a way that made Kimberly just a little bit tingly.

The truth was, Josh had an awful lot going for him. He was tall, he was good-looking, he was buff, he was smart, he was a basketball star, and, oh, his parents were filthy rich. Along with all that, he was somehow pretty humble and generally a nice guy, when he wasn’t using his hacking skills to blackmail people.

Bobby, meanwhile, had been pumped full of high-powered female hormones for two straight months, which meant, in theory, his body was going to start reacting a little more positively to attractive men than it had in the past. More importantly, he was desperate for a male friend.

Kimberly figured if she could make her ex switch teams, she could do pretty much anything. And if it didn’t work, well, at least she would get to see some fireworks.

#

Part Five

Bobby had been fully prepared to rip Beverly and the other cheerleaders a new one the next day at school, but his ex-girlfriend had nipped that idea in the bud, assuring him it would just make things worse. To his bafflement, the girls greeted him at his locker as though nothing had happened, fawning over his outfit and asking him his opinion on DeShawn's biceps. But as the day went on, he realized the cheerleaders didn't *need* to do anything else -- they'd gotten the ball rolling, and now the gossip-hungry organism that was Jefferson High was happy to do the rest.

By the time the final bell rang, Bobby was ready to snap. He'd endured non-stop staring and giggling in the hallways, at least a dozen different people whispering "she's a lady?" as he walked by, and being obviously excluded from a new "cheerleaders only" group chat during lunch hour. To top it off, someone had hung a jockstrap in his locker. And Kimmy was being no help at all, claiming she didn't want to get in the middle of things since the cheerleaders were her friends, too -- what a load of bullshit.

As he headed for the exit, he couldn't help but check on the online situation. The video had originally been posted anonymously on some throw-away Twitter account, and from there Ally, Beverly, and the other cheerleaders had shared it like crazy. The original Tweet was still racking up replies, mostly crying-with-laughter emojis. One particular response caught his eye.

You all need to grow the fuck up. Plus, who films someone in a bathroom?

Bobby felt a rush of vindication -- not everybody was laughing at him -- then frowned as he recognized the Instagram handle. It was Josh Delacroix. He hadn't thought about his former basketball rival in weeks, and now here he was, defending his honor online. He didn't like that, but he couldn't help but notice several dozen people had already piled on to agree with Josh's post, starting to turn the tide of opinion. Bobby reasoned he'd probably just done it to look magnanimous, or whatever. He had that squeaky clean image to maintain, after all.

Lost in his thoughts, Bobby didn't notice his mom's Range Rover parked outside the school until she honked the horn. He jumped, then looked up. His mom was waving cheerily from behind the wheel, and beside her in the passenger's seat was, of course, Serena. Bobby braced himself, then walked over. Maybe Serena was cancelling bootcamp in favor of a shopping excursion -- she would probably try to embarrass the hell out of him, but as long as their mom was there, she couldn't do anything too drastic.

"Hi, sweetie," his mom said, rolling down her window. "I thought you were working on your walk?"

Bobby frowned. "Um, what?"

“Barbie, please don’t tell me you’ve been tottering around like a secretary all day,” Serena chided from the passenger seat. “You’re a model, and you need to walk like one. Go back to the door and try again, okay?”

“I’m not going to *try again*,” Bobby spluttered. “It’s school, I’m not on some freaking catwalk.”

“The whole world is your catwalk now, sweetie,” his mom said. “Come on, please? I want to see what my girls were working so hard on yesterday. For me, Barbie?”

Bobby’s mouth swung open and shut as he tried to come up with an excuse. Finally, he dropped his bag, walked backward about a dozen yards, and placed his hands on his waist in approved fashion model fashion. Then, doing his best to ignore the curious onlookers, he sashayed up to the car with the bouncing, sexy strut he’d been forced to learn yesterday. Several guys catcalled, and Bobby couldn’t get to the safety of the Range Rover fast enough.

“Much better,” his mom said proudly as he slid carefully into the backseat, smoothing his skirt. “How was school?”

“Fine,” Bobby said automatically, still blushing. “Um, what’s with the ride?” He shot a suspicious look at Serena, who just smiled back. “Not that I’m complaining. The bus smells like armpit.”

His mom wrinkled her nose just imagining it. “Bootcamp, remember? I’m just dropping you two off at the gym for your workout.”

Bobby blinked in surprise. He’d been expecting another round of high heel torture at home. After all, the gym was his thing. Sure, he had stopped working out once the gynecomastia thing got worse, but he was still stronger than any actual girl. If Serena thought she could scare him off with physical exercise, she had another thing coming.

“It’s for me, too,” Serena explained casually. “I have a swimsuit show coming up, and I need to stay in shape.”

“Sweetie, you look amazing,” their mom chided. “Although, yes, that show is definitely top priority.”

“Um, I don’t have my gym stuff,” Bobby said. “Can we swing by the house?”

His mom wrinkled her nose yet again. “Oh, Barbie, those raggedy old shorts you used to wear? Don’t worry, I tossed them. Along with everything else in your gym bag.”

Bobby blanched. “Wait, you didn’t throw out my Tomcats jersey, did you?” he demanded.

“No, no,” his mom said. “I think you’re supposed to return it to the school? So I put it in the laundry. Anyways, sweetie, Serena and I did a little shopping and picked up some brand new gym wear for you.”

Bobby gave a small sigh of relief that his old school jersey had escaped the trash, even if his workout shorts hadn’t. He knew he wouldn’t like whatever the Vickerson women had picked out for him as a replacement, but at the same time, he reasoned it couldn’t be worse than stilettos and a miniskirt.

And now that he was taking the male hormone pills Dr. Skito had provided him with, maybe a trip to the gym would boost his testosterone levels and help him finally put on some muscle. At the very least, it was a chance to show up Serena for once. His older sister probably still remembered him as a wimpy little twelve-year-old. But things had changed, and even if he’d been out of the game for a while, he was still the athlete in the family.

Bobby smiled grimly. The gym was his territory, not hers, and Serena was going to find that out the hard way.

#

Kimberly was at home, trying to catch up on all the homework she’d neglected in favor of inventing a fake doctor, when the doorbell rang. And kept ringing. Someone was hitting the button like their life depended on it, and, since her mom was still at work, Kimberly grudgingly made her way to the door to answer it. She peered through the peephole, blinked and looked again to be sure of what she was seeing, then swung the door open.

She was met with the full view of her ex-boyfriend decked out in incredibly skimpy gym wear and drenched in sweat. His hair was a tousled blonde mess, his makeup was running, and he was practically hyperventilating, breasts heaving prettily in the confines of a tiny pink sports bra that matched his skin-tight bottoms.

“Did you run here?” she asked, genuinely taken aback.

“My mom dropped me off,” he said, gesturing to the Range Rover on the street with a painfully fake smile. “Because we’re, uh, having a sleepover! Remember? Just let me inside.”

“It’s not a great time,” Kimberly said, though on the inside she was dying to know what had gotten Bobby so agitated.

“Come on,” Bobby pleaded. “I texted you!”

“When?” Kimberly asked, frowning. Her phone buzzed. “Oh,” she said, seeing the message. “Two seconds ago.”



She looked at the Range Rover and saw Bobby's mom behind the wheel, while beside her was a girl she recognized only from photos -- a *lot* of photos. Serena was also in workout attire, and had a healthy glow about her, but in sharp contrast to Bobby, not a single hair was out of place and she wasn't sweaty in the slightest.

"Alright, come in," Kimberly said. "Try not to, like, drip everywhere."

Bobby darted inside, dumped his gym bag on the carpet, and slammed the door behind him like he was fleeing from a serial killer. "She was going to make me work on my 'angles' again at home," he said. "She never stops! She's like the freaking Energizer bunny, if the Energizer bunny was *evil*."

"What happened?" Kimberly asked, trying to disguise her curiosity as concern.

Bobby gave a moan of frustration, and she was surprised to see tears welling in her ex's eyes -- as if the sweat hadn't done enough damage to his makeup. "Everything happened!" he choked. "All the worst, most embarrassing, most..." He nearly sobbed. "I mean, first off, she made me wear this *freaking* outfit."

Kimberly had zero doubt as to why Serena had chosen it -- the bra crammed Bobby's growing boobs together into an enticing slice of cleavage, while the short shorts clung to every curve of his increasingly feminine butt with latticed panels to show even more skin. It was definite "gym bunny" wear, the sort of thing Instagram fitness models paraded around in to get guys drooling, and with his styled hair and full makeup, he would have looked like a hot blonde who was more interested in muscly men than actually working out.

"And I had to get changed in the women's change room," Bobby muttered. "But of course, Serena asks to make sure if it's *okay* if her *trans* sister uses the women's change room, because she doesn't want any *harassment*. Freaking bitch. She made sure everyone in the place knew I was a guy! Or, you know, that I was trans, or whatever." He switched to a screechy high-pitched voice that was probably not a very accurate Serena impression. "Make sure you're tucked up really tight, we wouldn't want anything flopping around! Now that you're taking estrogen, your booty is going to totally fill out!"

"Wow," Kimberly said, impressed, despite herself with Serena's viciousness. "I mean, wow, that's awful."

"I had all these MILFs looking at me like I was some kind of circus freak," Bobby said miserably. "I thought it would get a little better, like, once we were actually working out? I was planning to kick her ass, actually." He looked like he was on the verge of tears again. "But I can barely lift a freaking dumb bell anymore. I don't get it. I thought the pills Dr. Skito gave me..."

"It's only been a few days," Kimberly said quickly. "Nothing takes effect that fast."

“We were doing mostly resistance band and body weight stuff, anyways,” Bobby muttered. “Like, squatting on balance boards and all that. I don’t know how she does it, she barely broke a freaking sweat. Of course she had us do it right in front of the free weights section, so every single roid monkey in the whole place was staring at my ass. And she wouldn’t shut up. She kept saying...” Bobby flushed and trailed off. “You know, stuff.”

“Like what?” Kimberly demanded.

Bobby’s face was screwed up to keep from crying. “Like, telling me which guys were hot, and asking me which guys I’d like to take me out,” he babbled. “As if just because I’m, you know, just because I’m dressed like this... I’m not... I don’t like *guys*, okay?” He put his face in his hands and spoke in a small, shaky voice. “But when I was in the changing room, and all these hot girls were everywhere getting undressed, it was like... I didn’t even get turned on, Kimmy. At all.”

“Well, that’s a good thing, right?” Kimberly asked bracingly. “A hard-on in the women’s changing room is kind of a vibe changer.”

Bobby just gave a miserable shrug.

“Look, Serena can’t stay in Green Lake forever,” Kimberly said, deciding she needed to give her ex some emotional support, but not too much. “All you have to do is outlast her. Just hang in there for a week, and she’ll probably be flying off to Milan or whatever.”

“I wish,” Bobby said darkly. “She says she’s planning to stick around as long as it takes to ‘help’ me find my ‘true self.’ She’s serious about this.”

That much was becoming clear. Kimberly had always thought Serena was probably just a grown-up version of Beverly, or some other stuck up but generally airheaded girl. But from what Bobby was telling her, she wasn’t just catty -- she was downright devious, in a way that reminded Kimberly of herself.

In fact, while she didn’t particularly need a selfie, she was increasingly curious to meet her ex’s big sister. She’d turned Bobby into a quivering mess with one little trip to the gym, after all, which was something Kimberly could really appreciate. She was okay with letting Serena play with her doll, but she also had to make sure she didn’t break anything. Kimberly had worked way too hard to let an interloper mess things up.

“Maybe I can have a little talk with her,” Kimberly said casually. “Girl to girl.”

#

It was Friday after school, and Bobby was seriously considering fleeing the country. Every day seemed a little worse than the last: now that the cheerleaders had turned on him, lunch hour

had become an exercise in playing dumb as he tried to ignore the subtle and not-so-subtle jibes Bev and Ally were constantly throwing at him. And the final bell offered no respite, since it meant he was in his sister's clutches for the next three hours.

When it came to finding new ways to make him miserable, Serena's creativity was boundless. After running him ragged at the gym on Tuesday, she'd followed it up on Wednesday with a three-hour intensive on makeup, forcing him to start over from scratch after the smallest mistake. Thursday had been the worst yet, a simulated "boudoir" style photo shoot, cranking up the A/C in the studio while she had him wriggling into and out of various sets of skimpy lingerie, with his dad once again playing photographer.

And now here he was on Friday afternoon, attending his first barre class. They had barely started the warm-up, and he was already wishing the Earth would open up and swallow him.

"You are going to *love* what this does for your ass, little sis," Serena said, gripping the ballet bar and swinging her leg back and forth in a graceful arc. "A few months of this and you won't be able to fit it in your tights. Of course, the boys will love that, too."

Bobby flushed, but he managed to maintain the fake smile that had become his default expression whenever Serena taunted him. "Cool," he said. "I can't wait."

He could guess why Serena had picked this particular barre class: the back wall of the studio was made of glass, and across the hallway Bobby had a clear view of a basketball court where a pick-up game was underway. Of course, the guys hanging around on the bench also had a clear view of a bunch of hotties in skin-tight Lululemon whenever they "happened" to glance over. It was excruciating, being so close to his old domain but instead being forced to practice flexing his butt and thrusting his pelvis with the girls instead.

"It's amazing how fast you're filling out," Serena continued. "Of course, I don't know if your boobs will ever get to 'Barbie' proportions without a little help. Maybe I could suggest that to Mom and Dad as a little present for their new daughter?"

Bobby's stomach plunged at the idea, as ridiculous as it was. "Go ahead," he said flatly. "They'll tell you you're nuts. I'm a freaking minor."

Serena smirked. "Oh, you are so naive, little sis."

Bobby grimaced. "If you seriously think Mom and Dad would ever..."

"Hey, Barbie, sorry I'm late!" Kimberly said, appearing with her towel and water bottle at the ready. Bobby looked up. Once he would have gotten some enjoyment out of the sight of his ex wearing a pair of painted-on yoga pants, but it wasn't quite the same now that he was decked out in even skimpier attire. She leaned in for an air kiss, which Bobby grudgingly returned.

“No problem,” he chirped. He shot a defiant look at his sister. “Serena, this is my friend Kimberly. I told her she could come join, hope that’s okay.”

Kimberly had insisted on coming, claiming she might be able to get Serena to back off, but Bobby didn’t buy that one little bit. She hadn’t even been able to get Beverly and Ally off his back, so how was she possibly going to get Serena to do it? She was doubtless just in it for a selfie with a fashion model, just like the other cheerleaders. The only reason Bobby agreed to play along was because he knew Serena couldn’t be *quite* as horrible in front of a witness.

“No problem,” Serena said, and she looked Kimberly up and down with a surprisingly icy smile. “I think our mom mentioned you. You’ve been helping our little Barbie doll adjust to girlhood, right?”

Bobby grimaced at the “doll” addendum, but Kimberly was unperturbed. “I guess you could say that, yeah,” his ex said, returning Serena’s smile with one that looked every bit as fake. “Just kind of looking out for her, you know?”

“Don’t be so modest,” Serena said. “I heard you were really supportive when she, um, ‘came out.’ In fact, it kind of looked like you two planned that whole thing together?”

Bobby couldn’t contain a derisive snort. His “coming out” had been the work of an anonymous hacker obsessed with “Barbie,” and everything since then had been damage control. He knew Kimberly was probably thinking the same thing, judging by the flicker of disbelief that crossed her face.

“Like I said,” she repeated slowly. “Just looking out for her.”

“That’s so sweet of you,” Serena said. “But now she’s got her big sister here to look out for her, so it’s not really, you know, necessary.”

Bobby wasn’t sure what was going on, but suddenly Serena had shifted her laser-like focus directly onto Kimberly, almost as if he wasn’t there at all. It was a welcome reprieve. The class was getting underway, but both girls were completely ignoring the teacher’s instructions, observing each other closely as a strange tension started to mount.

Suddenly, Serena clapped her hands together. “Oops, looks like we’re starting,” she said, in a tone of cheery surprise. “Let’s kill those glutes, girls.”

Still slightly baffled, Bobby turned questioningly to his ex as they started doing lunges. She just gave him a terse shake of the head. She had a distracted look in her eye, and seemed oddly worried. Bobby couldn’t guess why -- after all, he was the only one here with something to lose.

#

Kimberly spent the whole barre class mentally preparing herself, and during the break it finally happened: Serena sent Bobby scurrying off to refill their water bottles, then came over for a private chat. Even though she felt a huge sense of foreboding, she couldn't help but feel a little bit of awe, too. Serena's hair was immaculate, and her body was perfect, with flat abs and an incredible ass obviously sculpted by years in the gym.

She and Bobby had the same great genetics, clearly, but Serena had been working with estrogen for a lot longer. Not only that, the way she carried herself was on a whole different level from Beverly or any snooty high school queen bee. She somehow managed to exude cunning, regal power and sex appeal all at the same time.

"So, Kimberly, I'm just going to cut right to the point," Serena said, flinging her towel over her shoulder. "How the fuck did Bobby rope you into this?"

Kimberly blinked. "Into barre class?" she asked, snarky by reflex even as she scrambled to figure out how she was going to play this situation.

"Into helping him pretend to be trans," Serena said casually. "I know he didn't learn all this shit on his own. Somebody helped him, and that somebody was you."

Kimberly drew a breath, glancing around the dance studio. The other girls were oblivious to the importance of this conversation, chattering in small groups about the instructor's amazing body, and she answered in a loud voice.

"You know, misgendering someone is a really bad look these days, Serena," she said.

"Misgendering, my ass," Serena shot back, seemingly delighted. "If you know Bobby at all, you know he's always been jealous of me, to the point of, like, pathology. First he tried getting Mom and Dad's attention with his basketball. That obviously didn't work. So he decided to try something more radical. Now he's in over his head and too stupid to find a way out." Serena crossed her arms and cocked her head. "You, on the other hand, don't seem stupid. So why are you playing along?"

Kimberly was suddenly regretting coming to barre class. She'd wanted to meet Serena and get a clearer idea of who she was dealing with -- watching Bobby do a bunch of exercises designed to improve the female orgasm was just a bonus -- but she'd underestimated just how quickly Serena would suss out the partial truth. She knew Kimberly was in on the fact that "Barbie" was bullshit, but for now still believed Bobby was the instigator of the whole thing. If she were to find out the whole truth, things would get very messy, very fast.

"Okay, fine, don't answer that," Serena said, raising her hands in mock surrender. "I'll guess. You're pretty, flexible, and in decent shape, so that means you're probably a cheerleader."

A small part of Kimberly was delighted to have Serena Vickerson call her pretty, but a much larger part of her was approaching panic.

“I know from Mom and Dad that Bobby mostly used his basketball talents to get laid, since he’s a horny little shit with a very fragile macho ego,” Serena continued. “So I’m guessing he pumped and dumped you at some victory party, right?”

Kimberly felt her face growing red. “He didn’t pump and dump me,” she blurted. “We dated for three months.”

“Oh, I’m so sorry. You *dated*.” Serena smirked. “Even better. So, you dated for three months, which was long enough for you to realize he gave exactly zero fucks about you, and *then* he dumped you.”

Kimberly held her breath. She had to get control of herself. This was getting to be very, very dangerous territory. She could practically see the wheels turning in Serena’s head.

“So when he came up with this crazy plan to be ‘Barbie,’ just to piss me off and get some attention, he knew he needed someone to show him the girly ropes,” Serena continued coolly. “So he went to you. And you agreed to help him, and to keep it all hush-hush, because...”

“Because I’m still in love with him, okay?” Kimberly snapped.

Serena blinked in surprise.

“There, I said it, I freaking said it,” Kimberly babbled, pushing the emotion in her voice to the limit. “I’m still in love with him, and I’d do anything for him, no matter what it is, even... Even...” She shut her eyes briefly. “Even helping him turn himself into a girl.”

Serena stared at her. Kimberly clenched her fists at her sides, waiting for Bobby’s sister to narrow her eyes and call bullshit. But then, to her mingled pride and embarrassment, Serena gave a derisive laugh.

“Jesus,” she said. “And here I thought you were smart, Kimberly. He dumped you after three months, and you’re still running after him like a puppy dog? Still letting him pull the strings? I hate to break it to you, but if he’s on hormones much longer he won’t even be able to give you that pity fuck you’re clearly after.”

Kimberly didn’t have to fake the blush on her cheeks. Serena had bought the story, but it was hard to feel victorious about it. In fact, she thought she felt an inkling of what Bobby had been experiencing these past few days.

“Well, lucky for you, I’m going to straighten all this out,” Serena said casually. “I don’t expect you to help me, since you’re still acting like a thirsty little thot. But I expect you to stay out of my way. Clear?”

Kimberly swallowed. “Clear,” she replied, in a small voice.

“Good,” Serena said coldly.



At that very moment, Bobby reappeared, pony-tail bouncing, with the refilled water bottles clutched in his manicured hands. Judging by the dark blotch on his sports bra, he’d managed to spill a bunch down his cleavage. Despite that, he had a bright smile on his made-up face.

“The line was super long,” he said. “Did I miss anything?”

“Not a thing,” Serena said, accepting the water bottle without so much as glancing at her little brother.

The instructor returned to her spot at the front of the classroom, and Kimberly went back to her spot on the ballet bar. She knew she’d bought herself some time by throwing Serena off the trail, but it was only a temporary measure. She needed to find a way to get Bobby’s sister out of the picture before she blew everything up.

Just before Kimberly put her phone away, it buzzed with a new message from Bobby showing several water droplet emojis, a barfy face, and finally, just to make it completely clear: *Totally spat in Serena's water bottle, get on my LEVEL.*

Despite herself, Kimberly's mouth twitched in the direction of a smile. Taking Serena down was going to require a lot more than just saliva, but she supposed you had to start somewhere.

#

Part Six

Barre class only lasted an hour and a half, meaning Bobby had to brace himself to put up with more "bootcamp" at home, but to his surprise, Serena was pretty hands-off. She had him back in the six-inch stiletto pumps, but seemed content to have him sashay back and forth with a book on his head while she did something on her laptop.

Bobby was used to her watching him like a hawk, critiquing every clicking step and upping his embarrassment whenever possible, so it was a welcome change. Maybe, against all odds, she was giving up? Maybe his "Barbie" act was so good that she was starting to question herself? It was an exciting possibility, but he tried not to get his hopes up as he swished around the living room with his hips swinging and his wrists held prettily limp.

To his amazement, it was still quarter to six when his older sister waved him away. "I have to make some calls, little sis," she said. "Class is dismissed early today."

"Fine by me," Bobby muttered, leaning down gracefully to remove his stilettos.

"Ah ah ah," Serena said, wagging a finger without even looking up from her laptop screen. "The shoes stay on, remember?"

Bobby grimaced, but he didn't want to push his luck and end up learning to do a striptease or something like that. He straightened up, tossing his hair, and fled before Serena could change her mind. He was starving -- the barre class had been surprisingly draining, and he'd been too busy silently fuming at the cheerleaders to eat much during lunch hour -- so he headed for the kitchen.

"Hi, sweetie," his mom greeted him, startling him slightly. He wasn't used to running into her in the kitchen, since she only ever cooked when Serena was home. "How's bootcamp?" she asked.

"Um, it's fine," Bobby said. "I got released early for good behavior," he added wryly.

His mom chuckled. "I know Serena can be a little intense, but she's really the best person to teach you," she said. "She worked every bit as hard as she's making you work now, I promise." Her gaze travelled downward to his footwear and she gave a knowing smile. "You're really getting much better in those, sweetie. Think of it as a rite of passage we women all have to go through."

Bobby tried not to make a face. He'd definitely never seen his mom wearing heels this high. "Thanks," he said. "Can I get a snack?"

"Sure," his mom said. "But only if you help me make these fajitas."

Bobby didn't normally help out in the kitchen, and definitely not while wearing an apron with a big floppy bow on it, but it was actually kind of nice. He helped slice up some peppers, struggling a little to manage the knife and cutting board with his long nails, while she did the bulk of the work much more efficiently. She cooed over him when he executed a very graceful pirouette on his way to the trash can, and complimented his "improved posture."

Bobby hated getting remarks like that from Serena or Kimberly or the cheerleaders, reminders of how undeniably girly he was getting, but from his mom it didn't sting the same way. For some reason, it felt kind of good. He'd rather she was praising him for hitting jump shots, but he had to take what he could get.



Serena was still on her call when dinner was served, which meant Bobby got to sit down to eat with just his parents. He still found it a little hard to make eye contact with his dad, especially after yesterday's impromptu lingerie shoot, but he couldn't deny he liked having their undivided attention as they asked him, for what felt like the first time ever, about his classes and his friends at school.

Deep down, he knew the reason he hadn't told them the truth about the blackmailer yet, about "Barbie" being the invention of some deranged hacker, wasn't just to stave off another humiliation. It was so he could have a little bit more of this: his mom and dad adoring him the way they'd always adored Serena. He was even considering telling them how bitchy Bev and the cheerleaders were being when the spotlight suddenly shifted away to its usual owner.

"Sorry about that," Serena said, waltzing inside. "Long call." She slid into her seat. "Ooh, Mom, these smell delicious!"

"Well, thank you, sweetie," their mom beamed. "Of course, Barbie helped."

"That's so cute!" Serena exclaimed. "You're going to make a great little wife someday."

Bobby flushed, but behind Serena's jibe she seemed to be in a genuinely good mood -- which worried him even more.

"What was the call about?" their dad asked eagerly. "It wasn't, by any chance...?"

Serena flashed her megawatt smile. "Jan Van Antwerp."

Bobby's mom dropped her fork, while his dad let out a small, uncharacteristic yelp of surprise. Both his parents launched into their follow-up questions simultaneously, while Bobby, for his part, had absolutely no idea what was going on. Serena held up her hands, and her parents fell silent.

"I had to call in a favor," she said. "But it's so worth it. I mean, I'd do anything to help kick start my little sister's modelling career, you know? She has so much *potential*."

"Wait, who's Jan Van the Twerp?" Bobby demanded.

"Only one of the most sought-after fashion photographers in the world right now!" his mom exclaimed. "Oh, my God, sweetie, this is amazing. I didn't think you were still in contact with him, after, um..." She trailed off abruptly, smile faltering, and to Bobby's puzzlement he saw a brief flash of anger cross Serena's face.

"Water under the bridge," his older sister said, regaining her grin. "He can fly in next month. The thing is, he wants full creative control of the shoot. He's very, very intrigued by Barbie's story. You know, the whole 'basketball star to blonde babe' angle. I think he wants to work with that."

“This is fantastic,” Bobby’s dad said. “I mean, of course he needs creative control. That’s a given. His name alone on this thing will catapult us into a huge contract. You sent him the shots we took?”

“He loved them,” Serena said. “Except, just one little, tiny thing.” She rolled her eyes with an innocent smile. “Okay, two little tiny things. He felt like the lingerie shots were a little, um, flat?”

“Well, Barbie’s still developing,” Bobby’s mom said. “They can give her a boost in post, can’t they?”

“In stills, sure,” Serena said. “But he wants to do video, as well.” She turned to Bobby with a wicked gleam in her eyes. “I saw you admiring our instructor’s boobs at barre class today,” she said. “It’s nothing to be embarrassed about, we girls all check each other out from time to time. I think you could definitely go for a C-cup, little sis.”

Bobby blanched. He stared at his parents for a moment, open-mouthed, waiting for them to step in and tell Serena she was crazy. His dad had a slightly pained expression on his face, but his mom, on the other hand, looked as if Serena had just suggested they all go for ice cream.

“Well, there is that little clinic in Casper,” his dad said slowly. “They’re small but they do terrific work, and very discreet...”

Bobby’s head was spinning. His dad couldn’t be serious. “Wait!” he squeaked. “Wait, what are we talking about? What kind of clinic? I’m already seeing a doctor for, um, hormones. Remember?”

“I know, sweetie, and that was very proactive of you,” his mom said. “But hormones can only do so much. Oh, this is so exciting!”

“Just one problem,” his dad sighed. “There’s no way we can get it done in time.” He waved his phone. “They’re booked solid for the next two weeks, and Barbie will need recovery time, too. This is Jan Van Antwerp, so it’s not like we can just ask him to reschedule.”

Bobby nearly fainted with relief, but it was short-lived.

“That’s a shame,” his mom tutted. “But you know, we could make an appointment for right afterwards? Just in case Jan Van Antwerp wants to work with her again.” She smiled into the distance with a dreamy expression on her face. “Barbie, you have no idea how lucky you are, sweetie.”

#

When Kimberly picked up Bobby’s call, her ex was so panicked she could barely make out what he was saying -- something about Antwerp, and definitely something about boobs. The

overarching message was that she needed to get over to his house ASAP, which probably meant failing another biology quiz. But hey, she'd signed up for this when she decided to turn him into a blonde babe.

It was late by the time she got to Bobby's place, but she could see an animated discussion going on in the living room window, apparently some kind of brainstorming session with Serena and her dad talking and her mom taking notes. Bobby opened the door looking like a deer in the headlights.

"What's going on?" Kimberly asked.

"Upstairs," Bobby said, gulping. "We can talk upstairs."

He led the way, and she couldn't help but notice that his walk was definitely "model material" now, with an exaggerated bounce in his hips that made his butt really wiggle. Kimberly didn't think she would be able to handle the heels he was wearing without breaking her neck, but he tackled the stairs with no problems. As soon as they were inside his room with the door shut, her ex started babbling.

"They want me to get a freaking boob job, Kimmy!" he blurted. "My whole family, my own freaking dad, they want to make an appointment at this, this clinic, and it's all because Serena knows this twerp guy, this Jam Vam Twerp whatever-his-name is, and he wants to shoot me, not with a gun, but like, with a camera, but I *wish* it was a freaking gun, because that would be better than getting a freaking *boob job!*"

Kimberly was a little stunned as she processed the information. Serena had just turned up the pressure in the biggest way possible, and she'd done it faster than Kimberly could have ever anticipated. Bobby was pacing up and down the length of his redecorated room, though the fact that he was still wearing his heels made it look a bit like he was practicing for a particularly frenzied catwalk. His arms were folded protectively across his chest and his pretty blue eyes were wide with panic.

"When?" she demanded. "When's the shoot, when's the appointment?"

"The shoot is in three weeks, and they want me to get the 'procedure' done right afterwards," Bobby moaned. "I can't *do* this anymore. I'm losing my freaking mind, Kimmy! You have no idea what this shit is like!"

Kimberly cleared some cosmetics off the bed and took a seat. "Okay," she sighed. "This isn't as bad as you think. She's one hundred percent bluffing."

"What do you mean?" Bobby demanded.

“She made the whole thing up,” Kimberly said, injecting confidence into her voice that she didn’t feel in the slightest. “Think about it. The absolute last thing she wants is to get shown up by you, right? There’s no way she would do all this wheeling and dealing to get you a shoot with some famous photographer if there was even the *slightest chance* you go through with it. You’re already overshadowing her career online, and this would blow you up even more.”

Bobby stopped pacing. “What, so she lied to our parents?”

“Has she never done that before?” Kimberly asked skeptically.

“Only all the time,” Bobby muttered. “So she’s just trying to scare me? You’re sure?”

“Absolutely sure,” Kimberly said. “She’s expecting you to completely panic, throw in the towel, and tell your parents you made ‘Barbie’ up for attention. Heck, she’s probably waiting for you to march downstairs right now.”

Bobby shook his head. “Even if the photo shoot is fake, my dad was talking to a real freaking surgeon on the phone, Kimmy,” he said. “All she has to do is be like, ‘Oops, the famous photographer with the dumb-ass name cancelled on us. Sorry, but Barbie can still get her boob job for next time, right?’ And then I’m screwed!”

“I’m not going to let that happen,” Kimberly said firmly, even though she was realizing, for the first time, just how badly she wanted to see her ex stuffing a pair of C-cups into his bra. “You’re taking those pills from Dr. Skito still, right? Those male hormones?”

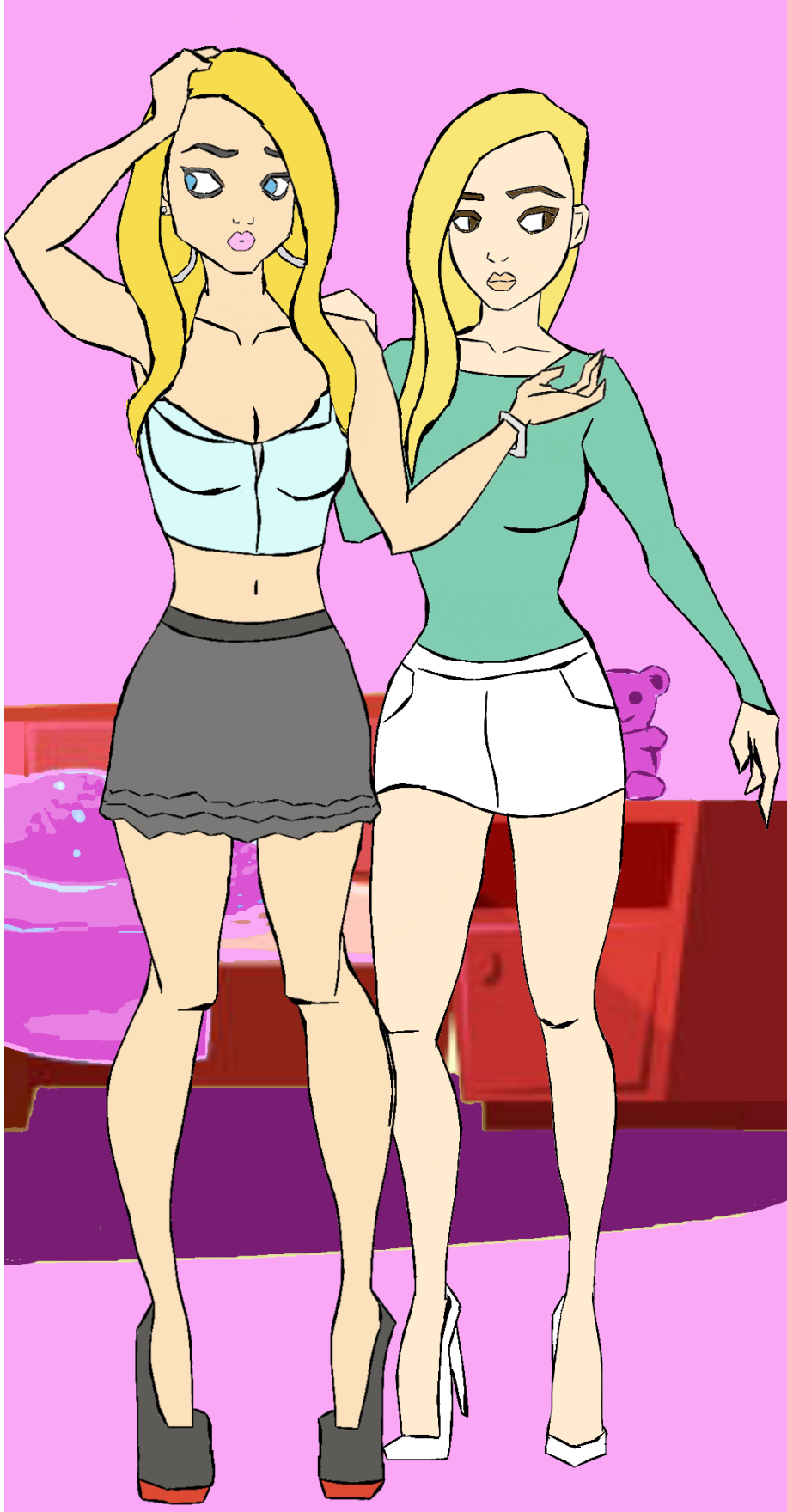
“Yeah, but they haven’t done a freaking thing,” Bobby groaned. “You think in three weeks I’ll be, like, normal again? Unless...” He blinked. “What if we get Dr. Skito to tell the surgeon I’ve got a condition, or something? Like, say I’m allergic to silicone? That could work!”

Kimberly grimaced. There was no way Skeeter was going to be able to hold court with an actual medical professional, but if it calmed Bobby down, she would roll with it. “Exactly,” she said. “Dr. Skito will help us out. We have three weeks to figure it out, remember? I promise you’re not going to get a boob job.”

Bobby stared at the mirror for a second, then let out a huge sigh. “Okay,” he said. “But even if I don’t get a boob job, my life is still hell.” He glared at the bedroom door, as if he could shoot lasers down the hall into Serena’s room. “She baits me every chance she gets, and if I ever slip, like, if I ever do something not ‘Barbie’ enough, she’s there to pounce on it. So I have to keep up the act twenty-four-seven. It’s getting to me, Kimmy. And school...”

“I know,” Kimberly said, glad to see him getting distracted. “Bev can be a real bitch.”

“I thought we were friends, or whatever,” Bobby snapped. “Or at least, you know, I thought they weren’t psychotic back-stabbers. And I’m still supposed to hang out with them? It’s like hanging out with a bunch of sharks! In a volcano! I can’t let my guard down for one freaking *second*.”



"I don't think sharks live in volcanoes," Kimberly said.

"It's a metaphor," Bobby growled. "What I'm saying is, there's nobody I can be myself around. Ever. Except you, Kimmy. And you're still a chick."

Bingo. Kimberly knew her number one focus now was outmaneuvering Serena and preventing a meltdown, but Bobby's rising stress levels had just provided her the opening she and Josh had been waiting for. She couldn't let it slide.

"I bet you miss your teammates, huh?" she asked, putting a sympathetic look on her face.

Bobby looked surprised for a moment, then actually sniffled. "You know what?" he muttered. "I really freaking do. I miss DeShawn, and Flash, and Chet, and I never thought I'd say it, but I even miss Kenny, and that dude was trash. He couldn't get us a rebound to save his life. But now?" He gave an angry laugh. "Every single one of them treats me like 'Barbie.' Meaning, they're either too weirded out to talk to me, or they can't stop staring at my..." He swallowed, face turning red. "Boobs."

"Come here," Kimberly said, patting the space on the bed beside her. "Sit down. Take those shoes off, seriously."

Bobby looked down at his peep-toe pumps and flushed again. "Serena says they have to stay on until I'm in bed," he muttered.

Once Kimberly would have just been impressed by Serena's control over her little brother, but after their little talk at barre class, she felt genuinely pissed off. "I say you can take them off," she said, more sharply. "She's not your freaking owner."

Her ex was silent for a moment, then bent down and undid the ankle straps. Once he would have probably kicked them across the room, but now he carried them gracefully over to his closet and put them back in place amidst a dozen other pairs of equally treacherous high heels. Kimberly couldn't help but notice that even barefoot, he still swayed his hips when he walked, in a distinctly feminine way.

"Just because your old teammates are creeps doesn't mean all guys are," Kimberly said, patting the spot on the bed beside her again. "I guarantee there's somebody out there who will be willing to just hang out with you and talk about basketball."

"Gay dudes don't like basketball," Bobby said glumly, smoothing his skirt beneath his butt to take a seat beside her.

Kimberly had to momentarily close her eyes at the power of her ex's sheer ignorance. "Cocky, much?" she asked. "I hate to break it to you, Barbie, but not every straight guy is going to be

into you, either. In fact, I was talking to someone the other day who said you were a seven, tops.”

Bobby straightened up. “A seven?” he demanded indignantly. “What was he, blind?” Realizing what he’d just said, her ex winced. “I mean, um, whatever. Sure. Seven. I don’t care. I don’t ever think about myself like... I mean, it’s not...” He was starting to stammer, blushing furiously. “It’s not like I *care*, I just...”

Kimberly took a moment to savor the concentrated embarrassment. Bobby, whether he was willing to admit it or not, was beginning to internalize the message all girls got beat over the head with since youth: all that mattered about you was how pretty you were. Now that he couldn’t rely on his basketball heroics to win him admirers, and now that his parents’ affection was tied into turning him into a fashion model, beauty was Bobby’s biggest asset -- maybe his only asset -- and he knew it.

“Don’t get your panties in a bunch,” Kimberly said. “Look, I know this is week was stressful.” She grabbed his feet, taking a moment to admire the pedicure, then put them in her lap and started to gently massage them. It was something she’d done occasionally when they dated, and sure enough, she could see the stress seeping out of her ex’s pretty face.

“Understatement of the freaking century,” Bobby muttered.

“Let’s unwind tomorrow night,” Kimberly said. “Find a house party or something. You can come over to my place early to get ready, and it’ll give you a break from Serena. No bootcamp on Saturday, right? So you can forget about all this stuff for a little while.”

Bobby looked dubious for a moment, then sighed. “Man, I miss house parties,” he admitted grudgingly. “I haven’t been to one in ages.”

“Then we’ll find one,” Kimberly said firmly, moving her ex’s feet off her lap. “I’ll start asking around right now. Hey, can I borrow that new dress your mom bought you?”

“Better you than me,” Bobby said darkly, getting up and heading towards the closet. “You mean the blue one with the ruffles? Or the pink-and-white halter?”

Kimberly took advantage of his absence to scroll through her phone contacts and message Josh Delacroix -- for anonymity’s sake, she had him saved as “Phone Repair Guy.”

Serena was her new priority, but that didn’t mean Kimberly was tossing aside her goal of turning Bobby into Josh’s own personal cheerleader. And if things went according to plan, Bobby would feel like he had another ally against his sister, which would make it easier to keep him in the game.

Hey lover-boy, I think it might actually be time to make your move, she tapped out. Up for a house party tomorrow night?

#

Part Seven

“Wait, so how do you know this chick, again?” Bobby asked nervously. He and Kimberly were making their way up the sidewalk towards a very large, expensive-looking house, and he was having definite second thoughts. This was a far cry from his usual Jefferson High house parties, which mostly involved getting wasted in one of his teammate’s basements and inviting some girls over to hook up.

“Yoga class,” Kimberly said. “She’s rich, you know, like most of the St. Ceylan’s crowd, but not snobby about it at all. She said she’s totally cool with you coming.”

Bobby grimaced. “It just feels weird going to a St. Ceylan’s party,” he muttered. “They’re like, the enemy, you know?”

“The enemy?” Kimberly echoed, rolling her eyes. “You’re thinking like a boy, Barbie. Not everything is about opposing sports teams.” She reached over to adjust a stray tendril of his wig. “Besides, you were the one who said you wanted to avoid Bev and Ally and them. I guarantee we’re going to be the only Jefferson High girls at this party. And also by far the hottest.”

“Don’t remind me,” Bobby said darkly, tugging at the sky-high hem of his skirt.

Kimberly had insisted they uphold their school’s reputation -- Bobby himself had often claimed Jefferson High had the sexiest girls -- and that meant she’d taken charge of his outfit, hair, and makeup. She’d bullied him back into the denim skirt he’d worn a few days ago, which was apparently not just a miniskirt, but a “micro” miniskirt, to put his freshly-shaven legs on full display.

It was paired with a crimson off-the-shoulders crop top that left his abdomen totally exposed while also showing off his collar bone, a whole lot of skin, and more than a hint of cleavage -- just looking down reminded him of Serena’s boob job threat, making him shudder. He had enough guys talking to his chest already without any “enhancements.”

He ruefully reflected that he was probably getting more coverage from his hair than his top. Kimberly had styled it into a “sexy messy” half up bun, leaving the remainder of his blonde tresses to spill down his shoulders. She’d done the touch ups on his makeup, too, ensuring no clumps in his mascara-laden eyelash extensions and picking a Vampy Matte lipstick to match his top, finished with a clear coating of gloss that made it permanently look like he’d just finished licking his lips.

To complete the “party girl” vibe, he was wearing big golden hoops in his ears, the annoying kind that always brushed against his cheeks when he turned his head, and a lacy choker around his neck. And, of course, he was clicking his way up the porch steps in a pair of high heels, though he had to admit that the four-inch wedge sandals were a piece of cake after a week straight in FMPs.

All in all, the resulting look could probably get him into any high school party on the planet -- and he didn't see many frat parties turning “Barbie” down, either. His ex looked pretty good too, in a spaghetti strap top and high-waisted Daisy Dukes, but Bobby knew he was going to be getting the lion's share of the male attention tonight, one reason why his heart was thumping so quickly behind the silky constriction of his strapless bra.

“Kimmy, I think this was a mistake,” he blurted, adjusting the strap of his purse on one shoulder. “Look at all the cars! There's going to be a ton of people in there. Let's just go back to your place and watch Netflix, okay?”

“Oh, no you don't,” Kimberly said severely. “I didn't get both of us all dolled up for nothing. You used to love parties. Just have a few drinks, relax, and if it sucks we can head out around eleven.”

Before Bobby could come up with a better argument, she reached forward and rang the doorbell. A few moments later, a pretty black-haired girl opened the door, bathing them in the sound of thumping house music -- Bobby was unpleasantly reminded of his studio session with Serena -- and shouted conversations.

“Kimberly!” she squealed. “You made it! Looking good, girl.” The two exchanged an air kiss, then the host of the party caught sight of Bobby. “Oh, my God, and this is Barbie!” she exclaimed. “I'm so psyched to meet you! Like, my brother is gay, and he thought it was so, like, inspirational? When you came out like that, in front of everybody?”

Bobby swallowed, then did his best to smile brightly. “Yep, that's me,” he said. “I, um, I love to inspire people.”

“He thinks you're gorgeous, too,” the girl giggled. “He would totally love to meet you.”

Bobby flushed, looking over at Kimberly for help, but she was busy checking her phone. “That's cool, but I'm not, um, dating right now,” he squeaked.

The host of the party stared at him for a second, then burst into laughter. “Oh, my God, Barbie, that's hilarious,” she gasped. “My brother just turned ten, so I think he might be a *little* young for you. Plus, you know, he only crushes on boys?” She shook her head, still giggling. “Come on in, you two.”

Face burning, Bobby pasted a smile onto his face and swished inside, clutching the strap of his purse much tighter than necessary. If this was supposed to relax him, he was going to need more than a few drinks. A whole lot more.

#

Kimberly couldn't lie: seeing her ex attend a house party as a hot blonde was an absolute treat. They had gone to plenty of parties together back when they dated, and Bobby had always been quick to make himself the center of attention, bragging about his latest exploits on the court or cracking jokes with his teammates, all the while standing with one possessive arm around her waist as if she were some kind of prop.

Of course, he'd also taken the opportunity to check out other girls as they walked by, and after a few drinks he was liable to start flirting with them, too. Kimberly had always been forced to scramble to keep his attention on her, usually by dragging him to the dance floor for some grinding or by letting him get a little frisky on the couch.

Times had definitely changed. Bobby was still getting plenty of attention from male admirers, but they were "admiring" very different things now. From the instant they entered the party, basically every guy inside had been ogling him like a piece of meat, either captivated by his long tanned legs, drooling over his flat stomach and tempting cleavage, or just plain love-struck at the sight of his pretty face. Kimberly could guess that at least half of them were already fantasizing about where they would like to put his glossy red lips.



But it wasn't just his beautiful appearance that was getting him so much attention -- whether he knew it or not, Bobby's own body language was equally to blame. Whatever Serena had been doing to him was obviously having an effect, because his graceful high-heeled stride had morphed into something Kimberly could have never taught him: a bouncy, neck-snapping, "come get it" strut that absolutely screamed sex.

At the same time, Bobby's total refusal to meet anyone's eye, choosing instead to dip his luxurious black lashes towards the floor, made him look like an incorrigible flirt -- the way he kept tossing his hair and playing with his earrings certainly didn't help matters, either. It was no wonder every other guy at the party seemed to have forgotten how to form complete sentences.

"Come on, let's get some drinks," Kimberly said, pulling him towards the kitchen.

“Good idea,” Bobby said weakly.

The kitchen counter was loaded with various types of booze: Kimberly saw Grey Goose, rum, a few wine bottles, and, of course, a cooler. Bobby groped for the beer as soon as they were within reach, but Kimberly slapped his hand away.

“Image, remember?” she chided. “Here, have a cooler.” She plucked out the girliest-looking strawberry spritzer she’d ever seen and handed it to him. He grimaced, then took it.

“They only have Bud Lite, anyways,” he said. “I hate that stuff. Why doesn’t anyone ever just have normal Budweiser?”

Kimberly tried not to smirk. She grabbed a drink of her own, then looked around to survey the party scene. It was definitely a step up from the usual Jefferson High variety -- St. Ceylan’s kids tended to come from rich families, and were preppy to a fault.

The boys certainly didn’t mind Bobby’s outfit, but she noticed a few girls, who were dressed stylishly but not showing nearly as much skin, shoot him snobbish glances. She scanned the crowd until she saw who she was looking for: not Josh, but a guy from the St. Ceylan’s football team named Kevin Naismith.

“Barbie, look at that boy over there,” she said, pointing him out. “Doesn’t he look like a buff, red-headed version of Adam Sandler?”

Bobby followed her finger, frowning. “Yeah, I don’t see it, Kimmy.”

“Keep looking,” Kimberly urged. “Wait until you see him in profile.”

Bobby kept staring, and Kevin, who she happened to know had been creeping “Barbie’s” Instagram on the daily for the past couple weeks, finally noticed. He looked slightly surprised, then gave Bobby a cheeky wink. Kimberly watched a blush spread over her ex’s face.

“Still don’t see it,” he said, taking a would-be casual swig from his spritzer -- it went down the wrong pipe, making him cough and dribble a bit into his cleavage. Blushing even brighter, he grabbed a napkin and sponged himself off. “So, um, what’s new with you?” he asked, trying to regain some dignity. “Did you do the cosmetology homework?”

“You’re really the queen of small talk,” Kimberly remarked dryly. “Finish that thing already. You drink like a baby.”

Bobby, clearly affronted, drained the rest of the spritzer in a single chug, drawing some slightly intrigued looks from the guys hanging around the kitchen. Kimberly was counting on the alcohol to loosen Bobby up a lot quicker than usual -- he hadn’t partied once since the initial “Barbie”

incident, and he'd lost significant mass since then thanks to the hormone pills and, more recently, his mom's strict diet plan.

For some reason she felt guiltier about plying her ex with alcohol than she did about forcing him to live as a girl, but it was all part of the plan. After three spritzers and a shot of vodka, she could tell Bobby was definitely starting to enjoy himself a little. They had been joined temporarily by a couple St. Ceylan's girls, who had been curious to meet "Barbie" in person and take a group selfie together, but both girls were now stumbling off towards the basement to dance.

"These spritzer things actually taste pretty good, you know," Bobby said. He took another glance at the two girls' butts, and his pouty red lips formed a devilish smirk. "And those St. Ceylan's chicks weren't so bad either."

Kimberly seized her opening. "Let's go dance with them, then," she said. "You can get a nice close look." She grabbed his wrist.

"Hey, wait, hold on," Bobby stammered. "I can't, you know... Because I'm a girl, now, and..."

Kimberly knew he was tipsy, but hearing those words come out of his lipstick-coated mouth was still heaven. "Barbie, girls aren't like boys, okay?" she said, smiling deviously. "We're not terrified of a little girl-on-girl contact. Come on, it'll be fun."

She didn't give him time to think about it, instead tightening her grip on his wrist and threading her way through the party to the basement stairs. The lights were dim, and the music was really thumping. A game of beer pong was going on in one corner, but most of the space was full of people dancing.

"I don't know how to dance like a girl!" Bobby protested.

Kimberly pretended she couldn't hear, putting a finger to one ear, then dragged him out into the middle of the dance floor. The male occupants perked up immediately -- the sudden appearance of two attractive blondes, one of whom was wearing a skirt so short it was barely covering both ass cheeks, could not go unnoticed.

Kimberly played it up for all it was worth, shaking her hips and grinding teasingly against her ex. He had a look of confusion and longing on his prettily made-up face, probably because he wasn't "responding" to the female form how he used to, but once the St. Ceylan's girls came over to join them he forced a smile onto his lips and started to dance, watching what the females around him were doing and trying his best to imitate.



Her ex had never had much of a sense of rhythm, but in this particular situation it couldn't have mattered less. All he needed to do was toss his blonde hair, shimmy his shoulders, and shake his booty a little, and the male half of the dance floor developed a sudden jaw disorder.

The two girls from St. Ceylan's were eating it up, though Kimberly suspected they were mostly getting a kick out of the novelty of seeing a former basketball star wiggle his butt in a micro miniskirt. The dance floor was getting suddenly crowded, mostly with dudes trying to dance their

way closer to their little foursome, and as soon as Bobby twirled on his high heels, back facing her, Kimberly slipped away.

She was a little buzzed herself at this point, even though she'd tossed the vodka shot into the sink while Bobby wasn't looking, but she had the presence of mind to send Josh a quick message: *Showtime*. Then, she found her burly red-headed football player over at the beer pong table.

"Hi," she said, leaning close to Kevin and pretending to slur. "My friend thinks you're cute, and she's wondering why you won't dance with her? She's the blonde one. You know, the super hot one?"

Kevin Naismith gulped, and she could see his eyes immediately go to the dance floor. He broke into a grin, finished his beer, and wiped his mouth. "Hey, I'm open-minded," he said. "Her name's Barbie, right?"

Kimberly rolled her eyes -- as if he hadn't been obsessively checking Bobby's feed for new photos every day. "That's right," she said. "Go get her, big boy."

He didn't need to be told twice, immediately dance-walking his way towards her oblivious ex. Now Kimberly felt a definite pang of guilt -- she'd been hit on by enough horny drunk guys to know exactly how the next five minutes were going to go -- but she figured if anyone deserved it, it was Bobby Vickerson, misogynist extraordinaire.

Plus, he had a rescuer on the way.

#

Bobby had somehow lost sight of Kimberly, distracted by the St. Ceylan's girl whose cleavage was practically right in his face, but then he felt his ex give his butt a playful swat from behind, making both of the girls giggle. Kimberly had always been kind of into spanking. Since Bobby was buzzed and actually enjoying himself for a change, he decided to play it up a little, putting a manicured hand over his mouth in mock horror, then giving his butt a wiggle.

This time, instead of a swat, Kimberly full-on groped his ass -- and her hands were a lot bigger than he remembered them. Bobby spun around, mock horror turning into real horror, and found himself looking at the broad chest of a guy who towered over him despite his high heels. He tipped his head back and saw the red-haired, definitely-not-Adam Sandler who Kimberly had pointed out earlier.



“What the fuck?” Bobby demanded, feeling his face go hot.

The guy just pointed to his ear, shrugged, and proceeded to grab him by the hips. Bobby stumbled as he was yanked closer -- if it weren't for his week straight of practice in stilettos, he probably would have lost his balance entirely -- and had to catch himself on the only sturdy surface available, which just so happened to be the asshole's chest. The guy grinned down at

the sight of Bobby's dainty manicured hand splayed against his pecs, then leaned down to shout in the smaller boy's ear.

"My name's Kevin!" he yelled, gripping Bobby's free hand in his. His hot breath stank so strongly of alcohol Bobby almost retched. He looked around instinctively for Kimberly, but didn't see her, and the girls from St. Ceylan's were more focused on taking selfies than on his current predicament.

"I don't care what your name is!" Bobby shouted back. "I just want you to fuck -- "

The bass dropped, entirely swallowing his last word, which was unequivocally "off." For some reason, the guy's grin got even wider, and Bobby found himself spun around in Kevin's much stronger arms. Suddenly his skirt-clad butt was grinding up against the guy's crotch, while one of Kevin's hands roamed across his bare midriff. Bobby tried to squirm free, completely mortified.

"I'm a guy, okay?" he shrieked -- he tried to use his old voice to say it, but panic had made his pitch even higher than usual.

"You can just say trans," Kevin shouted back. "And yeah, that's okay!"

Bobby tried desperately to wriggle away, but all he managed to do was rub his buttocks against a growing lump in the guy's jeans. He gave a squeak of horror as he realized what was happening. Kevin leaned down again, blasting Bobby's ear with his hot breath, and his stubble-coated chin brushed Bobby's cheek. He recognized the feel of lips on his neck.

This could not be happening. There was no way a guy was necking him on the dance floor. He looked around desperately, but there was nobody paying attention -- in fact, it seemed like all the other guys were looking the other way now that "Barbie" had been claimed by a big football player. Kevin's fingers brushed his chest, and to Bobby's eternal shame, he felt a strange tingling sensation in his nipples.

He started to hyperventilate, paralyzed by his own shock and fear, as the taller boy rubbed up against him. Why wasn't he kicking this creep in the balls already? He couldn't throw a punch with these nails, but he could definitely scratch his eyes out, so why was he just standing here? Bobby shut his eyes. Maybe if he just waited, the asshole would figure it out and go away, and he wouldn't have to make a scene in front of everybody. Maybe if he...

The music suddenly cut out, and Bobby felt Kevin's grip loosen. Confused but relieved, Bobby opened his eyes and stumbled away -- right into the last person in the world he wanted to see at that moment. Josh Delacroix gently caught him, letting him regain his balance, then turned to Bobby's would-be dance partner with a stern look on his face.

“Kevin, what the hell are you doing, man?” Josh demanded. “She obviously doesn’t want to dance with you. Back off.”

Bobby realized Kevin’s pawing hands had yanked his top askew, revealing the lacy edge of one bra cup. Blushing furiously, he pulled the fabric back into place. Half the party was now staring at them. The drunk asshole, Kevin, was swaying slightly on his feet.

“Dude, she obviously does,” he slurred. “She’s been teasing me all night!”

Bobby, still too upset to speak, shook his head as hard as he could, making his earrings bounce.

“You’re wasted,” Josh said, stepping firmly between them. “Get someone to drive you home, Kevin. Seriously.”

Kevin looked furious for a moment, as if he might take a swing, but Josh had him by a couple inches and showed no signs of backing down. In that exact moment, Bobby wanted nothing more than to see Josh punch him right in the face. Instead of starting a fight, however, Kevin looked over in Bobby’s direction.

“You little cock-tease,” he snarled. “I can’t believe I was going to let you suck my dick.”

Bobby’s mouth fell open in a mixture of shock and rage. Then, to his embarrassment, all the emotions somehow turned into a sense of total helplessness and he burst into tears. Not silent, manly tears, either. He was sobbing and sniffing and completely wrecking his makeup, and everybody was watching.

Josh reached out a hand, a concerned look in his brown eyes, but Bobby slapped it away, then turned and fled up the stairs. He wasn’t sure where he’d set his purse, but he’d kept his iPhone in his bra during the dancing, and now he fished it out to start dialing Kimberly’s number, squinting at the screen through his tears. He put it up to his ear, trembling.

“Hey, it’s Kimberly. Leave me a voicemail if you’re, like, a hundred. Or else just text me like a normal person.”

It was all Bobby could do to keep from hurling his phone at the wall. He barged his way into the closest bathroom and shut the door behind him. Typical Kimmy. The one freaking time he needed her, she was AWOL, probably making out with some other St. Ceylan’s asshole.

Bobby stared at his reflection in the mirror. His makeup was a total mess, eyeliner running down his cheeks, and his blonde hair was tousled from Kevin’s attentions on the dance floor. Half the party had seen him burst into tears, and even worse, he’d done it right in front of Josh Delacroix, his basketball nemesis.

How the hell had his life gotten so screwed up? A few months ago the only way he would have ever shown up to a St. Ceylan's party would be to crash it, steal some beers, maybe break a lamp, and get in a fight. Now he was a hot blonde mess weeping in the bathroom, wearing a tiny top that flaunted his cleavage, a tight denim miniskirt that clung to his butt like a second skin, and high heels that were impractical even *without* any alcohol in his system.

To top it all off, some idiot was now knocking on the door.

"Someone's in here!" Bobby snapped. "Get lost!"

The knob turned -- why the hell wasn't there a lock?

"Hey, this bathroom is *ocupado!*" Bobby yelled. "I'm serious, I'm taking a big shit and..."

Josh Delacroix poked his head in. "Hey," he said sheepishly. "Uh, I grabbed your purse for you, plus some makeup wipes from one of the girls. Figured you might need it." He tentatively held the small Gucci bag through the gap. "Everything okay?"

Bobby snatched it out of his grip, flushing. "Yep," he squeaked. "Yep, yep, totally great in here."

Josh glanced over his shoulder, then, to Bobby's utter horror, stepped inside and shut the door behind him. "Look," he said. "I told Kevin to get the fuck out, and he went home. I'm really sorry he was being such a creep. Do you want me to get you an Uber, or anything?"

Bobby stared at him for a moment, then snapped. "Oh, quit acting so freaking *nice*," he said. "I'm sick of this act. Go ahead and gloat! Seriously! Do it!" He folded his arms across his chest. "The one guy who ever kicked your ass on the basketball court is now crying in the bathroom wearing a freaking micro miniskirt. Get your laughs in, already!"

Josh blinked. But instead of getting mad, or leaving the bathroom, he just awkwardly scratched the back of his neck. "Barbie, you know I never thought of us as enemies, right?" he asked hesitantly.

Bobby narrowed his mascara-streaked eyes. "Meaning what, exactly?"

For some reason, Josh was the one who looked embarrassed. "Well, I always admired you," the St. Ceylan's star said. "I mean, I can only dream about having your handles, or your shooting touch. I used to watch so much tape of Jefferson High games, trying to figure out how you got off that three no matter who was guarding you."

It was Bobby's turn to blink. "Seriously?" he demanded.

"Of course," Josh said. "And I still admire you. Like, even more now, probably. To think that you were kicking my ass on the basketball court when the whole time you were secretly, you

know..." He made a hesitant gesture, encompassing Bobby's feminine appearance. "I really respect you. That's all."

Bobby swallowed. He had never, in his wildest dreams, expected to be having a conversation like this with Josh Delacroix, especially not in a bathroom. He had always thought Josh's squeaky clean image was just a front, and that Josh hated him every bit as much as he hated Josh.

But now that he was really thinking about it, why had he hated Josh at all? Just for being on St. Ceylan's? If they'd been on the same team, he probably would have loved having a big man who could actually catch and finish lob passes, or cover for him on the defensive end.

"I totally get it if you want to leave," Josh continued. "But I kind of need a beer pong partner." He pulled a six-pack of Budweiser from behind his back. "How about we crush a couple of these, then go hand out some L's?"

Bobby nearly choked up again. "Where did you find Budweiser?" he demanded. "The cooler was all Bud Lite. I *hate* Bud Lite."

"I always bring it from home," Josh explained. "I like it better, too." He popped one open and handed it to Bobby. "Cheers, Barbie."

At that moment, Bobby hardly cared if he was "Barbie" or not. For the first time in over two months, he had what felt like a friend again -- not Kimmy, with her constant bitching and scheming, not the cheerleaders, who were even worse, but a dude friend. With a tremulous smile, he raised his beer.

"Cheers, bro," he said.

Josh chuckled, maybe at hearing the phrase in a breathy feminine pitch, but he clinked his beer can against Bobby's and drained it in one impressive gulp. Bobby took a few moments longer, but still figured he did pretty well considering how long it had been since he chugged. He let out a distinctly un-ladylike burp and tossed the empty into the bathtub.

"Okay," he said. "Let's go wreck some losers at beer pong."

"Definitely," Josh said. "But, uh, maybe fix the makeup first."

Bobby caught sight of himself in the mirror again and winced. "Oh, yeah," he said, rummaging in his purse for his cosmetics. "Just, um, give me a couple minutes. Hey, crack another beer for me, will you?"

#

Part Eight

Parked a few blocks away from Josh's house, Kimberly's curiosity was killing her. She'd left the party early, as planned, and had carefully ignored all of Bobby's texts and calls, leaving Josh the opportunity to swoop in and play the hero. But had he pulled it off? She'd been coaching him for weeks on how to play it cool -- Bobby was already inundated with horny guys who were eager, at least online, to demonstrate how "open-minded" they were. It was essential that Josh came off differently. He had to be the one guy who treated "Barbie" like a normal person instead of an oddity or a sex object.

Of course, in reality, Josh was completely infatuated. If he couldn't keep that under wraps, he would scare Bobby off before things even got rolling. But if it worked, it might just be the final nail in the coffin for her ex's masculine self-image. It would be awfully hard for him to think of himself as a guy when he was busy getting all dolled up for dates with Josh Delacroix. She could just imagine him with Josh's big strong arm around his dainty little waist, or sitting on his lap, or tipping his head back for a kiss...

It was weird, but it was also really hot picturing Bobby as another guy's girlfriend. Kimberly figured she was still a little buzzed, and decided now was not the time for introspection on the matter. She needed to message Josh and find out what was happening back at the party. Just like she had him in her contacts as "Phone Repair Guy," he had her in his contacts as "Aunt Lee" -- it wouldn't do for Bobby to see Josh getting a text from her after she'd ignored all his calls.

Hey Joshy, how are things with you dear? she tapped, trying to sound middle-aged and aunt-like.

For a few minutes there was no answer, but then Josh replied, not with a text, but with a video. Completely intrigued, Kimberly opened it. She was met with a profile view of Bobby, glossy red lips pouted in concentration, holding his blonde hair away from his face with one hand while clutching a little white ping-pong ball in the other. Judging from the flush on his cheeks and slight sway to his slender arm, he was more than a little tipsy.

"For the win in double-overtime," Josh's voice narrated. "Barbie Vickerson lines up the shot... You got this, Barbie. This is *our* table."

Bobby let fly, and Josh's phone moved to show the trajectory of the ping-pong ball. It splashed into a red plastic beer cup on the other end of the table, producing howls of disappointment from the cup's owner but also, simultaneously, a high-pitched squeal of excitement. The phone camera jerked back to Bobby. Kimberly could not quite believe the sound was coming from her ex, but it was.

"That's three in a row!" Bobby exclaimed. "That's a three-peat, suckers!" Had he been wearing more practical shoes, he probably would have been leaping up and down in excitement, but as

it was the best he could manage was an inadvertently-adorable little shuffle dance. His long claw-like nails made fist-pumping out of the question, so instead he was fluttering his hands in excitement, looking for all the world like a ditzy blonde bimbo.

He turned and beamed at the camera -- or at Josh, rather -- then put his hands on his hips and gave a little shimmy. "Hell, yeah!" he chirped. "Who wants to lose next?"



The video jostled and cut out just as he finished speaking, but it looked an awful lot like Josh's arm was already encircling Bobby's slender shoulders. Kimberly blinked. It was a little

perturbing, to see her ex so happy, but obviously the plan had worked. The Bobby Vickerson of two months ago had hated Josh's guts, but "Barbie" was in desperate need of a friend -- and it looked like Josh Delacroix had become just that.

She switched over to her conversation with Bobby and tapped out a message: *Hey, sorry I missed your calls, I got stuck on the phone with my mom and then had to go pick her up. Everything okay?*

She had to wait a full ten minutes before she got a reply, which came in the form of a single, utterly dismissive thumbs up emoji. She rolled her eyes. It was almost like old times.

#

It turned out that tossing ping-pong balls into red plastic party cups was a whole lot harder with inch-long nails, but it didn't matter -- he'd realized after a few rounds that he had developed a whole new superpower, almost superior to his former sharp-shooting. It seemed like all he had to do was bend forward, and the opposition was guaranteed to miss. Badly.

The first time he realized the guys at the other end of the table were taking every opportunity to look down his top, it had turned him into a blushing mess and he'd missed three straight shots trying to awkwardly keep his cleavage from showing. He couldn't help but think about Serena's boob job threat.

"Hey, quit shooting funny," Josh scolded. "Where's your form?"

Bobby flushed. "I'm trying! It's this freaking top, it keeps..."

His partner's eyes traveled down to Bobby's chest, but instead of a lustful leer, he just shrugged. "Use it, Barbie. It's like a mismatch, right? He can't handle you."

Bobby grimaced at the choice of words, but since he didn't want to let his teammate down, the next time their opponent went to shoot Bobby tossed his hair in Serena-approved fashion, pouted his lips, and casually leaned forward to watch. The ping-pong ball didn't even hit the table, slipping right out of the guy's hand into his own cup -- point for team Josh and Barbie. The spectators guffawed.

"Good work," Josh said, with a bit of a smirk, and offered a high-five.

"Whatever," Bobby said, but he returned the high-five as well as he could without scratching his teammate's hand.

Under any other circumstances, it would be completely humiliating, but he was drunk enough to dull his embarrassment -- he and Josh had finished off the Budweisers in the bathroom -- and besides, it was in the service of the thing Bobby loved most: winning. Guys were going to ogle

him no matter what, so he might as well make it into a strategic advantage, right? That way, even if he wasn't shooting so great, he was still helping his team dominate.

All the embarrassing moves and poses Bobby had learned from Serena were now fair game: he played with his skirt, tossed his hair, shimmied his shoulders, and to prevent a potential game-tying shot, even bent down to pretend to adjust his high-heeled sandal, giving his opponent an eyeful of his taut butt. He figured once he got his shooting touch back he would stop, but since he kept missing cups, the only way he could contribute was by distracting the other team -- and it was working like gangbusters, so how could he justify *not* doing it?



Sure, it was demeaning, but as the victories kept racking up, Bobby almost quit caring. For the first time in what felt like forever, he was winning again. And Josh, unlike the other drooling idiots in the room, wasn't ogling him at all. He was just complimenting his tactics, throwing out high-fives, and hitting pretty much every single shot for their team.

Bobby was drunk, he knew that, but even so: Josh was so much cooler than he'd realized. He didn't treat him like he was a chick, or like he was some kind of freak. It was basically like they were just two dudes hanging out together, even if Bobby also happened to be flashing a lot of cleavage. And they obviously made a great team, since they were kicking everyone else's ass. In fact, Bobby was having the time of his life.

When they won their eighth game in a row, Bobby was so excited he threw his arms around Josh without even thinking, just how he would embrace a basketball teammate after sinking a buzzer-beater. Josh was just as pumped up, and Bobby found himself lifted off the ground, spinning in a circle before Josh set him back down.

Under any other circumstances, humiliating. Under these circumstances, while somewhat drunk, it actually felt kind of nice. Other than the occasional hug from his mom, which was usually perfectly calculated to avoid rumpling any clothes or messing up his hair, he hadn't had much physical contact since becoming "Barbie." Being crushed up against Josh's chest had set off the weird but not entirely unpleasant tingling sensation in his breasts.

Not only that, Josh smelled really good. Bobby knew it was probably his imagination, but it seemed like his sense of smell had improved lately, and for some reason Josh's mix of cologne and sweat made his stomach flutter. As he gripped Josh's bicep to steady himself, he realized the much taller boy still had one arm wrapped around his waist. He realized if he were actually a chick, this would be the ideal time for Josh to kiss him. Which was a weird, drunk thought he definitely would not be sharing.

"You're so cool," Bobby said instead, beaming up at him. "I was totally wrong about you, dude."

"You're pretty cool, too," Josh said, eyes fixed on his face -- that was another cool thing about Josh, everybody else wanted to look at his boobs. "We should hang out and watch a game some time. What's your Insta?"

Bobby took Josh's phone and carefully tapped in his Instagram handle. "Ignore all the, like, modeling photos," he muttered. "My sister just made me do this lingerie shoot. Fuck my life, right? Anyways, here you go." He handed the phone back, still smiling vaguely at Josh. "Dude, you have kind of a twitch going on under your eye," he said, pointing it out with one glittery nail. "That can be a symptom of high blood pressure. Who's your doctor? I know this great guy, his name is Dr. Skito, but he's not Japanese, and..." He trailed off into a girlish giggle. "Oh, man, I'm kind of drunk."

"Sounds like a great, uh, doctor," Josh said, shifting from one foot to the other. "I have to hit the bathroom real quick. Set up the cups for next game?"

“You got it,” Bobby said brightly. “Hey, remember that time we went mini-golfing and I thought that one guy had an erection? That cell phone was definitely bigger than Kevin’s junk. Tell him that. Tell him he has a tiny baby weiner.”

“Will do,” Josh grimaced, grabbing an empty chip bowl off the nearest counter and holding it at waist-level. “I’m going to go get the IcyHot. I mean, the chips. I’m going to get more chips on my way to the bathroom.”

He hurried out of the room -- poor dude had probably been holding it during their whole winning streak.

“Get sour cream and onion!” Bobby called after him. “It’s the potato chip of champions!”

#

Kimberly was practically tearing her hair out by the time Josh finally messaged her. He and Bobby had both been totally incommunicado all night, but she hadn’t dared go back to the party to check on things -- she knew Bobby would be embarrassed to have her see him hanging out with Josh, since he’d spent so much time telling her how much he hated the guy, and she didn’t want to risk it. She’d ended up going to bed, barely sleeping, and then waking up early to check for messages from either of them.

She didn’t get what she was waiting for until almost noon: a short message from Josh saying *I think it went okay. Bringing her over to your place now.*

Normally Kimberly would have pretended to not give a shit, but her curiosity was so overwhelming she was actually waiting on the front porch of her house when Josh pulled up in his dad’s Mustang. The blonde hottie in the passenger seat was wearing a pair of white aviator sunglasses and sipping on a smoothie from Orange Julius.

Kimberly watched in amazement as Bobby offered Josh a fist-bump -- the macho action now looked ridiculously cute -- and clambered carefully out of the car. He turned and waved goodbye as Josh drove away, wiggling his manicured fingers, looking for all the world like a girl sending off her boyfriend. Then, with the same seductive slither in his hips as he’d demonstrated at the party, he sashayed up to the porch.



“Hey, Kimmy,” he said, looking slightly embarrassed but also quite pleased. “What a party, huh?” He took the aviators off, observed them for a moment, then tucked them back into his blonde hair. “I mean, I guess you missed most of it, but it was totally lit,” he assured her.

“That was Josh Delacroix,” Kimberly said, choosing to go for the most neutral statement possible.

Bobby blushed. “Yeah, you know, we got to talking last night, and he’s actually pretty okay.”

“Pretty okay?” Kimberly echoed.

“Yeah,” Bobby said, sounding slightly defiant now. “I mean, we absolutely dominated beer pong. Then he kept talking smack about how good he is in NBA2K, so we went back to his house, just, like, the two of us, and played this huge tournament...” He had an almost blissful look on his face recounting it. “He’s actually pretty good, but I still won, and we had a couple more drinks and then, you know, passed out.”

Kimberly blinked. *I think it went okay*, Josh had said. That faux-modest oh-so-humble son of a bitch. He’d gotten Bobby to actually sleep over at his house, and the fact that it had been a completely innocent night of video games would do nothing to dispel the rumors. Bobby had to know that, but clearly he didn’t care.

“Oh, my God, my makeup got *everywhere*,” her ex continued, slipping into an extra girly cadence -- he seemed to do that automatically now whenever he talked about his hair or makeup or shoes. “I was a mess this morning, but Josh snuck me some remover and stuff from his mom’s bathroom. He didn’t even know the difference between lip liner and a brow pencil, can you believe that? Anyways, then we went for breakfast, you know, like, hangover breakfast, and we got smoothies at Orange Julius. And guess what his favorite flavor is?”

Kimberly winced. Josh was taking things over the top -- too many little coincidences would only make Bobby suspicious at some point.

“Banana!” Bobby exclaimed. “Can you believe that dumbass? But I got him to try some of mine, and he admitted it’s pretty good, and next time maybe he’ll get mango.” He tapped the aviators nestled in his blonde hair. “Oh, and he let me borrow his mom’s sunglasses for the ride over. Totally forgot to take them off, but I figure I can return them when we hang out tomorrow.”

Kimberly tempered her enthusiasm, knowing that Bobby would probably push back against anything she pushed too hard for. “So you guys aren’t, uh, enemies anymore?” she asked, hitting the perfect note of skepticism.

“I never really thought of him as an enemy, Kimmy,” her ex said, frowning. “It was just, you know, friendly competition. He’s actually really cool.”

Kimberly noted the transition from “pretty okay” to “really cool,” but decided not to remark on it. “Well, I guess that’s mature of you,” she said.

“Yeah, it really is,” Bobby said proudly. “I mean, he’s also really mature.” He paused for a second, looking oddly nervous all of a sudden. “You guys talk, right?” he asked. “Josh kind of let it slip.”

Kimberly’s satisfaction with a job well done was suddenly replaced by trepidation. “Uh, yeah,” she said, wondering exactly what lover-boy Josh had let slip. “A little bit. I never brought it up, because I thought you guys were, you know, friendly competitors.”

Now Bobby looked even more nervous -- in fact, he was downright blushing. “Does he ever, um, talk about me?” he asked. “It’s just that...” His face went bright red. “It’s just that last night, I noticed he was the only guy who wasn’t checking me out, which was great, of course, and the other day you said something about knowing this guy who thought I was a seven, tops, and I was just wondering if that was him.”

Kimberly could barely contain her glee. Whatever Josh’s faults when it came to wooing, the man clearly had some game after all. She put on a concerned face. “Barbie, I just don’t know if I should tell you that.”

“Why not?” her ex yelled. “I mean, I don’t care. I’m not gay, and Josh isn’t either, so it’s...all...” He trailed off, wincing. “Cool?”

“It’s great you have a boy friend again,” Kimberly said, carefully emphasizing the space between the two nouns.

Bobby flushed. “Guy friend,” he muttered. “Guy friend sounds better.”

Kimberly gave an innocent shrug. “Guy friend it is.”

#

Part Nine

Over the following week, for the first time in what felt like forever, Bobby got the sense that things were all going to work out okay somehow. The cheerleaders had backed off, for one, and were eager to get back into “Barbie’s” good graces now that they knew he was going to be doing a photo shoot with *the* Jan Van Antwerp -- they were now loudly disparaging whatever “jealous weirdo” had taken the bathroom video, as if they hadn’t been the ones sharing it all over the internet.

Bobby wasn’t above making them grovel a little, and he’d even used his newfound influence to suggest Bev and Ally and the rest of them start wearing skirts and stilettos daily, claiming Jan Van Antwerp was appalled by any type of leggings or flats, no matter how trendy. The male half of Jefferson High certainly thanked him for it, as it became typical to hear all the school’s hottest

girls clicking their way through the halls in high heels and flirty skirts, and Bobby knew it would mean at least a few less eyes on his butt throughout the day.

Of course, Serena was still devising new ways to torture him -- one day she would be dragging him to a "stripperercise" class, the next she would have him practicing getting in and out of the Range Rover in the most constricting minidress possible, out on the driveway in full view of the neighbors. But Bobby was able to stick it out with a big fake smile on his face, because once "boot camp" was over he got to go hang out with Josh.

His cover story was that he had a big test coming up in cosmetology class, and that he and Kimberly were studying together every evening -- there was no way he was going to let Serena find out the truth, since she would find a way to ruin it somehow. In reality, he was actually just walking around the corner, to find Josh faithfully waiting to give him a ride.

After spending so long in girly purgatory, hanging out with his former basketball rival was heaven. Normally they would cruise around town for a while, talking about the NBA season and enjoying the horsepower of his dad's Mustang. Bobby even persuaded him to rev the engine at a red light now and again, which always got stares. Then they would head to Josh's place to play video games or watch movies on his massive flatscreen TV. Bobby was getting the hang of using a PlayStation controller with long nails, and it was always competitive.

Of course, whenever they went out to get food together, people always seemed to assume they were a couple. At first Bobby found that humiliating, but after a while he realized it was actually great: the closer he stood to Josh, and the more girly he acted, the fewer guys dared to ogle him. They assumed that "Barbie" was off the market, and Josh was big enough to intimidate them a bit, too. When a blushing Bobby pointed this out to his new buddy, Josh just shrugged, but said they could play it up a little if he thought it might help.

That was how Bobby started getting into the habit of accepting Josh's hand on the small of his back while they walked from the car, or of holding onto Josh's muscular arm while they waited in line -- he was a little startled by how big the other boy's bicep was, especially in comparison to his. The male hormones he was taking had yet to kick in, and compared to Josh his slender arms and wrists were completely dainty.

Clutching onto Josh's arm like an obedient girlfriend would have been humiliating under other circumstances, but since they were both in on the joke, it felt more like they were fooling everybody around them. Plus, Bobby couldn't deny that Josh still smelled really good. Sometimes just being close to him made his stomach flutter for some reason.



That was the one bad thing about being around Josh, or at least the confusing thing. Thanks to all the female change rooms Bobby had been in the past couple weeks, he'd recently seen

more near-naked women up close than in the rest of his life put together. But while he could still enjoy the view, it definitely didn't give him a physical reaction the way it used to.

On the other hand, when Josh had come straight from a workout to meet him, all sweaty and rocking the post-weightlifting "pump," Bobby had felt an instant tingling in his breasts. It had only intensified when Josh changed right there in the car, casually pulling off his shirt to reveal glistening pecs and a six-pack Bobby once would have envied, but now, for some reason, just couldn't stop staring at.

Never suspecting the female hormones coursing through his body, Bobby managed to convince himself it was just the cheerleaders' general boy craziness rubbing off on him somehow. At the same time, no matter how exhausted he was after Serena's latest "bootcamp," he found himself taking extra time with his hair and makeup before he snuck off to meet Josh. He reasoned it was the least he could do: Josh was driving, often paying, and definitely keeping the horny guys away, so the easiest way to repay him was by looking good, and making Josh look good by proxy.

And really, it was a small price to pay for the sheer bliss of having a guy friend to play video games with again. Case in point, right now: he was currently kicking Josh's ass at the latest Call of Duty.

"Boom!" Bobby announced, tossing his controller onto the couch. "That's another in the win column, bitch!"

Josh leaned back with a mock scowl. "You've got to be cheating somehow."

Bobby batted his eyelashes. "Who, me? Nuh-uh. This is pure talent, J-dog."

It was Friday night, meaning Bobby had survived another week of Serena, and he was feeling victorious. The threat of the impending photo shoot was still hanging over his head a little, but talk of the boob job had been forestalled: his mom had found several articles stressing the importance of letting hormone therapy run its course before getting implants.

Of course, Bobby thought to himself, she didn't know that he was secretly taking male hormones instead of female ones -- maybe it was actually a good thing the pharmaceutical company had colored them pink. In any case, by the time the hormones "ran their course," it would be obvious a boob job was out of the question.

"You know, I think I'm going to put this on Insta," Bobby grinned, reaching for his phone. "This is the best K/D ratio I've ever had, and I'm doing it with these things!" He wiggled his glittery pink claws.

“Don’t rub it in,” Josh said. Bobby stuck out his tongue. When he pulled up his Instagram account, he saw a long chain of comments on his latest photo, all from one particular follower, whose handle was @HidingPrincessSupaFan. It looked like all of them contained the same link.

“Some weirdo is trying to make me read their LiveJournal,” Bobby said, frowning. “That’s like Tumblr for old people, right?”

“LiveJournal?” Josh echoed, in a weirdly strangled voice.

Bobby glanced over. Josh had bolted up off the couch and was staring at Bobby’s iPhone as if it were a snake. “Uh, yeah,” Bobby said. “It’s probably a fan thing. People are weird. Might be funny, though, want to look at it?”

To his surprise, Josh grabbed his phone right out of his hands and tossed it aside.

“What the hell?” Bobby snapped, standing up. “That’s an expensive phone, dumbass!”

Josh had a strangely panicky look on his face. “Yeah, I just, uh...” His gaze moved from Bobby’s eyes to his lips.

“Just what?” Bobby frowned. “And why are you -- ”

His next words were cut off by his former basketball rival leaning down and kissing him full on the mouth. Fireworks went off all through Bobby’s feminized body. Josh’s lips had just unleashed a hurricane of pent-up hormones, and it felt like an electric current under his estrogen-softened skin. Stomach fluttering, he had no brain power to process the weirdness of what was happening.

Bobby parted his glossy pink lips and let Josh deepen the kiss. He had to loop his arms around the taller boy’s neck for support as his waxed-smooth legs suddenly went weak. He was vaguely aware that Josh was a guy, and Bobby definitely did *not* kiss guys, but his body didn’t care. His breasts were tingling like crazy and it felt amazing, almost as amazing as the good old days when he could get a reliable hard-on. Besides, Josh was so cool, and they made such a good beer pong team, and it was so fun hanging out together...

With one tiny push from his muscular arms, Josh sent Bobby toppling back onto the couch, lips still locked to his. Bobby gave a small squeal of surprise, which gave Josh’s tongue the perfect opportunity to penetrate Bobby’s mouth, claiming new territory. His muffled protest came out sounding like a moan of pleasure, and a moment later, it actually was. Josh’s hard, muscular body was on top of him, pinning him to the couch, and he felt so small but for some reason it felt so *hot*, and...and...

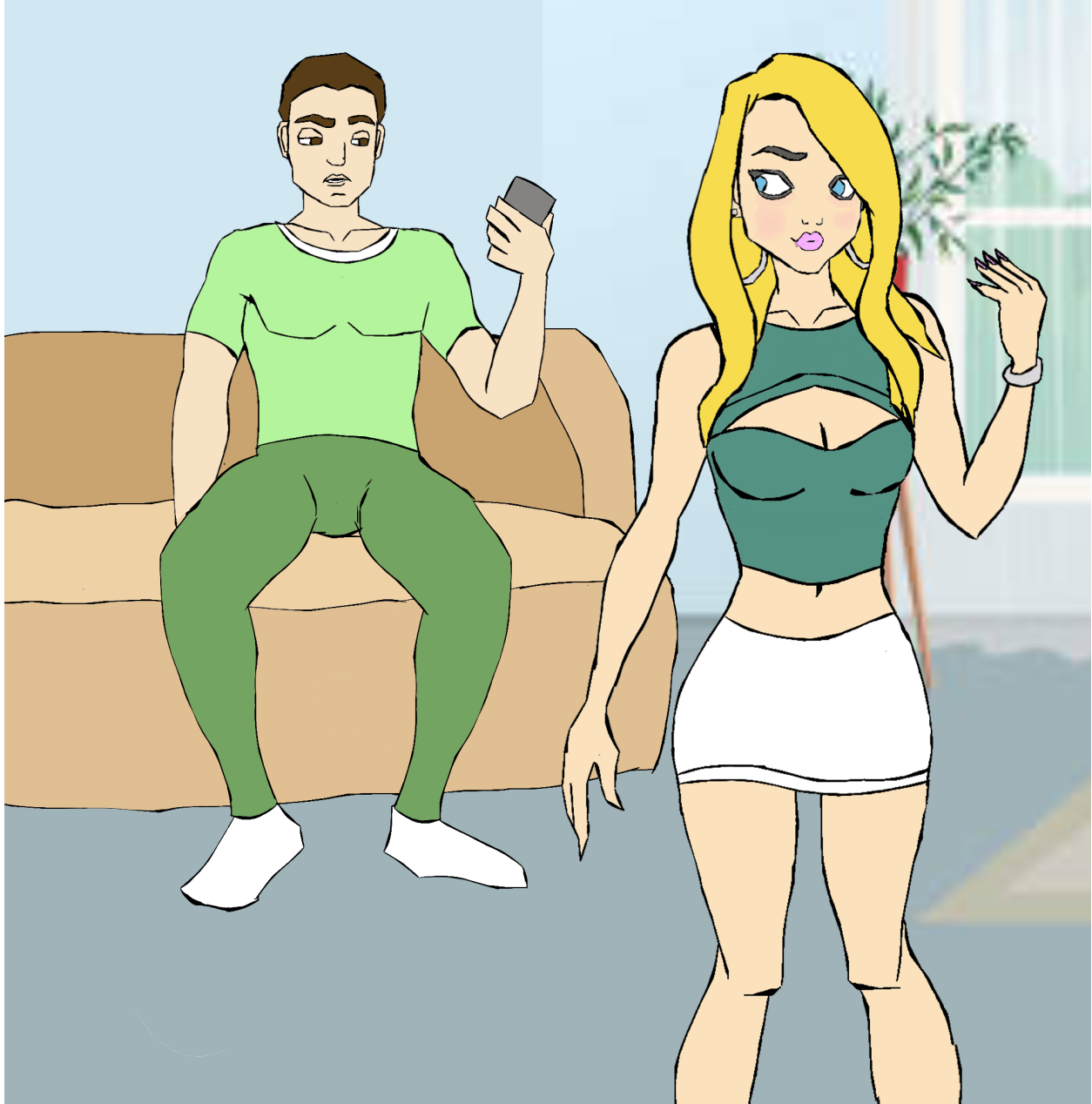
When Josh finally broke off the kiss, Bobby’s head was spinning in circles. He tugged down his skirt, which had ridden almost all the way up his hips. He stared up at Josh, particularly at the lip

gloss he had smeared on Josh's lower lip. He couldn't believe what had just happened. Josh looked almost as stunned, and definitely nervous. Bobby knew he was supposed to start shouting, ask Josh what the hell he was thought he was doing, tell him that he was *not* gay and he did *not* kiss guys. Instead, he looked down through his fluttering eyelashes and blushed.

"So you didn't *really* think I was a seven," he said in a small voice.

Josh had a pained smile on his face. "Barbie, you're a ten," he said. "Can you, uh, go grab us a couple beers? My dad has some in the fridge. Budweiser."

Bobby had never felt more confused in his life, but he also felt undeniably happy. In a daze, he stood up, clutching Josh's arm for balance, and adjusted his top. "Sure," he said, then, in a flash of inspiration, added: "Don't go anywhere."



Still blushing, he scampered away towards the kitchen, putting a little extra “sexy” in his strut for some reason. He completely missed the expression of panic on Josh’s face as the St. Ceylan’s star grabbed for his phone.

#

Kimberly couldn’t believe it. She had gone to absolutely insane lengths to girlyfy her ex, and had worked even harder to cover her tracks. She had invented an anonymous hacker to force Bobby into “coming out,” then sent said hacker to jail. She had persuaded a drug dealer to pretend to be a doctor in order to keep Bobby taking female hormones of his own volition. She had even thrown Serena off her trail by pretending to still be in love with her ex.

And somehow, some way, she had completely forgotten about the *fucking* LiveJournal account. It had been her first move against Bobby, creating an anonymous page where she impersonated him, pretending he was a trans girl stuck in the closet, but it had fallen by the wayside when she teamed up with Josh, whose hacking skills provided a much faster way to get Bobby stuck in the “Barbie” lie.

Now, it had come back to haunt her, and possibly ruin everything.

“Is it down yet?” she demanded, speaking to Josh on the phone in the privacy of her room.

“It’s down,” he confirmed. “I deleted the LiveJournal account, and I just deleted the links that got posted on Barbie’s Instagram, too. Blocked the follower.” He sounded almost as stressed as she was -- at least he recognized the gravity of their situation. “But those links were up on her page for at least a day. People probably clicked them.”

“But the LiveJournal is gone, now,” Kimberly said. “It doesn’t matter who read it, so long as Barbie doesn’t ever read it.”

“Yeah. Yeah.” Josh drew a crackly breath, clearly hesitating to say something.

“Something else?” Kimberly demanded.

“Kimberly, I kissed her.”

Kimberly blinked. “What?”

“I know I was supposed to wait a little longer, but I had to distract her from her phone, so I just went for it,” Josh babbled. “And...”

Kimberly braced herself. Dosed to the gills with estrogen or not, Bobby was still a homophobic little shit at heart, and she had no doubt he’d freaked out at Josh. She’d told her partner in crime to be patient, to wait until Bobby was truly desperate, but now he’d gone and jumped the gun, dashing their shared dream of turning “Barbie” into his submissive little girlfriend.

“It was amazing,” Josh finished. “The connection we had, it was unreal, Kimberly. Like, neither of us could stop. I have a freaking hickey on my neck.”

Kimberly nearly dropped her phone. “Seriously?” she demanded, forgetting the LiveJournal fiasco completely as she was struck by the mental image of her ex-boyfriend cuddled up on Josh’s lap for a hot and heavy makeout session.

“Seriously,” Josh said. “We didn’t, you know, go too far. I didn’t want to scare her off. But what we have is special. I just know it. I can feel it.” His voice was almost shaky with emotion. “But if she ever finds out what you did, I know it’ll all be over.”

“What we did,” Kimberly said flatly. “That’s why she’s never going to find out, remember?”

Her phone buzzed with a new message. She flipped over to her Instagram, checked her DMs, and felt all the color drain out of her face. It was from @officialserenavickerson.

Josh was still talking, but Kimberly couldn’t hear him. She had a weird rushing sound in her ears and felt vaguely sick. She took a gulp of air and tried not to panic. Maybe it was coincidence. Maybe Serena was telling her about some new barre technique. She opened the message.

You should really watch your socials more closely, Kimberly! Don’t worry, someone sent me screenshots before the LiveJournal account disappeared.

Kimberly’s heart started beating double-time. But just because Serena had found the LiveJournal -- of *course* she had, of *course* she had somebody monitoring Bobby’s Instagram for her -- that didn’t mean she knew what she’d found. She would probably think Bobby and Kimberly had written it together, as part of their plan to steal her spotlight. That meant there would be no reason for her to share it with Bobby.

Her phone buzzed again.

I guess I’m still a sucker for high school drama, because I asked some of your friends for details on you and Bobby’s break-up. Apparently he said he would be better off dating a Barbie doll. What a funny coincidence!

Kimberly’s fingers were shaking as she tapped out her reply: *What do you want?*

Just a little chat, woman to woman. Come over to the house tomorrow at 2:00 PM.

She read the message over and over again, breathing much too fast. Serena knew what she’d done, and if she could prove it, it didn’t just mean “Barbie” was gone. It meant Kimberly, and Josh by extension, might be in very, very serious trouble.

“Kimberly?” Josh repeated tinnily. “You still there?”

“I’ve got some studying to do,” she said, forcing herself to sound casual. “Good work taking the LiveJournal down. Talk to you later.”

She ended the call and tossed her phone onto her bed. “Fuck,” she whispered.

#

“Sweetie, those are the *bottoms*. Here, let me help.”

Bobby barely registered the exasperation in his mom’s voice -- he had been in a state of total distraction ever since the events of the previous night. After a couple beers and a little more kissing, he’d carefully repaired his hair and makeup and let Josh drive him home. Sleep had been a temporary respite from the confusion swirling around his brain, but as soon as he’d woken up this morning, what had happened with Josh had been all he could think about.

Which was probably why he had been trying to wrap a pair of blue bikini bottoms around his chest. Flushing, he dropped his arms to his sides and let his mom take over with the actual top, gently fitting his small boobs into the cups and then tying the straps into a pretty bow between his shoulder blades. The Vickerson women -- Bobby realized he was now counted among that number -- were swimsuit shopping.

It was Serena’s idea, of course, just another way to humiliate him, this time by making him try on an endless parade of skimpy swimsuits in front of her and their mom. The store’s air conditioning was cranked up way too high, and his newly-sensitive nipples certainly noticed. Serena was in fine form, too, making constant remarks about his “beach bunny” potential and asking him about his dream cup size. She was downright gleeful today.

But despite the fact that Bobby was stuck in a changing booth displaying his growing boobs to the woman who’d raised him, his embarrassment was dulled by an even bigger conundrum: Josh had yet to message him. He was eagerly checking his iPhone whenever he got the chance, but so far all he’d gotten were texts from Beverly and Ally. Maybe Josh was feeling just as confused about their make-out session as he was, maybe Josh was already regretting it and never wanted to hang out again...

“Can you figure out the bottoms on your own?” Bobby’s mom asked, holding up the matching blue scrap of fabric.

“Yeah, I got it,” Bobby said, blushing. “Do you mind, um, shutting your eyes?”

“It’s nothing I haven’t seen before,” his mom said. “And you’re all tucked up anyways, aren’t you?”

“Mom!” Bobby squealed.

“Shutting my eyes,” his mom sighed, dramatically placing one hand over her face.

Casting another look towards his phone, which showed no new notifications, Bobby grimaced and shucked off his panties, then spent the next minute wrestling with the ties for the bikini bottom -- his nails made doing knots a much bigger struggle than he remembered. When he

was done, the little scrap of fabric was sitting snugly against his hips, presenting a perfectly smooth crotch.

He winced as he observed his reflection in the mirror. Tucking was getting easier and easier, and not just because his technique was improving. It was impossible to deny it any longer: his Little Bobby was definitely littler than it used to be. God, he hoped the male hormones kicked in soon.

“Oh, sweetie, you look *hot*,” his mom said, delighted. “Let’s go show Serena.”

Bobby pasted the smile onto his face, bracing himself for another round of torment from his big sister. Then his iPhone finally buzzed, and he forgot all about Serena in his haste to yank it off the changing booth chair. His heart leapt -- Josh’s name was beside the message.

Hey, what you up to?

Ignoring his mom, Bobby furiously tapped out a reply: *Swimsuit shopping with Mom and Serena, it’s the worst.*

Bobby watched the little dots that showed Josh was writing another message. They disappeared, then reappeared, then disappeared again. Bobby’s stomach felt like it was on a rollercoaster. Was Josh about to bring up last night?

Josh’s new message blinked onto his screen: *Need another opinion?*

Bobby’s stomach flip-flopped. He looked at his reflection in the mirror again, casting a critical eye over his coltish legs, dainty waist, and small but perfect cleavage. There was no use denying it, he looked like the kind of babe he once would have drooled over at the beach. And Josh wasn’t gay, so it made sense that he wanted to get a look, too. It wasn’t all *that* different from sharing a picture of a sexy girl with one of his friends.

“Barbie?” His mom had an eyebrow raised. “Everything okay?”

Bobby adjusted his hair. “Um, you go ahead, Mom,” he said. “I’m just going to take a selfie real quick.”



#

Part Ten

Kimberly's commute over to the Vickerson household seemed to take forever, and, simultaneously, no time at all. She'd spent all night tossing and turning, and her mind was still racing with possibilities, none of them good. Serena clearly knew she was behind everything, and if she showed Bobby the LiveJournal, the jig was up. Nothing would stop him from returning to boyhood as fast as possible. Serena had to know that, so why hadn't she done it already?

Kimberly parked outside her ex's house, waited for an agonizing ten minutes for the dashboard clock to reach 2:00 PM, then got out and headed up the front steps to ring the doorbell. She heard the clicking of high heels approaching, and a moment later the door scooted open a crack, revealing one of Bobby's blue eyes.

"Oh, it's just you," he said, clearly relieved. "The neighbor kid saw me through the window and came over to ask Mom for a cup of sugar or whatever. Took forever to get him to leave, the little shit."

The door eased all the way open, and Kimberly realized why her ex was so reticent. He was wearing a neon turquoise bikini that offset his smooth tanned skin and had some kind of underwire trickery that made him look like at least a B cup. She could see why Josh had had so much trouble keeping his hands off them -- and if Bobby were to actually get that boob job, it would be pretty much impossible.

"Is this a boot camp thing?" Kimberly asked, trying to sound casual.

"Not exactly," Bobby said, blushing. "We went swimsuit shopping, and now of course I have to do a big freaking fashion show, so..." He swallowed. "Not really a great time? What's up?"

"I just wanted to swing by and see how you were doing," Kimberly lied.

Bobby's eyes narrowed. "Um, you haven't been talking to Josh lately, have you?" he asked nervously.

"Nope," Kimberly said blithely. "You two still buddies?"

Her ex's face went red. "Yep. Still buddies. You know, just two dudes hanging out."

"Oh, hey!" Serena had appeared over Bobby's shoulder, wearing a smile that made Kimberly's blood run momentarily cold. "It's your friend from barre class! Kimmy, right?"

"Kimberly," Kimberly corrected through gritted teeth.

"Barbie was just about to model this new bikini for us," Serena said, completely ignoring Bobby's pleading look. "Come on in! It'll be fun."

Under other circumstances, Kimberly would have been overjoyed to watch her pig-headed ex strut around in a skimpy two-piece, but as she followed the Vickerson siblings inside she felt a sense of definite foreboding. Bobby's parents were seated in the living room, where the coffee table had been pushed aside to make room. His mom was sitting back with a glass of wine, while his dad, who looked slightly uncomfortable, was gripping his craft beer much more tightly than was necessary.

“Hi, Kimberly,” Bobby’s mom said brightly -- at least she hadn’t called her Beverly this time. “Did Barbie invite you over for her little show? Come have a seat, dear.”

Still burning with suspicion, Kimberly took the empty seat indicated and looked at Serena, trying to read her face. Her ex’s sister looked genuinely happy, humming to herself as she linked her iPhone to the Bluetooth speaker sitting on the coffee table. Bobby, meanwhile, was fidgeting nervously with the straps of his bikini.

“Oh, this is too perfect,” Serena beamed, selecting a song. “Okay, little sis, give us a show! I want to see all the things we practiced, okay?”

The chirpy, poppy opening of a particularly famous Aqua song started to play, and the expression on Bobby’s face made it look like he had just swallowed broken glass. For a second Kimberly thought her ex was going to put his high-heeled foot down and refuse to do anything to the song “Barbie Girl.” But then he placed both his manicured hands just above the girlish flare of his hips, highlighting his tiny waist, and forced a smile onto his glossy pink lips.



As Bobby started his “walk,” Kimberly was tempted to pinch herself to make sure she wasn’t dreaming. He was back in the six-inch stiletto pumps Serena seemed to have made his standard footwear, but he handled them like a pro, strutting from one end of the living room to the other with a deadly swing to his hips, making his curvy butt swivel in a perfect figure 8 while his boobs jiggled just slightly in his bikini top.

He executed a perfect pirouette in the middle, spinning on his heels as gracefully as any Miss Universe contestant, and tossed his blonde hair, giving his “audience” a playful wink. When he was directly in front of the couch where his parents were sitting, he stopped and struck a seductive pose, exaggerating the camber of his back to draw attention to his curves. His mom looked briefly stunned, then gave a whoop of encouragement. His dad, meanwhile, suddenly had the complexion of a tomato.

But Kimberly realized Serena wasn’t watching Bobby at all -- she was watching *her*. The smirk on her face said it all: this show was for Kimberly’s benefit. Serena winked, then turned back to her little brother and gave him an encouraging nod. Flushing furiously, Bobby bent forward as if to adjust his pump, giving his dad a full peek down his cleavage in the bargain, then straightened up with the sinuous grace of a stripper, tossing his hair once more.

Kimberly could see the blood drain from Mister Vickerson’s face almost instantly. His feminized son was no doubt just as mortified, but he kept the bright white smile in place as he shimmied his shoulders, making his breasts jiggle again, and strutted back to the other side to strike another pose.



By the time the song ended, Bobby's blush had spread to the tops of his boobs and he looked like he was on the verge of committing seppuku. His mom burst into wild applause, almost spilling her wine, while his dad had to swallow very hard before awkwardly joining in.

"Not bad, little sis," Kimberly said. "But what happened to the little thing we practiced where you lick your lips? Photographers love that move. It shows you can be playful, you know?"

"I forgot," Bobby muttered, avoiding Kimberly's eye. "Can I put my clothes on now, Mom?"

“Sweetie, what about the black one?” Bobby’s mom reminded him. “Your father hasn’t seen you in the black one yet.”

“Oh, Daddy, the black one is adorable,” Serena said. “Why don’t you go put it on, Barbie?” She turned to Kimberly, flashing a smile. “She’s getting so good at that pirouette, isn’t she?”

Kimberly blinked. “Way better than I could do,” she admitted, which deepened her ex’s blush.

Serena put a finger to her cheek. “You know, Kimberly, I have this little cowl neck sweater that I think would look great on you,” she said. “Come up to my room, I’ll find it for you while Barbie gets changed.”

Bobby’s parents exchanged a confused glance -- clearly the invitation was out of character -- and Bobby, momentarily forgetting his embarrassment, looked genuinely bewildered. Kimberly felt droplets of sweat forming on her palms. It was finally time for the “little chat” Serena had invited her over for.

“Sure,” she said. “Why not.”

Without looking at her ex, who was still standing there flushing in his bikini, Kimberly followed Serena upstairs. Bobby had always made Serena’s room sound like some kind of shrine, strictly off-limits and kept in a state of perfect cleanliness on the off chance Serena showed up for a brief visit. That was why it had been so shocking when Bobby’s mom ransacked Serena’s closet to find things “Barbie” could wear.

Now Kimberly was finally going to see Serena’s room in person. She was expecting an ultra-stylish, sparsely decorated space, something worthy of a professional fashion model, so when the door opened she was taken aback. Serena’s room was...girly. The bedspread was pink, stuffed animals were sitting on every available surface, and there was even a rumpled boy-band poster on the wall -- Kimberly was pretty sure they’d broken up years ago, and half the members were in rehab.

She knew that Serena’s modeling career had taken off in her early teens, and she hadn’t spent much time at home since, but Serena’s room looked like it had been completely frozen in time. It looked like it belonged to an innocent fifteen-year-old girl, not a cunning, confident world-class fashion model.

“Hideous decor, I know,” Serena said casually, nodding at the stuffed animals on her dresser, but Kimberly thought she saw a tiny spark of affection in her eyes. “Mom and Dad should have cleared this place out years ago.” Serena shrugged, and the spark disappeared: she was all business again, calculated and in control. “Did you like that little show I put on for you, Kimberly?” she asked.

Kimberly swallowed. “I liked it,” she admitted. “So did you.”

"I fucking loved it, actually," Serena said, with a cruel smile. "Little macho man Bobby wiggling around in stilettos with his boobs jiggling just doesn't get old. But I'm sure you know that. After all, you invented this game. I've only just joined."

Kimberly took a deep breath. "The two of us would make a pretty good team," she said, doing her best to keep her voice perfectly smooth and unafraid.

Serena snorted. "I'm not Bobby," she said. "I don't do teams. But I love the game, Kimberly. You are one evil bitch, and I mean that in the best possible way." She waved her phone, and Kimberly saw a glimpse of the LiveJournal screenshots on her screen. "When did you start feeding him hormones?" she asked. "Right from the start?"

Kimberly hesitated for a moment, then let her shoulders slump, trying to look defeated. "Right after the bet," she muttered. Serena knew Kimberly was behind Bobby's transformation into "Barbie," but she didn't know everything -- Josh's involvement, for instance, was still a secret.

Even so, all Serena had to do to end the charade was show her little brother the LiveJournal entries. Particularly, the one that Kimberly had spent all night wishing she hadn't made: a photo of Bobby's painted nails, done at his house while they watched Netflix. He would recognize his room instantly, and know that Kimberly had written all the other entries, too.

"Right, the bet." Serena shook her head, amused. "I watched that video, too. The look on his stupid little face when he missed! Priceless." She flopped down onto her bed, leaving Kimberly to stand in the middle of the room. She grabbed one of the teddy bears and idly picked a bit of lint off its head. "So," she said, "Since this all started with a bet, I think that's how it should end, too."

Kimberly narrowed her eyes. "What do you mean?" she asked.

"I'll get there," Serena said, tossing the teddy bear aside. "You know I've been trying to make Bobby crack. Honestly, I thought it would have happened by now. But you're not letting him. You're keeping him motivated somehow. I guess you've gotten good at pulling his strings."

Kimberly replied with a mute shrug.

"That's why I've been cooking up a photo shoot that'll basically be all his worst nightmares rolled together," Serena said casually. "Here's my bet. If I get Bobby to crack -- if he backs out before or during the shoot -- I win. If I win, I show Bobby the LiveJournal, he realizes what you did, and your game is over."

"Why?" Kimberly blurted. "If you like this as much as I do, why would you let him go back?"

Serena wagged her finger. "That's the problem, Kimberly," she said. "For you, this over-the-top revenge scheme is your whole life. And I mean, I genuinely admire your dedication. But I've got my career to think about."

Kimberly fell silent. She considered her next words carefully. "If you're worried about him getting too much of the spotlight, don't be," she said. "He's going to be trying to *avoid* it. He hates being 'Barbie,' and he definitely doesn't want to be famous for it."

"You really think that what he wants is going to matter?" Serena asked coldly. "Mom and Dad are going to drag him all the way to the top, kicking and screaming, if they have to." Her voice turned bitter. "Once they see dollar signs, that's *all* they see."

Kimberly saw genuine emotion on Serena's face, but only for a moment, and she knew better than to pry open that particular can of worms. She decided to get back onto the bet. "So if Bobby goes through with the photo shoot, I win?" she asked.



Serena nodded. "That's right," she said. "If you can get Bobby to go through with it, all the prep stuff, all the sets, all the scenes, you win. Bobby never sees the LiveJournal, you get to keep your little Barbie doll, and I'll find some other way to make sure 'her' career never takes off."

Kimberly drew a deep breath. She was sure Serena still had some tricks up her sleeve, but if she didn't know about Josh, that meant she didn't know about Josh and Bobby -- and if Kimberly had anything up *her* sleeve, it was that.

"It's a deal," she said.

"Terrific," Serena beamed. "This will be so fun." She got up and went over to her closet. "Let's find you that sweater, before I forget."

Kimberly knew that Beverly or Ally would be wetting themselves at the prospect of borrowing clothes from Serena, but she barely even registered the garment that got thrust into her arms. She was already making plans.

Kimberly had won one bet against a Vickerson, and she'd done it by playing dirty. This time, she suspected she was going to have to play even dirtier.

#

Part Eleven

"You're sure his name is Jam Band Antwerk?" Josh asked.

Bobby gave a small shrug. "It's something like that," he said. "Anyways, he's coming this weekend to do the big shoot. It's going to suck."

It was a Wednesday evening, and they were over at Josh's place, watching ESPN on his dad's oversized flatscreen TV. It was something Bobby had done dozens of times, with dozens of friends, but it was a little different with Josh: for instance, the fact that the taller boy's arm was draped casually around Bobby's slender shoulders. The contact was more than a bit distracting, as was the smell of Josh's cologne.

Normally Bobby would have kicked his stilettos off and curled up more comfortably, but he'd noticed Josh kept glancing at them, kind of intrigued, so he'd kept them on and even bobbed his foot up and down here and there -- not to draw attention to them, or anything like that, but if Josh did notice, well, whatever, right?

"So it's going to be stressful?" Josh asked.

"Big time," Bobby muttered, trying to ignore the way he could feel Josh's deep voice vibrate from his chest. For some reason, it made him go all tingly. Under the guise of adjusting his skirt,

Bobby wriggled in closer, carefully keeping his eyes on the television screen. Josh didn't acknowledge the move, but a moment later his fingers started to casually stroke Bobby's bare arm.

"Maybe you could just ditch it," Josh said. "You know, flee to Mexico or something."

"Um, what?" Bobby squeaked. Josh's fingers had brushed his chest by accident, and through the skimpy material of his top and the lacy cups of his bra, his nipples were tingling like crazy.

Josh, totally oblivious to the hormone bomb he'd set off, reached down and pulled Bobby's blonde hair around to the other side of his neck. Bobby shivered slightly, determinedly watching the TV as Josh's hand, strong and callused from the gym, stroked his neck. When he grabbed onto the dangling hoop in Bobby's earlobe and gave it a gentle tug, Bobby couldn't help but give a little gasp.

"I said, maybe you could flee to Mexico," Josh said. "My parents have a place down there. We could go hide out until the photographer gives up on you."

Bobby bit his lip as Josh continued playing with his earring and running his fingers through his hair. "That sounds cool," he said weakly.

"You and me in Mexico, drinking Coronas on the beach," Josh grinned, then leaned down and claimed Bobby's mouth with the kiss he'd been waiting for. Bobby moaned, then wriggled upright to throw both his arms around the taller boy's neck, pressing his body against him. The mantra he'd come up with was repeating in the back of his mind: *kissing isn't gay, kissing's just kissing, kissing isn't gay...*

Josh's hands found his breasts again, and this time it definitely wasn't an accident. Bobby whimpered as his one-time rival started to gently squeeze. He was vaguely aware that he was still totally limp, tucked away in his panties, but somehow it felt like he was anything but. Suddenly desperate, Bobby shoved Josh's hands away, unzipped his top, and arched his back.

Josh needed no further invitation. Bobby shut his eyes and tried not to moan as Josh massaged tiny circles around his nipples. The material of the bra was so sheer and silky that it might as well not have been there. Bobby had a slightly panicky thought: he hadn't worn this bra on purpose, had he? Had he known he was coming over to Josh's when he put it on?

Then Josh intensified his efforts, sending bolts of electricity through Bobby's whole body, and it hardly seemed to matter. For the first time in a month, Bobby felt like he might actually *get* there.

"You can wear that sexy little bikini you showed me," Josh rumbled. "Teasing all the guys on the beach... You'd like that, wouldn't you?"

Bobby flushed. "Whatever," he gasped. "I wouldn't... I..."

"I know you love that," Josh said, biting gently at his neck. "You love looking sexy. You love making all those poor guys drool over you."

"Shut up," Bobby whimpered.

Josh was clearly turned on, too, completely flushed with a hungry look in his eye Bobby hadn't seen before. Bobby shut his own eyes, trying to just focus on the amazing feeling in his breasts, not on what Josh was saying, and definitely not on the fact that he was on his back on another guy's couch.

Suddenly he felt a hand reach under his skirt and grab his ass. He let out an involuntary squeak as Josh kneaded his cheek.

"They all wish they could get a handful of this," Josh muttered. "But it's all mine, right, Barbie? You're such a sexy little..."

Bobby felt something inside him suddenly snap. "I'm not your fucking girlfriend!" he squealed, shoving Josh backwards. "Get off! Just get off me, Josh!"

He bolted to his feet, wobbling slightly on his stilettos. Josh was frozen on the couch, looking first stunned, then ashamed. Bobby's gaze flicked downwards, towards the lump in Josh's sweatpants, and he felt his face grow even hotter. He grabbed his discarded top from the edge of the couch and slipped it back over his head, zipping it up over his heaving breasts.

"I'm sorry," Josh said. "Shit, I'm so sorry. I got carried away, Barbie."

Bobby didn't know what to feel. Part of him was utterly sick with shame, disgusted with himself that he'd just let himself be groped and fondled by another guy. Another part of him was still incredibly aroused, and wanted nothing more than to get back on the couch and let Josh's hands finish the job. The last part of him was devastated that, for all the time they spent just hanging out together, Josh only thought of him as a piece of ass.

Bobby grabbed his purse and hurried up the stairs without even bothering to fix his makeup.



#

Kimberly was starting to feel like her personal phone number was a crisis hotline. She was used to Bobby calling in a panic, but now Josh was in on it, too.

“I screwed up,” he said, for the fifth or sixth time. “I screwed up so bad, Kimberly.”

“Look, it’s not as bad as you think,” Kimberly sighed, shutting her laptop to better concentrate on the conversation. “She came back after she stormed off, right?”

“Only because she needed a ride,” Josh said. “It’s not like she was going to march across town in those shoes.”

“She could have Ubered,” Kimberly pointed out. “If she asked you for a ride home, she couldn’t have been that mad.”

“She didn’t say a word the whole way,” Josh groaned. “I was apologizing non-stop, and she just ignored me completely, and when her hand accidentally touched the stick shift she almost jumped out of the car.”

“Okay, but back on the couch, before you grabbed her ass and she noticed your, uh, stick shift...” Kimberly couldn’t help but trail off for a moment, caught up imagining her feminized ex engaged in heavy petting with another guy. “She was enjoying herself, right?”

Josh paused on the other end for a second. “I mean, I don’t want to brag, but yeah,” he said. “It looked like she was almost, you know, heading for the big O.”

“And she probably feels guilty about that,” Kimberly said matter-of-factly. “This is why I told you to slow down, lover boy. She might look like your dream girl, but she’s still working through a lifetime of being, you know, a guy?”

She could practically hear Josh wince at the reminder. “Okay, so what do I do?” he asked pleadingly.

“Chill out, is what you do,” Kimberly said. “Stop freaking apologizing. You were horny, you went a little too far, you said sorry. It’s not a big deal -- God knows she’s done it plenty of times. She’s not mad at you, she’s mad at herself.”

“You sure?” Josh asked. “She almost bit my head off when I tried to open the door for her.”

“She’s under a lot of pressure,” Kimberly said. “Just back off for a while. Let her think things through. She’s going to start second-guessing herself. Then she’s going to wonder if she overreacted. Then she’s going to remember how good you made her feel, and before you know it, she’s going to be crawling back.” Kimberly snorted. “You might even get a blowjob out of it.”

Josh was silent for a moment. “That’s not what it’s about,” he said. “I really care about her, Kimberly.”

Kimberly was tempted to ask him how “caring” it was to blackmail someone into crossdressing on webcam, but she knew feeding Josh’s self-delusion was the best way to keep him on her side. “I know you do, Josh,” she said. “And the best thing for her right now is to give her space. Go take your mind off it. Hit the gym or something. No messaging her.”

“Alright,” Josh said. He paused. “This whole thing with her sister being back is really stressing her out. She feels like she’s just...out to get her, I guess. You know anything about it?”

“Sibling rivalry, I guess,” Kimberly said. “I have to go. Talk to you later, Josh.”

“Later,” Josh said glumly.

Kimberly ended the call. She had her reasons for not bringing Josh into this. While she never planned to lose, it was important to have some kind of contingency in place in case it happened. And for this plan, that contingency was Josh.

Kimberly went back to what she’d been doing before the call, scouring the internet for information on a certain Jan Van Antwerp. More specifically, his past work with Serena -- Bobby had mentioned the two had some kind of history together, though he hadn’t known any details. It seemed like they’d worked together quite often. In most of the off-set photos Google found, the pair were smiling and laughing, side by side.

But one still was different. It was an old photo, behind the scenes at a shoot where Serena barely looked older than sixteen. Bobby’s sister was looking sideways at the now-famous photographer, who was young and handsome at the time. Her expression was one Kimberly didn’t think she’d ever seen on Serena’s face before: fear.

Kimberly frowned. Now *that* was interesting.

#

“I don’t see why *I* had to come,” Bobby said sourly, tugging at the hem of his tight white miniskirt. The airport’s air-conditioning was cranked to ridiculous extremes, and he was the only one of the Vickerson “women” with bare legs -- his mom was wearing a fashionable pant suit, and his sister was in distressed black skinny jeans.

“To make a good impression, sweetie,” his mom said. “Hold the sign up, I think I see him! And *smile*, remember? We paid good money for it!”

Bobby pasted a bright smile onto his face and reluctantly lifted the purple construction paper sign up over his blonde head. It read “Jan” in all capital, bright red letters, accompanied by a bunch of doodled hearts -- his mother’s idea, but she was adamant he act like he made it himself.

As for the smile, his mom and sister had taken him to the salon that afternoon to make sure he looked his best for Jan. Along with full body waxing and a new lace front wig, it had also meant a teeth-whitening session followed by collagen injections in his lips. They were still sore and puffy. He’d been hoping the swelling would go away quickly, but thus far he was stuck with a bee-stung pout his mom had coated in a shiny pink lip gloss.



Bobby was painfully aware that his sexy smile and short skirt were attracting looks from more than a few debarking male passengers -- all of whom no doubt wished their name were on the sign. But he gamely kept it in the air as a slight man with a shaved head and an ostentatious fur-trimmed gold coat came bounding towards them, followed by an assistant laden down with an insane amount of luggage.

"The lovely Serena Vickerson and her lovely mother!" the man exclaimed, flouncing right past Bobby as if he wasn't there. He spoke with some kind of European accent, along with a definitely "swishy" cadence. "My God, you both look amazing! What an absolute treat to visit you in your home, here in..." He glanced back at his assistant and snapped his fingers.

"Green Lake," the harried-looking woman supplied.

"Green Lake, Middle of Nowhere, USA!" the man, who was clearly Jan Van Antwerp, finished. He giggled slightly at his own joke, then pulled each of the Vickerson women into an air kiss.

Bobby was starting to think he had developed a superpower, somehow avoiding the flamboyant photographer's notice through the sheer force of distaste, but it wasn't to be. Jan Van Antwerp did a dramatic double-take, swung cartoonishly on his heel, and clapped both hands to his own face.

"And here is our little Barbie doll, just as advertised!" he sang. "Honey, you are gorgeous! Those cheekbones! Those *lips*. The boys must just eat you up!"

Bobby flushed furiously, but Jan wasn't done. The photographer grabbed him by the waist, and in place of an air kiss, gave him a brief but firm peck on the lips, making an exaggerated smacking noise as he did it. Bobby was too stunned to pull away.

"I just had to feel them for myself, honey," Jan said. "Don't look so shocked! My God, 'Rena, is she really this innocent? It's adorable!"

Before Bobby could even react, the photographer was somehow deep in conversation with Serena, scolding his assistant for something, and taking a Bluetooth call all at the same time. Feeling somewhat dazed, he followed the procession towards the exit, where Jan had a rental car waiting. He had just been kissed in public by an extremely gay man, and it seemed like he was the only one who'd even noticed.

"So tomorrow we scout location, and Saturday, bright and early, we begin," Jan announced, as his assistant started hauling the bags out to the curb. "I'm so thrilled to work with 'Rena's little sister, I really am." He gripped Bobby's face between his hands. "Look me in the eyes, honey."

Bobby blinked. "Um, okay?"

“Barbie, I think you have potential,” Jan whispered, staring at him with an almost frightening intensity. He glanced down at the sign that was still clutched in Bobby’s manicured fingers. “Oh, so cute. You little flirt, you!” He patted Bobby on the head as if he were a small child, exchanged another round of kisses with Serena and their mom, then skipped outside to the car.

As soon as he was out of sight, Bobby’s mom let out an audible sigh of relief. “I think that went really well,” she said. “Don’t you, Serena?”

Serena had a smirk on her face as she turned her gaze to Bobby. “Definitely, Mom,” she said. “I think Barbie’s going to have an awful lot of fun with him. I know I always did.”

Bobby couldn’t think of anything less fun-sounding that didn’t involve gruesome death. He was blushing, confused, and exhausted after just a couple minutes in Jan’s company -- a whole day was going to be excruciating.

“I know he’s quite, um, enthusiastic, Barbie,” his mom said slowly, and for a split second it seemed like she was avoiding Serena’s eyes. “But he really is the best.”

Forcing the smile back onto his face for his mom’s benefit, Bobby nodded his pretty blonde head. He was already planning to put Jan’s welcome sign through his dad’s shredder the second they got home.

#

For the first time in a long time, Kimberly could not take her eyes off her ex’s lips. She wasn’t exactly alone in her preoccupation -- all the other cheerleaders were equally entranced, and most of the guys in the cafeteria had developed temporary speech disorders. Bobby, completely oblivious, was busy slathering his ultra-puffy new pout in a shiny pink gloss with the aid of a compact mirror.

“Oh, my God, is there any collagen left?” Ally demanded. “Like, in the world? Those are definite DSLs, girl.”

Bobby snapped his mirror shut, flushing. “Anything for Jan Van Antwerp, I guess,” he said, then, realizing what he’d just said could be taken extremely out-of-context, flushed even redder. “I mean the injections! Not the, uh, sucking.”

“Well, obviously,” Beverly said. “He’s gay, right? He wouldn’t be into a girly girl like you.” The head cheerleader smiled brightly -- she was firmly back to acting like she and Bobby were besties -- and lowered her voice. “So, when’s the shoot? Spill, Barbie!”

“Tomorrow morning,” Bobby said. “Today they’re looking at studios and renting all the equipment and stuff.”

“Do you think they’ll need extra models?” Ally asked innocently. “Or maybe we could just come watch, and get, like discovered?”

Bobby looked physically pained by the idea of the cheerleaders showing up to watch him swish around in revealing outfits on camera. “I don’t know,” he said. “I mean, I’m already bringing Kimberly, so…”

Kimberly briefly shut her eyes. Bobby still had a lot to learn about girl politics. When she opened them, the other cheerleaders were, predictably, staring at her, looking alternately betrayed or curious. “I’m going to be Barbie’s social media coordinator,” she said. “So, you know, I have to go.”

“That must be such a sacrifice for you,” Beverly said cattily, but the bell saved Kimberly from dealing with any more jealousy. She pulled her ex up by the arm, not letting him finish his yogurt cup, and marched him off as quickly as possible under the guise of getting to cosmetology class on time. He pouted his lips at her, which was a lot more sensual than usual.

“What’s the rush?” he whined.

“I just wanted a word alone,” Kimberly said. “You know, to make sure you’re ready for tomorrow.” She lowered her voice. “Serena’s going to hit you with everything she’s got. You’re remembering that, right?”

“Yeah, I know,” Bobby sighed, adjusting the strap of his bra with one manicured finger. “This is her last shot to scare me off, so she’s going all in. I’ll be fine, Kimmy. I mean, it’s just wearing clothes. Jan seemed okay, and you’re going to be there, too, so it’s not like she can do anything too crazy.” He paused. “Please quit staring at my lips.”

Kimberly blinked. “Sorry,” she said. “Couldn’t help it. Seriously, those must use up, like, a full tube of lipstick.”

Bobby grimaced. “Pretty much.”

#

Part Twelve

Saturday morning came much too quickly. After showering, getting dressed, and eating a tiny breakfast carefully calculated to avoid bloating, Bobby climbed into the backseat of the Range Rover. He had it to himself, since Serena had left around 7:00 AM to help Jan set things up. Bobby was still groggy, and spent the car ride playing on his phone.

He couldn’t help but feel a twinge when he saw Josh’s last message, sent to him on Wednesday before the whole couch incident, was still waiting in his inbox: *Okay, see you soon*. Josh hadn’t

sent anything since, and neither had Bobby. If there was any silver lining to doing this photo shoot, Bobby knew it was that it would keep him distracted. He didn't want to dig deep and figure out how he actually felt -- it was painful, and also that stuff was for chicks.

"Here we are!" his dad announced. "Time for the first of many, many big photo shoots, Barbie."

Bobby finally looked up from his iPhone, and his eyes widened. "Wait, I thought we were going to a studio?" he demanded.

His parents exchanged a glance. "Didn't Serena tell you, sweetie?" his mom asked. "We got permission to do the whole shoot at your school! It'll add to the realism, and she thought a familiar environment might help you relax, too."

"Right," Bobby muttered, staring out the window. He suspected Serena didn't have his comfort in mind, but he figured prancing around for a camera would be pretty much the same no matter where he had to do it. It was a Saturday, after all, so it wasn't like he had to worry about running into any classmates.

"Jan and Serena have been setting up all morning, so all we need to do is get you changed, have your hair and makeup done, and then you can jump right in," his mom said. "Isn't this exciting, Barbie? Your first real shoot, and it's with --"

"Jan Van Antwerp," Bobby finished. He forced a smile onto his face for his mom's benefit. "It's *super* exciting."

His dad was already out of the Range Rover, and beat Bobby to the car door before he could open it himself. Blushing, Bobby accepted his dad's arm and made his much-drilled graceful exit, knees locked together as he swung his legs out of the car.

It felt more than a little strange walking into Jefferson High accompanied by his parents. In fact, it brought up some very unpleasant memories of the night "Barbie" had made her big debut to a packed audience at halftime. His sense of unease only intensified when his parents immediately headed for the gym hallway.

"We're doing the shoot in the gym?" Bobby asked nervously. "That's not very, um, scenic. You know, the library has really nice lighting."

"As if you've ever stepped foot in the library," his dad remarked.

"Neither did Serena, and she turned out just fine," his mom said reassuringly, giving her husband a look. "Jan has a very creative vision for the shoot, sort of a past, present, future, thing. But he'll explain it to you, don't worry."

Bobby's stomach sank as they entered the gymnasium. He'd avoided his old domain like the plague ever since his disastrous "coming out" -- he hadn't attended any basketball games, obviously, and his gym class had been replaced by cosmetology. Now, seeing the familiar hardwood with the Jefferson High logo painted at center court, he was flooded with memories of his past exploits. He had led his team to victory so many times in this gym, and now...

Now he was clicking his way inside on a pair of slingback pumps, skirt swirling around his tanned thighs, long blonde hair bouncing around his face, and he was here to do a freaking *photo shoot*. He thought back to what Kimberly had said, about Serena throwing everything she had at him today. Obviously his big sister knew that taking a bunch of ultra-girly photos would be even more embarrassing here, in the gym he'd once dominated.

Well, he wasn't going to show it. As they made their way over to where Jan's assistant was busy unfolding chairs, Bobby clenched his jaw in the same expression of determination he'd once worn while handling the basketball under pressure.

"There's our little Barbie doll!" Jan sang, appearing from behind a stack of camera equipment. "Come here, honey! You *clearly* got enough beauty sleep, because you look *exquisite*."

Bobby pasted a bright smile onto his face, hiding his grimace entirely as the swishy photographer kissed him on the cheek. "Thanks," he said. "Just, you know, happy to be here?"

He cast a look at Serena, whose smirk was already in place, but his attention was redirected when Jan seized both his hands, holding them tightly. His smile faltered and he looked back at the photographer, who had a slightly manic glint in his eye.

"Honey, this shoot is going to blow people away," he said. "Let me explain my vision. I know you're only seventeen, but you're already a very complex girl, Barbie. You have so many *contradictions*. And this shoot is going to highlight that, by contrasting your past with your dazzling future. That's why we're here, in this gymnasium that smells like sweaty boys."

"Cool," Bobby said, trying to subtly tug his hands free. "That sounds, um, really cool."

"So first we use your old life," Jan continued. "The drab, boyish life you never belonged in! The ugly cocoon that kept you trapped! I know this may trigger emotions for you, honey, but I've always believed that art is therapeutic. Now that you're returning to that old life as a beautiful, sexy young woman, you can feel truly empowered." He finally let go of Bobby's hands, snapping his fingers. His assistant hurried over with a garment bag and promptly unzipped it. "That's why you're going to love this first outfit," Jan beamed. "It was your mother's idea, actually."

Bobby glanced anxiously at his mom, who had her hands clapped together in glee. "Remember how I found your old jersey a couple weeks ago, sweetie?" she asked. "I'm so glad I didn't just throw it out."

Jan held out the garment bag. Serena was watching intently with a malicious smile on her face, while Bobby could see his mom was waiting with bated breath. Bracing himself, he reached into the bag and pulled out his old Tomcats jersey. For a split second, as his fingers touched the familiar fabric, he felt a wave of comfort. He could already imagine sliding it over his head, tucking it into his shorts, brandishing his name and number to the crowd as he jogged out onto the court to dominate the opposition.

Except there was a lot less fabric to it than there used to be. Bobby's pretty pink mouth fell open as he lifted what was left of his jersey. Someone skilled with scissors and absolutely diabolical had turned it into a sassy crop top, slicing half of it away to make sure it would show plenty of midriff.

He had gone to battle in that jersey so many times, proving his manliness over and over by embarrassing defenders twice his size and leading his team to wins, and now it had been turned into a flirty little number no athlete, male or female, would ever wear for a game. To his shame, he felt tears welling up in his eyes -- why was he so freaking emotional lately?

"Sweetie, is everything okay?" his mom asked nervously.

Bobby looked up, blinking back his tears. He could see Serena staring at him from over their mom's shoulder, a cold little smile playing on her lips, willing him to break down. He put a big sappy grin on his face and flung his arms around his mom.

"Oh, Mom, I love it!" he exclaimed. "Thank you!" His mom hugged him back, surprised but clearly pleased, and Bobby glared at his sister over her shoulder, subtly raising one manicured middle finger. Serena only rolled her eyes.

"Terrific!" Jan sang. "Then it's hair and makeup time, honey. Scoot! The boys should be here soon."

Bobby thought his stomach had already sunk as far as it could go, but Jan's words proved him wrong. "Boys?" he echoed weakly. "What boys?"

"Sweaty ones, honey," Jan said with an exaggerated wink. "Now get your butt in that chair!"

#

Kimberly waited around outside the studio for a full twenty minutes before she finally got a text from Bobby informing her Serena, sneaky bitch that she was, had changed the location of the photo shoot at the last minute. Fuming inwardly, Kimberly made the drive back across town as quickly as she could, pulling into a spot in the Jefferson High parking lot in an uncharacteristically sloppy park job.

By the time she got to the gymnasium, the shoot was well underway -- and she could barely believe her eyes. Her ex boyfriend was strutting his stuff in an extremely impractical pair of wedge sneakers, wearing a crop-top jersey in Jefferson High colors and matching hot pants that clung to his curvy butt like a second skin. His blonde wig was pulled up high into a sexy, hairspray-pumped pony tail, and big silver hoop earrings gleamed in his ears as he twisted and turned for the camera.



He had a basketball perched on his hip and was flanked by two muscular male models -- one wearing a jersey, the other shirtless. The famous Jan Van Antwerp was circling the trio like a hawk, shouting directions, and Kimberly could see Bobby biting his lip nervously as he struck pose after pose.

Between shots, he kept glancing towards the other end of the gym, where Kimberly saw a bunch of guys from Jefferson High's basketball team going through the motions of a pick-up game, but mostly watching the photo shoot unfold. Serena had outdone herself. Under other circumstances, Kimberly would be over the moon just getting to watch her ex squirm through such a deviously designed scenario. But if Bobby cracked, it would mean disaster for her plans to keep him in skirts, and possibly for her plans to not go to jail.

A familiar, over-loud voice broke her from her thoughts. “Yo, Kimberly, what’s up, girl?”

Kimberly turned and saw DeShawn, wearing his jersey and shorts. “Oh. Hey, DeShawn.”

“You an extra, too?” DeShawn asked, nodding his head towards the gym. “Like, for this photo shoot shit?”

“Just here for moral support,” Kimberly said. “For Barbie.”

DeShawn grimaced slightly, and Kimberly saw a distant look in his eyes. “Dope,” he muttered. “It’s all pretty nuts, you know? Like, his whole...” He thumped his head. “*Her* whole thing,” he corrected, then let out a long sigh. “I don’t get it, yo. Do you get it? Me and Bobby, I mean, shit, me and *Barbie*, we used to be bros, you know?”

“I remember,” Kimberly said dryly. “Look, I have to go check up on her, so...”

“We used to tell each other stuff,” DeShawn continued, now staring at his former teammate with an expression of mingled confusion, betrayal...and more than a hint of lust. “Like, what girls we were smashing, what girls we wanted to smash, how many times we’d actually smashed,” he listed. “But not just that stuff! Real stuff, too, you know? At least, I told *her* real stuff.” He gave a listless shrug. “I guess she was just making shit up the whole time. Acting like we were bros, when the whole time she wanted, you know, *this*.”

Kimberly was momentarily stunned into silence. She’d never really thought of Bobby as having friends -- just misguided admirers. She was sure he’d thought of his basketball teammates as props to make him look good, people who passed him the ball and boosted his ego. But DeShawn, poor gullible DeShawn, seemed to think him and Bobby had actually had some kind of bond that “Barbie’s” appearance had ruined. She almost felt bad for him.

“Some days I still just can’t believe it,” DeShawn muttered. “Like, that used to be our captain, yo. Now he’s... I mean, *she*, is a total dime. She’s the hottest chick in school, you know? No offense, Kimberly. And it’s like she has to keep throwing it in our faces, too, always wearing those tiny skirts and shit. I guess she even asked for us to be here for the photo shoot. What kind of weird game is that, man?”

“I guess she wants to make sure you see the real her,” Kimberly said, then hesitated, feeling slightly guilty at the forlorn look on DeShawn’s face -- after all, she was the one who’d taken his “bro” away. “It’s for the best,” she added. “And maybe some day you two can make up. You better get back in there. Background of a Jan Van Antwerp shoot, that’s a big deal, DeShawn.”

DeShawn gave a morose shrug, still watching his former captain primp and pose, now blushing hanging off one of the male model’s biceps. “Yeah, I guess,” he said. “See you around, girl.”

He headed back to the staged pick-up game, leaving Kimberly free to approach the photo shoot. As she watched, Jan Van Antwerp walked up to Bobby and repositioned him, almost as if he were an actual Barbie doll, moving his hand onto the male model's bare chest and tipping his chin back so Bobby would be looking adoringly up into the taller boy's eyes. Her ex's gaze cut shyly away to his teammates again, with a look of misery and longing.



Kimberly stopped just out of view of the camera and waved. Bobby finally caught sight of her, and his face went even redder. She saw him gesture pleadingly to Jan Van Antwerp. The photographer looked slightly annoyed, but gave a permissive nod.

“Okay, time out, everybody!” he shouted. “Barbie needs to tinkle! We’ll be back to it in ten minutes!”

Bobby clearly didn’t need to be told twice. He pulled his hand away from the male model as if the boy’s pectorals were literally, instead of metaphorically, smoking hot, then hurried towards the exit, determinedly not looking back at his teammates.

As he approached, Kimberly could see he was on the verge of panic. His chest was heaving prettily under the crop-top jersey -- it looked an awful lot like his old Tomcats jersey, now that she saw it up close -- and he had an almost shell-shocked expression in his blue eyes. Kimberly looked over his shoulder and saw Serena staring back at her. Her ex’s sister gave a little wave.

Bobby cast a fearful glance backwards, and shuddered. “Get me the hell out of here, Kimmy,” he hissed. “This is *not* okay.”

Kimberly took her ex by the arm, waving briefly to his parents, then steered him towards the girls’ bathroom. As soon as they were inside, he slumped against the sink top, breathing heavily. His prettily made-up face was a picture of anguish.

“That bitch,” he breathed. “Look what she did to my *jersey*.” He plucked at the fabric of his top, and Kimberly realized it really was his old jersey -- or at least, half of it. “And those two dumbbells I’m supposed to be batting my eyes at don’t even know how to dribble a basketball! They have hands twice my size and they can’t even palm it, the one asshole keeps trying to spin it on his finger and dropping it...” He shook his head furiously, making his silver hoops bounce against his cheeks. “And she brought my freaking teammates here to be extras. Said it would ‘add an air of authenticity.’ So they’re over there playing a game and I’m over here in front of the camera acting like some... Like some dumb *slut*...”

Her ex’s voice broke on the last word. He was red in the face with frustration and embarrassment, and clearly fighting back a sob. Serena had wasted no time bringing out the big guns -- no matter what Bobby had been doing in private with Josh, cavorting around with two hunky male models in front of his former teammates had to be setting off every “gay panic” alarm in his homophobic brain. The fact that he was doing it in full makeup and towering wedges, wearing short shorts and a girlified version of his own jersey that showed off his feminized body, was just icing on the cake.

“Look, you knew this was coming,” Kimberly said. “You’ve got Serena on the ropes, remember? She’s desperate. She’s pulling out all the stops. She doesn’t *want* you to do this photo shoot, because she’s completely terrified of you.”

“She doesn’t look terrified, Kimmy,” Bobby snapped. “She looks like she’s having the time of her freaking life.”

“That’s because *you* look like a mess,” Kimberly retorted. “She thinks you’re in here bawling your eyes out and begging me to drive you home.”

“You’re here to drive me home?” Bobby asked faintly.

“Nope. I’m here to make sure you beat her.” Kimberly put both hands on her ex’s shoulders. “This is a game of chicken, Bobby. You just have to hold in there a little longer. Pretty soon she’s going to be shitting herself, realizing she screwed up, bringing this Antwerp guy in, because guess what? He thinks you’re hotter than Serena ever was. She’s going to be old news, and the best part is, she did it to herself.”

“Wait.” Bobby swallowed. “What did you call me?”

Kimberly frowned. “Barbie?”

“No, you said Bobby.” A shaky smile spread across her ex’s face. “*Bobby.*”

“Maybe I did,” Kimberly admitted. “I guess I -- ”

“Because I’m still Bobby Vickerson,” Bobby said staunchly. “That’s why. No matter what I look like, no matter what I have to wear, I’m still Bobby Vickerson. And Bobby Vickerson doesn’t lose.”

Kimberly blinked, taken aback by his sudden intensity -- she’d honestly kind of thought she’d stomped it out of him. She stood back and watched as her ex checked his makeup, fluffed out his pony tail, and adjusted the short shorts that were trying to ride up inside his butt crack. He drew a deep breath, then nodded to himself in the mirror.

“Let’s go do this thing,” he said. “Come on, Kimmy.”

Kimberly was a little miffed she hadn’t gotten to finish her pep talk, but it seemed like her ex had done it himself for once. “Alright, then,” she said. “Lead the way.”

#

Part Thirteen

Bobby glared daggers at Serena whenever he had the chance to do so unobserved, but in between he was all smiles. Or pouts, or moues, or whatever else Jan Van Antwerp required. So long as Bobby never looked towards the other end of the gym, where his teammates were still

shooting around, he could pretend that the sounds of squeaking sneakers and a bouncing ball were just background noise, and that he wasn't being ogled by the same guys he'd once led to victory on the basketball court.

Of course, that didn't change the fact that he was currently down on the floor, sitting perched on top of the basketball with his head thrown back and back arched to push his boobs up and out. The two dumbass male models weren't in this particular shot, but they seemed to be enjoying the show plenty.

"Play with your hair, honey!" Jan ordered. "Use your left hand, play with your pony tail, and give us a nice sexy pout."

Bobby grimaced, nearly losing his balance as he lifted his left hand and ran his long nails through his pony tail to the renewed clicking of the camera. Serena put her hand on Jan's shoulder and whispered something in his ear, then flashed an innocent smile.

"Rena, you bad, bad girl," Jan said, shaking his head. "I love it. Okay, Barbie, make a fist and give the pony tail a little yank."

Confused, Bobby did as instructed, trying his best not to slip off the basketball.

"Mouth open, honey," Jan ordered. "Pretend it's your boyfriend getting frisky, okay? He's giving your hair a little tug from behind while he's, you know..."

Bobby's mouth fell open of its own volition, and he locked eyes with his dad just as Vickerson senior lost nearly an entire mouthful of coffee. Even Kimberly and his mom had gone red in the face. Bobby was so startled he lost his balance and slipped right off the basketball, landing ass-first on the hardwood with a painful thump that made his butt cheeks jiggle slightly in a way they never would have two months ago.

"Oops," Jan said. "Don't worry, honey, we got the shot. That wide-eyed innocent look is *hot*."

One of the male models offered Bobby a hand up, which he pushed away before getting to his feet on his own, still blushing furiously. The sounds of the pick-up game had stopped short, and before he could stop himself he looked over. His old teammates were staring at him, obviously torn between amusement and the weird hungry look that Bobby was starting to recognize. He blinked hard, setting his false eyelashes aflutter, and quickly looked away -- but not before he heard them start to snicker.

"Let's get another action shot," Jan suggested. "Hold the ball up like you're going to shoot it at the basketball goal."

"It's a net," Bobby muttered through gritted teeth, glaring at Serena. He complied, holding the ball up as if to shoot it, elbow a perfect ninety degrees.

“Not like that,” Jan said impatiently. “Honey, you’re blocking your face. Hold it to the side, fan your fingers more. That’s it. Now, kick up your back leg!”

Utterly mortified, Bobby slowly lifted his back leg. He was holding the ball over his head with one foot cutely popped up behind him in the air, a position no actual basketball player on the planet had ever adopted intentionally, knowing he had to look like some dumb bimbo who had asked her boyfriend to let her try to make a hoop on the basket thingy.



“Now throw it at the basket thingy!” Jan ordered.

Bobby hopped awkwardly off his one foot, heaving the ball towards the basket, and it fell pitifully short. Now even the male models were smirking at him, and there was an open guffaw from the other end of the court.

Bobby turned bright red, whirling to see who was belly laughing. It was Kenny, the worst freaking player on Jefferson High's team. Bobby felt like all the blood in his body was being brought to a boil. Maybe if it had been DeShawn or Chet, he would have been able to turn back around and ignore it.

But it was freaking *Kenny*.

"Jesus," Kenny gasped. "Could she even play for the girls' team now?"

Seething like he'd never seethed before, Bobby leaned down and snatched the basketball up off the floor. He started stalking towards the other net, but only made it a few steps before Jan Van Antwerp slapped the ball out of his hands.

"Earth to Barbie," he said. "Where the fuck are you going, honey?"

Bobby grabbed the ball back before it could bounce twice. He gave the photographer his sweetest smile. "I'm coming right back," he said. "I just have to kick someone's ass at one-on-one really super quick, okay, Jan?" He could feel his smile becoming completely unnatural. "Is that okay with you, Jan? Just really super quick, Jan?"

Jan's eyes widened momentarily, then he broke into a huge grin. "Yes!" he exclaimed. "This is what we were missing, honey! Attitude!" He glanced over at the guys, who were all now staring openly at his model. "But leave the basketball stuff to the boys, honey. Let's channel this into some smolder. Samuel, take your shirt off!"

Bobby glanced back and saw the other male model peeling off his jersey, revealing a six-pack almost as impressive as Josh's. He flushed, angry at himself for mentally comparing two guys' six-packs, and for thinking about Josh at all, then he turned to Jan once again.

"I promise it'll be quick," he said, still pulsating with rage. "You can even take photos if you want."

Jan narrowed his eyes, staring him down for a long moment, but when Bobby didn't look away, the photographer slowly nodded. "Alright," he said. "I don't know what one-on-one is, but it sounds sort of steamy. Just be aware that your prima donna card is one use only, honey. This is my shoot, not yours."

Jan spun on his heel, leaving Bobby free to walk over to where his former teammates were waiting. "You and me, Kenny," he called, hating his high girly voice more than ever. "Come on. One vee one."

“Sure, I’ll be the Ken to your Barbie,” Kenny said, winking. “You free tonight?”

Bobby gritted his teeth. “Funny thing about Ken dolls, they don’t have a dick.”

Even in his heightened emotional state, he realized it wasn’t the best choice of words. The gym had gone totally silent, and his parents were both red in the face. Kenny had stopped laughing, looking disturbed instead.

“Look, Barbie, I don’t want to play a...girl,” he said, enunciating carefully. “If I win, I’m an asshole, if I let you win, I’m a pussy.”

“If you don’t play me, you’re a pussy,” Bobby snapped. “Check the ball. First to five, wins.”

He hurled the ball at Kenny’s chest, still trembling with anger. He was vaguely aware that his mom was apologizing profusely to Jan Van Antwerp, and saw Kimberly was heading his way with a look of panic on her face. There was nothing he could do about his nails, but he took out his hoop earrings, fumbling with the tiny loops until he could slide them free.

“Barbie, this is a bad idea,” Kimberly said. “Kenny’s a dumbass, alright? You have to do the shoot.” She lowered her voice. “You have to beat Serena, remember? Not Kenny. And you’re wearing freaking heels.”

“They’re wedges,” Bobby corrected. “And I could beat this asshole wearing stilettos anyway.”

He dropped his hoop earrings into her hands, adjusted his pony tail, and turned back to his opponent. Kenny, egged on by his teammates, reluctantly checked the ball and settled into a defensive stance. Bobby knew they were probably just amused and intrigued, but that was going to change.

Even if he wasn’t good enough to be a starter anymore, he was definitely better than an end-of-the-bench nobody like Kenny. He was going to show everybody that he could still ball.

“First to five,” Kenny agreed, with a dramatic “what can you do” shrug. “Bring it on, Barbie.”

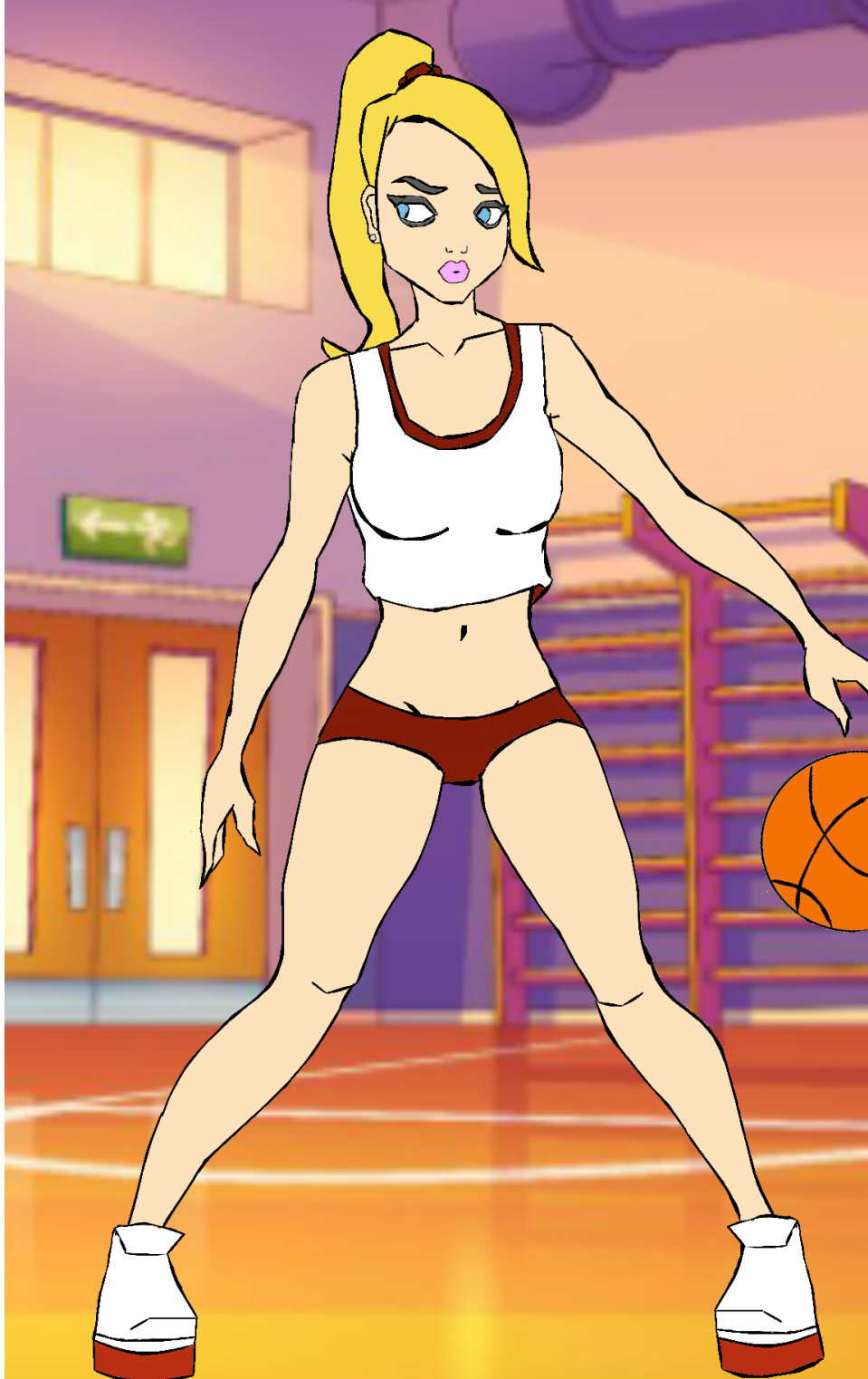
#

Kimberly knew Bobby’s struggles on the court, which had started soon after his lost bet and resultant makeover into “Barbie,” had been mostly mental. He’d been dealing with extreme heckling, a mysterious blackmailer, and the fact that pretty much everybody in Green Lake had recently seen pictures of him in a miniskirt. Obviously her ex was still under a lot of stress, thanks in no small part to Serena, but miniskirts were now part of his everyday attire and he didn’t have to worry about “Barbie” being shown to the world -- that cat was out of the bag.

On the other hand, he had also now been on high-powered female hormones for two straight months, and even she could see that any muscle he'd once earned at the gym was now long gone. He was honestly daintier than a lot of girls on the girls' squad. Kimberly genuinely had no idea what to expect as Bobby bent down to start his dribble, inadvertently giving a great view of his toned, curvy butt.

She was more concerned with Jan Van Antwerp, who looked either furious or incredibly excited, or some combination of both. He was deep in conversation with his assistant, both of them speaking Dutch, and Kimberly couldn't understand a word except "Barbie." She hadn't even considered Bobby might be the one to piss off the photographer instead of vice versa. If Jan stormed off in a huff and cancelled the shoot, did that mean Serena had won the bet?

Kimberly tried to gauge what was going on in her rival's mind, but Bobby's sister was busy watching the game unfold with an expression of mild amusement, arms crossed, hip cocked. His parents, meanwhile, were casting nervous looks at Jan and barely paying attention -- which was basically the same way they'd watched Bobby's real games back when he was a guy. Bobby himself looked as determined to win as she'd ever seen him, though the fake eyelashes and bright pink pout certainly added a new dimension to his facial expression.



Kimberly watched as her ex dribbled forward. He managed to send Kenny leaning the wrong way with a crossover -- for a split second, she could almost picture him with short dark hair and a skinny but masculine body -- but then he fumbled the ball as he tried to dribble past, long nails

getting in the way of his fingertip control. The basketball careened off his foot and Kenny was quick to steal it. Now it was Bobby's turn to play defense, and as he squatted down into position Kimberly realized half his teammates were staring down the front of his jersey, while the other half were admiring the rear view.

Bobby was too intent on the game to notice, watching the ball like a hawk. Kenny dribbled up slowly, then turned to shield the basketball as he worked his way into the post. Bobby had never been the strongest defender, but Kimberly felt almost embarrassed for him now: Kenny backed him down as if he was playing against a little kid, while Bobby, totally unable to hold his ground, stumbled backwards, reduced to slapping at the ball in hopes of a steal.

Jan moved forward to snap a few pictures, and Kimberly realized that Kenny was taking his time for a reason: he was enjoying having Bobby practically draped against him. Her ex's small boobs were pressed up to Kenny's back, and he was definitely close enough to get a whiff of Bobby's flowery perfume. Once he was under the basket, Kenny bumped Bobby out of the way, turned around, and laid the ball in off the glass.

"That's one!" he announced. "And watch the nails, will you?"

Bobby flushed bright red. His jaw was still clenched in concentration, but Kimberly could see real fear in his eyes, too. He was realizing that whatever strength he might have had was now gone -- even a lanky kid like Kenny could back him down easily. On the next possession her ex gambled for a steal, pony-tail bouncing as he jumped forward. The camera flashed. Kenny evaded him easily on his way to yet another lay-up.

"Come on, Barbie!" DeShawn yelled. "Play D with your feet, not your hands, girl!"

Bobby looked over at his old teammate, seemingly dazed, then hunkered down again as Kenny came looking for his third point. It was clear her ex was giving it everything he had: he was flushed and panting with exertion as he tried to keep Kenny from getting to the block, but it was hopeless, and this time when Kenny blew past him he added insult to injury. There was a loud *smack* as his hand swatted Bobby's bottom.

Her ex straightened up with a squeal of anger. "What the hell?" he demanded.

"Hey, if you're going to stick it out like that," Kenny grinned, shrugging. "That's what Ken does to Barbie, right? Three zip."

Kimberly glanced over at Bobby's parents to see their reactions. His mom had a slightly strained "boys will be boys" sort of smile on her face, while his dad looked close to popping a vein. Serena, naturally, looked delighted.

For all his talk, Kenny wasn't much of a shooter: when he tried a jump shot over Bobby's outstretched arms, the ball clanged off the rim and shot straight into his opponent's arms. Bobby

looked almost surprised for a second, then quickly dribbled back out to the three point line, the area where he'd made his bread and butter as Jefferson High's leading scorer. Down three to nothing, Kimberly knew the only way he would get back in the game was to hit from downtown.

"Go ahead, princess," Kenny said, putting his hands behind his back. "Take your time!"

Bobby had an expression of pure fury on his face as he rose up for the jumpshot, the expression of a spurned prom queen or maybe a starlet about to storm off to her trailer. He still had the picture-perfect form Kimberly knew he'd spent countless hours practicing. The only difference was, he hadn't thrown anything heavier than a used makeup wipe in months.

The basketball left his hands in a smooth arc...and barely grazed the bottom of the net.

Bobby's whole body seemed to slump. He stared at the basket in disbelief, pretty pink lips parted in surprise. His former teammates seemed a little stunned themselves. Under normal circumstances they would have been chanting "airball" and mocking whoever had missed like crazy, but instead they were exchanging awkward looks with each other.

Kenny put the ball in the hoop again before Bobby could so much as react. Kimberly watched in amazement as her ex's pouty lower lip started to tremble. His former teammates, DeShawn in particular, looked almost pained.

"Yo, Kenny, quit being a dick!" one of them shouted. "Let her at least get a layup!"

"Yeah, Kenny, let her score, you scrub!" Chet hollered.

Kenny glared at them. "See?" he demanded. "This is exactly what I was talking about!" But, still being a bench-warmer, he deferred to his teammates and passed Bobby the ball. "Okay, do your thing, Barbie," he said, rolling his eyes.

Bobby was standing utterly frozen at the top of the key, cradling the basketball in both manicured hands as if it were suddenly a foreign object. He stared around at his teammates with an almost pleading expression on his face, then glanced back over his shoulder. Kimberly wasn't getting as big a kick out of this as she'd thought she would, but someone certainly was. Serena was smiling at her brother, barely containing her glee.

"Go on, sweetie," Bobby's mom said nervously. "You need to get back to work, remember?"

With a look of total misery, Bobby dribbled forward -- Kenny backed away, making one exaggerated swipe nowhere near the ball -- and made a simple lay-up off the glass. The ball dropped through the net, and his former teammates cheered as if he'd just sunk another game-winner for them against St. Ceylan's. Several of them offered high-fives -- no more fist-pounds, Kimberly noticed -- and a couple pulled Bobby into awkward hugs that lasted just a

little bit too long. DeShawn, in particular, looked a little flushed to have his former friend's soft curves pressed up against him.

"Okay, okay, get lost, boys!" Jan Van Antwerp barked, suddenly striding into the middle of it and shooing Bobby's teammates away. He turned to his model. "Now that you have that out of your system, are you ready to be a good girl and *generously* continue the photo shoot I agreed to fly to..." He paused, asking his assistant something in Dutch.

"Shitsburg?" the timid man suggested.

"The photo shoot I agreed to fly to Shitsburg, Middle of Nowhere, USA, for?" Jan finished.

Bobby's lower lip was still quivering and his blue eyes were still glued to the floor, but he nodded his head submissively, making his blonde pony tail bob.

"Good," Jan said. "We've got two cute boys shirtless and waiting for you, honey. Earrings back in, and fix her makeup, would you, 'Rena?"

Kimberly watched as Serena took her little brother by the hand, the picture of a concerned older sister. "Come on, Barbie," she said. "Let's get you all prettied up again."

She shot a smug look in Kimberly's direction, a look that said, without words, the same disturbing thought Kimberly had been having all afternoon: I might be new to this game of yours, but I can already play it better than you.

#

Bobby couldn't stop replaying the loss in his mind, over and over. While Jan had him tossing his hair and bending over teasingly in front of the shirtless male models, Bobby was thinking about his first drive to the basket, how he should have gone left instead of right. While Jan had him standing between the two models with his cheek in his hand and a sly smile on his glossy pink lips, as if he were trying to decide which stud to go home with, Bobby was thinking about the chance he'd wasted to steal the ball cleanly.

When the first part of the shoot finally, mercifully ended, and he got sent back to the makeup chair, Bobby was thinking about the three-point shot he'd completely airballed even though he'd made it a thousand times before. His mom looked vaguely worried, making nervous small-talk to him while she let his hair out of the pony tail, sending his blonde tresses tumbling around his shoulders, but he could barely hear her. He had lost in one-on-one to Kenny, the very worst player on the team, and it hadn't even been close.

A horrible thought came to him as she started redoing his makeup, a thought that kept sneaking back no matter how many times he pushed it away: if he couldn't beat Kenny, did he even

deserve to go back to being Bobby? Jan's stupid "past, present, future" came back to him, and for a moment he couldn't help but imagine his future as "Barbie."

He saw himself preening and snapping selfies in the airport, boarding a plane to some stupid European city for a stupid fashion show, strutting along a catwalk in nothing but lingerie while Serena smirked at him from the front row, attending an afterparty full of leering men in a low-cut evening gown, hanging off the arm of a guy who looked, for some reason, like Josh...

He shuddered, but his eyes went to iPhone, which was sitting just out of reach. For a brief instant he wanted to message Josh and tell him about everything that had happened, even about losing to Kenny, and express just how miserable and messed-up he was feeling.

"Time for your next outfit, sweetie," his mom said, breaking him from his thoughts. "Come on, let's get you changed."

Bobby meekly followed his mom behind the wheeled curtain and let her help undress him. He was left shivering in his bra and panties for a few moments, still listening to the bounce of the basketball and the shouts of his former teammates from the other end of the gym, then she handed him a tiny, pleated plaid skirt. He stepped into it and slid it up his hips, doing the buttons, then obediently lifted his arms while his mom helped him into a pink, off the shoulder knit top.

His wedge sneakers were traded for white thigh-high socks and a pair of chunky black Mary Janes with a four-inch heel and one-inch platform -- Bobby was familiar enough with his dad's poorly-hidden pornos to realize Jan was going for a sexy school-girl vibe, but he didn't even have enough energy left to feel angry or ashamed about it. As his mom replaced his hoop earrings with studs, and centered a little golden necklace with a heart pendant in the perfect place on his bare collarbone, he felt almost numb.



Serena swept through the curtain, and Bobby instinctively looked down to avoid seeing her triumphant grin. "Mom, let me finish up here," his sister said brightly. "You need a break. Why don't you go grab us all a coffee?"

Bobby was tempted to grab onto his mom's arm and beg her not to leave him, but he found he didn't have the energy for that, either.

"Sure, sweetie," his mom said. "I'll be right back, Barbie. You look so pretty, by the way."

She gave him an air kiss and a dainty hug, accompanied by a slightly worried look, then hurried through the curtain. Serena yanked it shut behind her. Bobby stiffened as her eyes traveled up and down his body, taking in the new outfit. He waited for her to smirk, but instead she looked vaguely wistful, as if she were looking at something familiar.

"Go ahead and gloat," Bobby said bitterly. "I'm waiting."

Serena looked him in the face for a moment, then turned her attention to the rack of skimpy clothes Jan's assistant had wheeled in. She ran her fingers along one of the tops. When she finally spoke, it was in a low voice.

"I'm sorry."

The two words hit Bobby like a bolt of lightning: he had never heard Serena apologize to him for anything, ever, in his entire life. For that matter, he wasn't sure he'd ever heard her apologize to anybody else, either. He stared at her, uncomprehending, but she was keeping her gaze on the clothing rack, carefully inspecting a skirt.

"I brought Jan in because I knew this is the kind of shit he loves," Serena said flatly. "A fresh young model, all wide-eyed and innocent, that he gets to play with like a little sex doll on camera. Having you flirt with the guys, making you touch them, all that stuff. It gets him off."

Bobby narrowed his eyes. All the anger his defeat had drained out of him earlier was on its way back. "Bullshit," he snapped. "*You* planned all this."

"I know," Serena said. "And I brought Jan in because he'd go along with it. And maybe for another reason, too." She fiddled with the frayed hem of the skirt. "I thought it would feel different, being on this side of it for a change. You know, behind the camera? But for some reason I still feel like shit." She finally met Bobby's eye, and he was stunned to see a glimmer of tears. "Shoots like this wrecked me when I was younger," she said. "Lots of girls wouldn't do this. You don't have to do it." She took a deep breath. "Let's end it and go home. Right now. I'll deal with Jan."

Bobby's mouth fell open. After tormenting him for weeks, his sister was actually extending mercy. Waving the white flag. She was willing to let him end this miserable photo shoot early,

and maybe that meant she was willing to give up on her campaign of making his life a living hell. He was a heartbeat from accepting when he heard the voices of his teammates again. He flashed back to the humiliating lay-up, to their faked enthusiasm for him.

Serena was offering this because she pitied him, and Bobby was done being pitied for the day.

“You know, big sis, I think you’re just jealous,” he said through gritted teeth. “Because Jan thinks I’m way hotter than you.”

Serena’s face twitched. She almost laughed for a moment. “You little idiot,” she said. “Jesus Christ. You think it stops with him patting your ass and kissing you on the cheek?”

“What the hell are you talking about?” Bobby snapped. “He’s freaking gay.” He glared at her. “Kimberly said you would try this shit. Try to manipulate me. Well, it’s not going to work.”

Now Serena actually did laugh, a harsh, broken laugh that he’d never heard before. “Oh, Barbie,” she said. “You have no idea what you’re in for.”

The two siblings stared at each other for a moment, then Jan’s distinctive voice rang through the gym: “Where’s my Barbie doll? Where is she?” A second later the photographer came bursting through the curtain, camera in hand. “Honey, I was looking at some of the shots we got, and they are absolutely *fierce*,” he crowed. “Now, we go into the present! You’ve shed your boyish cocoon, and emerged from the chrysalis as a vibrant, feminine butterfly!”

Bobby turned to his sister and gave her his prettiest, most perfect smile, even as Jan wrapped his arm around his waist. “That’s me!” he chirped, looking Serena right in the eye. “I’m a total butterfly!”

Her expression shifted from disappointment, to anger, back to its usual icy indifference. Bobby let Jan loop arms with him and lead him away.

#

Part Fourteen

Kimberly had worried that the disastrous one-on-one game would send Bobby off the deep end, especially after she saw Serena sneak behind the changing curtain to talk to him, but it seemed like her ex was hanging in there. She’d texted him to ask what his big sister had said to him, but he hadn’t replied, and she couldn’t get close enough to talk to him in private in the middle of the photo shoot -- which was now taking place all over Jefferson High.

Compared to having Bobby swish around making eyes at shirtless male models in front of his old basketball team, the “present” shots seemed like a bit of a cakewalk. Kimberly suspected it

was tactical on Serena's part. Bobby had taken the first big punch and stayed standing, so now she wanted to lure him into a false sense of security before she struck again.

Of course, that didn't mean her ex was having a good time, exactly. Kimberly was using her role as "social media coordinator" to stay close to the action, and she had to admit she got a kick out of seeing Bobby playing the ditzy school girl for Jan's camera.

The photographer's idea of a typical day in high school seemed to involve a lot of stretching and bending: the first shot was of Bobby hinged at the waist, leaning down to drink from the water fountain in a way that thrust his butt back into the air, exaggerated the tautness of his calves, and, of course emphasized his pouting, collagen-plumped lips as he prepared to quench his thirst.

Jan insisted on at least a dozen takes, making minute adjustments each time. Bobby's cheeks got progressively pinker, especially when Jan's assistant scurried forward to hike his miniskirt up, exposing just a little peek of his *other* cheeks. It was enough to make Bobby's dad volunteer to go on a completely unnecessary coffee run -- his wife had just gotten back.

Kimberly had noticed earlier that Bobby's mom was not quite her usual self, and she kept a close eye on her as the shoot moved to the hallway. On the surface she was as enthusiastic and encouraging as ever, but Kimberly could see it slip occasionally, usually when Jan had his hands on Bobby to reposition him for a specific shot. She wasn't sure how it could be helpful to her, but the scheming section of her brain was working on it.

The next shot was in the girls' bathroom, where Jan wanted to get video of "Barbie" primping in the mirror.

"My God, it's disgusting in here," the photographer said gleefully, staring around at the dirty bathroom. "I love the authenticity. So American. Go on, honey, go up to the mirror."

Kimberly watched as her ex reluctantly sashayed up to the counter with a purse from wardrobe. She knew he spent more time looking at his reflection as "Barbie" than he ever had as a guy, but she also knew he hated it -- and doing it in front of an audience, well, that just salted the wound. But he had obviously picked up a thing or two from bathroom trips with the popular girls: after casting one defiant glance back at his sister, Bobby faced the mirror and started to vamp like the most shameless, airheaded, self-obsessed bimbo to ever find her own reflection.

Kimberly honestly couldn't take her eyes off it. The same macho, misogynistic jerk she once dated was now wrapping a lock of blonde hair around one manicured finger, twisting this way and that, pouting his puffy pink lips and fluttering his eyelashes. He pulled his blonde cascade of hair around from one side of his neck to the other, fluffing it playfully, then leaned forward with both hands flat on the counter, making his skirt ride up the backs of his thighs.

"Tell me you're not loving this," Serena whispered.

Kimberly flinched. The bathroom wasn't particularly large, and cramming all the equipment in made it even smaller. Somehow Kimberly had ended up shoulder to shoulder with Serena -- probably not an accident. She kept her gaze on her ex.

"It's cute," Kimberly replied. "But pretty tame after the basketball thing. That was..." She paused, feeling a little conflicted about giving her opponent praise. "Nasty."

"It's not my fault he can't play with the big boys anymore," Serena said, in a whisper that was entirely too loud. "I'm not the one feeding him hormones."

Kimberly stiffened. Serena was messing with her, but maybe that was a good thing. Maybe it meant Serena was looking for new angles, because she knew she'd already thrown her strongest punch. Kimberly decided to ignore her, refocusing on the photo shoot instead.

"Pure sex, honey, I love it," Jan shouted. "The lip gloss now! Someone put lip gloss in that fucking purse, right?"

Bobby flushed, but he complied with the photographer's order, daintily unsnapping the purse and reaching inside for a tube of lip gloss. Kimberly watched as her ex pouted his lips and carefully slathered them in a fresh coat of gloss, paused to spread it around, then blew a kiss to his reflection. If his dad had been present, it probably would have caused a cardiac arrest.



“Oh, that’s perfect!” Jan exclaimed. “Now play with your boobs, honey.”

Bobby dropped the lip gloss. It clattered to the bathroom floor and rolled across the tiles, coming to a stop near his mom's foot, but she didn't bend down to retrieve it. She looked almost as stricken as Bobby. Serena, on the other hand, had a particularly vicious smile on her face.

"P-play with my...?" Bobby stammered.

"Your boobs," Jan said, matter-of-factly. "Push them together, jiggle them around a little. I want you to look kind of pouty, okay? Like you wish they were bigger. Don't worry, honey, 'Rena told me all about it. I know you tried to get the boob job for me. Shame they were booked."

Kimberly could see the emotions warring on Bobby's face, humiliation battling his desire to beat his sister. He was still standing there, seemingly paralyzed, when Jan sighed, handed off his camera, and rolled up his sleeves.

"Let me show you what I mean, honey," he said, coming up behind Bobby in the mirror. "I'm going to guide your hands, okay? Just like when I help you get into the right pose."

Kimberly watched her ex's pretty blue eyes go wide as Jan grabbed each of his delicate hands and positioned them over his bust. She felt a sympathetic twinge -- not something she felt often -- as the photographer had him cup his own breasts. She glanced over at Serena, expecting to see her practically cackling.

Instead, Serena wasn't watching Bobby at all. She was looking at her mother, and her mother was looking back with an expression of pure shock on her face. Finally Mrs. Vickerson's eyes returned to her son, who was now reluctantly squeezing his boobs together, pouting at the mirror.

"There you go," Jan said, still pressed up against Bobby from behind. "Have fun with it, honey! They're all yours, you can play with them all you like. And next time we shoot, they'll be nice and big."

Bobby had a stricken look for a moment, but he quickly replaced it with a vacuous smile. Kimberly could see his legs trembling slightly.

"Some models are so skittish when they're just starting out," Jan continued, giving Serena a meaningful look in the mirror. "But you're quite mature already, aren't you, Barbie? You know it's all in good fun."

He gave Bobby a small pat on the buttocks, then finally stepped back. Kimberly released a breath she hadn't even known she was holding in, and it seemed like everyone else in the room did, too -- even Serena. Her facial expression was somewhere between disgust and triumph. Bobby's mom stood frozen for a second, then fled the room altogether.

“That’s terrific, honey,” Jan said, working the camera again. “Now I want you to look a little more thoughtful, okay? Like you’re realizing you’ve finally made it. You’re finally in the girls’ bathroom with your very own boobs, and you have the rest of your life to look forward to as the absolute *bombshell* you were always meant to be...”



Kimberly didn't stay to hear the rest -- it looked like Bobby was still holding it together, or was maybe just too stunned to storm off even after being second-hand groped by his photographer. With everyone's attention back on Bobby, who was now trying to somehow look thoughtful and sexy at the same time, Kimberly slipped out of the bathroom to follow Mrs. Vickerson.

Bobby's mom was a short ways down the hall, standing by the drinking fountain her son had recently been using as a prop. "Oh, hello, Kimberly," she said, in an unnaturally cheery voice. "Isn't this shoot just incredible? Jan really has a...a vision. The final result is going to be fantastic, I just know it."

Kimberly still didn't have the full picture, but she had enough to make an educated guess. She just had to do it in a way that wouldn't put her ex's mom on the defensive -- and sometimes, the simplest methods worked best. "Mrs. Vickerson, are you okay?" she asked softly, trying to sound as innocently concerned as possible.

"Of course I'm okay!" Bobby's mom trilled. "The shoot is going so well! Why would I not be okay, why would I..." She trailed off, and Kimberly saw a sob in her throat. "Oh, my God, she's *punishing me.*"

"Who?" Kimberly asked, feigning confusion even though she had a prime suspect. "Barbie?"

"Serena," Bobby's mom breathed. "She was so young, and back then all of us were just starstruck. I should have stepped in, but I thought..." She trailed off miserably. "I don't know what I thought."

Kimberly remembered the photo she had found, a young Serena looking over at Jan Van Antwerp with an expression of fear on her face. She thought of Bobby in the bathroom, with Jan guiding his hands to his breasts. She realized why Serena had brought Jan in: her surefire plan to make Bobby cave was forcing him through a hell that was already tested, because she'd been through it herself.

"But now it's water under the bridge, isn't it?" Bobby's mom said, regaining herself. "So there's no use talking about it." She whipped out a compact mirror and checked her eye makeup. "You'd better get back in there, Kimberly. This would be a great time for Barbie to get a behind-the-scenes selfie for her Instagram." She paused, then lowered her voice. "Please don't mention any of this to her. The shoot is almost finished, and it really is going to be fantastic. She'll be a star before she knows it."

"I won't say anything," Kimberly said, putting all the empathy she could muster into it. "I know you just want what's best for her. For both your daughters."

Bobby's mom had a shaky, almost pained smile. She nodded.

#

Because Jan wanted to do the final few “present” shots in a classroom, Bobby had to suffer not only through embarrassing photo shoot poses, but also flashbacks to absolutely bombing his last history exam. He was mostly stuck in his desk pretending to inspect his nail polish, staring at the camera with a bored pout, arms folded to push up his cleavage, or doodling hearts on a prop notebook.

Jan had stayed hands-off since the bathroom incident, for which Bobby was grateful. The only reason he hadn’t flipped out was that the photographer was obviously gay, which meant he obviously couldn’t enjoy copping a feel. In fact, Bobby reasoned it wasn’t all that different from one of his teammates slapping him on the ass back before he answered to “Barbie.”

No, the reason he kept replaying it in his mind had nothing to do with Jan, and everything to do with Josh. Fondling his own breasts had been an instant reminder of what had happened on Josh’s couch, and now Bobby couldn’t stop thinking about it.

“That’s it, honey, like you’re day-dreaming in class about some cute guy,” Jan encouraged, snapping another photo. “Tap your pen against your lips!”



Bobby flushed, but followed directions, still carefully avoiding his big sister's eye. A few poses later, Jan announced they were finished. Bobby supposed that meant it was time to move from

“present” to “future” -- the photographer had mentioned a few possibilities for that, none of which Bobby liked.

Apparently Jan and Serena wanted to shoot him in a bikini, as some sort of beauty pageant contestant, or in an evening gown as a successful Hollywood fashionista. They'd even floated the idea of a wedding dress, for a peek ahead at “Barbie’s” big day. Bobby shuddered just to think about it, but at least it would all be done in a studio. He was eager to leave. Being at school on a Saturday felt unnatural on its own, nevermind the fact that he was here prancing around on camera in a miniskirt.

But when he finally followed Jan out of the classroom, he suddenly lost all certainty of what day of the week it was. The hallway was full of his Jefferson High classmates, all of them casting him and the camera crew curious looks as they filed towards the gymnasium. Bobby shot a confused look over at Kimberly, who was looking down at her phone with a nervous expression -- no help there. One of the football players let out a loud wolf-whistle on his way past and Bobby instinctively tugged at the hem of his skirt.

“Um, Jan, what’s going on?” he asked.

“I felt like we needed more extras for this final part of the shoot,” Jan said casually. “So your lovely sister did a little social media blast, and here we are! All the pimply little adolescents you could ever ask for.”

Bobby looked at his sister, who had a grim smile on her face. “But I thought we were going to a studio, finally?” he asked. “You know, for the ‘future’ shots?”

“Past, present, future, it’s too many things for the reader to juggle in their mind,” Jan said, waving his hand dismissively. “I had to cut it down. It’s going to be ‘then and now’ instead. Much catchier. Come, come.”

Bobby only got a second to feel relieved he had escaped a wedding dress, then the photographer grabbed him by the arm and took off towards the gymnasium, leaving his assistant to gather the equipment. Bobby had to mince double-time to keep up, heels clattering on the polished floor. He pulled his hair out of his face and tucked it behind one ear.

By the time they arrived at the entrance to the gym, it was swarming with his classmates -- and not only classmates. Unless he was mistaken, there were kids from other high schools, too. A vaguely familiar dark-haired girl waved at him, beaming, and he nervously waved back. He only remembered she was the host of the St. Ceylan’s house party when she bounced up to him, pulling a ten-year-old boy along with her who could only be her brother.

“Hey, Barbie!” she exclaimed. “I know you’re probably super busy getting ready, but Georgie *begged* me to introduce him.” She shot a hesitant look at Jan. “Is that okay?”

“Oh, that’s fine,” Serena said, cutting in gracefully. “Barbie loves meeting fans, right, little sis? And her ‘social media coordinator’ would no doubt *love* to capture the moment.”

Jan rolled his eyes. “Make it snappy, you two,” he huffed, then flounced away into the gymnasium with a smiling Serena. That left Bobby facing a ten-year-old boy who seemed almost as embarrassed as he was, staring shyly at the floor.

Bobby looked helplessly at Kimberly, who gave him a “get on with it” nod. The situation wasn’t one hundred percent without precedent -- Bobby remembered a bunch of little kids in his neighborhood who always used to hang around watching him shoot, asking him dumb questions, doing the whole “hero worship” thing. He’d always gotten a bit of a kick out of it, but now his one fan was apparently a gay ten-year-old who thought “Barbie” was inspirational.

“Um, hey, George,” he said.

“Georgie,” the boy’s sister whispered.

“Georgie, I mean,” Bobby corrected. He shot a withering glance at Kimberly, who was clearly amused, then pasted a bright white smile onto his face. “Nice to meet you!” he trilled.

With no warning whatsoever, the little boy threw his arms around Bobby’s waist and hugged him tightly. “I love you, Barbie,” he snuffled. “You’re so pretty, and brave, and sometimes I want to wear a princess dress but I know Kyle’s gonna tease me, and I get really sad, but I know *you* would wear the princess dress, so then I can do it anyways, and it’s fun, and I don’t care what Kyle says!”

Bobby had absolutely no idea what to do. He stared at Kimberly, willing her with his panicky eyes to do something, but she just stood back with a small smile playing around her lips. “Oh, that’s cool,” Bobby squeaked, patting the boy awkwardly on the head, knowing he would have definitely been the Kyle of the scenario at ten years old. “Keep, um, doing you?”

Georgie pulled back with a watery smile on his face. “Barbie, can I have your autograph, please?” he asked, waving a piece of paper.

Stunned, but for a moment weirdly gratified, Bobby shrugged. “Sure,” he said. “I don’t have, like, a pen or anything...” He glanced around for Jan’s assistant, but the woman had already disappeared into the gym, laden down with equipment. He rummaged through his purse and pulled out a lip liner. “I guess this works.”

He leaned down to sign his name on the paper, remembering just in time to write “Barbie” instead of Bobby. The boy blushed again, mumbled a thank you, and took off back towards his sister, leaving Bobby and Kimberly alone.

"You know, that was actually kind of sweet," his ex said. She held up her phone, displaying a picture of Bobby signing the autograph, gracefully holding his blonde hair out of his face with one manicured hand like a beauty queen indulging a fan.

"You didn't have to actually take a picture," Bobby grimaced.

"Social media coordinator," Kimberly said. "I have to maintain my cover, or whatever." She paused. "Looks like Serena wants you to have an audience for the final round."

Bobby looked around at the mass of students still moving into the gym. He had an anxious flutter in his stomach. It wasn't just because he was going to be vamping around in front of an audience -- he'd already done it in front of his former teammates, and nothing could be worse than that. It was because seeing the crowd sent him screaming back to the night that had changed his life forever, the night the blackmailer had faked Bobby's "coming out" and stranded him in the gymnasium in a tight red minidress.

"Yeah," Bobby said, trying to wrestle down his anxiety. "Yeah, she tried to make nice while I was getting changed. Said she was sorry and all this bullshit."

Kimberly's eyes widened momentarily. "Uh, and what did you say?"

"Don't worry, Kimmy," Bobby said. "I'm not letting her get in my head. She wanted a photo shoot, she's getting a photo shoot. Jan Van Antwerp is pretty much eating out of the palm of my hand."

An uncomfortable look crossed his ex's face. "Well, good," she said. "Whatever Serena's cooking up for the big finale, we'll handle it together, okay? Let's get in there."

Bobby nodded grimly, took a deep breath, and walked through the doors. Jan's assistant was busy herding all of the students onto one side of the bleachers, to give the appearance of a full house, and Bobby's stomach sank slightly when he realized his former teammates were back in action, this time wearing their actual uniforms while they shot around.

Then he saw Ally, Beverly, and the other cheerleaders all chattering excitedly together, also in uniform, and his stomach absolutely plummeted.

"Oh, shit," he said faintly. "Oh, shit. You have to be kidding me."

He was vaguely aware of Kimberly's grip on his arm as she steered him over to the makeup and wardrobe set up, where Jan and Serena were waiting with matching smiles on their faces. His eyes went to the garment bag in his big sister's arms.

"So, I was thinking to myself, what is the ultimate form of this butterfly?" Jan asked dramatically. "When Barbie finally sheds her cocoon, finally frees herself from this hideous disguise as a

testosterone-pumping basketball player, what does she become?" He paused. "It was actually 'Rena's idea," he admitted ruefully. "But what an idea! Such a brain, your sister has."

Serena held out the garment bag with a cheeky grin. "I think you're really going to like this, Barbie," she said sweetly. "The best part is, all your friends get to be in it, too. Even you, Kimberly. One of the girls brought her spare uniform."

Bobby had never fainted before, but when his sister unzipped the bag, pulling out the skimpiest cheerleader outfit he'd ever seen in his life, his legs buckled underneath him -- if it wasn't for Kimberly holding onto his arm, he probably would have hit the floor.

"Handling it together, remember?" his ex whispered.

Bobby stared at Serena with all the hatred he could muster. He wasn't letting her win. No matter what happened, he wasn't giving her that satisfaction. "Amazing idea, big sis," he said, distantly impressed with the fact he could still speak. "Let's do it."

#

Part Fifteen

Getting Bobby into a cheerleader's uniform had long been nothing but a pipe dream for Kimberly. She'd entertained it as a long term goal, maybe in the scenario where "Barbie" followed Josh off to university and was suddenly free from the scrutiny of people who remembered him as Bobby. But even if Josh convinced his new girlfriend to try out for the squad, Kimberly knew that going from zero cheerleading or gymnastics experience to making a university team was extremely unlikely -- no matter how athletic Bobby had once been.

She hadn't even broached the idea of getting him to join the Jefferson High cheer team. Beverly had done it for her one lunch hour, and the plastic fork Bobby was holding at the time had immediately snapped in two. Considering how much of his strength the hormones had sapped away, Kimberly figured the notion of becoming a cheerleader had triggered the kind of emergency adrenaline most people only experienced in life-or-death situations.

And now here he was, waving a pair of pom-poms and shaking his booty in front of practically everybody he knew. She had to hand it to Serena -- her ex's sister was *not* playing around.

"Give me a T! Give me an O! You already know! Give me an M! Give me a C! That's how it's gotta be!"

Kimberly shouted the cheers on autopilot as she waved her pom-poms. She admired the added cheek of Serena making her join in. Beverly and Ally had messaged her about being extras in the shoot an hour earlier, while Bobby was busy sliding seductively down a locker, and Kimberly

had made the executive decision not to forewarn her ex -- there was too big a chance he would cut and run. Judging by Bobby's initial reaction to the outfit, she'd made the right call.

"Give me an A, T, S! We're better than the rest!"

Kimberly couldn't help but feel slight embarrassment at being made to dance for her opponent, but she was a cheerleader, and besides, she was just one of the pack. Bobby, on the other hand, was the star of the show. Jan had made that excruciatingly clear via megaphone, and he had already reduced Ally to tears for getting too close to his model in one shot.

Bobby was placed front and center, facing the bleachers with the other cheerleaders flanked behind him, and if there was any remaining doubt as to who the center of attention was supposed to be, the outfit he was wearing eliminated it. Serena could have easily had him in a spare uniform, making him just another cheerleader. Instead, she'd gotten a hold of an outfit that had Jefferson High colors -- crimson and white -- but looked more appropriate for bedroom role play than an actual basketball game.

Kimberly honestly couldn't help but admire her ex's body as he wiggled and cavorted: the choker-style top was basically a glorified push-up bra, cradling his cleavage together and leaving everything below the ribcage exposed -- tiny waist, flat tummy, tons of smooth, tanned skin -- until reaching the pleated white micro miniskirt, which sat low enough on his hips to make it clear he waxed down south, and was flimsy enough to flip up every time he kicked or spun around, giving a flash of his bright red panties.

His gorgeous face and sexy body were now just about the only things he had going for him, because he was an absolutely terrible cheerleader. It was clear he had no idea what to do. Bobby had heard the cheers plenty of times, but aside from the occasional leer during halftime, his focus had always been on the game.

Now he was awkwardly hopping up and down in front of the crowd, waving the pom-poms over his head with a panic-stricken white smile framed between his bright red lips. The wedge sneakers were back, which couldn't make things any easier, and his head was adorned with a floppy red bow that did absolutely nothing to keep his blonde hair from constantly tumbling into his face.

"Goooo... Tomcats!" he squeaked, glancing back over his shoulder and trying to copy the other cheerleaders as they struck their final pose.

"Oh, my God," Beverly said in a stage whisper that made Bobby flinch. "The least she could do is actually learn the cheers? Is she *trying* to make us look bad?"

Apparently Jan wasn't too pleased with the performance either. He grabbed the megaphone with a distinct look of disappointment on his face. "Barbie, honey, why do you keep looking back at your little friends?" he demanded, loud enough to make several people wince from the

feedback. "This is your night! This is about you! This is about making your dreams come true, remember? Don't look at them, look at the camera, and please, for the love of God, stop looking like a scared little virgin on prom night."

Kimberly watched her ex's face go just as red as his panties. Bobby was trembling with embarrassment, but he swallowed, nodded, and did his best to smile -- it came out as more of a grimace, for which she couldn't blame him. Jan's assistant ran up to fix his makeup, giving the cheerleaders a chance to put their pom-poms down.



"Of course it's allll about Barbie," Beverly said in a low voice, rolling her eyes. "Jesus, Kimberly, how do you put up with it? She brought us all here to be her little props, and we barely even get to be in the shot! I waxed for this!"

“Jan Van Antwerp is super hot, though, isn’t he?” Ally chimed in. “Oh my God, when he shouted at me I almost got a little wet?”

“There you go,” Kimberly said bracingly, ignoring the mental image. “Being in the background of a Jan Van Antwerp shoot is still a pretty big deal, right?”

Beverly shot a nasty look in Bobby’s direction. “She just wanted us here to show off,” she said. “That last cheer was too easy, girls. I think Barbie can handle something a little faster.”

#

Bobby had figured it out at last: at some point when Serena was making him march up and down the stairs in six-inch stilettos, he had obviously fallen, cracked his head open, and been hospitalized, meaning his current situation was some kind of horrible nightmare he couldn’t wake up from due to being in a coma. It was the only explanation that made sense, because there was no way he could actually be dancing around in front of half of Jefferson High in a sexed-up cheerleader’s uniform.

And yet, everything about it felt extremely freaking real. Everything from the waxy taste of his freshly-applied lipstick, to the ache in his calves as he hopped and kicked, to the cold air caressing his panty-clad bottom every time his skirt flipped up. Beverly was leading another cheer, but he couldn’t see what they were doing to try to copy them, because he was stuck out at the front, facing the bleacher full of his classmates, kids who’d once idolized him for his exploits on the basketball court and were now watching him make a total fool of himself.



Bobby knew the words to the cheers, but he had never watched the routines any longer than necessary to get an eyeful of cleavage or wiggling ass. With his face burning hotter than a frying pan, he did his best to go through the motions he remembered, desperately trying to keep time to the upbeat tempo as he punched his pom-poms into the air and bounced up and down.

When he tried to shake them -- the cheerleaders made it look so easy -- one flew right out of his grip. He had to scurry over to retrieve it, blushing furiously, and that was when the snickering started. People weren't just staring at him, they were *laughing* at him.

As Bobby straightened up, he felt like he was going to be sick. In the minds of his peers, the classmates he used to practically rule over, he wasn't anywhere close to a basketball star anymore. They saw him as the complete opposite: a pretty cheerleader, content to show off her body and entice her team to victory. And the worst part was, he wasn't even good at it. He was just some vain silly bimbo who had begged the photographer to let his "friends" come watch him dance around for them.

He turned back to the camera with a tremulous smile and waved the pom-poms. Jan was not pleased. The photographer looked totally exasperated, and Bobby felt a wave of fear as he grabbed the megaphone again.

"Barbie, honey, how are you still not getting this?" he shouted. "Take five, adolescents." He set the megaphone down and stalked over. Bobby found himself totally unable to meet the man's gaze, instead staring down at the floor through his fluttering false eyelashes. He only looked up when Jan brusquely took him by the chin, forcing his head level.

"Barbie, you are *not* a cheerleader," the photographer said firmly.

Bobby blinked. "I'm... I'm not?"

"Of course not," Jan said disdainfully. "Cheerleading is for girls who are pretty, not for girls who are goddesses. You, honey, are a model. The cheerleaders are out there to be a backdrop, nothing else. They're there to look cute if someone happens to pay attention to them. But you're a model, and you *make* people pay attention. Understood?"

Bobby swallowed. Jan still had his chin cupped in his hand, massaging his cheek with one thumb. "Okay?" he squeaked.

"You have power over that crowd, my little Barbie doll," Jan said. "They shouldn't be laughing. They should be mad with lust or mad with jealousy. Those are the only two acceptable options. Now forget about doing the fucking cheers, and *seduce* me."

The photographer gave him a smack on the ass that made Bobby jump, then walked back to his camera set-up, shouting for the cheerleaders to return to their places. The students in the crowd were still giggling to each other, amused at the spectacle of their former basketball captain dolled up in a sexy outfit trying to improvise a cheerleading routine on the spot.

Bobby caught sight of a girl near the front, a girl he vaguely remembered having the gall to ask him out last year even though she was a six on a good day. She was currently giggling herself sick, clutching onto her friend for support. Bobby decided, then and there, that he was going to

make her and everybody else stop laughing. No matter what. He drew a deep breath, inadvertently pushing out his chest.

The music started up again, and this time he ignored the cheerleaders jumping around behind him, and instead, he started to vamp. With both pom-poms held up behind his head, he made his way towards the camera in a sinuous strut, crossing one foot over the other to push the wriggle of his hips to the limit.



Some of the laughter dissolved, mostly into catcalls, but now Bobby was determined. He used every move Serena had drilled into him during their humiliating “boot camp,” and he was doing it like his life depended on it: he put a hand on the small of his back and thrust out his bottom,

then tossed both pom-poms aside and ran his manicured fingernails up his bare abdomen, shaking his hips in time to music.

The laughter had stopped. Bobby could see his classmates -- mostly the male ones -- suddenly leaning forward in their seats, eyes glued to his every motion. Flushing but dead set on his new goal, he leaned over to stroke his own thigh, stopping teasingly at the hem of his micro miniskirt, giving it a little tug. Someone in the crowd wolf-whistled, making his stomach churn. This was a thousand times worse than doing it in front of just his family: this was on camera, immortalized, and every single one of his peers was watching.

But as bad as it was, it was better than being laughed at. He strutted back and forth in front of the bleacher, posing with his lips pouted together, his eyes half-lidded in the “smolder” Serena had made him practice in the mirror. Jan was as excited as Bobby had ever seen him, circling with the camera as he shouted encouragement. Bobby looked at his big sister, who had put him in this humiliating scenario out of pure spite, then looked at Jan. He opened his lipsticked mouth, then, steeling himself, slowly ran his tongue around his bright red lips.

Jan’s eyes almost bulged out of his head. The camera clicked more furiously than ever, and a few poses later, the photographer held up his hand. “We got it!” he shouted. “Oh, my God, honey, you’re on fire! Last scene, last scene, come get some hair spray!”

Bobby finally let his shoulders slump. He looked up at the bleacher full of his classmates, and realized every single one of them was staring back. The guys either had glazed looks on their faces or were hungrily ogling him, while the girls looked almost as intent, either jealously evaluating his body or sizing him up as competition.

When Bobby glanced over his shoulder, he saw similar expressions on the faces of the cheerleaders, except for the few who were glaring cattily at him. Kimberly looked slightly stunned, but when she saw him she smiled and flashed him a thumbs up. Bobby grudgingly returned it, then ducked his head and followed Jan back to the makeup chair. His parents and Serena were all waiting there.

“Oh, sweetie, that was amazing,” his mom said, with a slightly anxious smile. “You looked so good out there.”

“Amazing,” his dad echoed, red in the face. “Very sexy, sweetie.”

Bobby flushed to what was probably a matching shade. “Thanks,” he muttered. “Um, are we almost done, Jan?” He glanced around for the photographer. “Jan?”

“Almost!” Jan sang, re-emerging from behind the changing curtain. “Wow, look at me. I should have been a jock!” He had abandoned his skin-tight pants and fashionably ripped sweater for a Jefferson High basketball jersey and shorts. He was in his thirties, but obviously still in terrific

shape -- Bobby could see the well-cut muscle in his arms. But that didn't explain why he was dressed up like a basketball player.

"Now we get to complete the narrative, little sis," Serena said brightly. "You were out there cheering your team on, but specifically, your boyfriend."

"That's right," Jan said. "Your boyfriend is the star player on the basketball team. He makes the most basket goals of *anybody*." The photographer grinned, flicking at his jersey. "And of course, with his girlfriend cheering him on, he wins the game! Which brings us to our final moment." He exchanged a proud look with Serena. "Everybody is swarming the court, excited beyond belief," he said, framing the imaginary scene with his hands. "And nobody is more excited than Barbie, who runs right up to her big strong man and gives him the victory kiss he so clearly earned."

Bobby felt all the color drain right out of his face. He swayed on his feet, stumbling slightly on the wedges. "But... I mean..." he trailed off, stammering. "I don't think I'd like that?"

His mom spoke in a wavering voice. "Jan, I don't remember you mentioning this earlier..."

Jan cut her off with a raised finger, then turned to Bobby. "Barbie, honey, relax," he said. "I know you were a little shy with the male models this morning. That's why I'm standing in. People almost expect it, now, these little cameos I do -- it breaks the fourth wall just a bit, it's very cheeky." He winked at Serena, who did not wink back. "So, let's make it memorable, okay, honey?"

Bobby gulped. "Wait, aren't you, um, gay?" he demanded, reaching desperately for an excuse.

Jan only chuckled. "Barbie, that's just the fashion photographer vibe," he said. "People expect it, they love it, so I do it. But don't worry, honey, I won't be giving you some weak little stage kiss. Watching you wiggle your ass out there definitely makes a man feel..." He smirked. "Straight."

Bobby's mouth fell open as he flashed back to all the times throughout the day Jan had grabbed his ass or adjusted his boobs. The photographer was straight, and that meant he'd been enjoying himself the whole time, and that meant this kiss...

Bobby gathered himself. He had spent the entire day doing things he'd never, in his worst nightmares, anticipated doing. He had preened and posed in front of his former teammates, been obliterated by freaking *Kenny* in one-on-one, acted like an airheaded bimbo for photos all over Jefferson High, and danced in front of his classmates dressed up as a slutty cheerleader. But this was too far.

"Forget it," he said. "Fuck this. Fuck all of you."

Bobby shoved past his stunned parents. He'd expected to see a look of triumph on his big sister's face, but instead Serena looked almost relieved. He didn't bother to wonder why. He

grabbed his robe off the back of the makeup chair, pulled it around himself, and fled the gymnasium as fast as he could manage on his teetering wedges.

#

Part Sixteen ((Book Two Complete))

Kimberly hadn't been able to get close enough to hear what was said, but judging from the speed at which Bobby was fleeing the gym, Serena had just played her trump card. The realization triggered an emotion Kimberly didn't feel often: genuine fear. She'd thought she had it in the bag. She'd thought that Bobby was humiliated but sticking it out, that Jan was thrilled with his results and ready to wrap it all up.

But clearly Serena had kept one last trick up her sleeve, and now Bobby was trying to ditch the photo shoot. If he did that, he would get the LiveJournal. If he got the LiveJournal, it was all over. Her plans for "Barbie" would be shattered, not to mention her plans for her own life -- if Bobby's parents pressed charges once the whole story came out, things would get very, very ugly for her.

Absolutely ruining the day she created that stupid LiveJournal account, Kimberly threw down her pom-poms and took off after her ex at a full run, not caring if Serena saw. Bobby was sashaying down the gym hallway as quickly as he could, fumbling with the sash of his robe, when she caught up to him.

"Hold on!" she called, grabbing him by the shoulder. "Barbie, what's going on?"

Her ex spun around, and she almost expected him to throw a punch. Instead, he just stared at her with a look of complete detachment. He didn't look angry, or humiliated, or distressed. He looked downright tranquil, and she knew that couldn't be good.

"Hey," he said. "I think I'm leaving."

Kimberly tightened her grip on his arm. Glancing around, she opened the door to the girls' locker room and pushed him inside.

"You're going to be okay," she said, partially trying to reassure herself as well. "Sit down, take a breath, tell me what happened."

She maneuvered Bobby onto one of the benches. He stared down at it for a moment, then took a graceful seat, automatically crossing one long toned leg over the other. She waited for the outburst to arrive, but instead he seemed to be barely aware she was there. There was a mirror on the wall across from them, and Kimberly realized he was staring at his own reflection, still with a dazed expression on his face.

She snapped her fingers in front of his eyes. “Bobby?” she demanded, hoping his old name would shake him out of it. “You with me, Bobby?”

Finally, Bobby looked up at her. “It’s not worth it, Kimmy.”

“What’s not worth it?” she asked. “What happened?”

“They wanted me to kiss Jan,” he said, sounding almost amused. “I told them all to go fuck themselves. Even my parents. I’ve never said that to my parents before, Kimmy.”

Kimberly took a deep breath. So that was the trump card: showing Bobby that Jan Van Antwerp wasn’t just a silly, grabby, light-in-the-loafers photographer, but a creep who was eager to stamp his claim on a hot new model in more ways than one. Kimberly could guess something similar had happened on Serena’s first shoot with him, and now Bobby’s sister had set herself in a win-win position.

Either Bobby agreed to the kiss, and had to experience the same kind of humiliation Serena had, or he refused, and Kimberly lost the bet.

“Look,” she said softly. “It’s just a kiss, right? You kissed a dog once on a dare. I remember that distinctly.”

“You don’t get it,” Bobby said, shuddering slightly. “He’s been touching me all day, and the whole time I thought it didn’t matter, because, you know, he was gay and just messing around, but the real reason he was touching me was because I’m just...” His face flushed. “I’m just, like, meat to him. This stuff gets him off. He’s going to have these photos of us kissing, and the whole time he’s doing the editing and photoshopping and whatever, he’s going to be thinking about...” He trailed off, then looked up at Kimberly with defiant, tear-filled eyes. “About *fucking* me.”

Kimberly was temporarily struck speechless. She sat down beside her ex on the bench, not knowing what else to do, and put her arm around his shoulders. He was trembling, and not from the cold. Part of her wanted to snap at him: welcome to my life, Barbie. Welcome to the life of every girl on the planet. But another part genuinely wanted to just hug him, because, whether he liked it or not, he was a girl now, and girls needed to stick together.

“If you walk away now, it means Serena beats you,” she said slowly.

“I know,” Bobby said. “I don’t care. I did the math, and nothing is worth kissing that creep. Nothing.”

Kimberly had only one move left, and it was a desperation move. She licked her dry lips, then spoke. “What if it was Josh?”

Bobby startled. He blinked at her. “What do you mean, what if it was Josh?” he demanded.

"I'm the reason he hasn't been messaging you," Kimberly said, using a truth to spin the next lie. "A couple nights ago he called me, freaking out, and told me everything. About, you know, you two hanging out. He said that he'd just blown it. He was scared that he hurt you. He kept begging me to talk to you for him." She took another deep breath. "I told him you probably needed space, to think it all through, and that he shouldn't message you. But the idiot's been messaging me non-stop, trying to check up on you and see how you're doing. I guess he knew today was going to be stressful for you, even if he didn't know why."

Bobby gaped at her. His mouth opened and closed several times, then he swallowed. "Show me," he demanded.

Kimberly handed over her iPhone. For once, there was no fakery required: Josh had been asking about "Barbie" constantly the past couple days, and what Bobby saw now, as he took her phone in hand, was a series of messages from somebody who genuinely cared about him and wanted to know if he was okay. Not somebody who thought of him as a piece of meat.

She watched her ex's face as he scrolled through the messages, and she knew she'd pulled it off when a shaky smile appeared on his lips.

"He's such a dumbass," Bobby muttered. "He's acting like I got kidnapped, or something."

"I can message him right now," Kimberly said. "He'd be here in a freaking second. You know that, right? He'll pick you up and drive you home, or to his place, or mine if you want. Somewhere you don't have to deal with all this bullshit."

"That sounds really good," Bobby said in a small voice, still staring down at the phone.

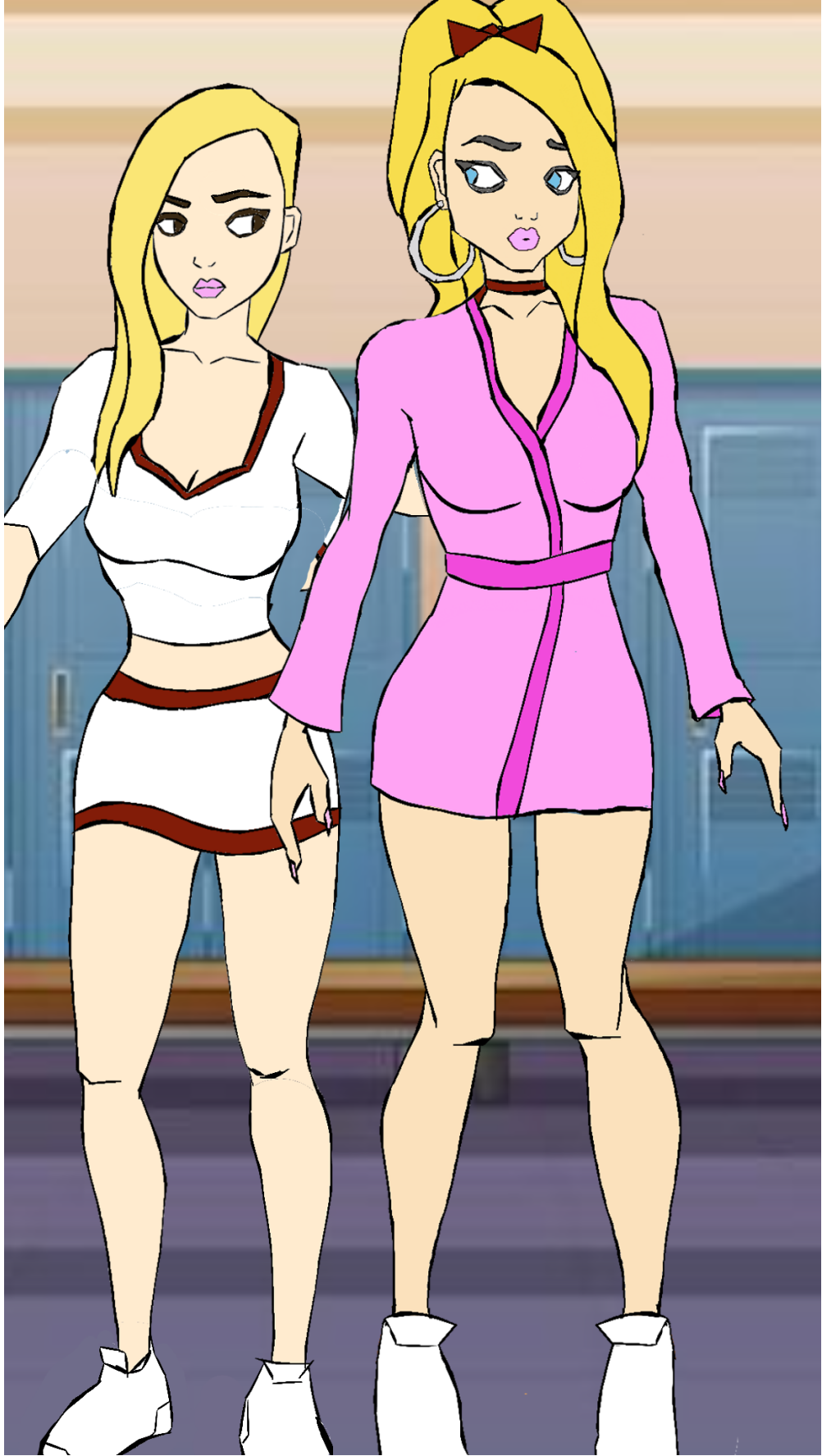
"Or if you want, you could get the best of both worlds," Kimberly said softly. "I can ask him to sub in for the final shot. You could kiss him instead of Jan."

Bobby recoiled, flushing. "Are you kidding?" he demanded. "That's practically worse!"

"How?" Kimberly challenged.

"I can't kiss him in front of everyone," her ex protested, red in the face. "Everybody in our school, all my teammates, I can't...I can't kiss a *guy*."

"Look, that ship is past sailed," Kimberly said flatly. "As far as everyone out there is concerned, you're a girl, Barbie."



Her ex grimaced, opening his mouth to argue.

“As far as Josh is concerned, you’re a girl,” Kimberly continued. “One he cares about. Like, a lot. And if you kiss him in front of all those people, well, I honestly can’t think of a bigger middle finger to Serena and Jan. You take all the power back. They don’t get to pick who kisses you, like you’re some kind of mannequin. Only *you* get to pick that.” She looked off into the distance. “I can picture the look on that creep’s face already.”

Her ex was still blushing, but she could tell from the gleam in his eye that he was imagining it, too. “Yeah,” he muttered. “Yeah, it’s like, look at this! You can’t have this, creep! It’s only for...” He halted, looking mortified. “Um, only for nobody?” he finished, in a slightly higher voice than usual.

“And it’ll drive Serena crazy,” Kimberly said, placing the cherry on top. “It’s the thing she was trying to torture you with, and you flipped it right back on her and enjoyed it. She’ll freaking *hate* that.”

“She totally will,” Bobby said, excited. He paused. “Except, how are you going to get Jan to agree to it?” he asked. “You’re only my social media coordinator, Kimmy.”

“I’m not going to do it,” Kimberly admitted. “But I know somebody who’s finally ready to stand up to him.”

There was a knocking sound as somebody rapped their knuckles against the locker room door. Bobby looked up. “Barbie, sweetie, are you in there?” came his mom’s voice. “Is it okay if I come in?”

Kimberly gave Bobby an encouraging nod. He looked at his reflection in the mirror again, adjusting his hair, and answered in a high, tremulous voice: “Yeah, Mom, you can come in!”

Kimberly took her phone back from Bobby’s limp hand and scrolled all the way down her contacts to Phone Repair Guy. She hoped Josh wouldn’t mind wearing a Jefferson High jersey for a little while.

#

Bobby sat quietly while Jan’s assistant touched up his makeup, only half listening to the argument going on around him. He didn’t exactly like the way his mom was framing it -- that Josh was his boyfriend, and Bobby found doing steamy scenes with other guys made him feel guilty and uncomfortable -- but he definitely liked seeing the shocked expression on Serena’s face as their mom held her ground.

“She’ll do it with Josh, and nobody else, and that’s final,” she said firmly, ignoring her husband’s pantomime that made it clear he had just sent her an urgent text message.

Jan stared at her for a moment, then turned his gaze to Bobby, who couldn’t help but squirm a little. “So, first you tell me to fuck off, and now you tell me how to do my own shoot?” he demanded. “Is that it, Barbie?”

Bobby looked up at him. “I guess so?”

“You already used your diva card earlier today, honey,” Jan said. “An average model does *not* tell Jan Van Antwerp what he can and cannot do.” The photographer broke into a wide grin. “And that means you, Barbie, you are going to be a *star*. I can’t remember the last time I had a filly with this much spirit! We’ll do the final shot with your boyfriend -- I assume he’s at least passably handsome?”

Bobby nodded, blushing.

“But I’d better see real passion, understood?” Jan demanded, peeling off his jersey. “No good girl bullshit! I want my toes to curl.” He tossed the garment aside. “And the next time we work together, honey, you better be single.”

Bobby smiled through gritted teeth. With the male hormones he was taking, he knew “Barbie” would be long gone by then.

“What about your vision, Jan?” Serena cut in, looking as flustered as it was ever possible for Serena to look. “You’re really going to compromise on this?”

“You’re the one who keeps adding to the vision,” Jan said, with a dangerous glare. “Why do you want me to kiss your sister so badly, anyways, ‘Rena?” He clapped his hands together. “Someone come help me herd the adolescents into place.”

Bobby exchanged a glance with Kimberly, who was hovering over by the clothes racks. She looked so happy for him that he was almost touched. It seemed like she’d really made his battle against Serena her own -- which was kind of weird of her, but he appreciated the support.

By the time his makeup was deemed perfect and he was released from the chair, the scene was all set. The students were milling around half-court, as if they’d just descended from the bleachers in a triumphant wave, pretending to congratulate Bobby’s former teammates, who were pretending to celebrate a victory. Right in the center logo, Jan had cleared a space and set up his camera.

And standing sheepishly beside the photographer, already wearing a Jefferson High jersey for the first and most likely last time in his life, was Josh. Bobby froze momentarily as he caught sight of him -- why hadn’t anyone told him Josh had arrived? The St. Ceylan’s star locked eyes

with him, looking almost as startled as Bobby felt, then broke into a smile. He gave a casual wave, as if he were here to pick him up for some NBA2K or a dumb movie, and Bobby couldn't help but wave back.

For some reason, as his mom made a last-minute adjustment to the bow in his hair, Bobby found his heart was beating double-time. He knew he had overreacted to what had happened with Josh -- after all, everybody got horny, right? And Josh wasn't *just* horny. Josh had spent the past three days thinking about him and hoping he was okay, and messaging Kimberly to make sure of it. That was something only a really good friend would do.

It was totally irrelevant that Josh was also a boy who thought of him as a girl. He was a friend, and a boy, and someone who made him feel extremely tingly. Nothing wrong with any of those things, except for the fact that when they were all combined it would almost make Josh his...

"Action!" Jan called.

Bobby's classmates started bouncing around, making the most of their opportunity to be on camera, whooping and hollering as if Jefferson High really had just won a game. Josh was busy dapping up DeShawn, but as Bobby got closer, feeling like he was moving on autopilot, the St. Ceylan's star turned and grinned at him. Bobby knew he was doing this to piss off Serena, and to stick it to Jan, but for some reason his stupid stomach was full of butterflies.



He swished his way up to Josh, tossed his pom-poms aside for the second time that day, and threw his arms around the taller boy's neck, inhaling the smell of his cologne. "Hey, J-dog," he said. "Um, you got here fast?"

"Might have broken a few speed limits, yeah." Josh looked slightly embarrassed. "I was really, uh, hoping to hear from you."

"Cool," Bobby whispered. The tingling sensation was back in force, and feeling his breasts pushed up against Josh's muscled abdomen wasn't helping.

"So," Josh said, glancing around at all the extras. "I guess we should..."

Bobby was already more-or-less on tip toe, thanks to the wedges, but he managed to stretch a little higher. Forgetting about all the craziness around him, he wrapped his fingers in Josh's hair and kissed him as hard as he could. The taller boy responded by lifting him into the air -- Bobby couldn't contain a squeal of surprise -- and kissing back with equal ferocity, thrusting his tongue inside Bobby's mouth.

Lightning bolts were shooting through Bobby's whole body as Josh maneuvered him, holding him under his bottom and letting him wrap his waxed-smooth legs around the taller boy's waist. Josh deepened the kiss and Bobby felt like putty in Josh's big arms. It was all so weird, and wrong, but he just couldn't bring himself to care. The crowd was cheering like crazy, cheering for *them*, and it honestly felt like winning a basketball game.

It was only when the kiss finally ended, and Josh set him down, that Bobby remembered Jan's camera. A wave of shame washed over him and he flushed. Even after he went back to boyhood, this moment would be immortalized forever: him playing the part of the adoring girlfriend, a sexy little cheerleader fawning over her man. And Jefferson High was never going to look at him the same way again.

But he couldn't think about that right now. He couldn't think about the past, *and* present, *and* future. It was too much to juggle. He had to just focus on the now.

"So," Josh said, clearing his throat. "You, uh, catch the Lakers game last night?"

Bobby swallowed. "Um, yeah," he said. "That call on the in-bounds play was garbage."

And he had to admit, the now wasn't *all* bad.

#

Kimberly was so relieved she could almost cry. She'd done it. She'd snatched victory from the jaws of defeat, and won the bet. Bobby had stuck it out through a day designed to be his own

personal hell, despite Serena's best efforts, and Jan was a combination of grudging and ecstatic about how the final shot had turned out -- he'd taken what seemed like a hundred photos of the moment between Bobby and Josh.

Kimberly could hardly wait to see the results in a magazine spread. Until then, she could be content with the memory of seeing her prick of an ex throw himself into another guy's arms. Whether he was fully aware of it or not, Bobby had just become his own lowest opinion of womanhood in front of everybody he knew, a vapid bimbo of a cheerleader eager to show the world just how devoted she was to her man. In other words, the exact kind of girl Bobby had always wanted *her* to be.

And he hadn't just committed to being that kind of girl, he had committed to being Josh's girl. The guy who he'd bested on the basketball court was now, as far as Jefferson High was concerned, "Barbie's" boyfriend. The extras were emptying out of the gym, but judging by the excited chatter and waving phones, Bobby's little display with Josh was going to spread far and wide by the time Monday came around.

Speaking of the happy couple, both of them were now being shepherded towards a woman with a notebook computer and wire-framed glasses. Kimberly vaguely remembered Bobby mentioning the interview that was supposed to accompany the shoot, and she vaguely hoped he wouldn't say anything too ignorant when trans issues came up. It was lucky he was a blonde.

"Congratulations."

Kimberly turned around to find Serena, also watching her little brother and his beau. "Thanks," she said cautiously.

"It looks like you got everything you wanted," Serena said matter-of-factly. "You won the bet, and you got to watch your ex suck face with another guy. I'll be honest, I didn't think Bobby had it in him."

"Oh, you know, it's a confusing time," Kimberly said. "All those hormones floating around."

Serena snorted. "So now what, Kimberly?" she asked. "You spend the rest of your life making sure Bobby never puts on a pair of pants again? Big dreams."

Kimberly bristled slightly. "Actually, you inspired me to dream a little bigger," she said. "I think I'd make a pretty good manager. Barbie's going to need one when this photo shoot does that 'famous overnight' thing for her."

"Same shit, different name," Serena said curtly. "You might not be dating him anymore, but your whole life still revolves around him. You understand that, right? Even if you're not in love with him, you might as well be. He's your whole identity. Your only fucking identity."

Kimberly clenched her fists at her sides. "And you're a really sore loser," she said. "I guess it runs in the family."

Serena narrowed her eyes, then flashed a cold smile. "You got that right, Kimberly," she said. "Why don't you go see how Barbie's interview is going? You know, since you're her manager and whatnot. I gave the reporter some extra reading material to work with."

Her ex's sister walked away, leaving Kimberly frowning, still processing what Serena had meant by...

"The LiveJournal," she whispered.

It felt like the world had just flipped upside down. Suddenly faint, Kimberly looked to where the interview was now underway, Bobby and Josh sitting side-by-side in folding chairs while the reporter smiled and made notes on her computer. Even from here, she could see a look of confusion spreading across her ex's face.

Her heart began to race. Serena was the one who had played dirty, and now Kimberly was left with only two options: fight or flight.

#

Bobby was desperately ready to get changed, but the fashion reporter insisted the interview would only take a few minutes, so he found himself still wearing the skimpy cheerleader outfit as he took a seat to answer her questions. All the guys exiting the gym slowed down significantly on their way past, eager for one last look at "Barbie" in all her glory, but none of them whistled or made comments.

Bobby would have liked to think it was because he was radiating a "don't mess with me today" vibe, but he suspected it was more likely because Josh was sitting in the chair beside him. The reporter seemed to think they were a couple, or something. The St. Ceylan's star looked almost as awkward as Bobby felt, which was kind of nice to see.

"Before we start, I just have to say, you two are adorable together," the reporter beamed. "Talk about chemistry on camera! How long have you been dating?"

Bobby somehow managed to choke on a breath of air. "We're not!" he blurted. "I mean, we're just, like, good friends?" He glanced over at Josh, blushing furiously.

"What she said," Josh said, smiling a little nervously.

The reporter raised her eyebrows skeptically. "If you say so," she said, smiling. "Now, Barbie, let's talk about you. You made quite a splash on social media with your 'coming out' a few weeks back, but that wasn't the first time you shared your real self with world, was it?"

Bobby grimaced. "Um, there was the makeover thing at the salon, I guess," he said.

"Right, as a result of a 'lost' bet," the reporter said, making air quotes. "I'm sure you tried very hard to avoid that makeover." She winked. "But even before that, you were keeping fans up-to-date anonymously, isn't that right? With your journal?"

Josh's leg jumped so noticeably Bobby and the interviewer both looked over. "Sorry," he said. "Cramp."

"Maybe if you're lucky, Barbie will massage it for you later," the reporter said slyly. "Since you two are such close friends, I mean. Now, Barbie, about this journal?"

"What journal?" Bobby asked, annoyed by the "massage" remark and genuinely confused by the question. He had never kept a journal in his life -- as far as he was concerned, that diary shit was for girls.

"You don't have to play coy about it, Barbie," the reporter said, handing over her notebook computer. "The LiveJournal where all those marvelous hashtags got started? Princess in hiding, boy to babe, all those?"

Bobby accepted the computer, frowning down at the screen. He was pretty sure he didn't have a LiveJournal account, and he definitely hadn't written the entries he now saw captured in screenshot format. He scrolled down to read the first one, slightly distracted by Josh's heavy breathing -- the guy obviously did not do well with interviews.

"Your sister shared it with me just before we got started," the reporter said. "She thought it might be a good conversation starter."

Bobby looked up, suddenly unruffled. Obviously his sister had typed up some embarrassing fake bullshit for the interviewer to spring on him, but after what he'd gone through today, he figured he was all but embarrassment-proof.

"Right," he said, handing the computer back. "My secret LiveJournal. Totally."

"I'm sorry if that's how you wanted it to stay," the reporter said, clearly not sorry at all. "But I think plenty of your fans will have put it together by now, Barbie. I love this quote, by the way, from your very first entry: 'I'm living this total lie, pretending to be a tough manly jock when I wish I was a cute sexy cheerleader.' Wow." She gave Bobby's outfit an obvious up-and-down. "Well, Barbie, can I just say, you made it? I mean, did you ever think your dream would come true this fast?"

Bobby felt his face grow red hot -- embarrassment-proof had maybe been wishful thinking. "Um, I guess not," he said.

“And what about the name you chose to create this account?” the reporter pressed.
“Bboy2003?”

Bobby rolled his eyes. Serena had really phoned this one in. “Yeah, it’s my birthday,” he said.
“And when I was younger people called me ‘Bobby Boy,’ so it makes sense?”

“People called you ‘Barbie Boy,’ I see...” The reporter made a note before Bobby could correct her, and continued. “Did you face discrimination growing up? I know you made a big show of acting manly, but surely ‘Barbie’ was peeking through all along, right?”

Bobby glanced nervously over at Josh -- the last thing he wanted was to dig up all this stuff with him here listening -- but Josh seemed to be off in his own world, staring over the reporter’s shoulder with a vaguely terrified expression. If he was this bad sitting in on someone else’s interview, he would never make it through a post-game presser in college.

“Sure,” Bobby said. “Um, just like it says in my journal.”

“So it was very brave of you to start taking hormones all on your own, before you even came out of the closet,” the reporter said. “That must have been exciting and terrifying all at the same time. There’s another quote here, so adorable, I just can’t resist reading it: ‘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?’ And then your hashtag was ‘booty incoming.’” The reporter shook her head, smiling. “Oh my God, Barbie, you’re so sassy.”

Bobby gaped at her. It was exactly the kind of fake journal entry Serena would write to embarrass him, but there was one very strange thing about it: Bobby distinctly remembered being at his locker one day, feeling incredibly self-conscious about the effect his gynecomastia was having on his body, and DeShawn walking over and slapping his ass. It *had* jiggled, and he’d been miserable about it all day.

“That’s me,” he said, smiling weakly. “I’m really sassy.”

“I hope Josh here can handle it,” the reporter said, winking again. “Now, you’ve obviously inspired a lot of young trans women around the country, maybe even around the world, but you haven’t been particularly active online since your ‘coming out.’ Why did you decide to stop journaling?”

“Can I see it again?” Bobby asked. “The, um, LiveJournal?”

“Sure thing,” the reporter said, handing her computer over.

Bobby shot Josh a look -- his friend was now chugging water from his water bottle like his life depended on it -- then scrolled through the entries. Most of them were pretty vague, stuff

Serena definitely could have come up with, but he still had a weird feeling about the whole thing. The feeling intensified when he finally saw a photo. It showed a hand with painted pink fingernails.

Bobby held up his own to compare. His skin had gotten smoother and his nails had gotten longer, but it was definitely his hand. And if he needed more proof, he could see his Tomcats team jacket in the background. His hand, his room, and there was only one person who could have possibly taken the photo.

“You know, it all seems so long ago, now?” Bobby said faintly. “I can hardly believe I even wrote all this stuff.”

“And now you’re living it out,” the reporter said, beaming. “The princess has emerged from hiding! Isn’t that right?”

Bobby looked over the woman’s shoulder and caught sight of Kimberly, standing there with a worried expression on her face, that smug fake concern she wore so well. He clenched his fists as hard as he could, not caring if his nails snapped off.

“I have to use the girls’ room,” he said. “Long day on camera, you know? I’ll be right back.” He got out of his chair before the reporter could protest, and headed straight for the source of all his problems.

#

Kimberly managed to get Bobby into the empty gym hallway before he exploded, but it was a close thing. She had never seen her ex this angry. Even dressed up as a slutty cheerleader, the fury coming off him was almost frightening. His blue eyes were burning holes in her.

“Nails did?” he shouted. “Nails did? You took that fucking photo, Kimmy, don’t lie to me! You took that photo, you wrote that fucking journal!”

Under any other circumstances, Kimberly would be trying to calm him down. She would be trying to stay relaxed. But the time for that was long gone. She had to commit to the contingency plan now, and that meant she had to match his emotion. She tapped into all her fear of getting caught, all her anger at her ex, and used it.

“I’m sorry, okay?” she screamed, twice as loud. “I’m sorry! I shouldn’t have helped him! I shouldn’t have fucking helped him, and I’m sorry!”

It was enough to make her ex pause. “Wait,” he said, panting. “Helped who? Who’s him?”

Kimberly stared at him, wide-eyed. “Who do you think?” she demanded. “Josh.”

All the wind went out of Bobby's sails at once. His lipsticked mouth fell open. "Josh?" he echoed.

"Of course, Josh," Kimberly said, trying to sound puzzled. "Who else would want to make you look bad? He was pissed after you sank that game-winner over him. Remember? Two months ago?" She stared guiltily at the floor. "He messaged me right after the game and told me about his idea for the makeover thing, at the salon. He said he would put up the five grand for our bet. And I thought if you lost, it would teach you a lesson, okay? I didn't know things would get so crazy. I didn't know some fucking blackmailer creep would show up out of nowhere."

Her ex's face fell. The feeling of betrayal was written all over his features, but Kimberly knew that Josh was the only person he would ever willingly shift the blame to -- not just because they'd been rivals, but because now he genuinely had feelings for Josh, and knowing Bobby, that scared the shit out of him. Her ex was staring past her, a haunted look in his eye, and it was only when Kimberly turned that she realized Josh had followed them out into the hallway.



"It was your idea?" Bobby choked, addressing him now. "Seriously?" He had a pleading tone in his voice, almost begging the other boy to deny it.

Kimberly locked eyes with her partner-in-crime. She could see the wheels turning in his head. At any second he could ruin her: all he had to do was play dumb, deny everything, and Bobby would think that Kimberly was just lying to save her own skin.

Except there was more to it than that. If Bobby thought the LiveJournal was Kimberly's doing, he was going to keep looking at it. He was going to dig deeper. He was going to start wondering about the gynecomastia showing up right around the same time his fictional self started taking hormones. He would start questioning the pills Skeeter was providing him.

Before long, “Barbie” would be history, just like Serena had intended, and if Bobby was driven enough, he might even figure out Josh had been the one to blackmail him. But if Josh shouldered the blame for the LiveJournal right here, right now, when Bobby had just kissed him in front of everybody he knew, those faked entries would suddenly be too painful to ever revisit.

And that meant “Barbie” would stick around for at least a little longer.

“I just wanted to embarrass you,” Josh said slowly. “You know, take you down a peg. I wrote the journal entries and put it online, hoping somebody would put two and two together, and, you know, make a big deal out of it. Then you came out as actually trans, and I felt like a complete asshole. That’s why I deleted it.”

“I’m not fucking trans,” Bobby snapped. “Didn’t you hear that last bit? About the psycho blackmailer?”

Josh’s eyes flickered. “I don’t know what’s going on,” he said. “Kimberly said...”

Kimberly held her breath. Josh would either sell it now, or wreck everything.

“She said you’d tell me when you were ready,” Josh finished. “I know it’s complicated. But I really care about you, Barbie. It was stupid of me to write that journal. I know that’s not the real you. The real you isn’t just some princess, she’s...she’s better at Call of Duty than any dude in school, and she knows more about basketball than my coach, and she’s not waiting around for some dumbass like me to rescue her.”

Kimberly didn’t think she could have written Josh a better speech herself. Bobby’s face twitched as he swallowed a sob. He stared at the floor for a moment, almost hyperventilating, but when he looked up he was glaring daggers at Josh. Kimberly realized that if Josh had been hoping to win Bobby back on the spot, it was too little, too late.

“Get the fuck out of here, Josh,” Bobby said, voice breaking. “I never want to see you again.”

Josh stared at him for a long moment, completely crestfallen, then he turned and walked away. As soon as he was out of sight, Bobby sank to the floor. Kimberly waited for the sob he’d restrained earlier to spill out, but it didn’t. Bobby sat there silently on the polished floor, his legs tucked gracefully underneath him, trembling but dry-eyed. When it became clear he had no immediate plans to get up, Kimberly slowly lowered herself down to join him.

“I get it if that goes for me, too,” she said softly. “The never wanting to see me again, thing.”

Bobby looked across at her. His blue eyes were still burning. “It should,” he said, voice clipped. “But I need you for something.”

Kimberly put a tentative hand on her ex's shoulder. "Anything you need," she said. "Anything I can do to make things right."

Bobby snorted. "It's called revenge," he said.

Kimberly blinked. "On Josh?" she asked.

"Not on Josh." Her ex gritted his perfect white teeth. "On the person who flew all the way from Rio just to make my life hell. Who made me strut around like a hooker in front of my own *dad*, who made me wear stripper heels for a week straight, who humiliated me every chance she got..." Bobby was building up steam, almost shouting the words. "Who made sure every friend I ever had now thinks I'm some slutty blonde bimbo, and tried to make me tongue a pervy photographer on camera, and then saw that somehow, somehow, in spite of her doing all that shit, I was happy for a second..." His face twisted. "And she decided to ruin it by giving that reporter the LiveJournal. If it wasn't for her, I wouldn't have ever known. And you know what, Kimmy? Not knowing would have been so much fucking better than *this*."

Kimberly drew a deep breath. Going after Serena was a tall order, but Kimberly knew a thing or two about payback. And most importantly, Bobby had someone to take his anger out on. Someone who wasn't her.

"You got anything specific in mind for this revenge?" she asked.

"Easy," Bobby said blankly. "I'm going to make everybody forget she even exists. I'm going to crush her so bad she won't even show up on the last page of search results. I'm going to beat her at her own game. And if that means being 'Barbie' for a while, I'll do it." He glared at the gym entrance through his mascara-rimmed eyes. "I'll hate it, and I'll do it."

Kimberly just nodded. This was the closest she'd ever come to Bobby learning the truth, and she'd escaped by the skin of her teeth. She hated sacrificing all the work she'd done to get Bobby and Josh together, but maybe it was for the best -- now, once again, her ex had nobody to turn to but her. And so long as Bobby wanted revenge, "Barbie" would stick around. Kimberly could definitely, absolutely work with that.

She sat beside him in silence for a while, only reminding her ex about the interview when he got to his feet of his own accord. He nodded, brushed off his miniskirt, and fished his phone out of his top. Kimberly watched him scroll down through his contacts, deleting someone named "J-dog" from his phone, and most likely from his life, forever.

For the briefest instant, her ex had an expression on his face Kimberly had never seen before. If she didn't know better, she'd think it was heartbreak.

THE END