



People don't take trips, trips
take people - Antoine's tale
Written and illustrated
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Chapter 1

“Lily, I’m back”, Antoine called out to no reply, returning back home with the coffees. He dropped his keys in the bowl next to the door and tried again, “Lily? I’ve got the coffees, where are you”?



“Come and find me, lover boy”, came a sultry voice, from somewhere in the apartment.

A smile crept across Antoine’s lips, as he knew what was about to come. He thought about how great life was and how lucky he was to have found a girl as amazing as Lily, it hadn’t always been that way, growing up in the French capital had been tough for his single-parent mother who had worked tirelessly to put food on the table for him and his sister.

Growing up poor had impacted his ability to make friends, the other kids so judgemental, belittling anyone who didn’t have the latest smartphone, this led him to become a quiet and introverted child, more content to sit at home and read a book, rather than playing football out in the park with the other kids his age. It had been a lonely childhood, but things got better when Lily came into his life, meeting her under the most unlikely of circumstances. People laughed when they told the story of how they had been stuck in a lift together, but it had been a stroke of luck for Antoine, who would have never normally built up the courage to speak to a girl like Lily, he often thought about how lucky he was, and that if fate hadn’t forced them together that day, completely isolated from the outside world, he would probably still be a miserable virgin living at home with his mother.

Antoine and Lily were vastly different people in terms of upbringing, and personality, Lily was from Avignon but had moved to Paris to study fashion design in university, Antoine had no interest in fashion or most of the other things Lily liked to do but having been given four interrupted hours to talk and get to know each other, they had clicked and made a connection. After the incident in the lift, they had exchanged numbers and agreed to meet up, but with Antoine fearing rejection, he had been reluctant to call, luckily for him Lily, as she often did in their relationship took the initiative sending him a friend request on his social media account and sending him a message. In the following weeks, the pair went on several dates as the connection between the pair grew, it wasn't long before Antoine was moving into Lily's apartment and the pair couldn't be happier.

Antoine being a worrier often thought about and felt bad about not contributing any money towards the rent, he tried to contribute half of the bills but being a website designer, and most of his money coming from temporary contracts, his income was very unpredictable. Lily didn't seem to mind, she would just tell him, that her mother was paying for the place while she was studying and not to worry, reminding him that him being there with her, was taking the burden off his mother not having to cloth and feed him.

Back in the living room of the 4th-floor apartment, Antoine placed down the cups of coffee he was carrying, "Ok where could you be", he said playfully, "are you in the bathroom"? He said loudly, playing along with Lily's game.

"Cold, try again", came the reply.

"How about the living room"? Antoine said cheerfully.

"Getting warmer, so close", Lily replied.

Chapter 2

“Found you”, Antoine said pushing open their bedroom door to see his goddess, kneeling on the bed looking at him with her beautiful eyes, playfully lifting the bottom of her short skirt up high on her white patterned tights, and inviting him to join her.



“Took you long enough”, Lily said, giving him a magnificent smile that sent butterflies to his stomach and blood pumping to his lower regions, “so are you going to just stand there all day or are you going to come over here and show me how much of a man you are”?

Antoine didn't need a to be asked twice, he bounded across the room and leapt on top of her, initiating a passionate kiss, what followed was 45 minutes of passion and excitement, as the couple pleased each other all the while, trying not to fall out of the inconveniently small single bed.

Naked, sweaty, and exhausted, Lily propped herself up on one elbow and lit up a cigarette, Antoine hated that she smoked but he had accepted it, Lily had always been a bit of a rebel, always doing what she pleased, not caring what others thought of her, and although frustrating at times, it was also one of the many reasons he loved her.

“So are you all packed for your trip”, Lily asked, breathing out a lung full of smoke.

“Yeah, I guess so”, Antoine replied, “but I still don't see why you can't just tell her the truth about us, you've graduated from university now, you're a grown woman”.

“Antoine, we've been through this, I told you when you moved in here about my mother, she made me promise when she rented this place for me that I wouldn't bring any men here”, Lily replied in a serious tone.

“Why do you care? you never normally care about the rules”, Antoine said joking.

“It's different ok, she's my mother and besides, she's only visiting for a week, you get to spend a week in Spain, relaxing and getting some sun, I'm the one who's stuck here entertaining her”.

“Is she really that bad”? Antoine asked.

“Well one day you'll meet her, and you can see for yourself, her heart is in the right place but she's so overbearing and controlling, you know I'd love for you to meet her, but if she knew you were living here, she'd go ballistic, stop paying the rent and demand I move back home to Avignon”.

“Come on, really? Are you sure you're not overreacting a little bit? That sounds a bit extreme”.

“Well, she's an extreme person, listen the week will pass quickly and then she'll be gone, you know I'd much rather be coming with you on your trip”, Lily said stroking Antoine's arm playfully.

“Oh yeah, going to miss me huh”? Antoine said turning to face her.

Lily, stumped out her cigarette and smiled, “why don't I show you how much, ready for round two”?

The pair once again started exploring each other's bodies, and while deep in the throes of passion, they were blissfully unaware that their lives were about to be thrown upside down.

Lily jumped, “did you just hear the front door”? she said rattled, Antoine heard it too as he sat upright to listen.

“Lily, Lily, are you home”? Came a voice from outside the bedroom.

“Shit, it's my mother, what is she doing here”? Lily whispered while panicking, she leapt from the bed and started to throw on her clothes, “just stay here and don't make a sound, ok”?

She left the room as Antoine sat there under the covers not knowing what to do, as he listened to the conversation on the other side of the door.

“Mama, what are you doing here, I wasn't expecting you until tomorrow”? He heard Lily say.

“What are you not pleased to see your me, my plans for the day got cancelled so I thought I'd come up early and surprise you, you could look a little happier to see your old mother”.

“Of course, I'm happy to see you, I'm just surprised”.

“Lily why can I smell cigarette smoke, are you smoking”?

“No, of course, not Mama, these walls are pretty thin, it must be coming from next door”.

“No, it’s coming from your room”? Lily’s mother said as Antoine heard footsteps approaching the door. Panicked he tried to reach for his clothes, got tangled in the sheets and fell hard on to the bedroom floor.

“There’s someone in there, Lily have you got a man in there?”

“No, of course not Mama, it’s... it’s... my roommate, Zara”.

“Really? I thought you said, she was away travelling, and why is she in your room”?

“err... she cancelled her plans to try and find a job, she has a date tonight and I was in there helping her pick out something to wear when you arrived”, Lily replied, happy with her quicky improvised answer.

“Oh Lily, You’re a good girl, such a good friend”.

“Yeah, I try Mama, perhaps I should see if she is ok, make yourself at home, Ok, I’ll be right back”.

Antoine once again heard footsteps approaching the door before it opened, and Lily slipped inside. She looked down at him on the floor wrapped in the bedsheet. “You idiot, I said to be quiet”, she whispered angrily.

“I’m sorry Lil, I heard footsteps and was trying to put on my clothes, but what have you done? You told her Zara was in here”?

“You heard that huh”?

“Yeah, I heard your whole conversation, you’re going to have to tell her the truth, shit, this is not the way I wanted to meet your mother, she’s going to hate me”, Antoine said annoyed picking himself up and sitting on the edge of the bed.

“No, it’s too late for that and besides, do you want her to ship me back off to Avignon, how are we going to see each other? do you have the money to take the train down there every weekend”?

“Fuck, of course, I don’t want that”, Antoine muttered, realising the severity of the situation, “but what choice do we have? She’s expecting to see Zara come out of your room and as you know she’s on the other side of the world right now”.

“Listen I’ve got a plan, you may not like it, but it will work”, she said sitting next to him on the bed.

“Come on Lil, really? you know you’re crazy plans never actually work” Antoine replied sceptically.

“Yes, they do”, Lily replied sounding hurt, “well apart from that time in Latin quarter, and ok maybe that time... but never mind that now we’ve got no choice, you need to be Zara”.

“What”? Antoine said loudly, “you can’t be serious”, he added in a quieter voice, realising he had shouted too loud.

“Lily is everything ok in there”? came a voice from the living room.

“Yes, Mama, I’ll be out in a minute”, Lily shouted before turning back to Antoine, “listen she’s never met Zara, you put on one of my wigs and we find you something to wear, then all you have to do is leave this room and go straight to Zara’s bedroom, I’ll find a someway to get Mama out of the house and then you can head off on your trip, easy”.

“Easy, it’s the craziest thing I’ve ever heard, it’ll never work”, Antoine stated.

“It has to work, and you have to try or this good thing we’ve got going here is going to come to an end, if you love me, you’ll try”, Lily said, looking at Antoine with pleading eyes.

Antoine lowered his head, knowing he couldn’t say no to her, he loved her more than anything, and the thought of losing her terrified him, “Ok Lil, I’ll try, what do we need to do”?

Chapter 3

As Lily re-entered her bedroom 10 mins later, having given Antoine one of her wigs, a stripy long sleeve top and a pair of loose pants to change into, she found him looking incredibly miserable leaning against the wall.



She couldn't help but giggle seeing him standing there in her clothes. "Please, don't laugh at me Lil, I feel self-conscious enough as it is", he said flustered, "we can't do this, it's crazy, I'm never going to fool your mother into thinking I'm Zara".
"Sorry, it's just so strange seeing you dressed up like that and you look so different with long hair, but trust me it will work, after I leave the room, wait a few minutes before leaving, keep your head down and go straight to Zara's room, ok"?

“What if she talks to me”?

“Just ignore her and keep moving, it doesn’t matter if she thinks you’re unfriendly, she only has to believe you’re Zara”.

“I guess it could work, but I’m really nervous Lil”, Antoine said shaking.

Lily stepped forward and gave him a kiss on the lips, “you can do this, ten seconds and it will be over, then you can go on your trip later, forgot all about this, and when you get back in a week, everything will be back to normal.

She kissed him one more time and gave him a smile that melted his heart, "Ok, ten minutes, right"? she said, he nodded indicating he understood and watched her leave the room, leaving him alone to contemplate the crazy situation he found himself in.

“Ok you can do this Antoine, man up”, he said to himself as he paced the room in Lily’s pink furry slippers, the only footwear she owned that would fit his larger feet. It was hard not to think about what he was wearing, still surprised, he fit into any of Lily’s clothes at all, her being a foot shorter and lot smaller than him, but the loose baggy clothes she had chosen all though a little tight fit would have to do.

Ten minutes later, and it was go time, he stood with his hand on the doorknob shaking, psyching himself up, trying to find the courage to step into the unknown. He took a deep breath, closed his eyes, opened the door, and stepped out into the living room, and bumping straight into Lily’s mother.

He cursed his luck, he had always had terrible timing but for her to be walking in front of the door at that moment was particularly unlucky, “Oh, careful”, shrieked Lily’s mother, “you almost knocked me over”.

Antoine stood there trembling with his path blocked as he quickly ran through his options in his head. He could run back into the room, but that seemed like a bad idea, if he was supposed to be Zara, it would seem odd for her to go back into Lily’s room. Alternatively, he could push past her make a run for Zara’s room, but that would be extremely rude. It left him with only one option, he lifted his head and smiled, “I’m really sorry, I’m Zara”, he said in a high awkward voice, “it’s nice to meet you”.

Lily’s mother looked confused as she stared at him scanning his facial features, trying to work out who or what stood in front of her. For Antoine, those few seconds being scrutinized and sized up, felt like hours as his palms started to sweat, and his heartbeat quicker his chest.

After a few moments with no reply, Antoine ducked his head once more, he had been caught, he knew it, and now he would have to explain who he was, and why he was wearing Lily’s clothes, it would be humiliating and worse still, he would probably never be allowed to see Lily again.

Wanting to end the awkwardness, and about to apologise and tell the truth, Lily’s mother stopped him by finally deciding to speak, and it definitely wasn’t the response Antoine was expecting, “oh don’t worry dear, it’s my fault, I should have been watching where I was going, did you find an outfit”? Lily’s mother asked smiling.

Antoine looked confused, “outfit”? Antoine asked puzzled.

“For your date, tonight! Did you find something to wear”?

“Err...’ oh yeah, an outfit, yes, Lily helped me pick something out”? Antoine said shocked that the woman actually believed he was Zara.

“Perfect, well come and join us for a chat then, you can drink your coffee, I’m Monique, Lily’s mother”, she said raising a manicured hand.

Antoine took a hold of her hand and gave it a light shake, “my coffee”? he asked.

“Yes, well there are two cups on the side and there’s only you and Lily here, it’s yours right”?

Antoine looked over to where he had left the two coffee cups from earlier, before looking over at Lily for help, who just shook her head and mouthed the words no.

“Uh, yes it’s mine”, Antoine answered bowing his head, he hadn’t known what else to say.

“Why are you so nervous dear? I don’t bite you know”, Monique said putting her arm around Antoine, "come and sit with us, Lily has told me a lot about you, but it’s nice to put a face to the name”.

Antoine shuffled across the living room carpet, in his Lily’s furry slippers and sat down on the sofa. He looked over at Lily and got a sinking feeling in his stomach, seeing the look of terror on her face, in all the time he had known her he couldn’t recall ever seeing her look frightened, she was

always so decisive and confident, and this more than anything else that had happened that day terrified him the most.

“So, Zara, you were on the same fashion course as Lily, right? How did you find it?” Monique asked.

Antoine looked at her with his mouth open, not knowing how to answer, he knew nothing about fashion, what was he going to say? Luckily, Lily came to the rescue, “she did great mama, top of our class, a much more talented designer than me”, Lily said answering for him, but talking about the real Zara.

“Wow, that's wonderful, I've seen some of Lily's designs, they're really impressive, and I'm not just saying this because I'm her mother if yours are even better, I'm sure you'll go far, “Monique said impressed.

After a moment of awkwardness, where no one spoke, Monique continued to ask questions, “so, Zara, Lily tells me you cancelled your trip to find a job, any luck so far”.

“She's still looking Mama”, Lily answered for him once more.

Monique looked confused, “Lily, the girl doesn't need you to speak for her, I'm sure she's capable of answering for herself”, she said glaring at her daughter.

“Sorry Mama”, Lily replied shaking her head. “just trying to help”.

Monique tried again, “so, Zara, what kind of work are you looking for”?

Antoine was on his own now and would have to come up with a believable answer, he thought for a moment about the real Zara, and what she might say if sat there in his place, “Well my dream is to one day design my own fashion line and see it walk down the runway at Paris fashion week, but right now, I know I need to start at the bottom, so I guess I would take any retail job, just to get some experience”. Antoine answered, seeing Lily out of the corner of his eye in shock, he couldn't blame her as he was equally as shocked himself not knowing where the words had come from.

“Oh, how nice, it's so refreshing to see a young person with some ambition, you chase your dream Zara, and if there's anything I can do to help, don't hesitate to ask, ok? You obviously mean a lot to Lily”.

“Thank you, Mrs Charpentier, that's very kind”, Antoine answered.

“Happy to help dear, and please call me Monique, Mrs Charpentier make me feel old”.

“Ok”, Antoine said unsure of himself, “thank you, Monique”.

Monique smiled turning to face her daughter, “I like your friend Lily, she so polite and has a goal in life, you could learn a thing or two from her, you know”?

Lily sighed and looked a little annoyed, “If you say so, mama”.

Monique ignored the snarky comment and turned back to Antoine, “so, tell me Zara do you have any plans for today? are you going out at all”? She asked.

Antoine didn't like the question, “err...No, I'm going to be in all day”. he answered quickly.

“All day, I thought you had a date later”? Monique asked confused.

“Yeah, my date, of course, but that's not until much later this evening, sorry I thought you meant this afternoon”, Antoine answered, the word date almost getting stuck in his throat as he glared at Lily.

A strange look crossed Monique's face, “no, that won't do, we can't have that, it's a beautiful day outside, you can't be couped up in here all day, Lily has promised to take me out into the centre for a little shopping, you can come with us, it would be so nice to have someone cheerful around for a change, maybe you'll rub off on miss misery guts over there” she said glancing at her daughter, “now go and pick out a nice skirt to wear, it's far too warm for pants today, and I'm sure a young fashionista like you wouldn't want to be seen out in those tatty old things”, Monique added, looking down at his baggy pants and pulling a face, “now if you'll excuse me, I need to freshen up a little before we head out, shall we meet back here in one hour girls”? And having finished her sentence, Monique stood up, walked towards the guest bedroom, set up for when she visited, leaving Antoine and Lily staring at each other in stunned silence.

Chapter 4

Stood waiting for a train to take them back to the apartment, Antoine looked over and glared at Lily to remind her of how absolutely miserable he felt, she mouthed the words I'm sorry at him as he sighed, looking down at the ground, not wanting to see if anyone was staring at him.

Hours earlier in the apartment, Antoine had discovered just how stubborn Monique could be, as, after a few attempts to get out of going into the centre of Paris with her, he had given up and resigned himself to his fate.

The whole trip out had been one of embarrassment and awkwardness for Antoine as Lily's words from earlier on the sofa echoed through his mind, "don't worry, we'll just walk about for a few hours, then we can think of some excuse and you can get back here and change before your flight". The problem was Monique had other ideas, excited to be spending time with her daughter, having not seen her in a long time, she had taken them out shopping, and to Antoine's utter disbelief, shopping turned out to be a full afternoon of traipsing around fancy shops and boutiques, he had never heard of, trying on humiliating outfits and shoes, all the while having to pretend, he was some sort of fashion expert.

It wasn't much better between shops where he was forced to try dresses and high heels, it felt strangely vulnerable to be walking the streets of Paris wearing a skirt, the soft fabric lapping against his thighs just felt so unfamiliar, the feeling amplified, even more by the cool summer breeze, circulating around his underwear and his smooth-shaven legs, which Lily insisted on before they left the apartment.

It was still a blur when he thought back to that hour before they left the apartment, as Lily gave him a turbocharged makeover, knowing Zara wouldn't have a thin layer of hair across her body, it was marched straight into the ensuite bathroom where he sat in stunned silence as Lily removed every hair below his eyebrows. He was then, still in a state of shock taken back into the bedroom where a light coating of makeup was applied, which Lily again insisted on, telling him a girl like Zara would never leave the house without painting her face, so not wanting to arouse suspicion he agreed to at least allow her to brush his lashes with a little mascara, and coat his lips with a little gloss.

With each change to his appearance, Antoine felt his male self slowly slipping away, he had always had quite delicate features having taken after his Asian mother, and as he sat there watching the woman he loved, with nothing but a few brush strokes and a little makeup seemingly erase every trace of his masculinity, he wondered if she would ever see him the same way again.

By the time Lily had finished his makeover, leaving Antoine to stare glumly at his feminized reflection in Zara's full-length mirror, he knew it was too late to back out, he was going to have to leave the house, where people would see him dressed in woman's clothes. He examined the image in the mirror, looking for anything that might give him away, his figure wasn't too bad, as he tried to keep in shape, running two or three times a week, the problem was he didn't know how to act or move like a woman, and in his mind, the afternoon could only end badly.

He shifted in his seat as he tried to adjust the bra strapped tightly around his chest, which felt tight and uncomfortable digging into his shoulder blades, he didn't want to wear it but filled with a couple of pairs of rolled-up tights for padding, it at least fulfilled its purpose, giving him the illusion of having small breasts beneath.

Looking down at his legs he was surprised again at how worryingly feminine they looked without their coating of fuzz, they now looked long and lean and dare he say it, sexy. He tried to pull down the hem of the short skirt slightly feeling uncomfortable showing so much thigh, remembering how he had fought against putting it on, when Lily first produced the short, flared flimsy piece of material from Zara's wardrobe, but having tried the alternative a pair of short denim shorts, where

he'd had to tuck back his penis between his legs and push his balls up inside his body, he quickly came around to the idea of wearing the skirt, as humiliating as it was to be seen wearing one in front of Lily.

"Ok, I think that's the best I can do on short notice" Lily announced, "let's see if any of Zara's shoes fit you"? She said snapping Antoine out of his daze.

"Let me guess, a pair of heels to go with this skirt"? Antoine moaned.

"Well, I was thinking a pair of flats as we'll be doing a bit of walking, but if you want a sexy pair of heels, I'll see what I can find". Lily quipped back.

"No, no, please no heels, flats are fine", Antoine said frightened.

"Come on lighten up a bit, I know you're worried, but look at yourself, I mean, you're not going to win any beauty contests or anything, but you pass well enough as a girl, we just have to fool Mama for a few more hours, here try these", Lily said dropping a pair of flat strappy sandals next to him.

With Lily's help, Antoine strapped the sandals to his feet, as he sat there quietly, still hurting from the comment about passing well enough as a girl, "wow, they fit perfectly, I guess you and Zara are not just the same dress size, but you also have the same size feet, what a stroke of luck", Lily said cheerfully, as Antoine felt like he had been pierced by another dagger through the heart, not feeling lucky at all.

"We should really paint your toenails, it will seem odd if we don't", Lily said thinking aloud, "but I don't know if we have time".

"No", Antoine said firmly, "please enough with the girly stuff, and besides have you seen the time, we're already ten minutes late to meet your mother".

"Well, I promise you she will be later than us, but you're probably right, we don't have time", Lily said sounding disappointed.

It had felt like a small win at the time, but that decision not to paint his toenails, although he didn't know it then, would come back to haunt him later.

A few hours later, Antoine felt extremely apprehensive as Monique led them through the doors of a fancy nail salon in the middle of Paris centre. As Antoine looked to around the unfamiliar location and whiffed the foreign smells, he thought back to Monique's comment back in the apartment and remembered the way she had looked down at his unkept toenails in disgust while examining his appearance. He had no idea the result would be him sat red-faced and embarrassed, as a surly Vietnamese woman gave him not just a pedicure but a manicure to go along with it, if only he could turn back time, he would have happily let Lily paint his toes any colour she wanted.

So, after actioned packed afternoon around the French Capital enfemme, a shellshocked Antoine stood on the station platform, wondering what the hell he was going to do to get out of his predicament. His flight to Spain was taking off in a few hours, and he had no hope of catching it, even if he could get home in time and change, he couldn't think of any way to hide his new nails, which now extended past the end of his fingertips, changing the way he moved his hands as he was constantly worried about stabbing himself.



“Thanks for the day out girls, I really had a lot of fun”, Monique said happily.

“That’s good Mama, I’m glad you had a nice day”. Lily answered.

“So, where to now”? Monique asked, “who’s up for some cocktails”?

Antoine shot Lily a look and she nodded, knowing what he meant, “It’s been a long day Mama, we should probably get back home”, Lily replied.

“Oh, my goodness, of course, silly me, Zara has a date tonight and she will need time to get ready. I’m so sorry Zara, it completely slipped my mind, let’s get you home and get you looking beautiful for your man”, Monique said excitedly. Antoine just bowed his head, things that day just seemed to be getting more and more out of control, as he was forced against his will to live out Zara's day.

Chapter 5

As the door of the apartment closed behind him, Antoine led out a sigh of relief, his nightmare outing was over, and he was back in the safety of his home.

He looked down at the flimsy skirt, he couldn't wait to change out of, flapping against his smooth thighs, and could hardly believe he had just ventured out into the centre of Paris wearing it, and nobody had even batted an eyelid.

Monique placed her handbag down and turned to her daughter, "Lily, do you have any wine"? she asked.

"Err... yes, there are a few bottles in the kitchen, but you're not going to start drinking now, are you Mama"? Lily asked surprised by the question.

Monique laughed, "No, not right now, but I thought we could open a bottle later, and watch a movie together, while Zara is out on her date".

"Ah about that Mama, there has been a change of plans", Lily replied.

Monique looked at her with an inquisitive look, "change of plans"? She asked.

"Err... yes, you see, Zara's a bit nervous about tonight, so I thought I'd go along with her for moral support", Lily said, seeing Antoine's mouth drop wide open in surprise, out of the corner of her eye.

"Really, what a shame, I was looking forward to spending some time with you, but I guess we'll have plenty of time to catch up over the next week, I suppose you two will be wanting to get ready then"? Monique replied with the sound of disappointment in her voice.

"Yes, we'll have plenty of time to spend together Mama, and you're right we should probably start getting ready, just make yourself at home ok", Lily replied, grabbing Antoine's hand, almost dragging him into their bedroom and closing the door behind her.

With the door closed, Lily turned to a stunned looking Antoine, standing awkwardly in the middle of the bedroom, "Oh my god, I can't believe, we pulled that off, you really fooled her into thinking your Zara". Lily said bouncing up and down.

Antoine looked down at his feminine outfit before looking slowly back up at Lily, "pulled it off, are you crazy? I thought you said this would be over by now, you just told your mother, we're going out on a date, what were you thinking Lil?"

"Antoine, listen, I know you're not happy about any of this, but Mama is expecting Zara to go on a date tonight, and that means leaving the house, I thought if we went together, it might not be as scary for you", Lily said flashing him a smile.

Antoine wanted to scream at her, but looking at Lily's beautiful face he found it difficult to stay angry with her, "why didn't you just tell her, my date had cancelled at the last minute"?

"Oh, I guess I could have said that sorry, I didn't think of it, but it's too late to dwell on it now, we need to get you ready to go out", Lily said taking his hand and leading him towards the ensuite bathroom.

Normally after a warm shower, Antoine would be feeling calm and relaxed but sat on the bed, his mind couldn't stop thinking about how bizarre the towel, he was wrapped in, felt against his smooth-shaven body, his glowing pink skin, felt so sensitive and tingly against the now rough feeling texture of the towel. He ran his hand down his smooth forearm, shuddering at the sight of his extended nails, firmly attached to the ends of his finger, as Lily plopped down on the bed beside him, "now don't freak out, ok? This needs to be done", she said holding an electric razor and a comb in front of his face.

“Don't panic”? Antoine said, his voice trembling slightly, “What are you planning on doing with those”?

“I'm just going to trim down your eyebrows a little, we got away with covering them up with the fringe of the wig earlier, but we can't risk someone seeing them”.

“No way Lil, that's going too far, I'll look ridiculous”, Antoine whined.

“Antoine, it needs to be done, like it or not, for the next week, you are Zara, and a girl like Zara wouldn't have thick caterpillar eyebrows, and listen you won't look ridiculous, in fact, I quite like this feminine side of you”, Lily replied squeezing his leg through the towel and giving him a kiss on the cheek.

Trying to process all she had just said, Antoine sat in silence as he felt Lily comb through his eyebrows, before the loud hum of the electric razor filled his ears, followed by the sound of the blades zipping across the plastic of the comb.

An hour later, Antoine stood staring at himself in the bedroom mirror and felt incredibly awkward, fully dressed in his outfit for the evening, having just sat through having his face painted.

As he gazed at his feminine reflection, he was distinctly aware of how different girls' clothes felt compared to boys'. He could feel the tightness of the bra strapped around his chest and the weight of the water balloons, tucked inside the cups. The bikini bottoms, he was wearing for underwear, were extremely tight and constrictive, compressing his penis and testis, which were tucked uncomfortably between his legs, and lifting up his bottom giving him a rounder more feminine shape.

The black leggings he now wore fit him like a second skin, and the tight stretchy material encasing his legs felt like nothing he had ever worn before. Lily had paired the leggings with black spaghetti strap top, made from a silky material, clearly visible through the semi-transparent flower-patterned blouse, wrapped loosely around his shoulders, he hated to admit it, but he definitely looked the part of a girl about to go out on a date.

Looking back towards his face, he grimaced seeing it covered in makeup, but the part that still upset him the most, was his new brows, shaved down to almost nothing, before Lily had produced a pair of tweezers to finish the job, leaving them looking delicate and extremely girly.

The rest of his face now matched his eyebrows looking incredibly feminine, as Lily had taken her time in transforming him, lining his eyes with dark eyeliner even giving him a little flick that extended past the corner, completely changing the shape of his eyes, and with the powders and colours she had blended into the creases above, and a coating of mascara, she had somehow managed to make his plain-looking eyes really stand out.

A flash went off behind him, causing Antoine to jump, he quickly spun around only for another flash of the camera to blind him, “what are you doing? Please no pictures”, Antoine gasped.

“Don't worry, I won't show anyone, they're just for me, I just couldn't resist with how cute you looked putting on your lipstick”, Lilly replied pouting.

“Well, I don't feel cute right now, in fact, I feel downright ridiculous, why do I need to practice putting on lipstick anyway”?

“Relax baby, you look gorgeous, no one is going to recognise you tonight, and I already explained about the lipstick, you need to know how to put it on, in case you need to touch it up later.

“Yeah, I guess you're right, but I was kind of hoping we wouldn't be out that long”, Antoine replied still holding the tube of bright red lipstick he had just coated his lips with, awkwardly with his longer than usual pink nails.

(See picture 5)



“Baby, stop worrying, I’ll look after you tonight, I promise, now come over here and try your shoes on, you might need a little practice in them before we head out”.

Antoine watched on with astonishment as Lily placed down a pair of red heeled peep-toe pumps on the floor, having picked them out from Zara’s room for him to wear, “I can’t wear those”, Antoine exclaimed.

“Why not”? Lily shot back, obviously expecting the complaints.

“They’re high heels”, Antoine announced.

“Well, actually they’re wedges, but what’s did you expect to wear? you need to look like you’re going on a date, I already gave in earlier and let you wear those leggings instead of a skirt, flats just won’t look right with your outfit”.

“But I won’t be able to walk”, Antoine complained.

“How do you know? Have you ever tried”? Lily shot back.

“Well, no, of course not, but everyone knows heels are impossible to walk on”.

“Really? Who’s is this everybody? I wear heels all the time, and I’ve once never described them as impossible to walk on”, Lily replied.

Antoine could feel himself losing the argument, “Err... but it’s different for you, you’re a girl”. Antoine blurted out.

lily laughed out loud, “Antoine, can you hear yourself? Are you saying my feet are any different to yours because I’m a girl? Come on now, I’m wearing shoes just like yours tonight, and I’m going to be walking around just as much as you, you just need to change the way you walk a little, you’re fit and healthy, so you’ll be fine after a little practice”, Lily replied lifting her leg up onto a nearby cabinet to show Antoine the high brown wedge heels she was wearing.



"I know, I just mean, err...", Antoine replied flustered before being interrupted, "so, why don't you try them on and see for yourself, it won't kill you, you know? Now come on take a seat on the chair and let's give them a go" Lily said, picking up the scary-looking shoes and walking towards him.

Prompted once again by Lily, Antoine moved over to the chair in front of Lily's makeup station and sat down slowly, feeling the tightness surrounding his legs.

Taking a hold of his right foot, Lily slipped Antoine's right foot into the stiff upper material of the wedge pump with ease as he watched the strange sight of his matching red toenails pop out of the front peephole at the front and felt sick. He then watched on in horror as she repeated the process with his other foot before stepping back satisfied, leaving his feet looking like those of a girl.

Antoine dared not move, staring down at the unusual sight of his legs clad in black leggings, and his feet angled awkwardly in red ramped shoes, with their strange wooden cut out designed

wedge beneath. He suddenly recalled seeing Zara wearing this combination before as a strange and worrying thought popped into his head, did his legs actually look better wearing her clothes than the real Zara?



“Well don’t just sit there gawking, stand up and walk about a bit”, Lily stated.

Antoine hesitated for a moment before taking a deep breath and lifting himself up on to his feet. He instantly felt unstable on his feet as his whole centre of balance seemed off thanks not only to the shoes, but the water balloons tucked in his bra pulling him forward. He now felt like a giant, standing there wobbling perched on the tall platform wedges, he had always been much taller than Lily but now he absolutely dwarfed her.

He slowly lifted his right foot, feeling the surprising weight of his new shoes, before placing it tentatively down and taking a step forward, only to stop dead in his tracks as the unfamiliar sound of a clack, as his wooded heel came into contact with the tiled floor beneath, echoed through the room.

“There you go, now try walking to me”, Lily said encouragingly, stepping back to the far wall of the room.

Antoine tried taking another step but this time as he placed his weight down on the back of his shoe, the bottom the shoe slid out beneath him on the polished bedroom floor, sending him stumbling around wildly, his arms flailing as he desperately tried to retain his balance, and the loud sound of wood clanging of tile filling the room.

“Woah, careful, don’t take such large steps, “Lily said concerned, “watch me ok”?”

Antoine having steadied himself, watched on as Lily effortlessly strode across the room, did a little pirouette before returning to her position on the far wall, “you need to take small steps, put your heel down first, placing one foot in front of the other, roll your hips, and hold your arms out for balance”, Lily instructed, “you got it? Now try walking to me again”.

Knowing he had no choice, Antoine tried to pluck up the courage to try again as he looked down at the odd sight below, seeing his feet arched in an unnatural steep angle, and his unnervingly cute red toenails, popping out from the front of his shoes, and shining in the light, "And keep your head up, don't look down at your feet", Lily stated.

"Ok, I'll try", Antoine replied.

Taking a deep breath, Antoine lifted his head thinking about what Lily had instructed him to do before taking a step forward, followed by another, followed by another. A smile formed on his red-painted lips, as he realised, he was doing it, he was actually walking. But the smile didn't last long as he suddenly realised what he was doing and felt ridiculous, dressed as he was, mincing along the bedroom floor in front of his watching girlfriend, the water balloons in his bra jiggling about, and his lifted backside gyrating from side to side as he carefully placed one foot in front of the other just like Lily had demonstrated.

His rewards for walking 5 metres in the uncomfortable shoes was a thrilled Lily, who took him into her arms and kissed him passionately on the lips, "see I knew you could do it", she stated pulling back smiling, "now you just need to practice a little more and you'll be a pro in no time", she said looking up at the clock on the bedroom wall, "looks like we've got around 25 minutes until he gets here, so get walking girl".

Antoine tilted his head and his eyes widened, "until who gets here? Lily, what have you done"?

Chapter 6

“Promise me, you won’t get angry,”? Lily said trying to look innocent as Antoine felt a sinking feeling grow in his stomach, “I was talking with Mama earlier and out of the blue, she asked what time Zara’s date was arriving to pick her up, well not expecting the question, I kinda panicked and said 7.30 without thinking”.

“What? No way! You didn’t”? Antoine gasped. “Sorry, but it’s ok, I’ve come up with a solution”, Lily replied.

“I’m guessing it doesn’t involve, abandoning this crazy plan and telling your mother the truth”? Antoine said looking downhearted.

“That ship has sailed, I’m afraid baby, not unless you want to see me shipped back to Avignon, but knowing Mama was expecting a man to arrive to take Zara out, I gave Pedro a call”.

“Pedro! That gay guy you work with”? Antoine said, not quite believing what he was hearing.

“He’s not gay, he’s just a little effeminate, and besides who cares about his sexuality? He’s helping us out”, Lily said looking a little offended.

“You told him about... this”? Antoine said moving his arms down in front of his body to indicate the way he was dressed.

“Of course, I had to, but don’t worry he’s cool with it, he’s a really relaxed and openminded guy”, Lily answered, taking Antoine’s hand to calm him.

“I can’t do this Lil, it’s all too much, I thought you said, I only had to do this for a few hours, now look at me! I can’t go out on a date with a man dressed like this”.

“Shh, not so loud, Mama is only next door, she’ll hear you. Listen, it will be ok, trust me, I’ll be there with you, just think of it as a night out in a costume”, Lily said taking his other hand and squeezing them between her own.

“Shit, this is crazy, Lil”, Antoine said shaking his head from side to side as he felt the unfamiliar feeling of long hair brushing against his cheeks, “where are you planning on taking me anyway”?

“Well, Pedro wasn’t keen at first, so I had to offer to buy him dinner and a few drinks after to get him to agree”.

“Oh, great, Lil, just great so what? A restaurant and then out clubbing”, Antoine moaned.

“Don’t be so sarky, will you? I didn’t know today was going to turn out like this, I’m just trying my best to keep us together, and I’m not planning on taking you to a nightclub or anything, I wouldn’t do that to you, I know how uncomfortable you’d feel, I was thinking just a quiet bar, somewhere not too far from here”, Lily replied having become quite emotional and looking on the verge of tears.

Antoine suddenly felt bad, the last thing he wanted was to see Lily upset, “I’m sorry Lil, I know you didn’t plan any of this, I’ll try a little harder, ok? Like you said it’s just a costume”, Antoine said forcing a smile.

“Really? No more complaining then”? she asked. “Well, I’m not promising that, but I do promise to do my best Zara impression for you, from now on”? Lily smiled and hugged him tightly, “Thank you, Antoine, I love you and don’t want to lose you”.

“I love you too, Lil”, he replied as he looked down at the entanglement of long black hair below him and felt as though the water balloons in his bra were about to pop, pushing against his chest.

30 minutes, later Lily watched as Antoine walked back and forwards across the room, sitting down and standing up, as she gave him pointers, she was just thinking how much his body language

and posture had improved, when there was a knock on the front door, quickly followed by a shout, "Lily I think Zara's date is here", Monique's voice called out. "Ok, Mama I'll get it", she replied loudly, before turning to Antoine, "ok, time to go, are you ready"?

"No", he replied, looking down once more at his unbelievable outfit and feeling like he was in a nightmare he couldn't wake up from.

"You'll be fine, now come on", she replied, taking his hand, and leading him out of the room to the sound of their wedge heels clicking loudly of the tiled floor.

The front door opened to reveal a smiling Spaniard in a bright red top, "Hola Lily, hola... Zara", Pedro said, pausing slightly between his greetings as he looked Antoine up and down. "Hola, Pedro", Lily replied as Pedro stepped forward and greeted her with a kiss on each cheek. Standing behind Lily awkwardly, Antoine didn't know how to act, "hola, Pedro", he muttered feeling embarrassed beyond belief. Pedro stepped forward as Antoine tensed up, terrified, knowing what was coming. With his eyes wide open, Antoine watched almost in slow motion as Pedro tilted his head up towards him and pressed his lips against Antoine's skin, kissing him on both cheeks, just like he had with Lily, moments earlier.

With the introductions over, there was then a moment of awkward silence as all three of them stood in the doorway, until Lily spoke, "Ok let's go" she said before turning her head and yelling "bye Mama don't wait up".

"Have fun you two, don't do anything I wouldn't", Monique replied, followed by a giggle, as Lily ushered the group out of the door.

As the door closed behind him, Antoine looked down the corridor outside the apartment, as a sudden panic took over him as he, realising he was again outside dressed as a girl, but this time with a full face of makeup and wearing shoes he could hardly walk in. He wanted to run back into the safety of the apartment, but knew he that wasn't an option, for the next few hours, he would need to venture out into Paris pretending to be a young fashion graduate, and the thought terrified him.

"So, you look different Zara, did you do something to your hair"? Pedro asked as they strolled towards the lift.

"I... um...", Antoine spluttered as Pedro chuckled. Lily gave him a playful slap, "stop it, Pedro, don't tease her, she feeling uncomfortable enough as it is".

"She!" Antoine repeated surprised.

"Of course, she", Lily replied pulling a face, "do you want me to call you Antoine or refer to you with male pronouns while we're out in public? Might turn a few heads".

"No, I guess not, but it just feels so odd", Antoine replied.

"Well, it's not exactly a normal situation for me either, you know? I didn't think when we woke up this morning, later that evening I'd be dressing my boyfriend up in my roommate's clothes and taking him out into the city for a night out, pretending to be my best friend! But let's just get through it ok? And who knows, perhaps if you relax a little, we may even have some fun", Lily said reassuringly.

"Ok, Lil, I'll try, but it's going to be tough in this strange outfit", Antoine said as he stared down mesmerised at the sight of his girly legs squeezed into tight black leggings, and his ultra-feminine shoes clicking along the corridor.

"Strange, come on now girl, you look fabulous," Pedro cooed, "you look so fierce in those red wedges".

As they approached the lift, Antoine saw his distorted girly image in the shiny metal doors and looked down in shame, "Hey come on Pedro, I told you not to embarrass her", Lily said.

“Lily, please, I was being sincere, honest, she looks so good, nothing like that glamourpuss Zara, of course, but if you hadn’t told me, it was Antoine under there, I would have never guessed he wasn’t a real girl”, Pedro replied flustered.

Antoine looked up, brushing a few strands of dark hair out of his face as the lift pinged and the doors opened, “It’s ok Pedro, and thanks for the compliment, I guess”, he replied tottering into the lift and wishing the night was over.

Out on the street, with the light starting to fade Antoine felt extremely vulnerable, he felt strange and off-balance dressed as he was, and worried, knowing that he wouldn't be able to run or defend himself if something happened that night. But trying to push those thoughts to the back of his mind, he set off with Lily and Pedro, down the street, discovering that walking on the uneven pavements, on his tall shoes, was very different to the flat floor of the apartment bedroom and required a lot more effort and concentration to avoid the holes and gaps that threatened to send him crashing to the ground.

After walking for ten minutes, that seemed a lot longer for Antoine, they arrived at the shopping centre, where the restaurant Lily had booked was located. As they stepped in through the large glass doors, past the recently opened Starbucks, Antoine suddenly stopped dead in his tracks, as he looked around nervously at the bustling shopping centre packed with people.



Antoine suddenly felt dizzy, and his legs began to shake as he looked around at all the shoppers zipping around, and the sound of muffled music and people chatting filled his ears. Suddenly noticing that Lily and Pedro had disappeared into the crowd, unaware he had stopped, his heart skipped a beat, not wanting to lose them, he quickly stepped forward on his now aching feet and tottered along as fast as he could, dodging people as he went frantically searching for his companions.

“There you are Zar”, Pedro announced as Antoine stumbled up out of breath, “we thought we had lost you, girl, where did you go”?

“Sorry, I got lost in the crowd”, Antoine replied trying to lower the pitch of his voice causing his words to come out almost like a whisper.

“What did you say”? Pedro asked loudly above the noise of the crowd.

“Never mind”, Lily said helping out, “come on, the restaurant is just up ahead”.

Three hours later, in a bar not far from their apartment, Antoine sat cross-legged in a feminine position, by a little table in the corner. Having relaxed a little after a few drinks, he was now feeling much more confident, having been out for a few hours and having nobody stare at him or call him out for pretending to be something he wasn't.

As he sat in there, in the pleasant atmosphere, sipping his drink through a straw trying to avoid wiping off his lipstick on the rim of the glass again and then having to reapply it, he listened to another one of Pedro's interesting stories and found that he was discovering things about Lily that night that he didn't know.

“And at that moment, she walked in, and there was Lily, sat there eating her lunch, you should have seen the look on Fifi's face”, Pedro said laughing loudly.

“Hey, I didn't know it was hers, I was just so hungry, having not had a break all day. I was only going to eat a bite or two”, Lily replied pouting.

“So, what happened next”? Antoine asked eagerly.

“Oh, Fifi's reaction was priceless, she just stopped and stared at Lily with her mouth open in surprise. It was just like a Mexican standoff in a movie as neither knew what to say, then Fifi, let out a loud sigh, stamped her foot angrily, and stormed away on her big, tall heels. It was so funny”, Pedro answered struggling to tell the story as he was laughing so much.

“It wasn't funny at the time, Ped, I had only been working there a few weeks, I thought she was going to fire me”, Lily pouted.

“But she didn't, and now you too are like best friends, and I bet you still steal her lunch”, Pedro joked.

Antoine laughed once more, as he realised despite being dressed as he was and being called Zara, he was actually having fun. Lily had been right earlier, when she had said Pedro was a very relaxed person, he was constantly joking around and loved to have fun. In truth Antoine felt guilty, thinking about all the times in the past when Lily had asked if he wanted to hang out with Pedro and the rest of her friends from work, he had always refused, assuming they would have nothing in common but having gotten to know him a little he realised he had been too quick to judge.

“So, admit it, Zara, you're having fun, right”? Lily asked rubbing his arm through the soft transparent material of his blouse.

“Yeah, ok, it's not so bad” Antoine replied smiling and rolling his head, “well apart from earlier in that restaurant, I was so nervous sat on that exposed table in the middle of the room, I lost my appetite completely”, Antoine replied smiling.

“Probably explains, why you're such a lightweight tonight”? Lily joked.

"I'm not drunk", Antoine replied shocked.

"Ok, time for another drink then, I think it's your round Zara", Lily shot back.

Antoine looked over at the bar and then down at his painful feet, "ah what the hell", he thought standing up, "Pedro hunny, will you help me, please"? he said jokingly batting his eyelashes and trying to look cute and innocent.

Pedro stood up and placed his arm around Antoine's waist, "of course chica" he said smiling, "Lily, are you having the same again"?

Lily looked up at her boyfriend above her looking extremely cute and relaxed and felt her body tingle. As the day had worn on, she had become more and more accustomed to seeing him looking like a girl, and as the time passed, her attraction towards his new look had grown, "perhaps this week won't be so bad after all", she thought to herself, before turning to Pedro, "Yes, and get a round of shots while you're up there".



Chapter 7

Antoine opened his eyes the next morning and smiled broadly as he saw Lily's beautiful face lovingly looking down at him, smiling, "Morning baby", she cooed, "how are you feeling"?

Antoine stretched, "hmm, I'm not feeling my freshest, but considering how much we drank last night, not too bad", he replied as he noticed she was fully dressed.

Antoine suddenly looked around and felt a bit disorientated, realising he wasn't in his own bedroom, "Are you going out"? he asked.

"Yeah, I told you the other day, I'm going to help out Brie with her pop-up store today", she replied.

"Can't you cancel? What am I supposed to do"? Antoine asked worriedly.

She leaned in and kissed him on the forehead, "sorry baby, I promised her I'd help out, she won't be able to cope on her own, just stay in the room and wait till I get back, we'll sit down later and figure a way out of this situation, ok"?

"But what if your mother decides to come in here"? Antoine asked looking over towards the door.

Lily smiled reassuringly, "don't worry, she won't come in, why would she? Besides, she said something about going out shopping later".

"And what if I get hungry or need to use the bathroom", Antoine shot back.

Lily brought her hand up to her head and started stroking the side of her face, thinking, "hmm, ok that's a good point, you might need to use the bathroom or get a drink, ok, we'll find something pyjamas for you to put on and I'll help you put on a little makeup just in case".

"Great", Antoine moaned wishing he hadn't said anything.

Two hours later Antoine sat bored in Zara's room looking through the mobile store app, trying to find something to do to pass the time, trying to ignore his pink fingernails curled around his phone surrounded in its girly pink case Lily had put on.

The time was passing slowly as he dared not leave the room, constantly on alert every time he heard Monique's footsteps walking around the apartment on the other side of the door.

Hearing the footsteps once more Antoine shot up like a meerkat, holding his breath as the footsteps this time seemed to be getting louder and heading towards his door. He hoped with all his heart that he was wrong about what was about to happen but as the sound of knocking on wood, echoed through the room, he knew his worst nightmare had come true., "Zara dear, can I come in"? Monique cheerfully asked from the other side of the door.

Antoine jumped up panicked snatching his wig of the bedside cabinet, "Just a minute please", he shouted back in a high pitch panicked voice.

He wrestled the wig into position on his head, twisting and turning it to make sure it was on straight just as the handle to the door lowered and the door slowly opened, "good morning Zara, I hope I'm not disturbing you"? Monique asked from the doorway.

"Err... no, you're not disturbing me, can I help you with something Monique"? Antoine asked trying to appear calm.

Monique smiled, "oh no, I'm fine, I was just wondering if you had any plans today"?

Antoine's mind raced, thinking about how to reply, "err... no, I'm just going to stay home today and perhaps look through some job websites", he answered, feeling happy with his answer having remembered Lily telling her mother Zara was looking for work.

“You poor thing, it must be tough, not having an income right now, but I’m positive something will turn up soon,” Monique replied reassuringly, “but I think right now you could use a short break, how about you change out of those PJ’s and we’ll head out for a few hours to get some fresh air? It’s another beautiful day today”?

Antoine panicked, “err... thanks for asking Monique, but I really need to keep looking for work”.

Monique took a step forward, “that can wait surely? A little break will do you the world of good, it’s way too stuffy to spend all day in this room”.

“No, really I’m fine, I better stay here”, Antoine replied, the tone of his voice coming across harsher than he had intended.

“I see”, Monique replied looking hurt, “sorry to bother you, you probably don’t want to spend your afternoon with an old woman like me, I’ll leave you alone”, she replied turning to leave.

“Monique, wait”, Antoine quickly said, “I’m sorry, I didn’t mean it like that, I’m just a little stressed at the moment, you know, having no job, I think you’re really cool, I love spending time with you”,

Monique turned back around as a broad smile crossed her lips, “Really, that’s so sweet of you to say, Zara, ok, you get dressed and I’ll meet you outside in say 30 minutes? And don’t worry if money is tight right now, today is my treat”, she replied before walking away, leaving Antoine wondering what the hell had just happened.

Left alone to get ready, Antoine was unsure of what to wear, he slowly got off the bed and looked around the room, opening a few draws and the closet only to be overwhelmed by the number of clothes Zara owned.

He ummed and ahed, for a good 20 minutes, not wanting to look stupid and trying to think about what clothes went together. But with time running out he knew he had to make a decision and seeing a woolly white sweater and a pair of jeans shorts on a chair, he picked them up and slid them on, feeling reassured that they went together as he had seen Zara wear them the day before she left on her trip.

With the outfit on, he felt a little strange, once again wearing Zara’s clothes without asking, especially with the sweater still smelling of her favourite perfume.

With the decision about what to wear taken care of, Antoine walked over to Zara’s makeup station to check his appearance. His makeup still looked presentable after Lily had applied it that morning but thinking something was missing, he located the tube of red lipstick he had worn the previous evening before puckering up and sliding the creamy solution across his lips, once again shaking his head, and wondering how the hell he had got himself into this crazy situation.

Stepping away from the mirror, the only thing left was to find a pair of shoes, which wasn’t easy with the huge selection at his disposal. Deciding heels were definitely out narrowed his options and after trying on a few pairs of trainers and not liking how they looked with the outfit, he picked out the same flat sandals, he had worn on his first outing crossdressed the day before and strapped them to his feet.

A few hours later, Antoine once again found himself out on the streets of Paris dressed up and pretending to be a girl named Zara. The sun was shining, and the temperature was perfect for a pleasant stroll around the city.

The problem, of course, was Antoine didn’t want to be out and felt very self-conscious as he tried to focus on the way he moved and behaved, not wanting to appear out of place in front of Monique or the numerous other people he passed by in the street.

After following Monique into a few shops and doing his best to look around at the different clothes and outfit on offer, they arrived at a large indoor area full of stalls, Monique, what is this place”? Antoine asked looking around at the huge open space.

"It's where Lily is helping out her friend, I thought we'd stop by and say hello as we are in the Neighbourhood", Monique replied striding ahead.

"Oh, just great", Antoine muttered to himself, knowing he would now have to meet another of Lily's friends dressed as Zara.

They walked on through the giant room, past tables full of shoes, clothes, and all manner of trinkets. Stopping in front of a stall, Monique pulled out her phone and looked down puzzled, "Hmm, this is the place she told me, but I don't see her".

"Good afternoon, can I help you with something"? A smiley round-faced girl asked from behind the stall.

"Oh, hello", Monique replied, "I'm actually looking for my daughter, but perhaps I'm in the wrong place".

"Oh, you must be Lily's mother? She mentioned that you might drop by today, my name is Brie, it's nice to meet you".

"You too Brie", Monique said looking relieved, "is Lily not here"?

"You just missed her, she just stepped out to grab us some lunch, but she'll be back soon, I'm sure she won't be long".

"Ok, no problem is there a bathroom here I can use by any chance"? Monique asked looking around.

Brie stepped out from behind the stall and pointed to the back of the room, "there are some public toilets not far from here, head through those door in the distance, take a right and go up the stairs".

"Thank you, Brie", Monique replied before turning to Antoine, "you look around a little Zara, do you and Brie know each other"?

Antoine froze, did Brie and Zara know each other? it was about to get pretty awkward if they did, "no, we've never met, but I've heard a lot about you, nice to meet you Zara", Brie said extending her hand.

Antoine breathed a sigh of relief, extending his own hand and limply shaking Brie's hand, "nice to meet you too, Brie, Lily's told me lots about you too", Antoine lied hoping she couldn't tell he was a fraud.

"Perfect, you too get to know each other then, I'll be back soon, Zara, why don't you look around the stall, if you like anything, we could always pick up a few pieces, to help Brie out, back soon", Monique said before turning and walking away.

Brie turned, "so, Zara, I thought you were travelling at the moment"? Brie asked an awkward-looking Antoine with a puzzled expression on her face.

"Uh..., yeah, I cancelled my trip at the last minute, decided to stay and look for work", Antoine said flustered, picking up a hairband from the stall trying to distract her from the questions.

"Oh, I just thought...", "Hey I like your designs", Antoine said interrupting her, trying to change the topic of conversation.

"Really", Brie replied looking happy, "everything here is my own design, I'm trying to get noticed, you know? Is there anything you like in particular"? she asked.

Antoine panicked once more before turning to look at the stall in front of him, picking up the nearest thing to hand, a wooden-soled wedge heel, "these are... cool", he said holding the shoe twisting and turning it in his hands.

“They’re from my new designs, “try them on, what size do you take”? Brie asked moving back behind the stall.

“Uh... it’s ok, I don’t want to trouble you”, Antoine quickly replied dropping the shoe back on the table. “Oh, no trouble, let me guess, a 38”, right? Brie asked.

“39”, Antoine replied instantly regretting the words slipping out of his mouth.

When Monique returned from the bathroom, ten minutes later, she found Antoine and Brie chatting away like old friends. As she approached, she noticed the new shoes on his feet and gave a little nod of approval.

“I’m back girls, oh love the shoes, Zara, they look so much better than those old sandals you had on, step over here and let me take a better look”, Monique announced as she approached.

Antoine sighed quietly, taking a few steps forward, once again feeling his foot angled at an uncomfortable angle, and wondering how he had ended up once again stuck wearing heels.



“Oh, I like them, they look great on you, do you like them”? Monique asked as Brie leaned in listening hoping to make a sale.

Antoine was now in an impossible situation, how could he say no and hurt Brie’s feeling, watching on with a big smile on her face, “yes, they are... nice”, Antoine replied blushing with embarrassment, brushing back his wig, which now housed the hairband he had picked up earlier.

“Brie, how much are they”? Monique asked.

“45 Euros, but as you know Lily, I’ll give you a 20% discount”, Brie replied happily.

“No”, Antoine cried as both the women looked at him strangely, “sorry, I don’t really feel comfortable with you paying for me, Monique”.

“Oh, Zara, you are sweet, but honestly, they are so reasonably priced, and we’ll be helping out Brie by purchasing them, I told you today is my treat, I know money is tight right now, while you are looking for work”, Monique replied opening her purse and handing Brie two 20 euro notes, “Please, keep the change, and do you have a bag for Zara’s sandals, this new pair is so cute, I’m sure she’ll want to wear them out”, she added.

“Of course, be right back”, Brie replied disappearing behind the stall.

Realising Monique had just done something nice for him, and that she didn't know that the last thing he wanted to do was buy a pair of heels, he looked her in the eyes and forced a smile, “thank you, Monique, that’s very kind of you”, he said knowing he’d now be forced to wear the clumpy wedge shoes for the rest of the day.

“Mama, you made it”? Antoine heard Lily’s voice from behind him as Monique stepped passed him.

“Hi darling”, he heard Monique reply as he turned slowly to see them hugging. Antoine just stood there awkwardly, grinning like a fool waiting for Lily to notice him. It took her a moment, but when she did finally spot him, Lily's eyes opened wide in shock as she suddenly realised the dark-haired girl in the denim shorts and wedge heels was actually her boyfriend, Ant... ahem Zara, oh my god, what are you doing here”? she cried out surprised.

“Oh, I couldn’t just leave her moping in that dark depressing room all, day”, Monique answered for him, “I thought she could use some air and a bit of retail therapy”.

"Well, it's great to see you Zara", Lily said stepping over and giving Antoine a hug, whispering sorry in his ear.

For the next 15 minutes, Lily, Monique and Brie stood around chatting, as Antoine stood next to them nervously looking around at everyone who passed by, "Well we better be off Lily", Monique suddenly announced, "we have a few more stops to make, but I'll see you later for dinner"?

"Sure Mama, and don't keep Zara out too long, I'm sure she has things to do at home", Lily replied.

"Oh, don't worry, darling, she's a big girl, I'm sure she'll tell me if she gets sick of me", Monique answered cheerfully, "Oh before we go, I want a picture of you three, I do love to have pictures to look over and since you moved up here Lily, I hardly get the chance".

Lily nodded, taking Antoine by the hand, and moving over to stand by Brie, who had moved out in front of the stall, "So which restaurant do you want to eat at later Lily, I was thinking that new place I read about online".

"Restaurant"? Antoine repeated as the flash of the camera almost blinded him.



Chapter 8

“Yes dear”, Monique replied giggling, “you know a place people go to eat”.

Rolling his eyes, Antoine looked over at Lily hoping she was going to make up an excuse telling her mother they couldn't possibly go couldn't go but instead, all he got was a shrug of her shoulders and a weak smile.

“What time do you finish here, Brie”? Monique asked.

“We're closing at five, but we'll need to pack up and take the stock back to my place after, so it will probably be more like 6 or 7, by the time we're actually done”, Brie answered cheerfully.

“Perfect, I'll book a table for 8 then, give you two a chance change, you will come with us, won't you Brie”? Monique stated matter-of-factly.

“Um, well, I guess I don't have any plans tonight, but I wouldn't want to intrude”, Brie responded.

“Nonsense dear”, Monique announced loudly, “you wouldn't be intruding, we'd love to have you with us, right, Lily”?

“Of course, Mama”, Lily quickly replied, not wanting to upset her friend as Antoine shot her a look.

“Well, that's settled then, I'll send you a text later to confirm the booking”, Monique said, leaning in to give Lily a kiss goodbye, before looking over at Antoine who had a worried look on his face, “Is everything alright, dear? You look a little pale”, she asked.

“Oh, yes, I'm fine Monique, just a little hot”, Antoine replied, quickly making up an excuse.

“Well, let's get you some air then shall we, it is a little stuffy in here, say your goodbyes Zara, and we'll head out”. Monique replied.

Brie stepped forward and gave Antoine a hug, “great to finally meet you Zara”, she said, “I'll see you later tonight then I guess, and thanks once again for purchasing one of my designs, those shoes look great on you”.

Antoine gave her an awkward smile as Lily stepped forward to hug him, “I'm sorry, baby, just go with it ok? I love you; everything is going to be alright”, she whispered in his ear.

With the goodbyes over with, and after a final wave, it was time to leave and as Antoine walked out by Monique's side, he couldn't help but worry what Monique had in store for him, the rest of the afternoon.

Two hours later, with the events of the last few hours racing through his mind, Antoine sat on the street, outside a little patisserie, feeling extremely self-conscious on full display as strangers walked by, and glanced over at their table. He folded his arms across his lap to make himself look smaller and cover up the fact he was now wearing a flimsy little skirt.



After leaving Brie's store, Monique had guided Antoine around the city on another shopping spree, as he followed along miserably, feeling completely lost and out of his comfort zone amongst all the different styles and brands of clothes, he was supposed to be an expert on.

Not wanting to blow his cover or embarrass himself Antoine had just let Monique take charge, and very happy to do so, she had proceeded to make him try on and eventually purchase, almost everything she liked the look of.

The outfit he now wore, as he sat there staring down at his coffee cup, was entirely different from the one he had worn when he left the house that morning. The first thing to go was his woolly

jumper, having been replaced with a lightweight cream coloured blouse after Monique insisted, he needed something cooler to wear, as it was probably the reason, he was feeling so hot earlier.

After that first purchase, the flood gates had opened as Monique continued to buy him item after item, not taking no for an answer, all the purchased items, so many, Antoine struggled to remember half of them, now sat in shopping bags, in the back of Monique's car as he wondered how much money she had spent on him that day, buying things he didn't want.

"So, Zara, how did it go on your date last night"? Monique asked surprising Antoine with the question as he almost spilt his coffee.

Placing his cup down on the table, he tried to look unfazed, "uh, yeah fine", he stated.

"What! that's all I get, just a fine", Monique replied forcefully.

"Well, we went out for dinner and then to a bar, it was pretty fun I guess", Antoine replied telling the truth.

"So, you like him then, what was his name, Pedro, right"?

Antoine felt really uncomfortably with the line of questioning, "he's a nice guy", but I think we'll just be friends", he replied again telling the truth.

"Oh, what a shame, but I'm sure the right man for you is out there somewhere, stay positive Zara, you'll find him", Monique said reassuringly.

"Thanks, Monique, but really, it's not a big deal", he replied, not able to look her in the eyes, "boys aren't really my top priority right now".

"Good for you, Zara, I like a strong independent woman, who knows who she is and doesn't need a man to define her", Monique replied picking up her coffee and taking a sip, as Antoine sat there smiling awkwardly.

"So, talking of men, is my Lily, seeing anyone, right now"? Monique probed.

Antoine quickly picked up his own coffee and took a long slurp to give himself some thinking time. He didn't know how to answer, he knew from what Lily told him, she was forbidden from bringing men back to the apartment, hell, that was the whole reason he was currently sat crossdressed in the middle of the day, sipping coffee, but on the other hand, he could use the opportunity to tell Monique that Lily was seeing a great guy called Antoine, and sing his own praises.

He really didn't know which option to choose as he couldn't help but think the question was some sort of test, "Zara, did you hear me"? Monique asked as Antoine stared blankly into space.

"Uh, yeah, sorry, Lily, right, no she's single, too focussed on her career to see anyone right now", Antoine answered, hoping he had made the right choice.

Monique smiled, "She's a good girl, my Lily, I really I brought her up right" she said happily, " I'm so glad she isn't wasting her time with some loser and is focussing on her career", she added as Antoine nodded along, "thank you, Zara, that's put me in a really good mood, come on drink up, time to go".

Antoine again forced himself to smile, feeling deflated by Monique's response, he knew now, not only would Monique never accept him dating her daughter, but he would also have to leave his comfortable seat, get back onto his tired legs and go god knows where, "where are we going Monique, more shopping"? Antoine asked.

"No, dear, I think we've shopped enough for one day, I have something else in mind, call it a bit of a treat for keeping me company today", Monique replied patting him on the back of his hand.

Antoine stood up and straightened his skirt, feeling the thin fabric brush against his smooth thighs and looked down at his cute red toenail, poking through the peephole of his new wedge sandals, which he knew, would soon be causing him discomfort once again.

“Ready, dear”? Monique asked.

Antoine nodded as once again he stepped out into the unknown, one tiny mincing step at a time.



Chapter 9

Entering through the front door of Mon petit hair salon, Antoine had an awful feeling that something terrible was about to happen but as he followed behind Monique, who confidently marched the length of the room, past the waiting customers, and up to the front desk, he knew there was nothing he could do about it.

“Good afternoon, ladies, do you have an appointment?” the perky receptionist asked.

“Good afternoon dear, no, unfortunately not, coming here today was a bit of a last-minute decision, but as I always visit your amazing salon, when I’m in Paris I was hoping you could fit us in”?

The receptionist started typing on the keyboard below her as Antoine willed her to come back and say the place was fully booked,

“You said you were a regular customer, can I have your name, please”, asked the receptionist cheerfully.

“Monique Allard, I usually see Anabelle, when I visit”, Monique answered, "but if she's busy, we can always see someone today".

The receptionist once again started typing, as Antoine looked on nervously and Monique looked around the room taking in the scenery.

“hmm... it looks like we are quite full right now, but I can see here, you are part of our VIP programme, please, take a seat ladies and I’ll see if I can squeeze you in”, she replied.

“Oh wonderful, thank you very much”, Monique replied before turning to face Antoine, “you’re going to love this place, Zara, I’ve been coming here for years and they are the best salon in the city”, she told him before they walking back towards the entrance and taking a seat in the waiting area.

Two minutes later the receptionist appeared and handed each of them a bottle of water "Great news Monique, Annabelle has had a cancellation and can see you in a few minutes", the receptionist announced as Antoine's last hope of escape evaporated,

As Monique thanked the receptionist, Antoine dove into his bag and quickly dug out his phone to text Lily, “Lil, I’m in trouble, your mother has brought me to some fancy salon, and I think she wants me to get my hair done, what am I going to do? I’m wearing a wig, they are going to find out I’m a boy, help”, the text read.

It was an agonizing few minutes of waiting for Antoine, as he just stared down at his phone hoping for a miracle but when his phone finally pinged and he read the reply, all hopes of a reprieve quickly evaporated. “Dam, trust my mother to head to the salon the first chance she gets, you’re not going to like this, but you have very few options right now, your only option is to tell them you’re wearing a wig as you cut your hair recently and don’t like it short, ask them to style the wig for you and you should be fine, people do that all the time, just be confident, good luck”.

Just as Antoine finished reading the reply, the receptionist reappeared, “Annabelle’s ready for you now, do you want to follow me”, she said.

Monique stood up first as Antoine slowly got to his feet before the three of them walked through a side door and into a private room with two chairs set up. Upon entering the room, Annabelle, a stylish looking young woman with blue hair, smiled broadly and came over to greet them, “Monique great to see you, you should have told me you were in the city, I could have made more time for you”, she said cheerfully kissing Monique twice on both cheeks.

“Lovely to see you too, Annabelle, sorry for the late notice, coming here today was a bit last minute thing”, Monique replied, “this is Zara, a friend of my daughter, she’s been keeping me

company today, and I thought we'd have you work your magic on us before we head out to dinner at a fancy restaurant later tonight".

"Hi Zara", Annabelle said looking over at Antoine and smiling, "No problem Monique, we'll have you both leaving her looking like royalty, what would you like doing today"? she asked turning her attention back to Monique.

Monique ran her fingers through her hair, "well, I was thinking just a trim and a blow-dry, do you have time to fit us both in"?

"Yes, that should be fine, take a seat ladies and we'll get started", Annabelle replied, pointing towards the two empty chairs.

Antoine looked at Monique for help but was only greeted with a smile, "don't be shy dear, take a seat", she replied, ushering Antoine over towards the chair.

Brushing his short skirt tightly against the back of his thighs, Antoine sat down on the comfortable chair as Annabelle arrived behind him, he was just about to touch his head, when she was startled by Antoine shouting out, "wait", surprising both Monique and Annabelle, who jumped in surprise.

"What's wrong dear"? Monique asked concerned.

Antoine took a deep breath, "I... I...um... I'm wearing a wig", he stated pulling the mop of dark hair off his head and placed it on his lap where he stared down at it in shame.

Monique gasped, "oh my, I had no idea, you should have said something earlier dear".

Antoine still looking down at the wig resting on top of his short skirt and tickling his thighs couldn't bear to look at them, "I'm sorry Monique, I was embarrassed, I had it cut not long ago, and I didn't like how it turned out", Antoine lied repeating what Lily had told him to say in the text.

Monique came over and placed her hand on his shoulder, "oh, you poor thing, I can see why you don't like it, short hair doesn't suit everyone, and on you, it does make you look rather masculine", she said trying to comfort him, "and I bet, with you finding it difficult to get a job right now, you didn't have the money to fix it, am I right"? she asked.

Antoine slowly lifted his head and saw Monique's kind smiling face behind the freakish sight of his made-up face and boyish haircut, through the mirror. Absolutely stunned that despite the wig, Monique still believed he was a girl named Zara, Antoine nodded along.

Monique nodded with him before turning to face Annabelle, "Annabelle, I know we're short on time today, but do you think you can do something about this"? Monique said pointing at Antoine's head, "I have no idea where the girl went for her last cut, but that hairdresser should be shot, there would be a big tip in it for you if you can fix her mess".

Annabelle stepped forward and started running her fingers through Antoine's short boy cut, "hmm... well, we could do a weave and dye the top to match, but I have another appointment at 6.30, I wouldn't be able to fit both of you in".

"That's fine, you work on Zara, I had my hair done just last week, I'll book another appointment for later in the week", Monique announced, "this is much more important".

"No, please Monique", Antoine said, in a quiet sad voice, "you don't have to do that for me, I'm fine really".

"Nonsense, girl, I've been wondering since we met why you were so shy and reserved, nothing like the girl Lily had described to me on the phone, and now I know why, let's fix this up and get you your confidence back, no arguments. Annabelle, I'm going to head out for a walk, do what you need to do, and as we'll be pushed for time, do you think you could do her makeup when you're done with her hair".

“You got it, Monique, leave it to me, when you get back Zara here will be looking absolutely stunning”, Annabelle said happily, “this is going to be fun, I love a makeover”.

“Annabelle, you’re the best”, Monique replied cheerfully, “ok, Zara, I’ll be back around 6.30 to pick you up, we won’t have time to go home and change before dinner, do you want me to fetch one of your new outfits from the car, so you can change when you’re done”?

Antoine just nodded his head in a daze, having not heard a word Monique had said, since realising he was about to receive hair extensions. He watched through the mirror as Monique said her goodbyes and exited the room, leaving him at the mercy of the blue haired hairstylist, “well, you won’t be needing this anymore”? Annabelle announced, tossing the wig sat in his lap on to the counter, spinning his chair around 180 degrees, and tilting it back towards the sink.

Two hours later, Antoine was once again sat in the waiting area of the salon, fidgeting, and looking nervous, trying not to make eye contact with the two women sat opposite him. Having changed the outfit, Monique had left for him, he now felt more embarrassed than ever, sat in a fancy women's hair salon in a designer black dress waiting to be collected and taken out to dinner.

with his head down, he could once again feel long strands of hair brushing against his neck and shoulders, but this time he was struggling to come to terms with the fact he was no longer wearing a wig. He couldn't quite believe the long shiny curls at the edge of his vision were now his hair but having watched in a trance, as Annabelle the stylist, had slowly, strand by strand, firmly attached them to his head, he realised that returning to his old life as Antoine, had just become a lot more difficult.

As the loud tick of clock above his head, echoes in his ears, almost in slow motion. Antoine closed his eyes, too frightened to look over at the customers opposite him in case he was forced into having a conversation, and too ashamed to look down any longer, at the dark ruffled material of his skirt, draped across knees reminding him of the living nightmare, he couldn't wake up from.

Shifting in his chair to try and find a more comfortable position, Antoine shuffled forward a little, pushing off the ground, feeling the steep angle his foot was forced to rest in and shuddered as he experienced the extremely strange and unfamiliar feeling of his shiny nyloned legs sliding past each other, under the silky skirt of the dress, as he folded one leg over the other just above the knee.

When Monique re-entered the salon, late having lost track of time, she looked over to the waiting area and gasped at the beauty sat waiting for her. For a moment, she stood like a statue in the entrance, taking in the sight of the new Zara. Gone was the tomboy she remembered from earlier, and in her place sat an elegant and sophisticated looking young lady, wearing a beautiful black dress and sparkly high heeled platform pumps.

Hearing footsteps approach, Antoine looked up to see Monique approaching with a huge smile on her face as folded his hands across his lap nervously, glad that the torturous wait was over but dreading now having to leave the salon dressed as he was.



“Wow, Zara, you look gorgeous, darling, didn’t I tell you this place did amazing work” Monique announced loudly, having stopped next to his chair, “how do you like your new look”?

Seeing her so excited and not wanting to say anything out of character, Antoine forced a smile and thought about what Zara might say, "Oh hi, Monique, yes, I love it, thank you so much", he replied, cringing on the inside as he forced the words out.

"You're very welcome dear, and I'm sorry I'm late, I lost track of time, let's quickly pay the bill, then we'll get ourselves over to the restaurant, I think we can still make it in time", Monique replied, looking up at the clock on the wall.

Antoine carefully stood up and wobbled on his tall heels, not used to the height of his new footwear, feeling as though he was about to fall flat on his face.

Having found his centre of gravity, Antoine took a tentative step forward, feeling the tendons in his ankles stretch uncomfortably, and catching a glimpse of his blurry reflection in the glass window to his left. With a look of utter disbelief on his face, Antoine's eyes were drawn to his impossibly tall sparkly shoes shuffling along the tiled floor, and the flimsy flared skirt lapping gently around his shiny nylon-clad knees.



“Careful Zara”, Monique cried out.

Antoine quickly turned to see a panicked look on Monique’s face but before he could react, he felt his shin crash into a decorative sheep on the salon floor, sending it careering across the room loudly, and almost knocking him over to boot.

Red face and embarrassed, Antoine looked around as the three women in the waning area, and the receptionist, who had popped her head out on the far side of the room, looked over to see what all the commotion was about, “sorry, sorry”, Antoine muttered quietly, wanting the floor to open up and swallow him.

“Are you alright, dear”? Monique asked rushing over.

“Yeah, I’m fine, I think the sheep came off worse than me”, Antoine replied trying to make light of the situation.

At that moment, the receptionist came rushing over, with the displaced sheep tucked under her arm, “Are you ok”? “are you hurt”? She asked placing the sheep back in its position and inspecting Antoine's feminine-looking legs for injuries.

“Just my pride”, Antoine replied mortified, “sorry, I wasn’t looking where I was going”, he told the receptionist as she stood back up.

The receptionist smiled, “don’t worry about it, you’re not the first person to bump into that old thing, we should really think about moving it someplace else”.

“Come along now, Zara, let’s pay and be on our way, shall we”? Monique said, feeling a little embarrassed herself with all the fuss.

Antoine nodded, feeling his newly extended hair tickle his bare shoulder, before gladly following Monique across the room towards the reception desk.

“Thanks so much, girls”, Monique said cheerfully, speaking to the receptionist and Annabelle who had come out of her room to say goodbye, “you’ve done a marvellous job as always, and we’re really sorry again about the ornament, are you sure you don’t want me to pay for any damages”?

“Don’t be silly, there was no damage and we’re the ones who should be apologising to you, injuring our customers is not something we like to do here at Mon Petit”, the receptionist replied handing back Monique her credit card and giggling.

“You're welcome, Monique, all I did was enhance the beauty that was already there, it wasn’t difficult with young Zara”, Annabelle added smiling happily, “I’ll see you in a few days for your appointment, nice to meet you, Zara, enjoy your dinner, you two”,

Antoine looked over and again forced a smile, trying to ignore the comment about enhancing the beauty that was already there, “thank you, goodbye”, he said meekly, thinking how absurd it was to be thanking the girl who had just transformed his hair into a girly feminine style and worried how he was going to navigate the rest of the evening, perched on top of his preposterously high heels that were already hurting his feet.

Chapter 10

Parking up around the corner from the restaurant, Monique turned off the engine and turned towards Antoine who had been sat silently thinking throughout the journey, “we’re here”, she announced cheerfully, “are you hungry, Zara”?

“uh-huh”, Antoine responded, agreeing but not sure if he could actually eat with the feeling of butterflies in his stomach.

“Well, I hope so, because this place is supposed to be delicious”, Monique replied, “let’s go and find Lily shall we”?

It was only a short walk to the restaurant, but it was slow going for Antoine as he struggled to keep pace with Monique feeling very unstable and uncomfortable thanks to his new footwear that were causing him all types of problems.

Up until this point, Antoine had thought he'd been adjusting well under the circumstances, having plenty of practice walking around on his ramped wedged shoes over the last 24 hours, but these new platform pumps, with their extremely tall and unstable stiletto heels, were a completely different kettle of fish.

With his head down to avoid making eye contact with anyone on the busy Parisian street and dreading the inevitable reunion ahead of him, Antoine took his time, making sure to plant each foot carefully, before each wobbly step, curling his toes to grip as his shiny nyloned feet slid around inside his hellish heels, threatening to send him toppling over on to the hard pavement below.

Out of breath and exhausted, Antoine and Monique turned a corner and saw the restaurant in front of them with its eye-catching façade, but Antoine as Antoine battled with his skirt, which was threatening to blow up and reveal his feminine underwear, the flashy looking eatery where the last thing on his mind as he spotted Lily sat on a wall by the side of the building.

Lily looked beautiful that evening having dressed up for the occasion and under normal circumstances, Antoine would have felt excited seeing her looking so pretty and feminine, in her short white dress with a floral design, and high wedge shoes. But that evening, as he slowly minced his way towards his loving girlfriend, his heels clicking loudly announcing his arrival, Antoine was finding hard to think of himself as her man, feeling completely humiliated and emasculated in his own fancy evening dress and towering heels as Lily stared back at him with a bewildered look plastered on her face.



"Hi Lily, sorry we're late, darling", Monique cheerfully announced, rushing ahead to greet her daughter, "have you been waiting long"?

"No problem Mama, I've only just arrived", Lily replied standing up and hugging her mother, as the whole time her eyes remained firmly locked on Antoine standing awkwardly behind her.

"Hi Zara", Lily said stepping forward to hug her feminized boyfriend, very surprised to see him in a dress but also amazed by how good he looked wearing it.

"Hi, Lil", Antoine quietly replied, his blushing red cheek hidden under his thick layer of foundation.

"Is, Brie not with you"? Asked Monique.

"No, she's running a little late, but she's still coming, she sends her apologies, and will meet us inside when she arrives". Lily replied releasing Antoine from the hug.

"Ok, that's fine, I guess", Monique replied, "Well, girls, I don't know about you, but I'm famished, shall we find out table"?

Lily linked her arm through Antoine's who was still looking a little shell-shocked with everything going on, before guiding him towards the restaurant.

"Good evening madam, do you have a reservation"? Asked a handsome looking man just inside the door.

"Yes, it's under Charpentier, but please call me, Monique", Monique replied in a flirtatious voice and playing with her hair.

Lily shook her head in disgust and rolled her eyes, seeing her married mother blatantly flirting with a man half her age.

"Ah, yes here we are, a table for four", replied the smiling Maître d, "I'm afraid your table isn't quite ready yet, but you are welcome to wait by the bar"?

Monique breathed in, her cleavage lifting and becoming a little more prominent, through the deep V of the silk designer dress she had worn that evening, "Yes, the bar will do just fine, perhaps you'll join us for a drink...Jean", she replied reading the nametag on the man's chest.

"Can I use the bathroom"? Lily asked to break up the awkwardness.

"Of course, madam, just past the bar area on your left". The Maître d replied grabbing a few menus from beside him, "ladies if you'd like to follow me? I'll show you the way".

"I'll come with you, Lily" Antoine announced, arriving at the bar area as Monique located a spot to sit and Antoine and Lily broke off, heading towards the restroom.

As Antoine once again focused on his foot placement, he again got a feeling he was about to do something wrong. Since the whole cross-dressing charade had begun, he had tried desperately to avoid using the women's bathroom as much as possible but having held off all day if he had tried to hold on any longer, he would have wet his panties.

But with the bathroom being right next to the bar, he didn't have long to dwell on it as Lily ushered him through the door. After checking they were alone, Lily turned to face her boyfriend, "Oh my god, Antoine, you look so beautiful, I can't believe you're wearing a dress, and those shoes, wow".

Antoine shook his head, seeing his girly reflection in the bathroom mirror, "it's your mother, Lil, she won't listen to me, I know she thinks she's helping, but this situation has gotten way out of hand, I feel so weird being here and dressed like this".

"I know, I'm so sorry, baby, but she'll be gone in a few days and then we can get back to normal, promise", Lily replied reassuringly, "Try to think of it as a unique experience, you know, not many men get to find out how the other half lives".

"I think I've already had enough experiences to last a lifetime", Antoine replied animated "today was awful, Lil, I was so embarrassed in all those shops, and when we entered that beauty salon, I thought I was going to have a heart attack".

"But you survived", Lily replied smiling, "and they did a great job on that old wig, it looks so natural now".

Antoine looked down at the floor, catching a glimpse of his shiny legs and shoes emerging from beneath a designer black dress, which even after an hour, still shocked him, "it's not a wig", he mumbled quietly.

"What"? Lily asked, not understanding what he had said.

"It's not a wig, Lily", Antoine repeated louder, "they put all this hair in my hair and...", he said trailing off as he started to feel quite emotional.

"No way, you got extensions, no wonder it looks so good", Lily replied completely stunned, before stepping forward to get a better look.

"I couldn't stop her; you know what she's like"? Antoine said in a sad quiet voice.

"Hey, don't worry, baby, it's not a big deal, we'll just get you a haircut once Mama goes home, you'll be back to your old self in no time", Lily said in a soothing voice, " And you know this might not actually be a bad thing", she paused running her hand through Antoine's newly extended hair, "it will actually make thing easier to conceal your identity".

"Nothing about this is easy, Lil", Antoine replied staring her in the eyes.

Lily leaned forward and gave him a little peck on the lips before stepping back and flashing him a heart-melting smile, "Well, it's tough to be a girl and to look beautiful, perhaps in future you'll be a little more grateful for all the things I go through just to look pretty for you".

Antoine smiled back, "I can definitely see that now", he replied feeling slightly guilty for all the times he had taken her for granted.

"That's better", Lily announced, "try to relax and smile a little more, you look really pretty when you smile, now go and sort yourself out, then we'll get back to Mama, Ok"?

Antoine nodded, again not liking that people kept telling him he was cute and pretty, but feeling the pressure pressing against his bladder he quickly tottered into one of the cubicles to relieve himself.

Later at the table, looking nervously around the elegantly designed room and seeing all the people in their designer outfits, smiling and conversing, Antoine felt out of his comfort zone, having never been able to afford to eat in such a fancy restaurant in the past, but feeling encouraged after the conversation with Lily in the bathroom, Antoine decided to try and relax and just go with the flow, In the belief that if he could just get through the next few days, everything would go back to normal and he could have his life back.

As the appetizers arrived, Antoine's eyes lit up as he saw a selection of delicious-looking dishes placed down in front of him by a smiling waiter. Smiling back at the waiter, Antione tried to push the thoughts, that he looked ridiculous and stupid, to the back of his mind, which was easier said than done, sat there in the fancy restaurant wearing a silky dress and hosiery, very conscious of the fact that no-one around him seemed to think he was out of place, sat with the three women on his table, wearing similar girly outfits.

"So, how is the business going, Brie"? Monique asked as the waiter placed a dish in front of her.

"Well, it's been pretty tough trying to start a brand and make a name for myself but I'm going to work hard and make it a success, even if it kills me", Brie answered enthusiastically.

"I can imagine how tough it must be, but you keep going, these things take time, and I have a feeling that with your drive and passion, you'll make it a success", Monique replied sincerely.

A huge smile crossed Brie's face, "thanks, Monique, that so nice of you to say, Lily's been a massive help too, it's just a shame she can only help out on her days off".

Monique fell silent for a moment, as though she was deep in thought before looking across the table, her eyes resting on Antoine who was ignoring the conversation and staring down happily at his food.

"Brie, I've just had an amazing idea", Monique announced proudly, "You need some help with your business, right? and Zara is looking for work at the moment, you two could help each other out".

Antoine's head shot up at lightning speed as he realized what Monique was implying, and with his eyes wide open and his blood pumping loudly in his ears, he waited on with bated breath for Brie to respond.



Chapter 11

The next morning, Antoine was in a foul mood as he struggled to force his feet into a pair of high heeled sandals as his ponytail, not for the first time, annoying fell in front of his face. Frustrated he reached up and removed the strands of hair stuck to his tacky pink lips and tossed the ponytail back over his shoulder.

Having finally managing to close the zips on the back of his frightening looking shoes, Antoine stood up and waddled over to the mirror, where he sighed loudly, seeing his image reflected back wearing a loose white blouse, and a tight pink miniskirt, which matched his eye makeup, all sparkly and pink, making the long fake eyelashes he was wearing stand out even more.

Hearing the handle of the bedroom door move, Antoine looked up as Lily entered the room, "Ok, are you ready to go"? she asked a little flustered, "if we don't leave now, I won't be able to walk with you to the centre before work, otherwise, I'll be late to work again".

"I don't want to do this Lily, how can you expect me to stand around all day in this outfit, selling women's clothes on a market stall"? Antoine moaned.

Lily walked towards him, "I know, baby, and I'm sorry you've been pushed into doing this, Mama can be so impulsive at times, but you know she was just trying to help, right"? she said calmly, "I mean, what could we say without it sounding suspicious"? she asked with an innocent look on her face.

"I know, I get it", Antoine stared bluntly, "she thought, she was helping an out of work girl, get a little extra money, but I'm not a girl, Lil, I don't feel comfortable dressed like this, and I have no idea how to be a salesgirl".

"You'll be fine", Lily said, wrapping her arms around him and giving him a comforting hug, "it is easy, just do what Brie tells you, smile at the customers and remember to give them the space they need to make a decision, sales is like the easiest job in the world, you'll see".

Antoine nodded, agreeing once more to do something he really didn't want to do, all for the risk of losing the beautiful girl in front of him, who he loved to death, "Are you coming to collect me when I'm done tonight"? He asked hopefully but already knowing the answer.

"No, sorry, baby, you know I'll be working late, just take a taxi back, ok"? She said stepping back and smiling at him, "remember it's only for one day, the pop-up shop was only a short-term thing, Brie's done after today. Now come on let's pretty girl, Mama's in the shower, so if we leave now, we can sneak out without you having to speak to her".

After an awkward train ride into the city and a painful 20-minute walk to the building, as they entered the centre, Antoine's frustration from that morning was threatening to boil over, but with nothing to be done, on they went, down the maze of corridors as Lily powered ahead with Antoine struggling to keep pace as the bottom of his tall sandals slipped and slid on the polished marble floor beneath.

Clicking along, clutching his oversized purse, Antoine felt the dull ache in his ankles and the uncomfortable rubbing by the straps of his sandals on his bare feet. Not able to take it any longer, he stopped, bent down, and readjusted the straps easing the pressure on his arched feet and finding a relatively more comfortable position,

Hauling himself back to his feet, Antoine turned to see Lily, 20 meters up the corridor glaring at him with an annoyed look on her face, "Zara, please. I'm going to be late; can you try to move a little faster", She announced loudly.

Antoine placed one hand on his hip and stared at her in disbelief, "move a little faster! Are you kidding me"? He angrily spat, "how the hell am I supposed to do that when you've forced me into

this tight skirt and these ridiculous shoes? I've had enough of this". He said in a serious tone holding her gaze.



"Here we go again", Lily muttered under her breath, "Ok, listen, I'm sorry, ok, I just can't be late again this week, I've already been warned", she stated before softening her expression. "I was insensitive, sorry, baby, I know you are still adjusting to those clothes, now please, come here, I'll slow down, I promise", She replied smiling and reaching out with her hand.

Antoine tried to stay angry, but once again as he looked at his angel smiling at him, his anger dissipated as he was powerless to resist her commands, "Ok, but please go a little slower, I'm trying my best here", he replied, before mincing over loudly and taking her hand.

"Who knew being a salesgirl was such hard work", Antoine thought to himself as he was about to help Brie start packing up for the day. After an awkward start that morning, feeling awkward and self-conscious by his appearance, especially after Brie persuaded him to put on one of her dresses and a pair of wedge heels, to promote her designs, Antoine had settled into the role, too busy to think about how he was dressed.

It had been nonstop all day, talking to customers, trying his best to sound enthusiastic and knowledgeable about the styles, and walking back and forward to the backroom to replace the items as they sold. The result left Antoine feeling utterly exhausted, aching in places that he didn't even know he had muscles, with surprised him as first as he considered himself to be quite fit with his regular morning jogs, but after a full day force to balance on his tiptoes, he now realised that walking around on tall heels all day requires using a whole different set of muscle groups.

“Thank you so much for today, Zara”, Brie announced looking over they takings for the day, “you’ve been such a massive help, I think this is the most I’ve ever made in a single day, you’re a natural”.

Antoine smiled, “no problem, Brie” he replied cheerfully". to be honest it was quite fun, but I can't wait to get home, my legs are killing me”,

“Yeah, I bet, people don’t realise how fit you have to be to stand on your feet all day”, she replied, "here this is for you, and as a thank you, you can keep the outfit, after all, it looks amazing on you”, Brie said handing him a wad of Euro notes.

“Thanks, Brie”, he replied, looking down and quickly counting the money, happy to receive some decent compensation for his embarrassing day’s work but not overly thrilled about being given the outfit to keep.

“Oh, looks like you have a visitor”, Brie announced lifting her hand and pointing over his shoulder.

“Antoine looked puzzled before turning around as his pulse quickened, “what now”? He thought, “I can’t be doing with this, I just want to go home”.



“Hello, girls, how are you? Has your new assistant been pulling her weight Brie”? Monique cheerfully stated as she strode up.

“Hi Monique”, Brie replied walking forward from behind the stall to greet her, “oh, yes, she’s been a god sent, thank you so much for suggesting she help me out today”, she added as the two embraced.

“Hi, Monique”, Antoine said trying to sound as though he was pleased to see her, “what brings you here”? he asked as she kissed him on both cheeks and gave him a light hug.

“Well, I was bored at home all alone and thought I’d come to meet you after your day of work, are you two finished for the day”?

“Yes, we’ve just closed up for the day”, Brie answered before turning to Antoine, “you can head out with Monique if you’d like, Zara? I can pack up the rest of the stuff”.

“Are you sure, Brie? I can't leave you to do all the heavy lifting by yourself, “Antoine replied, hoping to avoid another trip out enfemme with Lily’s mother.

“I’ll be fine, it was the last day, and thanks to you, we’ve almost sold through all of my stock, there’s only a small box to carry, you go and have fun, you deserve it”, Brie said smiling back.

“Wonderful, that’s settled then, “Monique cheerfully announced, “how about we go and grab a coffee? I’ve got a favour to ask you”, she said looking over at Antoine, who once again had a nervous feeling in the pit of his stomach, knowing that he wasn't going to like what she had to say.

Chapter 12

Sat in a café, having changed back into his pink skirt and blouse, but deciding to stay in the fancy wedge shoes, gifted from Brie, as they were slightly more comfortable than the strappy sandals, he had worn than morning, Antoine looked up as Monique placed two lattes on the table and proceeded to sit down.

“Thank you”, Antoine said feeling very apprehensive about the favour Monique had mentioned earlier.

“You’re welcome, dear”, Monique replied, “so how was it today”?

“Oh, yeah, it was fine, we were really busy, time just seemed to fly by, to be honest”, Antoine replied, picking up his cup and taking a sip.

“That’s good”, Monique said smiling, “I bet it feels good to be working again, even if it was only for a day”.

Antoine nodded, “yeah”, he replied shuffling in his seat and pulling at his tight skirt, which was riding up his shiny thighs, a little too high for his liking.

There was then a moment of silence as Monique took a drink as Antoine sat waiting nervously for her to speak. He watched as she placed the cup back on the table before looking up at him with a smile, “so there was something I wanted to ask you”, Monique said cheerfully.

“Ok”, Antoine replied anxiously, his brain coming up with all sorts of awful scenarios.

“Did Lily mention about getting her cousin Marianne an internship at Fifi with her”? Monique asked.

Antoine thought back, Lily had told him about arranging some work experience for her cousin a few weeks back, but with everything that had gone on in the last few days, it had completely slipped his mind, “yes, she told me”, Antoine replied wondering where she was going with this.

“Ah, good, well there’s been a problem with her accommodation, the landlord has decided to sell the place she was going to live, leaving her with nowhere to stay”, Monique said calmly, as Antoine listened on wide-eyed, “Well, I can’t have her all alone in a hotel, so I’ve said she can stay at the apartment”.

“What”! Antoine exclaimed, not meaning to sound so abrupt, “where will she sleep”? He asked flustered and slightly too loud.

Monique looked surprised by the reaction before tilting her head to the side as though she was thinking, her expression then changed and she nodded her head as though she had just worked something out, “Oh, sorry dear, I didn’t mean to scare you, that apartment is your home, I would never ask you to leave”, she replied reaching over and taking Antoine’s hand to console him, thinking she had worked out the reason for the outburst, “Marianne would stay in my guest bedroom, I’ve already found a hotel for the last few nights of my visit”.

The reply didn’t make Antoine feel any better, but he tried to calm himself down and not show his emotions, “when does she arrive”? He asked quietly.

“She flies up tomorrow morning”, Monique stated, “and that’s what I wanted to ask you, seeing as you have some free time at the moment, I’d like you to help her settle in, show her the ropes as to speak”.

If Antoine was feeling nervous before, he was now about to have a meltdown, but what could he say? it was Monique’s apartment and if he refused to show her niece around it would not go over to well. He looked up trying desperately to stop his arms and legs from shaking and forced a smile, “No problem, Monique, you can count on me”, he replied before picking up his coffee and staring into the cup petrified.

Later that evening back in the apartment, Antoine heard a noise from inside Zara's room as Lily came in through the front door. He rushed out to the living room to meet her.

"Lil, we need to talk, something really bad has happened", Antoine said in a panic.

"I know, it's Marianne, Mama text me earlier, but it's going to be ok, I've got a plan, we just need to...", "Hello, darling", Monique interrupted coming out from her room, did you get my messages"? she asked.

"Hi Mama", Lily replied, "yes, I got them, sorry I had no time to reply, it's been a really busy day".

"Oh no problem, but the reservation at the restaurant is in an hour, you better quickly get ready", Monique said tapping her wrist.

Lily sighed quietly to herself, the last few days had taken their toll on her, leaving her feeling stressed and exhausted, "OK, Mama, I'm going", she replied, before turning to Antoine, "I need to get ready and so do you, we'll talk about this later, ok"? she said before walking across the living room and disappearing into her bedroom.

Back in Zara's room, Antoine was still a nervous wreck, the last thing he wanted to do was dress up in Zara's clothes and go out, but with little choice, he went about making himself look presentable for dinner.

Having spent the day in a skirt, he wanted something to cover his legs that evening and after thinking about it for a second, he just grabbed the shiny tight leggings, he had worn for his date with Pedro a few nights ago, and with a little effort, forced them into position tightly around his legs.

Not bothering to change out of his blouse, he took down his ponytail, squeezed a little styling mousse on to his hand, and fluffed up his hair a little to give it some volume, still amazed that the long flowing locks were actually attached to his head.

Not wanting to mess around with makeup, he picked up the red lipstick he was used to wearing on nights out these days, and brushed it across his lips, before standing back and nodding satisfied that it would do.

To complete the look, he found a red blazer in the wardrobe and slipped his feet back into the same red wooded wedges he had worn last time with the leggings, knowing they went with the look and that the shoes were at least bearable to walk in. Once ready, Antoine exited the bedroom and went over to sit on the sofa to wait.

15 minutes later, Lily exited the bedroom wearing a tan skirt, a loosely fitting sweater, and a pair of low heels, as Antoine wondered if he had even needed to change, but with other things on his mind, he jumped up and clomped over to talk to her.

"Lily, please we have to talk about Marianne", he said flustered.

"I know baby, but don't worry, I told you, I have a plan, it's going to be ok", Lily said stroking gently through his hair, "she can stay for a few days, a week tops while I find her somewhere else to live, you can just stay out of her way".

"Another week, merde", Antoine exclaimed, "but I'm not going to be able to stay out of her way, your mother wants me to show her around, we're meeting her at Charles de Gaulle in the morning".

"Merde", Lily repeated, "that does make things awkward, but she's never met Zara and you've fooled everyone so far, you just need to carry on doing what you're doing".

"Lily, I don't think you realise how bad this is, Marianne may never have met Zara, but she has met Antoine! Remember when she came up to visit, and we bumped into each other while I was leaving the apartment".

Lily looked at him and went as white as a sheet, “oh my god, I had totally forgotten about that”, she said panicked, “but it was a long time ago, right? She can’t possibly remember you”?

“Are you sure? I remember her, the stuck-up little princess with a high and mighty attitude”, Antoine said shaking his head.

Lily went quiet and looked away for a second before turning slowly back towards Antoine with a sad look on her face, “you’re right, it’s over, we’ll have to come clean. When Mama comes out of her room, we’ll sit her down and tell her everything”.

“what”! Antoine shouted, “no, you can’t do that, not dressed like this? Do you really want to tell her that the girl she’s just spent the last few days with is actually her daughter’s boyfriend? She’ll kill me, and she’ll feel like a fool, Lil, you can’t”!

“arrggg”, Lily exclaimed bashing her forehead into the wall, “I don’t know what to do, everything is so messed up”, she screamed.

“Hey, please, you’ll hurt yourself”, Antoine said worried, placing his hand on her head, “your right, it was a long time ago, she can’t possibly remember me, especially dressed like this, I’ll just have to be extra careful, we can make it work”.

Lily turned just as the door to Monique’s room opened, “what’s all the shouting out here, is everything ok”? she asked concerned.

“Yes, Mama, we’re fine, everything’s fine, you look nice, are you ready to go”? Lily replied with a smile.



It was an early start the next morning as Antoine sat at the kitchen table forcing down some corn flakes, feeling as though he was on death row and eating his last meal.

"Thank you again for agreeing to help Marianne settle in, Zara", Monique said from across the table, "she's such a sweet innocent thing, I'd hate to think of her being in the big city all by herself".

Antoine looked up, his eyelids heavy, not just because of the double coating of mascara on his lashes, but due to the sleepless night of worry, where he had stared up at the ceiling, trying desperately to come up with some excuse to get out of meeting Marianne, "your welcome, Monique", he replied meekly, thinking back to when he had met Marianne and she had made a nasty comment about the way he was dressed, cute and innocent were definitely not the words he would have used to describe her.

"I know I'm going to be with you two for the next few days, but I really appreciate you coming along, I'm sure she doesn't want to spend all her time with an old person like me", Monique said restating the point, making Antoine feel even worse, "I just know you two are going to get on like a house on fire, you're both around the same age and both have a love of fashion, I can't believe you've never met each other before".

Antoine forced a smile, "yeah, looking forward to it", he replied before going back for another spoonful to his tasteless breakfast.

Almost two hours later.

"Zara, hurry please, we're late and her plane has already landed", Monique said panicked as they rushed through the door to the airport arrivals building.

Antoine didn't reply, he just kept moving focussing on his posture and the way he was walking, trying to be as feminine as possible and not do anything remotely masculine that might give away his true gender.

They rushed on through the building as Monique got more and more flustered and continuing to comment that they were late, until in the distance Antoine thought he could make out the figure of a girl, sat alone looking out of the window of the waiting area, she definitely looked the part, sat up straight with her head held high, dressed entirely in pink.

Antoine lifted his hand and pointed towards her as Monique looked in the direction and smiled, "ah there she is", she announced as they powered on towards her.

As the girl in pink got larger and larger in his field of view, Antoine's heart was beating so fast he feared it might bust out of his chest as he wiped his sweaty palms on the side of his coat and hoped for a miracle.

"Marianne, we're here, I'm so sorry we're late", Monique announced as they got within earshot.

Marianne looked over at her aunt annoyed at having been kept waiting, before turning her gaze towards the flustered looking girl, she knew her aunt had dragged along, and she had no interest in meeting. But as she examined the rather tall girl, in her miss-matched outfit, her facial expression suddenly changed from pissed off to surprised, "do I know her"? She thought to herself, "she looks familiar".



Chapter 13

It was a rather uncomfortable trip back from the airport for Antoine, as he tried desperately to avoid eye contact with Marianne, who kept staring at him and smiling.

It was a relief to get back to the apartment, where after Marianne announced she wanted to take a shower and freshen up after her flight, Antoine was able to return to Zara's room to have a moment to process things.

Picking up his phone, in its girly case, Antoine needed to talk to Lily, "I think she knows, what do I do"? He typed quickly, having finally adjusted to his slightly extended nail, before hitting send.

A few moments later a reply came through, "knows what"?

"Who I really am, I have a bad feeling about this, Lil", he typed back.

"why? what happened!!!" came the reply.

"Nothing happened, well not like you're thinking anyway, but she just kept looking strangely", he replied before waiting anxiously for Lily to finish typing her reply, "baby, you're being paranoid, knowing my cousin, if she knew who you were, she would have definitely said something, trust me. Just try to relax, the only way she'll know something is up, is if you act strangely and tip her off, we'll speak again later, ok? I need to get back to work, you'll be fine, I love you".

Antoine sighed, "perhaps she's right", he thought to himself, looking over at the mirror, as far as disguises went, he had a pretty good one, and as long as he could act the part, there was no reason she would suspect anything was wrong.

Putting down the phone, Antoine lay down on the bed closing his eyes to rest for a moment but and not slept a wink the night, he was soon fast asleep.

He was woken by a knock on the door, groggy and disorientated, he slowly got his bearings, remembering where he was and who he was supposed to be.

There was a second knock, as Antoine jumped to attention before rushing over to answer the door.

Opening the door, he found Marianne wearing only a towel and grinning, "can I come in"? she asked cheerfully.

"Err... yes, of course", Antoine replied stepping back and allowing her to enter the room, fighting the urge to not look down and check out her body.

"Thanks, Zar, you don't mind if I call you, Zar, do you"? she said, not waiting for an answer, "So, the thing is, I don't really have much to wear, with the other apartment falling through at the last minute, I had to change the shipping address for the stuff I was sending up, and they said it's going to take a day or two for them to redeliver my things here", she said quickly, hardly taking a breath, "Aunt, Monique, said perhaps you wouldn't mind lending me some stuff for a while as we're close in size, Lily's stuff would be a bit tight on me".

Antoine just stared at her trying to process what she was saying, still drowsy from his nap. "is that ok? Marianne quickly added, "I don't want to make you feel uncomfortable".

(See image 22)



“No, no, it’s fine really, I’m sorry, I just woke up, please take whatever you need”, Antoine replied trying to lower the tension.

Marianne looked at him oddly and smiled, “great, thanks Zar”, she said and without a care in the world, she dropped her towel to the ground, revealing her glistening toned naked body, “do you have any tampons”? she asked, “I think my periods just arrived”.

The shock of seeing Marianne suddenly drop her towel, and watching her pert little breasts bounce up and down, was too much for Antoine’s male brain to handle, as he felt the blood rushing to between his legs, causing his tightly strapped down member to fight against its restraints, “I don’t know”, he squeaked, turning his head to avoid looking at her breasts any longer as he felt the pressure grow between his legs.

“You don’t know”? Marianne answered surprised, “isn’t this your room? surely you know where something so important is kept”?

Antoine panicked, “err... will you excuse me, I need to use the bathroom”, he said running from the room, “please, look around, and use whatever you need to, ok”?

Marianne watched as Zara, dashed from the room clutching between her legs, "something's not quite right about her", she thought to herself.

Antoine spent the next 30 minutes locked in the bathroom pacing about, giving Marianne plenty of time to get herself ready and vacate his temporary room, so he wouldn't have to go back and deal with the situation.

Now worried, he had spent too long in the bathroom, and not wanting anyone to come looking for him, he flushed the toilet, washed his hands, and exited the room to find, Monique and Marianne, thankfully clothed this time, sitting on the sofa, both looked up as he approached.

“Are, you ok, dear? You were in there for quite a while”? Monique asked concerned.

“I..., I...”, Antoine stuttered, before Marianne jumped in, "Aunty, leave her be, don't embarrass her by making and make her spell out what she was doing in there”.

“Oh, of course”, Monique said apologetically, “I’m sorry, Zara, you did clean the bowl though, didn't you”?

"Aunty!", Marianne yelled.

"Ok, ok, I'm sorry", Monique said", "come over here, Zara, and sit down for a moment”.

Antoine slowly walked over and perched himself on the end of the sofa, as far away from Marianne as he could get as he was still getting weird vibes from her.

“So, Zara, has offered to show you around, but I was thinking, that today, I might come with you too, but only if you don't mind, of course? I don't want to cramp your style”, Monique said acting all upset.

“Of, course, we want you to come, Aunt Monique, I love spending time with you, I’ve also invited my friend, Claudia along, so we can have a girls day”, Marianne said looking over and giving Antoine a smile.

“Oh, that sounds wonderful”, Monique replied happily, “is there anything, in particular, you want to do”? she asked Marianne, leaving Antoine just sitting there quietly as the two women planned his day for him.

"Nothing special, we can just walk around, do a little shopping, there are a few things I need to get now with my bags getting delayed”, Marianne replied.

“Perfect, well if that’s decided, why don’t we head out, right away? we could get some lunch, I’m starving”, Monique stated.

“Sure, I’m ready, but perhaps Zara, needs a few moments to get herself ready”, Marianne said flashing him another smile.

Antoine just shook his head, “no, I’m ready”, he replied, just wanting to get it over with and not wanting to change out of the first pair of flat shoes he had worn in days.

4 hours later, weighed down by all the new items of clothing, Monique had bought for him, Antoine, stood frustrated next to Marianne and Claudia, waiting for Marianne to answer the question Monique had just asked her.

Even in his comfortable clothes and shoes, Antoine was feeling completely drained, as the hours of traipsing around the city after a sleepless night had taken their toll on him. All he wanted to do, was to go back to the apartment, lock himself in his room, and have a few hours away from the feminine prison he was being forced to live in.

“What do you think, Claude”? Marianne said, turning to her bubbly excitable friend, “casual or fancy”?

Claudia bounced up and down, like an excitable puppy, “fancy, of course, fancy, we can all get dressed up”, she replied giggling, “did you even need to ask”?

Marianne smiled, “how about we all go back to the apartment and change? Zar, you down mind if Claude and I borrow something to wear do you”? Marianne replied looking over towards Antoine.

Antoine just stood there like a statue, not surprised at this point that these women were forcing him out on another night out dressed as a woman but was finding it hard to keep playing along as he fed up with the whole awful situation.

He forced a smile and tried to look excited, “of course, that sounds so fun”, he said holding the awkward-looking smile on his face, for what seemed like an age, until Marianne finally looked back over towards Monique.

“Ok, girls, let’s do it, let’s have a proper night out”, Monique announced clapping her hands together excitedly”, Lily can join us when she finishes work, and us girls can all hit the town. ok, let's call a taxi, so we can get back and start dolling ourselves up”, she added as Antoine stared on blankly.



Chapter 14

“Ok, I think you need to start again”, Lily said through the phone as Antoine showed her the look he had created.

Antoine sighed, “I know, I look like a clown”, he replied downbeat.

“Don’t be like that, come on, how can you expect to be an expert makeup artist after just a few days, it took me years to learn this stuff”, Lily replied trying to lift his spirits, “you just need to use less eyeshadow and contour a little, now grab a wet wipe, clean off everything and I’ll talk you through it, ok”?

Antoine nodded, knowing he was going to have to go out no matter what, and it would make things easier if he at least looked the part, especially with Marianne, watching him like a hawk. Rummaging through the pile of makeup items covering the top of Zara's Vanity. he found a makeup wipe, and went about removing the products coating his face, that he had spent the last hour painstakingly applying.

Fresh-faced with his eyes stringing a little, Antoine picked back up the phone, “ok, what do I do”? he asked forcing himself to smile.

“Ok, first find a small tube that says primer, dab a little on that orange makeup sponge and rub it into your skin in a circular motion”, Lily said as Antoine got to work.

Lily continued with her step-by-step guide, instructing her boyfriend on how to curl his lashes, blend his eyeshadow, and draw the perfect wingtip at the corner of each eye.

By the time Antoine finished his makeup, closing the lid on the pink lipstick, he had just carefully applied to his lips, Lily looked on, proud of what she had achieved with her spontaneous online makeup lesson and thought once again about how cute Antoine looked.

“Now, what are you planning to wear”, Lily asked.

“I was thinking the black leggings and a long sleeve top”, Antoine replied, having already placed the items on the bed.

Lily shook her head, “no, you can’t wear the same outfit again, it will look odd, you’re supposed to be a girl who loves fashion, you need to mix it up”.

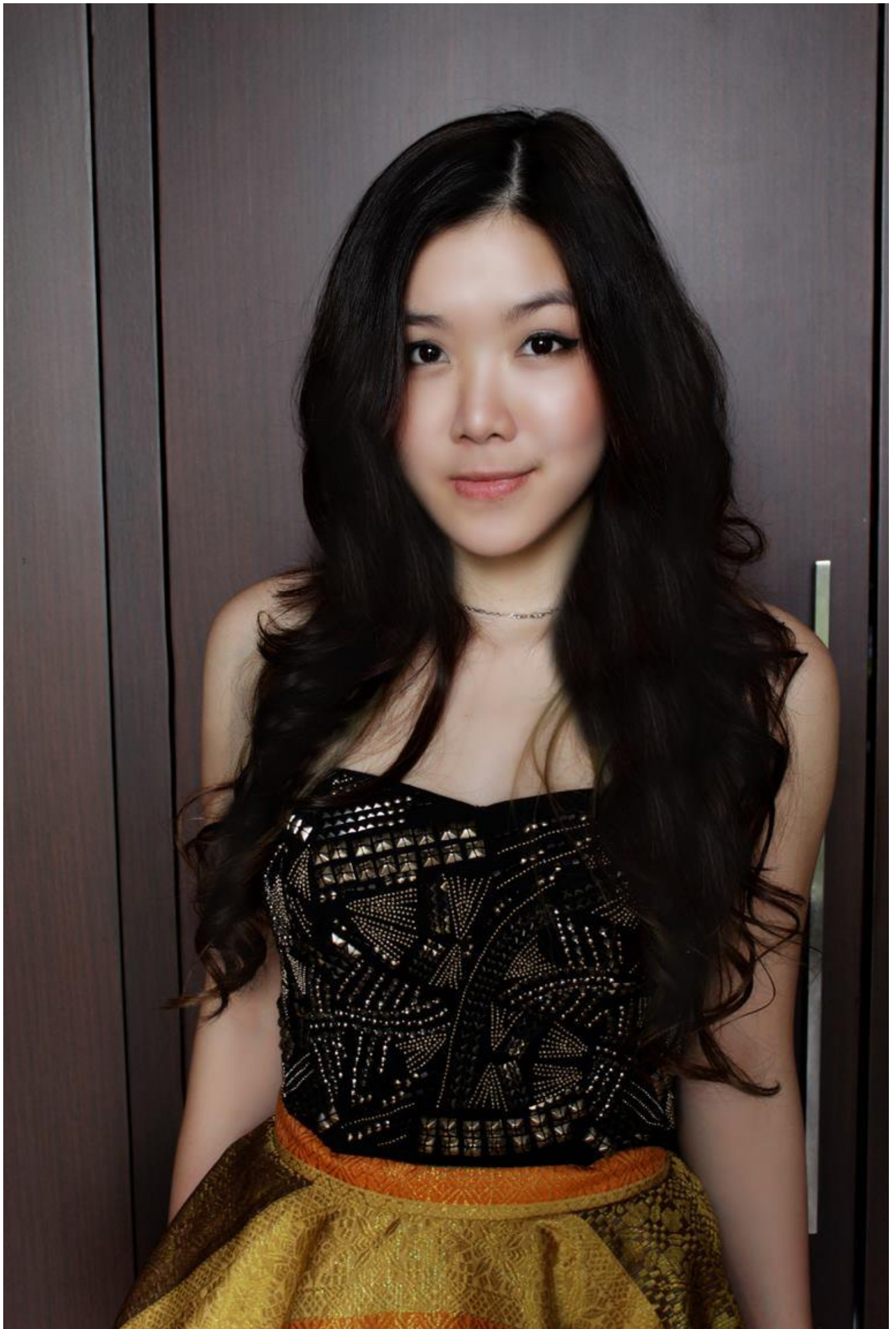
“Mix it up how”? Antoine asked knowing he wouldn’t like the answer.

For the next 30 minutes, Antoine was stuck in an endless cycle of hell, trying on some combination of clothes, sending a picture to Lily, who had now gone back to working having finished her break, before sitting down in the humiliating girly outfit, waiting for Lily to reply with the inevitable comment saying something was wrong and suggesting a new outfit.

Sitting on the bed in the latest suggestion from Lily, a cream-coloured sleeveless blouse, a flared stone coloured mini skirt, and the wedge sandals Monique had purchased from Brie, the day they went to visit Lily, Antoine shivered a little as he felt the cold air on his exposed arms and legs, in the cool air-conditioned room. Lifting his arms, he crossed them across his body and rubbed his upper arms to try and warm up a little as there was a knock on the door.

Taking a deep breath, he stood up on his wooden-soled shoes and clomped over to open the door, finding a dressed up and ready to party, Marianne.

“You look nice, Zar”, She said walking in without being invited, “thanks for letting us borrow your stuff, I love this dress., who’s it by”? she asked staring at him, waiting for a reply.



“Err... I’m not sure about that one” Antoine stuttered, “I haven’t worn it in so long”.

Marianne tilted her head to the side and screwed up her eyes, “really! but even so, you must have some idea, especially a dress as expensive as this, it’s not like you have that many designer things in here” she replied in a mocking voice, as Antoine felt himself start to sweat.

“Well, at first, I thought it might be a Balmain, but It’s not right”? Marianne asked as Antoine quickly agreed, “right”, he repeated.

“Yeah, I thought as much”, she said nodding along with Antoine, “oh, I know, I’ve got it, it must be a Louis Boobaton from the ready to wok collection a few years ago, that’s it isn’t it”? She announced excitedly.

Antoine saw and out and took it, “yes, that’s it, it’s a Louis Boobaton”, he replied, feeling nervous looking into Marianne's piercing eyes, as though she was peering into his soul, “wow, you really know your stuff, Marianne”, he said hoping a compliment might ease the tension.

“Thanks, Zar, I always try to keep up with all the latest trends and designs, but I’m jealous, you must know so much more than me, right? I mean, having studied fashion design for all those years. Where was it you studied again”? Marianne replied, once again sounding as though she was mocking him.

Antoine smiled, he knew the answer to this one, “The Institut Français de la Mode, that’s where I met Lily”, he replied this time with confidence.

“Oh yeah, of course, I remember, silly me, well”, she said smiling, “Well, I should get back and see how Claude is getting on, but before I go, I have one last question, as a fashion expert, given the choice, what shoes would you wear for a day walking around Paris, sightseeing? A pair of Christian Louboutins or a pair of Tods”?

Antoine froze, he had never heard of either of those names, but he knew he was being tested on his fashion knowledge and would have to choose one. He said the names over in his mind as he considered the way they sounded. The first one sounded French and much more fashionable whereas the second one sounded American and perhaps a little boring. But was that the idea? said with the intention to catch him out.

As Marianne looked on smiling, Antoine started to tremble as he pushed his elevated feet down into the ground, hoping that she wouldn’t notice, “The Christian Louboutin”, he blurted out, hoping he had pronounced the name correctly, having reasoned it sounded more fashionable and must be the correct answer.

Marianne nodded, causing Antoine to smile, feeling confident he had chosen the right one, “Ok, I’ll remember, thanks, Zar, and thanks for the Louis Boobaton. I’ll be sure to look after it”, she said leaving the room and giggling.

With the conversation from earlier forgotten and still wearing the outfit from earlier, he had been forced to wear after Marianne had seen him with it on, Antoine sat in a rooftop bar overlooking Paris.

It was a beautiful evening; the perfect temperature to be sat outside, still, and pleasantly warm with a clear sky above them full of stars and the city of love, so alive and full of energy beneath them.

Taking a sip of his fancy cocktail, captivated by the brightly lit city below, Antoine finally let himself relax, he reasoned that if no one had outted him at this point, his disguise was probably good enough to fool everyone, and worrying about it all the time was just needless stress and wasted energy, even his outfit that evening, wasn't really bothering him, and apart from his tightly tucked away penis, it actually felt rather comfortable.

The other three women around the small circular table, Monique, Claudia, and Marianne all looked beautiful and stylish in their fancy night-time outfits, and as Antoine tried to keep himself to himself, they chatted away happily about Marianne's internship at the famous bridal store Fifi,

Looking down at his phone and noticing that it was almost eleven o'clock, Antoine felt a little anxious and worried. Lily was supposed to meet them at the bar almost an hour ago and although she had a track record of being late it wasn't like her to not let him know.

Excusing himself, by saying he needed to use the bathroom, Antoine left the table, trotted out of the rooftop bar, and found a quiet spot but when he tried calling, Lily's phone just went straight through to the answering machine.

After the third time of trying and hearing the same irritating message, Antoine was really starting to think that something bad might have happened to her, but at the same time he didn't want to jump to conclusions, she was a strong independent woman, able to look after herself and was only 50 minutes, she may just have been held up somewhere. He slumped against the wall and considered going to tell Monique, but then thought twice as he knew she would overreact and cause a massive fuss, perhaps over nothing.

Luckily for Antoine, he didn't have to make the decision as a text from Lily came through on his phone and having quickly opened it, he was released to find his suspicions to be true. she'd been held up at work by a late customer and would be there in ten minutes. He breathed a sigh of relief, opening his large flat purse and placing his phone back inside.

He had just closed the button, having fumbled for a second, thanks to his nails, when Antoine did something that would change his life forever, something automatic, something he had done a million times before, but in the coming years as Antoine replayed the moment in his mind over and over, it was the one he would have given anything to be able to go back and change.

"Antoine", someone called out in a loud voice.

Instinctively, Antoine lifted his head, responding to the call of his name, as a terror washed over him, coming face to face with Marianne, who was now staring at him with her mouth wide open.

"I knew it", she shrieked excitedly, "I knew it was you".



Chapter 15

“Please, Marianne, I can explain”, Antoine said panic-stricken, as he took a few wobbly steps forward.

“Oh, I can’t wait to hear this”, Marianne replied smiling, “go on then, explain how my cousin’s boyfriend is dressed up in a cute little outfit and pretending to be her housemate”.

“I had to do it”, he blurted out, “Monique arrived unexpectedly, and we couldn’t let her find me there”, Antoine said, realising how silly his words sounded.

“Ha, sounds rather farfetched that, Antoine”, Marianne said loudly as a couple walking past gave him a strange look, “that’s not a wig right, you’ve had your hair extended and had your nails done, and no boy I know could act so naturally as a girl if they had just started dressing like this a few days ago”.

Antoine stepped closer, “shh, please keep your voice down, and please call me, Zara, in public”, he said looking around nervously, “it’s the truth, I promise you, I don’t want to be doing any of this, it just sort of got out of hand, I’m only doing this until Monique leaves”.

“Really? So, all this is just to trick poor old Aunt Monique”, Marianne replied, screwing up her face, “that’s so cruel”.

“No, not a trick, just a... a... just please don’t tell her, Marianne, it would really terrible if she found out the truth, especially now”, Antoine begged.

“I don’t know, I don’t feel comfortable lying to her, she doesn’t deserve this, you know”, Marianne said, shaking her head.

“I know, she’s been really kind to me, but please, Marianne, you can’t say anything”, Antoine pleaded.

Marianne fell silent for a moment as she thought about what the feminised man had said, before a sly smile crossed her lips, “ok, I won’t tell her”, she chirpily replied.

“Oh, thank you, thank you”, Antoine said relieved.

“But”, she paused, “from now on, you need to do whatever I say, if I ask you to do something, you’ll do it without complaint”, Marianne added.

Antoine had a sick feeling in his stomach, he didn’t like the look in her eyes but what choice did he have, “ok, but please just don’t tell her”, he said while bowing his head.

“Well, as long as you remember that I’m the boss now, we won’t have any problems, now let’s go back and enjoy the rest of our evening, and in the morning me you and Claude are going shopping”. Marianne said cheerfully.

Antoine breathed a heavy sigh, knowing that things had somehow just gotten worse, as Marianne turned to leave, taking a few steps before spinning back around again, “oh, and Zara, you’re not to tell Lily about this conversation, are we clear”?

The next afternoon, Antoine found himself on the streets of Paris, miserable and uncomfortable. As soon as Lily had left for work that morning, Marianne had entered his room and started rummaging through Zara’s wardrobe, examining the clothes inside, and making comments about the styles.

Having hardly slept a wink, he watched in horror as she started tossing sexy looking dresses, definitely better suited for a night out, towards him on the bed before announcing that she wanted him to try them so she could see which one she liked the best.

For the next half an hour, he was forced to parade around the room, modelling outfit after outfit, until Marianne finally settled on what was probably his least favourite of all the dresses, he had tried on, a short leather number with an embroidered metal-studded pattern, the material hugged his body tightly and made it difficult to bend.

Pairing the outfit with a pair of off-white tights and the tall sparkly blue pumps, that had caused the embarrassing incident where he kicked over the sheep back in the salon, Marianne sat him down and started to paint his face with heavy makeup, looking as though she was having the time of her life, as Antoine silently obeyed every instruction, helpless to resist.

The next few hours were some of the most humiliating of the young man's life to date, as he trotted along next to Marianne and Claudia, who were dressed much more casually than him, in their flat shoes and minimal makeup. Their first stop was an art museum, where he garnered quite a few stares the way he was dressed. He tried to keep his head high and act confidently, as people tutted and whispered, but on the inside, the humiliation was killing him, especially as Claudia snapped picture after picture, with her expensive camera, she had brought along especially for the trip.

After the museum, it only got worse, as the girls dragged him into shop after shop, forcing him to try on all sort of outfits, and purchase a set of lingerie where he had been measured up by one of the salesgirls, who looked almost as uncomfortable as him as Marianne and Claudia stood around giggling and snapping pictures.

By mid-afternoon, Antoine's legs felt like jelly, having long ago lost the feeling in his toes. Having just posed for another picture, he turned to Marianne, "Marianne, are we almost done yet? I think my feet are going to drop off if I walk any further", he moaned.

"Come now, Zara loves shopping, what fashion major wouldn't? We have plenty more hours in the day yet, come on", she said linking her arm through his, "you're going to love the next shop, I promise".



Half stumbling, half dragged, Antoine minced his way up the street, as his two tormentors guided him onwards towards a high-end shopping centre.

Entering the building through the large glistening automatic glass doors, Antoine looked around in awe, it was a place he had never ventured into before, having heard it was exclusively full of designer stores with ridiculously high prices, well out of his price range, and by the look of the place he knew it to be true.

Up the escalator, they went before crossing the second floor as Antoine tried not to look directly at any of the intimidating rich women milling about, who were giving him dirty looks, as he clicked along the marble floor in his torturous shoes.

Seeing the place, she was looking for, Maryanne gave his arm a tug and made a beeline for the entrance as Antoine looked up at the name, "Christian Louboutin", and wondered why the name sounded so familiar.

Entering the bright clean store full of some of the highest heeled shoes, Antoine had ever seen, he once again started to worry. Marianne taking charge of the situation, led the party of three over to the far wall, where she started taking down shoes of the display and asking him what he thought.

"Hello, ladies, can I help you with something today"? asked the hovering salesgirl.

"Yes, my friend here, just loves your brand, she told me she isn't leaving today until she gets herself a pair of Louboutins, can we try these three pairs in a size 39, please", Marianne said, pointing out a few pairs of stilt-like shoes on the shelf.

The saleslady smiled and quickly headed off, returning a few minutes later, laden with shoe boxes.

Antoine sat down, feeling very apprehensive about the situation he was in, but one thing was for sure, the feeling of relief and pleasure as he slid his nyloned foot out of his sparkly pumps and wiggled his numb toes around in the air, was one of the most satisfying feelings of his entire life, like having a cold refreshing drink on a swelteringly hot day after going hours starving of thirst but amplified.

But the relief was short-lived as Antoine was soon back up on his feet, scared to death of falling, as the heels now squeezed onto his feet, were somehow even taller than the ones he had just taken off, and this pair had a ludicrously tall platform at the front, raising him up a good few inches and making him feel like a giant.

Prompted by Marianne, he tried to take a few steps but found it almost impossible as he shuffled his feet along the ground comically as Claudia once again started snapping pictures.

"Those Lady Dafs don't look right on you, "the salesgirl said, "try the Bianca's, they'll look fierce on you", she added, picking up another show box and opening the lid.

Shuffling back to the cushioned stool, Antoine carefully removed the ridiculously tall shoes from his feet and was handed a new pair to try.

With shaky hands he picked up the next pair of absurdly tall shoes, staring at them in his hands and afraid to move. This next pair looked equally as scary as the last, the platform at the front was much smaller but the stiletto heel at the rear was equally as thin and intimidating.

Slipping them on his feet, he once again stood, to attempt a few steps, having to bend his knees slightly to balance and feeling his calf muscles stretch.

Hearing the now familiar click of his heels, Antoine tried to steady his nerves, as he walked away from the seating area catching a glimpse of himself in one of the mirrors, perched high atop the shiny designer shoes with their red bottoms, he wouldn't be winning any awards for gracefulness, but at least he could walk, he thought as he just wanted to get this it over with and leave.

After a few laps of the store and a few dozen photos, Antoine sat back down and returned the shiny patent pumps to their box.

“She’ll take them”, Marianne announced as a shocked expression crossed Antoine’s face. The saleslady smiled before gathering up the shoeboxes, telling them, she would meet them at the paying counter when they were ready.

When she was out of earshot, Antoine quickly turned to Marianne, “Marianne I can’t buy those, they’re far too difficult to walk in and how much are they anyway”? Antoine asked.

“600 Euros”, she announced, “but it’s lucky we came today, that’s after a discount”.

Antoine’s mouth fell open, “600 Euros”, he exclaimed, “are you crazy, I don’t have 600 Euros to spend on a pair of shoes”.

“You have a credit card don’t you”, she shot back, “ I saw you use it earlier when you bought your new sexy undies”.

“Yes, but I’m not using it to buy those, come on be reasonable”, Antoine said standing up for himself.

“Ok, sure, do what you want, but if you don’t want to buy those shoes, perhaps I don’t want to keep your secret anymore!” Marianne replied flicking her head and turning away from him.

It was almost dark as Antoine finally arrived back outside the apartment, utterly exhausted, he wobbled in through the downstairs foyer, deep in thought as Marianne fed up with waiting for him, with his slow mincing steps, had taken the shopping bags and gone on ahead.

It had been an awful day and the worse part was, he couldn’t see things improving anytime soon, at least as far as he knew, he was going to be able to spend the rest of the evening at home to recover from the day’s events, he just didn’t know what he was going to tell Lily when she noticed the 600 Euro charge on their credit card bill, could he really tell her what Marianne had told him to say? that he had seen them and just had to have them.



Chapter 16

The next day, Antoine's torment continued, as he was now living in his personal version of hell.

It was Monique's last day in Paris, and with Lily having to work, she had left it up to Marianne to decide the day's activities. When asked what she'd like to do that day, she smiled happily and announced that she wanted to go sightseeing, having not visited the famous attractions in years, and with her starting her internship soon, she wanted to see them once again while she had the opportunity.

Under normal circumstances, walking around some of Paris' world-famous attractions, would have sounded like fun for Antoine, he had grown up in the city but like most people who live in a tourist destination, he rarely if ever visited the famous sights, but on this occasion, as he soon found out, when Marianne joined him in his room whilst getting ready, it wasn't going to be a very enjoyable experience.

"No, you can't wear that"! Marianne announced, looking at the simple casual outfit Antoine was wearing and pulling a face.

Antoine sighed, "but it's just sightseeing, do I really need to wear something fancy"? he asked.

"Zara, you're a fashion major, girls like you need to make a statement at all times", she replied walking towards the wardrobe, "now let's see if we can find you something more appropriate".

Ten minutes late, now dressed in a thin white dress, so short, his silky underwear would have shown if it weren't for the tiny pair of floral shorts, he wore under it, Antoine watched in horror as Marianne located the shopping bags from where he had dumped them the previous day, pulled out a shoebox and place it beside him.

"Oh, no, not those shoes, please", Antoine begged, "I can't walk around all day in those, it's not possible".

Marianne smiled and removed the lid, picking up one of the tall, red-soled pumps and holding it out for him to take, "I seem to remember asking you a question the other day about what shoes you would wear for a day of sightseeing, do you remember your answer"?

The memory of the conversation came flooding back as he suddenly knew why the name of the shop, where he had purchased the ridiculously tall shoes, was so familiar at the time, "but...I... I didn't understand what you were talking about, you tricked me". Antoine replied pouting.

"Ha, tricked you, are you serious"? Marianne said almost laughing, "there is only one trickster her, Zara, you've lied to me and Aunt Monique from the first moment we arrived", she stated, emphasising the word Zara, "now put on your fancy new shoes, that a lot of girls would kill to own, and I want to hear no more complaints, do you understand me"?

Defeated Antoine reached out and took the towering shoe from her, and with shaky hands, he reached down and slipped the designer pump on to his left foot, watching his foot arch into a preposterous angle, and feeling a tightness in the back of his calf. As he slipped on the second shoe, feeling the tight restrictive leather constricting his foot and compressing his toes, he knew it was going to be a long tiring day, and he wasn't sure how he was going to get through it.

"Are you ok"? Monique asked Antoine, mid-afternoon as he hobbled along slowly trying desperately to keep pace with the three women.

Antoine glanced over, too miserable to smile, physically and mentally exhausted. They had just arrived at the grounds of the Eiffel tower and having already minced his way around the Arc de Triomphe, the remains of Notre-Dame, and the Louvre, every step was now agony perched atop his tall thin heels, and he was fighting the urge to scream, "yes, I'm fine, Monique", he replied politely "just a little tired, that's all".



"I'm not surprised in those fancy shoes", Monique said, looking down at his feet, "I did tell you back at the apartment, I didn't think they were appropriate for the day's activities".

Antoine looked to her left seeing Marianne and Claudia smiling, as the thought of killing them entered his mind, the more painful the better, "I know, Monique", he replied meekly, "but I'm fine really, but if you guys can slow down just a little, I'd really appreciate it".

With the group now moving at a snail's pace, they continued on up the long straight path of the Champs de Mars, onwards towards their destination, with Antoine tottering along, one tiny step after another as the magnitude of the task was at hand was threatening to overwhelm him, with the imposing tower looming over them in the distance, never seemingly getting any closer, the thought of making it there just seemed impossible.

Trying to take his mind off the crippling pain in his feet, and the stares and comments from the tourists all around, Antoine thought back to the first time he had visited the tower, a happier time, accompanied by his mother and sister. He remembered how excited he had felt seeing the tower up close for the first time, running along the path, racing his sister to see who could make it to the base first. The memory, briefly, brought a smile to his face, an ironic smile as he realised, he wouldn't be winning any races that day, it was going to be a challenge in itself just to get there.

But with a lot of internal strength and will power, get there he did, feeling proud of himself for now giving up, and realising that perhaps he was stronger than he had given himself credit for.

"This is the spot girls", Monique announced, "pass me that camera of yours, Claudia, this is the perfect spot, to take a picture of the three of you".

Happy to oblige, Claudia handed the camera to Monique and skipped back over to join Antoine and Marianne.

"Perfect girls, you look so pretty, oh to be young and beautiful", Monique sighed", but just take a few steps to the right", she told them as she looked down the lens of the camera trying to get the perfect shot.

Following Marianne's lead, Antoine took two painful steps to the left, stumbling slightly as his heels sunk into the soft ground, he reached out and grabbed Marianne's shoulders for balance as he heard the click of the camera, once again feeling annoyed, knowing the embarrassing moment had been captured and was now stored forever.

As Monique went to take another picture, Antoine was too tired to move, he just looked over and hoped things would get better once Monique left, "they could hardly get any worse", he thought to himself, but first he would have to make it back home, a journey he really wasn't looking forward to.



Chapter 17

As the morning sun shone down, warming the back of his freshly shaved legs, Antoine looked over at Marianne, camera in hand and breathed a heavy sigh.

For the past week, he had worn nothing, but dresses and skirts and the worrying thing was, it now felt somewhat normal.

With Monique returning to Avignon, Antoine had hoped things would have gone back to normal but with Marianne now occupying the guest bedroom, showing no signs of moving out, things were worse than ever, not only was he stuck living Zara's life, but he was now also lying to Lily.

There were days like this one, where he considered telling Marianne to go to hell, but he would always chicken out, as the shame of her telling Monique the truth, and having Lily taken away from him was, was far scarier than having to live twenty-four seven in his torturous 6-inch Louboutin pumps.

He regretted not telling Lily the night Marianne discovered his secret, he should have talked to her, explained the situation, and made her promise not to let on to Marianne that she knew, but that ship had now sailed, he had been lying to her for almost a week, and he knew the one thing Lily hated and had made him promise never to do, was lie.

As a gentle gust of wind tickled the top of his exposed legs, under his yellow long-sleeved summer dress, he felt a mixture of guilt and embarrassment, thinking about all the things Marianne had forced him to say to Lily.

When she had asked about his new skyscraper heels, he now exclusively wore, he had smiled and told her, he loved the feeling of walking on heels and wanted to take advantage of the situation while he could.

Then there was the time, a few days ago, where he had approached Lily, sat around the apartment relaxing on her day off. With instructions from Marianne, he had nervously tottered into the living room in a little mini dress and his now standard Louboutins and asked her if they could go out shopping together as he wanted to buy some new clothes so he wouldn't have to wear Zara's stuff all the time.

Those were just two of the many instances, he had been forced to tell his girlfriend, he wanted to do something girly, each time feeling like he was falling deeper down the rabbit hole, and each time feeling deep shame and embarrassment, but the worst part of it all, to his utter shock and horror, each time his painted lips had somehow forced out the words, Lily seemed to accept what he was telling her, and on a few occasion she even sounded excited.

at least, one upside to the whole bizarre situation, was that their sex life was better than it had been in years, he was still living in Zara's room, as Lily still believed they needed to keep up the pretence for Marianne sake, but whenever they had the apartment to themselves, Lily would pounce on him like a wild animal, in the last week, they had made love in every room in the house as he had to admit, sneaking around like a pair of teenagers, did give him a bit of a thrill.

"Zara, will you focus please", Marianne said interrupting his thoughts, "I asked you to step forward, the light is perfect right now".

Pushing himself forward from the railing of the apartment balcony, Antoine took a couple of tiny steps forward and turned towards the camera.



The morning photoshoots were now commonplace, this was the fourth time this week, Antoine had dressed up in an outfit selected by Marianne before heading outside to the balcony to pose for her.

Having asked on multiple occasions and receiving no answer, he still had no idea, what she wanted all the pictures for, perhaps it was just to torment him or perhaps she was collecting them as evidence to blackmail him down the line, but one thing was for sure, Antoine hated every minute of his morning photoshoots.

“Ok, Zara, looking hot girl”, Marianne announced after taking what seemed like hundreds of pictures, “go back inside and put on the dress with the gold sequins”.

Knowing that arguing would not change anything, Antoine didn't even bother to respond, he just clicked his way back into the apartment and headed for Zara's room. He knew exactly which dress she meant as he remembered trying it on before, finding it to be almost indecently short, and making him feel half-naked and extremely exposed.

Back in the room, he slowly stripped off his loose yellow dress and tossed it to one side, looking over towards the clock on the wall and stopping in his tracks with a puzzled look on his face. It was 11 am, Marianne usually left for work around this time, so why was she asking him to put on another outfit? Had she lost track of the time?

Having lowered the flashy dress over his head and fastened the matching wide belt around his ever slimming waistline, Antoine let himself smile a little. He was now convinced that Marianne was going to be late for work and after everything she had put him through lately, he had no intention of telling her.

Slipping his sore feet back into his tall designer pumps, he headed for the door, thinking about Marianne getting into trouble and perhaps even getting fired, after all, she had only just started her internships at Fifi, it would surely look bad to turn up late in the first week.

Stepping out into the living room, the smile on his face quickly disappeared as he saw Marianne waiting by the door, ready to leave the apartment, “come on, time to go”, she announced with a smile.

“What! Go where”? Antoine replied looking down at the way he was dressed and panicking.

“Never you mind”, came the reply, “I’ve put your keys and some essentials in here”, she added, handing him a small black purse, “love the dress, by the way, you’ve got some killer legs girl”.

With the click-clack sound of his heels echoing in his ears, Antoine once again found himself out in public, following along behind Marianne through what he knew to be the expensive part of the city, feeling self-conscious and nervous.

His mind was in overdrive, trying to work out where she was leading him and to for what purpose, becoming so caught up and preoccupied in his thoughts, he had little time to worry about the length of his tiny skirt or the numb feeling in his toes.

Stopping at a crossing, Marianne took the opportunity to quickly whip out her camera, “Smile, Zara”, she said cheerfully. Antoine looked over his right shoulder and glared at her.

“Oh, come on girl, that was terrible”, she announced looking over the camera, “let’s try again, ok back up a step or two, yeah that’s better, now lift up your left leg and pretend you’re readjusting your sunglasses”.

Antoine obeyed, not wanting to cause a scene in public, but as he stood wobbling on one leg, perched atop of his shiny designer pump, he saw something in the distance that made him feel sick to his stomach, as he suddenly realised where they were headed.



Chapter 18

Shaking like a leaf and completely distraught, Antoine slowly walked through the entrance of Fifi's flagship store, looking around nervously expecting to see Lily.

A young Asian woman behind the counter looked up and smiled, "Marianne, just in time, is this her"? She asked.

"Hi Annisa", Marianne replied, suddenly switching from French to English, "yes, this is Zara, what do you think"?

As the girl behind the counter looked in Antoine's direction, as he smiled nervously and gave her a little wave. He didn't speak English and had no idea what she had just said, but he had heard his feminine name said aloud, and knew they were talking about him.

"Well, she is definitely tall enough, we can see what she looks like in front of the camera", Annisa said, eyeing Antoine up and making him feel extremely nervous.

Antoine turned to Marianne, "Marianne, what's going on here"? he whispered.

Marianne turned to face him and gave him a wicked smile, "Fifi is looking for new ways to expand their business, you probably already know they're in the wedding planning business, right? I was in a meeting the other day, and they were discussing a new package, a sort of all-inclusive deal, where not only would they dress the bride and groom, but all the other guests too", Marianne announced as Antoine looked at her with a confused look on his face, trying to fit the pieces together and struggling to see how this involved him.

Marianne continued, "Well, they need models for the outfits and of course I instantly thought of you. I showed Annisa some of the pictures have taken on the balcony, and guess what? she has agreed to give you a shot".

"What"! Antoine exclaimed, a little too loudly, "me a model, no way, you can't be serious? Does Lily know about this"?

"No, not yet I only mentioned it yesterday, and it was Lily's day off, but don't worry, you're going to be amazing, you have the perfect physique to be a model, you're tall, have legs that go on forever, and not much up top", she replied as Antoine looked on dumbstruck.

"Is everything ok"? Annisa asked, having watched the altercation.

"Yes, everything is fine, Annisa", Marianne said turning back towards her, "Zara, was just hoping to see Lily, I told you we all live together, right"?

Annisa nodded, "oh, I see, she's not here right now, she's running some errands for Fifi this morning, she won't be back until this afternoon, oh, and speaking of Fifi, she's upstairs getting things ready for the shoot, why don't you go and introduce her to our new model"?

"Sure, see later, Annisa", Marianne said cheerfully, before turning to Antoine and taking his hand, "come on Zara, there's someone I want you to meet.

Still unsure of what was happening, Antoine looked over at Annisa nervously as he felt a strong tug on his arm as Marianne dragged him towards a staircase, with so much force, he stumbled on his tall heels, making Annisa giggle.

Reaching the top of the staircase, they entered a large room, full of what Antoine would have described as Junk, but he didn't have time to survey the area fully, as his eyes were drawn to the pretty blonde girl in the corner wearing a flowing white dress.

Antoine instantly knew who it was, suddenly becoming even more nervous, if that was been possible, as he now stood, wearing a flashy short dress, face to face, with the talk of the town, Fifi Genevieve LaRue, Entrepreneur, fashion icon, and Lily's boss.

Fifi turned to see who had disturbed her from her task as Antoine gritted his teeth and forced a smile, knowing he needed to be careful what he said as the last thing he wanted to do, was lose Lily her job.



“Good morning, Fifi”, Marianne said, now speaking in French once again”, this is Zara, she is going to model some of the outfits for us today”.

Feeling extremely self-conscious in the presence of the intimidating, blonde, minor celebrity who was looking him up and down, scanning her eyes over his body, Antoine looked down at the ground, and not for the first time recently, wanted it to open up and swallow him whole.

“Hello, Zara, it's nice to meet you”, Fifi said looking down at his feet, “It's great to have you here, so far I've been doing all of the modelling by myself, and I can't tell you how glad I am to have someone take my place for the day, and by the looks of things, you'll do just fine, we're even wearing the same shoes”, she said with a smile.

Antoine looked up from the ground and over to Fifi's arched feet, as a wave of embarrassment crashed over him. She was right, her pair were a sort of beige, nude like colour, whereas his pair were black, but having worn the torturous shoes every day for the last week, he instantly recognised them.

“See, Zara, you're going to fit in perfectly around here”, Marianne chuckling, before turning back to Fifi, “Zara, loves this brand, she wears them everywhere”.

The smile on Fifi's face disappeared as she looked down at her own towering shoes, “that makes two of us”, she replied with a hint of sadness in her voice, “but I don't really have a choice”.

Marianne looked at her oddly but didn't say a word, not wanting to pry into her new boss' life, having only met her recently.

“Marianne, we need to finish up here”, Fifi said, changing the subject, “can you take, Zara, through to the next room? I think the makeup artist should be ready”, she added pointing across the room”, after you get her settled in, you can come back and help me in here”.

“Oh, yes, no problem”, Marianne said jumping to attention, “Come on, Zara, time to make you look pretty”.

Two hours later,

A frustrated Antoine stood wearing his third outfit of the day, staring down the lens of a camera, and trying to obey the commands directed towards him. He was dressed in a silky purple top and a tight yellow pencil skirt. On his feet, he wore a pair of pink strappy sandals, which although tall by most people's standards, compared to the shoes, he had tottered in wearing, these blocky sandals felt like a comfy pair of running shoes.

As heard the camera clicking furiously around him, Antoine held his pose, and couldn't help but think, how messed up, his life now was. He had lost count of how many times, in the past few weeks, he had been forced to stand embarrassed in front of a camera, wearing some extremely girly outfit, as each new photo added to the already massive collection of images, he prayed no one would ever see.

To make matters worse, everyone in his life, was now treating him like a girl named Zara, as it seemed, the only person who actually remembered who he really was, was himself, and as the days passed by, with him locked away in his feminine prison, worryingly, even he was starting to forget, what it felt like to be a man.



Chapter 19

After yet another change of outfit, Antoine found himself back in front of the camera, feeling a lot more comfortable than he had earlier. It was partly due to knowing what was expected of him, having modelled now for the last few hours, but it was mostly due to the outfit he was currently wearing, with its long white skirt, that covered his legs for once, and the loose-fitting blouse, he wore on top that felt soft against his skin. The shoes on his feet weren't the most comfortable, with their gold platform sole and tall red heel, but Antoine was used to uncomfortable shoes by now, they had become part of his everyday life, and if one good thing had come from being forced to totter around on his fancy Louboutin pumps every day, all other pairs of heels now felt manageable in comparison.

Placing his hand on his hip and twisting his neck to face the camera, Antoine knew the shoot was coming to an end, and it couldn't come soon enough, his jaw ached from all the smiling and he was in desperate need of the bathroom. But just as the end was in sight, his heart sank as he looked up towards the back wall of the room, to see Lily, having returned from her errands, with her hands on her hip and staring at him with a look of bewildered look on her face.



He tried to stay calm and focus on the job at hand, but with his girlfriend glaring at him, staying in character became next to impossible, as he became all wooden and awkward. After a few minutes of disappointing the cameraman, he called a halt to the shoot, thanking him for his time and telling him they were done for the day.

Nervously, Antoine stepped down from the little podium, he had been perched on, and slowly made his way over to the back of the room, not knowing what he was going to say when he arrived, struggling to think up any believable excuse to explain why he was suddenly at his girlfriend's place of work, and taking part in a photo shoot.

Stopping a few feet away from her, Antoine looked down at her puzzled face from atop his platform heels, "hi Lil", he said shyly, before looking down at the ground, unable to keep eye contact out of shame.

"What the hell are you doing here"? Lily asked, "I almost had a heart attack when I realized it was you up there".

Antoine screwed up his eyes and took a deep breath, things had gone far enough, he had to tell her the truth, "Lil, I need to tell you something, please, don't get mad ok"?

Lily waited silently ready to hear his confession but just as Antoine was about to speak, Marianne popped up out of nowhere, "hey, cous, did you manage to see Zara in action? what do you think? It's a great idea, right? Zara, needs some work and we need a model".

"Oh, hey, Marianne, yeah, great idea", Lily replied in a monotone voice, "but do you think you can give us a second? Zara, was about to tell me something important".

Marianne smiled, "oh, I think I know what it is. Zara, told me a few days ago, that her dream was to become a model, but she didn't know how to tell you, look we've been doing shoots on the balcony all week, doesn't she look great"? Marianne said, pulling out her phone and showing Lily some of the pictures she had taken.

A stunned Antoine didn't know how to respond as an equally stunned Lily, slowly took the phone and flicked through the pictures.

The next few seconds felt like hours to Antoine as he watched Lily's surprised face, as he felt his palm become clammy and his legs begin to tremble slightly. Finally, after what seemed like an eternity, Lily looked up, "Is this true, is this what you wanted to tell me"? she asked, "you want to be a model"?

Antoine looked over at Marianne's grinning face, as he resisted the urge to put his fist through it, before looking back towards Lily panicked, "Err... I...I... yeah", he said almost choking on the word, instantly regretting saying it, knowing he could take it back.

"Wow, I have to say I'm surprised, I had no idea", Lily said shaking her head, "I just wish you hadn't felt the need to keep this from me, you know I would have supported you", she said pouting, "but, if this is what you want, you have my blessing, after all, you really do look happy in these pictures".

Antoine felt like he had just been slapped in the face as he just stood there again lost for words, with a stupid expression on his face, she couldn't possibly believe him, could she? surely, she was just saying all this for Marianne's benefit.

"Girls, what are you doing just standing around"? Annisa voice boomed in English, as she approached from across the room, "I don't pay you to stand around and chat".

Marianne turned, "Sorry, boss, we were just talking to Zara about the shoot", she replied in a little innocent voice trying to act all cutesy, "we'll get right back to work, but before we do can I ask you how you thought Zara did today? She would never say it herself, but she's really anxious to know what you thought, she has her heart set on working here at Fifi, it would mean the world to her".

Annisa smiled, "Well, she did ok, I guess for her first professional shoot, but we just don't have enough work to hire her full time".

Antoine tried to pick out some of the foreign words, lost again with the pair talking in English, suddenly wishing he had focused more in his school English class.

"Oh, I've just had an idea", Marianne said excitedly, "Annisa your still looking for someone to work in the stockroom, right? How about if Zara, filled both roles, she has loads of experience with fashion, and when you need to shoot the outfits, she'll be right here".

Annisa paused to think for a second, as she sized Antoine up, "ok", she quickly replied, "why not, but it will be on a trial basis, tell her to come in tomorrow, Lily, you can show her the ropes, right?"

Lily had been standing to the side quietly, looked just as shocked as Antoine with the latest turn of events, "err... yes, I can do that", she replied hesitantly.

"Good, see you tomorrow", Annisa said turning to Antoine and addressing him in her broken French. She then turned back to Marianne, "now, let's get back to work, girls, this place needs clearing away".

As Antoine watched Annisa walk away, "he looked up at Lily, "what just happened"? he asked nervously.

"You just got a job", Marianne announced leaping on him and giving him a hug, "isn't that great, now we can all work together".

From Marianne's vice-like grip, Antoine looked over at Lily with pleading eyes, begging her to say or do something. But all he got in return was a shrug of her shoulders and a glare, he could tell she was angry about something, but he would have to wait until later to find out.

"I need to get back to work", she announced and with that, she turned to leave.

As soon as Lily was out of earshot, Antoine wriggled lose from Marianne's grip and turned to face her, "are you insane"? he asked angrily, "what have you done? I can't work here".

Marianne smiled, "of course, you can, Zara, I can't think of a better place for a young fashion graduate like you to gain some experience, oh this is going to be so much fun", she announced happily, "now I better get back to work too, you can find your own way home, right"? And just like that, Antoine found himself alone, his head was all over the place and he felt like he was about to throw up.

In a state of delirium, Antoine carefully descended the staircase and headed towards the exit, only stopping to half-heartedly return the wave from Annisa, who shouted goodbye from behind the front counter.

Out on the street, Antoine turned left and just started to walk aimlessly with no real destination in mind. For almost an hour he clicked along the sidewalks of Paris, in the designer heels and outfit, that he had forgotten to change out of, eventually stopping as exhaustion got the better of him.

Leaning against a wall to catch his breath and take the weight off his sore feet, Antoine looked around unsure of where he was, but that was the least of his worries in that moment as the memories of the morning ran through his head, "what the hell am I going to do"? He thought to himself, "how am I going to get out of this mess"?



Chapter 20

One week on, Antoine found himself settling into a routine of sorts, he would wake up, get showered and changed into a girly outfit, eat breakfast with Lily and Marianne before accompanying the girls to work at Fifi's wedding planners.

He found the job itself pretty easy, all he had to do was keep an inventory of the stock and bring the occasional item up to the front of the store for a customer to try on.

He also found that his colleagues, in the store, to be a fun group of people, always goofing around and playing little jokes on each other, in fact under other circumstances he could have even seen himself enjoying working there.

The problem was, of course, Antoine felt like a fraud, pretending to be someone he wasn't, all the time worried that he was going to say or do the wrong thing and have his secret revealed.

Things weren't much better at home, where he was constantly having to put on an act for the one person in the world, he had promised never to lie to.

These days, Antoine didn't know which was worse, when Marianne was around or wasn't. When she was with them, as much as he had grown to dislike her. at least he could use the excuse, that he was acting the way he was, to stop her finding out who he really was, but when she wasn't around, he would have to pretend he was enjoying living as a girl, telling his girlfriend that he wanted to explore his feminine side for a while.

The whole situation was a mess with Antoine caught in a web of lies, each day digging himself a bigger hole. Like today, where all three of them had a day off at the same time. Lily had arranged to visit the salon to do something new with her hair and as soon as Marianne heard about her plans she asked if she could go along too.

Antoine had heard the girls discussing the plans a few nights earlier, over dinner, and initially, he had thought for a second, he might finally get a few hours to himself, where he could throw on some of his old clothes and relax, of course, Marianne had other ideas.

The next day at work, she approached him in the stockroom, telling him that when they got home from work that evening, he was to approach Lily and ask her if he could join them at the salon.

His reaction as you can imagine was one of shock and horror, but after arguing his case and losing, he found himself red-faced and embarrassed that evening, once again lying to Lily as he asked to join them at the salon saying he wanted to try something new, something that made him look a little more feminine.

So, the next morning, having got dressed in an outfit Marianne had picked out, Antoine found himself out on the street, hobbling along in a pair of the most ridiculous shoes he had ever seen, trying to keep up with Lily and Marianne.

The shoes in question were bright pink and incredibly tall, but it was the heel that really made them stand out, or the lack of one, as these shoes were a heelless design, Marianne had informed him, which meant he really had to be careful placing his feet, as all his weight now needed to be distributed across the small area at the front of the unusual shoes.

The rest of the outfit was pretty standard, a silky long sleeve blouse and a short skirt reaching mid-thigh that revealed almost the entirety of his long smooth shaved legs, encased in a pair of sheer hose.

What wasn't standard and probably the thing Antoine hated most about his outfit for the day, was the pink flower hairband sat atop his head, and that was really saying something considering how much he despised the scary pink footwear strapped to his feet. When she revealed the ultra-girly hairband to a horrified looking Antoine, earlier that day, Marianne insisted that she had chosen it

as it accessorised his outfit perfectly, but Antoine had his doubts, thinking it more likely she had chosen it just to embarrass him, and if that was the case, she had achieved her goal.

Having stumbled slightly after letting his mind wander for a second, Antoine stopped to collect himself as he saw Lily turn and look his way, probably after hearing the clumsy sound of his heavy shoes, clomping along the pavement as he had quickly regained his balance.



“Are you ok”? Lily asked as she took a few steps towards him.

Antoine nodded, “yeah, I’m fine, I just lost my concentration for a second”, he said with a forced smile.

“Well, be careful, you don’t want to trip”, Lily said, “I did tell you to wear a pair of flats today; those shoes are fun but I’m not sure they’re the most practical choice”.

Antoine wanted to scream, he wanted to tell her he hated the shoes and would like nothing more than to be in a pair of flats, or better still, dressed as a man and not on his way to a hair salon, but seeing Marianne within earshot with a sickening smile on her face, Antoine bit his tongue and lied, “ I know, you’re right of course, but I couldn’t resist wearing them, they are just so cute”, he said feeling ridiculous as the words left his lips, the words Marianne had told him to say.

Lily shook her head, “Well, it’s your choice I guess, you’re just surprising me so much lately, I never knew this side of you existed”, Lily said reaching out with her hand, “come on, let’s walk together, we can discuss what you’re going to do with your hair”.

20 minutes later, Antoine found himself sat in a salon chair, his hair having just been washed, and wrapped up in a towel on top of his head. He and Lily hadn’t come to a decision about what to do with his hair, telling her he would perhaps just leave it up to the stylist, and if truth be told, Antoine preferred it that way, he knew he would be walking out of the salon with a new feminine hairdo either way, at least this way, he could tell himself it was forced upon him and not something he had willingly picked out himself.

Looking around as he heard footsteps approach, Antoine saw his stylist for the day, a tall, beautiful woman with an edgy hairstyle, “Hi, you must be Zara, I’m Mari, what are we doing today”?

“Hello Mari”, Antoine replied, trying not to appear nervous, “I’m not sure, I want to change my look a little”, he said forcing out the words through gritted teeth, “can you perhaps suggest something”?

The woman’s face lit up, “really? You want to leave it to me? Usually, customers come in knowing exactly what they want, I hardly ever get to be creative”.

“Err... yeah, but nothing too wild”, Antoine replied looking up at the woman’s purple hair, the right side of her head shaved above the ear.

“Oh, don’t worry, “Mari said running her hand along the side of her shaved head, “this kind of look isn’t for everyone, “you’re looking for something cute, something to bring out your pretty features, right”?

Antoine felt a sense of relief, “err... yeah, I don’t think purple is the colour for me”, he replied, “oh, I mean, it looks great on you but I... I...”.

“Don’t worry babe, it’s fine, I know what you mean, shall we get started”? Mari said with a smile.

From the moment Mari started working on him, time seemed to pass at snail's pace for Antoine, as he watched ever flick of her comb and ever snip of her scissors, trying to picture in his mind each step of what she was doing as surprisingly this salon didn’t have a mirror he could look into. But finding the whole process extremely stressful and tiring, after a while, he gave up trying to predict what he would look like, closing his eyes, and leaving Mari to do her thing.

The rest of his time in the salon followed a similar pattern as Antoine sat bored with his eyes closed, trying to keep his mind occupied, apart from when Mari suddenly asked him to move back over to the sink, where she proceeded to cover his hair in some solution with a strong chemical smell before starting to wrap it in foil.

This caused Antoine to panic as he quickly realised from watching enough TV and movies to know, that he was having his hair dyed. But with Mari reassuring him once more, he wasn’t going to end up with purple hair and she was just going to give him a little more vibrance, he once again closed his eyes and tried to relax.

When Mari asked if he wanted her to do his makeup like his friends, he just nodded his head. The girls had already spoken about going out later that evening, and the thought of not having to do his makeup when they got back home, definitely sounded appealing.

Mari finished by blow-drying his hair, and as he heard the dryer switch off, Antoine felt a mixture of relief and nervousness. He was glad the ordeal was finally over as he felt like he had been sat there for days, but he also knew, it was now time to see what this woman had done to him and hoped it wouldn't be anything too extreme.

With his heart thumping in his chest, Antoine took a deep breath as Mari brought over a hand mirror and placed it in front of his face. The gasp that followed could be heard on the other side of the salon as Antoine first laid eyes on his new look, his mouth dropping open and his eyes widening as he tried to get his head around the blonde-haired girl staring back at him.

"You like it"? Mari asked in an excited voice.

Antoine didn't hear her as he just gazed upon his new platinum blonde locks, another change to his appearance that he knew made him look even less like his former self and even more like the girl, everyone seemed to believe him to be.



Chapter 21

The week following the trip to the salon, past by with no major incidents as Antoine was slowly getting used to life as Zara, a blonde fashion graduate working in a bridal store.

The days seemed to blend into one as he spent his days, running around on his high heeled feet between the stockroom and the main floor, and his evenings studying up on all the latest fashion trends, the memory of the Louis Boobaton incident was still haunting him, and he was determined never to look like a fool again if asked a question about fashion.

If truth be told, life as Zara wasn't that bad, he still dreamed of returning to how things used to be, but after living her life for so long, he could now see some benefits. As Zara, he was meeting new people and found that unlike when he used to meet people as Antoine, people now were more interested in what he had to say, going out of their way to get to know him. The problem was the whole house of cards he had constructed was about to come crashing down.

Outside on one of his breaks, Antoine found himself pacing up and down on his new red designer pumps, which were a little stiff and tight as he was still breaking them in. It was a lovely afternoon, and the sun was shining as he felt the warmth of its rays absorbing into his dark outfit, consisting of a loose-fitting long sleeve blouse and a pair of tight-fitting frilly shorts.



But the weather, as pleasant as it may be, was the last thing on Antoine's mind at that moment, as he clicked up and down the pavement, racking his brain for a way out, but no matter from which way he approached the problem, he kept coming back to the same conclusion, he would have to own up and finally tell the truth.

It had been a typical start to his shift in the store that day, having nothing really to do, which was fairly typical in the first few hours after opening, Antoine had found his usual stop to sit, out of sight at the back of the stockroom and had started watching videos on his phone until Annisa or Fifi came and gave him something to do.

It was around one thirty when he heard the door open. He quickly slipped on his red heels, which had been sat on the floor next to his chair and jumped up to look busy.

"Zara, are you here"? Fifi's voice rang out.

Antoine quickly tottered around to the front of the room and came face to face with his famous boss, "Yes, I was just rearranging some of the dresses, so they are easier to find", Antoine said, "how can I help"?

"You know, Zara, I don't expect you to be running around all the time, I'm well aware at this time of the day, it's always quite if you are sat down when we need you, its, not a problem, you know," Fifi said with a knowing look.

Antoine smiled, "I just don't want you to think I'm lazy", he replied, "it's just sometimes there isn't that much to do in her, not that I'm complaining", he quickly added, "I really love working here".

"You don't need to worry about that, Zara, we all know how hard you're working, and we love having you here", Fifi said with a smile, "that's why I called in actually, do you remember last week, we asked you to bring in your degree certificate, we really need it for our insurance, you don't happen to have it with you do you"?

"Err... no sorry, I'm so forgetful sometimes", he replied in a panic, "I keep meaning to look for it, my bedroom is a bit of mess at the moment, I'll have a look tonight".

"Really? A mess, and this place is so organised", Fifi said with a giggle, "well there's no real rush but we really need it by the end of the month, otherwise we can't keep you on here".

Antoine nodded, "ok, understood", he replied.

"Great, well with that out of the way, why don't you came out the front for a while, most of the girls are in the staffroom, Annisa brought in some cake".

Ten minutes later, having barely touched the cake, feeling too anxious to eat, Antoine had excused himself before going out to get some air.

Back outside on the street, Antoine was getting slowly getting his head around what needed to be done, the fallout would be devastating but with no other choice, he knew he would have to face it.

Looking up, he saw Marianne approaching as a heavy sigh escaped his painted red lips, "what does she want"? he thought to himself, "I could really do without this right now".

"There you are", Marianne announced as she approached, "what are you doing out here"?

"I just needed to be alone to think", Antoine replied willing her to go away.

"It's about the certificate isn't it"? Marianne asked.

"What you mean the lack of one? Antoine shot back, "it's not in her room Marianne, I've looked all over, she must have taken it with her, it's over, I'm going to tell everyone the truth".

Marianne looked surprised, "the truth, are you sure you want to do that? you know what that means right"?

"Well, what else can I do"? Antoine moaned, "I can't exactly magic a degree certificate out of thin air".

"True, but I think I have a solution", Marianne replied smiling.

"I'm not going to like this am I"? Antoine groaned.

"Probably not, but hear me out", Marianne said, "I looked on the university website and it just so happens, that next week they are having another graduation event for past students who were busy when they handed out the certificates the first time around", she paused for a moment to take in his stunned reaction before continuing, "Well, I decided to give them a call, pretending to be

you, or Zara, I guess, and told them you had lost your certificate and wanted to attend the event, and guess what as long as you pay a small fee, they said it would be no problem”.

“What”? Antoine shrieked, “you did what? I can’t do that”.

“You can and I suggest you do”, Marianne replied calmly obviously expecting the reaction.

“No, no, no, this is too much”, Antoine said starting to pace around again, “people will know her, and I look nothing like her, I need to put a stop to this, this craziness has gone on too long”.

“Well, that's one option, but you know you could get arrested right”? Marianne announced.

Antoine stopped in his tracks his head pivoting towards her, “arrested”? He cried.

“You signed a contract as someone else remember? That’s called fraud, if they call the police you could go to jail and even if you didn’t, imagine the stories in the papers”.

Antoine placed his head in his hands and felt as though he was about to be sick, “You have another choice, of course”, Marianne added, “Go to the ceremony and pick up the certificate, you'll be in and out in no time, and besides, it's been years since Zara graduated, what are the odds one of anyone she knew will be there, think it through, ok? you don't want to make a decision you'll regret”.

As Marianne finished her sentence she turned and sauntered away, back towards the store, as Antoine just stood in a daze watching her go, “what am I going to do now”? He thought to himself, “I thought this was over”.



Chapter 22

After almost a week of constant worry, with the day of the graduation ceremony looming over him, the day had finally arrived as Antoine found himself all dolled up nervously posing for a picture outside of the venue for the event.

His makeup had been applied heavier than usual and having spent the afternoon in the nail salon, his nails now extended past the tips of his fingers, making it a little more difficult to use his hands.

It all felt like a dream or was it a nightmare, either way, no matter how much Antoine willed himself to wake up, the crazy events that kept forcing him to live someone else's life, just kept coming.

As he pushed his dyed blonde hair out of his face, turning slightly to the side and lifting one of his tall designer heels, which was almost automatic at this point whenever someone pointed a camera at him, Antoine looked up at Monique's smiling face and felt sick.



Monique had arrived that morning, supposedly for a quick visit into the city to meet a friend, but it all seemed too much of a coincidence as Antoine couldn't help but feel that her presence that day was down to Marianne, especially as Monique started talking about his graduation ceremony without being told.

"You look beautiful, Zara", Monique cooed as she lifted the camera once more to get another picture, "how does it feel to be back here after so long? You must have some lovely memories of this place".

Antoine forced a smile, "yeah, but it feels a bit strange, to be honest", Antoine replied trying to stay in character and feeling ridiculous as he looked over at Marianne to Monique's left grinning at him and Lily to her right who had a worried look on her face.

"That's understandable", Monique replied, "you are a different person now, we all change as time goes by, and revisiting the past can sometimes feel a little strange".

Antoine smiled and nodded, "you're, right about the different person part", he muttered under his breathe.

"What was that"? Monique asked, "sorry dear, I couldn't hear you from over here".

"Oh, nothing", Antoine said, "Perhaps we should go inside"? He added, having had enough of standing outside and posing for pictures in his girly outfit, while people walked by and stared.

Entering the building, Antoine was sure something was about to go wrong, after all, he was an imposter, surely, someone would know. But having made it past registration, accompanied by Monique, Lily, and Marianne, Antoine found himself directed towards a large hall where the dreaded ceremony was being held.

It was a room, split in half, with rows of chairs on either side of a centre aisle, which led up to an intimidating stage on the far side of the room.

With fifteen minutes to go until the start of the ceremony, the room was still only half full as people stood around happily chatting. "Do you recognise anyone"? Monique asked snapping him out of his daze.

Antoine didn't of course, but looked around anyway, "No, it's been a few years since I was here", he lied, having never set foot in the building before that day, "I think most of these people probably graduated this year".

Antoine hoped what he had said was true as although he didn't know anyone, there was a chance someone there knew Zara. He tried to push the thought to the back of his mind as he couldn't bear to imagine what would happen if he walked up on stage and someone outed him as an imposter.

After a few more pictures, Antoine and the other women found their seats as the boring introductory speeches, praising the graduates and the institute itself began. Antoine hardly heard a word, as he sat with his smoothly waxed legs crossed mid-thigh on a surprisingly uncomfortable chair, shaking like a leaf.

Lily took his freshly manicured hand and leaned over, placing her mouth next to his ear, "you'll be fine", she said in a soothing voice, "just smile and walk slowly".

Antoine gave her hand a squeeze, he would definitely be walking slowly given the height of his heels, as the last thing he wanted to do was trip and fall in front of all these people.

There was nothing left to do but sit and wait for his name to be called as he watched the other graduates being called up, studying their movements, in the hope of imitating them as he made his own terrifying trip onto centre stage.

"Zara Dumont", the man on the stage announced as the words echoed through the hall.

As he felt the eyes of the three women sat around him fall upon him, Antoine knew it was time, slowly getting to his feet and shuffled past the people in his row looking down at all the smiling faces and trying not to vomit on them.

Reaching the centre aisle, it felt like every eye was suddenly on him as he forced a smile onto his glossy red lips and started tottering towards the stage, the deafening sound of his heels clicking off the wooden floor, sounding like a drum being beaten in his head.

It was the longest walk of Antoine's life, as time seemed to stand still, the short walk, feeling like a trek across the Sahara, each tiny mincing step not seemly getting him, any closer to his destination.

But with one step on his fancy red shoes, and then another, followed by another, Antoine finally made it to the front of the room, and after carefully ascending the small staircase, he stepped out onto the stage and looked down at all the people below, his heart threatening to burst out of his padded chest.

He took a breath and walked over to the smiling man in the centre just as he had seen countless people before him, accepted the envelope in the man's hand and leaned in to receive a kiss on each cheek, the room gave him a round of applause and a small cheer, and just like that, it was over.

Having made it back to his seat, Antoine couldn't stop shaking as he clutched the degree certificate in his long-nailed hands, adrenaline coursing through his veins.

He had done it and he felt amazing, it felt as though he had conquered a mountain or overcome some impossible task. Through the eyes of anyone looking on, he had done nothing spectacular but for Antoine, it was a pivotal moment, a moment that would change the way he thought about his life.

Still feeling the high of being up on stage, in front of all those people, Antoine watched the rest of the ceremony, passing the time by critiquing the outfits of the women making their way to the stage, all his hours of reading up on the latest fashion trends, having unknowingly crept into his brain.

Feeling much more relaxed, Antoine had a thought, "If I can walk up in front of all those people and fool them, perhaps I should try and enjoy myself a little more, after all, it's not like I have much of a choice in any of this".



Chapter 23

After all the sleepless nights and the worrying leading up to the day of the graduation ceremony, in the end, it had passed by without incident.

Now two weeks later, having passed off a new copy of Zara's degree certificate to Fifi, Antoine was back working the stockroom and as much as he didn't want to admit it, he was actually enjoying the job. The work itself was nothing too exciting, mostly fetching, carrying, and organising, but the group of people working in the store, made the days pass quickly, days full of laughter and fun.

Antoine had now slipped into a daily routine, where he knew how to look busy, when in fact, he was actually doing the bare minimum, but he must have been doing something right as he was constantly receiving compliments about what a great job he was doing.

The only person in the store, he tried to avoid was Marianne, but with Lily in charge of the rota this month, she had tried her best to arrange their day's off to keep them apart, but there was nothing she could do about today, as today was not a normal workday.

A magazine had gotten in touch and wanted to do an article on the store asking to interview and photograph some of the staff. Seeing it as free publicity the store had agreed. Antoine had been the obvious choice to fill one of the spots, after all, half his job was to model the clothes, it said so in his contract. Marianne had volunteered to be the other model and with no objections from anyone else, she was allowed to join him.

"Ok, Zara, give me a fierce look", said the cameraman as Antoine tried and failed to translate the words into a facial expression.

Sat facing backwards on a chair, wearing a white dress and some tall sandals, Antoine was still trying to work out the reasoning behind the photoshoot. They had called it samurai, but apart from his thickly drawn on anime eyebrows and field worker's hat, he wasn't really seeing the Asian connection. "I definitely don't look much like a Samurai", he thought to himself as the camera clicked, "and what possible connection does this have to a bridal store, anyway".



But if he could see the connection, mattered not, as he was there to pose and look attractive, and although Antoine didn't seem to think he looked very attractive, everyone around him seemed to disagree, especially some of the young men, who were working, at the small studio on the other side of the city, who couldn't keep their eyes off him.

One man in particular who seemed to have taken a fancy to Antoine was a young man called Denis. Denis' job was to assist the cameraman and the models and today that courtesy had been extended to Antoine. It was a little uncomfortable at first as Denis kept following him about, continually asking if there was anything, he could do for him, but after a while Antoine realised, he was just a sweet kid with a bit of a crush, in other circumstances they made even have been friends.

At one-thirty, with the shoot halting temporarily for lunch, Antoine tottered over to a sofa on the sidewall and sat down to rest his aching feet. Having brought nothing with him to eat, Antoine felt a little annoyed, why had no one told him to bring any food, now he would have to venture out wearing the outfit from the last shoot or go without and feel hungry all day. The outfit he was wearing was actually not that bad compared to some of the ones from earlier, a checked white shirt and matching pants that finished high on his ankle, looking more like a pair of pyjamas than an expensive designer outfit. But as comfortable as the outfit may have been, Antoine still didn't like the thought of venturing out by himself into a part of the city he wasn't very familiar with.

Zara, I'm heading to fetch some lunch", Denis announced, appearing beside him and making him jump slightly, "what would you like"?

"Err... thanks Denis, but I don't want to put you out, I'll be fine", Antoine replied having not brought any cash and not wanting to give the young man any encouragement.

"Don't be silly", Denis replied with a smile, "lunch is provided by the studio, I'm just the errand boy".

"Oh, in that case, sure, I'll have some lunch", Antoine replied.

"Ok, but what do you want"? Denis shot back.

"Oh... yeah, um... anything will do, just get me whatever Marianne is having", Antoine replied, not sure what to order.

"No problem, I'll be back before you know it", Denis replied smiling warmly.

As the young man left the room, Marianne suddenly appeared, "so, looks like someone's got an admirer", She said in a mocking voice.

"Oh please, don't start, I did nothing to encourage it", Antoine replied wiggling his toes inside the tall sandals strapped to his feet, trying to get the feeling to return to his toes.

"So, you've noticed then", Marianne said, sitting down next to him, "perhaps you should give him your number, he is kind of cute".

"If you like him so much, perhaps you should date him", Antoine replied rolling his eyes.

"Oh no, he only has eyes for you, babe, and besides, I've got my eyes set on his friend Pierre. And speaking of Pierre, he's just invited me out the back to smoke", Marianne announced.

"But you don't smoke", Antoine replied flashing her a look.

"I do now, and so do, right"? Marianne said with a wicked look in her eyes, "Aunt Monique said you were smoking in Lily's room when she first arrived, that's how she knew you were there".

"That was Lily, and you know it", Antoine said annoyed, "I hate cigarettes".

"Well not today, girl, you're coming with me for moral support", Marianne answered, "just don't inhale and you'll be fine", she added as she almost dragged him to his sore feet before leading him across the room.

Out on the steps at the back of the studio, was seemingly where all the cool kids hung out, well if you considered smoking cool, which Antoine definitely did not, but nevertheless, he was forced to puff away on a revolting cigarette anyway, while forced to listen to Marianne flirt away next to him.

Antoine tried to make small talk with the other two men, who were standing around, but dressed as he was and pretending to be a young woman, he just didn't know what to say to them.

Instead, he just turned to look at the scenery, the grey drab city buildings as he listened in on Marianne's conversation, "for sure", Marianne said, "We could do that, my friend Zara, likes him too, perhaps the four of us could go out sometime".

"Great idea, Marianne, I know Denis would be up for that", Pierre replied to the dismay of Antoine listening on, "Let me get your number, we'll set something up for the weekend", he added just as the fire escape door opened, "speak of the devil here he is", Pierre announced.

"Hey guys, lunch is here", Denis said cheerfully from the doorway as Antoine turned to look at the man, he had been set up on a date with, against his will. He breathed a heavy sigh and knew he would once again be forced to lie to Lily.



Chapter 24

Click, click, click! The sound of his tall stiletto heels, colliding with the pavement, filled Antoine's ears as he quickly made his way through the streets of Paris.

He didn't know how long he had been walking for but with his legs and feet now numb to the pain, Antoine powered on knowing he was almost home.

Stopping for a moment to cross the street, he allowed himself to look around. It was a beautiful evening with the sun just starting to set in the distance but still strong enough to warm his exposed arms and nylon covered legs. He reached up to wipe a bead of sweat from his brow as he watched a young couple walking hand in hand on the other side of the road. He quickly dropped his head looking down at the clothes he had been forced to wear, longing for the day's when he and Lily had walked together on pleasant Autumn evenings just like this one, he hadn't appreciated it at the time, but now he would give anything to just experience it one more time.

Crossing the road, Antoine heard the swish of his nylon clad thighs rubbing together and felt the pull of his pink restrictive skirt, decorated with green flowers, that wasn't making his journey back home any easier.

Stepping carefully on to the curb on the other side of the road, he once again spotted the couple who were now kissing in the distance, they looked so happy, he thought to himself, probably returning home from a date, having had a much nicer time one than the awful, forced date he had just run away from.



The day had started out quite well. Antoine on one of his days off from the store had sat around most of the day watching television and relaxing, well as much as possible with the knowledge he was going out that evening on a double date with Marianne. Of course, he had been on a date a few weeks ago, with Pedro, but that had been different, on that occasion, Lily had been there and with Pedro knowing his true identity it hadn't really been a date. The men tonight on the other hand were expecting Zara the model and Antoine didn't like the thought of it one bit.

It was around four-thirty when Marianne appeared at his bedroom door wanting to help him get ready but Antoine now much more confident and proficient at applying his makeup and styling his hair, told her that he was fine and didn't need her help. Marianne hadn't seemed particularly happy at the announcement, but after making a compromise, where she would pick out his outfit for the evening, she had reluctantly agreed and left him in peace to get ready.

An hour later, fully dressed in the tight uncomfortable date night outfit Marianne had picked out, Antoine stepped out into the living room to find it empty. Hearing Marianne moving around in her room, still getting ready, he tottered over to the balcony, opening the door, and stepped out into the bright sunlight.

Antoine closed his eyes for a brief second and let all his worries wash away, for the briefest of moments, he was no longer a man dressed up as a blonde-haired fashionista, wearing a tight pink skirt and teetering on painfully tall stiletto heels, in that moment, with his eyes closed, he was his old self again, as he pictured himself dressed in one of his old favourite outfits, waiting for Lily to walk out through the doors behind him. His painted lips formed into a smile as he pictured her dressed up and looking beautiful, skipping out through the balcony door to wrap her arms around him and tell him she was ready to go out.

The sound of heeled shoes approaching, alerted Antoine to the presence of someone behind him as he spun around, knowing he was about to see Marianne, but still feeling disappointed as he opened his eyes to see her standing there in a tight red top and short black skirt.

After a taxi ride to a little restaurant on the north side of the city, Antoine and Marianne were greeted with a kiss on both cheeks by their dates for the evening, Pierre, and Denis before sitting down at a small table along the back wall.

The restaurant itself was looked very traditional and rustic, but not in a bad way, it was clean and nicely decorated, with the walls covered with pictures of what Antoine took to be were generations of family members as he concluded that the restaurant must have been a family-owned and handed down through the years. But even with the setting being so pleasant as Antoine was soon to find out, the date that evening was going to be anything but.

After some small talk where Antoine lied about his love of modelling and fashion, the appetizers arrived and they all tucked into what turned out to be some delicious food but sadly, it all went downhill from there.

Denis, Antoine's date for the evening, who as expected from the brief time Antoine had spent with him on the modelling shoot, turned out to be a nice friendly guy, rushed off to the bathroom and didn't return for twenty minutes. In his absence, Pierre started paying less and less attention to Marianne turning to Antoine to ask him questions.

At first, Antoine thought he was just being nice, trying to involve him in the conversation with Denis out of the room, but as time passed, Pierre began to almost ignore Marianne completely, who was now, butting in and interrupting, trying to get some attention, Antoine started to realise Pierre's true intentions.

Denis returned briefly, as things for a short while returned to how they were at the start of the evening, but that didn't last long as within five minutes he was once again rushing back to the bathroom, leaving Antoine in a very awkward position.

It was clear by now, Pierre had eyes for Antoine and Marianne who was now shooting him daggers from across the table had noticed too. But with the alternative being to look at Pierre, who

kept giving him complimenting and touching his arm and hand, Antoine tried to start up a conversation with Marianne, who just sat there pouting.

Pierre kept up his pestering as Antoine tried to discourage him by looking uninterested and giving him short one-worded answers, but this just seemed to encourage Pierre even more with things coming to a head, when Antoine, who was taking a sip of his red wine at the time, suddenly felt a hand, land on his nylon encased knee under the small table.

Wide-eyed and almost choking on his wine, Antoine froze, not knowing how to react. Antoine stared across the table, giving the smiling Frenchman, who was grouping him under the table, a look that said keep going and I'll kill you, as the feeling of Pierre's fingers moving in a circular fashion massaging his kneecap was making him feel sick inside. Pierre didn't seem to get the message, or he just didn't care, as Antoine felt the hand slide up his inner thigh.

What happened next, caused quite a scene. Antoine quickly stood up, his chair flying backwards and making a loud awful screeching sound on the tiled floor. Angry and acting on autopilot, he tossed his wine in Pierre's face, slammed the glass down on the table and called him a pig. He then stormed out of the restaurant, the only sound to be heard, the clicking of his heels echoing throughout the silent room, all conversations having briefly paused, with all heads now looking on, to try and find the origin of the sudden outburst, that had abruptly interrupted their evening.

It was dark by the time Antoine arrived back at his apartment, thoroughly exhausted and in dire need of a drink of water, he peeled off his cursed shoes and tossed them next to the door before plodding across the living room floor on his nylon cover feet, the feeling just starting as he reached the kitchen with a tingle in his toes.

Filling up a glass with water, he gulped it down in one before placing it back under the tap to refill it as he noticed the lipstick mark on the rim and shook his head in anger. He'd had enough, and he wanted out. Turning off the tap, he headed straight for Zara's room, his plan to first get out of his uncomfortable feminine outfit, scrub his face clean of makeup and then find a pair of scissors to cut off all his girly blonde hair.

But pushing open the bedroom door, Antoine's plans were interrupted as he saw Lily sitting on the bedside table with a certain sadness in her eyes, "Antoine, we need to talk", she said looking up at him.

Antoine slowly nodded his head, lumbered his way over to the bed and sat down, crossing his legs mid-thigh, and resting his hands, palms down, neatly on top.



Chapter 25

There was a moment of silence in the room, as Antoine looked down at his flowery pink skirt, feeling a little nervous until suddenly the question he was waiting for was asked, "Antoine, where were you tonight"? Lily asked.

A million thoughts rushed through his head, he wanted to tell the truth but that would involve untangling a trail of lies, lie upon lie, going back so far, he had forgotten what was actually true at this point.

Looking up, he suddenly realised too much time had passed since Lily asked the question, now in a panic Antoine's mind went blank, "whatever it is, you can tell me, you know", Lily added in a soothing voice.

"I was out shopping with Marianne", Antoine blurted out.

"Oh", Lily said in an emotionless voice, "why didn't you just say that? And why don't you have any shopping bags"?

"I... we didn't buy anything, and I didn't tell you as I thought you would think less of me", Antoine replied, fiddling with the hem of his skirt awkwardly.

"Why would I think that"? Lily said moving over to sit next to him on the bed.

"Well... I'm your boyfriend and going shopping to buy girls clothes doesn't really sound very masculine, does it"? Antoine said quietly.

"Antoine, I've told you before, I'm ok with you exploring this side of yourself and I thought I'd made that quite clear during our alone time together that I like it", Lily said lifting his chin gently and looking him in the eyes, "is there something else? something you're not telling me"?

Put on the spot, Antoine had to think fast, he knew he'd have to say something as a simple no would sound suspicious, "there is something", he replied sheepishly.

"Go on", Lily said encouragingly.

"well...It's just... I've been trying to do my best at work recently, you know, try to impress Fifi and Annisa and Marianne's been helping me", Antoine said, shocking himself once again at how well he was able to lie these days.

Lily nodded, "I see, so this has become more than a disguise for you now? This is a lifestyle you want to explore further"? She said looking him dead in the eyes.

"Shit, shit, shit", Antoine said inside his mind, somehow, he had done it again, he had made things worse, but what could he say. Slowly nodding his head, he forced a smile on his painted lips, "yes", he whispered, bowing his head.

Lily seeing how difficult it was for him to say the words wrapped her arms around him, "don't worry, baby, I'm going to support you through this, everything is going to be just fine".

Three days later, Antoine found himself out in the city doing a familiar activity, shopping, but what wasn't familiar was his partner for the day. Since the chat in the bedroom, Lily had been pushing Antoine to spend more time with her, which under normal circumstances would have been something he would have loved, the problem of course was now, she believed that he wanted to live as a woman and was going out of her way to help him achieve that goal.

One positive to come out of the chat, was the next day, Lily had approached Marianne and had a talk with her, Antoine didn't know what they had said to each other, but since then Marianne had pretty much left him alone, she was no longer ordering him about or telling him what to wear.

He was already reaping the rewards of that chat as he found himself out wearing a pair of pants for the first time in as long as he could remember, not exactly manly pants with them being bright white and the legs finishing around his ankles, but in his mind, it was a pleasant change from the usual skirts he was used to wearing.

What was strange to Antoine though was the feeling of having his legs covered in public, which surprised him as up until a few weeks ago he had lived his entire life in pants but as he tottered through a busy shopping area of Paris on his designer red pumps, the rigid tight material of the pants compressing his legs slightly and squashing his male parts flat, he realised he had forgotten what it felt like.



The day started out a little awkwardly for Antoine, and although he had been out shopping with Lily in the past, before he had been the one waiting around and carrying the bags, now things were reversed, he was the one going into the changing room with arm fulls of soft and frilly garments. Trying them on before exiting for Lily to critique his look, the funny thing was as the day wore on, he started to relax and enjoy himself.

It had been a long time since he'd spend a whole day alone with Lily, and as the day wore on, Antoine realised he had missed her company recently, he had missed her sense of humour and her positive approach to life but more than anything just being around her.

By mid-afternoon, Antoine had almost forgotten the way he was dressed, he was just having too much fun, no longer worried about what anyone else thought of him or the topics of conversation about fashion as they surprisingly just seemed to naturally flow out, he even shocked himself by having his own opinion about certain styles and colours, especially as he didn't know where they were coming from.

Around 5 pm, a tired Antoine was ready to call it a day and head home but when he mentioned this to Lily, she informed him, that she had one last surprise in store for him that day.

"Where are we, Lil"? Antoine asked as their taxi pulled up outside a building he didn't recognise.

"Wait and see", came the surprise as Lily paid the driver before they both exited the cab.

"Come on, you're killing me here, please give me a clue", Antoine said playfully as the pair strode confidently side by side towards the entrance of the building on their tall heels.

"Oh, ok", Lily said, giving in, "remember you said the other day, that you wanted to do well at your job and impress Fifi? Well, I figured the best way to do that is to get to know her a little better".

Antoine felt confused, "get to know her? What does that have to do with...", his sentence was cut short as he looked over to see the very person he was talking about, dressed in a flattering black pantsuit and trademark 6-inch heels, smiling back at him.

"Hi Fifi", Lily said, rushing over to greet her with a hug.

Antoine watched on stunned, trying to work out what was happening, as the two girls greeted each other before turning to face him, "Are you hungry, Zara"? Fifi asked cheerfully, "I know this really cute little restaurant around the corner from here".



Chapter 26

In the weeks that followed, Antoine found himself spending more and more time with Fifi, at first it was almost a courtesy as he didn't know how to refuse an invitation. Take last Tuesday, for example, where out of the blue, Fifi had approached him and invited him and Lily out for dinner that evening. Of course, he had agreed to go, only later finding out that Lily had already made plans that evening and couldn't make it.

Hoping to reschedule, Antoine had approached Fifi, "erm... Fifi, do you have a moment"? He asked nervously.

Fifi smiled, "Yes, what's up, Zara", she asked in her cheerful voice.

"Well, you see, I've just found out that Lily can't make it to dinner tonight, can we reschedule"? Antoine said not knowing why this petite girl made him feel so nervous.

Fifi crossed her arms just beneath her bosom, "so, you don't want to spend time with me without Lily, is that it"? She said pouting.

"Err...no... it's not like that...it's just...I....".

Fifi giggled, "I'm just messing with you, Zara, if you want, I can ask Annisa and her new boyfriend to join us, or we could just cancel, it's not like it's a special occasion or has to be a onetime thing or anything".

"Err... no... you don't need to cancel, we can go", Antoine announced without thinking, "actually, I've been meaning to get to know Annisa a little better", he replied smiling, "you know, it's kind of hard to speak to her, with her French being so limited, in fact, I'm a little scared of her, to be honest".

Fifi giggled again, "what scared of Annisa? she's like the nicest, kindest person, I've ever met, and I'll tell you a secret, her French is much better than she lets on, she just doesn't want to be put in a position with her staff, where she feels uncomfortable, you'll see later, wait until she has a few drinks, her French is probably better than mine".

"Better than yours? But aren't you French"? Antoine asked confused by her statement, having wondered previously, how she had come to have such a strange accent.

It was Fifi's turn to look nervous, "Err... yes, of course, I'm French, I... just... well... it's a long story, perhaps I'll tell you about it one day", Fifi said, "Well, I better try to look busy, I'll see you later, Zara", she added before turning eloquently on her stilt-like heels and sauntering off across the room.

So, later that evening Antoine found himself in a restaurant close to the bridal store, sat between Fifi and Annisa, who, just like Fifi had said, turned out to be a different person outside of work, laughing and making jokes about how she was the only non-blonde at the table.



After the dinner, spending time with Fifi became more and more common for Antoine as he found her to be nothing like what he had expected. From the outside, she had this scary aura about her, always dressed immaculately, her makeup and hair done to perfection, and she was never seen in anything but the highest of heels. But as Antoine slowly got to know her, he found that the person beneath the façade was relaxed, caring, and really fun to be around. In fact, apart from her ultra-feminine appearance, when relaxed, she acted more like one of Antoine's old male friends than the face of an internationally famous bridal company.

The dinners soon became a regular after-work activity, sometimes others would join them, but mostly Antoine and Fifi would just go alone, chatting about their day, and how difficult it was to always try to act graceful and feminine, neither realising that they had more in common than they knew.

Regular shopping trips soon followed as Antoine found himself accompanying Fifi out to buy clothes and shoes. She seemed to think he was some kind of fashion mogul, buying anything he recommended. He couldn't blame her for thinking that, as Zara was supposed to be a fashion graduate, having spent years studying fashion trends and the latest styles. It also didn't help that Marianne had made him wear all those terribly high heels for so long, as Fifi now believed they had similar tastes, forcing Antoine to continue wearing uncomfortably high heeled shoes, just to keep up appearances.

Soon, Antoine found himself, accompanying Fifi almost everywhere as he started to joining her at interviews, store openings, and PR events. Before he knew it, he was hardly spending any time at all in the stockroom, each day now was now different and full of variety, and as much as Antoine told himself, he shouldn't be enjoying himself, and that he should be coming up with a plan to get his old life back, the truth was, he was just having too much fun to even consider it.



Chapter 27

It was a pleasant if not slightly breezy afternoon as Antoine and Fifi strolled slowly through a park not far from the store. The picturesque park was a place they often walked through on the way back to the store, its peaceful nature and tranquillity a safe haven away from the normally noisy city.

The scene that day was no different, the only noise to be heard, being the birds singing and the clicky clack of their high heeled shoes, which to most observers would probably seem an odd choice of footwear for an afternoon stroll through the park.

But the thoughts of random strangers critiquing his footwear was the last thing on Antoine's mind, he a much bigger problem, and it had nothing to do with his hair sporting bright pink highlights, leftover from a photoshoot a few days back.

"Zara, please tell me what's wrong", Fifi suddenly announced, making Antoine stop and turn towards her.

"What do you mean? Nothing is wrong", Antoine replied defensively, brushing his hair behind his right ear, which had just blown in front of his face.



“I don’t believe you”, Fifi announced forcefully, stamping her high heeled foot, “I know you and I know something is wrong, you’ve had a sad look on your face all day, and you’ve hardly said two words to me, did I do something to upset you”?

“No, you haven’t done anything wrong”, Antoine quickly stated, “you have been such a good friend to me, that’s what makes this so difficult”.

“So, there is something, I knew it”, Fifi said stepping closer, “please, tell me what it is, I want to help you, I hate seeing you so sad”.

Antoine started to tear up, “I... I... can’t”, he said struggling to hold back the tears.

“It’s ok”, Fifi announced, stepping forward and giving him a hug just as Antoine broke down and started crying.

“I’m... I’m a fraud”, Antoine mumbled into her shoulder, “I’m not Zara, I’m not even a woman”.

Then there was silence, realising what he had just done Antoine pulled away and took a step backwards. Fifi opened her mouth in shock as time seemed to stand still, Antoine seeing the surprise in her eyes without thinking, took off running.

With his long skirt flapping against his legs and his high heeled shoes sinking into the grass, Antoine ran, in that moment, he didn't care about how ridiculous he must have looked like, he just needed to escape. He ran until his legs ached, finally stopping as he was having trouble breathing.

Spotting a small, cushioned bench, he sat down and crossed his long legs, “what have I done”? he thought to himself, “why did I tell her? But then again, she would have found out soon enough anyway with the real Zara coming home”.



Antoine had received the news the previous day when Lily had received a text from Zara, and he had been a nervous wreck ever since. She was coming back next week and would, of course, be wanting her room and all her things back.

Antoine and Lily had spent the previous evening trying to think up a way out of their predicament, but with Maryanne in the spare room and Monique up visiting, there didn't seem to be any option other than to finally tell the truth.

The fallout was going to be devastating to everyone involved, even Lily would find out all the lies he had been forced to tell her,

Antoine knew was about to lose everything he loved and as he sat somewhere in the middle of the park, dressed up in his feminine outfit, his feet aching inside his towering high heeled pumps and the sight of his pink hair blowing around the edge of his vision, Antoine also knew that almost all of his problems, could have been avoided, had he just been a little smarter.

Looking to his left, Antoine took a deep breath as he saw Fifi awkwardly walking towards him, struggling as her expensive designer shoes sank into the soft grass. His first instinct was to run, but he knew that wouldn't solve anything, he would have to face her eventually.

"Can I sit"? Fifi asked as she arrived in front of him slightly out of breath.

Antoine nodded, moving his pink handbag to make room.

Fifi took her time, taking off her own handbag before smoothing out her skirt before finally sitting next to him, crossed her legs in a similar position to his, "I want to tell you a secret", she announced, "but before I do, you have to promise not to tell anybody, nobody knows this, not even Anissa".

Antoine turned to his left and nodded, intrigued by what she was about to say, "I won't tell anyone, I promise", he replied.

Fifi let out a heavy sigh, "I'm a fraud too, my name is not Fifi, and I'm also not a woman, she announced as Antoine screwed up his face.

"Don't do that, this is not a joke, what I told you was true", he said loudly before putting his head in his hands and leaning forward.

Fifi reached out slowly and started rubbing his back, "I wish I was joking, but trust me, I'm not, my real name is David Lubis, I'm a man who went travelling to Jakarta looking for a little adventure, and well, I guess I found it", she said letting out a small laugh, "I'm not even French".

Antoine looked up and after staring at her for a moment, he still couldn't tell if she was joking, "you're serious"? he announced, his facial expression now having changed from anger to utter shock.

"Yes, I'm serious, it's a bit of an unbelievable story, I'll tell you about it, but first, I think you should tell me your story, once I know everything, I can help you", Fifi said nodding.

"I don't know where to start", Antoine said, taking a deep breath, "everything just got so out of hand".

Fifi smiled, "how about you start with your name"?

"Well, my name is Antoine, and if you think you have an unbelievable story, wait until you hear mine"!

Chapter 28

Antoine pinched himself, but he didn't wake up, "Is this real"? he thought to himself, stood in the centre of Times Square, New York City, dressed in a mini skirt and high heels, "surely stuff like this doesn't happen outside of Hollywood movies".



Antoine had always wanted to travel to New York, having watched countless movies growing up, and now here he was, standing amongst all the lights of Times Square, albeit perched atop a pair of 5-inch stiletto pumps. Everything seemed so familiar but at the same time not.

After telling his story to Fifi in the park, the two had chatted for hours as they became even closer bonding over their common secret. When they left that day Fifi had promised to help him with his problem and told him not to worry, which was easy for her to say, Antoine didn't get a wink of sleep that night.

But It didn't take Fifi long to come up with a solution and when she invited him out to lunch, the next day, in a nearby restaurant, she laid out her solution.

"What do you want to eat"? Fifi asked with a smile as the two feminized men sat down gracefully.

"Oh, anything, I'm not really hungry", Antoine replied.

"You're still worried about, Zara coming back, the real Zara, I mean", Fifi said before pausing for a second, "oh this is going to get too confusing; we need a new name for you, you're not Zara, and Antoine doesn't suit you, right now",

"Fifi, please, my whole life is about to explode in front of my eyes, a new name is the last thing on my mind", Antoine stated manically.

"You look quite cute when you're animated", she said with a giggle, "I told you, don't worry, I've got a plan".

"Really", Antoine said with a puzzled expression, "I'd love to hear it"?

"I'll tell you, but first you have to choose a new name", Fifi replied, before turning her attention back to the menu.

Antoine sighed, "fine, how about just Antoinette? that's the female version of my name, I think".

"Hmm... I guess, but it sounds a bit old fashioned, let's shorten it", Fifi replied, "Toinette, no, that's too long, Toni, no, too masculine, hand on, I've got it, Netti, Netti is what I'm going to call you from now on".

Antoine sighed, "I guess it's as good as any name, now are you going to tell me this plan, or are you going to leave me to die of a panic attack".

So, over a delicious light lunch, Fifi explained her idea to Antoine, and that with New York fashion week starting in a few days, it would be the perfect time to take a trip. Antoine wasn't so sure and questioned her, but Fifi seemed to have an answer for everything, telling him he could use his own passport through immigration as they had no right to tell him how he could or couldn't dress.

When he asked about Lily, Fifi suggested she come along too, she and Fifi were good friends and Antoine would need to tell her something. Talking it through, they decided that Antoine was to tell Lily that he had told Fifi that he wasn't really Zara, but he was to keep the part about revealing he was a boy to himself, this way he could also protect Fifi's own secret.

When they had finished discussing the plan, Antoine just sat there in stunned silence, he didn't like the idea of travelling to another country crossdressed, especially one where he couldn't speak the language, not to mention how different it would be, this time he wouldn't be pretending to be Zara, on this trip, he would be himself, or Netti, meaning whenever he needed to show any form of ID, people would know his true gender

With no better idea, Antoine agreed to try Fifi's plan, even if he couldn't get an answer out of her as to what would happen when they returned, in his mind, this plan was just delaying the inevitable, but with Fifi telling him, she had a plan for when they returned but needed a little more time to sort out the final details, all he could do was place his trust in her and pray.

So, this how Antoine found himself posing for a picture, disorientated and jetlagged on a pleasantly warm evening amongst the crowds of people in Times Square. The plan was to stay for a week, see a few fashion shows, explore the city, and attend a few parties with some of Fifi's famous friends.

They had only landed a few hours ago, only stopping briefly at the hotel to drop their bags before an excited Lily had insisted they head straight out and see the city.

"Are you hungry, girls"? Fifi asked as Lily finished taking Antoine's picture.

"Oh, yes, I'm starving", Lily announced, "I've hardly eaten all day, how about you Netti"?

Antoine nodded, "yes, I could eat". He announced dazzled by all the lights and noise surrounding him.

"Ok, great", Fifi replied excitedly, "there's this place in lower Manhattan, a friend recommended to me, they do all sorts of flavoured rice pudding, it's supposed to be delicious, does that sound ok"?

Lily and Antoine nodded, not knowing the city, they were happy to let Fifi take the lead.

Fifi smiled and did a little dance, "oh, this trip is going to be so much fun, let's go girls".



Chapter 29

It was Antoine's third day in New York City and having finally gotten over his jetlag, he was slowly starting to acclimatize to the more hectic pace of life. Finding it fascinating, in just how different it was to back home in Paris, everything in America seemed so much bigger, from the towering building looming overhead to the food portions served at every restaurant, not to mention the speed at which people seemed to move about their daily lives, always seemingly in a rush to get somewhere.

The day had started with a buffet breakfast in the hotel before heading out to explore some of the city's most famous sights. The highlight of the day, being the Staten Island Ferry.

The feelings he felt as the boat circled the Statue of Liberty had reminded him of the excitement he had experienced as a child approaching the Eiffel Tower for the first time. He had the same butterflies in his stomach and the same sense of amazement, even if he was struggling to keep his balance on the choppy water in his platform sandals.

Returning to Manhattan, the three companions enjoyed a light lunch before deciding to head up Empire state building, another building Antoine was looking forward to seeing. As a child he had always loved the film, King Kong, imagining himself to be the mighty ape scaling the iconic building, so it was quite ironic as he felt the wind blowing around his pantyhosed legs and up the short skirt of his dress, only to realise that having finally made it to the top of the building, he had more in common with the woman King Kong had carried to the top than the ape himself.

but thoughts of old movies were not in Antoine's thoughts for long as it was on top of the building, that Fifi decided to drop a bombshell on the group, "I received some amazing news earlier today, "she announced as the three gazed out over the city skyline, "It's going to solve all your problems, Netti".

Both Lily and Antoine turned to face her, intrigued by what she was about to say, "Well, don't keep us waiting", Lily said after a slight pause.

"Oh sorry", Fifi said with a giggle, "Well, here's the problem right, the real Zara, is about to return from her trip to find out that Netti has been sleeping in her room, using her things, and living her life, but what if I told you, that you didn't need to return"?

"What"? Lily and Antoine both blurted out simultaneously, "not return to Paris"? Antoine added surprised.

"Exactly", Fifi replied, "As you know, the shop continues to expand, I'm about to open a new store in Milan, and I want you to go over and get it started".

"Me"? Antoine stated loudly, "But I don't know anything about opening a store, and what about Lily? I wouldn't want to be so far away from her".

"Netti, you would be perfect for the task and I'll be making frequent trips out in the first couple of months to see how things are going", Fifi stated confidently, "and as for Lily, I want you to go too, with the two of you over there, the store is bound to be a success, please think it over, you don't have to give me an answer straight away".

The group then fell into silence as they turned to look out over New York City, Fifi happily taking in the sights of the sprawling metropolis beneath her, while Antoine and Lily, still stunned by the announcement, were trying to imagine what moving to Italy would be like.

The slightly awkward atmosphere continued as they returned down to street level to search for a cab. "Hey, love the pink hair, babe", a man commented while walking past, giving Antoine a wink "how about I give you my number and I'll show you a good time"?

Antoine ignored the comment, already having noticed since arriving in America, that men on the street there were much more forceful than back in France. It also didn't help that he didn't understand what they were saying, only picking out the odd word, like the word babe and pink.

"Get lost creep", Lily shouted in English, "go harass someone else".

The man shrugged his shoulders and walked away before Lily turned to talk to Fifi about how obnoxious the man had been. Antoine lost in his own thoughts, still thinking about the comment and how he looked, spotted his reflection in a nearby shop window.

Tottering over, he stared into the eyes of the pink-haired fashionista looking back at him, "how did I end up here"? He thought to himself, "Is this who I am, now"?



The next morning, Lily didn't have much of an appetite as she sat struggling to force down some food at the breakfast buffet, that she had enjoyed every other day of the trip. She couldn't stop thinking about Fifi announcement the previous day,

She looked over the breakfast table at Antoine, her boyfriend, who these days looked and acted more feminine than her most of the time and felt a strange mixture of emotions. Love, jealousy, hate, pride, but the one overriding them all was guilt.

It had been her crazy plan for Antoine to assume Zara's life and at first, she had encouraged it, the excitement and thrill of it had rekindled some of the passion in their relationship, but now she didn't know what she wanted, could she be with Antoine long term if he was going to continue living as Netti? Could she imagine Netti being the father of her children?

The thoughts continued as the three finished breakfast and left their hotel heading to a fashion show, one in which Lily had been looking forward to all week. She should have been ecstatic, front

row seats at New York fashion week, something she had dreamed of for years. But now they were actually going, she found herself just feeling numb.

She walked on ahead to where their cab was waiting, opening the door before looking back to see Antoine strutting up the street in his cute little outfit, consisting of, a short blue mini skirt, that showed off his sexy pantyhosed legs, a pink jacket that matched his coloured hair, and the tall platform sandals, that he had been wearing for most of the trip without any issue at all.

She smiled thinking about how beautiful he looked in the morning light, his makeup a little heavier than usual, having glued on fake eyelashes to give his eyes a dramatic look, but still somehow achieving a sweet and innocent look,

Seeing her waiting by the taxi, Antoine looked over while brushing his hair out of his face in a very feminine way, Lily smiled, but inside she felt completely lost and confused, she wasn't sure what she wanted anymore, but she was certain about one thing, as much as she loved Antoine, she had no intention of moving to Milan.



Chapter 30

As he exited the hotel into the busy New York street, Antoine shivered, the weather had really taken a turn over the last 24 hours, the warm pleasant weather they had been enjoying over the last few days now replaced with a dull-looking sky overhead, and a biting cold wind.

Looking down, Antoine grabbed the bottom of his thin polka dot dress and tried in vain to pull it downwards to cover a little more of his already chilled legs, the cold wind violently attacking them from all sides, the sheer pair of nylons encasing them doing little if anything to protect him from the cold.

Seeing him looking so uncomfortable, Fifi turned to face him, "Come on, Netti, keep moving and you'll warm up soon", She announced, looking equally as cold.

Antoine wanted more than anything to go back into the hotel and change but knowing that he didn't have any outfits that were much warmer than the one he currently wore, and also knowing that their destination that day was to be another front-row view at a fashion show, he knew mentioning it would be a waste of breath, instead, he just nodded his head, "ok", he replied, his teeth chattering, quickly tottering over towards the waiting cab on his sandalled feet.

With a few hours to kill before the show, and with it being so cold, the girls decided to do a little shopping. Antoine had eagerly agreed, he enjoyed shopping a lot more than he used to these days, now that he wasn't bored watching Lily try on clothes, but it was the thought of getting out of the cold that really appealed to him, thinking he could perhaps even find a warm coat at the same time.

Two hours later, he hadn't found the warm coat he had been hoping to find, but the black hoodie he was now wearing was the next best thing. He had initially picked it up as a joke, placing it over his shoulders and putting a matching hat on his head, before pulling a gangster pose.

Lily and Fifi had found it hilarious, so funny in fact Fifi insisted on buying it for him, putting it down on the company card as a business expense. Antoine wasn't going to argue, the hoodie was made from a soft warm material and was almost androgynous in its look, a pleasant change from all the ultra-feminine clothes he had been wearing the last few days.

Imagining the hoodie to be something he could have seen himself wearing back in the days before he started to live life en femme, Antoine looked had looked into a store mirror to be faced with his now-familiar feminine image reflecting back at him,

He shook his head and smiled, the hoodie which he had hoped might make him look a little more manly, only emphasised just how much he had changed. His thin frame beneath, the long pink hair above, and the long shapely legs beneath, screamed girl, the baggy hoodie only serving to make them stand out even more.

The following few hours were spend fighting through crowds and posing for pictures in the packed out Spring Studios in the Tribeca neighbourhood, where New York fashion week was being hosted.

Having spent the last few days at the event, Antoine now felt comfortable in the previously unfamiliar environment, he now knew what to expect, but even so, the energy and the enthusiasm of all the guests, dressed up in their fanciest outfits, all trying to get noticed was still quite the sight to behold.



With early evening bringing to a close the last show they were scheduled to attend that day, Antoine looked around and reflected on the last few days, realising that he had actually enjoyed himself, not everything, there had definitely been parts he hadn't enjoyed, like the pain in his feet after a full day of walking on tall platform heels or the Indonesian film crew that had been trailing them for the last few days, documenting their every move, or more accurately Fifi's, for their website. But when he looked at the experience as a whole there had definitely been more positives than negatives.

Life was definitely not boring anymore, for the last few years Antoine had been content with the life he had built for himself, but it had become rather dull. These days life was much more exciting, every day was filled with new experiences. But perhaps the thing that he now appreciated most was his friendship with Fifi. Antoine had always found it difficult to make close friends, in the past he'd had lots of acquaintances but no one he could really rely on, Fifi, in a short time he had known her had eclipsed them all, as he now thought of her as someone he could really rely on.

For that reason, he had finally made up his mind about her offer to move to Milan, yes it would be scary, and he would be committing to living as a woman for a little longer, but on the other hand it would be an exciting adventure, and with Lily by his side, he was willing to give it a go. But unfortunately for Antoine, like most things in his life, never seemed to go to plan.

It was just after the last show when Lily turned to Antoine, saying she was going to take a walk and have a smoke, inviting him to join her. Having not had much chance to speak to her that day, Antoine quickly agreed, leaving Fifi to chat with some friends she had met at the event.

They turned the corner and walked up the street away from the crowds, "so, did you enjoy the show today?" Lily asked, looking up at Antoine who was towering over her.

"Yes, it was a good one", Antoine replied happily, "their choice of music was really good, and I liked a lot of their designs, they were much more normal than the ones in the show we saw yesterday, I could actually see myself wearing some of the clothes from today, perhaps in Milan".

Lily looked over and gave him a weak smile, "Netti, I'm not going to Milan, with you".

Antoine stopped dead and looked over, "What? But yesterday you said you were ok with this".

"I know, I... I.. can't go, things are different now, we've changed, you've changed", she replied.

Her statement pieced Antoine's heart like a dagger, as a rage built up inside him, "changed? You mean this", he said grabbing his pink hair, "and this", he said grabbing a hold of his flimsy little skirt, this was your idea remember", he screamed, "I never wanted any of this".

Lily took a step back, startled by the sudden outburst, "no I don't mean the way you look, although it does make things a little more complicated", Lily shot back, "I'm talking about all the lies, I've known for weeks that Maryanne knew the truth about you and I've been waiting for you to tell me, you never used to lie to me! You know how much I hate people who lie".

Hearing her words, Antoine felt sick, "you knew, and you didn't say anything? So, you've been lying to me too"?

"If you want to think that fine, but all I've ever done is support you, maybe I could have said something, but how many lies have you told me in the last few weeks? telling me how happy you were, those crazy tall expensive pumps, you said you just had to have, was anything real"? Lily said with tears forming in her eyes.

Antoine screwed up his eyes and took a deep breath, "Lil, please, things just kept happening", Antoine said looking her in the eyes, "I just felt so confused, I didn't know what to do".

"You could have talked to me", Lily replied sadly, "we promised each other in the beginning, that no matter what, we would never lie to each other, you've broken that promise, how can you ever expect me to trust you again now"?

"I'm sorry, I was stupid, please forgive me, I can make this right", Antoine pleaded.

“I do forgive you, but things are different now, I think we should perhaps take a step back, be friends for a while, I need some time apart to process everything”, Lily replied looking away.

“You’re...you’re breaking up with me”, Antoine muttered in disbelief, “I can’t believe this, look at me, Lil, I did all this for you, because I love you, and now you’re going to end things just like that”?

Lily nodded slowly, “Yes, I’m sorry, I’ve made up my mind, you should go to Milan, start over, perhaps things will be different once some time has passed”.

Antoine opened his mouth to speak, but no words formed in his head, instead, he lifted his hands to his head and slowly turned.

His world and his future had just been blown apart in front of his eyes and it had left him feeling completely numb as he slowly stumbled away down the street.



Chapter 31

2 months later

With the familiar sound of high heels clicking along on the stone paving below, Antoinette strutted through one of the central squares of Milan, thinking about how much life had changed in the last six months.



The slightly shy, introverted man, known as Antoine, who had struggled all his life to make friends, was no more, and in his place Antoinette, the outgoing, fashionista now existed.

The first few weeks after moving to Italy had proved difficult, as Antoinette struggled to adapt to a new culture and language, while also trying to find somewhere to live and manage the opening of the new shop, but, with the arrival of Fifi, halfway through the second week, things had gotten easier.

Sat talking one day, Fifi had offered some advice that Antoinette really took to heart, three simple words, “let it go”, she had said talking about his old life, and after hearing the words, everything changed.

After the conversation, the way Antoinette perspective on her time in Milan changed drastically. No one knew her in Milan, she could start over, be whoever she wanted to be, be a better version of himself, no, be the best version of himself, starting with her name, and from that moment on she would only ever think of herself as Antoinette or Netti.

The next day, she signed up for an intensive Italian language course and after using some of the budget, given to her to open the new store, Antoinette hired a translator. Feeling more confident

and adventurous, she had vowed to explore and get to know her new city, venturing out, walking, shopping, and whenever possible chatting with the locals.

It didn't take long for her to fall in love with the beautiful old city and along with it the freedom in exploring her new self. She realised that Antoinette was everything Antoine had always wanted to be, confident, decisive, and popular, so after another chat with Fifi, during another one of her visits, she decided to make it official.

She applied to change her name and documents and started seeing a doctor. She would soon be starting hormone replacement therapy and had even booked an appointment, with a consultant, to discuss breast augmentation and facial feminizing surgery.

Three months after arriving in Milan, the new store was due to open in just a few days, which meant Fifi was coming over for a visit.

That afternoon, Antoinette was feeling excited, looking forward to meeting up with her close friend. She had carefully selected an outfit, heavily influenced by a runway show, she had recently attended, and she couldn't wait to discuss it with Fifi, over a bottle of wine later that evening. But with still a few hours until dinner, and wanting to look her best, not just for Fifi, but also for the store opening, which was going to feature in a local magazine, Antoinette was heading for the hair salon with a special look in mind.

Later that evening

Looking out over the breathtaking city beneath her, the Duomo looking particularly spectacular lit-up in lights, Antoinette felt like a princess in a Disney film.

In that moment, she was at peace with everything that had happened, and although, if you had asked her a year ago if she could see herself ever wanting to live out the rest of her life as a woman, she would have instantly said no, and thought you were crazy for asking.

But things had changed, and now stood perched on a pair of high heeled shoes, she would have once thought of as impossible to stand in never mind walk, the warm evening air gently blowing around her exposed legs below her designer skirt, and through her long dyed hair, Antoinette, wouldn't have it any other way.

Upon hearing a pair of high heel shoes clicking towards her, Antoinette turned, as a huge smile appeared on her painted lips, "Fifi, there you are", she said tottering over to give her a great big hug.

"Netti, it's so good to see you", Fifi announced happily, "wow. you look amazing, I love your outfit, and your hair, it looks great. I guess the lifestyle here in Milan suits you after all".

Antoinette stepped back and looked her friend in the eyes, "thank you, Fifi", she said sincerely, "you know, you were right, living in another country, really changes the way see the world and yourself, and although it took me a while admit it, I've never been happier".



The end





































