

A dark silhouette of a man in a suit, likely Joe Six-Pack, is visible in the background. The image has a purple-to-black gradient background with a horizontal grey band.

# **TWO Forms of ID**

***Joe Six-Pack***

***J O E   S I X   P A C K***

***TWO  
FORMS  
OF ID***

**A Web Classics Revisited Story**

2007 Paperback Edition

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## TWO FORMS OF ID

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## Chapter 1:

### Is it Too Much To Ask?

It was so hot, you could have fried an egg on it. His forehead, that is.

Over in the corner of a dim office, a woman was punching furiously at her multiplexed office phone, hunting and picking for the right convenient preset to turn off that damn hold music. How had she turned it on in the first place? She was just trying for an outside line.

Her claw-like nails clacked and scraped on the flimsy plastic buttons, as she fruitlessly kept pushing and poking at random. The woman, who kept poking buttons with the persistence of a woodpecker, was somewhere in her mid-thirties. But she looked much older. She was not particularly attractive, being skinny and looking frazzled. Her stringy brown hair was her most recognizable quality.

The air above Harvey Angler's head was – if you looked closely – rippling with heat. That's how hot his forehead was. It wasn't because of the season, or because of the poor air conditioning in the cramped office, it was something on his mind. He was stewing over his incredible situation he now found himself in.

By the way, this is also something that you could have cooked on his forehead: stew.

The crackling sound of the muzak version of "Summer Breeze" piping loudly out of the phone's tinny speaker finally caused Harvey to momentarily ignore his problems and drop his guard. He took his fist and slammed it down on the phone like a hammer, causing the handset and base to bounce onto the floor. But at least the music stopped.

So he felt a momentary wisp of relief in this otherwise hellish day.

“You’re trying to get us caught, aren’t you?” The woman said, under her breath, hissing at him.

With those words, Harvey’s dark mood returned, twice as intense as before. But you see, it wasn’t really Harvey’s fault at all. It was his situation.

“Hello, Jean.” A stout man with horrible skin said. He had appeared out of nowhere. “Not having problems with the phone, are you?”

The woman gathered up the loose phone parts and clumsily dumped them on her desk. “No! No. No.” Jean Angler said. “My daughter is just a bit clumsy, you know.” She shot a look of anger at Harvey.

“Oh, so is this your daughter, Jean?” The lump of a man said.

“You haven’t met yet?” Jean straightened up in her chair to do the introductions. “Richard, this is my daughter. Honey, say hello to Mr. Rollins, the office manager.” Richard stuck out his hand and smiled broadly. Harvey got up and politely shook it.

“What’s your name, sweetie?” Richard said.

Harvey swallowed a truckload of pride, steadied himself and answered: “Christina.” He delicately cleared his throat and concentrated on sounding more effeminate. It was actually pretty eerie. He had the voice dead on. “My name’s Christina.” Harvey smiled through his anger and revulsion.

“Well, be careful with that phone, Christina. They’re not cheap.” Richard then turned to Jean with a smile. “What is it with girls and phones?” He laughed to himself at his own keen observation.

“Ha-ha!” Jean replied, trying to pretend it was funny. “Oh, yes. Kids. What’re you gonna do?” She smiled back in the empty, hollow way you do with tepid office humor, as she prayed this conversation would end as soon as possible.

“Who knows!?” Richard turned around halfway, preparing to leave the scene. “I don’t!” He continued to chuckle as he proceeded on his way. “Good to meet you Christina.” He added as he left.

“Yeah.” Harvey muttered. “Nice to meet you.” He plopped back down onto his butt and started to rebuild the momentum in his snowballing anger.

“Will you just take it easy, Harvey?” Jean hissed.

Harvey bounced up in his seat to tug the backside of his dress under him. As he did, strands from his long wig of mousy brown hair flew along his shoulders, held in place by a pink hair band. He continued to fool with his little-house-on-the-prairie dress and its stupid doily collars until he couldn’t bear to touch it anymore. A faint sizzling sound could be heard coming from his ears as his brain broiled in its own juices.

Jean’s face showed fear. “I need you to get yourself under control, Harvey. Don’t make me lose my job! We still have five hours to go.” She gently kicked him in the ankle, leaving a scuff on his white stockings.

Harvey’s mind started to misfire and sputter. He was barely getting through this as it was, and it was getting worse and worse by the millisecond. To keep himself from going mad – if he wasn’t way beyond that already – he reviewed the events that led up to this nightmare in the hope that he could now spot the exact moment where it all went wrong.





It was three weeks ago when he had first heard of Jean's problems at work. She was harping and whining on the subject incessantly. She was going to lose her job, no one liked her, no one respected her, the work was too hard, the air conditioning didn't work, blah, blah, blah.

Jean was Harvey's older sister. Much older. She was twelve years his senior, physically – but years behind in emotional maturity. It seemed to Harvey that she might never settle down and learn to take life easy.

His sister was the sort of person who should have never been entrusted with the responsibilities of a job, or even the responsibilities of dressing herself. She was a twenty-four hour a day basket case, a bundle of jittery, spazmatic nerves. One day, she would surely explode in a tangled mess of anxiety and paranoia.

But until that day, she was Harvey's own personal demon. He lived with Jean, in the house he had grown up in, as his parents moved away when they retired. For his part, Harvey had grown up the neglected one in his nuclear family, being too well adjusted to warrant the sort of attention his frazzled parents paid to the trouble-ridden Jean. But his parents had burnt out long ago. So now the problem had been dropped into his lap. He could deal with it well enough, as his resistance had been built up for many years. And he could tolerate her quirky, draining personality without too much strain on his life.

That was until Jean started in on her new job. How she got it, Harvey had no clue. And even though he was happy for her, he now had a whole new level of Jean's insecurity to cope with. Her complaints and worries about work were

always the same, and became like a mantra as she chanted and recited them at every opportunity. Harvey tried hard to console her, but he had run out of answers. He was reduced to pleading for sanity and calmness, only to be rewarded with Jean's list of problems once again. He begged her to stop. But it wasn't long before he found himself holding her when she started to cry. He promised her everything would be okay. And he promised her that he would "Do anything on Earth to help."

What would it take to calm her down? Harvey resolved to help her fit in at work. Yes, it was really going far above and beyond the call than anybody should have had to do on behalf of another grown adult, but she was his sister. He had to help her adjust.

He set to work on rebuilding his sister in the mold of a driven, professional businesswoman. Harvey was by trade an electrician, but his flexible schedule allowed him a lot of free time. It was needed. He chose Jean's outfits, drilled her on using business jargon and even wound up spending his nights finishing most of the work she was supposed to be doing. It paid off slowly – ever so slowly – in good performance reviews, compliments and even a raise. For the first time in a long time, Jean was settling in and calming down. And Harvey could relax.

For a minute or two. No sooner had the paranoia about her abilities left her when new worries burrowed into her head. She was obsessed with her inability to bond or socialize with coworkers. They were all mothers and fathers, raising families and talking about the tests and travails of being parents.

So here it was, April 25. Bring Your Daughter To Work Day. And here Harvey was, dressed as a young girl, pre-

tending to be Jean's daughter. This, despite the fact that he was twenty-four years old and holding an M.B.A. Why?

When Jean had first mentioned it, he couldn't even believe that she'd ever suggest such a thing. Pretend to be a girl to help Jean's social standing at work? Was she insane, or just oblivious to reality?

Neither. She did know one thing about her brother. He liked to dress.

He didn't do it often, but he never turned down the opportunity. Halloween, costume parties, Mardi Gras. Whatever excuse he could find, he was in a dress and on the town. Not that he was a habitual cross dresser. Harvey never felt any overpowering need to dress, nor was he sexually aroused by it. He just thought it was a kick.

Harvey may have been twenty-three years old, but he was in that small percentile of men who were fully gown at under 5'6". And he was very young looking. On a good day he could be mistaken for a college freshman, what with his beard never really growing in. So by pure accident, he discovered he had a useless talent he never before suspected a man could have. He could be a girl. A teenager, to be specific.

David Ibsen, a longtime friend of Harvey's was the first to spot it. He'd tease Harvey from time to time about his size and androgynous appearance, but never think twice about it. But a drunken bet made by David and his friends resulted in Harvey making himself up to be a teenage girl for a day. The bet was to see if he could be passed off in disguise for twenty four hours. Harvey collected some easy cash. He was unnervingly convincing as a girl. No beauty queen, mind you – more like a portly chess-club-loser type of girl – but the disguise was credible. Needless to say,

Harvey's friends were visibly uncomfortable and disturbed with his newfound skill. But Harvey liked the power of making his friends so obviously uneasy. That was the fun part about dressing up. There was no thrill from wearing womens' clothes, he just simply liked freaking people out. And he was quite good at it.

So it was armed with this knowledge that Jean had made her suggestion. Harvey would come to work in a dress and pretend to be Jean's nonexistent daughter, Christina. Jean had already bought the dress, the wig and the shoes. All Harvey had to do was put on his little-girl act and hang out all day at her office. This wasn't any big problem, was it? He did say he would "Do anything on Earth to help," didn't he?

Harvey was aghast. He hadn't suspected that his sister was so off the deep end. It was unbelievable. Jean apologized, and retracted her idea. He was right. It was silly and dumb. Then she just waited for the inevitable.

Two days later, when Harvey suck into Jean's room and opened a drawer of Jean's dresser, he found a note under the dress he wanted to try on. It read "Gotcha!"



"Harvey." Snap snap. "Harvey!" Jean snapped her fingers in front of his face again. Harvey broke from his shoe gazing to focus his glare on his sister. "The sandwich cart is coming by. Do you want a snack?" Jean asked.

Harvey said nothing, intensifying his glare.

"You hate me. You're going to hate me forever, aren't you?" Jean whined. Harvey clenched his jaw and sneered.

The cart wheeled on by, unmolested by the self-involved siblings.

“Hey!” Harvey yelled to the sandwich guy before he got to the elevator. “Do you have tuna?” He sprinted to stop the closing doors. “Tunafish?” He repeated. The man handed one over, and Harvey thanked him.

When he got back to Jean’s desk, she was pretending to concentrate on paperwork. “I knew you couldn’t stay angry all day. See? I told you you’d get used to it.”

Harvey talked with a full mouth. “I’m hungry, okay?”

“Whatever you say, sweetie.” Jean replied. “Who can understand teenagers, anyway?”

A large, balding gentleman with thick glasses stopped at Jean’s desk. He smiled and nodded a silent greeting at Harvey. “Oh! Is this your sister Jean?” he said with sarcasm.

Jean’s head snapped up with alarm. It was her boss, Mr. Pickwick. “My sister!?” Jean said, with the typical sense of panic she infused into her speech.

“I was kidding, Jean.” Mr. Pickwick said.

“What?” Jean replied in distress. “What do you mean?”

Harvey stepped in to save her. “He was joking, *Mom*. Relax. *Mom*.”

Jean’s worried eyes darted back and forth between the two people. She was sure that this was going to get her fired. Right now. This instant. She’d be alone. On the streets. Lying in some dark alleyway. And then she finally caught on. “Oh. Sorry. Busy day.” She said. Harvey rolled his eyes. “And what’s your name, little lady?” Mr. Pickwick asked.

A small bit of tuna caught in Harvey’s throat. He tried to make his coughing sound as effeminate as possible.

“You all right?” Mr. Pickwick asked out of courtesy.

"I'm fine." Harvey said with a smile. He was going to have to pour on the charm. If he made a good impression here, it would certainly speak favorably of Jean to have raised such a delightful young daughter. "Thank you for asking." He tilted his head to the side and put on his cheesiest aw-shucks little girl big-toothed smile. "I'm Christina."

Mr. Pickwick held out his hand to shake, and Harvey grasped it lightly and limply. "I'm very pleased to meet you, Christina. Your mother speaks very highly of you. Can't stop talking about you."

"Really?" He replied to Pickwick. Harvey twisted his head slightly to peer at Jean. She blocked his stare with a manilla folder. "How nice of her." He said, bitterly. For a moment, Harvey almost dropped the act. Then he recovered. "She's just the greatest Mom in the whole world!" He said through his clasped teeth.

"How old are you Christina?" Mr. Pickwick asked for no apparent reason.

Harvey brought himself back to the task at hand. "I'm almost eigh..."

"Fifteen!" Jean interrupted.

Harvey's head darted back at Jean. He so wanted to bean her. But this was no time to crack. He was here for one reason: to leave a good impression. "I'll be sixteen in three mon..."

"Seven months!" Jean interrupted again. Harvey was wondering just how much of this story Jean had worked out in advance. Much more than she had let on previously, it seemed.

"Isn't that like kids? Always trying to be a little older. And they grow up so fast." Mr. Pickwick smiled at Jean. She

missed her cue to say something like “Before you know it, they’re all grown up,” or some other parental cliché.

“Fifteen, hmm?” Mr. Pickwick looked at Harvey with a critical eye. “You seem awfully mature to be only fifteen, Christina.”

Harvey coughed again, involuntarily. What did this guy know?

“Yes sir. Very poised for only fifteen.” Pickwick said, obviously contemplating something. “Jean...” He asked.

“Yes,” Jean’s overanxious voice responded, “Mr. Pickwick?”

Pickwick paused as he thought deeper. And paused. And paused.

Harvey decided he needed to bail out. Now. If he came clean, maybe they could just claim that this was a sort of practical joke. Ha. Ha. Everyone would have a good laugh. Maybe some stories to tell. Maybe some people would get fired and dragged out by security. Whatever the cost, it was now done and over. He reached for the seam of his wig to pull it off.

Mr. Pickwick finally finished his thought. “Has Christina ever done any modeling or acting?” He asked Jean, turning his attention away from Harvey.

Harvey discreetly pulled the wig back onto his head.

Jean looked as nervous as she had all day. And that was saying something. “Acting? What do you mean some kind of acting job, or was she an actress or or...” She went into the first stages of hyperventilation.

‘Boy, she’s good in a crunch,’ Harvey thought. He had little choice, so he stepped into the fray. “No. No. I’ve never done anything like that, Mr. Pickwick.”

“Would you like to try?” Mr. Pickwick asked. “You’re very tall for a fifteen year old, which is what people look for in a model. And you’re so well poised, I think you’d make a great actress.”

“She’d love to!” Jean suddenly shouted.





## Chapter 2:

### A Step or Two in the Wrong Direction

“What?” Jean said.

“You *know* what.” Harvey said with the greatest degree of gravity. He was at home now, so he no longer had to pretend. He no longer had to hold back.

Jean’s worried eyes looked at Harvey in despair. “I knew it. You hate me.”

“I don’t hate you, Sis. I just sometimes...” Harvey searched for the right words. “I sometimes don’t know what you’re thinking.”

“You hate me!” Jean wailed.

“I just said I don’t hate you Jean!” Harvey barked. He quickly got a hold of his emotions. It was a big mistake to yell at his fragile sister. She would always take it too hard and emotionally curl up into a ball for days. “Let’s just back track a little here, okay?”

“You hate me.” Jean repeated.

Harvey rubbed the temples of his head. “You were perfectly aware that I was pretending to be your daughter just for the day, and just to help you out, right?”

Jean nodded.

“And I was really uncomfortable doing this.”

Jean nodded again.

Harvey once more collected his thoughts and tried to frame his speech in the least threatening way. “So... why then, would you volunteer me... for a commercial... where I would have to go though even more... potential embarrassment... and discomfort?” Once finished, he awaited the response from Jean, knowing perfectly well he wasn’t going to hear anything he wanted to.

He felt the same, dreadful feeling he had spent years growing up with. Jean was taking over his life.

When he was younger, all he ever wanted to do was get out of this house. He just wanted to have a real life of his own. But Jean was so needy. She had to be constantly watched. The demands were incredible. And now, here he was, a grown man who's life was being taken over by having to look after his sister.

Jean pleaded. "You don't understand, Harvey." Harvey wholeheartedly agreed with that observation. "Mr. Pickwick's been having a tough time casting that spot for the commercial."

"I don't really care about that Jean..." Harvey tried to say.

"No! You... You see..." Jean's nerves started to kick in. "If I could get Christina into the auditions, Mr. Pickwick would love me for it! I might get a raise, a promotion..."

"There is no Christina, Jean." Harvey wanted to make this clear. "She doesn't exist."

"But..." Jean protested.

"She doesn't exist." Harvey said again.

"Glaucoma. He's got bad eyes. It will only be for a minute or two!" Jean's speech was sped up in fear of not getting it all out. "You just have to go and show up then you get to leave! See? See!? You don't understand! You never listen to me and you never understand!!"

Harvey reached inside his shirt pocket and picked a B-12 vitamin from it. He was going to need the strength. He swallowed it down with an audible 'gulp' sound. "Slow down. And try that again." He said, resuming his temple massage.

"Mr. Pickwick is nearly blind. He's got glaucoma. He can't see."

Harvey waited for the relevant part.

Jean concentrated, knowing this was her only chance she was going to get. "He never even saw you. He thinks you really are some cute fifteen year old girl." Jean saw that she had grabbed a sliver of Harvey's attention. "You go to the audition, the director gets one good look at you, and we go home."

Unbelievably, now that he had heard the explanation, he saw it's twisted, cruel logic.

"I can't do that again, Jean." Harvey felt the need to say it out loud, just to save face.

"Please, Harvey." Jean asked.

It was going to be just a few minutes. A few minutes out of the rest of his life. He could manage it. He could get his sister the promotion, the raise and the respect of her co-workers. He had to try. Against ninety-nine point nine percent of his better judgment, he had to agree. Which is why he found himself on his way to the audition the very next morning.



"You said it was going to be quick."

Jean barely even heard him. "Shush! We've only got a few minutes!" She then rammed a tube of lipstick into Harvey's lips. "Pucker like a fish."

Harvey grabbed Jean's arm and tore it away from his face. "Just give me a moment, all right?"

Jean almost opened her mouth to speak, but it quickly dawned on her that it was one of those instances where she had better do what Harvey said. She walked away without another word.

When he was a kid, Harvey would have killed to be in this spot. He had always been overshadowed by Jean and her needs. His parents rarely even noticed his difficulties with life. He had spent many night as a kid dreaming of the opportunity to go out in the world and make a name for himself.

He desperately wanted to become famous. Not that he ever really told anyone that. He was just a small-town kid with no real hopes of going anywhere. And he knew it. But still, in the back of his mind, he knew that fame was the only way he'd ever be able to show his family how special he was. But now, he was trapped in a lie, as if life were turning his dreams back on him and laughing. What did they call it? Irony?

Such a polite word for such a horrible feeling.

Harvey spun around on his stool to look at himself in the mirror. He had on his wig, the hair band, and a new dress from the costuming people. He did look like a young girl, he knew that well enough. But he had always thought he was kind of a dog – as a girl. His face was kind of chubby, his legs were thick, he had squinty eyes and thin lips. Sure, he could pass as an ugly eighteen year old, but as a cute fifteen year old girl? Mr. Pickwick must have been as blind as a bat.

Across the sound stage, the director huddled with his production assistant. “They’re all drama queens, Shana. Damn stage mothers.” He sucked on a cigarette. “I can’t use any of them. Is there anybody left on the list?”

Shana, a heavily made up woman of elusive but advanced age, checked her list. “Three more.” She stopped on one name. “And this Christina Angler girl. She’s the one Pickwick suggested, Luke.”

Luke the director peered over the tops of his sunglasses. "That's all?"

"That's the lot," said Shana.

Luke turned his head and eyes to the sky and waited for divine inspiration. None came. "Okay. Here's what we do. If none of these other girls pan out, we just cast the one Pickwick wants."

Shana was suspicious. "Are you serious? Did you see her?"

"I know. Arf. Escapee from the dog pound. But Pickwick writes the checks for this God-awful commercial shoot." Luke pushed his glasses back onto his face. "And you can't go wrong casting the bosses' favorite, now can you? Let's just get this done and get the hell out of this town."

"Amen." Shana agreed. She turned to the remaining actresses. "Let's have the next one!"

Back with Harvey, Jean was licking her thumb and using it to scrub something invisible off Harvey's face. "Stop fussing!" She said.

"Stop rubbing your spit on me then." Harvey cracked.

Jean disregarded his request. "It'll just be a few minutes. You're the last one they'll look at. They've probably already made their choice by now."

"Good." Harvey said. "Just let me get out of this meat market! They want me just for my body!"

Jean played with Harvey's bangs.

"That was a joke." Harvey said.

"What was?" Jean replied. "Look, honey, just memorize the line, okay?"

"Pickwick picks the perfect peaches?" Harvey asked.

Jean nodded. "That's the one."



“Pickwick picks the perfect peaches!” The cute girl on the TV said. She took a big bite. “Mmmmmm! Peachy!” she further added.

“Dude, I can’t believe that’s you.” The guy sitting next to Harvey said.

Harvey couldn’t even look. His head was between his legs, sitting bent over on the sofa. It was the perfect position for a crash landing in an airplane, but it was only his life that was out of control.

Jean came into the living room with a bowl full of Bugles. “Did I miss it? I missed it!” Jean whined. “Did I miss it, David?”

David Ibsen, a good friend of Harvey’s, was sitting on the couch next to the distended man. “Yeah. I told you not to leave.”

“Jean?” Harvey asked from between his knees, “Why is David here?”

“Don’t mind him David, he’s just a little cranky.” Jean said, dismissing her brother.

Harvey’s upper half sprang up as if here a resurrected corpse. “Just a little!”

“Maybe you can reassure him that it’s not the end of the world if he helped out his sister and filmed a TV commercial.” Jean popped a crisp in her mouth. “And made thirty thousand dollars I might add.”

“I’m not complaining about the money, Jean.” Harvey said softly. “It’s the whole face-on-national-television-as-a-girl thing that’s got me kind of...” Harvey’s tone changed. “*Cranky!*”

“I didn’t know it was going to be a national ad, Harvey.” Jean said innocently. Harvey’s eyes would have burnt a hole through Jean’s head if humans had such powers.

David nudged his friend with his elbow. “I wouldn’t worry about it, man. That girl looks nothing like you.” Harvey looked at his friend suspiciously. David was watching the show. “She’s cute.”

Harvey was sure that was an unintended insult in some weird way, but he let it go. “They used computers or something.” Harvey muttered.

“No shit?” David said. “Wow. They can sure do miracles with computers.”

“They didn’t do that much. Just a good make-up job.” Jean interjected. “Good lighting.”

Harvey scanned the area for blunt objects he could club Jean with. None. He went back to an earlier question. “Why is David here?”

“David is here to take a look at the contract we signed.”

“We?”

“I signed. Minors can’t sign a contract.” Jean corrected. “David, did you read it?”

“What?” David replied, distracted with the TV show again. “Oh yeah. The contract.” David was a skinny man, about twenty-eight or something and had graduated from drinking buddy to good friends with Harvey some years ago. His hippie looks, complete with scraggly beard and sandals belied his true occupation. He was a lawyer.

David plucked the contract in question from between his butt and the couch cushion, where he had been keeping it. “It’s all on the up-and-up. It’s got no tricks or anything in it. It’s pretty fair.”

“It depends on how you look at that.” Harvey grumbled.



Jean was intent on pursuing her line of questioning. "So, what if they want to do more commercials?" Harvey's head snapped to attention and gave her such a look.

"Well," David said, pausing to sip his beer. "It's a standard commercial contract. The producers of the spot – Pickwick Packing & Canning – have an option to make what's known as a 'callback' where they can have Harvey come back to film another spot, but at twice the previous rate."

"Come back?" Harvey said.

"Twice the rate?" Jean said.

"Twice the rate? Sixty thousand dollars?" Harvey computed.

Jean's face lit up. "Sixty thousand!"

Harvey's brief moment of happiness vanished when he saw the look on Jean's face. It was a look of delight mixed with fear. "You know something, Jean."

Jean's face turned a deep red. "I got a call this morning when you were in the shower."

Harvey didn't need to hear any more. For the first time in his life, he ground his teeth. "David." He turned to face his friend. "What happens if I don't want to do another commercial?"

"Then you have a buy-out clause. You refund a certain amount of money and you break the terms of the contract." David continued. "In this case, it's five thousand dollars."

"Shit." Harvey cursed. "They're vultures!"

"Hey, don't sweat it, man." David said. "I wouldn't let anything happen to my pal." He smiled wickedly and whispered. "Don't let this get around, but I think of you as the kid sister I never had."

“Shove it, fuckface,” Harvey growled. He looked at his hands as if they had an answer. “Five thousand.” He came to a decision. “Fine. I’ll do that.”

“Harvey!” Jean snapped. “Sixty thousand!”

“Forget it.” Harvey stated. “This ends now.”

“Nope.” David said, his face still pointed at the television. “Fraid not.”

Harvey grabbed a handful of his vitamins, slapped them into his mouth and chased it with some beer. “What?” He asked.

“To enact the buy-out clause, the parent and/or guardian of Christina Angler must make an affidavit as to Christina’s status.” David finally broke his attention from the set. “You know, like why ‘Christina’ is unable to fulfill the terms of the contract. But if Jean makes this statement – and presumably makes up a story – she could be sued for fraud. And you for identity fraud. And even if she tells the truth, it’s still fraud, and everyone goes to jail. Even me, now that I know.”

Harvey’s world suddenly became way more claustrophobic. “You’re telling me there’s no way out?”

“Nope.” David said simply. “If they want you, they can have you.”

Harvey turned to look at Jean again, and she already knew the question.

“They want you.”



### Chapter 3: The Van

It was a long year for Harvey. That first callback wasn't so bad, but the second callback was too much. The third was impossible and the fourth and fifth had sort of been a blur to him. It was a very, very long year. But there were good things in his life, though. Jean had been promoted three times. She was still a basket case, but the higher up you move in a company, the more eccentric you can be. The higher she moved up, the better Jean fit in at work. At times, she almost seemed happy.

That didn't last very long, however. When tax time came, the IRS became suspicious of the money that had flowed into Jean Angler's accounts on behalf of the minor "Christina Angler." After all, you can't hide \$380,000 very easily. With that kind of money, Harvey had thought he was set for at least a few years, and he quit his electrician job.

But then the walls came crashing in. When they filed taxes, they had too much money to hide. The IRS demanded that the money go into a trust fund that only "Christina" would be able to access at age eighteen.

By that point, though, Harvey had already blown \$32,000 on a new car, and another \$20,000 down payment on a new condo. Which left him in the position of owing himself \$52,000

The money he had earned was essentially in an account that could never be touched. Not as long as reality continued to insist that there was no such person as Christina Angler to withdraw the money.

This left Harvey in deep debt, so much so that he had to find a way to pay it off, desperately. No job for an electri-

cian could pay enough to do it. Three years of jobs as an electrician couldn't do it. There was only one way to earn big money fast. It was back to work for Christina. This time, with David's help, they could craft a way for the money to go to Harvey's account, and keep him from going bankrupt.

Thus, the presence of Harvey Angler started to become more and more rare. More often than not, you could find him trying to squeeze himself into young ladies' jeans and practicing around the house in high-heeled shoes.

Often times, he'd even remain in his outfit long after he'd gone to an audition. Not because he was particularly fond of dressing this way, but because he was a little lazy.

Still, that was the easy part. The hard part was getting ready. On this particular morning, Harvey gripped the towel rack with his free hand as Jean grasped the wax on Harvey's forearm. And she pulled. Harvey cursed and swore as the ripping tore the hair from his body. His swearing reverberated on the tiles in his small bathroom. "Not fun." He growled, as he rubbed the arm with a towel. "Crybaby." Jean joked. A patented Harvey dead-eye stare told her it was not the time for humor. "Is that everything? Arms, legs, chest..."

Harvey was very sure that was everything.

"Eyebrows!" Jean remembered.

"Fuck." Harvey said. He dropped his shoulders and walked over to the chair in front of the sink. He sat, and awaited the next round of humiliation. His objections were minor, however, compared to the stink he had put up a year ago.

Because there had been a change. He was no longer pretending to be Christina to help his sister. He was doing it

now to keep himself from spending the next ten years in prison. If he couldn't come up with the missing money, he was done for.

"How much do you think?" Harvey said, pulling his brow around to visualize it.

"Not too much. Younger girls have thicker eyebrows, normally." Jean said.

Harvey wasn't sure. "Really?"

"I'm sure. They get thinner when they get tweezed over a lifetime."

"Let's get going, then." Harvey gripped the counter to prepare for the oncoming rush of pain.

After that, the hair would get colored, the skin exfoliated, and the nails lengthened. Jean would cut his now chin-length hair and mix up a tooth whitening treatment. And Harvey sat still for all of it.

This wasn't the first time he had done this. It was now a part of his weekly routine. Every Sunday was his "day of beauty." He had been through the routine half a dozen times now. He had to keep himself looking as good as possible, because this was now his full-time job. He was an actress slash model.

Running a circuit of talent agents, production houses and theater auditions, Harvey had become a local showbiz mainstay. Well, Christina Angler was how he was known around town, not as Harvey. He'd visit the crowded, cheap offices of theater professionals and sit in his seat while Jean filled out forms, and waited patiently to do his bit for a scout, casting director or just the chance to drop off his demo DVD.

Jean would drive him from audition to audition, trying get work with a growing sense of desperation. But since he

was well-recognized from his commercials, few wanted to cast the “peach girl” in another commercial. The same went for TV shows. Especially after meeting Harvey in person, and seeing how much help make-up and computer wizardry had done for Harvey’s career.

What remained for him were the leftovers.



As Jean parked the car in the lot, he turned to her brother. “You ready?”

Harvey checked himself in the rear view mirror. He took a deep breath. And let it go. “Yeah.” He whispered.

Mostly – though not entirely – for show, Jean held Harvey’s hand as she led him into the building. It was an old creaky why-isn’t-it-demolished-yet palace located in the forgotten part of the theater district. Inside, they were assembling the finalists for a children’s anti-drug performing troupe called “The Yes! to Life Gang.” They traveled the country, going from school to school giving ‘uplifting and inspiring’ motivation to a bunch of disinterested kids. It was hideous and sickening, but it was work. And it paid very well. It would singularly erase his \$52,000 debt.

Harvey reflected on the moment, realizing that his childhood dreams of fame were now so staggeringly perverse that it would take years of intense therapy to undo the damage. He’d have to just get used to the idea that this was his course in life for the immediate future. God help him if he should think too much about it, because he’d go insane in an instant.

Jean and Harvey shuffled into the theater, and found seats alongside the kids and mothers packing the first few rows.

One by one, the kids got up on stage and did a little song and dance number and then thanked “everybody” for “such a wonderful, fabulous time!” Gosh!

Harvey got up and did his bit. He did a little singing, a quick tap routine, a scene from Shakespeare and then thanked everybody and returned to his seat directly. Overall, his nervous voice was kind of deeper than he normally was able to keep it, and he wasn’t so good on his feet. And he was certainly the least enthusiastic ‘kid’ on stage. Honestly, he was ready to get out of here and go to the next audition halfway into his act.

So when he piled into the “Yes! to Life” van nine days later, along with the rest of the troupe for the four-month national tour, he was still a little confused. How had he gotten the job? Maybe he’d never know.

Jean had been there, and was actually crying for him as he was set to leave. She had hugged him like a mother would have, seeing her baby off on a long trip. It made Harvey feel extremely uncomfortable, but every real mother and father was doing the same with their kids as they bid farewell. So he kept up appearances.

He had to do some things he wasn’t proud of to get ready for the long trip. He couldn’t get away with growing a beard, so he had undergone some intense, day-long sessions of electrolysis to take care of what chin whiskers he had and his sideburns. He had been watching MTV for the whole week before the trip, so he’d at least have a clue as to what all the kids would be talking about.

For the last eight days, he had been talking at the highest possible pitch for all of his speech. He needed to make it a habit. And most embarrassing to him, he had to work on a new, imperceptible method to ‘conceal’ the family jewels.



It took a lot of attempts, a lot of duct tape, and a lot of pubic hair pulled out by the root. But eventually he had something close to undetectable.

Harvey had packed all of his three or four “girl” outfits he had, along with a hastily assembled array of grooming items & cosmetics. Jean had given him a few things as well, like a bag full of his vitamins and a portable video game. It was going to be a long four months, and he would be spending it with a van full of kids who were just about half his age. Harvey kept reminding himself that this would take care of his money problems. It would be all right soon.

The money would be sent to Jean, and she’d take care of the debts. All he had to do was survive. No matter how insipid the “Yes! to Life” message was, no matter how lame the show was going to be, no matter how vacuous the kids were, no matter how many times he’d have to sleep in this cramped van – he just had to survive. 120 days. That was all it was going to take. He was a grown man, after all. He could tough it out.

“Here we go, kids!” The troupe director said, grasping the handle to the van door. “We’re going to have a fun-tactular time!”

A slight sense of panic and a definite sense of dread took hold of Harvey as the door of the van slid shut. It clacked and locked, leaving him in total darkness with five little kids he had never met and thousands of lonely miles on the road were ahead of him.



When the door finally slid open for the last time four months later, Harvey had grown used to the metal door's rumbling, rolling noise, and used to the feeling he was being freed from a cave. He stumbled out and stretched out into the cool air of spring, blinking his eyes to get used to the sunlight.

"Christina!" a blonde girl with a bright smile called.

"Amber!" Harvey spun around and hugged her tight.

"You've got my phone number, right?"

"Christina!" a black girl joined in the hug. And an Asian girl joined in as well.

They broke after a long minute and then Harvey approached the two boys in the troupe and gave them each a peck on the cheek. "I had a *super* time!" He said.

A chorus of goodbyes and sad farewells lingered forever before the group finally broke up and went their separate ways. Harvey scanned the parking lot and found Jean. He sprinted across the lot with his bags in tow and embraced Jean as if she were a lost teddy bear. "I missed you *so* much!" Harvey said.

Jean was a little startled to greet this chipper, upbeat version of her brother. This wasn't the person she had dropped off here months ago. This person had changed. But Jean wasn't totally surprised. She had clues. Harvey would write every so often, and make the occasional phone calls. Jean realized over the course of several letters that a slow change had come over Harvey. After all, you can't spend four months on the road with five teenage kids and not try to build up a resistance to the energy and vitality of youth – because if you didn't, you might just find yourself giving in to it. And it was clear he had failed miserably to build any resistance.

Harvey leapt into the back seat of Jean's car, and started rifling through his bags. "I got you something!" he said. "Look!"

Harvey produced a snow globe with the script 'From beautiful snowy Utah!' written on the base. "I thought that might keep you thinking cool at work. Even though it's only March. Well, summer's only three months away! You can use it then. Do you like it? Isn't it cool?"

Jean wasn't used to not being able to get in a word edge-wise. "Yeah. Great, good. Thank you. It's real nice."

The months of closeness with a group of teenagers had definitely rubbed off on Harvey. His usual slow, sarcastic way of talking had now become a hyperactive talk-before-you-think speech pattern. As the car pulled out, Harvey twisted around in the rear seat and waved frantically at the people he was leaving behind. "Bye guys! Bye!" He called back, knowing full well they couldn't hear him.

The "Yes! To Life Gang" had a simple message, accurately encapsulated in their name. The performance was a musical play that lasted about twenty minutes. The story was very basic: A young girl was worried about her popularity. All her "so-called" friends were taking drugs, and she had been offered it many times. Then one day, a 'girl from the bad side of the tracks' pressures the good girl into taking a hit of ecstasy. Sure enough, her life instantly becomes a living hell and she nearly dies from overdosing. Then her real friends – the "Yes! To Life Gang" come in and help her get back on the road to recovery, turning her on to the vast pleasures of a drug-free lifestyle.

And slowly, it became clear to Harvey why he had been chosen for the part. He was the gloomy, sullen bad girl from the other side of the tracks. He was perfect to play

the villain, set against the sugary happiness of the rest of the cast.

“So did all the checks clear? I really hope they cleared because I worked really really hard and for a long long time and it was okay, but I wouldn’t want to do it again, although I liked seeing the country n’ stuff.” Harvey asked Jean.

“Yes. Everything’s taken care of.” Jean reassured. “The tax problems are behind us.”

“Oh my God, I was so worried.” Harvey tucked his shoulder-length hair back behind an ear. “It would have totally sucked to go through all this and not get the money, you know? You have no idea how worried I was. I mean, I was really really worried.”

“No, everything’s just fine.” Jean paused. “But there is something I have to tell you about.”

“Yeah, you mentioned it last month! On the phone? Remember? Vice President of Customer Experience! That is such a cool title!” Harvey bubbled.

Jean looked a little closer in the mirror. Did he have his ears pierced? “No, honey. That’s not what I meant.” Harvey didn’t act like the man she remembered.

After Harvey had figured out that he was to play the downbeat character in the “Yes! To Life Gang” show, it had started to bother him. He had never really pictured himself as a villain. He wanted to be the good guy. So, as the weeks went on, he started to work a little harder, and wanted to make a better impression. Soon, he was suggesting to the producers that he could play one of the regular parts if it was okay.

Eventually, the time came, and Harvey sung and danced his heart out. He did very well in his new role. So much so,

they developed a rotation. Every few days or so, he'd play the bad girl. But more and more often, he'd play "Angie," the girl who loved to do extreme sports in her drug-free lifestyle. Sometimes he'd play "Maya," the girl who loved to use her brain and be a top student. And sometimes, he'd play "Brittany," the cheerleader who wanted a career in fashion design.

Harvey was convinced he was showing his superior acting abilities in his girlish roles. Why, the very fact that he could now recite all his lines with a bright, earnest smile on his face and sing his songs with the inner glow of a born-again Christian was proof enough. It wasn't as if he had started to think a little like the super-happy characters he played in the show. It was acting, of course. All acting.

Harvey stuck his head into the front. "Can we stop somewhere to eat? I'm heck-a starved. You know what I haven't had for a long time? Pizza. They never wanted to get us Pizza. It was hamburgers, chicken and Taco Bell. Why didn't they want us to have Pizza? I mean, what's up with that!?"

"I have dinner at home." Jean said. "I wanted to make it a bit of an occasion."

"Okay. I guess I've had enough fast food to make me explode." Harvey flipped the long hair out of his face and began to play with the zipper on his jacket. Jean had to keep driving, but the more she looked at Harvey, the more things she spotted.

Harvey was wearing a purple cord jacket with a hood that had fake fur trim. It was popular with girls these days – trendy, almost. He was also wearing what were obviously girl's jeans, a shiny dark blue denim that had flowers stitched along the cuffs.

But what made the biggest impression on Jean was the definition in Harvey's face. Or lack of it. Gone was the puffy fifteen year old girl 'look' he had when he started. Months of dancing had slimmed him down and taken the fat out of his body. If Jean didn't know better, she'd have said he had lost his baby fat. He looked like a healthy, young and vibrant fifteen year old girl. And he was smiling. Smiling – it wasn't exactly what Harvey was known for.

It was so unusual a sight that she had forgotten to mention the very important thing she needed to talk to him about. Until it was too late.

"You must be Christina." The man in Jean's house said to Harvey when they got to the door. He was about six feet tall, dwarfing Harvey by seven inches. He had a satisfied smile on his face. "You're even more beautiful than your Mother said you were."

Harvey smiled politely, nodded, and then slowly turned on his heel to face Jean. Through his smile he asked in a very quiet voice: "Who is he, Jean?" The cold, dead stare Jean remembered from long ago returned.

"Say hello to Patrick, dear," Jean asked, "Don't be rude."

Harvey whisked back around and slipped back into sweetie-pie mode. "Hi, Patrick." He stepped forward, shook his hand and then stepped back again.

Patrick turned his attention to Jean. "Didn't you tell her, Jean?"

"Tell me?" A pit formed in Harvey's stomach.

"Well, Patrick and I..." Jean's famous nerves started to flare up. "You see, that is, I..."

"Show him the ring." Patrick said.

Jean haltingly offered her hand to Harvey for viewing. "Patrick and I are..."

*Two Forms of ID*

“Your Mom and I are engaged!” Patrick proclaimed with pride.

## Chapter 4: Crossed Purposes

“Sometimes, Jean, I don’t know what you’re thinking.” Harvey said.

“How many men have ever proposed to me, Harvey?” Jean had obviously practiced the answer to this question. “I’ll tell you how many. One. Patrick. It’s my one chance at happiness. You know that.”

Harvey’s pretty head was spinning, shocked into near stupor. Everything he had planned on was falling apart again. He just wanted to get things back to normal. “Couldn’t you have just told him?”

“That I had a daughter who is really my brother and he’s touring the country in a children’s acting troupe to avoid fraud charges?” Jean reminded him. “He’d have had me locked up!”

Harvey was seated on “Christina’s” bed, in “Christina’s” room, looking at “Christina’s” things, scattered about the room. Apparently, Jean had redecorated Harvey’s old room as a cover for her story with Patrick. She had thought of every detail. There were posters, a closet full of trendy teen fashions, and a vanity in the corner. And everything was pink, hot pink or violet. Harvey surveyed the room and buried his head in his hands.

“Why did you have to say anything about having a daughter at all?” Harvey wanted to know.

“How could I have hidden that?” Jean replied.

“Can we at least tell him now?” Harvey said, in a whine.

Jean stared into space. She didn’t have a good answer for that one. “I don’t know. I think he really does love me, but



I have to be sure, Harvey. Otherwise, he might leave me.” Jean’s hands started to tremble. “You hate me, don’t you?”

If there was one thing that Harvey had noticed about his sister was her newfound sense of calm. He heard it on the phone when he called on the road. It grew stronger every time he had talked to her. Now, she seemed at peace, which was something he had always prayed she would find.

Maybe that’s what a relationship could do for her. It would help her find that stability she had been looking for for so long. And now here she was, her hands shaking and body shivering, about to lose all that she had gained.

Grudgingly, Harvey took her hand and tried to comfort her. “It’s all right, Jean. It’ll be okay.”

Jean hugged her brother, and Harvey hugged back. “I’ll tell him if you really want me too, Harvey. I can’t keep hurting you like this.”

Harvey held her tighter. “It’s all right Jean. I’ll be Christina for a little while longer. You tell him when you’re ready. Just remember, I’d rather it be sooner than later, okay?”

Yes, he knew it was a mistake. But he had no real idea how he could stop this freight train of lies now.



“How’s it feel to be sleeping in your own bed again, short stuff?” Patrick asked Harvey the next morning. Harvey reflexively twitched at the nickname.

“Great!” Harvey said brightly. Four months of being a “Yes! to Life” troupe member had left him with the innate ability to fake happiness without even thinking about it.

"It's so great to be back home!" Harvey sat down at the table in a shapeless nightgown he had found last night in his closet. It had a pattern of tiny strawberries on it.

The sound of cereal spilling into Harvey's bowl temporarily halted conversation. Harvey had correctly figured the "Boo Berry" cereal in the cupboard was for the child in the house. It was then that Jean appeared in the hallway in her robe, yawning and stretching. "You'd better get off to work, hun."

"I don't have a job anymore..." Harvey started to say before he realized who Jean was talking to.

"Ha, ha, ha!" Patrick chuckled. "You don't have to go to work for a few more years, Christina, do you?" Patrick continued to chuckle as he rose and put on his coat. He walked over to Jean and gave her a quick peck on the cheek. "I'll be back by five thirty. What say I pick up some pizza on the way home? We'll have a party! Just the three of us!"

Harvey sat up straight in his seat. "That'd be great! I'd love that!" He was obviously too used to going along with the group.

"I'll see you then, my lovely ladies!" Patrick said, as he left the house.

"Oh God," Harvey said, the instant the door closed. "I don't know if I can keep this up." He got up to go to the fridge to get some milk. "Look at me. I'm eating kid's cereal even. God help me."

"What do you think of Patrick?" Jean asked.

Harvey spooned a couple of mouthfuls before responding. "I guess he's okay. He seems nice."

"Yeah." Jean replied dreamily.

“Hey, why aren’t you going to work?” Harvey asked. “Aren’t you going to be late?”

“I quit,” she responded.

Harvey coughed up a mouth-full of cereal. “You quit!?” He cried. “What... What... But... I... But... the dressing up... the commercials... I did it all for... *Why!*?”

“Patrick’s got a good job. He makes a lot of money. More than I ever will.” Jean smiled.

“You were a *vice president!*” Harvey couldn’t believe that the reason he had to start dressing like this in the first place was now irrelevant. “You... You had everything!” He spooned up his last few bits of cereal. “You just gave it up?”

“Well... yes.” Jean said. “I want to be his full-time wife. And if I never see that grey, life-sucking office again, it will be too soon.” She smiled with satisfaction.

“Yeah. Okay.” Despite his shock at learning this, Harvey stifled a yawn and picked up the bowl. He loudly slurped down the remaining milk. “What’s he do?”

Jean looked nervous for a moment. “Sales.”

“Sales?” Harvey said, only slightly curious.

“So, Harvey...” Jean said, obviously leading into a subject she wasn’t eager to broach. “I think we need to keep working on our cover story until we tell Patrick the truth, don’t you?”

Harvey sighed, slumped in his chair and then nodded. “Yeah. I guess.”

“So let’s just get in the habit of using the right names around the house. Right?”

Harvey nodded again, a frown worked its way around his clenched jaw.

“Why don’t we try it,” Jean asked. “What’s your name?”

“Dead Meat,” he said.

“That’s right, honey. You’re my daughter, Christina.” Jean looked at Harvey cautiously, ready to spot the twitch or the flinch that would signal when he had taken enough of this and was going to fight back. “And who am I?”

“Jean.” Harvey said.

“Mother. I’m your *Mother*.” Jean decided to push it. “Or maybe you should call me ‘Mom.’”

Harvey slid his jaw from side to side, his eyes trying to not look at Jean. “Mom.” He snorted a blast of air from his nostrils. Quickly he got up and left the kitchen, leaving the mess of his bowl and spoon behind. “Moms do the dishes.”

“I don’t want this to ruin our relationship, Harvey.” Jean said, seriously. “I really treasure you as a brother.”

“*What-ever*.” Harvey replied. He went to Christina’s room, and slammed the door behind him. He flopped on the bed. He turned to dress himself for the day. He chose a pair of his favorite panties, some half-clean jeans, a simple pink cotton cami top and did his makeup and hair.

Still feeling frustrated, he flopped onto the bed again and dialed a phone number. “Hey, Amber! It’s me, Christina!” He said merrily. “I said I’d give you a call, right?”

Harvey’s mood brightened considerably now that he was talking to a friend.

“No, I just wanted to call. My, uh... Mom is being a *jerk*.” Harvey sighed. “So how’s it going with you?”



“Patrick’s home!” Jean called from the living room. “He’s got dinner!”

It had become a habit, Patrick arriving home with dinner. Jean just wasn't up to cooking, so it was left to 'the man of the house' to bring home something to eat, and it had been this way for the past two weeks – ever since Harvey came home.

Bursting out of his room, Harvey appeared at the front door to relieve Patrick of his bounty. In a flash, all the dozens of Chinese take-out cartons had been opened, and Harvey was busy dumping a bunch of rice onto his plate.

"Must be hungry!" Patrick observed. Harvey only nodded in response, because his mouth was too full to answer. "I brought you more videos!" Patrick said, proudly.

Harvey smiled and took the DVD discs politely. Every day after work it seemed, Patrick had a handful of DVD discs to give to Harvey. They were usually inane teen flicks that were devoid of any real entertainment. Harvey knew that Patrick was just trying to be nice, so he always accepted them gracefully.

He had stored up about twenty of them before Jean had insisted that Harvey actually watch one or two of them in Patrick's presence, so he didn't feel insulted. But after a few weeks, it was now routine for Harvey to spend the last hour and a half of the night watching one of the DVDs – just to please Patrick, and by extension, Jean. He looked at what he had been brought tonight, and decided that watching "13 Going On 30" was going to be the best of the bunch.

"Have a nice day, honey?" Patrick asked Jean.

"Just us girls." Jean replied. Harvey grumbled something to himself.

Patrick smiled back. "Good. Good. Christina..." Harvey looked up, ready to respond. "Just curious. When do you go back to school?"

"Mom wants to home-school." Harvey grabbed a spring roll and nibbled. That was the response Jean and Harvey had worked out to that question. They had a whole bunch of cover stories by now.

"What about while you were on tour?" Patrick asked. "I'm curious. Didn't you need to be in school then?" He further queried.

"They had a tutor for us." Harvey spat out a little cabbage as he talked. It was true. He had earned a B in math and a C in English without even studying. It helped that he already had taken Advanced Calculus 325 and Creative Writing 402 in college. He wiped the half-chewed cabbage on his pants.

"Christina! Watch your manners!" Jean scolded.

"Muth-errr!" Harvey complained, spitting out some bits of food.

"Chew. Then talk." Jean said forcefully. Harvey mockingly exaggerated his chewing motion in response.

Patrick chuckled at the mother-daughter interplay. "Well, it must have been a very interesting four months on the road."

Harvey shrugged. An awkward silence followed.

"Umm...." Patrick was at a loss for conversation. "So nothing happened today?"

"Nope." Harvey answered. He took his plate from the kitchen to watch TV.

Jean picked up her plate and followed, making a silent "follow me" motion to Patrick. She had something to say to Harvey, and she was going to need backup.

Although transfixed by the television, eventually, Harvey glanced to his side. "Yes?" Harvey said to Jean, noticing her presence in the room.

"Christina, I got a call from an agent." Jean said. "They left a message on the phone."

Harvey spun around wildly. He had been in this conversation before and it had gotten him into this mess. He wasn't about to repeat it. "No you didn't." He said, forgetting to be the chirpy teen he was pretending to be.

"Somebody who saw you on tour. He said he was very impressed with your singing and thought you were a great dancer. Said he thought you could be the next big star. The next Emily Grant. He asked if you wanted to do some demos and send them to the record companies." Jean nonchalantly picked out some glazed pork from a carton. "I called back and told him you weren't interested."

"Good." Harvey said, sharply nodding his approval.

"Uh." Patrick said, in a way that suggested he had something to add.

Harvey looked at him, stopping all chewing. Jean did the same.

"Yeah, well, I got that call too." Patrick explained. "I thought you'd be interested."

"Did you." Harvey said, accusingly.

"I sent him your demo disc." Patrick looked very embarrassed.

Harvey shivered. He remembered that he still did have a demo DVD, one that he had made just before he had left on the tour. And it was just probably lying around the house, ready for anybody to find it.

Patrick continued, looking nervous. "I mean, your mom said that you had been looking for work for so long, and I figured..."

"You didn't sign anything, right?" He asked.

"No, of course not." Patrick replied. Harvey returned his attention to the TV set. Then he turned his death stare at Jean.

"And you?" He said to Jean.

"No." She answered quickly.

"Fine then. There's nothing to worry about." Harvey said, before turning his eyes to the TV again. Without any legal entanglements, there was nothing to worry about. He was sure that any moment, either Jean or Patrick was going to say "But..."

Fortunately, "but" never came.





## Chapter 5: Contraindications

“Harvey!?” David called from across the lawn. “Harvey!” Harvey, who was fidgeting with the lock to Jean’s front door, turned to see a man locking up his car. “David!” Harvey called, recognizing his friend. He ran along the walkway and tackled David in a bear hug. “Where have you been!?”

David had to find his feet again, knocked off balance by the embrace. “I’ve been around.” Harvey let go and started to guide David to the house. “I’ve been calling you and there’s no answer. I thought maybe your tour got extended.”

“Hey, well, I guess I should have called you n’ stuff.” Harvey said apologetically. “I’ve just been... occupied since I got back.”

David, now close up and personal with Harvey, noted that the man before him had undergone some drastic changes in almost every way. He barely even recognized his friend. His personality was definitely different, a lot more “up” than he thought Harvey was capable of.

Harvey must have just returned from some exercise or jogging, as he was wearing a ball cap, baggy sweatpants and a large loose t-shirt that almost fell to his knees. The shirt had the logo for the Powerpuff Girls on it. If he hadn’t seen this person at the front door of Jean’s house, he might have never made the connection to Harvey.

“Do you have another gig or something? Didn’t the money thing work out?” David asked. He wasn’t sure why Harvey was still pretending to be a girl.

“What?” Harvey responded. “No. I’m not working anymore.” He finally unlocked all the locks and opened the front door. “Mooo-oom! I’m home!” He called out.

David was a little startled to hear Harvey call out for his mother. She was living in Florida. Was she visiting?

“She’s not home. Cool.” Harvey went into the kitchen.

“You want a Pepsi?” He asked on his way.

“Beer?” David replied.

“Sorry! The beer’s not mine! It’s Patrick’s!”

“Who?” David thought for a minute. “Oh yeah, Jean told me about him! Is he living here?”

Harvey returned from the kitchen with two cans of Diet Pepsi and tossed one to David. “That’s why I’m still doin’ this.” Harvey said, referring to his appearance. He jumped onto the sofa and curled his legs under him as he grabbed the TV remote. “They’re engaged.”

“Really!” David said with surprise. He was one of the many that figured Jean would spend her life as an old maid, clinging to Harvey’s side. “Dude! That’s good news. But why...”

Harvey was flipping through ten channels a second. “All he knows is that Jean’s got a daughter. He doesn’t know the rest.”

“Ohhhh.” David said, finally getting the picture. “I mean, you’re gonna tell him, right?”

“Jean’s going to. When she’s ready.” Harvey sipped his drink. “Which better be soon. Believe me.”

David popped the top on the can, and started to drink down the strange non-alcoholic substance. “Urf.” He said to the can. He wasn’t used to it. “Um. So... You gonna be okay?”

"I'll be fine. After six months pretending to be a girl, I can do it for a little while longer." Harvey said, finally stopping the channel flipping. He opened up the DVD tray and popped in a disc. "Have you seen this movie? I love it." As Harvey pressed play, "13 Going On 30" started on the TV. "I've seen this one at least... ten times now."

"No. I missed it." David said, dryly. "The money worked out okay?"

"The what?" Harvey replied.

David was a little worried. "The money for the trust fund?"

It took a moment for Harvey to catch on. "Oh..." It was coming back to him. "Yeah. The trust fund. That's all worked out. Sucks that I won't be able to touch it 'till I'm 18, though."

"You're 23, Harvey." David had to clarify.

"You know what I mean." He said, dismissing his error with the wave of his hand. He then decided to remove the cap he was wearing, which released his shoulder-length hair.

David nearly jumped out of his skin when he saw the lush, well-kept, feminine hair on Harvey's head fall to his shoulders. "Are you okay, man?" David had to ask.

"Yeah. Fine. Why?" An alarm went off on Harvey's watch. He stopped it quickly.

"You just seem... different." David was trying to say something very strange without sounding strange.

Harvey reached onto the table and stuck his fingers into a tiny bowl on the table. He found a few of his vitamins and popped them into his mouth and took a swig of the soda to wash them down.

David took a long look at that bowl. "Those aren't your normal B-12's are they?"

"Hmm?" Harvey said, not really listening. "I dunno." He turned to show the incredulous expression on his face. "I'm not old enough to drive, you know." He laughed. "So I don't do a lot of shopping."

David reached over and grabbed a few pills and took a look at them. "They're awfully big for just vitamins."

Harvey shrugged. "Started getting those while I was on the tour. Higher potency."

David carefully examined the bowl full of various shaped and sized pills. "Mind if I try 'em?"

"Okay. But don't chew them – they're gross tasting. Just swallow."

"Thanks." David said. Harvey's attention was into the movie, and David pocketed the pills when he was sure he couldn't be seen. "So, what'cha been up to?"

"Just stuff." Harvey responded. Suddenly he remembered something. "Oh, man. There's this guy." Harvey said, before pausing to take a swig of cola. "This guy who keeps calling. He wants to sign me to a contract."

"A contract? For what?" David was curious.

"Singing, jerk!"

"Singing?" David had to say, to make sure he heard that right. "As a girl?"

"This guy thinks I've got a great voice." Harvey said, humorously. "No accounting for taste." He seemed to ignore the more important part of David's question. "He saw me on tour, and now he can't stop trying to sign me."

"Uh. Okay." David needed to pause. "I was going to ask you about that. You've always had a high voice, Harv, but

right now you kinda sorta sound like a perky... cheerleader... or something.”

“I’ve been working on it!” Harvey said with pride. “I think I can still get it higher!”

“Good?” David replied, unsure that was the correct answer.

“Yeah, it’s good! The more range I have, the better I can sing.” Harvey took another sip from his can. “And it helps me pass, of course.”

“Okay.” David was more and more suspicious. “Pass?”

“As a girl – duh!” Harvey sprang up off the sofa. “I must stink. I’m gonna shower and change.” He tossed the remote to David. “You wanna do anything? Go anywhere?”

“You wanna see a game?” David asked.

“Yeah! Just give me a few minutes.” Harvey said, disappearing into the hallway.

David heard a few doors open and close before the shower noise began. He flipped through the channels until he just let it stop on some news program. He turned up the volume and checked down the hallway.

Quickly, he went to the front door to check and make sure Jean or Patrick weren’t pulling up in the driveway, and then he went into the kitchen. He didn’t know exactly what he was looking for.

David looked through all the cabinets and found nothing strange. Except for the Boo Berry. He moved on to the living room and opened the drawers and checked the shelves. He read through the book titles. He couldn’t find anything. He checked down the hallway and saw the bathroom door was still closed.

Carefully, quietly, he snuck his way down the hall, and abruptly stopped at the first door. Inside, the pink walls

and canopy bed made it clear there was a teenage girl living here. “Wow.” David muttered to himself. It was really authentic looking. The details were incredible. It really looked like Harvey was selling this “Christina” identity hard.

He opened up a drawer on the vanity, only to find a haystack of cosmetics. He moved over to the closet, and saw the small amount of clothing hanging there. Most of the clothes that should have been there were strewn about the room in chaos. He walked over to the bed, again checking for anything out of the ordinary.

David heard a loud gasp from behind him. He quickly turned to find Harvey standing before him in the doorway, naked to the world. David would have apologized, he would have come up with some excuse for violating Harvey’s privacy. But instead, he couldn’t tear his eyes away from Harvey’s body.

It curved. And not in the way a man’s body should.

The hips kind of flared. The shoulders were narrow. The neck was thin. His legs gently undulated in a very feminine shape. And where Harvey was trying to cover himself, he had very small lumps. On a girl, they would be called breasts.

“What!?...” Harvey started to say.

David slowly approached Harvey and pulled Harvey’s arms away from his chest. He studied it and felt his throat go dry. “What’s happened to you, Harvey?” He croaked.

Harvey dove to avoid him, and grabbed a bed sheet to cover himself. “What do you mean?” He said.

“Harvey. What’s happened to your body?” David asked. “You’ve got...” He made the international sign for breasts by cupping his two hands.

"It's just an infection." Harvey said, trying to regain his composure. "Or something." Harvey pulled the sheets off his bed to cover him more. "It'll go away."

"Harvey." David said.

"It's not your problem anyway. Why don't you leave?" Harvey protested.

"Harvey."

Harvey got loud. "Just get out! You're invading my privacy!"

"*Harvey!*" David was louder.

Harvey slumped onto his bed. "I don't know. I don't know what's happening. I... I... It started happening in Arizona. On the tour. It was just one day, I looked down and something had changed."

"Has it gotten any worse?" David asked.

"Yeah." Harvey turned away from David, so as not to look him in the eyes. "I thought it would stop. I thought it was the flu or a weird bug. But it seems to be happening faster, now." Harvey seemed to be on the verge of crying.

"You need to see a Doctor." David stated the obvious. "Right now."

"I can't see a doctor. Not like this." Harvey said. "And I couldn't tell Jean."

David felt the vitamin pills inside his shirt pocket he had taken. "I think she knows."

"What?" Harvey asked.

"I just don't want you talking to Patrick or Jean about this, okay?"

"Why?"

"Just promise me, you'll keep this to yourself, until I can check on something. Okay?" David grasped the small man by the shoulders. "Okay?"



Harvey looked up into David's eyes. "Okay."

"Good. I'll call you tomorrow morning. Just go on like normal, and wait for my call."

"Okay." Harvey sniffed. "Thanks, David."



David drove off that afternoon worried. He knew perfectly well what was going on, but he couldn't figure out the 'why' question. His best friend was being feminized, slowly and carefully.

"Feminized" – was that even a proper English word?

He had no idea of the details, but Harvey's world had somehow been cunningly manipulated, forcing him to make all the wrong choices, and forcing him to adjust to the impossible situation he was now in. And he was being made to adjust in a more permanent fashion than Harvey seemed to suspect.

When he had first heard of the 'Christina' plan, he had laughed hard and long. It was one of the funniest things he had ever heard. Now that humor had turned into horror. Harvey seemed more Christina than he did Harvey – just in body – and his mind didn't seem to be far behind.

It was Jean who was behind it. It had to be. She was the one with all these weak excuses to keep Harvey in skirts. How in the hell would she have ever gotten away with all the lies she's been telling Harvey? And this Patrick guy was in on it as well. He surely had something to do with it.

Did Jean want a family – and for some twisted reason decide to turn Harvey into her daughter? Did Patrick have some sort of control over Jean and Harvey? And why

didn't Harvey suspect anything? It was plainly obvious what was happening to his body. And he ignored it?

David pulled up to a forensics lab he used in some of his legal cases. Inside, he handed over the pills to one of his most trusted experts for analysis, and told him to "put a rush on it." David hung around for the results, knowing one thing for sure. They had estrogen in them. This was how Harvey was being changed physically. But mentally? Maybe it was drugs. Maybe it was hypnosis. Maybe it was something else.

When the tech came back with the results four hours later, David went over it in every detail. Sure enough, the pills were cocktails of estrogen and anti-androgens. There was a small percentage of human growth hormone, to accelerate the changes, and a smaller amount of progesterone for breast development.

David didn't find what he'd hoped he'd find. There were no trace of muscle relaxants, mind-altering drugs, or even sleeping pills. All these things did was alter the body's hormonal balance. The mental aspect of Harvey's change was still unsolved.

The next morning, he tried to call Jean's old number, but couldn't get through. It hadn't been disconnected, but the phone would ring once and then hang up making a funny clicking and humming noise. He knew well the sound. A caller ID block had been placed on his number. Someone there at the house didn't want him to talk to Harvey.

David parked his car down the street from Jean's house and waited patiently. A tall man in a business suit left around 7:45. That was probably Patrick, leaving Jean and Harvey inside. Soon after, David accidentally dozed off. He awoke sometime around two, cursing at himself for

sleeping. Looking at the driveway of the house, he saw that Jean's car was now gone. That meant that either Jean had left alone, or possibly both Jean and Harvey were gone. He waited a little while longer to pick up any more clues, but there were none forthcoming.

When David found himself at the front door of the house, he wasn't sure what to do. He'd have to tell Harvey about the pills, but after that, then what? If he was sensible, Harvey would leave with him right then and there. But If Harvey had been coerced in to staying, or if he didn't believe him, what was he going to do?

He rang the bell.

The curtain at the side of the door opened briefly, and the door started to unlock. "David! Why didn't you call?" Harvey ushered David inside. David stood there, contemplating exactly how he was going to say this. But before he could form a thought, he was attacked.

Harvey leapt up and wrapped his arms around him, screaming. "I'm rich! Two million dollars!" Harvey shrieked. David swam his way out of Harvey's hold and put him back down on the ground. He looked around to see the other people in the room. There weren't any.

Harvey, however, was hopping up and down with the goofiest look of glee on his face. "I'm rich!" He repeated. And he hugged David again. He had been into hugging lately.

"What!?" David needed to know what was going on.

"The contract!" Harvey said, still bouncing.

David's reply was to twist his face to indicate a lack of information.

"The record contract! The one I told you about? They want me to be a star!" Harvey caught his breath and pulled

the hair from his face. "They phoned me this morning. They like the demos I made so much, they're going to remix them and release them on CD!"

David was still unable to form a reply.

"Two million dollars!" Harvey said, emphasizing the reason David should be happy for him. "They're going to pay me two million! In advance!" Harvey started to bounce again, and David tried to hold him still.

"Harvey! I have to tell you something!" David tried to say. "The contract is getting Fed Ex'd here by four! That's why I'm so glad you're here! I need you to be my lawyer!" Harvey was an uncontrollable ball of energy. "Can you check the contract!? I can pay you any fee! A huge retainer! We'll both be rich!"

"Harvey! They're turning you into a girl!" David said.

"I don't have to do anything! I just sign it and they release the CD!" Harvey went on.

David grabbed Harvey by the shoulders and shook hard. "Stop it!"

Harvey's face turned to shock.

"The vitamins are hormones! Jean is turning you into a girl!" David said firmly.

Harvey had no reply. He wasn't ready for that. His mind was away on vacation.

David lowered his voice. "Those B-12 vitamins. I had them analyzed."

"W-W-W" Harvey sputtered. "What...?"

"They're hormones. Estrogen." David wanted to be as clear as possible. "They're the pills they give transsexuals before surgery. Girl pills"

Harvey's eyes widened out as his mind was about to complete its 180-degree turn. "What?"

David went over the facts again. “You’re being changed into a girl by your sister and maybe her lover. We need to get out of here, immediately.” Harvey lost his strength as David was holding him, so he deposited Harvey on the nearby lounge chair. “Harvey?”

Harvey was off in his own world, unavailable.



When David stopped the car in an empty parking lot, blocks from Jean’s house, he let himself out and went around to the other side to let Harvey out. Harvey wasn’t doing a lot of things on his own. He was lost far too deep inside his own head.

David had stopped the car next to Whitaker Park, the only local park in the area. He assisted Harvey to a park bench where they both sat down. David didn’t want to take Harvey back home, and he figured that as long as they were both out in public, there wouldn’t be anything suspicious. That’s the way he thought, being a lawyer.

“I suppose I knew it.” Harvey said, after not speaking for an hour or so. “Somewhere, inside, I guess I knew.” David was ready to let Harvey talk it out, and he just listened. “I was taking them every day, and, Mark – one of the guys in the troupe – said he knew what they were. His Uncle was using them... his Uncle was a transsexual.”

Harvey turned to face nothing in particular. “I thought he was just trying to screw with me. But I think... At least I’m pretty sure... I knew. I don’t know why I kept taking them. By the time I could see what was happening, I guess I tried to ignore it. I didn’t want to believe what it meant.” Harvey then started to rub his neck.

David finally spoke. "I think they may have been trying to make into their daughter. I don't know why."

Harvey didn't budge. "Makes sense. I guess nothing would shock me now." Harvey got on his feet and started to walk along the path. David joined him. "It's Jean I'm worried about. I don't think this was Patrick, though. I can't pin much of this on him."

"I don't know how he could have *not* known." David said.

Harvey shrugged. They kept walking until they came upon another bench, where they sat again. Harvey's hand balled up into fists. "Two million dollars, David."

David was startled to hear that. "But Harv..."

"Two million. A record deal." Harvey turned away from David. "Did I ever tell you I wanted to be a rock star?"

David chuckled. "We all want to be rock stars, Harvey."

"Yeah." Harvey said. Followed by a long silence.

"You're thinking about it, aren't you?" David asked.

Harvey sighed. "I'd be set. No more money problems."

"But money's not the reason, is it?" David hid a smirk on his face.

Harvey looked at him, and said something as honestly and earnestly as anything he had said in his life. "I want something out of life, David. I don't want to die as a nobody."

David nodded.

"Jean was always my life. I wanted to leave that house. But I couldn't. I wanted to go somewhere. Do big things. Be famous. But there was always Jean to worry about. I could never leave." Harvey's eyes wandered into the ether. "If I just could have left that house. And done something big with my life."

"Get your parents' attention."

“Thanks, doc.” Harvey cracked. “Yeah. If you want to go that deep.”

“Do you want me to take you back to Jean’s, Harvey?”

Harvey wasn’t sure that what was what he was getting at. But then he realized it was. “I can’t leave that contract on the table. It’s something I’ve always wanted. Even if it isn’t my real name on the paper.” Harvey thought for a long minute.

David lifted an eyebrow in curiosity.

“I’m going to sign that contract. If I can trust one person in this world, I trust you. If you’ll help me do this the way I want to.”

David got up and scratched his beard. “Patrick? Jean?”

“I’ve had enough of ‘em. It’s time to move on.”

“I think you’re getting in way over your head, Harvey.” David said. “I think this is the stupidest thing you could do.” David pulled his car keys from his pocket. “But let’s get going. I have to check out that contract.”

Harvey walked up to David, ready to thank him. David retreated a step, ready to get hugged again, when Harvey stuck out his hand. David shook it firmly.

## Chapter 6: The New Girl On The Scene

Escorted by her lawyer David Ibsen, Christina Angler was seated outside the opulent Los Angeles offices of the Cannon Record Group, waiting for her appointment with the Chairman and CEO of the company.

Harvey thought that he was just coming to the place to introduce himself to all the record people. But now he found himself on the top floor of the tallest building he'd ever been inside of, ready to meet the most powerful person in the entire industry. Harvey's knees were knocking as he sat in the comfortable waiting-room chair.

"Stop that. You're making me nervous." David mumbled under his breath.

"I'm doing it on purpose?" Harvey whispered back. "I thought I'd never have to meet anybody at this damn record company. I didn't think anyone would actually have to see me."

"And they just send someone they've never met a check for two a million dollars?" David answered.

"Well, it makes sense when you put it that way." Harvey said.

Edward J. Cannon was seated in his immense intimidatingly furnished office, reviewing a tape of Christina Angler singing and dancing. Photos of Christina's face and body were sprayed across his desk. "This Christina girl couldn't get a Catholic priest to jack off to her face. She's downright ugly."

The speaker box on Mr. Cannon's desk cracked with a static-soaked voice. "We always take care of it, Edward. It's part of the program. You know that. She's got potential."



Mr. Cannon crossed his arms. "I can't cash checks written out to *Potential*." He picked up another photo of Christina. "I don't want another Emily Grant."

The speaker crackled. "Emily liked life too fast. So I've tried to find a more emotionally mature type this time."

Cannon drum-beat his hands on his desk. "I have my doubts, but I trust you. You've never been wrong about these girls of yours."

"And you always have the same reservations." The voice chuckled. "And you always wind up getting filthy rich off them."

"You're sure she has the unique qualities we need in our top stars." Cannon asked.

"I'm not going to lie. She's the biggest challenge we've ever taken on in this program. But after you've done this twenty times, you just need to try something different. We need it and the public needs it. And I promise you, she'll be the biggest star we've ever had."

Cannon gathered up the photos on his desk and put them away. He pressed a button and the TV screen on his wall rolled up into the ceiling. "Well, I suppose it's time to meet the next big thing. I'll call you later."

David looked at Harvey and his jitterbugging knees with a mild sort of anger. "You're going to wear out those shoes if you keep doing that."

"Just shut up." Harvey said. "You're making me agitated."

From the elevator came Rick Gilburn, the VP in charge of artist development & business affairs, whom Harvey and David had met with just a few minutes ago. He was a shorter, stockier man who looked a little uptight in his suit. Harvey thought he was a nice enough person, but he was a

true business executive. It was hard to think he dealt with flighty artists who created art with music.

“Still waiting?” Mr. Gilburn said to the two of them. “I’m sure it will only be a minute or two.”

A device on a secretary’s desk buzzed from the other side of the huge, cavernous room. “Mr. Cannon will see you now. Go right in!” She said.

With that, the giant double doors that led to Mr. Cannon’s office unlocked of their own accord, and slowly opened. “All set?” Mr. Gilburn said, slapping David on the back. “No need to worry. The old man’s a sweetheart.”

Harvey and David stood up, and followed Mr. Gilburn into the office. It was as large as an indoor tennis court, with a fifteen foot ceiling and a view of the city that was breathtaking.

“Miss Angler!” The sharply dressed, trim figure of Edward J. Cannon said. “Welcome to the Cannon Group!” David noticed the giant doors closing behind them, like a tomb.

The four people exchanged introductions. David and Harvey found seats, but Mr. Gilburn remained standing.

Mr. Cannon wasted little time. “I won’t beat around the bush. Christina, we think you have what it takes to become one of our top talents.”

David and Harvey turned in unison to face each other. They shared the same startled look.

“You do want to be a star, don’t you, Christina?” Cannon said.

“Uhh... Yeah!” Harvey wasn’t expecting such adoration. “That’d be great!” In his head, Harvey cursed at himself for sounding so stupid.

“Good. That’s the right attitude.” Cannon poked at a button on his desk. “Send Donyell in, Marcie.”

The giant door clacked open again, as an unfamiliar figure entered.

Mr. Cannon introduced the man. "This is Donyell, one of our top people. He'll be working with you, Christina, to develop and hone your... sense of presentation." The young black man introduced himself with a silent handshake and a smile. Harvey wasn't expecting this, someone who would be assigned to him. He was just going to cash the check.

Cannon turned his attention to David. "Mr. Ibsen, if you could go with Mr. Gilburn to hammer out the contactual details and all that legal hoo-hah. Christina, you stay here, and Donyell and I will give you a rough outline of what we have in mind."

David turned to Harvey, to make sure it was okay. Harvey gave him a subtle nod, and David was on his way. Mr. Cannon waited until he and Mr. Gilburn had left – and the doors had shut – until he continued.

"Christina, first of all I want to let you know how excited we all are at the Cannon Group to have you as part of the family. We think that you've got a lot of potential as an artist and we're delighted to be able to help you develop." Mr. Cannon then returned to his desk and seated himself. "I say the same thing to every artist we sign: 'There's nothing between you and success but an open mind.' And I firmly believe this. Please have a seat."

Harvey took one of the chairs positioned in front of Mr. Cannon's large mirror-finish desk. Donyell seated himself on the corner of it, so he could face Harvey. "I think you'll find I have a very open mind." Harvey replied, the only one in the room seeing the irony in the statement.

“Spectacular,” Mr. Cannon said. “Let me lay out what we expect from you, Christina. You have a very unique quality amongst the artists that are a part of our family. There’s an indistinguishable, compelling, special something you bring to a performance. Everyone I’ve talked to can’t help but notice it. There’s just something you have that makes people want to hear what you have to say.”

Harvey smiled, but behind it, he couldn’t help but think: *special qualities?* Well, of course there was something different about him. Was this the way it coming through to the rest of the world? How deeply troubling.

Mr. Cannon continued. “Your best approach to finding an audience is to keep going in the direction you’re obviously going. One girl, her guitar, and a message. Along the lines of a coffee house performer, a solo singer. Like a Fiona Apple or the like. Someone with a lot of credibility, a loyal audience and not a lot of showbiz getting in the way. How does that sound?”

Harvey shrugged. “That’s... Just what I was thinking.” He said. Actually, he hadn’t been thinking about it at all. He was still expecting a fat check.

“Wonderful. Just wonderful.” Mr. Cannon gestured to direct Harvey’s attention to Donyell. “Donyell here is going to be your personal contact for you. He’s already lined up some dates for you to perform around the L.A. area. Some low-key dates in front of small crowds. That should get a buzz going. And then Donyell has a long list of suggestions for the new records. I believe you already have a producer or two in mind, don’t you Donyell?”

“I’ve got a lot of top guys who want to bring your vision to the people, Christina. I hope you like some of my sugges-

tions.” Donyell smiled a warm, inviting smile. “I’m really very excited to be working with someone like you.”

Inside, Harvey’s hopes were being crushed. He had just wanted money. Now, in the span of a few short seconds, he had gone from flying home this afternoon to having shows and a recording session. “I’m sure it’s going to be great.” Harvey said.

Riding the elevator down, Harvey finally let out his breath. David did much the same. “I think we fooled ‘em.” David said.

“I think I just *got* fooled.” Harvey replied. “They want me to do shows, record a CD. They even want to do a photo shoot later tomorrow.” He looked at David with a wilting grin. “Meet the next Lisa Loeb.”

“Who?”

“Exactly.” Harvey muttered.

“Wow. That’s moving fast. But it wasn’t anything you weren’t expecting, right?”

Harvey took too long to answer. “Right.” He said.

“You *weren’t* expecting this.”

“Nope.” Harvey just let his attention wander away. Just what had he been thinking, anyway?



In anticipation of the shoot, Harvey had purchased a new set of clothes. If he was going to be a coffeehouse guitar singer, by God, he was going to look the part. He had some sort of reasoning that he could stink to high heaven as long as he just looked like he should be successful.

So, as he showed up for the photo shoot, he wore his best. He had a brand new wig with wavy brown hair, cut an inch

below the shoulders. He had a pair of english-rim glasses with blank lenses on his nose. He wore two or three earrings on each ear, cleverly designed to look like he had his ears pierced.

The outfit was a loose black nylon see-through shirt, with the short tails tied in a knot at his belly. A burnt orange tank top was mostly covered by it. Harvey had a long, black floor-length gypsy skirt on, that covered the rest of his body nicely. In fact, all you could see was the silhouette of his shoulders under the top, and the only real skin visible was from the elbow down on his arms. And when he walked you might be able to glimpse his toes poking out, wearing flat-heeled nature sandals.

All in all, he was quite sure he projected just the look he wanted to. Deep, thoughtful, and sexually non-threatening. As David dropped him off at the photo studio, Harvey told him to go and do some sight-seeing.

“You sure you’ll be okay?” David asked.

“No. It’s just I don’t want anyone to see the carnage.”

David nodded affirmative. “You got it.” He then sped off.

Harvey turned to the studio and took a deep breath. He hoped this wasn’t going to hurt too much. He had a hard enough time looking at himself in the mirror. Taking pictures was a whole new level of shame.

Arriving, he saw Donyell, who was seated to the side, taking quietly to his cell phone. Behind the camera, an impatient assistant was trying to line up a shot. The cameraman himself was angrily discussing something with the make-up person. And poor Harvey was completely freaked out of his mind.

As he entered, Donyell abruptly ended his call and introduced him to the cameraman. “Yves” was his name.

“Hi.” Harvey said.

The man just rolled his eyes and mumbled something in French.

Donyell then shuttled him over to the make-up desk, where two people quickly descended upon him in a whirl of activity. After they were done, Harvey was ushered in front of the hot camera lights and awaited direction. But all he could see were people talking amongst themselves.

He knew that everyone in the room was talking about him, but not talking to him. They all had scowls on their faces, and trying to avoid looking at Harvey. He knew why. He had been in the photo studio for less than thirty minutes, and it was already a disaster.

Before anything happened, the cameraman came out and yelled to his make-up people to start over again. By the time they were done, he had spent two hours in the makeup chair to hide the layers and layers of makeup needed to make him look halfway naturally effeminate in close-up shots. After ten minutes under the lights, they had to re-do his face from all the sweat.

The photographer was used to working with professionals – or at least actual women. He was viscerally frustrated with his subject. He didn’t take direction, and he wasn’t getting into the groove. After all, photography was all about “grooves,” and “feeling it,” as he explained repeatedly.

Harvey, for his part, didn’t understand the concept of groove, in this context. Whenever he was asked to “look alluring” or “playful” he had no earthly idea of how to do such a thing. He wasn’t a girl. He had no ability to do any of the things he was being asked to do. And even when his input wasn’t required, just simple posing was useless. All of

the rules of photography – as it applied to women – didn't apply to Harvey. Essentially, no one but Harvey really knew this wasn't just a makeup-on-a-pig photo session, but something much, much worse.

Everyone was frustrated. And in Hollywood, frustration exhibits itself as impatience and unbridled anger. Which is why the photographer had just fired the lighting guy using just about every swear word Harvey had ever heard. The caterer had just been physically tossed from the set. The girl trying to supply rolls of film was over in the corner crying due to the ferociousness of the insults she had just been exposed to. Needless to say, Harvey had never thought he would ever fear for his life because someone was taking a picture of him, but here he was.

The photographer approached Harvey and sneered. "You are not a woman – you are a *fat* oozing *boil* on the *ass* of the world!"

Harvey was feeling a sense of relief that he wasn't really the girl this man was angry with. Because if he was, then he might feel a little offended. He tried to shrink away from the approaching storm of anger, but with every step backward, the photographer took another forward.

"You have all the charm of a flatulent *orangutan*!" The man went on. "When I say make *love* to the *camera*, I do not mean for you to look as if you were *fucking* it, *cross-eyed* and *nauseous*!"

The photographer finally retreated, leaving Harvey to try and stand up straight from the forty-five degree angle he had been forced to adopt during the tongue-lashing. The intensity of the session was now beyond fearsome, and was now venturing into a peculiar region of deep foreboding Harvey hadn't yet experienced.



“*I need wind!*” The photographer yelled, pointing to a man running a fan.

“Aren’t you making enough yourself!?” Donyell spat from across the room.

“Out!” The photographer pointed at him. “You leave my studio this instant!”

Donyell got up out his chair and strode with purpose to the photographer. “I’m paying for this studio, I’m paying for your camera and I’m paying for you to take some God-damned photographs!” If he had gotten any more into the photographer’s face, he would have had to devour his head to make space. “Now you get yo’self behind the camera and take the pictures I’m *paying* for!”

Donyell walked back to his seat, but then melodramatically swept back around, pointing his finger accusingly. “And be grateful I don’t take the check, shred it into bits, swallow it, and force you to pick trough my *toilet* to pick out the pieces!”

And with that, Donyell took his seat again and crossed his legs for emphasis. All Harvey could do was pray this would be over soon enough.

“Give me...” The photographer said to Harvey. “Give me... enchanting.”

## **Chapter 7:** **A Message From Our Sponsors**

All in all, no one should have paid for the photographs. The next afternoon, as Harvey laid out the proofs in front of him, he winced in pain. There must have been three hundred shots. Christine Angler in a dress. Christine Angler in jeans. Christine Angler with her hair up. With the hair down. In a windstorm. At night. In the sun. Half in shadow. All in shadow.

Profile shots, head shots. Contour shots, full-length shots. There were photos of Christine lying down, leaning, standing, jumping, running, bending, stooping and even dancing. Smiling, yawning, pouting, licking, smirking, frowning and whistling.

They were wholesale awful. It was clear to Harvey that it was just a guy in a dress. Mind you, a skinny, short, slightly curvy guy – but still a guy. None of the pictures were any good.

“What do you think?” He asked David, who had just gotten out of the bathroom and was walking by.

He had already spent an hour looking at them, when they came in last night. “They have photoshop.” He said.

“Yeah.” Harvey replied. “They better.”

“Wasn’t my idea.” David reminded.

“I know, I know.” Harvey conceded. “But it’s not like I really had a choice. They needed photos.”

“Yeah.” David replied. He didn’t have a lot to add to this sorry situation. “Listen, we’ve got to get packed if we’re going to catch the plane.”

Harvey had already packed, and was wearing his “traveling” outfit of a frumpy sweater, baggy jeans and a baseball

cap. He had already decided this was a disaster. There was no way he could try and pull this off. It was time to get out of here while he could still look at himself with some sense of pride. "We'd better go before..."

The phone rang.

Drooping his shoulders, Harvey walked over to the phone, thought about the consequences of answering it, and then picked up the receiver.

"Hi Donyell." He said into the receiver. "Yes. No. No. I'm going to be fine." He said, answering questions only he could hear from Donyell.

"The check." David whispered. "When do we get the check?"

Harvey was still responding to questions. "Yes. No. No. No. Uh-huh. Listen, I was wondering exactly when I get..." He was cut off by an answer. "Tonight!?" Harvey said, his mood suddenly brightened. "Great!" He eagerly awaited more information. "At the show? Absolutely. Yes. Who's performing?" His mood dropped like a stone. "I am."

David, listening with eager anticipation, threw his hands in the air and spun around in exasperation. Harvey winced in visible pain.

"Tell him you're sick." David suggested, whispering.

"Okay." Harvey said to the phone. "Yeah. No. No. Yes. Right." He then hung up.

"So?" David asked.

"So?" Harvey replied. "So I get the first installment of the money tonight. When I'm performing at the Java Juice on Grove Street. Tonight at eight."

"You're going to go through with it?" David said. "You're going to actually perform in front of an audience."

"I already did it for four months on the tour." Harvey said, shrugging David's concerns off. "Some coffeehouse in front of a bunch of poser bohemian *arteests* isn't going to be any worse."

"You'll actually go on a stage in a dress and sing."

"Half a million." Harvey said simply. "I can do a couple of lousy songs for half a million."

"I suppose most people could. Heck, I'd do it."

Harvey got up and passed a mirror on the way to the bathroom. "And who am I to deprive the world of such beauty? Such talent?" He said, theatrically.

"Who indeed?" David agreed. They both got the sarcasm.

"So I guess I have to stay." Harvey shook his head, scolding himself.

David chuckled to himself, but not in an amused way. "This thing could get crazy if you let it."

"Yeah. I know." Harvey stopped looking at his reflection and finally made it to the bathroom. "Can you call the desk and ask to extend our stay?"

"Sure. But I can't."

"Can't what?"

"Stay. I have court tomorrow. I have to be there for a client." David picked up his suitcase. "I gotta go."

Harvey sighed with a deep, blood-pressure-lowering breath. "Okay." He checked his hair and make-up and returned to give David a hug. "Check in on Jean, if you could."

"Sure." David said. "Just hang in there."

"I will." Harvey replied. And with that, David picked up his luggage and was out the door. Harvey checked his watch for time. He was going to need to get ready soon.

He needed new clothes for tonight, and he was going to have to pluck his eyebrows again. And shave.

All Harvey could think was that this was the last time. The very last time. The promise he made himself was the only thing keeping him from screaming.



Harvey was nervous. As nervous as he had ever felt in his life. And he certainly wasn't expecting it. He was a performer. He had done this before. He had done crappy, horrible routines in front of over-active, jeering, captive kids. That was the worst audience you could hope for.

But here he was, in front of no more than a couple of dozen disinterested people of his own age, and he was sweating buckets. He had spent a few minutes scouting the room and looking around, and then the fear grabbed a hold of him and wouldn't let go. He quickly ran to find a bathroom and locked himself inside. He knew he was hyperventilating, even though he had never done it before.

After a few terror-stricken minutes, he was able to get it under control. He just had to tell himself that this was going to be okay. Lots of people did this. He was better than most.

Then he remembered he was in a dress, pretending to be a sixteen year old girl.

Deep breaths. Deep breaths. Take it easy. Deep breaths.

He eventually emerged from the bathroom, feeling horrible. The first thing he saw was the smiling face of Donyell. "Don't tell me my girl is nervous!" He said, his smile making Harvey feel a fraction of a fraction better. "This ain't nuthin' for a pro like you! This is easy. No drama, girl!"

"I don't know why I'm so nervous." Harvey said.

"Oh, I know why." Donyell said. "This is the first time you've done your own songs in front of people, isn't it?"

That couldn't be it, could it?

Donyell looked Harvey in the eyes. "The only way you'll ever know if this is going to work is to just go ahead and do it. You can worry about it later."

The large effeminate black man had a point, Harvey realized.

As he took the stage, there was just a microphone and two stools. One for Harvey, and another for the glass of water resting on top of it. It was all the comfort he was going to be given.

Harvey picked up the acoustic guitar as if it were a sack of wet garbage. The guitar felt like it was totally foreign to him. He had cradled one for months, writing his material, but now, he even had trouble remembering if he played right handed or left handed. There was no doubt about it, he was a wreck.

He felt for the seat behind him, and sat down. He then had to adjust himself, as he had tangled his long flowing skirt beneath him. Then he sat up again to adjust the microphone. He plucked a string or two on the guitar, to check to see if it was still in tune. He sipped some water. He re-re-readjusted his seat.

Did he need to make a phone call? Maybe there was a baseball game on TV. He really could use some new pens. Did you know that when it's winter in the norther hemisphere, it's summer in the southern hemisphere? Why hadn't he seen any blue jays recently? Were they endangered? Where do they get tar from?

He knew he was trying to not think about what he needed to do, and he was going to try and get away with it as long as he could. But a round of coughing in the crowd was a reminder that he actually did have to get on with the business of performing.

He hoisted the guitar onto his leg and cleared his throat. He had chosen a song he could play a bit before having to start singing, which made all the more awkward when he started to sing before playing. "Sorry." He said into the microphone. He started over.

He tried to start singing again, but his voice had been sapped of every last bit of confidence, and this time it came squelching out of his throat, dying upon arrival.

He struggled through the song, doing what he could. He knew it was too late to bail out now. This didn't stop him from forgetting the lyrics to his third song, turning into an impromptu instrumental. On the fifth song, he got stuck in a chord and didn't remember how to get out of it. On the next song, a string broke and made Harvey jump a foot in his seat. It was harder to tell which was higher strung. The guitar or the player.

That was it, and Harvey called an end to the show, playing the rest of the song with the five strings he had left. As soon as he was done, he dropped the guitar where it was and slunk off stage. He didn't stop until he had hit the parking lot, trying desperately to get into the limo waiting there. He kicked it and beat on the window. He just wanted to get away from this embarrassment.

"That's not ours, girlfriend." Donyell called from a few spots away. He was holding the door open on the limo they came in. Harvey didn't make eye contact as he just darted for the open door.

The door was closed as soon as Donyell got in, who took the seat facing Harvey. He tapped on the driver's partition, and the limo began to move.

Donyell gave his passenger ten minutes before he opened his mouth. "Now I know that wasn't 'zactly what you hoped for, but... We can always work these things out."

Harvey shook his head. "I'm never doing that again."

"You can't let one bad time ruin your whole career, girl!" Donyell said.

"Never again." Harvey repeated.

"So you're throwing away everything? All this?" He motioned to the limo's interior. "You're going to give this up?"

"I... I..." Harvey stuttered. "I'm not giving this up!" He set his eyes on the window, his gaze becoming focused. "If I'm going to do this, I'm going to do this right."

"You just need to have a little more confidence..."

"What I need..." Harvey interrupted, "What I need is to not dick around with some fucking acoustic guitar!" His anger and veracity scared even Donyell. "I'm a performer! Not some stupid guitar player!"

Donyell tried to add some support. "So we can get someone..."

"And if I can't sing, then we need something to help me out! Some backing singers! A taped track! This was fucking bush league!" Harvey was getting louder and louder as he spoke. The glass windows of the car were starting to vibrate because of the volume. "And who's idea was it to wear the stupid hippy dress? This was a joke from start to finish! I'm not going out on stage alone ever again! We get a band, we get some dancers, we get some lights... *And then we'll get it right!*"



Donyell crossed his legs effeminately and touched his limp hand to his chest in reaction. He looked at some notes he had taken to help out, and then back at Harvey. He examined his immaculately manicured nails. He adjusted the gold ring on his pinky finger. "So, should I get Mr. Cannon on the phone?"

"No." Harvey replied. "I want a meeting. ASAP."



Mr. Edward Cannon was in his element. Behind his huge expensive desk in his shiny, spartan office. This was his command center. This was the top of the world. This was his pulpit. "Christina, I believe in being frank with my people, so I'll say it straight. No one gets anywhere on this industry on their talent. Talent is easy to find. Talent falls in my lap twenty times a day. Talent has no problem finding me.

What I look for in an emerging artist isn't how well they dance or sing. It's how well they adapt. And I think it's quite clear we're going to have to do a better job of adapting you to your strengths as a performer.

"You're sixteen." Mr. Cannon said. Harvey grimaced, holding the urge to snicker in. He tried to fit better into the chair he was seated in. "You're just sixteen and that makes our approach simple. You're young and fresh. A girl who can be seen as a discovery. You need to be the sort of act that gets... revealed, rather than pushed on the public. To give people the sense that they're the ones who found you, as opposed to having you everywhere at once and promoted before people have even given you a chance.

We've found that heavy marketing campaigns for new, young talent invariably wind up hurting long-term sales.

"If we have you sneak up on the public, and you get 'unearthed' by critics and fans, that's where we can make the most impact. What we'll do is position you as a girl-next-door type, an all-American apple pie local-girl-makes-big sort of thing.

"At which point, if sales are positive, we'll then progress you down the line, expanding your audience with more traditional marketing approaches that cross multiple demographics with a worldwide promotional strategy."

Harvey was following it up to that last sentence.

"So, now I'll put you in the capable hands of Donyell, and get you started on a whole new approach. A whole new start. Sound good?"

Harvey talked for the first time in a few minutes. "Yes."

"All right then. If you have any questions, just give my office a call, or talk to Mr. Gilburn." Mr. Cannon got up to offer a handshake. "I hope this is the beginning of a long, mutually beneficial relationship, Christina."

"I just want to do this the right way." Harvey said. "Do I get the money I need to do the show the way I want?"

"Money is not a problem."



"Now we're really gonna have some fun!" Donyell said, happy as a schoolgirl. "Now we're gonna make you famous!"

"I guess." Harvey answered. He just wanted to put on one decent performance before he went home.

“Let’s start over. Okay, the thing you need to know about me.” Donyell said, as he led Harvey into the limousine waiting outside, “I may work for Mr. Cannon, but I’m always going to tell you like it T-I-is. I’ll never lie to you.”

Harvey crept into a new, ostentatious white stretch Cadillac and had flashbacks to his prom night. Donyell sat beside him.

“I am going to be one hundred thousand percent honest with you at all times, so don’t you ever worry about me. If you’re dressed like a bag lady, I’ll tell you. If you smell like a skunk, I’ll tell you. If you’re talkin’ the talk, but not walkin’ the walk – believe me I will tell you the dirty truth! Now, is that clear?”

Harvey nodded. He had come to the conclusion that Donyell was a little flamboyant.

“First stop is the salon. It all starts with the hair.” Donyell pulled a small stack of photos from his clipboard. “And... These are computer composite images of you with six different styles and colors.”

Harvey took the photos. Where had they gotten a photo of him? They had taken a shot of “Christina” and digitally superimposed different styles of hair on his head. He tried to give them a good look, but then Donyell abruptly put his hand in the way.

“But before you even look at those, I want you to do something for me.” Donyell let out a dramatic sigh. “When I think of Christina, I think: hello, eighties! Tiffany, Madonna and all that old stuff. And when I think of Angler, I think of... fish. All scaly and swimmin’ in the sea. And I don’t want nobody looking at Christina Angler and thinking about fish or the eighties, or nothin!” Donyell steadied himself. “So what I need you to do is think of a new name.

Something that just says ‘Hey! I’m new, I’m fresh, and I got it goin’ on!’”

Dazzled by Donyell’s dramatic performance, it was a moment later that Harvey realized he had been asked to do something. “Right now?” He asked.

“No time like the present!” Donyell said.

It really wasn’t his name anyway, so Harvey didn’t much care. “Uh... I really don’t know... How about... ‘Harley?’”

“Biker slut. Get serious.”

“Ummmm... Uhhh.... Jasmine.”

“Oh *please!*” Donyell threw up his arms. “I don’t want stripper names! This doesn’t have to be so hard! Just... I don’t know... work with.. ‘Christina’ a little.” He used his hands to make a fluttering motion. “It has to come from inside. Don’t force it. Make it natural. The real star inside.”

“Okay... um... How about Chris.”

Donyell shook his head.

“Tina.”

Donyell covered his face in shame.

Harvey sounded it out. “Crus... Creee.. Crooo... Cruss... Chriss... Chriss..tee...”

All of the sudden, Donyell started to wildly point at Harvey, as if he were in a game of charades.

“Christie?”

“Mmmmm...” Donyell contemplated it. “More like... K-R-Y...” The twisted expression on his face implied Donyell was contemplating the entire nature of the universe and reducing it down to a mathematical formula. “K-R-Y-S-T-I!” He proclaimed.

“Krysti.” Harvey said, making sure he heard it correctly.

“Krysti – young, hip, groovin’!” Donyell snapped his fingers for emphasis.

Harvey let it rattle around in his head for a while. It had a ring to it. He started to smile. “Krysti. Krysti. Krysti. Krysti. Krysti Angler.” Then he had another idea. “Krysti Angel.” He said, beaming.

Donyell held up his palm to the excited Harvey. “No more calls we have a winner!” Harvey and Donyell high-fived. He pointed back to the pictures Harvey was holding. “Now which one of these girls is Krysti Angel?”

Harvey flipped through them quickly, finding himself so caught up in everything, he was giggling. Then he stopped on one, and held it up to Donyell. “This is Krysti Angel?”

Donyell nodded in agreement. He was pleased with himself.

“Yeah! You got it!” Harvey said. It was a few hours later. The stylist at the salon, had just turned Harvey’s chair around, so he could see the finished product in the mirror. “That’s perfect!”

Harvey fluffed his new mane of hair from the bottom. It was a golden blonde, feathered and winged at the sides. It was like Drew Barrymore’s from Charlie’s Angels. And it looked great to Harvey. It felt great. He couldn’t stop playing with it.

Next was the make-up table, where he was made up with glittery pink cheeks, shimmery pink lips and the eyelash-load-bearing limit of mascara. Harvey then had his nails done in clear polish with a slight pink tint to it.

From there he was driven to the glitziest, highest-class clothing store that Harvey had ever been allowed in, and found they had shut the place down to let him shop alone.

It was a good thing, too. With Donyell at his side, egging him on, Harvey cleaned the place out.

They had an arm full of the ‘punk’ look. They took six bags’ worth of the ‘sporty’ look. They loaded up the limo with the ‘all-american’ look. And they had to call for a truck to haul away all the stuff for the ‘teen princess’ look.

And the shoes. They bought slides, they bought flip-flops. They bought thongs, sandals and sneakers. Knee-length boots. Calf-length boots. Ankle boots. One inch, two-inch, three-inch, four-inch heels. They had enough shoes to outfit an army and have something left over for a navy as well.

Then it was on to accessories. Bracelets, rings, earrings, necklaces... In the middle of all this, Harvey realized how bizarre this all was. He was a man, a grown man, shopping for cute, sparkly teenage girls’ clothes. And not only was he doing it, he was loving it. He was so far gone, he was trying outfits on, deciding what colors looked good on him, which outfits fit him, which ones didn’t make him look fat. Not only was he enjoying himself, he was in heaven. He wanted more clothes to try on. He wanted more shoes to go with the clothes. He wanted more styles, more sizes, more, more, more.

“Can we do this next week?” He asked Donyell.

“Each and every week, honey.” Donyell turned a compact mirror towards Harvey’s face. “Now you tell me, if you buy a ticket to see Krysti Angel, is this what you’d expect to see?”

“That’s who I’d expect to see.” Harvey replied with a satisfied smile.



On the way back from dropping the girl off, Donyell's cell phone rang. "Donyell." Said the voice on the other end.

"Mr. Cannon. I just dropped her off at the hotel."

"Good. Everything go fine?"

"Fine, fine as wine. The girl's a little low-key at first, but when you get her excited, she becomes a total queen."

Mr. Cannon agreed. "That was my impression too. Did we get her to agree to the name and image we had worked out for her?"

"Oh yes, Mr. Cannon. She even thinks she came up with it herself. That girl almost does my job for me."

"Good work, Donyell. Well, you know the routine. We need to keep her as busy as possible. One thing after another. Keep her from sleeping, keep her from eating and most of all, keep her from thinking. Non-stop activity."

"You don't have to tell me, Mr. Cannon. Who's your best man for the job? Donyell is."

"You're a good man, Donyell. Keep it up."

"Ain't no thing." He answered and clacked his cell phone shut with satisfaction. He knew his job, and he knew it well. He had been at this for years. Many girls. Many stars. Too many to remember. And now his job was to create Kristi Angel, from the outside in.



Waiting to hear about the meeting, David had been in the middle of some light reading at the hotel, but his book had just fallen out of his hands. Because a few seconds ago, some teenage girl skipped into the room, dressed in a pink ruffled miniskirt, a daringly minimal tank top with her bra straps showing, and a denim jacket half-falling off her

shoulders. Her pink toenails were perfectly visible, resting atop platform flip-flops. And the little tart was smiling at David.

She tossed her jacket onto a chair, and thrust her hips forward and to the side, keeping her hands behind her. “Hi, mister! I’m Krysti Angel!”

David’s first impulse was to demand this girl leave his hotel room. But having the logical mind a lawyer has, he analyzed the facts. You needed a key to get in this room. Harvey had that key. He knew only one person in 150 miles of this city, and that person happened to be dressed like a girl. And the voice of this girl perfectly matched the perky, irritating voice he had grown used to hearing from Harvey.

“Harr...” David began. He had to run through his logic one more time before he continued. “Harvey?”

The girl shifted her hips and crossed her arms in front of her. “No, mister! I just told you, I’m Krysti Angel!” And she giggled. “Buy my record?”

David approached the girl, examining her like a mysterious artifact unearthed from a crashed spaceship. “Harvey.”

The girl couldn’t hold back anymore. She collapsed in laughter, having just scared the life out of his good friend.

“Asshole!” David yelled, kicking Harvey in the rear. Harvey continued to convulse on the floor, cackling. “You... I... *Don’t do that!*” David bellowed.

“Oh God, you just about shit your pants!” Harvey said, in between laughs. David fell back into the chair he had been sitting in. Harvey tried to find his feet. “I gotta stop laughing before my eyes run.”

Harvey made his way over to the couch, still randomly spurting a laugh or two. He slumped into the seat, leaving



David with a chance to realize what the heck was happening here.

“What did they *do* to you?” David begged to know. “You look like one of those spoiled trendoid girls you see at the mall. Only... In concentrated form.”

Harvey rose his arms to display himself better. “That’s the idea!” His arms fell down again. “I’m the girl next door. I’m the sweet young thing America will fall in love with – Krysti Angel.” He poked his cheek with a finger to drive the point home.

“Jesus Christ. They don’t fool around, do they? And where did they come up with that stupid name!?”

“I chose it!” Harvey said, indignant. “And I like it. I think it’s cool.”

“Ooookay. Sure.”

“Anyway, I’ve got a photo shoot tomorrow.” Harvey said, unconcerned. In fact, excited.

“And that doesn’t bother you?” David asked. “You’ve been bitching about pretending to be a girl all damn day.”

“Look at me!” Harvey said with a smile. He waved his hand up and down his body and gave a ‘pretty girl’ flutter of his eyelashes. “I could fool anyone!” He kicked off his shoes and stretched his legs onto the coffee table.

“Well...” David said, hesitant to agree. It was true that Harvey was definitely a passable girl. Though he still had a kind of ‘androgynous’ bent to his appearance. “They do have photoshop.” Harvey pouted in response to the phony insult. “It really doesn’t bother you?”

The phone in the room rang, and David picked it up. After saying hello, he held it out towards Harvey. “It’s that Donyell guy.” He said.

“Already? I don’t even get a chance to eat?” Harvey said, sighing. He picked up the phone and went back to work.



## Chapter 8: The Only Thing Stopping You is Yourself

Harvey arrived at the photo studio, chauffeured by the white limo. He had been told that this new car was “at your disposal.” Just what he wanted – his very own gaudy, tacky monument to excess. Truth be told, he actually liked it because of those factors.

It was time for a new round of pictures, since there was a whole new “Krysti Angel.” Once Harvey was promised that this was going to be a much more low-key affair than his first photo shoot, he conceded to do it. He was told all he’d have to do was show up, everything would be taken care of, and this photographer was a much more easy-going person.

The place was a little out-of-the-way, and it took a little while for the driver to find it. It was driving Harvey nuts, because he was really very anxious to get there. Not so he could struggle through another agonizing session, but because he had invited a guest. The first thing Harvey saw when he got to the studio was a familiar, friendly face.

“Amber!” Harvey said with a girlish squeal. “Oh my God!” He ran to his old “Yes! to Life” compatriot, and they hugged each other hard. “I’m so glad you could come!”

“I haven’t seen you, in like, forever!” Amber said, almost crying, she was so happy. “Why didn’t you tell me you were in L.A. earlier!?”

“Oh my God, I totally zoned! I was like, all, busy and then just like, yesterday I was sitting around and I thought, who do I know in L.A.? So I called.”

“Oh my God, You can’t be serious!”

"I am so *totally* serious!" Harvey could feel his IQ draining like a bathtub with the plug pulled out. But he really was so happy to see Amber, he didn't care. "I'm such an airhead!"

"You can make it up to me by telling what you've been up to." Amber said, fixing some hair that had fallen into Harvey's face.

"Okay, okay, okay. So. I get home from the trip, and My... Mom tells he she's gonna get married."

"I know that part, stupid! What happened after that!?"

Harvey smiled in a quick moment of reflection. He really had missed Amber. It felt so good to talk to someone who really understood him.

"I forgot! Okay, so, so, so." Harvey giggled. "So, there's like, this call that comes from this guy. And this guy is like, head of a record company..." As Harvey told his story, or at least an edited version of it, he was getting more and more animated. As he gave every detail, he watched Amber's excited expression get more and more electrified and surprised. It drove him on to tell his story faster and faster. Once he was done with it, his friend was at a loss for words.

She gathered herself up and hugged Harvey again. "So you're going to be so awesomely famous now!" Amber said. "I'm so jealous!"

"I guess, I don't know. Maybe, if I work real hard!" Harvey said.

Amber tried to look cross. "I've been killing myself going to every audition in town, and you just get a phone call and you're more famous than I'll ever be," she said, not making it sound terribly amusing. "Well," she smiled, "I guess those are the breaks!"

“C’mon! It was total luck! You’ll get something! I know you will!” Harvey said. “You just have to keep trying!”

“Sure. Okay.” Amber replied, unenthusiastically. She hugged Harvey again. “It’s so good to see you!”

“Hey, have you heard from anyone else?” Harvey asked.

“Well, I know that Connor is here, I saw him once at a cattle call for a soap commercial.”

“Oh my God! He’s was so creepy!”

“Oh, I know! He’s was always just hanging around, and staring at you, and...”

“Ladies!” A man said, interrupting them “I hate to interrupt your chattering, but we do need to get the session underway!” He was an older man, bald with a grey goatee. He held a camera. “Now which one of you is Krysti Angel?”

“I am!” Amber replied, stepping forward. “Just kidding!”

“Hi.” Harvey said, nervously.

“I see.” The photographer said, looking Harvey over.

“Do you think I’ll look okay?” Harvey asked, concerned.

The Photographer gave him a confident smile. “Don’t worry, Baby. I can make you look amazing.” He made some adjustments on the camera. “I’ve been doing Weight Watchers stuff for years. I can make anyone look like an ‘after!’”

Harvey looked at Amber, who grinned. They both knew it was a veiled insult.



Harvey threw a shoe across the room, slamming against the wall. It was too bad, because he was the only one there to see it. The photo shoot was another debacle. He had so

little idea of what to do, and even when he had a vague idea of how the photographer wanted him to pose, it was useless. Sure, he could stand a certain way, but what if something was showing? What if he was giving something away?

This was a camera, for God's sake. It could see right through any disguise.

And when they wanted expressions or emotions, how the hell was he supposed to know what to do? He barely knew what he looked like when he wasn't making any expression at all. Now he was supposed to fake it? They wanted the impossible!

"Hey, Krys? You all right?" A voice came from the other side of the dressing room door. It was Amber. "I heard a noise. Are you okay?"

"I'm fine." Harvey replied, dejectedly. He really didn't feel like talking about it.

"I'm gonna come in, okay?"

"I don't..."

But Amber was already sticking her head through the door. "Is this guy giving you problems? I mean, if he's ticking you off, we can just get out of here."

"He's not the problem." Harvey admitted. "I am. I have no clue how to do this."

"Photo shoots are rough. I've done a few and they're never fun. And dull. Y'know?"

"You've done a few?"

"I did a few for some clothing catalogs and websites. Prom dresses, cheerleader outfits, department stores. The usual. I even did one for Halloween costumes."

"What's the secret?" Harvey asked, eagerly.

“No secret. You just, like, turn your brain off and try not to take anything personally.”

“I don’t know if I can do what they want me to do n’ stuff.”

“C’mon, it’s simple. Just watch what I do.”

Amber dragged Harvey out by the arm, and put him back in front of the photographer.

“I assume this means the ‘break’ is over?” The photographer asked, sarcastically.

“We’re gonna give it one more try.” Amber announced. She turned to Harvey and said, “One more try, okay?”

“Fine,” Harvey replied.

“One more try.” The photographer said to himself. He flipped on the lights and turned on a wind machine. “Let’s see if you can give me... ‘fun-loving.’”

Harvey groaned. An assistant came out to dust his face with powder and position his body in a pose.

But behind the camera, he could just make out Amber doing the same pose Harvey was being set up in. Amber’s happy expression was wildly exaggerated, looking like she might be involved in some sort of hostage situation with a gun to her back.

But what she was doing was showing Harvey what he should be acting like. Harvey figured this out after some initial confusion, and imitated Amber as best he could.

“That’s what we’re looking for.” The photographer said.

The rest of the shoot went smoothly, as Amber led him through the session. All Harvey had to do was imitate Amber, and the guy behind the camera was happy.

After two hours and a few costume changes, the shoot was over, and Harvey was allowed to step down from the platform he was on and get out of those hot lights.



“Thank you for your cooperation, miss.” He turned to Amber. “And thank you to your friend.”

He turned back to Harvey as he started to take down his equipment. “If I were you, I’d kiss her feet for saving your butt today.”

At that moment, Harvey’s phone rang. “Krysti!” Mr. Edward J. Cannon said, on the other end of the phone. “I hear the shoot’s not going well. What’s the problem?”

Harvey didn’t know what to say. The phone felt like a hundred pounds in his hand. The last thing he wanted was to get in trouble. “I guess I... I’m a little nervous. But we’re past that. Everything’s okay now.” He felt even more grateful to Amber.

“Oh, I can imagine all this attention can be difficult to deal with for a girl your age.” Cannon said, with a kind tone.

“I guess so.”

“Well, I’ll tell you what. I’m giving a party for some of the media people tonight, I’d like you to come. It’ll help you relax and take your mind off things.”

Just the opposite, thought Harvey. He couldn’t imagine a more tense situation for him right now. But he already knew you never said ‘no’ to Edward Cannon.

“Sure! Sounds great!” Harvey spoke with that “Yes! to Life” attitude that had gotten him so far.

“Wonderful! Wonderful!” Mr. Cannon proclaimed. “I’ll have the car for you outside at ten. They’ll pick you up, drop you off here for some work at the studio, take you to the offices here for administrative stuff, take you at three to a salon for a quick touchup and then I’ll see you around seven at the Mayfair Ballroom.”

“Okay! I’ll be there!” Harvey said. After putting down the phone, he fell back into a chair. “I haven’t even gotten four hours sleep. I feel horrible. This is going to be a nightmare.” He decided.

Turning to Amber, he smiled. Why not share the misery? “You wanna go to a party?”



The limo did indeed pick up Harvey and take him to the studio, then the office, then to a salon. The salon it took him to was a private little house that was hidden behind a pottery store and very exclusive. There was actually a codeword to get in. The stylist there gave Harvey a load of skin treatments and shampoos to use every day, as well as making him over for the night’s affair. When they were done, Harvey had never looked so good. Or so girlish. His eyes here large and bright, his lips big and shiny and his skin was flawless. They had twisted and pinned his hair up in the cutest way.

Back in the limo, the driver presented him with some white boxes, “compliments of Mr. Cannon.” Inside Harvey found a daring new outfit that he’d never have chosen on his own. It was a sequined rose red spaghetti-strap top which left his midriff bare. His midriff wasn’t his best asset, he knew. The skirt was ankle-length in the same rose color, but was made of a satin-like material with a lining for fullness. Included was a pair of clear high heeled platform sandals, and a simple crystal pendant necklace & matching earrings. Harvey did his best to enhance his sub-A cups, but there wasn’t much to be done. And the skirt hid his best features, his lean dancer legs.

He dressed in the car, and then sped by Amber's place to pick her up. She was absolutely giddy, obviously having the time of her life. And why wouldn't she? She was getting picked up in a stretch limo right in her neighborhood to show everyone.

"Is this yours?" She asked Harvey. "This is so awesome!"

"The record company lets me use... Well, they kinda gave it to me, I guess."

Amber's eyes were jumping out of their sockets. "Oh my God! This is off the hook!"

"I suppose," Harvey said, trying to play it cool. "So don't let me do anything stupid tonight. I'm counting on you, Amb."

"That was your first mistake." Amber teased.

It was only a few more minutes of nervous giggling before they arrived at the ballroom. It was a red carpet affair, and as Harvey departed the limo, he was helped up by a doorman into the flashbulbs of a pack of paparazzi. Harvey tried to smile, but felt like diving back into the car. He stumbled twice, Amber keeping him upright. Clumsily, they made their way into the lobby, where they were led into the main ballroom, packed with hundreds of men & women in semiformal attire.

"Krysti!" The deep voice of Mr. Cannon came from behind. "I was afraid you'd have second thoughts. I'm so glad you're here." He wrapped his strong arm around Harvey's waist, resting his hand on Harvey's half-bare hip. Harvey shuddered, but he didn't stop smiling. "And this is...?"

"Amber." Harvey said, swallowing hard before speaking. "She's a friend from way back."

"A pleasure to meet you." He turned back to Harvey. "I want you to meet some of the big players here in the me-

dia market.” He looked around for a moment, giving Harvey a moment to talk to Amber.

“I guess you should just kinda mingle or something.” He said. “Looks like I’m going to be busy.”

Amber’s expression was one of kid on Christmas morning. “All these people here are in control of making people famous?” She said, almost dreamily.

“I suppose. I don’t know if...” And before he could finish, Amber had already disappeared into the crowd.

“Larry!” Yelled Mr. Cannon in the general direction of a gray-haired and bearded man with thick glasses. “Larry, meet Krysti Angel, Cannon Group’s hottest rising star!”

The man turned around slowly, and held out his hand. Harvey shook it firmly. “Hi there!” Harvey said earnestly.

Larry looked at Harvey up and down, seemed to sneer a little, and looked back at Cannon without speaking. He just sipped his drink and turned away.

Feeling more than a little confused and certainly uncomfortable, Harvey led Cannon to where he couldn’t be overhead. “What’s his problem?” Harvey asked.

“Larry’s an old timer. He’s seen a lot of girls come and go. I suppose he’s a little jaded.” Cannon patted Harvey on the shoulder. “Don’t worry about it.” He looked in another direction. “Phil!” He yelled. Harvey found himself being arranged into position to meet this new person. “Meet Krysti Angel!” Mr. Cannon said.

This man, in his forties, just nodded in their general direction without breaking the conversation he was having. Cannon swerved Harvey around again. “Rhonda!” He said to a wrinkly woman with thick glasses. “Krysti Angel! The Cannon Group’s newest, hottest young star.”

The woman, in a gaudy green dress with sequins, shook Harvey's hand limply. "How wonderful." She said with a smile. Then she looked at Cannon again. "You must be *very* excited." She sipped a glass of champagne. "Or drunk."

Harvey played with his new necklace as he had started to worry. This was going to be a stinking, grisly disaster. It was a very bad idea to come here. "I have to go to the bathroom," he declared, needing to get out, and he left Mr. Cannon's presence swiftly.

He looked for Amber for a little support, but she was nowhere to be found. Inside the ladies' washroom, Harvey leaned forward on the counter, breathing heavily, as all his worries caught up with him. He was in over his head. David was right. He was in too deep and sinking fast.

He looked at himself in the mirror, his makeup still intact despite his pouting. He looked at his exposed belly, thick and undefined. His broad shoulders. If you looked closely, you could even see an adam's apple on his neck. This was ridiculous. He was a man, after all.

Harvey felt like the most worthless person on Earth. A fraud. An ugly, obvious fraud. God, he needed some sleep.

A sneering voice came from the doorway: "The one and only Krysti Angel." Harvey was caught off guard, and fitfully turned to see who it was. It was someone he knew. By reputation. It was the familiar figure of Emily Grant.

Familiar, because everyone on Earth knew who Emily Grant was. She was the last big star of popular music. She was all over everything, her face on TV, movies and magazines. Emily Grant was tipped to be the next Britney. She was the hot young thing just a year ago – if even that long ago. She was the biggest selling artist the Cannon Group

had. The music was crap, but she sure was a looker. Even if she was just a little too young to be a real star.

Emily had obviously led a fast life, as her face was now ravaged by time, despite the fact that she couldn't be older than eighteen. Her eyes had bags, her skin creased on the sides of her nose. Her bare arms looked bone-thin and fragile. She had a cigarette in one hand, which she kept perched at her mouth. She looked at Harvey with disgust. "Krysti Angel. Mr. Cannon's newest protégé. How sweet."

"I'm a big fan," Harvey said, lamely.

She slowly approached Harvey, not breaking her laser-like stare. "Is this my replacement?" She was now so close, Emily could have stuck her cigarette in his eye. And she looked like she was capable of it. She took a long drag and blew the smoke in Harvey's face. "You're pathetic!" She sneered.

Harvey wasn't in a mood to disagree. He just stared down at his shoes.

Emily took a few steps around the backside of Harvey, examining him. Evaluating him. "My God, how desperate are they? You're a fucking tub of lard!"

"Huh?" Harvey said, not expecting such a crude insult.

"Huh?" Emily mocked. "Huh!" she said again. She walked around in front of Harvey again. "You shouldn't be much of a challenge. The cameras get one good look at the fat, fucking *cow* behind the music, and you're history."

Harvey immediately, involuntarily, felt his belly with his hand.

"I bet you haven't even gotten a single person to even shake your hand tonight. They can smell a loser a mile away. And when you've failed, Cannon will come back to

me, desperate for any sort of star clout. And I'll cash in for twice as much as I made before! Classic!"

Emily turned her back and started to laugh. "Ha, ha, ha!" She then turned around again and spoke clearly. "If I were you, I'd do whatever it takes to make sure I stay at the top. Because you're sure not going to stay there on your looks." She opened the door a little to peer outside. "I'd say you need to suck off at least sixty percent of the men in the room to just get a back-page article in Billboard."

She walked to the other side of the bathroom. Her physical presence, with her mean and vicious tone scared Harvey. Terrified him. She wasn't real, Emily Grant. She was just someone he had seen on TV and in magazines. It was like being pushed around by Bugs Bunny or Homer Simpson. The surreal feeling made it even more scary.

Emily washed her hands and then dried them with a few paper towels. With every movement, Harvey was convinced she was going to strike. She then flicked her cigarette at Harvey's feet. Harvey jumped two inches into the air. "What are you doing here, you country-fried bumpkin? Go home." On the way out, she passed Harvey and bumped him hard in the process. "Leave this to the people prepared to make sacrifices."

Harvey stood still, trying to keep his composure. This was a tough place, Los Angeles. This was a horrible place. Why was he here? Harvey lost his feet and fell in a heap on the floor. He was not going to cry. No. He wasn't going to cry. He kept trying to tell himself that.

Mr. Cannon greeted Emily as she exited the washroom. "So?" He asked Emily.

"I think it went fine, Mr. Cannon, sir." Emily said, suddenly eager to please. "I went through the script word for word."

"That's wonderful, Emily. I'll make sure you'll have as much... Um..." Cannon searched for the right word.

"Smack." Emily quickly interjected.

"Is that what the kids call heroin?" Mr. Cannon rhetorically asked. "Anyway, you'll have whatever \$10,000 can buy you. Now please leave, before anyone sees you."

Emily retreated, backwards, bowing. "Thank you sir, thank you!" She then turned tail and briskly sped out of the hall, rubbing her needle-hungry arm.

She'll probably have overdosed and be dead by morning, Cannon thought to himself. Good thing he had that Greatest Hits of Emily Grant package ready for release. Dead stars were much more profitable than live ones.

The door to the washroom opened as Harvey stepped out, wobbly in his heels. "Mr. Cannon?" He said, with a slight slur.

"Oh!" Mr. Cannon said, feigning surprise. "I was getting worried, Krysti."

Harvey looked up, and found his view blurry. Blurry from tears in his eyes. But quickly his world seemed to come into focus. "Don't worry... Nothing for you to worry about, Mr. Cannon." Harvey straightened his posture and put on his best smile. He shook his hair back out of his face and straightened his top. "I need to meet more people, don't you think?"

Edward Cannon smiled. "Yes. Of course." He escorted Harvey back out onto the floor. "Walter!" he called. A pudgy man who was sweating in his suit turned around to



acknowledge Cannon. "This is Krysti Angel, the Cannon Groups' fastest rising star!"

Harvey smiled brightly and took Walter's offered hand with both of his hands. Harvey then leaned forward and kissed him on the cheek. "Hi! What do you do Walter?"

Walter smirked. "I work for the Daily Entertainment Bulletin."

"Oh my gosh!" Harvey placed his hand over his chest in astonishment. "That's a big important publication! Do you write?"

"Well I edit some, and do some ad sales." Walter said, definitely warming up.

"That's fascinating!" Harvey gushed. "Tell me all about it!" He took Walter by the arm.

A smile crept across Mr. Cannon's face as he left Krysti alone, and moved on to other guests.

## Chapter 9: The Self-Winding Watch

At four in the morning, Harvey was woken by a phone call. It was Donyell. He had lined up a radio interview for the east coast, and Krysti was on the air in ten minutes. After stumbling through it, Harvey was then surprised by a nutritionist who had let herself in and cooked Krysti a special breakfast designed to bring off some pounds.

“Didn’t you know?” The nutritionist asked. It had all been approved yesterday. Didn’t Krysti remember?

Then it was time for exercise. The trainer entered when the nutritionist left. Five miles on a treadmill. Fifty crunches. A half-hour of aerobics.

Now it was six o’clock. Donyell called again. Re-shoots of the photos this afternoon. A salon appointment at eight.

At nine, another call. The record producer wanted Krysti in the studio for backing vocals. That was at ten. Then, at eleven, a writer at the record company needed to interview Krysti for background information on the press bio.

At noon, the nutritionist called, wondering where Krysti was. Food was prepared and ready back at the hotel.

One o’clock, and an interviewer from Billboard called, asking to confirm rumors of Krysti being signed to a contract. “How did you get this number?” Harvey asked, exasperated.

On the way to the photo shoot, Donyell had proofs of the print ad campaign to look at. Approve. Change. Revise. Again.

At the shoot, a new photographer. He wanted pensive. He wanted surprise. He wanted thoughtful. He wanted everything Harvey couldn’t give him.

Five o'clock. The nutritionist called, and was irate. It was costing the record company good money to make these meals, why wasn't Krysti there? On call waiting, the trainer. Time for an evening work-out.

Seven o'clock. The record producer had accidentally wiped the computer of the backing vocals. Could Krysti come back in?

Nine o'clock, in the limo back from the studio, contracts to sign, agreements to read, waivers to agree to.

Ten o'clock, schedule for tomorrow. More interviews. More record company business. Another session in the studio.

Eleven o'clock. Harvey collapsed in bed, so grateful to end the day.

The phone rang.



The album, simply titled "Krysti Angel" performed poorly upon release, selling only 20,000 copies in its' first month. It's overproduced, tuneless music was a poor showcase for the singer's voice, which on most tracks wasn't even Harvey's anymore. The cover photo showed a half-visible face in a blur, obscuring Krysti as much as possible. The video failed to gain airplay on TV. And the song was never on the radio.

Harvey shrugged it off, initially. The record was out, and the contract was fulfilled. He was in line for a big payday, and that's all he cared about. As a matter of pride, sure, he would have loved to have a big hit on his hands. He had tried to help promote it, and no go. But he had gotten what he wanted. Even if it wasn't a success.

He had done what he came here to do, and now he was done with it. He had made the sacrifices, turned on his better judgement and shat out the product they wanted. And that was the end.

Until, that is, a throwaway track called “Luv Me 4 Me” appeared on the soundtrack of the sleeper blockbuster hit movie of the summer. No one knew the movie was going to break big, and the Krysti Angel song followed on its’ coat tails. A music video using film from the movie was quickly manufactured and a new single was scheduled to be issued.

Publicity and promotion was needed. Fast. The moment of opportunity would certainly pass quickly. Harvey initially turned down the requests for more promotional work. He was packing for home. This was over, as far as he was concerned, and totally exhausted.

Then he got a phone call from David.

“You did read that contract carefully, didn’t you?” He said.

“You’re not telling me they can force me to do promotional work. I read that thing back and forth. And so did you.” Harvey replied.

“That’s not what I’m getting at. You have no further obligations, since two million is enough for you.”

“Right.” Harvey said. “See you soon.” He hung up the phone.

‘Enough for you.’ Was the phrase he immediately repeated to himself. Enough? Did that mean there was... more?

“Hi, Mr, Cannon. This is Krysti Angel.” Harvey dialed up the CEO of The Cannon Group, curious to figure this out. “I have a question. About the money thing.”

“Money thing.” Cannon repeated.

“Is there some sort of sales percentage I get from the record?”

“There’s a tiered system when your record hits certain sales goals, yes.”

“So if I sell more, I earn more?” Harvey said.

“Exactly. Up to five million,” Cannon replied, “in addition to the base amount.”

The flight was cancelled. He booked another hotel room. Harvey spent nearly five whole days getting ready for a new photo shoot, trying to get the perfect pictures to put on sleeves, in magazines and posters. This time, when the photo shoot came, Harvey was slimmer, trimmer and shapelier. He had upped his own dosage of female hormones while he went on diet pills. The kinds only celebrities can get. Or are desperate enough to take chances on. The pounds came off quickly.

He wanted sales. More records, more money. He was going to go home a multi-millionaire if it killed him.



The radio charts treated the record well. The single was at the number five spot, after being at fifteen the week before. Everyone was excited. Harvey had to hand it to Mr. Cannon, it went exactly as he said it would. Here he was, being “discovered” by the public, and sales were growing exponentially. The record was being sold out from its’ initial pressing. It was being put back into the shops by the crate-full. The downloads were going crazy off the music sites. White label twelve-inch dance mixes were breaking on the dance floor, and everybody wanted to get in contact with the newest, hottest artist in America.

From four in the morning until ten, it was radio interviews. In the afternoon, Harvey was being interviewed in print. In the evening, he was back in the studio recording b-sides.

Someone came along with a publishing deal, and Harvey signed it. Another person came along for personal appearances at record stores. Harvey signed it. Then someone mentioned a concert tour. There was so much money flying around, it didn't seem real anymore. Harvey was spending thousands on clothes, transportation and hotel rooms. Ten thousand dollars a day, by his count. But then, millions were coming in every time he signed a new contract.

Soon, TV came calling. And they wanted Krysti for sit-down interviews. At first, the record company kept it light – they said it was better to create demand than fill it. But soon enough, no request for an interview was turned down. Harvey flew from LA to New York and back three times in a single week.

And through this, he was still on the diet. Still on the workout routine. Still recording vocals. Still running himself absolutely ragged.



## **Chapter 10: It's Like You Never Left**

“Get in.” Harvey said, as his limo pulled up at LAX. “It’s going to be a long drive.”

“Huh?” David was confused. It had been almost two months since he had left Harvey in L.A., and he didn’t remember Harvey looking like he did now. It wasn’t a big difference, but it was there. He was thinner, that was for sure.

“David, this is my new production team, Smash & Grab.” Harvey said, gesturing to two men sitting on the opposite side of the limo.

“Production team.” David said, repeating it to himself to make sure he understood.

“They did the last three platinum records on the dance charts. We’re working on a new record.” Harvey explained. David smirked. “So you must be Smash, then.” He said to one of them.

“I’m Grab, yo.” The man said, smiling. It exposed a mouthful of gold braces.

“I rented a house out in Beverly Hills.” Harvey said, to break the awkwardness.

“Didn’t this limo used to have a black velvet interior?” David said, examining the insides of his ride.

“I liked pink better.”

“You’re kidding,” David had to say. “You said you got a house?”

“Well, I personally didn’t rent it – I had someone do it for me. It looks real nice!”

David still couldn’t believe it. “You rented a house!?”



"I'm not going to go back to Jean's place. And I need to stay out here for the publicity, recording, video shoots and stuff." Harvey shrugged off David's concern.

"You just can't go renting a house without checking with me first, all right?" David said with a severe look on his face. "I have to go over the books to see if..."

"David, you're not my father! I'm perfectly capable of making my own decisions!"

"I wasn't saying that! It's a matter of money!" David countered.

"Do you want me to book into the Y?! A public figure like Krysti Angel can't stay in a hotel for weeks on end." Harvey pointed out. "It's something I would had to do sooner or later."

"But how much does it *cost*, Harvey!?" David growled. "All this comes out of your earnings!"

"David, we're going to have to spend some money on the essentials, and this is an essential, okay?" Harvey said, to clear things up. "And who's Harvey?"

David looked at the confused expression of the two other men riding with them. "Uh... Uh... I was just talking to someone named Harvey. Brain fart. Sorry. My mistake."

"Whatever. I'm keeping the house." Harvey replied.

"Fine." David wanted to drop the subject.

Harvey was glad to let it go. "So relax." He sipped from a champagne glass. "Have a drink?"

"Uh... Should you be...?" David said. Harvey was old enough, but Krysti wasn't.

"Vitamin water." Harvey said, clearing up the confusion.

Previously unnoticed by David, he spotted Donyell in the corner, looking very impatient, and quietly cursing on his cell phone. But as soon as Donyell saw David, he put the

phone away without even saying goodbye to his call. "Well, welcome welcome back, Mister Ibsennnnn!" He sung out.

Once David and Donyell reintroduced themselves. He noted that Donyell's handshake was little more than a weak pinch. "You two have been busy." David said.

"Oh, let me tell you! We have been to the magazines, we have been to the the photographers, we have been to the film studios, we have been all *over!*" Donyell's head pivoted from side to side as he talked. "We own this town!"

"Well it sounds like you've had fun." David said, trying to keep up in a conversation he didn't want to have. He turned to Harvey, who was nibbling on a piece of celery. "Man, you're gonna have to be put on an allowance."

Harvey's eyes turned to Donyell, with a catty look. "Krysti Angel's a spoiled princess, David," Harvey said. "A girl's gotta live. It's part of the image."

"Mmm-hmm!" Donyell agreed.

David wasn't sure what to make of that. "Just take it easy, that's all I'm saying."

"Never mind him, Donyell. He's just a stick-in-the-mud." Harvey said, laughing.

David sat back and decided not to say anything until the ride was over.

Which it was, forty minutes later, when the limo pulled into the long, gated driveway of some sort of gaudy theme hotel. Or at least that's what David thought it was. It wasn't.

When David stepped out of the car, he couldn't believe it. "Holy fuck! You paid money to live *here?*"

Harvey smiled as he got out of the car. "Isn't it *too much?*"

David looked around the the naked statues spouting out water into a huge artificial pond. A garden of loud, neon

flowers packed every available square inch of the yard, excepting for the drive way which was made out of white gravel. A walkway of cobblestones wove around ornate French streetlights until it led to the house.

The house itself was in the style of a Spanish monastery – if it had been attacked by giant, man-eating plants. Vines and ferns emerged from every visible ledge. Trees shaded the building, nearly obscuring it totally. All one could see was vegetation and stucco. As they drank in the sights, a maid and butler slowly approached the car, and stood by patiently to greet the master of the house.

David saw them first, and realized who they were, and more importantly how expensive they were. “How much is this costing us?” David yelled at Harvey.

“Stop worrying!” Harvey yelled from the other side of the limo.

“I cant believe this!” David said, shouting into the air.

Harvey gave him a dirty look. “Don’t blow a gasket, David!”

“What?” David said. “Don’t I have the right?”

Harvey ignored him and ran into the house. David reluctantly followed. As he passed through the enormous oak doors, and into the white marbled interior, he wondered where the furniture was. But it was just the receiving room. In the next room, he found the furniture.

When the Nazis captured France, they plundered all it’s treasures and riches, taking it for their own. And they must have deposited it all in this one room in Beverly Hills.

A mad array of gold-framed paintings were scattered along the walls, almost concealing the maroon velvet wallpaper. Huge, overstuffed, gilded furniture straight from the palaces of beheaded kings were arranged in a tight

circle around an oval gold table with a turquoise stone top. Above it, a crystal chandelier with 1000 or so tiny bulbs hung on a golden chain from the vaulted ceiling. The dull orange shag carpet on the floor contrasted with everything else in the room, if not everything else on the planet.

Harvey's head popped up from behind one of the sofas. "Don't you love it?" He then hurdled the back of the sofa and arrived at David's feet, excited and deliriously happy. "It's so Hollywood!"

David had his hands on his head, gripping his hair in preparation of pulling it out. "What... in the world... are... you... thinking?" He said slowly as the words came to him. "This is going to cost a fortune, and it looks like Sigfield & Roy and Liberace threw up in here!"

"It's perfect! I love it!" Harvey squeaked.

"You're nuts." David said.

The expression on Harvey's face turned dark. "You can go back home if you want to David, nobody's stopping you. I like this. I think it's incredible!"

Donyell strolled in, followed by the dour maid & butler. "Wait 'till you see the safari room!" He said. He continued to walk on into a hallway, calling out "This way!"

Harvey turned to follow, but David grabbed him by the arm before he could move. "Are you sure? If I had read about this in the paper, I would have assumed you'd have lost your mind and totally sold out."

"It's Hollywood, David. The rules are different here! Everyone sells out. It's just a matter of how much."

"You're..." David looked around to see if anyone was around. No one was, but he lowered his voice. "...you're Harvey Angler, a man. You're an electrician. You're pretending to be a teenage girl, pretending you know how to

sing and pretending you know what you're doing! There's hardly even a real record yet!"

Harvey looked shocked. "If I want to get a house, I'll get whatever goddamned house I want! This is my life, and all you need to do is read the contracts and file the papers."

Harvey growled a feminine grunt. "If you want to go and tour the country in some crowded van for six months and eat 10,000 stupid peaches, then go ahead and be my guest. If you want to be up all hours of the morning, day and night answering the same stupid questions over and over, by all means do that. And if you want people prodding and poking you, serving horse feed for meals, making you work out until you sweat raw salt, and then having a bunch of overweight, balding men tell you that you're not appealing enough, then please take over for me! I earned this, I deserve it, and I'm going to enjoy it. And David..." He took a breath. "...Please call me Krysti in front of the h-e-l-p."

"Right." David replied. "I don't like it, but I won't stop you."

"Oh, like you could." Harvey replied.

"I can still take you in a fight."

"You have a glass stomach."

"You faint at the sight of blood."

Suddenly, Harvey was dead serious. "I couldn't do this without you, David. I'm looking to you to make sure this doesn't get out of control and I don't get taken advantage of."

"Besides the house, I guess?"

"Besides the house." Harvey laughed. "Just don't be afraid to tell me where things go off the rails."

"I've got no problem telling you you're insane."

“Good.” Harvey glanced at David to see if he was being sarcastic. “I have some contracts I need you to read. I already signed them, so see if I did anything stupid.”

“When are you going to learn not to sign contracts?”



Harvey got the first round of proofs back from the photographers and laid them out on his big marble table. He had hundreds, maybe as much as a thousand photos to look at. Krysti in denim, Krysti in silk, Krysti in hats, Krysti in heels. Almost every style and look that Krysti Angel could have was represented in these photos.

And Harvey didn't like any of them.

They came with some notes from the record company, notes that indicated which photos they favored. Sure enough, they were the ones where you could see the least of him. The more the photos obscured the truth, the more both Harvey and The Cannon Group liked them

It wasn't like Harvey didn't look like a girl enough, it was that he didn't look like a superstar. He just looked forgettably average. A little chubby, a little thick. And his face was attractive, but not remarkably so.

“Having a tough time deciding?” David said, walking to the table with a cup of coffee in his hand. It was about ten in the morning, but both harvey and David were still just waking up. “I like that one.” David said, pointing.

“Yeah, it's kinda blurry.” Harvey sighed. “Can't see anything.”

“So it's a little... artsy.”

“It's not going to sell a single copy of the record, though.”

“You've got a point, I suppose.”

“So how did those contracts look?” Harvey asked. He held a 6-grain muffin in his hand that he was picking apart like birdseed.

David gave him a menacing glare. “You know, you are damn lucky you didn’t sign anything you can’t get out of.”

“So It’ll be okay? It’s a lot of money.”

“Less than it looks like, there are a lot of expenses to cover. It’s not just raw cash. The deals are always more complicated than that.”

“But I still make some serious money, right?”

David sighed. He hated to give in to the idea that Harvey had actually done the right thing without his advice. “Yeah. Pretty much.”

“Good.” He returned his attention to the photos. Harvey fell back into a slouch. “I mean if the face were good, or the body was good, one or the other, I could get away with this.”

“Your body’s not too bad.”

“It could be better.”

“True, but... You’re not suggesting what I think you’re suggesting, are you?”

“I don’t know.” Harvey said. “But if it’s a choice between doing a little in-and-out thing at a clinic that wears off in a few weeks and making another million or two, which do you think I should do?”

“You really don’t think what you have is enough?”

“It’s enough to live comfortably for the next twenty years or so.”

David silently agreed with that. “So what would you have ‘done?’”

Harvey looked at some of the head shots. “The face would be the easiest thing to do.” He said, critically. “Plump up

the lips with a quick collagen shot. I could do the same with the cheeks and chin. It'll wear off in a few weeks."

David was still skeptical. "That's the most severe thing you'll have done to yourself, if you do it."

"The reward could be pretty big, though."

"I say do it." David said, surprising Harvey.

"Really? Seriously?"

David scratched his beard to look wise. "I know about that collagen stuff. I've tried a few cases of botched plastic surgery. The collagen is temporary, and you won't even have a scar if they go in through the mouth." He nodded, agreeing with himself. "Even better, there's no swelling after a day. We could do it this afternoon and re-shoot the photos in two days, and just beat the printing deadline."

"Okay. I'll phone Donyell and have him set up another shoot."

"Let me just find a reputable guy in the area. I've got some industry contacts and they can tell me who's good."

And then both men set off to plan their day.





## Chapter 11: A Third Hand

When Harvey awoke in the doctor's office, he was feeling extremely dizzy and disoriented. His face felt like he had just been stung by a hive full of bumblebees, which he fully expected. After all, he had just taken a series of shots in the face for collagen injections. He knew he was going to look monstrous for a few hours with all the swelling, but that was a given. Actually, he kinda wanted to see it before the swelling went down.

What he didn't expect was the searing pain in his abdomen.

As the nurse came in, he tried ask a question. "Whbbfft?" He said, his swollen lips getting in the way of talking. "Whbbfy muh bummy surb?"

"Now, don't move. The stitches will come out." She said with a comforting smile. "Doctor, he's awake," she said to an unseen figure.

Momentarily, the pain in Harvey's midsection was alleviated by his fixation on the lights above his head. So bright. So white. He then tried to shake off the fog in his head that made shiny things so interesting.

"Mr. Angel," The doctor said. Harvey didn't respond for a moment, not used being addressed in the masculine. "Back with us, I see."

"Um..." Harvey said, trying to focus his thoughts. "Whatbff..."

"Don't talk, Mr. Angel. The swelling won't let you talk for a few hours. And you don't want to open the wounds inside your mouth. Your assistant Donyell will be here in a moment to help you out to your limousine." The doctor

then picked up a piece of paper. “I do need you to clear one thing up for us, though.”

Harvey was handed a small stack of papers. He looked at them, trying to read. He was just able to make it out in his hazy state. They were medical consent papers.

“As you can see, you’ve signed the papers in someone else’s name. I’m afraid we’ll have to insist you sign them in your legal birth name, Mr. Angel.”

As Harvey examined the papers, he saw a signature for the collagen injections: Kyrsti Angel. He didn’t even remember signing them, for some reason. Was it the drugs? He read the rest of the text. It was a consent form with checkboxes on it, and Harvey hazily read through the list, looking for the checkmarks.

The problem was, with the medication starting to wear off and his wits coming back to him, he then realized he was being referred to as “Mister.”

They knew. Why would they know? Maybe because they were trained doctors and could spot things like this. Maybe because...

Then he came to an item on the list.

Liposuction.

And instead of being checked, it had a heart drawn around the box. He had approved it?

“I’m afraid, from a legal perspective, we’ll have to insist you sign these papers in your legal name, Mister Angel.”

He didn’t know which he was more worried about. The searing pain in his midsection or being discovered.



The new, brighter, feminine face of Krysti was much more photogenic. It looked good from any angle – sweet, innocent and pure. Well, at least in all the approved angles that were released from the record group's promotional department. And the photo retoucher's arms were probably worn out from all the smoothing of Harvey's rough male skin and twenty-five year old eyelids.

Still, magazines were publishing as many Krysti covers as they could. Posters were selling like crazy. Websites of Krysti images were popping up everywhere. Record stores were stacked to the rafters with Krysti CDs, and still selling out. Triple platinum in eight months.

The whole thing was snowballing. It was an honest-to-goodness sensation. Krysti Angel was big and getting to be a phenomenon that was taking the whole industry by storm.

In the middle of it all, sat twenty-three year old electrician Harvey Angler, smack dab in the center of a storm he had little control of. He had been here before, with control slipping from his fingers.

Losing control of his life was something that seemed to happen quite often to him, so it wasn't like this was an unusual feeling. It would be wrong, however, to say he was okay with it. But experience always teaches you something. And if any human on Earth was prepared for this, it was Harvey.

This time, he had built up a few layers of protection around him. At the outer layer was his record company. Inside that was his assistants, Donyell and the others. Then there was David, and all the people in his firm. Closer to the center was Harvey's Krysti exterior. That was the hard

exterior shell. Inside there, Harvey was enjoying the ride in relative comfort.

From his vantage point, Harvey saw the whole thing unfolding. He had seen it so many times before with starlets bursting on the scene. Girls who would make it big and then flame out.

He used to be fascinated by those careers. They'd have one hit – and some even had no hits – and they'd just live on the publicity until it died out. He didn't want Krysti to be one of those girls, though. So he decided not to lay back and enjoy a fleeting moment of fame, but to capitalize on every opportunity.

He asked to be on TV in any available time. Harvey did a few local shows first, then some national shows. Late night, mid day, morning. Krysti was a guest in demand. If you had her on your show, your ratings doubled. She was clearly the newest, biggest thing in the United States, and Harvey couldn't have been happier about it. He even had the injections done a few more times to keep up the new look.

Then, in one interview, a local TV talking head gave Harvey a compliment that ruined most of his fun. In the middle of a interview came a question. "Krysti," she said, "I think it's great that someone without a lot of God-given beauty can be given a little taste of what it's like to be famous."

For over two days, Harvey rolled the phrase around in his head. It was an insult, he had figured that much out. Certainly an unintended one, as the bubble-head who said it wasn't capable of such verbal acuity to say anything but the crudest observations.

But the subtext, if you could even call it that, was that he wasn't particularly attractive. Now that he had gone under the knife to improve his appearance, that observation stung. It was one thing when he was just a guy in a denim skirt, but now he had worked hard for some degree of acceptance as an attractive girl. He was eating bird seed and running seven miles a day, for heaven's sake!

And what was that bit about a "taste" of fame? Despite his best efforts, people still thought of Krysti as a one-hit wonder. They viewed her in the same terms he saw other starlets burn out. What was the key ingredient it took to remain in the headlines? To stay in the light of fame?



## Chapter 12: Famous for Being Famous

“David?” Harvey said, calling up his friend.

“Hey, Harvey.” David replied. “How are they hanging?”

“High and hidden.” Harvey answered, wincing as he just thought about it. Usually, he didn’t even notice the pain anymore, unless he sat down too quickly. “Thanks for reminding me, jerk.”

“What’s on your feminine teenage mind, Harvey?”

“Well...” Harvey said, slowly. “I’ve been thinking.”

“First mistake.”

“Do you think I’m a one-hit wonder?” Harvey asked.

“Yeah. And a damn good one. I’d put you up there with Toni Basil.”

“Oh.”

“Let me guess. You want more.”

“How did you know?”

“It’s been kind of a theme for you lately, Harv.”

“You’re not going to lecture me, are you?”

“It hasn’t worked yet.”

“Do you know how much money is out there?”

“Harvey, this has nothing to do with the money, and you damn well know it.” David wasn’t irritated. If anything, his voice just sounded slightly bemused. “You’re as famous now as you’ve ever wanted to be. And that’s what you like.”

“I want to do a world tour, David.” Harvey said, in effect affirming David’s statement. “I think touring would be the best way to get as much out of this as I can. In a tour, I take in more money, the record company takes a smaller percentage, and record sales increase as well. I can’t think of a reason not to do it.”



"Do you want me to make some calls, Harvey?"

"Find people who know how to do this sort of thing and then coordinate with Cannon. This is something I want to do."

"Are you really sure about this, Harvey? Once you do this, I don't think you'll be able to just disappear into history anymore. People will start to judge you a little harsher when you try to cling to fame."

"It's what I want to do. When you have that brass ring out there, David, you have to go for it. If I do this right, I can make this a career. I can live like a king."

"Queen."

"Whatever."

"You're sure."

"I'm sure. You'd tell me if I were doing the wrong thing, right?"

"I'm not your bitch, Harvey. I'd tell you."

"Okay."



In the middle of his early afternoon exercise routine, Harvey's doorbell rang. He ignored it, assuming it was part of the song he was aerobicizing to. The second time, he realized what it was and turned the music down. "Rosita!" He called out. His maid had been around just a minute ago. "Get the door! Por-fa-vor!"

Silence. And then the bell again.

Harvey sighed petulantly, shut the stereo off and grabbed a towel to dab his brow as he headed to the front door. He then draped it around his shoulders to slightly obscure the hot pink and black leotard he was wearing.

Checking his face in the mirror beforehand, Harvey tucked some stray hair into his pink sweatband, and he opened the door with the chain latch still attached – just in case someone was trying to break in. After all, Krysti was a big star. “Hello?” He sang.

“Oh,” said the FedEx guy who was half-way into filling out the “sorry we missed you” form. “I rang the bell.”

Harvey signed for the package and took it inside. It wasn’t so much a package as it was a giant Toblerone bar. Or at least it was packaged like that. A triangularly-shaped cylinder. He undid the end and found a tube inside.

“Thank you for your order, CHRISTINE AGEL,” read the receipt. Harvey grimaced. He hadn’t remembered ordering anything. He undid the tube and found a poster inside. Curious to see it, he unrolled it and found it to be rather large. He tried to get a look at it, but every time he tried to, one end would slip out of his grip and it would roll back up again.

Harvey hunted for a piece of tape in the kitchen, deciding the only way to see the poster was to put it up. He carried it into the exercise room, and affixed the top of the poster to the wall of mirrors. He unrolled it and then taped it to the bottom.

Now, finally able to see whatever it was that he ordered, he was confused. It was a life-size poster. A poster of Emily Grant. Not the Emily Grant he had met, but the Emily Grant of a while ago. Before she had really broken as a big star. She was just a kid back then, fresh-faced and still with a hint of baby fat in her cheeks. She was so innocent and delightfully young. That was before the drugs. Before the sex tape that got broadcast all over the place. Before that public nervous break-down.

It was a goofy poster, too. It was titled “Grow with Emily!” It was obviously made for younger girls, to chart their height as they grew. A ruler stretched up the center with Emily on one side standing sideways, and another shot of her on the other side standing forward with an impish grin on her face.

Unable to resist, Harvey stepped up and measured himself. Emily was about an inch shorter. Only an inch. He felt embarrassed. “Five five,” he mumbled to himself. “I’m such a whimp.” He looked at the poster once more, trying to figure out where it had come from. Maybe it was a gift. Maybe Amber ordered it as a gag. It wasn’t important.

Then as he turned, the mirrors on the opposite wall caught his eye. As Harvey stood, he looked to be standing right next to Emily Grant. Kidding himself, he struck the same poses in the poster and made himself laugh.

But after he the amusement had died away, he took a longer look. Emily was a little thinner in the waist. Her legs had better definition. Her neck was thinner, her arms more slender looking. And she had the most incredible cheekbones.

And her smile. She had such a fabulous smile.



A deranged figure leapt at Krysti, its’ hands ready to claim whatever prize they could. The flailed viciously, clawing for life. It’s hollow, animal eyes cried out for anything it could claim as its’ own. “I love you Krysti!” It screamed.

The gauntlet of crazed humanity that Krysti had to pass through whenever she wanted to move anywhere was like sailing a tornado of flesh and sweat. The hands grabbed

and clutched at her, the faces pleading and desperate for recognition. At the heart of the swirling, feverish, screaming mob of teenagers, it sounded like one was trapped inside the engine of a jet plane.

Harvey took his time, occasionally taking something offered, signing it and giving it back to whoever claimed it. "Thank you!" He said. "I love you all!" He went on down the line, kissing, smiling and waving to the crowd.

"Krysti! Krysti! Please, Krysti! Krysti Krysti! *Krysti!* Please! Krysti! *I love you!*"

With a loud thud, the door closed behind Krysti's entourage. The sound of the crowd was muffled down, as the activity of being backstage at a concert took over his senses.

A camera crew and interviewer dove in, the lens and microphone probing for anything it could catch. Only weeks of this sort of behavior had trained Harvey not to blink or squint as the camera light blinded him. "K-gel! What kind of show can we expect tonight?" The man asked, using a nickname the tabloids had given Krysti.

"It's going to a fantastic show! I hope everyone loves it!" Krysti squealed. She put on the brightest, most luminous smile she knew how.

Another question: "What will you be wearing tonight!?"

Krysti giggled. "You're just going to have to wait and see!" Harvey turned, following his bodyguards down into the bowels of the amphitheater. Another microphone was stuck into his face, with another blinding camera light that turned his world white. He didn't even blink. He just kept smiling.

“Krysti! The show is sold out! 60,000 people have come to see you tonight! How does that make you feel!?” Another interviewer asked.

“I’m so humbled! I’m glad people like my music! It’s going to be a great show!” Krysti said. Then Harvey had to get away. “I’m sorry!” He apologized and pouted. “I have to get ready!”

Finally, his bodyguards cut off access to the throngs of people following him, and ushered Krysti into her dressing room.

Inside – as was contractually required in Krysti’s rider – were four couches, two easy chairs, three full-length mirrors, one 44” projection TV, two CD players, two large coffee tables and a buffet of food. An iced tub of 24 spring water bottles, one quart of cranberry juice, 12 cans of Coke and assorted Gatorade flavors. A kettle of hot water, a box of lemon tea and a tin of assorted international coffees. There were two deli platters, a plate of fresh fruit, a plate of veggies with ranch dip, four tunafish sandwiches, two bags of Cool Ranch Doritos, one box of Captain Crunch, one box of Boo Berries, 12 assorted candy bars, a small box of Andes chocolate mints – and what the hell, a couple of corn dogs.

There was also one Amber, who was working her way through the box of Captain Crunch. “Hey, gurl!” She said.

“Hey!” Harvey replied. “I like those pants.”

She was wearing a pair of glitter-speckled gold lamé stretch pants. “They’re yours,” Amber replied.

“I know.”

“You gonna have any time to hang out?”

“No.” Harvey said, dejectedly. “They got me running crazy today. In fact, I gotta change.”

“Kay!” Amber said, getting on her feet. “I’ll see you later.”

“Hey, is that one of my wigs you’re wearing?”

Amber blushed. “No.” She said. “I just like the way you did your hair, so I got mine done just like.” Before harvey could say anything, she left. He just shrugged it off. Kinda creepy, but kinda flattering.

Now that he was left alone, Harvey looked at the contents of his dressing room. He spent twenty minutes counting everything, making sure that all of his petty whims and desires had been met to the letter. He was positively overjoyed to note that they had forgotten the required 20” x 30” oriental rug, and whispered it into the ear of one of Krysti’s attendants. He left, and Harvey was a twitter with the knowledge he could throw a wonderful, spoiled showbiz fit when the stage manager came to apologize. What fun was it to be a star unless you could act like one?

Checking the time, Harvey quickly downed the hormone pills he stashed in his purse and then called Donyell on his cell phone. Only a few minutes later, Donyell and a couple of his helpers came in with two racks of glittery, gauzy clothing for tonight’s performance. There would be seven costume changes, each outfit more spectacular than the next.

Harvey’s first outfit was a white men’s dress shirt that tied closed under Krysti’s ‘breasts’ and pleated plaid skirt. Of course it was dressed up with sequined highlights and made from slivery, shiny materials that gave it that “stage” look. After he dismissed his staff from the room, Harvey took off his black tank top and slipped out of his jeans.

For the first time in a while, he detached the expensive artificial breasts from his body, the glue stretching and snapping from his skin. He massaged his chest – his poor,

abused chest. The glue had been on him for several months now, and left his skin raw and irritated. Ever since he had committed to Krysti's packed schedule of personal appearances, he had to wear the breasts every day, and usually for over fourteen hours or more. He had paid a hefty price for these, over five hundred dollars for each. They were his "walkaround" pair, and he needed to change into his "active" pair for the show.

He was a little ashamed that he had multiple pairs and had actual need for different types of breast forms. He also owned backups for each type. He had some for everyday use, different ones for stage performances and another type for photo shoots. Harvey placed the pair he used for these live shows into his nylon bra. These were lightweight forms that weren't very realistic, but being foam rubber, they didn't throw off his center of balance when dancing.

Harvey checked to make sure he was still tucked away. You couldn't see a trace of his manhood in his panties. He remembered when that used to hurt, having it crammed and squeezed into hiding. Now, he barely even thought about it unless he had to go to the bathroom. There was no time to worry about that now. He'd deal with it at a later time. For no, it was invisible and that was the important part.

Critically, Harvey looked in the mirror to evaluate Krysti's appearance. Her padded butt looked good, the glue-on chest was ample, and that liposuctioned waist was slender and trim. Not to mention her young face and long hair. Of course, the featureless "active" breast forms were for heavy-duty activity and didn't look quite right on this body. Harvey almost seemed sad that he could see through his own illusion.

Donyell stuck his head through the door, allowing the thundering noise from the supporting act to burst through the opening. "Snap snap!" Donyell said, melodically. "You've got fifteen minutes, girl!" The door shut again, muffling the blaring music.

Harvey sighed and put on his costume, including the dancer's heels he had gotten used to over the last few weeks of rehearsals. The practice had been relentless. A choreographer had been hired to make the show one long production number, something Harvey had been assured was absolutely necessary for the sort of talent Krysti was. After all, he had been largely hired on his dancing ability.

A group of dancers had been assembled from a pool of people who did this sort of thing for a living, and rehearsals had taken two and a half weeks, five hours a day. Harvey insisted on being there for every single minute, because he wanted to make the tour a big success. He wanted to do this right.

Not to mention that the money would be incredible, if they sold out the huge arenas Krysti had been booked for. And oddly, the record company was taking a much smaller cut of the profits. So Harvey was sweating, strutting, dancing and lip-synching with his dancers and hired band to get everything perfect.

It brought him back to his days on the van, as the cramped quarters and forced closeness formed friendships with people Harvey wouldn't normally associate with. He had grown particularly close to Krysti's male lead dancer, Chase. He was a ruggedly handsome man, the sort that could have easily gone into movies or TV. And he was quite easy to talk to, and was a big fan of football. Harvey hadn't found another man who liked to talk sports in a while, so



he welcomed the opportunity. Of course, he Harvey had to act 'dumb' when it came to sports, being as it didn't fit Krysti's image to be a big pigskin fan.

Harvey was familiar enough with Chase to rib him about being a man's man, yet dancing in costume on stage. But Chase was quick to point out that there were very few jobs around where you could get a good workout and stare at the bare asses of so many toned girls all day.

"Hadn't thought of that." Harvey said, wondering why he hadn't thought of that. If he was smart, he would have hired only girls to dance with onstage. Then an ugly thought occurred to him. "Do you stare at mine?" Harvey asked, curious to know.

Chase laughed. "I learned long ago not to criticize the meal ticket."

Harvey joined in the laugh, a little nervously.

## Chapter 13: Trainspotting

As the sold-out show pulled into it's final week, it stopped being fun for Harvey. Yes, it had started out as a exciting, even exhilarating experience, but two months into it, Harvey had started to feel listless. A few weeks later he had become bored. And finally, he had grown to openly hate the whole thing.

He couldn't hang out with Chase, as the paparazzi was always trailing Krysti's every move. There were already rumors that he was carrying Chase's baby. Harvey was relatively sure that wasn't the case, but proving it was pointless. And besides, it seemed that being linked with your lead male dancer was an 'in' thing for Krysti's ilk.

But it isolated him. He couldn't risk being photographed in public. There was always paparazzi following him, but now every idiot on the face of the earth had one of the stupid camera phones. There were just too many opportunities to be exposed. So day after day, city after city, Harvey found himself locked in his hotel room, with nothing but a TV and a phone to keep him company.

But who was he going to call? He had so few friends anymore. Amber was doing her acting thing, she had gotten a part in a movie. Jean had usually occupied his time every day, giving him almost nothing of a personal life. Without her, there weren't many more people in his world that he knew. David was just about the only person he really could talk to anymore. When he came to visit occasionally, Harvey was always eager to see him. Desperate to see him, really.

“So when are you coming to see me David? I’m in the area.” Harvey said to his cell phone.

“Busy here wrapping some things up.” David replied. He sounded distracted. “Keeping up with your stuff isn’t easy. Very busy.”

“I’m not working you too hard, am I?” Harvey asked.

“No!” David replied. “No, it’s a good kind of busy. Lots of billable hours.”

Harvey supposed that was good. Of course, he was the one paying for the hours. But he had a lot anyway. “Well, when do you think you can drop by? I’m awfully bored.”

“Uh-huh.” David said. Harvey could hear him typing on a keyboard in the background. He was obviously not paying attention. “You bet.”

“David!” Harvey shrieked, in his girlish voice. “Just listen to me for a second!”

The keyboard continued to clack. “Listen, it’s great to hear you’re doing so well. I may not be able to get out to see you, but if you have the time, I’m sure my staff would love to meet you. I’ll be in touch.”

And then the line went dead.

Harvey tossed his pink bejeweled phone into a satin-sheathed pillow in anger.

He went over to the couch and threw himself down in the seat. But he was restless. He got right back up again and then paced around for a minute before heading to the bathroom. He closed the door behind him and then took a long look at himself in the mirror. Then he focused on the poster behind him – the “Grow With Emily!” poster he had pinned to the back wall. He stood beside it. Closer. He was getting closer.

A knock on the front door meant that it was time for the day's schedule to begin.

"Just a minute." Harvey replied in a sweet voice. He took a deep breath, checked himself in the mirror and touched up his lipstick. Then, he grabbed a pair of sunglasses and hid his face behind them. Grabbing a long faux fur mink coat, Harvey wrapped it around himself and went to the door. "I'm ready." He said, as he opened it.

Donyell was on the other side. "Girl, you know the routine. Radio interviews, print interview, CD signing. We even have you throwing out the first pitch at a baseball game today. Then rehearsal, sound check, meeting your local fan club, contest winner, and then the show."

Harvey sighed. It had been like this for months now.

"And then after the show..." Donyell said, as the two entered the elevator at the end of the hall. The door slid shut with authority.

The alarm went off. Harvey woke up, looked at the clock. It was on the other side of the bed today. It was another bed today. The new clock read eight AM. It was just enough time to do his beauty routine. What city was this?

By eleven, a knock on the door meant that it was time for the day's schedule to begin. He put the poster away.

"Just a minute." Harvey replied in a sweet voice. He took a deep breath, checked himself in the mirror and touched up his lipstick. Then, he grabbed a pair of sunglasses and hid his face behind them. Grabbing a long faux fur mink coat, Harvey wrapped it around himself and went to the door. "I'm ready." He said, as he opened it.

Donyell was on the other side. "Monring, K-gel! You know this routine. Radio interviews, print interview, CD signing. Oh, you're to do an appearance at the local mall

today. Then rehearsal, sound check, meeting your local fan club, contest winner, and then the show.”

Harvey sighed.

“And then after the show...” Donyell said, as the two entered the elevator at the end of the hall. The door slid shut like a jail cell.

## Chapter 14: The Chicken Pox

The alarm went off. It was... under his panties? Harvey felt like crap. He rolled around and went back to sleep. Someone would surely wake him in time for...

The lock to his hotel door had come open, a streak of fiery bright light burst into his pitch black room. "Oh, Lordy lord." He heard. Then the pillow over his head was ripped away. With blurry, dried eyes, Harvey could see the panic-stricken face of Donyell. It was even more panicked than normal.

"Get up, girl! You've got to get up!" He said, an unusual tone of genuine dread in his voice.

Obligingly, Harvey did, just remembering to pull the sheets over his flat chest as the lights were flicked on. "Ow!" Harvey said, the light stinging his eyes. "What's going on?" He said, his head hurt so bad.

"You have to tell me where you were last night, Krysti girl." Donyell said, being very deliberate in his words. "You need to tell Donyell what happened last night."

"Last night?" Harvey said, trying to kick-start his mind. It had just been like every other night for the past few months. A late plane that arrived in the dead of night, checking into the hotel, collapsing in bed...

Then Harvey looked down at the foot of his bed. A boot was there. A man's leather boot. Her sunglasses were there as well.

Focusing even farther beyond the foot of the bed, he saw a tripod. And a small video camera perched on top of it. "Whazzat?" He slurred, asking Donyell.

"It ain't no good," was his reply.



By the time they had gotten four or five cups of coffee into Harvey, he had been watching it over and over. He just could not believe it.

“Extra just called and I hung up. Inside Edition I told to fuck off.” Donyell said, re-entering the room. He had been fielding phone calls for the past fifteen minutes. Finally he just shut his cell phone off. Being Donyell, he did so by dramatically flushing it down the toilet.

Harvey rubbed his temples. “How many sites have it now?”

“Who knows how many. Once it gets out there, it’s gone worldwide.”

Harvey slumped back in his chair. He just did not know how, who, or even when it had occurred. But he did know what it was. What it was was a sex video, starring Krysti.

It shouldn’t have been possible. But there it was. It was incredibly grainy, lit in night-vision green and off-center, but that’s what it was. The video showed Krysti arriving in the room, some guy on her arm, and they proceed to fall all over each other, saying trite, cliché things about how much they wanted each other – and then they get in bed. The video ends a minute after that, showing a fluttering bed sheet moving around like waves in the ocean.

Harvey had gone over the video so many times now. It just wasn’t possible. It couldn’t be. It just couldn’t. But those were his things you could see in the video. It’s how he was dressed last night. It’s how he had done his hair. And it was definitely his voice. Or Krysti’s voice, to be precise.

At least nothing on it was going to blow his cover.

“I can’t even get through to your lawyer.” Donyell said. “And Mr. Cannon wants you to call him PDQ and ASAP.”

Harvey nodded his acknowledgment. He just had to keep watching the video. Knowing that roughly eleven billion million people were doing the same was making him sick.

As he tried to slow it down, and watch everything in slow motion, Harvey was more and more convinced it really was him in the video. You never actually saw anything risqué in it. At no time was Krysti naked, and at no time was the guy nude – whoever he was. In fact, the language wasn’t even that bad either. All Krysti was saying was “I want you so bad,” “I gotta have you, baby,” and other clichés. The guy said much the same thing, adding “we’re gonna get crazy,” and “we’re gonna do it wild style.”

And when they actually got into bed, Krysti was just unbuttoning her top when you lost sight of her behind the bed sheets. It was all PG, fortunately.

“I’m only going to ask this once, because I have to.” Donyell said. “Were you drinkin’? Were you on anything?”

Harvey had to think. He could remember last night in just vague terms. He had a decent show, but had taken a spill at one point and fallen on his shoulder. The crowd never noticed, and he went on with the show. But then afterwards, there was a guy who said he was a doctor and gave Harvey some tranquilizers and painkillers to deal with the badly injured shoulder. Harvey could still feel the pain as he twisted his arm.

“The painkillers?” Harvey replied. “I don’t drink, and I’ve never done drugs.”

Donyell looked at Harvey with doubting eyes.

“Honestly!” Harvey insisted. “I’m not nearly old enough.” He insisted. That bit was a lie, but a very convenient one.



But that still left the problem of what exactly had happened last night. Harvey took the painkillers immediately, and then the rest of the night quickly dissipated from his memory. The very next thing he recalled was waking up just an hour ago.

It was clear to him that the painkillers had been a bit of an overdose. He had practically blacked out after taking them. But what had happened after that was something he couldn't explain. Had someone hypnotized him into doing it? Had someone tricked him somehow? How could he have possibly gone along with this?

"I think we're going to need to do some damage control, girl." Donyell said, looking like he needed some painkillers himself.

Harvey grabbed a cell phone and dialed one of her presets. "Hey, Amber? It's me." Harvey's girly voice was shaking. "Could you come over? I need some help."

The next few hours were spent in the middle of a hurricane. Phone calls went back and forth, stories were told, retold and told again. Krysti was having to explain herself to everyone at the Cannon Group, to her touring group and to her entourage. Then, arrangements were made for public statements. A war room was built out of Donyell's suite. A command center was made out of the Cannon Group's offices halfway across the country.

But when the hurricane subsided, the apocalypse followed. A press conference was held that afternoon, just in time to beat the evening newsmagazines deadlines. Harvey was out front and had a prepared statement to read. David and his team had been faxing things back and forth from Cannon Group and from Harvey. Seconds before Harvey

was going to appear before the cameras, the statement was put into his hands.

As soon as he stepped into the room, cameras shot off like machine guns. Stroboscopic flashes lit the room. A wave of people advanced on the table, all struggling to get the bet angle. Amongst all the commotion, Harvey couldn't even read the fax from behind his sunglasses. He handed it to Amber to read for him.

"I categorically deny that the video showing on television and on the internet is representative of my values and how I live my life. I can only hope that my fans believe me when I say that this video is an exaggerated fabrication, and whomever it is that made it are not people I know, and this video was not made with my approval or knowledge. I apologize to anyone offended by this video, as I am also offended by it just as much as you are. I would never appear in an video of this type or conduct my private life in this way. I want all my fans to know that. Thank you."

Amber read the statement and then they quickly exited the room, as hundreds of clicking cameras snapped their images. It had been carefully worded, making sure that the message was that Krysti had nothing to do with this video – but no patent denial that it wasn't her in it. After all, Harvey was eerily certain it was.

And the only thing Harvey could do was sit in his dark hotel room and watch the news as they obsessed over this. He felt helpless. And he had no answers as to why it was happening.

All he knew was that someone had sabotaged his career.



"Fantastic work. Well played." Mr Cannon said to his speaker phone.

"Honestly, Edward, I didn't have a thing to do with it."

"This had your fingerprints all over it." He said.

The voice at the other end of the line chuckled. "Really, you give me too much credit. I was calling to congratulate you. I was worried you're getting smart enough to do this without my help."

Edward Cannon eased back into his leather chair. "Having a young female performer get caught in bed with a sex tape is almost like a kid getting the mumps. Every kid catches it. They get well and then they go on, better for the experience. It happens to everyone these days."

"Look, I've gotten kind of bored with the whole routine. I was hoping I could come up with something new this time."

"Stick with the classics." Edward replied. "It kept Emily Grant's name in the news. It did the same with Paris Hilton, Rob Lowe, Charlie Sheen, so many I can't even count. There's no better way to get your name in the headlines again. It will probably carry Krysti through to her next album. We'll give it some sort of title like "Fallen Angel" or something like that. Make it sound like a confession. People will eat it up."

"Plus, now you can dress her up in more sexually mature fashions and give her some sex appeal." The voice said "That's worth a bit right there. No more restraints."

"Broaden the appeal." Edward replied. "Like I said, a classic."

"Just let me know next time you do this, Edward."

"Me? I certainly didn't have anything to do with it. I still think it's yours."

“Wish it was. It was nicely executed. It even really looks like her in the video.”

“You know, it’s odd. If I didn’t know better, I’d say this girl was just setting herself up for these things. I’ve barely applied any pressure to her at all. It’s like she want us to exploit her.”

“If only all our talent was so accommodating!”

“We’d be out of a job!”

“Ha! Well, we can’t have that!”

“Ah well. I was going to say, that Krysti’s working out so well, we don’t really need to get any other girls into the program. I think we’re good for at least 24 to 36 months with her.”

“Really? So you mean I don’t have to drive that Godforsaken van all over the place this year?”

“Give the Yes! to Life! gang a much-needed rest. You don’t need to use that scam for the time being.” Edward said, satisfied. “Krysti’s going to be big, and I don’t need to give her any competition from our own company. She’ll be shitting gold bricks for us for some time.”

“Until you want me to get her hooked on drugs and blow all her money.” The voice said.

“Until then.” Edward answered. “I’ll be in touch.”



## Chapter 15: Broken

Amber appeared to have been waiting forever for her friend to show up. She had probably been only waiting a minute or two, but her natural impatience must have made her feel like it was an hour. "Where have you been, K-gel?" She said.

"Quiet!" Harvey replied, making sure no one else had heard. They were meeting at an outdoor cafe. Harvey had dressed in sweats, sunglasses and a baseball cap to hide Krysti's identity from the world. It was not good to be seen in public right now. "You're going to get me spotted!"

"You worry too much." Amber said, sipping her drink.

"Some guys followed me in a car from the hotel. I had to take three taxis to lose them." She looked around again.

"At least I think I lost them."

"Just relax! It's a nice day out, and as far as anyone cares, we're just two girlfriends having lunch."

"You relax. My world is coming apart, fast."

"So enjoy it while it lasts. C'mon, Krys! Take a deep breath."

Harvey looked at her funny.

"I mean it, take a deep breath!"

Harvey took a breath.

"Deeper!" Amber demanded.

Harvey took a deep, lung-filling breath.

"And let it out... Let it out..." Amber said. "Now, don't you feel better?"

"I guess." Harvey shrugged.

"Do you want to talk about it?"

"Not really." Harvey said. "But what's really driving me nuts is all the attention I'm getting! I mean, I'm just a stupid pop star! I mean, move on to something else! Isn't there a war or something going on somewhere?"

"It's not fair."

"No it's not fair!" Harvey whined. "I get all these questions, I can't do any interviews without them asking me about the tape, and even people in my own entourage are asking me about it!"

"The nerve!"

"I'm not kidding! My own people!" Harvey slumped in his chair. "It's all so overwhelming, it's driving me nuts!"

"Well, I could take some of that off your shoulders, y'know." Amber said. "I wouldn't mind helping out, if you need it."

"Like?"

"Like answering the phone for you, or doing some appearances and sticking up for you. I can't bear to see you taken advantage of like this!"

"But you're doing so well with your own career!" Harvey replied. "I don't want you to toss that aside just for me."

"We're friends, Krysti. Best friends. And y'know? Best friends do, like, stuff for each other n' things."

"You'd do that for me?" Harvey was overwhelmed.

"Of course I would." Amber drank from her glass again. "It's so not the drama."

"Well... Okay. You tell Donyell that I said it was cool. He'll get you a room at the hotel and we'll figure out where to go from there."

"Awesome." Amber smiled to herself. "Now that that's settled, let's eat. Can I order you a drink? They have a great wine spritzer."

"I'm only sixteen. And so are you."

"They don't card here." She said. "No one would dare, anyway."

Harvey and Amber giggled, conspiratorily.



The rehearsal was chugging along as normal. No new routines were being introduced today, as the show was in its' last two weeks. No one seemed particularly pressed to introduce any new wrinkles this close to the tour ending.

Of course, there was a contract David had faxed over three or four times to take the show to Asia and South America for a few more weeks. It wasn't high on Harvey's list right now to do anything about it. He was looking at the time off as a live preserver in an ocean of boredom.

The music stopped pounding, Chase grabbed Harvey and thrust him into the air on the final beat. In the show, there'd be a big explosion of fireworks. In rehearsal, all that happened was a lingering awkward silence.

After a moment, the group posing around Harvey broke up and Chase settled Harvey down onto the ground again.

There would have been blinding lights on stage at that point, but not in rehearsal. All that met the end of the routine was some coughing back stage.

"Do you want to set up for the next one?" The stage director asked.

Harvey waved him off. "That's 'Rose Without any Thorns,' right? I think we all know it by now."

"Let's break then." The director replied. "Break everyone!" He yelled, clapping sharply.



The dancers then wandered off into various directions, as Harvey grabbed a towel and drink from an assistant.

“Hey, you doing okay?” Chase asked.

It took only a moment for Harvey to figure out what he was talking about, which was the video. Everyone wanted to talk about the video. “I’m okay,” he sighed. “Well, eventually.”

“I can’t believe how weird it must be to have that sort of thing out there like that.” Chase said. “If it was you, I mean.”

Harvey shrugged, in an effort to neither confirm or deny it, but that was effectively admitting to it. “It happens when you get famous, I suppose.”

“Well, if it was me, I don’t know if I could deal with everything.” Chase sunk his head into a towel for a moment to deal with the sweat. “You wanna burn off some steam and do something?”

“I can’t go anywhere. The press is hounding me.”

Chase thought about it. “We can just order a movie on the spectravision. Do some room service and hang out.”

“Yeah, some time to unwind might do me good.” Harvey reflected.

“I could get some wine, we could order up a couple of steaks...”

Harvey laughed. “That sounds like a date, Chase.”

“So... what if it was, would that be okay?”

Harvey was taken aback. “Uh... Well, what about that rule of yours, about the meal ticket?”

“The tour’s almost over. It’d be a shame not to get to know you a little better before it was over.” Chase said, a glint in his eye. “And besides, I kinda see you a little differently now.”

“Different?”

“You know, I thought maybe you were a little stuck up. But now I think there’s a party girl in there who comes out from time to time.”

“A party girl.” Harvey said, unsure he had heard that correctly.

“So, what say you and I meet up at your room in about an hour or so, and just get comfortable for a night in?”

“I’d like that.” Harvey said, running his finger down Chase’s chest. Suddenly, he recoiled, grabbing his finger back. “B... but... I have to go over some contracts and... stuff.”

“Rain check?” Chase asked.

“Yeah...” Harvey was trying to collect himself. What had possibly take a hold of him to just say what he had said? He was acting like... like... Oh, God, what the hell was going on? “Yeah, I’ll take a rain check.”



Harvey tried to rationalize the misstep with Chase as a one-time thing. Kind of like when you go up to the top of a tall building and you have the tiniest instinct to jump off. Sometimes you just think or say the most dangerous thing possible, just because your brain spits it out there in your subconscious. Not that he was really thinking it. He’d never go on a date. With a guy. It was just something he said. It was just a mistake.

But he hadn’t really believed that. It was just a lie he was telling himself. Deep down, he knew something was desperately wrong in his head. If it was the grind of the tour, or the pressure of being famous, he couldn’t say. Maybe

because of the “unique” situation he found himself in as a teen starlet was wearing on him worse than he thought.

So, Harvey called the tour manager and told them to cancel the show for tomorrow. He said it was a sore throat, and escaped in the limo before anyone could challenge it. There’d be hell to pay when he got back, but Harvey just needed to take the day.

The next concert was scheduled for the local amphitheater. Not local in terms of where they happened to be, but Harvey’s local amphitheater, back in his home town. He had been there many times growing up, watching college basketball and hockey games.

In fact, it was close enough that Harvey had just decided to drive out to his hometown all on his own. Well, no. Not really. He was obligated to bring along the camera crew for this video channel he was supposed to have following him. Sort of an official documentary or reality show thing. He was getting 1.4 million for it, and had already spent it. So he really didn’t have a choice. Besides, wouldn’t it be cool to have some video of the hometown girl who made it big come back to town?

The answer was no. Harvey wondered why he had ever thought of it. He really just needed time away from everything and everyone, and here he was, having to put on an act in front of the camera. Was this craving for fame so deeply imbedded that he couldn’t spend ten minutes away from the press?

Screw it, a voice told him. I need to rebuild Krysti’s image, and this is the perfect opportunity.



Harvey tried to focus on the scenery outside the tinted windows. Tucked into his limo, on his way home, he was seated across from a camera man who was stealing crude glances at him. Next to the guy was some glamor-boy reporter with a two hundred dollar haircut and a goatee. It was a contest between the two to see who could look the most bored.

Secretly, Harvey was excited. Excited to see the places and people he had once been so close to. And excited to see the jealous, bitter look in their eyes as an untouchable teen princess like her strode through that little po-dunk town, doing anything she wanted to, and throwing around her money and fame like holy water purifying the unclean. It was going to be so satisfying, he might just explode.

“Krysti. What does it feel like, going back home after all your success?” The haircut asked.

“I have kinda mixed feelings, Dirk.” Harvey said, trying to look thoughtful. “Can we try that again?”

“Sure Krysti.” The man known as Dirk was maybe in his late thirties, trying desperately to look young and hip with his goatee and spiky frosted hair. He an VJ for NYX, a New York-based music video program that was falling all over itself to get this opportunity. “Let’s pick it up from your response.”

“I...” Harvey looked thoughtful and reflective. “I guess I sorta have conflicting feelings, Dirk.” He sighed. “It’s going to be a lot of fun to see all the people I love so much. But, I’m still a little nervous.” Harvey had built up a little tear in Krysti’s eye. “I just hope they don’t have any... Well, I just hope people don’t think I’ve changed because of success. I’m really just a small-town girl at heart.”

Dirk's peppy mood turned dour all of the sudden, and he laid on the sincerity. "A few words on the passing of Emily Grant."

"Cut," Harvey said. "Passing? Did she die?" Harvey asked, astonished at the news.

"This morning. OD'd." Dirk replied.

Harvey straightened back up and put the same look of fake sincerity on her face that Dirk had. "Roll." She said to the cameraman. "It's awful news. I'm *devastated*. Show business is one giant family, and to lose anyone is tragic beyond words. I think that all of us will have her friends and family in our prayers tonight." He looked to Dirk. "Is that good?"

"Okay. Brilliant. Yes. I think that's all we need for now." Dirk said. The cameraman and sound man deactivated the equipment and set it down.

A half hour later, the limo had pulled into the main street of town. "Why don't you get out so you can film me arriving back home?" Harvey suggested to the cameraman. The cameraman replied with a look that said "Don't tell me how to do my job, you little twerp." He then checked with Dirk for the okay.

"Great idea." Dirk answered. We can get a crowd ready for your arrival. That'd be a great shot. A limo pulls up, the kids see Krysti coming home and they go nuts. Great shot."

"We can get out here and you circle around for a little bit, and meet us right back here in a few." The cameraman said.

"That's great stuff." Dirk said. "We'll meet you back here in, say, a half hour? That should give us enough time to get a crowd together."

“Okay.” Harvey said. “But Dirk, you stay with me, because I need to go over some other ideas I have. I want to have you shoot some other stuff too.”

“Got it.” Dirk answered. He nodded to the cameraman, and he got out and trotted off. And so, Harvey found himself alone with Dirk.

“I can’t tell you how much I like your work, Dirk.” Harvey said. It was time to butter him up. “I’ve always thought you were the cutest guy on NYX.”

“Really?” Dirk said. “Thanks Krysti. And I appreciate all you’re doing for us.”

Harvey got closer. “Is that shirt silk, Dirk?” She whisked a finger along his sleeve. “It is! You know, I won’t sleep on anything but silk anymore. Its’ touch is addictive.” That was no lie. In fact, it was now part of his hotel accommodations rider.

“Krysti? I mean, is this...” Dirk was unsure of her intentions. “I mean, I don’t want to...”

Harvey winked at him. “I bet your goatee tickles when girls kiss you.” He giggled. That should be enough to keep him under Krysti’s spell, Harvey thought to himself. Harvey backed off and looked in his purse. He leaned back in his seat and flipped open his cell phone.

Dirk grabbed her by the arms forcefully. The phone dropped to the floor. “So, you’re a dirty girl?” He said with more than a hint of interest. He then grabbed her loose shirt and tore it down her body, exposing her convincing breasts.

Harvey looked into his eyes and saw lust. Dirk then pinned her to her seat. He pulled the shirt completely off, as Harvey struggled against his control. “What the fuck are you doing!?” Harvey shrieked. “Get the hell off of me!”

But Dirk then ran his fingers lightly over Harvey's exposed nipple. And shocking himself, Harvey moaned in pleasure. He could really feel it.

The sound energized Dirk, making him even more bold. Before Harvey could stop him, he had grabbed the top of his jeans and started to try and undo them.

"No!" He yelled. "I said get off me!" One of Dirk's arms got too close and he bit it, forcing him to release his grip. She then got a leg between them and kicked him off.

From the floor, Dirk rested on his arms, knowing he didn't have to move. She had nowhere to go. "You like it rough, Krysti? You like biting?" He taunted. Harvey had refastened her jeans and positioned himself near the door. He quickly grabbed the phone that would alert the driver.

"Don't come near me, Dirk." Harvey said forcefully. "I'll just tell the driver to let you off and we can forget about this."

Dirk sat back in his seat and dusted himself off. "We don't have to fight, Krysti." He grinned a malicious grin. "Because I know you want this." He grabbed his bulging crotch to be more clear on the subject.

Harvey just cringed. "You can kiss your exclusive goodbye, dumbshit."

Dirk lunged at harvey, tackling him, and sending him to the floor. Dirk grabbed her long hair and pulled it like a bridle, causing Harvey to yell in pain. Dirk trapped him, keeping a knee on her chest. Harvey was at his mercy.

Dirk then used he free hand to pull down his pants. "We're going to have a party, Krysti." He said, short of breath. "You look like a party girl. Am I right?"

Harvey was fighting to get the advantage, twisting and bucking. He growled and cursed at Dirk, trying to look ferocious as possible from his position.

"I'm really turned on when girls fight it, Krysti." Dirk said, smug and confident.

"You fucking rape girls!?" Harvey said, able to form sentences through his intense anger. "Is that how you get off!?" Harvey snarled.

Dirk quickly took his weight off of Harvey. "Don't say that," he said. "Don't say that unless you really mean it." The look of mischief and desire was gone in his eyes.

As Harvey and Dirk looked in to each others' eyes, no words were spoken. Dirk's grip had gone slack and Harvey got his arms free.

"I'm sorry." Dirk said, getting up and into his seat. "I'm really, really sorry." He gripped his head in his hands. "Oh God, I'm sorry."

Confused, Harvey sat up and took the farthest possible seat from Dirk. "Just don't move. I don't want to have to call the police."

"I... I'm really sorry. I just thought... Well... Most of the girls I interview. They just..." He looked up at Harvey and with every degree of honesty in his expression and voice, he said, "Most girls think this is a game. And they like to play the game. I guess you're not like other girls."

Then the car pulled to a stop and the phone buzzed. It was time to get out of the limo and make her grand entrance back home. A crowd had gathered, a large one. And the camera man was there to film it all.

Dirk silently turned away. Harvey picked up the buzzing phone from the driver and answered it. "Give me three



minutes.” He said. He needed to prepare before the door was opened for him to exit.

“Look... I’m not... I don’t...” Harvey said, fully understanding the hidden truth behind the statement.

“No,” Dirk said, “and I’m sorry.” He turned slightly to make eye contact. “I guess I said that already. But I really am. And I totally respect you for it. I just misread the situation. That’s all.” He tossed Krysti’s shirt back. “Are you... I mean... Are you okay?”

“I’m fine.” Harvey replied. He took the shirt and inspected it for damage. But it looked okay. Maybe a popped button or two. He started to fuss, putting it back on. “Um, Dirk...” He asked. “How am I not like other girls?”



A crowd of excited teenagers waited outside, and when they saw Krysti emerge from the limo, a scream that shook the ground erupted. Flash bulbs were going off like lightning. Harvey smiled as best he could to the crowd, stopping mid way through and letting them circle around him.

The expressions on the face of the crowd were of total infatuation. They so wanted to just be near Krysti. To just have a taste of the experience of being Krysti. The feeling was a savage gentleness. They cried out with their eyes for more, but revered Krysti and shielded her from the rest of the world.

As the crowd continued to go nuts for Krysti, Harvey just bathed in the adoration. He could not imagine a better homecoming than this. What incredible energy he felt. As the kids were going out of their skulls and pawing all over

him, Harvey drifted off. He was in another state of mind. Somewhere he had never really been before.

This was a place where his life was just a plasmic explosion of life and power, The world around him was just bright light. He was home.

“Light me up?” Harvey said.

Dirk found his lighter and flicked it. Harvey took a long, seductive drag. He then blew it out of his mouth in one full-mouthed puff. The smoke lingered around his head. He closed his eyes and inhaled it all in.

As the smoke cleared, Harvey regained his senses. It was like he was just awakening from a dream. Where was he?

He looked around, finding himself back in the limo. Dirk was just stepping out of the door, his face smeared with faint marks of pink lipstick. Harvey’s lipstick.

“I’ll call you.” Dirk said, winking back at Harvey. Then the door slammed shut.

As the limousine sped off, Harvey watched in the rear window as they pulled away. Dirk waved as he pulled his luggage alongside and headed into the local airport.

What had just happened?



Walking around for hours in a daze, Harvey still hadn’t been able to piece everything together. The sun was setting, and the sky was turning to black.

What had happened back there with Dirk? He hadn’t been... He couldn’t have... But something in the back of his mind was telling him that’s exactly what he had done.

And something in the back of his throat pretty much confirmed it.

He had long since told the driver to take the limo and find a place to stay overnight. Harvey would just figure things out on his own. Assuming he could start to get a grip on a viscous reality.

Block after block Harvey had been wandering. Suddenly, the houses seemed familiar. Clearing his mind, he looked around to see where he was. And right in front of him, was a house he knew very well.

The door opened slowly. "Krysti! What are you doing here? What a surprise! Nothing's wrong, is it?"

"David?" Harvey had to ask for verification. He barely recognized his friend. "You shaved?"

"Uh, well... Yeah." David seemed embarrassed. "I used to get away with it being a small-town lawyer. But you know, when you represent a big talent like Krysti Angel, you have to be taken seriously."

"I've never seen you without a beard."

"It feels weird." David said. "Not an emergency, I hope."

Harvey concluded that it *was* an emergency, but not one he wanted to talk about. "No. Tour was coming in just down the road."

"I'm coming to see you tomorrow night." David walked over to a tape gun and put a strap of tape on a cardboard box. As Harvey looked around, he saw everything in the house had been boxed up. The furniture was wrapped in plastic.

"You're moving?" Harvey asked.

"Yeah, I was going to surprise you. But I closed down my practice here, and I'm moving into a suite on Roxbury Drive in Beverly Hills."

"Moving?"

“Well, I have to be near you if I’m going to be doing all your legal work. It doesn’t make sense to keep commuting like this.”

“But what about all your clients here? The shelter? Mrs. Tomlinson at the youth club? The machinists union?”

“Who cares.” David said, dismissively. “They never paid and were always wanting me to work for free.” He finished up with the box he was working on. “Besides, now that I represent Krysti Angel, I’m big time. My rates are going to be too much for them to afford.”

“Are... Are you really going to move, David? We grew up here in this town.”

“Whatever. When the brass ring is there, you have to grab for it, Krysti.”

“Harvey. My name is Harvey.”

“Not anymore.” David said, going to an envelope in his briefcase. “I finally finished it all, Krysti.”

Harvey took the papers and looked at them. Legal change-of-name documents. Christina Angler to Krysti Angel. Legal notices on the death of Harvey Angler.

“What is this?”

“It’s what you asked me to do. Finally kill off Harvey and make you Krysti, permanently.” David said, going back to his packing. “I told you it was going to be a shock, even if it’s a ‘formality’ as you called it.”

“I never asked you to do this!” Harvey objected.

“You called me up last month and asked me to do this. You called yesterday to ask how it was going.”

“I never called you!” Harvey said, desperately. “Why would you do this!?”

David frowned and walked over to his answering machine, lying on the bare floor of the empty room. He pressed the message button.

*Beep.* “Hiya, David. Krysti here. I just wanna check on that death thing. Have the papers cleared? Gimme a call when you can. Okay? Love ya!” *Beep.*

The floor fell away from Harvey. It certainly sounded like his voice. But he knew he could never ask for this. It must have been somebody else. But who? Amber. She was the only one who could possibly have done it. She must be behind all of this. It had to be true. It was the only explanation.

David walked over and placed a hand on Harvey’s shoulder. “Look, Krysti, I know this is kind of a big moment in your life, but I think that moving forward as Krysti is the best thing for you. I was a skeptic at first, but this is the best career move you could make. You have a lot of potential, and a lot of money to make. This is the right move, Krysti.”

“My name is Harvey!” Harvey shouted.

“You asked me to call you Krysti from now on, so don’t get pissed with me!” David replied.

“I’m not Krysti Angell! I’m Harvey Angler.”

“Look, it’s late, Krysti. I need to finish packing.”

“You kept the documents, right? You can make me Harvey again, right?”

“Krysti, we went over this already. This is a one-way deal. There’s no going back now.”

“My name is Harvey!”

“No. It’s not.” David said. “You even made me sign a contract saying I’d only refer to you as Krysti from now on.” David whisked a paper from the pile in his briefcase and

gave it to Harvey. "So don't go changing your tune now. But I agree with what you said, Krysti. We need to forget about the past and live for today. It really is for the best."

Unwilling to engage in the conversation any further, David turned his back to Harvey as he packed another box.

Harvey had never done this. He had never asked for this. He didn't remember anything. It was all a lie. A joke. An aneurism. These were plausible excuses. Because he'd never want this. Never. Was there any point in explaining it to David? No. He couldn't even explain it to himself. Harvey just saw himself out.

Harvey continued down the road. Somehow, his life was being erased from the world. And he knew that someone had been doing it. There was a plot underway. A grand conspiracy. It was the same problem he had been having for weeks. First, it was the work on his face and the liposuction. Then more and more things had been happening. The sex video. He could barely remember doing these things, and some of them he couldn't remember at all. It was like there was someone using his identity. Someone who called herself Krysti. Someone else was fooling people into believing he was Krysti Angel. Someone who was jealous of his success. Why would Amber do this to him? Maybe it wasn't just Amber. Maybe David was helping her. Yes. It had to be true.

It wasn't long before he looked up and found himself in front of his old house. He hadn't purposely walked here, he must have been doing it out of years of habit.

Jean's car was parked out in the driveway. She was still living here.

Maybe they weren't on speaking terms. Maybe they were. Still, Jean was really the only person who remembered

Harvey anymore. And that was worth more to him than anything else right now.

Harvey approached the door tentatively. He hadn't been in contact with Jean for months. Maybe a whole year. Not since he stormed out. The fact was that Jean was his sister, and he had known and cared for her for over twenty years. The bond they had was permanent. It had hurt being so far away from her, even as liberating as it was. Even with this freedom, he couldn't change the way he thought. Every time Harvey did something, every time he went somewhere or talked to someone, in the back of his head was Jean. Was she okay? Had she fallen to pieces again? What had she said to Patrick? Did they get married? He had been thinking about her for so long, caring for her and looking after her, there was just no way to turn it off.

He stood at the doorbell for a while before he rang it. At the last moment, he had second thoughts. Should he have come here in a sequined top, daisy dukes and heels? He barely even thought about dressing this way anymore. Maybe it was going to make the wrong impression. Before he could do anything about it, he heard the locks on the front door turn.

"Christina?" Patrick said, as he opened the door. "Well, I'll be." He turned away to talk to someone inside the house. "Jean, look who's here."

Harvey pensively played with his hair. How was Jean? What would her reaction be on seeing him?

"Oh my." Jean said, coming to the door. She covered her mouth in surprise and shock. "My baby's come back home." She held her arms open wide. "Let me get a look at you! You've grown so much!" She took a step back to

look Harvey all over, like a mother who hadn't seen her child in years.

And this also gave Harvey a chance to back off a step and examine Jean. He hardly recognized her. Where he had left her a frazzled, frumpy woman who couldn't take care of herself, she now appeared almost totally different. Her frizzy greying hair had been dyed golden brown and was neatly cut into a perky flip. Her formerly bony body was now filled out, looking healthy and vigorous. Maybe even a little plump. She was wearing an apron and had tucked two oven mitts into the pockets as she examined Harvey. She had never cooked in her life successfully, barely able to follow the directions of a frozen pot pie.

She wasn't wearing a hastily assembled collection of things from her dresser, like she used to. Instead of a pair of cords and a ratty cotton blouse, she wore a full-skirted dress. Instead of her dirty sneakers, she wore a pair of black pumps with two-inch heels.

She didn't look a thing like Jean, she looked like a soccer mom. She looked happy and calm, but that's what made it eerie for Harvey. Jean had never been any of these things. She was a walking bundle of nerves, a coiled spring of bad vibes, ready to unfurl at any moment. He wondered what had been done to her.

"How goes the career?" Patrick asked, eagerly. "Would you like a soda?"

Jean approached Harvey and hugged him warmly. "It's so good to see my baby again." She then backed off, looking worried. "My goodness, you're nothing but skin and bones. Come in and have something to eat. I have a pie cooling in the kitchen." She abruptly looked alarmed. "Oh, I hope it's not burning!" Jean promptly walked off towards the



kitchen and put her oven mitts back on. "Just you make yourself comfortable and I'll have something whipped up in a jiffy," she said as she exited.

That left Harvey and Patrick alone, as Harvey took a few steps inside his old house. It looked much the same, but with crucial differences. It had pictures of Krysti on the shelves and walls. The formerly sparse decoration was now replaced with vases and fresh cut flowers, throw pillows on the couch, and other homey touches. On the couch was a half-finished crochet, attached to a ball of yarn in a basket.

"Uh." Harvey said, not sure of where to start. "How are things?"

Patrick was eager to please. "Would you like a seat? I hear you're making a lot of money now. Have a seat."

"Yeah, just a little money." Harvey sat in the offered seat. Patrick quickly landed himself nearby.

"That sounds very exciting. It must be exciting to be a big star."

Harvey searched for a topic, with little success. "I like what you've done with the place." Harvey said.

"We've kept your bedroom just like it was when you left it." Patrick looked to see if Jean was listening. "Would you mind if charged a little money for tours? I mean, it is kind of expensive with all the doctor bills for Jean."

"Uh... Jean's sick?" Harvey had to run that one through his brain again, dropping out the bit regarding the tour. "You're telling me Jean is sick?"

"Oh, no. Physically Jean's fine. It's her... mental state that's needed a little bit of... professional attention."

"W... What happened?" Harvey asked.

"Well, your mother was more than a little broken up over you leaving like you did. As it turns out, it was for the best

– I mean, you’re certainly become quite successful – but at the time it proved to be quite damaging to her.”

“So, did something happen? Is Jean okay now?”

“She’s doing very well. She’s been out on her own now for several months, and I think she’s getting better every day. And I think in a lot ways, she’s feeling better than ever. The therapy has helped her deal with a lot of demons and she’s finally found a good, safe place to be. Mentally speaking.”

Harvey was more than a little frightened. Why hadn’t David told him this was happening? He only lived a few blocks away. How could have been so in the dark about his sister?

He got up from his seat and went into the kitchen. Jean’s back was turned to him, and she was polishing a white plate to a mirror finish. “Did you fly in?” She asked.

Harvey didn’t quite understand what she was asking for a moment, but then understood. “No, the tour is coming through in the city. I decided to swing by and see how things were going.”

“You might have called. Or written.” Jean said. “I only have one daughter in this world and it would be nice to hear from her once and a while.” She stopped polishing the plate and set it aside. She let out a deep breath and then turned around with broad, warm smile. “But I can’t stay mad at you.” She said. She quickly enveloped Harvey in a giant bear hug.

This person wasn’t the sister Harvey once knew. It was how he wished she could have been, but not the person he knew. Once Jean had let go, Harvey took a step back and carefully examined his older sister. He searched for any indication that she was fighting something. Fighting some-

one's control. But she was totally relaxed and natural. Harvey looked into her eyes, expecting to see some sort of strain or inner conflict. But her eyes were only clear and steady.

"You've been seeing doctors?" Harvey asked nervously.

Jean smiled weakly and diverted her attention back to the stove. "Your money has helped us out a lot. David's been very nice to drop by with a check. It's been a godsend."

Harvey, still waiting for an answer about her mental health, took a little while to understand what she had just said. He hadn't sent Jean any money. He would have, if asked, but he hadn't heard anything from Jean since the day he left. That meant David was doing this on his own.

"Jean?" He asked, in as deep a voice as he could muster. "It's me, Harvey."

Jean's attention was suddenly broken, as his eyes darted left and right. Her hands, which had been resting on Harvey's shoulders, grasped tightly. Harvey could feel Jean tremble. Jean then gathered herself and looked Harvey in the eye. "Please... Please. You're my daughter." She was pleading.

Before Harvey could spend more time taking a look at her, she had wrapped him back up in another hug.

"Now shoo! Out of my kitchen!" Jean said, forcing Harvey out.

"But, I just need to ask..."

"We can talk when you've had some home-cooked food in your tummy." Jean replied. She got Harvey to the door, and closed it behind him. Defeated, Harvey turned to Patrick, who was looking eager to talk.

"So, out on the road, how much do you take at each show, just a ballpark figure." He asked.

“Why did Jean need to see a psychiatrist?” He asked.

“Well...” Patrick hesitated. “I don’t know if I should say.” He looked at the kitchen and made sure he couldn’t be heard by his wife. “It was about you, actually.”

“About me?”

“She had this odd idea that you weren’t her daughter.” He looked a little embarrassed. “She told me that..” Patrick chuckled, nervously. “I know this is going to sound crazy but... She was convinced that you were her *brother*.. In disguise.”

Harvey had to quickly find a seat, before he collapsed in dread.

Patrick checked again for a closed kitchen door. “She just insisted you were her brother. She even told me that you were doing all this to avoid being put in jail by the IRS.” He looked sad, and shook his head. “I thought I’d lost her for a while. But I found this doctor to help her. Now, she’s as happy and healthy as I’ve ever known her.”

Happy? “Does she still think...”

“Oh, no. She’s been delighted to realize she has a daughter. In fact, we’re thinking of having another.” Patrick grinned. “Would you like to have a brother or sister? You might just get one.”

Harvey didn’t even hear that. He had retreated far into his mind, into a place he could hide. Could it be possible his own sister didn’t even know him anymore? Had he done such an evil thing as to be responsible for his sister having her past erased?

Harvey got up from the chair he was sitting in and went into the kitchen. Welcome or not, he had to ask a question.

He grabbed his startled sister by the shoulders and got her full attention.

“Jean, please tell me who I am.” He said, trying to look as serious as he felt. “Am I your brother?”

Just as soon as he said the words, he regretted it. If Patrick were telling the truth, the things he just said might unravel what thread of stability Jean was clinging to. It would confirm a truth she had been conditioned into denying.

But he had no choice, he had to know.

Jean looked into Harvey’s eyes, then from side to side. She looked like she was about to try and run, but she held her ground. Her surprise and shock slowly faded. Moment by moment, her expression changed. Where she had been confused, her eyes gained resolve. Her posture straightened. She stiffened her lip and said with conviction, “You are my daughter, Christine Angler. And I love you.”

How was he to react? On one hand, the woman he had known for his entire life had shown him in five seconds more resolve and stability than Jean had mustered up in thirty years. She was sure and resolute. She was happy and enthusiastic. And she went back to scooping ice cream into small dishes.

“I want to thank you for testing me, honey. I know that I’ve had some problems, and the only way to fix them is to face them. You’re very nice to help me in my recovery.” She turned to face him again. “And I don’t know how I could have ever forgotten I have such a wonderful daughter.”

So here he was. Harvey was just another name in the world that meant nothing to his sister. He had a place in her life, but as her little girl, not her little brother. He had done so much damage to her. He had only ever wanted to help. Now Jean was a different woman, believing lies she

herself had once made up over the dinner table here just less than two years ago.

Harvey didn't know what to feel. Happiness for her new-found strength, satisfaction that Jean was finally balanced, sadness for the trap she had set for herself, or regret for not stopping this when he could. In any event, his life was at an end in this house.

"Do you mind... Do you mind if I get a few things from the basement?" Harvey asked. It was time to just take his stuff and put this all behind him.

"Your things?" Jean said, puzzled. "Everything is still in your room, just like you left it." As Jean talked to him like he truly was Krysti, it killed him. Harvey wanted to grab her and shake the memories back into place.

"There were a couple of boxes in the basement." Harvey said.

"Oh!" Patrick perked up. "The ones that said Harold or Harvey or whatever."

"No, those must have belonged to an old boyfriend." Jean replied. "They were full of nothing but men's things. I donated those to the Salvation Army."

He dared not show it, but the blow was crushing. Harvey's life was in those boxes. It was all the physical things he had left in this world. And it was gone. First his identity, now his memories.

"Um." Harvey needed something, just a little remnant of his old life. "Do you have any photo albums or anything?"

"Oh, goodness." Jean frowned. "I was hoping you had them. I can't seem to find anything at all around here. I must have misplaced all of my old photos." She smiled, brushing away the frown on her face as easily as turning off

a lamp. "I'm sure they'll turn up. Would you like me to send you some when I find them?"

"Say, it must be exciting being on the road all the time." Patrick said, elbowing into the conversation.

"Can you give me a moment? I need to go check on something." Harvey said, clumsily ending the exchange. He made for the back door of the house. A flashlight was nearby, and he grabbed it as he stepped into the back yard, where it was dark.

Harvey took deep breaths. He had to gather himself. This had all started out as a way to help his sister be social at work. How could it have gone so far? Reality had twisted itself in knots. He no longer recognized anything about this world he lived in anymore.

Searching the yard with the weak light from the flashlight, he found one thing he was familiar with. He saw the one lone tree that sat in middle of the square-shaped yard and made his way over to it.

Dried out and dying, the tree had been growing there since he planted it as a toddler. He felt sad for it, seeing it in the shape it was now. It looked like it hadn't sprouted a leaf in years. As he ran his fingers over it, the bark crumbled off into his hands. Still, he could read his initials, as he had carved into it so many years ago. This was a part of him. Maybe the last part of him.

He still recognized it. At least it was still there. Maybe with a little care, a little attention and it might have a fighting chance. All it needed was some help.

Taking one last breath, Harvey gathered himself up and headed back into the house to face these people, his own family. A family he had never even met.

Patrick suddenly burst from the back door. “What the hell!?” He shouted. Thinking he may have been coming at him, Harvey wondered what was going on. But Patrick darted past him.

Turning around to see where he was headed, Harvey was shocked to see his tree lit up in the night, surrounded by flames. His tree. His own tree he had planted was on fire.

Patrick grabbed a garden hose and furiously twirled the spigot to get it going. “What happened out here?” He shouted.

Harvey looked around, trying to get his bearings. He didn’t know exactly what was going on. Then he looked down and saw the smoldering match in his hand.





## Chapter 16: The Crown Isn't So Heavy After All

Rain fell from nowhere in the pitch black sky, invisible at night. The sound of the drops on the ground was a white noise with no pattern or tone. Harvey ran, a scrambled mess of emotion, down the middle of the blackened street. He knew the streets well, having grown up here.

Harvey ran for blocks, and ran as fast as he could. It was if he heard pounding footsteps behind him, in the dark. Someone seemed to be following him at every turn. Harvey could almost hear the breathing of the person chasing him, putting the fear of God into his heart. That person was getting closer with every step.

Harvey took a shortcut through a yard, and leapt over a fence into an alley, losing a shoe in the process. He kept running down the alley until he reached the street again. He thought he heard some scuffling in the gravel of the alleyway, and took off in another direction. After what must have been a couple of blocks, Harvey couldn't hear any more noise. It was hard to tell over the pounding of his own heart and his belabored breathing, but he thought he was in the clear.

Harvey looked around to see the familiar surroundings of Whitaker Park. Harvey stumbled through the street-lit walkway to the one building on the grounds, the public restrooms.

Inside, the bright fluorescent lighting hit him like sack of nickels. He leaned against the sink for support, and to catch his breath. All he could hear was the huffing and wheezing he was making.

"Poor baby," he heard.

Harvey looked around. He checked the stalls. He was alone. he stood perfectly still to hear what he could hear. Nothing. He went back to the sink. When he saw the mirror, he saw the mess he had made of his face. It revolted him. Everything about him was revolting. The hair, the underwear, his very body.

Harvey turned on the faucets and used his bare hands to scrub the makeup off.

The true horror of his life had finally caught up to him. He had been at the mercy of jackals, preying on him and laughing at his pain. He had been giving in to his urges, slowly selling his own identity away, chunk by chunk. He always thought he could buy it back. Now, he was worried he might be wrong. With the scrubbing, Harvey was trying to wash the world away. The world was no longer a place he wanted to live in. He scrubbed until his face felt as raw as his spirit.

He grabbed a load of paper towels and wiped his face dry. And he looked in the mirror. What he saw wasn't his scrubbed, red face. Not his clean, makeup-free face. Not his feminized face. In the mirror, was Krysti Angel.

It was the face he had seen in his dreams. The perfect, ultimate vision of Krysti Angel. The real Krysti Angel. With her vapid expression, her platinum blond hair and her dark, defined make-up. She was the unrivaled, absolute vision of desire.

"Poor Harvey." The reflection said. "Poor little Harvey."

Harvey flew from the restroom and ran. He ran in panic and raw terror.

"You're not going to ruin it for me, Harvey." The high, bubbly voice said. "I've worked too hard for it."

Harvey suddenly came upon a building. The same building he had just left. He turned around and ran the other way. In only a few steps, he came upon the building again. It was impossible. He turned again, but now suddenly found himself back inside. There was no place to go.

The voice came from the mirror. "I'm right here, Harvey." Harvey turned to look. Her near-white hair was fluffed out for maximum volume, virtually exploding from her scalp. Harvey placed his hands to his head, and found that his own hair was now exactly the same.

He ran out the door again, but instead of finding himself outside, he was back in his Beverly Hills home. He was in his exercise room, with the giant wall of mirrors. And in the mirror he could see Krysti again. He turned away, but the mirrors were on all the walls. There were infinite reflections of the girl in the mirror. But no reflections of Harvey.

The girl was dressed in tight, skimpy clothes. A miniskirt that seemed to deliberately show the panties underneath. A bikini top held her perky boobs to her body. Harvey felt his body and felt the very same clothes on himself. "Oh God." He whimpered.

"Look, we finally did it!" Krysti said, walking to the poster of Emily Grant pinned to the wall. She stood in exactly the same pose. "We're just like her!" She couldn't be happier. "We're shaped just like Emily. We've got the same great legs, the same great body, the same slim arms and neck, and the same great boobs!"

"N... n... no... I'm not... This isn't real." Harvey said back, desperately unsure that he should even be talking to something that was the embodiment of madness. "It's all fake. None of this is real." Harvey grabbed at himself. "This

body isn't real, the legs aren't mine! The smile isn't mine! These breasts aren't even..." He grabbed at his chest the tear of the rubber glued to it.

But there was nothing to grab. He then realized that he could feel them. Feel through them. "Oh my God," He said to himself. The clarity of his insanity became horrifyingly obvious. They were real. He had breasts.

"Well, they're new, but they certainly are real." The reflection said. "You just had those put in last month."

His eyes started to twitch, and he couldn't stand up straight. He fell against a wall and held on to it for dear life. Nothing was real anymore. Nothing was certain. There was no Harvey. There was no life.

"Don't cry Harvey. It's what you wanted." The voice said. In the reflection, the girl drew her fingernails down her body. Harvey looked at his hands, to see the long red fingernails on his hand now even longer.

"Don't. Please." Harvey cried.

"Harvey, you were going to take it all away. I can't let you do that." The high-pitched, childlike voice said. "This is everything I ever wanted."

Harvey fell over on to his side, not able to stand any longer.

"It's Krysti's world now. Just like we wanted it to be. Only now..." The voice giggled insipidly. "...I'm no longer a dream in your head. You're the dream in my head."

Harvey grabbed his scalp and screamed with all of his energy. "I don't want to be you! I don't want you to win! *I don't want to die!*" He yelled.

"Ohmigawd! *Kill!?*" Krysti exclaimed. "Ohmigawd. Ohmigawd. You are *so* overreacting!"

"You can't have this body!" Harvey yelled. "Get out of my body! Get out of my *mind*!!"

"I don't want your stupid body or your stupid mind!" Krysti yelled.

On the floor, Harvey slightly uncurled himself from the fetal position and looked back up at the reflection in the mirrors. He was back in that dank restroom. Krysti had an expression of shock on her pretty face. She seemed genuinely disturbed. Then she shook her head and smiled warmly.

"You're already Krysti. You've been Krysti since, like, forever!" She thought for a moment. "Remember when you had that crush on Madonna?"

"What!?" Harvey yelped.

"You had a crush on Madonna."

Whatever turn of conversation Harvey had expected, that was possibly the very farthest thing from it. He wasn't sure he should even answer. "No. No I didn't."

"You are such a liar!. You had the posters, the records, the videos... And don't lie to me, I know."

"What are you talking about? A lot of kids my age did..."

"And then you had a crush on Paula Abdul. Then the Spice Girls. Kylie Minogue."

"That's not that strange..."

"And then Brittany Spears. And Christina Aguilera. And then Mandy Moore. Jessica Simpson. Avril Lavine."

"So what!?" Harvey objected.

"You kept scrap books of all the press clippings. You taped all the videos and interviews on TV. You wrote them letters. You had autographs. You didn't just have, like, this ginormous crush on them, you were following their every move and writing everything down." His reflection giggled.

“Didn’t you ever stop to think why you were so captivated by them? Why you bought all the records, read the magazines, bought all the merchandise?”

“I just liked...”

“Oh, puh-leeze!” Krysti said, being cross with him. “Don’t forget that I’m you, so don’t deny, like, the total obvious truth n’ junk!”

There was a long minute of total silence. If he said what he was thinking, he feared that he was going someplace he could never come back from. He was on the edge of a cliff, mentally. Emotionally. This answer would only make things worse. Harvey decided a hundred times to keep quiet. But he then, on the hundred-and-oneth time, he spoke. “I was jealous,” Harvey said to himself, in a very small, worried voice.

“Because you want to be her,” Krysti said, “you wanted to see it through her eyes.” In the reflection in the mirror, Krysti spread her arms wide. “And here I am, ta-daa!”

“You’ve been behind everything,” Harvey said.

“There you go with that multiple personality thing again.” Krysti said, rolling her big eyes in exasperation. “I know what you’re thinking, and you’re so *totally* wrong. *You* did everything. You got the surgery. You made that video. You told David to change your name.” Krysti looked cross. “I don’t know what you keep telling yourself, but you did everything. Every last change.”

“You’re lying!”

“You even bought that first supply of estrogen when you were on tour. And then you blamed Jean for it.”

“This isn’t true!” Harvey searched for proof. Proof that he wasn’t behind this. It was harder than he thought. “The video! Yeah, the video! Why would I tape myself looking

like I was having sex and then release it to the internet!?” Harvey objected. “That makes no sense!”

“Of course it makes sense. You were all worried about how you were going to stay in the news. And then, all of the sudden, here comes this sex tape scandal and you’re more popular than ever!”

“That’s insane!”

“No, it’s smart! You remember when Paris Hilton had her sex tape released? She became, like, a zillion times more popular! You knew that.”

“Everyone... Everyone knows that.” Harvey was defensive. “It wasn’t just...”

“Yeah, but you envied her. That’s the difference.” Krysti said. “You wanted that kind of attention. You wanted to be the petulant little starlet who is taken advantage of one night, and the whole world gets to see it.”

“You’re lying! I know you’re lying!”

“What was in those boxes you wanted, Harvey? The boxes you had to have from your house tonight. What was it that you’re all so bent out of shape about? Do you even remember?”

“My clothes. My books.” Harvey said, lying.

“Your ten year collection of scrap books.”

“Those are going to be worth a lot of money!”

“Come *on*, Harvey!” Krysti said, at the end of her patience. “Why does this have to be so *hard*!? I’m the girl you always wanted to be. Krysti is spoiled rotten, self-obsessed, heart-stoppingly gorgeous, crazy rich and exactly what everyone in the whole wide world secretly wishes they were: young and out of control! So what’s the problem!?”



"This isn't what I wanted! It's not!" Harvey protested. "I'd be insane to believe I could ever be that kind of person."

"But here we are." Krysti replied. She shook her head.

"And if you'd just be honest with yourself, you'd do this."

"But if I'm really Krysti, then who are you!?"

"I'm not someone else! You're just imagining that I am! Somewhere, deep in that mixed-up thing you call a brain, you need some sort of excuse so you're not the one in control, Harvey. You've blamed everyone else, and now you've run out of *real* people. So now you're blaming it on an alter ego that isn't. You're just *imagining* I even exist."

"Imagining?"

"Of course. you're as sane as you ever were, Harvey. You're just trying to blame someone else for doing everything you've done."

"But..."

"Just admit it!"

"I..."

"Admit it!"

"Will you go away if I admit it?"

"I'm you, Harvey. I can't go away." Krysti said. "But I'll stop talking to you, at least."

"Maybe I did one thing."

"No, you did *everything*. The surgery, the hormones, the video, the come-ons, the fame – you made every single decision!"

"So, maybe I did!" Harvey yelled at his reflection. "What does that prove!? What does that change?" He shook his head and looked up. "There. I admitted it. What do I do now?"

"Now... You just have to stop pretending."

"Who's pretending?"

“You are. You’re pretending you’re Harvey.”

Pretending? That was it. Proof positive that he was insane. How could you grow up, live for decades and not be the person you were inside?

Insanity. Pure insanity. Harvey was who he was. “I am Harvey,” he said, “always have been.” It defined him. Harvey. That was his place in the world. It was all he ever had been. All he ever could be. It was all he knew. “Harvey’s reality. And you’re fantasy.”

The reflection said nothing.

“I’m one hundred percent Harvey – A hundred and ten percent.” He paused. That wasn’t altogether true. “With some exceptions,” he clarified.

He had been pretty good at being Krysti. But he really wasn’t *truly* being Krysti. He was just acting. It was a performance. A brilliant performance. It was a shame no one really noticed how good he was at being Krysti. It seemed like everyone had been fooled. They thought she was real. And it had been so easy.

Come to think of it, David was really the last one to know the truth. The last one to call him Harvey.

Until tonight, actually. Now even David didn’t call him Harvey. Or even seem to care.

So... Was he was the only person in the world who was telling himself to be Harvey? There was no one left who could say different. Hardly a single person knew of a ‘Harvey Angler’ and his existence. And if no one knows you exist, do you?

And if that were true, what was really stopping him from being someone else? From being the girl he had been acting like. He could actually be her. *Really* be her. No pretending.

What was stopping him? Maybe it was true. Maybe he wasn't pretending anymore. Maybe he was just faking this. Maybe he wasn't crazy.

"Okay, so let's say I could get away with acting like Krysti for a while..."

He took a look at his reflection in the mirror. There was no longer any response. Just the reflection of a teenage girl. It wasn't a dream or a hallucination. He really did look like that. He really was what he saw. He was a girl. A princess. A spoiled starlet. A teenage girl with a body that could snap your heart in two.

He turned to face himself straight on. He looked himself in the eyes. At first, his eyes were narrowed by the questions he had. But slowly, millimeter by millimeter, he relaxed. His frown straightened out. He shifted his weight onto one leg, onto his high-heeled shoe and he thrust his hips. His suspicious eyes relaxed. He shook his wrists, causing his bracelets to tinkle, and tossed a lock of blond hair out of his vision. He opened his eyes all the way. Then, he smiled.

And he laughed.

Who, exactly, was he trying to fool?

Krysti nodded her head. She let out a deep breath. This felt right. It felt good. "I'm Krysti Angel." She said, trying the name on for size. It fit.

She examined herself in the mirror. "This is mine," she said with a smile. She played with her long, lustrous hair. It felt so soft. She dragged her fingers lightly along her neck. So slim, so smooth. So beautiful. "Did I really do this to myself?" She asked.

"Yes." The answer was definite. "I did. I made myself who I see today."

She turned to the door and thought about leaving. But she stopped and looked at herself again. “Damn right I did this!” She proclaimed. “I worked fucking hard for this!” Turning to get a better look, she drew her hands up her bare legs. “God, that feels so good.” She ran her hands over her perfect breasts. It felt wonderful. “I’ve been so wrapped up in everything, I haven’t even enjoyed this.” She was hot. She was sexy. She was young. She was rich. She was famous. “I love being Krysti Angel.”

Turning on her heel, she strode purposefully as she left the squalid little bathroom. “So I gotta stop wasting time with all this talking to myself n’ stuff. Being insane, is, like, so Roseanne.”

Krysti practically skipped on out of that park, lit brightly by sunshine. She couldn’t stop laughing as she walked, her body and spirit as light as a feather.



## Chapter 17: The Queen of Comedy

The exploding balls of flame splintered into a thousand white-hot embers that fell gently over the heads of the crowd. The audience went wild.

Krysti led her dancers on the most difficult routine of the show. The finale. Ten dancers moved in unison, strutting their long legs and thrusting their slim waists to the crowd. Krysti's body raised up over the stage, and she flew above the audience, as if she were what her name implied. An angel.

Her popularity was still peaking. Everyone was talking about her. And everyone either wanted to be her – or be with her. Now eighteen, the restraint of childhood was gone. Impossibly, while her body got more and more lush and fertile, her face seemed to become younger and hotter. Was it plastic surgery? No one seemed to care. It was an irresistible combination of youth and sex appeal.

As the show reached its' climax, Krysti swooped down onto the stage, stopping just inches from the fingertips of her dancers, all reaching high into the air to touch her – but she was tantalizingly out of reach.

There was a tremendous explosion. The noise was deafening. The show was over. The audience went wild.

When the lights went dark, the invisible wires suspending her were given slack, and she landed in the arms of her crew. Krysti was hoisted off stage by her company of dancers, as the house lights faded up in the seats. No more encores. It was onto the next city. She was sent down by her dancers gently, landing in her tip-toes and bouncing in joy. "Great show, everyone!" She bubbled.

No sooner had she uttered the words than an attendant swept in with a blanket, covering Krysti and ushering her out to the dressing rooms. Led through the corridors, she ducked the attention of dozens who just wanted a autograph, a memento, a word or just a glance. They all just wanted the smallest, most insignificant bit of attention from her. And they would have to wait.

“Krysti, I have some papers for you to sign.” David said, appearing from the shadows. He handed a pen and a stack of papers to Krysti and then waited patiently. Krysti concentrated as she signed, the tip of her tongue sticking out the side of her mouth.

“There you go!” She said, proudly brandishing her accomplishment of signing her name. “What’d I sign, Davie?”

“The usual, Krysti.” David replied. “Here’s another.”

“Okie dokie,” Krysti answered with a vacant smile. She loved to sign her name.

But she wasn’t so dumb. She had been seeing the papers she was signing lately. David was swindling her out of about fifteen percent of her earnings and hiding it in an offshore account. No doubt it was under his personal control.

“And this one, too.” David said, feeding in another contract.

Krysti gave it a quick, discreet glance and read it as another licensing deal she got almost no money from. She was so proud of David. He used to be this miserable hippy who got stepped on at every opportunity. He did charity cases and pro-bono work and never got the recognition or money he deserved. Now, here he was embezzling millions from her. She was so happy he finally had the spine to stick up for himself and take what was out there for him.

“Um, Davie? This looks like I’m signing over all my South American merchandising to you.”

David looked a little flushed. “Don’t worry about it Krysti, you trust me, right?” He was lying like a weasel. He was ripping her off for everything she was worth.

She signed the papers. “All done?” Krysti asked.

“That’s all for now.” David replied, not even hinting that he had just pocketed millions with that single signature.

She was so proud.

“What about that lawsuit by my Mom? I saw on TV where they said they were gonna sue me.” Her “parents” had appeared on TV, on a couple of the tabloid shows, crying about not getting any money. That was a total lie, and no doubt it was all Patrick’s idea.

“Your mom and dad want a percentage of everything you earned up until you were eighteen. They want about eighty percent.”

“What!?” Krysti shrieked. She went from sweetness to crazed banshee in microseconds. It was one of her many wild mood swings her entourage had grown accustomed to. “That’s fucking outrageous!” She was so happy for Jean. She deserved to be wealthy and well-off. Even if she was under the mistaken impression that she was Krysti’s mother. Still, the old Jean would have never had the guts to sue for millions. “Well, they’re not getting a cent!” She bellowed.

They’d probably settle out of court for a few million. Jean was going to really enjoy being rich. Krysti was happy for her. Married, settled down and well-off for life. Jean deserved the peace and quiet.

Yes, this was all crazy. But being Krysti Angel was to be living with crazy twenty-four seven.



Krysti was quickly changed out of her costume and into her street clothes. Tonight, she wore a gold sequined catsuit, a tiara and six-inch, platform-soled, fur-trimmed boots. In her glam-ridden mind, she believed it to be terribly understated. She put on a pair of Chanel sunglasses, tucked her pet teacup chihuahua Mr. Bipples into her purse, and headed out to the stretch Hummer waiting to take her to the party.

“Mr. Cannon, returning your call.” Said Krysti’s secretary, handing her the phone.

“Eddie baby?” Krysti said. “Davie tells me that you aren’t releasing the royalties on my download sales! You’re not trying to steal from your little K-gel, are you?”

“No, Krysti! I told David, we’re just waiting for some red tape to clear. We’ll have those funds in your account by tomorrow. Friday at the latest.”

“I told Davie you weren’t trying to cheat me!” Krysti said with glee. Of course, Cannon was lying through his teeth. He wasn’t going to give over that money unless she filed papers or refused to work. But who could blame him? She was raking in so much money, they probably didn’t have enough to cover the royalties. And maybe they were trying to buy time so they could cook the numbers again and try and skim some money off the top.

It felt so wonderful to have all these people all wrapped up in trying to cheat her. She was the center of so many people’s lives. It was nice to be needed.

“Buh-Bye!” Krysti said, throwing the phone back to her secretary.

“Krysti, I know you’re busy, but I thought you should see this.” Another attendant passed her a copy of a glossy magazine.

“Yip yip yip!” Mr. Bipples snapped at the magazine.

“Shush, Mr. Bipples!” Krysti scolded.

Krysti set her Perrier down and took the magazine. “K-gel’s maid tells us the queen of pop is a pill-popping addict!” The headline read.

“Sue them for everything they have!” Krysti yelled at the top of her lungs. “Those bastards can’t get away with printing lies!” It was probably Corazon, the woman she had let go when she found her stealing silverware. She had sworn revenge on Krysti, and this was probably what she was talking about.

The lawsuit would never get into court. She’d have to drop it when David told her there was no way to disprove the statements. He always said that.

Corazon probably just saw the estrogen she took every day, so it was technically true anyway. Oh well, she’d have David write up a press release and maybe he could do a talk show or something. It was worth a couple more minutes in the spotlight, at least, and that just meant more people involving themselves in her amazing life.

The car pulled into the hotel parking lot, in the back where the discreet, hidden entrance was. That meant that only half the usual photographers were waiting for her. They snapped their pictures as Krysti was ushered into the service elevator, which would never be seen or published. No one paid for shots of the back of her head – but they took them anyway. Now, when Krysti went to Monte Carlo and sunbathed nude on some rich man’s yacht, those shots sold. Sometimes she’d hire someone to take the pictures and sell them, just to make sure she looked good in the photos. No sense in having an amateur take nude shots of you if you can prevent it.

As she was being ushered into the elevator, Amber had arrived and was heading out. "Hey-yay!" Krysti said.

"Hey, girlfriend!" Amber said, kissing her friend on the cheek. Amber had dressed for the night, choosing a flimsy orange sherbet-colored dress that clung to her as if it were wet. She had a pair of sunglasses in her hair, and was teetering on stiletto-heeled strappy shoes. Just in case there was any question she was drunk, a bottle of vodka was helping her keep her balance. In the other hand, she was holding a lit cigarette. "Gonna go uptown and seee if theeres annny ack-shun in this backwater burg!"

"Go get 'em!" Krysti said, as she stepped into the elevator. "Don't do anything I wouldn't do!"

"I won't!" Amber replied, and then promptly fell into a shrub, her legs flying in the air. Hundreds of flash bulbs fired off to get a picture.

Krysti turned to one of her entourage. "See, now that's something I wouldn't do."

Ah, Amber. The harmless comic relief. Didn't she just check into rehab yesterday? Well, maybe she was just taking a day off. Rehab was such a bore.

The elevator opened up on one of the six floors Krysti had rented out, and Chase was waiting for her. "Hey, Babe." He said, laconically.

"Chasie poo!" Krysti said, launching herself onto him. She wrapped her arms and legs around him, as they kissed deeply for a long moment, while Krysti slowly slid down his body.

Chase rescued her from falling all the way to the floor by lifting her small frame up like she was a little girl. "How was the show?" He asked.

“Okay.” Krysti responded, giving Chase a quick peck on the cheek. “I missed you soooo much. Why did you ever give up dancing?”

“Hey I got... responsibilities now.” Chase wasn’t sure she’d swallow that answer. He was now on the payroll as her boyfriend, and he’d never have to work for the rest of his life.

Sure enough, Krysti didn’t swallow it for a second. She knew better. Chase had become a total parasite, quitting his stage dancer job and now trying to record some sort of hip-hop record on Krysti’s money. But he had such cute dimples when he smiled. Maybe, if she needled him enough, he’d come back to his senses. “But Krysti misses you.”

“Yeah. Same here. Hey, listen, I need a few bucks to pay this guy. Y’know, for some... stuff. Think you could spare, like, five?”

Krysti turned to one of her flotilla of assistants who had been watching uncomfortably. “Write him a check for five thousand.” She said, as unconcerned with the money as she could be.

Of course, she knew that this would end badly. It was a gambling debt, and Chase’s wagers had been getting larger and larger. But it was better to deal with this now, because later it would cost less when they got divorced. Oh, yes, they were married now. But nobody knew that yet. They had managed to sneak off to Las Vegas two nights ago and got a quickie marriage. Krysti was assuming it could last three, maybe four weeks. But that wasn’t important. It was only the here and now that mattered to her.

She pondered for a moment as she decided to leak the Las Vegas wedding photos to a tabloid sometime in the

next day or two. What good was getting married unless you got three or four color pages in the National Enquirer?

"Mr. Bipples missed you too," Krysti said to her bagged dog, "didn't you snookie-wookums?"

"Yip!" The dog responded.

One of Krysti's assistants ever-so-politely interrupted. "Excuse me, but I think it's time for Mr. Bipples' appointment."

"Oh!" Krysti responded with her characteristic bright smile. "It's Tuesday, isn't it?" She turned to talk to her dog again. "It's time for you to see your therapist, Mr. Bipples!" Krysti handed over her pooch to the assistant, loving how ridiculous it all was. Pet therapy. Please. But hey, pet therapists have to earn a living. Who was she to say no?

"Waitaminnute," Krysti said, putting her hands on her hips. "I thought we were going to a party!" Krysti pouted. "I wanna go to a party."

"We *are* havin' a party." Chase replied. "You, me, and Jack." He hoisted a bottle of Jack Daniels into the air.

"I *like* that kinda party." Krysti said, smiling. She giggled as she snuggled into Chase's arms, as he carried her away into his hotel room.

Ah, she loved this life. No concerns, throwing money every which way, being a petulant high-maintenance teenage star. Back when Harvey was spending another night doing his sister's homework, or trying to talk her out of another one of her spirals of panic, he had often day-dreamed what it would be like to be on the other side, as the center of attention. To be the person who's personality quirks could cause whole armies of people to respond to her eccentric, thoughtless whims. What would it be like to be the girl, so precious and fragile.

This was far more than Harvey had hoped dare, though. He just wasn't the focus of someone else's life, but the focus of so gargantuan an enterprise as Krysti Angel. Krysti Angel Incorporated. Krysti Angel Worldwide. Krysti Angel, the legend. And that voyeuristic part of Harvey that was inside Krysti couldn't resist taking every opportunity to be even more eccentric and petulant than she had any need to be. It was glorious.

The exterior of the man she used to be had been meticulously and deliberately peeled away, layer by layer. And Harvey was the one doing it, so obviously he was okay with it. The work had been amazing. The best plastic surgeons in the known universe had re-built him into this amazing creature, beyond any vision of femininity anyone had ever seen or imagined.

But was there anything left of Harvey anymore? Of course there was. It was still all Harvey. He just used a different name now. Now he acted the way he'd always been capable of, but held back because of what he looked like. If anything, Krysti was more Harvey than Harvey used to be.

What was left was a wispy pink fluffball drifting along in life, with no regrets, and little concern for the toils of living. A girl so wrapped up in herself that the outside world wasn't even important enough to be a rumor. She was the sun in her world. Everyone orbited around her and basked in her presence.

Somewhere along the way, Krysti decided that being with men was just part of the deal. Did she truly desire men? Maybe not. But she couldn't have been more aroused than when she was picturing the innocently young Krysti Angel moaning like a cat in heat, being ravaged and invaded repeatedly. Submission. The very thought of delicate Krysti

being controlled and manhandled by a crude, rough man in the heat of passion was all the satisfaction that she could possibly ask for. She orgasmed just at the thought it.

Her little artifact from her pre-Krysti days was easily made into something she had far more use for. Surgery was a modern marvel. What ever did people used to do when they wanted to become irresponsible children?

What a wonderful thing it was to be this girl.

There were lawyers she couldn't trust, betrayal by long-time friends for money, family members demanding a percentage and entranced by vast sums of wealth. Her record company wasn't paying, she had fans stalking her, paparazzi shooting pictures everywhere, tabloids spreading wild lies, and dozens of lawsuits against her – and dozens by her. Plus, there was always another enormous, decadent, wasteful party around the corner. She was living out of control, at breakneck speed. And there was no real danger. So many people too look after her. To protect her. To worship her.

Growing up, he had to be the adult when he was really a kid. Now, Krysti was a childhood that would never end. It was incredible. It was everything Harvey always wanted.

Some men get to meet the girl of their dreams. Once and a while, some get to *be* the girl of their dreams.





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