

# Your **ESSENCE**

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## YourEssence (Chapters 19 through 31)

### Chapter 19 - No Time and No Solution Make Diana Go Something Something

Diana left David lying in bed as she went to get showered for the day. He had a later start for the day, so he said Diana should get ready first. To Diana's shock, he didn't ask to use the restroom. Not to brush his teeth or anything. Diana knew she never would have done that. While she enjoyed giving a blowjob from time to time, the first thing on her mind afterward was constantly cleaning up and brushing her teeth. While this dissonance was alarming, even more troubling was the fact that Diana had experienced flashes of some of David's desires while reflecting on this blowjob. Diana could remember that David found it sexy when a woman swallowed. She couldn't help but feel a bit of the same as this memory integrated itself into her mind. Seeing David lying there in one of her nighties was confusing in a way it never had been before. Like David had adopted the use of husband, Diana felt like she was looking at her wife. This seemed small on the surface; they were, in fact, in the bodies of the people who filled these roles. Up to now, they hadn't internalized that, however. Diana knew that David in her body was her husband and vice versa. Now, it was David as her wife, according to her brain. Diana was freaking out a bit, just like David had a couple of days prior. She lamented that she hadn't taken David's warning more seriously then. She could have sacrificed **\*David's\*** relationship with Olivia and kicked her out of the apartment. That might have been enough to keep David from sliding so precipitously into Diana's memories.

Diana hopped into the shower and, for a moment, felt some relief. The warmth of the shower was pleasant, and her thoughts drifted momentarily as she allowed herself to feel. Feel the water, feel the warmth, feel the pleasure. *Oh no, mmm...* Diana's thoughts returned to the morning blowjob. David had worked her member magnificently, unlike any sexual experience 'David' had ever had. Diana's mind rushed through a host of sexual experiences as her mind searched for a comparable experience. Each of these sexual conquests wedged itself newly into Diana's brain, but she didn't

realize the damage that allowing her mind to wander like this could bring. She was still largely ignorant of the impacts of memory recall on her mind, body, and behaviors. She was of the continuing belief that she hadn't suffered any similar side effects as David was experiencing.

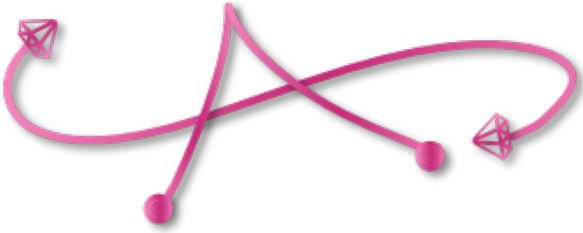
Even though she was in the shower, Diana could hear something coming from the bedroom. It sounded like moaning. *Is David masturbating?* Diana wondered. She felt as blood rushed to her member, bringing back an erection into view. *When in Rome...* Diana thought as she instantly started to rub her hand up and down her dick's length. A week ago, Diana never would have done this. Sure, she had masturbated in David's body. A man's body and hormones make it practically impossible to avoid, but she would have at least stopped to think about it for a minute. She was more accepting of the body swap than David, but that didn't mean she would take advantage of the situation.

Diana's mind was in a full-blown memory rush as she pumped her dick, thoughts of ex-girlfriends of David's, crushes, his first time reaching orgasm as a teen, the shock, the embarrassment, the thrill. Diana was feeling masculine to the extreme as she reached another climax.

Despite her intentions to devise a plan for her and David to get back into their original bodies and stop this slide that David was experiencing, she had failed to come up with anything. Having toweled dry, she unconsciously wrapped the towel around her waist and stepped back into the bedroom. It smelled like sex in there. David was still lying on the bed and seemed to be passed out, possibly from over-exertion. Diana knew that a good orgasm could certainly necessitate a bit of a rest. Rather than disturb David, she tried to get dressed as quietly as possible. When she heard David, she bent over to pull up her boxers. "Woo, keep it off sexy!"

Diana's heart pounded. The passion she had been searching for from David was finally here; she only needed to act on it. David was willing to go further with her. Diana's hormones had her erect again in an instant as she wrestled with her desires. On the one hand, this was everything she had wanted. David was willing to engage in a physical and intimate relationship again. Diana's heart longed for this and had for so long. On the other, this was potentially not David's true wish. He had been impacted these last two days by the effects of YourEssence on his brain.

Diana was still paused in the bent-over position with her hands on the elastic of her boxers. She had to decide and fast.



## Chapter 20 - Diana's Only A Man Afterall

Diana felt her body take over as the faint tickle of her boxers collecting against her ankles made David giddy. "Woo! There's my man! Now come over here so I can show you my appreciation," David's voice oozed with sex appeal. Diana heard the words coming out of David's mouth and could practically hear herself saying the exact words if their positions were reversed. This was starting to freak Diana out. More than ever before, she had this nagging sensation that it wasn't David she would be having sex with; it was 'Diana.' It was like having sex with her clone. Diana couldn't let this lie unaddressed.

"David, babe, you sure you are up for this?"

"Hell yeah! Morning sex is the best kind of sex, plus you already know I'm horny this morning. Might as well take the edge off, given the day ahead of me," David said back. This put Diana's concerns at ease as she knew she would never have responded like that. So, without reservation, Diana set to task and ravished her husband's feminine body. Her current male body wanted this just as much as David did. Diana could feel her passion vibrating through her, and she was again overwhelmed by the concentration of her sexual energy in her crotch. It was so different from how she had felt in her own body. She felt so much power, so much energy, so much desire. She finally understood why guys were so incessantly trying to get to the penetration part of sex. It was like her body could barely exist a moment more without it. So, despite the brief moment of foreplay, Diana rushed to press her penis into David's entrance.

"Mmph, a little warning next time?" David grunted as he felt Diana press herself into his vagina.

"Sorry, I just got so excited there," Diana replied, but her attention wasn't really on David's words. Diana was singularly focused on pumping her length in and out of David.

David was similarly distracted, but the shock of being so abruptly penetrated had brought a focus to his mind that hadn't been there. *Diana is acting like a teenage boy crazed over getting her dick wet*, David thought as he lay there, taking the thrusting of his partner in stride. *I wonder if she realizes how she is acting. It might be good fodder for our next counseling session.* David's mind began to wander as he was overcome by the pleasure emanating from his body. *I wonder what Dr.*

*Simms will think when I tell her that we resumed having sex again. Will she call it progress that \*I'm\* finally getting 'David' to pay more romantic attention to me? Or will it be too soon to tell?* With these thoughts, David's mind slipped into a deeply 'Diana-centric' space. David's previously stoic disposition suddenly changed. He became much more effusive in his vocalizations. He was moaning and reacting to Diana's touch and thrusting. Diana took note and responded in kind, increasing her effort before she finally had to tell David to take it down a notch.

"Shh! My mother will hear!"

David covered his mouth with his hands as he let out a deeply satisfied moan, which, fortunately, was now muffled. Diana was approaching climax and looked down at David. "You've been taking my pills, right?"

"Yes, every night."

"All right, because I'm close."

"Oh, me too!"

"David, I'm going to cum; you're on the pill, right?"

"Huh?" David looked confused at Diana's words. It was too late to do anything about it, however. Diana couldn't hold back anymore as she unloaded inside David. The brief moment of confusion was overtaken by pleasure on David's face as he wrapped his legs and arms around Diana, pulling her in closer against his body as his orgasm crashed over him.

After a brief moment of blissful cuddling, Diana pulled herself off David.

"My birth control. You've been taking that right, David?"

"Hmm? \*Your\* birth control? I didn't know that you were taking the male pill."

"Focus up, David, \*My\* birth control. You know, so you don't get pregnant from what we just did. You've been taking that, right?"

David looked confused at Diana. Something wasn't registering for him. This misunderstanding frustrated Diana, and David finally said what he was confused about. "Why do you keep calling me David?"

Diana's heart sank. Sure, it had been a bit confusing about what birth control she had been referring to. That was built into the odd situation they found themselves in. That was a simple frustration with the language and how science had complicated things. No, instead, this was Diana's worst fear manifesting. It had been David's, too. Diana needed to figure out what was up and fast.

"David, that's you. Remember? I'm Diana, and you're David. We've been taking each other's YourEssence for several weeks due to your work project?" Diana paused to see how David was responding. She wasn't getting any visual clues that this was resonating with David. "Shit, David, don't do this. You're scaring me."

As if a switch flipped, David responded, "Yeah, of course, we've been this way for weeks. Thanks for reminding me of the obvious." His response rang false to Diana's ears. He was making it seem like nothing had just happened. *Was that how he felt? What was that? Did he **\*believe\*** he was me?* Diana's thoughts raced. "You don't remember what happened? Like 5 seconds ago?"

"Well, besides you giving me an amazing orgasm, I'm not sure what you're talking about."

Diana hung her head. The effects of YourEssence on David's mind were visible to Diana now. Diana had to wonder how much longer he could tolerate the use of her doses before David ceased to exist. "We need to get your mother to leave. Tonight. You have to change back tonight."

"What? Why?"

Diana was shocked by this reaction. It seemed like every other response from David originated from the parts of his mind that were Diana and not David.

"Do you really need me to explain it? You don't even seem to be able to tell what is happening to you. You're acting like 'me' without even realizing it now."

"That's silly. I know who I am. Besides, I would have thought you liked that I was getting to understand you better."

"Are you sure that's all that made you think that? Or did you actually want to spend more time with my mom?"

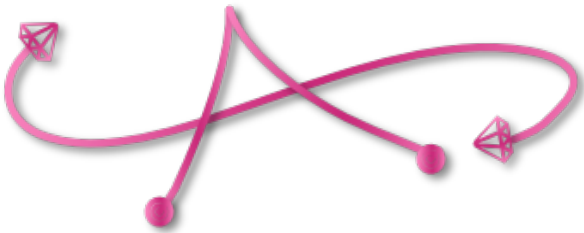
"What? I've enjoyed spending time with her."

"Since when has that been true? You've always tolerated my mother, but I wouldn't call you close."

A momentary pause silenced the room while David considered Diana's words. Then, a moment later, David held his hands up to his face as tears started flowing. After several minutes of sobbing, David finally replied, "You're right. This has gone too far. I can't tell where these thoughts come from; it all feels like me."

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David and Diana were on edge as they exited their apartment for their respective jobs. Olivia had been her usual chipper self, offering to make breakfast for the married couple, but they politely declined. Diana needed to deal with the fallout of her outburst at work, while David had the daunting prospect of getting through his job only to spend the afternoon socializing with his mother-in-law at a beauty salon. Something he never would have imagined he'd do, but he was strangely looking forward to it. Similarly, he was enthusiastic for his training at school to conclude as well. He could feel the passion that originated from Diana about improving his teaching technique. It worried David how much that feeling just felt natural. They felt like they originated deep inside his mind. The fact that it was foreign was only knowable because of David's remaining knowledge of himself. That memory would soon disappear if things continued on their current trajectory. David resolved to do as Diana had directed. He would get Olivia to leave so he could revert to living as himself.



## Chapter 21 - Lose Yourself They Said, It Will Be Fun

"All right, that's time. Turn in your exams now," Robert called out to the room. David saw that a few professors hurriedly filled in the remaining bubbles on the multiple-choice exam form. David had finished a few minutes earlier and felt satisfied that his knowledge of the material was sufficient to ace the exam. The morning supplemental course material had been engrossing enough; the opportunity to demonstrate his understanding had David practically floating. Diana's passion for teaching had deeply engrained itself in David, and he couldn't process this passion as anything other than organic and natural.

As the group of teachers started to disperse for the day, Diana's work friend Carie scuttled over to

gossip. "Did you hear about Frank?" Carie asked under her breath.

"No, what?" David matched Carie's volume level as he leaned in to continue the conversation.

"I heard that his transfer to New Mexico University got denied. Too much 'male ego' in his interview with the school admin. Can you believe that? A principal who listens to their employees? Who would have guessed it!"

"No! That's amazing. I can't believe the chauvinist is finally getting his comeuppance. What's Robert going to do?"

"Probably nothing. Eagle Sky is in a rich neighborhood. They can afford to turn away teachers. Robert can barely afford a belt to hold his pants up. Thank God for that belt buckle. It's doing the Lord's work!"

"Stop it! You're too much," David chuckled out his response as he batted at Carie's arm playfully.

"What?! You'd prefer he shows a bit more crack?" Carie jokingly responded as the two made their way to the parking lot.

"So, what do you have planned for your afternoon off?" Carie asked as they reached their cars.

"Spending the afternoon with my mom. We're going to get our nails done."

"You don't sound too excited about the prospect."

"No, I am. It will be nice to have some time with her one on one. I have a moderately uncomfortable topic I need to discuss with her."

"Like how David isn't giving it as good anymore, and you need to move home?"

"I'll have you know we are doing great in that arena. Twice this morning, thank you very much."

"Girl! You're finally getting some again. Thank goodness. You were so bitchy when you weren't getting any."

"What can I say? I have a healthy sex drive. So sue me."

"No one says that anymore. It would help if you listened to your students more often. Pick up the lingo of the day."

"I don't think the kids call it lingo either."

"Fine. Fine. At least update your references to the last ten years instead of pulling from your parent's generation."

"I'll try."

"Perfect! Back to your mother, however. What's the problem if David is finally back giving you the D."

"She just suddenly showed up this week and isn't telling us why she's staying with us. David wants her to go back home, and I need to be the one to convince her."

"David wants her gone? How do you feel about that?"

David had been managing through the morning, but Carie's rapid-fire conversation had him acting on pure instinct. This was a recipe for disaster. Even though David could operate effectively with Diana's passion for her career, something about Diana's feelings towards her mother had a way of activating the purest aspects of Diana's feelings in David's mind. So, like what happened earlier in the morning when he felt Diana's love and passion, David's mind flipped. The aspects of David that remained were now buried under the weight of Diana's emotions and feelings.

"Frankly, I'm bummed out about it. David knows how much my family means to me. I'm worried about my mother, and it's not like her to unexpectedly visit like this. She doesn't like being away from Dad this long. I know something's up. I have to get her to tell me."

"Well, I'm not one to meddle, but you should do what feels right to you **\*Diana.\***"

Hearing Carie say that was like driving a stake through the remaining aspects of David that existed in his mind. David felt reinvigorated and practically made new by the connections forming in his mind.

"You're so right. Thanks, Carie. I'm sure David will understand."

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"Chiquita, that was such a nice thing to do with you. I haven't been pampered like that in forever," Olivia celebrated as she stared at her nails while she held her arm out to get a good perspective on her hand.

"It was mama. Why haven't we done this before?"

"You never really seemed like you wanted to chiquita. I was surprised when you agreed to come."

"Well, I didn't know what I was missing."

The mother and 'daughter' pair walked through the shopping center to which the salon had been attached. While walking, David was entirely consumed by Diana's thoughts. Still, unbeknownst to him, his desires had blended with Diana's to create a version of Diana that represented David's idealized version of Diana. Hence, his enjoyment of the salon originated from David's desire for a more traditionally feminine partner.

"Mama, I want to stop in here. There's something I've wanted to do forever, and I feel like it's almost a right of passage to do it with your mother."

"What's that chiquita?"

"I want to get my ears pierced."

"Really? You hated it when I had you get your ears pierced as a bambino. Why the sudden change?"

"It just feels right. I can't explain it any other way. I know David will like it, and I think I'm finally ready. Again..."

"You don't need my permission, but I'll go with you."

Ten minutes later, David and Olivia were leaving the shop with David's ears freshly pierced. David had asked Olivia to hold his hands as the piercing gun rapidly shot the needle through his earlobe. He remembered the 'first' time he had experienced this as a child and how much he didn't want it then. *How things change*, David thought wistfully.

Looking across the shopping center, David's eyes landed on the trendy chain restaurant. "Why don't we get dinner, just the two of us?"

"Sure! You know I won't turn down a chance to spend more time with you!"

David and Olivia sat at a table by the window, allowing them both to watch as patrons made their way around the shopping center. A quick visit by their waitress and ordered their drinks and an appetizer.

"So, how are things with David? Really? I can tell something is not right. You haven't called as much lately. I'm worried about you," Olivia asked as the waitress dropped off their drinks.

"You know me too well, mama; things were difficult there for a while. David hadn't been paying me enough attention, and it was hard to feel good about myself. We've only been married for a year and a half. I didn't think the passion would disappear that soon. Fortunately, we started seeing a counselor, and she's helped. Not to be indelicate, but **\*David\*** has improved a ton since we started seeing her," David said, concluding his statement with a devious little smile as he sipped his margarita.

"Well, that's good to hear. I thought he might be having an affair; a mother can always tell when something is wrong. I checked his things; I didn't find anything wrong."

"So that's what you were looking through our stuff for. You should have just said that."

"I wasn't sure how you would respond. You were acting so strangely, too. I thought for sure that you were pretending to keep a straight face despite your husband's infidelity. I didn't want you to be upset that I suspected him."

"Well, he isn't cheating on me. I know he's not like I know the back of my hand," David said as he held his hand up. Looking at his hand with its newly painted nails, he was shocked by how feminine he looked. His neatly shaped and polished nails had him mesmerized until the waitress returned with their food a moment later.

The mother and 'daughter' continued their conversation over food and drinks until things reached their natural conclusion. David had deeply enjoyed their time together, and the conversation had been joyful.

"I'm so glad I don't have to worry about you anymore, chiquita. You don't know how much stress that causes. Well, maybe someday you'll know," Olivia said as she glanced down at David's midsection.

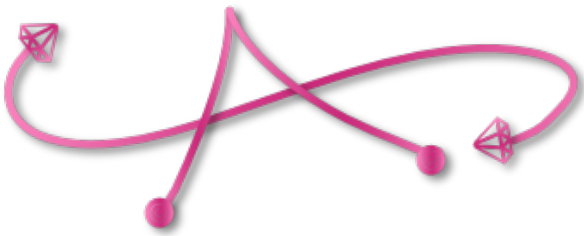
Instead of responding with a dismissal, David wishfully imagined a future that included children. He unknowingly placed his hand over his belly in a way to suggest he was considering the prospect.

"So you do want children! I knew it! It would be best if you talked to David. Tonight! It would be best if you talked to him tonight. Tell him how you feel! He will respect your wishes; I know it."

"Mama, it's more complicated than that. David doesn't know what he wants when it comes to children. I have to wait until he is ready," David said, reticent to the reality of his 'husband's' family desires.

"I think I've said what needs to be said. You deserve to be happy, too, Diana. You get to want things, too," Olivia said as she finished the last gulp of her beverage and stood up.

"I'll be off then. You have a lot to discuss with your husband," Olivia said as she started to leave David, who was sitting there stunned at Olivia's actions. "I'll be waiting for the 'good news,' you can call anytime!"



## Chapter 22 - David Jumps In The Deep End

"Olivia? David? Anyone home?" Diana called out as she entered the apartment. She saw David's shoulder bag on the kitchen table and knew that David had at least come home at some point. Diana continued to call out to anyone to see if someone was home before she noticed that Olivia's bags were not in the living room anymore. *Did he manage to do it? He was so uncomfortable with the idea this morning.* Diana's inspection of the space seemed to confirm it, in any case. Olivia had left. They had the apartment to themselves and would thus be able to revert to their original bodies tonight. Diana was ecstatic as she practically jumped for joy.

"What's got you so excited? You look like you won the lottery," David asked as he emerged from the bedroom.

"My mother, she's gone. You did it!" Diana said as she continued to dance in place, moving her arms

and hips around in joyous little motions.

"Yes... my mother decided to head back home. She said she was finally satisfied that things were okay between us. She thought you were cheating on me, so she dropped in on us unexpectedly. The idea that you would cheat on me is pretty far-fetched, but you know how mothers are."

Diana's dance of joy gradually stopped as she heard David's response. *Shit, he's back to believing he's me. I need to get through to him... Wait, are those studs in his ears? Did he get his ears pierced? My ears? I don't want pierced ears; why would he do that?*

"So, umm... 'Diana, did you have a good time with your mother this afternoon?' Diana asked cautiously. She didn't want to disturb David if she was misreading the situation, and she didn't want to swing the opposite way either by disrespecting whom David felt he was. Either could result in explosive reactions after so much time apart. Diana couldn't know how long David had been experiencing this either.

"It was a great afternoon; thanks for asking, sweetie," David replied, leaning in and giving Diana a peck on the lips.

"I see you got your ears pierced. That's... new."

"Yeah! I realized I wanted to do it, and we made it a little right of passage. Mama and I went in, and she held my hand while I got it done. It was cute. It hurt like heck, though," David said and then paused as he modeled his ears swaying side to side, showing each ear off as he framed it with his hand. "Do you like them?"

Diana felt a simultaneous dual response populate her mind. *Yes! No!* Her thoughts rang out. David's 'yes' and her 'no' hit the tip of her mind with equal weight. It scared her immediately amidst the demonstration of YourEssence's mind-altering effects she was observing in David. *If I had two opposite reactions, that means one of us liked seeing me in earrings. I'm guessing that's David. This means that even though David thinks he's me, his mind's desires still exist. I need to figure out how to make him remember himself.*

"I think they are exactly what \*David\* wants."

David paused and looked quizzically at Diana before continuing, "I'm glad! I got my nails done, too. Don't you think they look fabulous?"

"Oh, yes, \*David\* likes them a lot."

"All right... so I had something to discuss with you, David. Would now be an ok time to bring it up?" David asked, emphasizing the use of 'David' in the sentence to call attention to the fact that he had noticed what Diana was saying.

"Yes, now would be fine. \*David\* is available to talk."

"Ok, what's the deal? You keep saying your name in every sentence. It's weird, cut it out."

"Do you think hearing the name \*David\* is weird?" Diana asked, raising her eyebrow.

"Yes, what you're doing is weird. I'd prefer you cut out the silliness because I want to talk to you about something serious."

Diana could see her gambit wasn't working, so she straightened up and clarified to David that she was giving her undivided attention. "Ok, go ahead..." Diana said before mumbling "David" at the end.

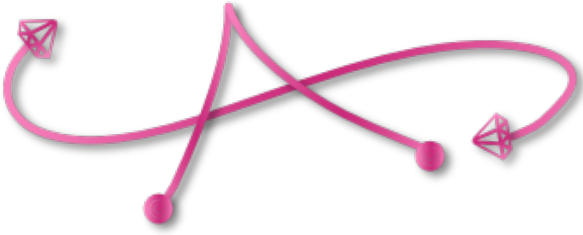
"Well, it's about us and our future. I was talking with Mama and realized I was done waiting for the perfect time. I, gosh, this is hard; I want to start a family with you. I think it's time we think seriously about kids."

"Holy fuck!" Diana exclaimed as she heard the words come out of David's mouth. "You what?"

"So I guess this is not something you share," David said with obvious tears forming in his eyes. Diana had clearly upset David with her response. "I'm sorry 'Diana', I didn't mean to upset you. I'm just surprised. We talked about something so different this morning. I thought we would be discussing a different kind of future. You know... relative to you and me and the 'roles' we play."

"I knew you'd be upset if I told you I wasn't on the pill anymore. I stopped a couple of weeks ago hoping we could get to this point together, but you were so adamant this morning that I knew this was going to happen," David got out before he dropped his face into his hands and began to cry.

Diana felt stuck in an exceedingly difficult position. She couldn't console David traditionally without risking him going deeper into his new reality. If Diana didn't offer some respite, then she could damage her relationship with David irrevocably. She had to choose carefully.



## Chapter 23 - We Interrupt Your Usual Broadcast For This Important Message

"There, there, *'Diana.'* I'm sorry. I shouldn't have said that; let me start over. Starting a family with you would be a dream come true. You're the most important person in the world to me. I want you to have what you want, and we should absolutely talk about this more," Diana said to David as she embraced her husband. David settled down with Diana's apology and comfort. The two stayed hugging while David considered his path forward. He knew he wanted to start a family; it was his most intense and significant desire. He needed to figure out how to proceed now that his *'husband'* had reacted poorly to his initial prompting.

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Later that night, Diana concocted her plan for saving David from himself. Doing some quick research showed that women would switch to a different version of YourEssence when getting pregnant so they didn't interfere with the body's natural processes related to gestation. Typically, YourEssence poses a problem as it may cause damage to fetal cells. It wasn't guaranteed to prevent an egg from implanting, but Doctors recommend cessation of YourEssence treatment when someone tries to get pregnant. Diana would use this information to prevent David from taking her nightly dose of YourEssence, and then in the morning, hopefully, things would be better for David.

Diana sent the article to David's device and asked him to read it. "Oh gosh! I can't believe I didn't know about this. Thanks for sharing this with me."

"Of course. I wanted to show you I'm serious about considering this for us. So when I started researching it, I wanted you to know immediately."

"That means a lot to me that you started researching it for us. I'm sorry I got upset with you earlier."

"I'm sorry, too. You should be starting your ovulation in the next few days, so if you're serious about this, then we should probably stop taking YourEssence right away. Wouldn't want to risk a pregnancy not taking."

"I'm impressed you know my cycle so well! You're right, though. I will skip my dose tonight and call

my Obstetrician tomorrow for the updated doses. One night without YourEssence won't kill me," David said, giddy with the idea of working to become pregnant.

That night, David tried to initiate sex with Diana again, but Diana shut it down. "We don't want to risk getting pregnant while YourEssence is in your system. The gloves come off tomorrow, though. You'll be pregnant by nightfall if I have anything to say about it," Diana exaggerated to appease David's misdirected ambitions. Noticing that her words had created the desired result, Diana felt sorry for David. He was resting so peacefully pressed up against her body. For a split second, she almost considered letting David have what he wanted. *Would it be so bad to maintain the status quo?* Sleep soon arrived, and Diana pondered what the future she would wake to would hold.

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"Holy shit!!! Wake up, wake up, wake up! David, you have to wake up. Something's wrong. Something's very wrong!!!" Diana shouted at David as she shook him to get him to wake up.

"Huh? What's going on? What's wrong?" David said groggily. His voice awkwardly cracked as he said this.

"David, you... You didn't change back. At least not fully. You still look like me! Like Diana, but different. You look like you, too, but a girl version of you. Something's very wrong! This isn't supposed to happen. Oh God, we're going to go to jail. They're going to send us away for abusing YourEssence!" Diana was distraught. Her words were frantic and fast. David couldn't process what she said as he still had morning fog.

"Just hold tight.... Diana. Do you look like... me? Wait... that's not right. I'm not Diana, I'm David. I'm remembering now. I was losing myself, and your memories were taking over. We would stop using YourEssence, and things would hopefully get better. You... hang on. I wanted to keep taking YourEssence. You tricked me into not taking my pill last night by telling me we would try for a baby," David started to cry as his thoughts and memories coalesced into a coherent timeline of the last few days, finally unencumbered by the 'corrective' forces of YourEssence.

Diana went to embrace David, but David turned away as she approached. Diana backed away as David's response indicated he needed some space. Standing there, Diana felt powerless as she reached out to provide comfort, but she soon drew her hand back to not further disrupt David's delicate state.

Diana grabbed some clothes and then left David to himself. Diana was relieved to wear her regular

clothes for the first time in so many weeks. Living as a man had carried many benefits. There was a tremendous relief in being back in her own body. Sitting in a cami and sweats, she hadn't realized how much she had missed her body.

It was an hour later when David finally emerged from the bedroom. He was also wearing a cami but hadn't placed anything on over his legs, leaving his crotch exposed. He appeared to have at least some manner of penis beneath his panties but no sign of his testicles. Further, David seemed to be a chimera of himself and Diana. His breasts were smaller now and his hips narrower, but he still had a noticeably pinched-in waist. His facial features were soft and feminine, but distinctive qualities proclaimed him to be very much a relative of the Martin family. He looked like a sister that David didn't have.

Diana stood up to approach David, but he waved her off. "I'm not ready to be consoled; I just need some coffee." Diana followed David's wishes but couldn't help noticing that David was a mere inch or two taller than she was.

David returned with two cups of coffee as a peace offering. Diana viewed it as a positive sign that David didn't hate her. A few silent moments later. David placed his coffee mug down and said, "We have a lot to talk about."

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"So, I understand why you did what you did, and I forgive you. I know I wasn't in my right mind. I wasn't even in your right mind. I get that now, so I don't hold you accountable for how you had to handle my craziness."

"Thank you, that means a lot to me, David. I was so scared and confused. I didn't know what to do!"

"I completely understand. Now comes the hard part: we must decide what to do about me."

"What do you mean 'do about you'?"

"Well, you changed back into yourself. I am something else now. Someone else. Going back to our original plan isn't possible anymore," David said as he hung his head in despair.

"I'm sure we can figure something out! Don't give up hope!"

"Don't Diana. I hit the dark web to look up my symptoms. My situation isn't going to get better. It



looks like we have two options. The first option is to return to taking YourEssence, and we make our role reversal permanent."

"That would mean we both become the other person permanently, though. Would we even remember who we were?"

"Based on my experience, no. We wouldn't."

"That's so sad. Don't you think that's sad? To let our real 'selves' die like that?"

"Yes, which leads me to option two. You divorce 'David,' and I go down to a fly-by-night sex change shop and have them finish what YourEssence has done to me. Then I come back and get all my paperwork changed to reflect my new life as a trans woman."

"What?! Why would I leave you?"

"Because I know you, Diana. More so than anyone else on any level. I was you up until last night. I know you are 100% heterosexual. You like men. I can't blame you; I feel like that might be true for me now still, which is just even more reason for you to leave me. It doesn't make sense for two heterosexual women to be married to each other."

"That's ridiculous. You're jumping to conclusions. We don't know anything about our lives or wishes after 3 hours of being in this situation."

"Diana..."

"No, David. I'm not resolving to leave you after three hours. Final answer."

"Heh, you do need to update your pop culture references. That's almost thirty years out of date now."

"What? What are you talking about?"

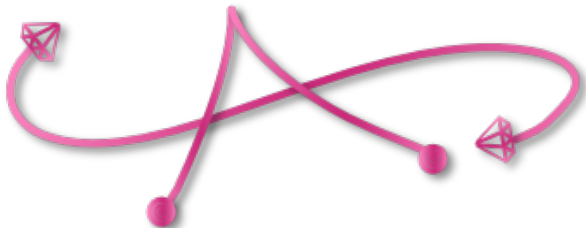
"Carie, she joked that I said something outdated yesterday. She told me to update my lingo. Well, she meant you. Then you just said 'final answer' like that old game show. It made me think of Carie's comment. Sorry, I'm not making things better. I'll let it go..."

Diana was contemplative for a moment before she burst out laughing. "She's so right. I make 'old

school' look like a newborn."

"What? You are so ridiculous," David said, visibly releasing the stress of the morning as the humor of the interaction provided relief. Diana came over and finally embraced David. "We will figure this out. Together, no more talk of leaving each other. Ok?"

"Yeah... okay"



## Chapter 24 - That's Not What I Hear

"You'll have to do it for me; I don't want to raise suspicion," David remarked Monday morning. The weekend had been tough on both of them, but they hadn't landed on any permanent solutions. Diana refused to accept a future where they would separate despite his continued insistence. "Why do you think I forced us into couples counseling?" She said in response each time David tried to convince her that she could just let him go for her happiness. It was a mild appeasement, given how distressing the last week's events had been for David. Still, he couldn't shake the feeling that his best option was retreating to a cave, never to be seen again.

"Yeah, I'll call. It's no problem. Should we say coronavirus? That should be believable as to why you'd be out for so long."

"Better than saying chronic diarrhea."

"Eww, gross, David."

"What? I agree with you."

"Yeah, but you didn't have to go there."

"Hmph, I thought it was funny. Oh well..."

"Shh, it's ringing... Yes, hello. This is Diana Martin. I'm calling to let you know David Martin won't be

in today and likely won't be for most of the week... Yes, coronavirus... Yeah, it gets around... I will... I will... Thank you, goodbye," Diana said, ending the call on her device.

"They bought it?"

"Yes, Candice says to get lots of fluids into you. So be sure that you mention that once we get you back on your feet."

"If anything, it would have to be you, Diana. I won't be able to return to being David Martin."

"Are you so sure? You haven't even tried taking your own YourEssence yet. Maybe it will work?"

"Not according to the forum posts I saw."

"It's not like we're working in an area with robust studies. We're already outside the realm of legality here. What extra harm could it do to try it?"

"According to the forum, I could end up crippled. Or otherwise disfigured. They made it sound pretty horrible."

"Crippled? I don't buy it. How would that even work?"

"How does anything YourEssence work? You do recall we turned into **\*identical\*** clones of each other, right? The stuff works on every cell in your body, and as you can see, I'm no longer made up of a single person's cells as it is."

"Right, but I don't understand why your original body's dose would be any worse than continuing to use mine."

"It just is! I don't know why!" David exploded in frustration. Diana decided to back off at this point. David was going through many complex emotions, and Diana's thinking was causing more distress. Diana decided to file that thought away for now.

"I'm sorry, David. I didn't want to upset you; I'll stop."

"Thank you. I know it's hard to accept. We will have to at this point, however. I can't explain the science behind it all."

"I wouldn't expect you to," Diana said, concluding the brief debate. "I've better get going; I can't be late for my job."

"All right, have a good day. Don't forget the notes I took on the new teaching techniques. I wouldn't want Robert to catch you on your first day back."

"Don't worry. I read them all last night. It seems pretty straightforward. I can see why you liked the training. It's right up my alley. Are you sure you'll be fine here in the apartment alone?"

"Yes, I'll be fine. I'll catch up on daytime television. I'm not going to get in trouble."

"All right, be good. I'll see you tonight."

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*Finally, I am alone with my thoughts.*

*Why does she keep pushing me to try 'David's' YourEssence? I don't want to. That's not who I am anymore. Can't she see that?*

*I understand now that she was scared that I thought I was her, but that's not exactly true. I thought my name was Diana, but I wasn't her clone or anything. I was **\*me\***, the female me. It was good, and I was happy with who I was. I was excited about the future—about having a baby...*

*A baby...*

*Me, becoming a mother.*

*Could I see that as my future?*

*Diapers, crying, colic, and all the rest.*

*Breastfeeding...*

*Nurturing, bonding, loving...*

*Grr! Why did she have to trick me like that?! We could have been trying for a baby last night instead of crying over the impossible future we're trying to navigate now.*

*It's all too much. Diana should have left things the way they were. They were better then...*

David was now standing in front of Diana's vanity mirror in the bathroom. Her bottle of YourEssence was in his hand. He was shaking from overstimulation. His thoughts were running wild as he debated taking his future back into his own hands. *She would have no choice but to go back to being David. We can't both take Diana's YourEssence. There aren't enough pills for that. We would get caught. She doesn't want to go to jail!* David thought as he held the YourEssence pill in his hand, ready to down the medication.

"No!!! I can't do this to Diana!" David yelled out as he put the pill down. He was visibly shaking as he stared at his new reflection in the mirror. It was an entirely different person staring back at him. He could see aspects of both 'his' and 'her' face reflecting back. It was the aspects of Diana that felt comforting. *Why do I want to be a woman now all of a sudden?! Why couldn't I go back to being David like Diana wants? It would probably work... take a pill and find out. Grr! No! I can't! I won't!*

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"Mmm, smells amazing in here. What are you making?"

"Pozole, it seemed like a good option for tonight."

"Wow, you know how to make Pozole?"

"Well, you do, so yeah, I do now too."

"Right, is there anything about me you didn't absorb?"

"As far as I can tell, no."

"Seriously? Do you remember everything? So you know who kissed Evan out back," Diana started naming an obscure memory of her childhood that had no connection to anything David would have encountered. To Diana's dismay, David finished her sentence, "behind Chuy's restaurant in 8th grade. Yes, it was Claudia."

"Well, it seems I'm at a disadvantage then. I didn't get all of your memories from my time as you," Diana remarked, stunned by David's display of Diana's memories.

"That's all right; it's probably for the best. You know I'm having a tough time here due to what happened to me."

"Yeah, of course... I'm sorry, David."

David recoiled a bit at hearing Diana call him that name. Even just the suggestion of who he was originally led to discomfort. "Dinner's ready though. Buen provecho."

"Provechito," Diana replied hesitantly. *How deeply do my memories run in David?*

"So tell me about your day. Did Robert give you a hard time?" David asked as the two sat down for their meal.

"No! Everything was good today. It was nice being back with my students again. A far cry from the rough and tumble energy of the office environment. I didn't want to punch anyone, so that was good!"

"Why would you want to punch someone? Did something happen at the office?"

"Oh, did I forget to tell you? Your boss came down on me the other day and criticized the deal I had worked up. It made me so mad I almost clocked him on the spot."

"What?! You can't punch Tom. What happened? Tell me you didn't hit him!"

"No, no, I didn't hit him. I wanted to. I really wanted to. My fist was closed and everything, but I stood there and took it. Brian got an earful later over whiskeys, though."

"So that's why you were so drunk the other night."

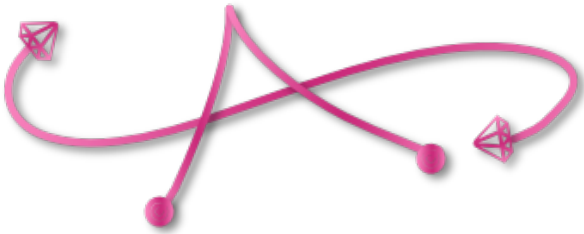
"Yeah, but we're still due a huge bonus check. It should be ready for you when you go back to the office next week."

"You know I can't do that. I can't go in looking like this; they wouldn't even know who I am."

"Right, right. Well, maybe they will mail it then."

"Yeah, maybe."

The couple ate the rest of their dinner in relative silence as the tension between them grew. David couldn't bring himself to admit how he felt for fear of losing Diana. Diana couldn't admit that she knew David was lying about what would happen if he took his own YourEssence. She had looked it up while on break. There were hundreds of cases of residual reversions. All of them cleared up by taking an individual's own YourEssence. Diana couldn't figure out why David was so reluctant to take his YourEssence.



## Chapter 25 - Counseling? No Thank You

**\*New Notification\* Counseling Session Tuesday, 6 pm. Confirm appointment?\***

"Oh shit, I forgot about our counseling appointment tomorrow," Diana groaned as she continued to wash the dishes from dinner.

"We will just skip it this week. It's the least of our worries."

"No, we can't skip it. We signed up, and we're going to go."

"How exactly do you propose we do that? Arms extended, ready to have them put shackles on us?"

"Don't be so ridiculous, David. No, we will just have to go as each other one more time. It won't kill us to use YourEssence illicitly again."

"Are you serious? Are you willing to take that risk? What if I don't remember who I am?"

"Well, we will just have to take that chance. You seem to have been doing better these past few days, so I am not that worried. Plus, my mother isn't here to trigger you anymore."

"Uhhh yeah, but I just told you I already have your entire set of memories up here. What else would she have triggered? No, I don't think we should do this. Why is it so important that we don't miss an appointment."

Diana paused. She knew it would be okay to miss a session, but she wanted to understand David's desires. His apprehension to return to living as himself had piqued Diana's curiosity and fears. "Because I want us to be able to continue our work on repairing our relationship. That's what's important to me, and for whatever reason, Dr. Simms seems to get us talking about our relationship better than we can manage on our own."

"It's that important to you?"

"Yes, it's that important to me."

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"How was your day at school 'Diana'?" The real Diana asked David.

"Pretty typical. Carie was her usual gossip self. You won't believe the latest scandal," David started to jump into the story but stopped when Dr. Simms invited them back into her office.

"Welcome back, Martins. You're both looking healthy. How have things been since last week?"

David responded rapidly, "Good, 'David' and I have made great strides since last week. I feel closer to him than I have in months."

"That's amazing, Diana. What do you think led to that?"

"Of all things, a visit from my mother. I know... I know... It sounds implausible, but it's true."

Diana sat and listened in shock. *How can he be so open about this all? Does he lose himself that much in the fantasy that we've constructed?* Diana continued listening as David told a sanitized version of the week's events. He described how he had bonded with Olivia, how it had opened his eyes, and how his 'husband' had been so supportive.

"That sounds wonderful, Diana. I'd like to hear from David now. How did this week feel from your perspective?" Dr. Simms asked as she turned her body towards the person she believed to be David. Dr. Simms continued to take a few more notes as Diana collected her thoughts and set her plan in motion.

"Actually, it's not that great, Mary. I felt a bit ganged up on and like my desires took secondary status to 'Diana's,'" Diana responded as she watched David's face. As expected, he looked shocked



and at least a little hurt.

"Oh? That's a surprise. Tell me more. Why are you feeling this way?"

"Well, 'Diana' left some parts out. For starters, Olivia thought I was cheating on her daughter, so she went through all my stuff. That was a huge violation of my privacy, and it doesn't make me feel good to be accused of something so bad. The real frustration is even worse, however. 'Diana' ambushed me at the end of the week with something truly shocking. She just dropped that she wants to start a family out of nowhere. \*I\* don't get where that comes from. It's never been something she wanted, just something our parents pester us about."

David looked aghast on the couch. The familiar distancing Dr. Simms had noted on the couple's initial visit had returned, as the couple was now as far removed from each other as the couch would allow.

"That does sound like a lot. Diana, what do you have to say in response to David?"

David was looking deeply into Diana's eyes. He had a look on his face that only a married couple could have, which allowed him to convey his question, "Are we really about to do this?" Diana's look back was stoic and firm. That was all the encouragement David needed.

"I thought 'David' understood that \*I\* needed to see some things change. \*I\* want to change, and part of that is that \*I\* want to start a family. I don't think wanting to be a mother is so far-fetched. I had a great mother, and I'd like to use what I've learned to be one too."

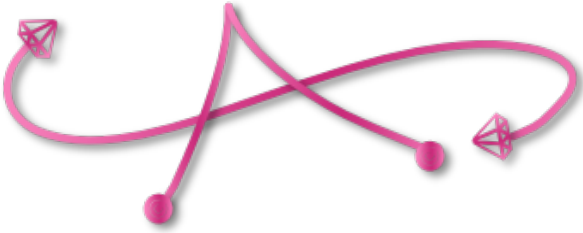
"You say you want to **\*change\*** but what about your more **\*manly\*** qualities? Are you going to abandon those?"

Dr. Simms looked curiously at the person she believed to be David, noting that the question was oddly phrased. Her attention was soon redirected as the response to this question came back.

"This is who \*I\* am. Who I want to be. I like this! If I must give up some things to get that, I accept it. Can you?"

Diana was shocked. David had just confirmed that he preferred to be and stay a woman, and Dr. Simms was furiously scribbling notes on her legal pad. Diana's response was about to shape their respective futures, and she needed to proceed with caution so that she didn't inadvertently alarm Dr. Simms.

"I..."



## Chapter 26 - Catharsis for David

"Yes, I accept you 'Diana,' but I need some time to think about what that future you seek means for me. It's a pretty big change to our whole dynamic. I'm not saying no to kids, but I'm not ready to say yes... yet."

Dr. Simms was furiously scribbling notes as this bombshell unfolded before her. She could hardly believe how quickly it had escalated and was convinced there was more to it than the words being spoken. She couldn't place her finger on it, but she felt like there was some subtext that carried a deeper meaning.

David was cautiously elated. He seemed like he wanted to leap off the couch and prance about in joyous dance, but he wasn't allowing himself to do so, given the tenuous agreement that Diana had acquiesced to. He didn't even know the full extent of what Diana was truthfully agreeing to. Diana wasn't in a position to be entirely forthright after all.

"You mean that? You aren't mad at me for feeling this way?" David finally spoke.

"Yes, I mean it. I didn't say I wasn't mad, however. I still feel pretty upset about how you have treated me since 'your' mother visited. That said, I love you 'Diana.' I'm committed to figuring this out and finding our path together."

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"I can't believe you! Why did you say those things in front of Dr. Simms!" David launched his judgment at Diana when they were securely sealed in their car.

"What? Me? Did you even hear yourself? You were going on and on about how great everything was. You get so lost when you are in my body!"

"I was pretending! You know, for the doctor?"

"Well, it didn't seem like pretending when you admitted you want to stay living as a woman."

"I said I wanted to change. I didn't say I wanted to live as a woman."

"What do you think it means to become a mother?"

"Well, if that's what we decided, then obviously. I just meant I don't want to be 'David' anymore. I don't feel like I'm that person anymore."

Diana paused. David had just admitted an even bigger truth that needed to be discussed.

"You don't feel like yourself anymore? Or you don't like your old body?"

"Both. I know who I am. I'm me, but that me isn't 'David' anymore. It's hard to explain."

"So, you're saying I'm married to a stranger now?"

"Stranger? What? No, you're still married to me."

"But I don't know who **\*you\*** are anymore. You just told me you aren't 'David,' so who are you then?"

With that, David started to cry. His reality felt so heavy that he could barely handle the discussion's concepts. He still had all his memories of his life as David. So, all the things he had lived and all those experiences were still his, but he also had something more. Something new. Those things merged, combined, and presented themselves with his original self. He was neither David nor Diana, yet he was also both. David did his best to explain this through breaks to collect himself as his emotions weighed heavily. Diana looked on worriedly but also with a glimmer of empathy, allowing David to find the strength to continue.

"I think I get it better now. This is a lot to handle."

"Yeah, I know..."

"Do you remember when we first met? When you told me you were going to marry me?"

"Heh, yeah. I was so full of it. I just wanted to get your attention. I thought earning the attention of someone as beautiful as you would be so amazing."

"Now remember it from my perspective."

"What?"

"You said you had my memories. I want to know if you remember it like I do."

"Umm, ok. Let me think," David closed his eyes and reflected on that night. His memories flowed and felt ephemeral for a moment before they coalesced together. A smile broke across his face, and Diana knew that he was remembering. Before he could speak, Diana leaned in and pressed her lips against David's. The two remained in place as they both relived the memory of their first meeting. As Diana pulled away, they shared an intuition about what the other was thinking.

"Now you know what I felt, and with that kiss, I'm setting us off on the right foot for our **\*new\*** relationship."

"You wanted me to kiss you that night..."

"Yes, I thought you were cute, too."

"And what do you think now?"

"You're a significant person to me, but I need to fully get to know who this new **\*you\*** is before I can decide our future."

"So, you want us to start over?"

"In essence, yes."

"What does that mean exactly?"

"Well, for a little while, it means that we need to find you another apartment."

"What?!"

"If I'm going to stay living as you, then it's only fair that I keep the apartment. It's **\*my\*** salary that

pays for it primarily."

"So you want us to stay in each other's bodies?"

"That's up to you. We need both of our incomes to live. That can come from 'David's' job and from 'Diana's' teaching job or another income source that you produce, but we can't just live on one salary."

"So you'd have me become another person?"

"If that's what you think is right for you, then I'll support it as we relearn who we are together."

"When do I have to decide? Are you kicking me out tonight?"

"No, I'm not kicking you out. You can stay with me until we get a place for you, but one of us is sleeping on the couch until then."

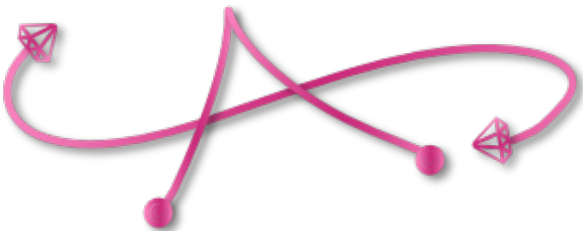
"Fair enough. I guess I'm the one sleeping on the couch."

"Right, you are."

"Yeah, that's a good incentive for me to decide quickly."

"Take your time, but we will follow through once you decide. I'm not willing to leave things unaddressed indefinitely."

"Yeah, of course. I'll decide. I can't afford not to..."



## Chapter 27 - Choices, Choices, Choices

"A week goes by fast..." David said to Diana. While David was taking the time to make his choice, Diana reverted to living as her original self. So when David said this, it was to the female version of

Diana.

"Yeah! It really does!" Diana replied. She wanted to ask if David had decided what path forward he wanted to pursue. The limbo of the last three days had been challenging.

"I know you're waiting to hear what I've decided about our future. It's not lost on me that this is a huge decision. It's just been tough to make such a big decision. It impacts us both so thoroughly and completely... I don't want to lose you..."

"That's what I want, too! We have to give ourselves the space and time to learn to love the new 'us.' Plus, you'll experience the joys of preparing for a date—heck, a first date even! The excitement, anticipation, and fear—it's all part of it! I know you'll love it, even if it feels worrying now."

"First date? Uhhh..."

"Yeah, we will have our new relationship's first date after you decide what path to take."

"If I choose to have us swap, do we really have to do that? I mean, we would already be married in that configuration anyway."

"Yes, absolutely. I'm not going to deny you this experience. You might not know it yet, but it would be a big point of contention in the future if you didn't live through it yourself."

"I can't really tell the difference in my memories, though; it's all the same to me."

"We'd know the difference. Trust me. It will be great! You have to decide what shape the date takes. All things considered, that's a pretty sweet deal. You get to decide what your new body looks like, and you already have a hot date lined up!"

David felt a bit better after the conversation with Diana. The couple had been distant for the past few days, and it became more apparent to David that Diana was giving him space. She was still committed to him as things stood now, so David just needed to decide what shape his future would take.

He had spent the last few days outside of YourEssence's influences, hoping the right path forward would present itself. Little nagging things were the only clear signs he got, however. Neither his nor Diana's clothes genuinely fit right in his hybrid state. His height was different, and having breasts meant his shirts hung awkwardly on his chest. Diana had no bras in an appropriate band size for

David either. David's most persistent thought was that he just wished to get past this decision and move on with his life.

Since the counseling session, David researched YourEssence and UniGlobal and learned about BetterEssence. It would offer him a path to become the woman of his dreams or at least the genetic potential of what his body would have become if he had been born a woman. This was tempting, but it carried significant downsides. He would have to effectively transition socially from male to female. His parents would need to be informed. His work and colleagues. His friends. He also had to wonder whether or not Diana could learn to love this version of him or rather her.

If David suggested that they make their once temporary swap a permanent facet of their lives, those social stresses could be avoided. They would settle into their reversed roles like they had previously done. The only difficulty was that Diana insisted that David move out temporarily while they relearned each other. This would create another kind of stress in their relationships with friends and family. David wondered how Dr. Simms would react to hearing they were living apart or how Diana's work friends would respond. David put this thought aside for the moment as all versions of his future included this point.

The last thing David had to consider was just how pervasive his mind's absorption of Diana's memories had been. He was now fluent in Spanish due to his time as Diana. He felt a stronger connection to Diana's siblings than to his own. David wondered why the same hadn't happened to Diana.

*Maybe it had? Diana was stoic when she was in my body. Perhaps she is experiencing the same memory changes as I am but is hiding it more. That would be consistent with my behavior. More than it is for Diana. Maybe it's a mix of my mind making her act differently and her not realizing it to be able to raise the concern.* David pondered to himself.

Waking up the following morning, Diana reached over and pulled herself up behind David, embracing him. David wasn't sure at first, but he thought Diana might have been playing with his nipples. It wasn't much attention, and Diana's hand soon came to rest, gently cupping David's breast. David turned his head and saw that Diana was still asleep.

*She's playing with my breasts in her sleep... I've never known Diana to do anything like that. Is she dreaming of having sex with me? A female version of me?*

David rustled and turned onto his back, hoping it would get Diana to notice what she was doing. David could tell how much of his memories and behaviors had been absorbed by Diana based on

what she did in response. Instead of turning away and resetting herself, Diana adjusted her position and returned her arm to rest on David's breast.

*Well, that's a signal on its own, isn't it?*

Later that morning, David had prepared coffee for himself and Diana.

"Mmm, that smells good," Diana said as she exited the hallway and entered the living space.

"I poured you a cup. Here you go," David said as he handed the cup to Diana.

"My hero. I was really zonked out. I guess the week took it out of me more than I realized. I had some good dreams, at least," Diana said as she sipped the warm drink.

David knew from first-hand experience what Diana was dreaming and agreed they were almost undoubtedly happy.

Diana sat down on their couch, and David followed suit. David was looking at Diana for signs that she had been affected by YourEssence. Something that would tell him that she would not reject living as David for the rest of her life. Something that could let David feel more sure of his decision. He wanted to stay living as Diana, and he wanted to stay married to 'David.'

Diana was curled up on the couch with her knees at her chest. Just like David had adopted doing. David was trying to find the courage to share his decision, but Diana was complicating it. David would be robbing Diana of her life, of her body, of her femininity. That seemed like a lot to ask.

Diana put her cup of coffee down and leaned back against the couch, stretching out. David noted how Diana was now acting less like herself. This move was much more a 'David' move. Especially the positioning of her legs with her crotch exposed widely. As Diana returned to sitting upright, she didn't reposition her legs. She was man-spreading on the couch without realizing it.

"So... I've been thinking a lot," David said timidly. It was a small sample size, but David was done waiting. He wanted to get things moving again after the week of limbo.

"Oh, have you decided?" Diana asked as she reached down and aggressively scratched at her crotch.

"Yes, I have," David said, gaining more confidence.



"That's great! Who are we going to become? Boyfriend and girlfriend? Girlfriend and girlfriend?"

"Well, I still wish we could stay as 'husband' and 'wife,' but I've decided within the options you've given me."

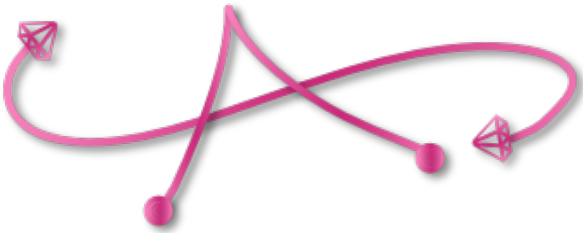
"Right, those are the rules! It's better to start the process. So what will it be?"

David sat there and looked at Diana deeply. *Is that stubble on her face?* David questioned as he looked at Diana. He shook it off, figuring it was an illusion, and finally summoned the courage to say it. "I think we should swap permanently. I'd much rather date 'David' and live as 'Diana'"

"Great! I figured that was the case," Diana said, standing up. Something was off, however. She suddenly appeared to be much taller than before. She reached behind her back and released her bra. David's suspicion was confirmed as she pulled it from under her shirt. Her breasts were gone, replaced by David's firm pecks.

"You knew? How?"

"I had my suspicions, plus it's what I wanted too. I knew you would figure it out, so I took a YourEssence when I got up. Now, we can go apartment shopping together. You should take yours so we don't have to wait too late to get started."



## Chapter 28 - You're So Beautiful

"¡Eres tan bonita!" Diana remarked as David exited the hallway.

"Gracias, ¡qué lindo!" David responded as he blushed. He grabbed the sides of his dress and twirled them back and forth a bit before his elation took over, and he did a playful spin, causing his dress to twirl.

"I can tell already that this was the right decision. From now on, I should prepare myself to respond

to 'David.' You should do the same for 'Diana,' that is."

David moved over to Diana and pressed his body against hers. He wanted to show her how grateful he was that she was accepting this so readily. Staring into her eyes, David felt the same love and passion for her that he had grown to know over these last few weeks. He tried to lean forward for a kiss, but Diana leaned back.

"Uhh, sorry. We're not at that step yet. We haven't even had our first date."

"Seriously? Maybe we can take a minute first before we jump right in?"

"Nope! These are the rules! Don't worry, I'll ask you out soon."

"Phooey, well, I guess I'll just have to wait. Don't leave me waiting for too long, though!"

"Wouldn't dream of it. Now, should we go check out the first place on our list for today?"

"Sounds good!"

\*\*\*\*\*

"'Diana,' this is Jackeline. She's going to show us the apartments today. I told her we were looking for a two-bedroom and that you would be moving in right away. I'll stay behind while I get our old apartment cleared out."

David looked at Diana, a bit confused, but Diana gave the "go along with it" glance, and David decided to roll with it.

"Yes! We're very excited to be apartment hunting."

"Well, I'm delighted to be able to show you some places today. These are all part of my company's buildings, so if you have any specific questions, don't hesitate to ask. I should have answers or be able to get you an answer quickly," Jackeline said to the couple. Diana had informed Jackeline that they wanted a new apartment to expand their family. Diana didn't want to explain this detail to David at this point. She hoped that her explanation would be enough to convince David.

"So, this first apartment is on the fifth floor: two bedrooms, one with an en-suite and a second guest bathroom off the main living space. There's a bonus room that can be used as a small office

or a playroom," Jackeline introduced the first apartment as they walked into the empty apartment. Diana glared at Jackeline as she said playroom, but the gesture was lost on her.

"I like how bright it is! I could see 'us' here," David said nearly instantly.

"Well, the important part is if you could see 'you' here. Don't forget you'll be on your own for a while," Diana responded, trying to temper the enthusiasm.

"Oooh! 'David!' This is so cute! Don't you love the color!" David called out as he checked out the second bedroom.

"It's very yellow. You like it?"

"It's so cute for a little girl. Or even for a boy. It would save time painting for later," David replied gleefully.

Diana's fear was realized as David had reached a logical but inconvenient conclusion. "Let's not get ahead of ourselves, 'Diana'; we still have a whole courtship to get through," Diana whispered to David quietly so she wouldn't raise suspicions.

"Yeah, yeah. All right. I'll file this away as a mental note for later."

"Well? What do you both think?"

"I like the en-suite. It's a good size, and the shower looks high-end," Diana replied.

"Well, I love it. If it were up to me, I'd take this place right now," David answered.

"We have two more places to see," Diana responded.

"David's right. It doesn't hurt to see the other locations. I hand-selected these places for you both. I know you'll like them all," Jackeline said, agreeing with Diana.

"Don't be surprised when I say this was my favorite at the end of the day. That's all I'll say!" David replied.

"If that's the case, we will apply for this apartment. I don't think Jackeline would let someone else rent it from under us."

"Of course! I've been clear that these places are being viewed today. No one else would dare rent them without talking to me first," Jackeline affirmed Diana's claim.

"That's a relief. All right, on to the next location, then?"

"Let's!" Diana and Jackeline accidentally replied in unison.

\*\*\*\*\*

"I can't believe that place had a second level. I've never seen an apartment with two floors before," David remarked after they exited the second apartment.

"It's city living with a flare. It's supposed to feel like a townhouse, but the apartment building has multiple units all like this," Jackeline remarked.

"Oh, that's so interesting. It did feel very homey," David continued the conversation before noticing that Diana was quiet. "What do you think 'David'?"

"I loved how much living space there was. I worry about having the stairs. It seems like a lot of up and down," Diana remarked.

"That's fair. Good for the glutes, though!" David joked as he ran his hands along his dress, emphasizing the curve of his backside. David hoped Diana would catch his gesture and was excited to see it had created the reaction he had hoped for. Diana clearly adjusted her stance to allow her growing member to move more freely. David chuckled internally as the three made their way downstairs to the next apartment.

\*\*\*\*\*

"Oh my goodness! Is this a Spanish villa? The courtyard is so cute!" David remarked, practically gushing in enthusiasm. "It reminds me of the home I grew up in!"

"I thought you might like this one," Diana remarked.

"Because you know me so well! Oh, 'David, ' you're amazing. I can't wait to see it!"

"So, this is another two-bedroom, but only one bathroom. That's the downside of this location,"

Jackeline introduced the apartment as they walked into the entrance.

"Oh, small kitchen too," David remarked as the first entered.

"Nice high ceilings, though," Diana countered.

The group walked through the apartment and noted its distinguishing features. When they met back in the living space, Jackeline popped the big question.

"Well, these are all the places today. Do we have a winner?"

"It's mostly your call 'Diana.' I'll be happy with any of them," Diana answered, directing everyone's attention to David.

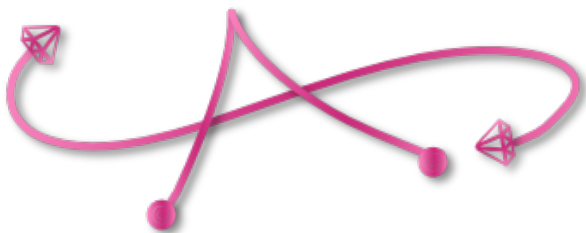
"I should have known you'd say that," David sighed. He had suspected that Diana might put this decision on him. It was a big decision, and David had hoped for some support.

"Don't you think you should at least rank them for me? What if I pick the one you liked the least?" David asked, hoping to undermine Diana's tactic.

"Nope, they are all top choices in my book. We can't go wrong no matter which one you choose," he grinned as he let this statement out.

David crossed his arms over his chest in protest, but he could tell from Diana's posture that his mini-protest would not work.

"Fine, if I get to decide on my own, then I think the one I will go with is..."



## Chapter 29 - You're on your own

*Reader's note: David's and Diana's pronouns have switched to she/her and he/him, respectively.*

*'David' wasn't kidding about this whole moving out on my own thing. I'm glad he let me pick which place to move into. I'm even more pleased that I chose a place close to my work and still relatively close to our old apartment. I can't imagine how much harder my life would have been these past two weeks if I had to drive an extra twenty minutes every trip back and forth between the two apartments. Let alone doing that on top of a longer work commute, David thought to herself as she continued the seemingly unending task of unpacking boxes of clothes, books, kitchen appliances, and cleaning supplies. Every corner of the apartment had another stack at least three high for her to navigate. Diana had insisted that the vast majority of their shared possessions be moved. He was, as he put it, "living the bachelor life" and thus did not need all of the accompanying possessions.*

David had accepted this answer at the time, but she felt sure it was a further sign that Diana would cave quickly on this 'dating each other' phase and promptly return to living together. It had been hard on David to pack up her things and leave Diana's as they were. A few times, she caught herself starting to pack Diana's things and realized that he wasn't making the move with her. This left her melancholy at times, amplified by the fact that David found Diana attractive. It was another reminder of how Diana had felt those months ago when he forced David to attend counseling. *If I had known this was how Diana felt, I would have straightened my act up. Sigh...*

The first night on her own in her new apartment was lonely. She reached to Diana's side of the bed to feel for him and kept coming up empty-handed. Thinking back, it had been years since David had lived independently, and an extra week of YourEssence had made it more difficult for David to distinguish 'his' memories from Diana's. So when she tried to remember the last time she lived alone, a memory of Diana popped up. She had been living back home with her parents, over an hour away from the city. 'David' had invited her to dinner after they met at a party. David could remember how 'David' had approached her. *He thought he was so cool. I was way out of his league, but there's no denying he was fit. That pickup line was so ridiculous. Saying he was going to marry me someday. I can't believe I let that slide; it was so corny and forward. Will he try and do something like that again now that we're dating?*

David reflected on her memories. Dinner had been enjoyable but fairly ordinary. The thing that had impressed Diana into giving David another date was the fact that he actually listened to what she said. So many guys paid such superficial attention to her when on a date. That was fine for one-night stands, but as a recent college graduate, she needed someone to take her seriously and be interested in something meaningful—something long-term.

David grabbed her phone. *Hmm, no notifications. I guess 'David' is doing fine on his own. Is it too desperate to text him that I miss him?* David wondered to herself. David wrote a half dozen

messages one at a time before deleting them. She couldn't press the issue so soon. She needed to listen to Diana's suggestions and follow through with this arrangement. David had to admit that she was excited to be courted by Diana. It would be a shame to have missed out on that part of their relationship if they had just agreed to skip over it and maintain things as they were.

*Carie will understand. I'll explain it to her, and she'll listen to me,* David thought as she typed out a message to Carie. The faint light of her phone was the only light in the room as David waited anxiously for Carie to respond.

"Oh, God, Diana. I'm so sorry! He was always a pushy asshole. Maybe this separation will be good for you. There are plenty of fish in the sea!"

David read Carie's response. *Shit, maybe I explained it poorly. Now Carie thinks I'm leaving 'David.'* *I'll have to fix this quickly,* David thought as she typed out her response.

"Oh, we're not at that stage yet! It's a trial thing to give each other space to 'be ourselves.' I don't want to leave him, and I don't think he wants that either."

After another few minutes of anxiously waiting, David's phone beeped with a notification.

"Oh, well, maybe this will be good for you both. A bit unconventional, but I'm guessing your counselor knows all about this and is supportive."

"We haven't told her yet..."

"Shit, are you sure this is going to work out for the best?"

"'David' really thinks so. I want to believe him. I miss having him here with me, though."

**\*\* Meanwhile, at Diana's Apartment \*\***

"Why can't I sleep? Ugh, this is so frustrating!" Diana said out loud to no one in particular. As Diana scanned the bedroom, he noticed the distinct absence of several familiar objects. His dresser was moved with David; he had said it made more sense for her to keep it with her, but now the bedroom seemed oddly empty. His stacks of clothes in the corner didn't help the room feel very homey. Getting up, Diana trodded over to his en-suite, hoping that he could reset for the evening with a quick shower.

The warm water pouring over his body provided momentary relief, but his thoughts soon drifted. Diana had enjoyed his time living as David before they made the call to swap places permanently. Now, seeing his body in the shower, the permanence of that decision finally set in. He had a dick. A rather large one at that. He also had a substantial amount of body hair. It covered his chest's pectorals and formed a tidy line heading towards his crotch. Diana couldn't dismiss one of his best assets, however. David had always taken good care of himself, frequently visiting the gym. It showed the most in his abdominals. Standing there, Diana flexed his abdomen and watched as the individual muscles flexed, making themselves visible beneath the hair and skin. The visible six-pack was very appealing and gave him a sense of pride. The memory of 'Diana' running her fingers down his body and bouncing over the ridges had him feeling instantly horny.

*There's that familiar feeling again. It really does have a mind of its own,* Diana thought as his penis quickly became erect. Diana's thoughts of 'Diana' soon turned to more steamy memories as he remembered the curves of her body and the ways that he enjoyed making love to her. *I wonder if she's thinking about me right now,* Diana thought as he worked his hand along the length of his member.

Diana finished his ministrations quickly and lamented that masturbation was not as fulfilling as having sex. An errant thought of playing with 'her' clitoris bounced into his mind as he remembered his life as Diana momentarily. *There is no denying that was good; this is good, too. Just different.* Finally feeling somewhat satiated, Diana tried to go back to sleep. The freedom to throw a pair of boxers on and not have to dry his hair for thirty minutes was a great relief.

Lying on his bed, he spread himself out as big as he could. The cool air from sleeping over the covers provided some further comfort. His body ran much hotter than before, so the ability to cool off was essential to his ability to get a good night's sleep. Despite tossing and turning to find a comfortable position, Diana was soon drifting off to sleep, his mind finally able to put his worries away for another time.

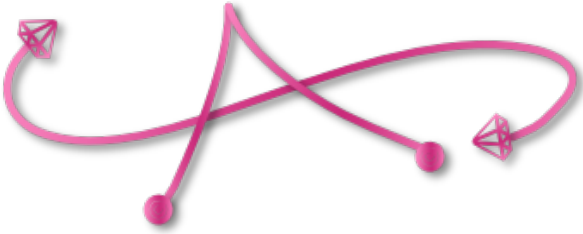
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Diana woke the following day and turned his attention to the calendar in his kitchen. It was the one possession of 'Diana's' that he insisted on staying with him. David had relented but told Diana she would buy a new one for her apartment. It was decidedly antiquated for the 2060s, but Diana had always found comfort in working off a physical calendar. That trait appears to have remained with him in his new body.

While looking through the calendar pages, Diana's thoughts processed through the steps of his plan



to ask David out for their first date. *All right, today is the 6th. Let's map this out. I should ask 'Diana' out on this day. That will allow me some time to prepare, which will give 'Diana' time to reset her expectations and experience the feelings of going on a first date. The question is if that's enough time. I don't want her to think this is a foregone conclusion. We need to do this right. If I wait too long, she might think I'm playing the field or not interested in her anymore, and then I'll ruin our chances of being happy together... All right, I think I've got it. I'll wait...*



### Chapter 30 - Day 1 starts, The new 'Diana'

***Reader's note: For clarity, the characters will now be referred to by their respective body's names, not their original names. They will refer to each other and themselves with these names accordingly. References to Diana mean the individual who started as David and vice versa.***

Diana, formerly David, tossed restlessly in bed. She had turned her alarm off after it had gone off the first time at 5:30. "I haven't slept a wink, ugh. What time is it?"

Diana's phone responded, announcing the time: "It's 6:36 a.m. To reach your work destination on time, you must leave by 7:02 a.m. this morning."

"Shit! I barely have enough time to shower. I guess I'm not washing my hair today," Diana said as she rushed to get the water running for her shower. *I'm going to have to rush through all of my usual routine. God, I'm so tired...*

"This was easier when I had David's body. God... Men don't know how easy they have it," Diana cursed as she ran a razor blade over the stubble that had come in on her legs. "Why does this always happen to me? I get settled, and then I mess some details up. I wish I had gotten some actual sleep last night. Ouch! Shit, did I just cut myself!?" Diana grumbled as she finished shaving her legs and armpits. Quickly rushing to towel herself dry, she inspected her leg to see how severe her cut was. "Just a nick. That'll heal up fine. On to more pressing matters." Diana worked quickly to apply her foundation. A touch of blush on her cheeks and a light application of eye shadow followed by eyeliner. Using her blending sponge, she worked the makeup as expeditiously as she could manage—the sponge serving double duty as she cleaned up her eyeliner as a final step.

"Looks good enough for the university students. I hope Robert doesn't come by today. Or Carie... what are the odds of that after what I messaged her last night? Exactly zero. Shit, no time for talking to myself."

Diana rushed over to pull on her stockings. She rapidly rolled up the sheer fabric to the toe and delicately placed her foot in. She repeated this on the other side and gently slid the fabric up her freshly smooth legs. In an instant, she was zipping up the zipper on her dress and throwing a button-up blouse on over her bra. "Stupid buttons, why do there need to be so many of these?" she complained. "What time is it?"

"It's 6:58 am. Should I prepare your car for on-time departure?"

"Yes!" Diana shouted back at her phone before dashing towards the closet to grab her heels. Bouncing on one foot as she placed her heel into the shoe before switching to the other, she made her way to the door. "7 o'clock, I gotta get going. I guess I'll just have to drink the work sludge they call coffee. Damn," Diana said as she shut her new apartment's front door.

\*\*\*\*

"Good morning, Diana!" Carie greeted Diana as she stepped into the teacher's lounge. Diana simply grunted, acknowledging Carie, and went straight to the coffee maker. Carie didn't know how rushed Diana's morning had been, but she knew she needed to offer comfort to her friend.

"Are you doing all right today?" Carie asked.

"Yeah, I just had a rushed morning. Some coffee will make it better."

"I'm sure it will, but I meant, are you okay after dealing with your living situation for a whole night?" Carie cut straight to the point.

"Umm, yeah. Look, I don't have time to talk about it right now. We can catch up over lunch. Yes, let's have lunch together. That will work," Diana responded, appearing to hold both sides of the conversation on her own. Carie worried about Diana's rapid response and demeanor.

"Yes, lunch will work, sweetie, but you know I'm here for you, right?"

"Yes. Of course. I don't know what I'd do without you, Carie. Thanks for everything," Diana

responded, furthering the one-sided conversation. She uttered the last word as she exited the lounge.

"What's with her today?" Janet asked, appearing worried.

"Oh, you won't believe it. It's so scandalous," Carie's gossip tendencies overtook her as she was asked about Diana.

"Do I want to know? I like Diana and don't want anything bad to happen to her..." Janet responded, looking increasingly concerned.

"It's her marriage. They're in a trial separation, and she's not happy about it."

"Oh my God. The poor thing. She must be so upset!"

"Yeah, she was worried about it last night when she told me."

"Should you be telling other people about it? It seems kind of private?"

"We're all friends here, plus I know we're all team Diana. David can go walk off a cliff for all I care."

The two women continued gabbing as Frank slid out of the lounge, having noted their conversation.

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"Oh, Robert, how nice to see you today," Diana remarked as Robert entered her lecture.

"Hello, Mrs. Martin. I'm just here to observe today. Pay me no attention," Robert said as he went to the back of the lecture hall.

"Continuing, can anyone tell me the six tenses of Latin?" Diana asked her class.

A few students in the front of the class raised their hands quickly, but Diana wanted to try out one of the new techniques she had learned from Robert's training. "Actually, why don't we try something different. Class, why don't we start at the front of each row and send the answer back one at a time to the student behind you? Once we get the answers to the back of the class, then we will check to see if we all got it right."

Diana's students dutifully performed the task, sending the answer back one at a time until everyone transferred the information to the back of the room.

"All right, let's check our answers. Let's start with this row, Jonathan. What tenses did you end up with?"

"Present, past, future, perfect, past perfect, and future perfect," Jonathan answered incorrectly.

"Cringe!" Tobey shouted out from across the room.

"Hey, that's uncalled for. I'd like you to step outside while we help Jonathan."

All the while, Robert was observing this interaction unfold. He kept quiet, but Diana was secretly terrified of how her teaching would be judged. As she explained the proper tenses caringly to Jonathan, the class session time elapsed. "All right, everyone, I'll see you back here for our afternoon session. Don't be late. We've got a lot more topics to cover!" Diana ducked her head from the lecture hall and saw that Tobey had already chosen to excuse himself to lunch. Robert stopped by her lectern as Diana gathered her things to go to the lounge for lunch with Carie.

"I think you handled that very well. The exercise didn't work this time, but you demonstrated good adaptation and empathy for your student. Nice work, Mrs. Martin," he said as he exited the lecture hall. Diana was elated; Robert was old-fashioned and always used last names when he felt a high degree of respect for someone. As Diana made her way to the professor's lounge, she caught Frank looking at her with a curious expression. *Is he checking me out?* Diana wondered as she continued on her way to meet Carie.

Sitting down with her salad, Diana told Carie what happened in her class with Robert. Carie was short in all of her responses, however. She obviously wanted to talk about Diana's more pressing and personal issue. "Alright... Ask, what do you want to know?" Diana finally relented.

"When did you decide this? How long will it last? Was it really David's idea? Do you think he's cheating on you? Are you cheating on him?" Carie gasped for air after hurriedly asking all these questions in one breath.

"We decided a week ago. We went apartment hunting together and decided to go forward with it because it would be good for us both. I'm not sure how long it will last. David isn't buying new furniture or anything. So, I don't think he expects it to last long. It was David's idea, in any case. I think you asked that. What else did you ask? Oh... Yeah, are we cheating on each other? Thanks for

thinking the worst of us, but to my knowledge, neither of us is cheating."

"Sorry, Diana, but people are wondering why you'd do this. Cheating just seemed like a reasonable answer," Carie responded with some degree of remorse. Her response had exposed another problem for Diana, however.

"What do you mean 'people' are wondering? You are the only person who knows about this, right?"

"Well, I had to tell Janet. She overheard us this morning; you know how she deals with change. She doesn't, so I had to smooth things over. It's all okay, though. I'm sure she won't tell anyone."

Diana felt frazzled. She should have known better than to tell the school gossip. She thought Carie would be a better friend than that. Is that why Frank leered at me? Does he think I'm romantically available now? Eww, gross. Diana's thoughts wandered back to the odd interaction in the hallway.

"Well, please don't tell anyone else. This is not a big deal. I don't want people worrying about it, and I'm not worried about it. In fact, we're seeing our counselor tomorrow, and we will let her know about it then. I'm sure it will all work out fine, and we will get her blessing that we're doing the mature and responsible thing. So, please, no more discussion over my marriage. Okay?"

"Yes, of course! I'd never betray your request, Diana. I'm sorry that I said anything at all."

"Thank you, Carie, I appreciate it."

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As Diana redirected her attention to her salad, she had just enough time to take two bites before her alarm to head to her following lecture went off. Diana now had three minutes to return to her class and had the odious responsibility of disciplining Tobey. She had dealt with troublemakers before, but Tobey took the top spot for the most annoying ones to deal with. Everything was "cringe," or someone else acted like an "NPC" to Tobey. There was little common ground that could be established.

Diana worked up her mettle. She needed to be mentally prepared for this interaction. At least Robert would understand what had happened if she needed to send Tobey to receive further disciplinary action. As Diana walked into her lecture hall, the students were at their typical rambunctious level.

"All right, everyone, in your seats. Tobey, I need to speak with you for a moment. Stephen, please

lead the class in reading chapter 13 of your book. We will discuss Napoleon's ambitions and his historical influence on literature when I return," Diana directed her class. Despite the loud classroom environment, She knew she could press forward with her words. Counting on a good student like Stephen to keep things on track was a benefit. Tobey should have been solemn in his march to the front of the lecture hall as he knew he was in trouble, but instead, he maintained his flamboyant attitude, making rude gestures and distracting the other students as he slowly made his way forward.

"Tobey, you know we've talked about your disruptions in class before. Why are you so insistent on treating other people this poorly?" Diana asked though she knew the answer: Tobey did it because he wanted attention.

"Because it's funny. I wouldn't do it as much if you didn't set me up so well," Tobey responded as defiantly and resolutely as Diana expected.

"So it's my fault that you insult your peers? That's an unlikely story. Do you want to try again?"

"Nope, just give me a demerit. I'm over this."

"A demerit is a guarantee. I think we need some more meaningful intervention, however. Maybe a parent-teacher call will get your attention?" Diana said it like a question, but it was already a foregone conclusion in her mind.

"Like they'll care," Tobey responded.

"I think they'll care a lot when I tell them you might flunk another course until you can demonstrate the emotional maturity needed to advance."

"You'd fail me for that? You can't do that," Tobey started off scared but quickly changed his phrasing to show his defiance.

"I can; it's as simple as that, Tobey. Now, are you going to behave for our history lesson today? Or should I send you to speak with Robert right now?"

"You should send me. I'm not taking your crap anymore," Tobey dug his heels in as his response came out venomously.

"All right, you know the way. Start marching," Diana said as she stuck her hand out, pointing towards

Robert's office.

The two walked in silence as Tobey continued his defiant demeanor. Diana was sure he thought he was untouchable and entirely immune to punishment. She secretly hoped that Robert would punish Tobey as he would his teachers who failed to meet his expectations.

"Robert, I've got a discipline case for you. Tobey is continuing to disrupt the classroom learning environment. Can I leave him with you?"

"Yes, thank you, Diana. Tobey, please take a seat," Robert stood up, creating an imposing presence that Diana knew would cause her student some fear, though she also knew that Robert would never truly hurt anyone. Tobey sat down in the chair Robert had guided him to and immediately dropped his head. Diana thought he might look back as she left him, but Tobey did not attempt to.

Diana returned to her class and stood just outside her classroom door. She took a quick moment to straighten her dress and fix her hair. Pulling loose strands behind her ear and tucking them there, Diana momentarily felt strangely out of place. She had been so willing to support her troublemaker, but he gave her no room to work with him. It was oddly familiar and yet distant. As she took a deep breath, she remembered a time in David's memories when a teacher scolded him. The interaction had gone similarly poorly, with David being sent to the Principal's office. *I haven't remembered that encounter for a long time. Feels like a lifetime removed. I guess it is now that I'm Diana. Why are boys so willing to be so obstinate? I hope I have girls. I don't want to deal with the problems of having boys. Hopefully... someday..* Diana's thoughts drifted off into wishful thinking before she regained her composure and stepped back into her class, ready to conclude her lesson.

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Settling back in at her apartment, Diana kicked her heels off her feet, letting them rest haphazardly near her shoe rack. She would deal with storing them neatly later. *What a day! The hits kept coming; I barely had a minute to peace all day between Carrie and Tobey.* Diana proceeded to let her skirt fall off her hips as she unzipped the zipper. Frustrated that she had worn stockings, she hurriedly tugged the fabric down and kicked her legs as hard as possible to get the material to release from her feet. Finally, down to her undergarments, she collapsed onto her couch. Lifting her left foot atop her right knee, Diana massaged her foot, which felt knotted up from the extra tension in her body throughout the day. *I wish David were here to help work these knots out. It was my first day on my own after getting moved, and I already wished he was here. I hope he doesn't plan on waiting too long before he asks me out. I'm ready for this show to start,* Diana thought to herself as she pressed her thumbs firmly into the soles of her sore feet. *I'm glad my ass looks as good as it does in heels.*

*Otherwise, I'd throw all of them out in the trash... Then again, a new pair of Jimmy Choo heels are just divine to slip into. After a few dates, I'll have to let David know which ones interest me. Maybe he'll know already... that will be interesting to see how that works out.*

Diana finished massaging her feet and decided to go with a classic lazy girl dinner: banana oatmeal. Diana placed a half cup of oats into a bowl, poured some water into the bowl, and added some soy milk and a dash of cinnamon and vanilla extract. Into the microwave for two and a half minutes, and she would be good to go. As the microwave worked, Diana cut a banana into slices so she could top her oatmeal and be done cooking.

The microwave's beeping, indicating it had finished, was overlapped by the sound of Diana's phone ringing. *That'll be David. I knew he couldn't wait more than a day... Oh, oh! Kaitlyn is calling. I haven't talked to her in ages.* Diana's mind pivoted quickly as she saw who was calling. Kaitlyn was one of Diana's closest friends in college. They hadn't talked as much recently now that they were both busy with work and life.

"Kaitlyn!!!!" Diana answered her phone, practically squealing in delight. "What is going on?!"

"Diana!!! Oh my God. I'm so excited to hear your voice! It's been too long."

"Don't I know it! You're so awesome for calling!"

"Well, we needed to dish and get caught up. I've got some news."

"Oooo, tell me, tell me. What's your news?"

"Well, you know things have been going good with my job. I got a promotion, and I'm that boss ass bitch now!"

"Oh my God, Kate! You are the boss now?! That's so exciting!!!"

"Yeah! I got a big raise, and now I know how much everyone makes. I used that info to get an immediate adjustment, too! They aren't going to hold this lady down!"

"You're so awesome, Kate; I wish I had that courage. You're an inspiration!"

"That's not all...," Kaitlyn said with excitement. Diana could hardly wait to hear her friend's further news...



"What else could there be? You've got to be one of the youngest bosses at your company."

"Youngest by three years, but that's not what I wanted to tell you."

"Well... dish. What else do you got?"

"Our family duo is going to be a trio in about five months!"

"What?! Holy shit! Kate! You're going to be a mommy! You must be so excited!"

"We're very excited! You should see how Marcus is making all these repairs around the townhouse. Our place will be the safest home within a twenty-mile radius."

"Wow, that's so wonderful. I bet you're glowing already. How has the first trimester been for you?"

"Oh, well, for me, it's been a breeze. Though, I should tell you that we hired a surrogate. My job is too busy to go through a pregnancy right now."

"Oh! Well, that's still awesome news. I'm so happy for you!"

"Thanks, Diana. I couldn't hardly stand waiting to tell you. The doctors said it would be best to wait until twenty weeks. Sixteen seemed good enough between best friends."

"I am glad you told me! I'm a bit jealous," Diana said, wiping a tear of joy and sadness from her cheek.

"Jealous? I thought you were resolved to wait until forty before you had kids. I feel like you said that on numerous occasions."

"Well, some things have changed for me recently. I realized I wanted to get started sooner rather than later."

"Wow! That's a big step. How does David feel about that? I mean, he must be over the moon."

"Yeah... we're actually not quite there yet."

"Okay... I know that tone. You're not telling me everything. What's going on?"

Diana audibly sighed and took a deep breath before she started, "You know me too well—better than I know myself even... David and I are temporarily separated. We're in counseling, though, so I think we can work through this tough patch."

"Di, you should have told me. I would be there to support you! I should be there now," Kaitlyn's voice faded out a bit as Diana heard Kaitlyn continue, "Marcus! I need to take the car! Diana needs me... No, it is an emergency... No, no one is hurt... No, you can't come with me. Marcus! Let it go. I'll be back when I'm back!"

Diana listened as Kaitlyn had this side conversation with her husband. Finally, Kaitlyn returned on the line fully, "Where are you staying? Send me the address, and I'll be there straight away. We are going to do some serious girl talk," Kaitlyn instructed Diana. As she was saying this, Diana tried to interject. However, Kaitlyn did know Diana very well, so she instantly shut down Diana's objections, responding, "No objections, Di, you will see me as fast as traffic allows. Now send me that address!"

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Diana knew she had about an hour before Kaitlyn would reach her apartment. Traffic at this time of day would be dreadful—*one of the fringe benefits of being a teacher. I can leave before rush hour falls over the city*, Diana thought to herself. Diana's anxious energy was building up as she paced back and forth across the length of her living room. She needed to do something to avoid stewing in her own dread. She knew Kaitlyn would press her on every aspect of what was happening between her and David. *Just my luck, I have to explain this situation twice in one day. The tricky part is that Kaitlyn won't have the same boundaries Carrie has with me as a work friend. I need to do something rather than just fret here in isolation*, Diana thought as she started to form an idea.

"Running! I'll run on the treadmill in the building's gym for thirty minutes. That will take my mind off all of this," Diana triumphantly announced to her empty apartment. Breaking the silence helped her feel better about the idea. She hadn't realized how quiet the apartment felt before. *I just need to get changed first. Let's see, sports bra, that's a check. I unpacked those yesterday into my dresser. Now the harder question is, do I want to run in athletic tights or shorts? 'Diana' was also fond of the tights, but I feel like shorts are the right call*; Diana's thoughts worked quickly as she took near-immediate action along with her decisions. "How do I look?" Diana asked herself as she looked over her attire. The tank top she chose hung loosely on her shoulders, exposing her sports bra and providing ample cooling opportunity. "Pretty all right if I do say so myself," Diana answered her own question as she admired the curve of her backside in the short shorts she was now wearing. "Extra glad I chose to shave this morning, too."

Diana used her personal device to unlock the gym door, but only one other tenant was there. A man who appeared to be in his late forties, maybe early fifties, was using a rowing machine. He briefly stopped his workout and turned his attention to Diana. He offered a simple smile and head nod in acknowledgment and then returned to his workout. Diana was glad he hadn't gotten up; she didn't have first-hand experience turning down a stranger's advances. Reflecting, she realized how sheltered her time as a woman had been. On the one hand, she was glad for it, but her memories of batting away men's advances told her another story of what her reality had become.

Diana set a towel over the bench beside a treadmill and stepped onto the device. She knew she averaged about a nine-minute mile, but that number felt too leisurely for this version of Diana. When she was David, she pushed herself to reach seven-minute miles and was very proud of her physical fitness accomplishments. Feeling emboldened, Diana set the treadmill to a seven-minute mile and started running. The experience wasn't entirely foreign, but Diana could tell that there were some substantial differences in the experience of running as a woman versus the experience as a man. The most obvious was the jiggle and wobble of her breasts. While the sports bra seemed to be restraining more substantial shifting, there was only so much the fabric could do to keep things in place. Furthermore, her gait while running was now altered. There was a different shifting of weight from side to side that was unfamiliar and led to Diana slowing the treadmill's pace so she could adjust to it more effectively.

After a half mile, Diana was finally feeling in the groove. She turned up the music on her personal device, which sent conductive waves directly to her eardrums. With the music playing, her body in sync with it, Diana decided it was time to push herself. She dialed the pace back up to seven minutes. She almost immediately felt the extra fatigue and burn as she pushed herself. She soon realized how much she was sweating as a bead of sweat dropped from her forehead onto the treadmill console. *No pain, no gain, they say. I'm going to finish this mile if it kills me,* Diana resolved as she tried to focus on the music playing over the aches she felt in her thighs and calves.

"Phew!" Diana said audibly as she closed out the mile. Her pace ended in the mid-8-minute range, and she practically squealed in delight. *Yes! I did it!* she excitedly thought as she reduced the treadmill's pace to split the difference between her standard pace and the pace 'David' was used to.

The following two miles felt like a breeze comparatively as Diana closed out her run. As she stepped off the treadmill, she was glistening with sweat all over her face and chest. She quickly grabbed her towel to clean herself and the treadmill off when she was startled by a touch on her shoulder. "Eek!" she screeched in response to the unexpected touch. Turning around quickly, she saw the middle-aged man standing there looking shocked.

"Gosh, I didn't mean to startle you. I just wanted to welcome you to the building. You moved in on five this weekend, right? My name is Jerry. I live on three. It's nice to meet another gym rat," the man said, extending his hand to Diana.

Diana cautiously shook his hand as she held her towel to her chest. "Nice to meet you as well. My name's Diana," she said in an amenable but not overly pleasant tone.

Jerry wasted no time in advancing his mission. "I know this is forward of me, but maybe you'd like to join me for a drink sometime? Or coffee if that's more your style?"

"Oh... ummm," Diana froze a bit as she encountered her first-ever come-on by another man. She felt vulnerable in this closed-off space. There was no one around to hear her if this man's reaction to her rejection became violent or aggressive. Diana's mind searched for a polite and gentle response. "That's very kind of you to offer, but I'm actually married. I'm sorry I left my ring upstairs," she said, hoping this would suffice.

"Oh? I thought you moved in alone. I'm so sorry to have assumed. Of course, someone as beautiful as you would be committed to another. Well, maybe I'll see you both in the gym sometime. Welcome to the building!" Jerry responded as he turned to leave the gym.

*Phew! I can't believe how tense that was! Thank goodness he accepted my answer. Maybe choosing to become Diana wasn't all sunshine and rainbows, after all. That was pretty terrifying; Diana's thoughts raced along with her heartbeat. Toweling her face and forehead off one more time, Diana was reeling from the interaction. As she was standing there in a fog, her personal device alerted her that she had fifteen minutes until Kaitlyn should be arriving. *Shit, I need to get a quick shower in and get dressed. Shake it off, Diana; it's going to keep happening. I traded in my maleness for this...**

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"Kaitlyn!!!" Diana squealed in excitement as she opened the door to her apartment. Standing in the doorway was her college friend holding a bottle of white wine, a box of tissues, and a heart-shaped box of chocolates. Kaitlyn reciprocated Diana's welcome as she stepped into the apartment. Kaitlyn's arms gently opened to embrace Diana in a hug, but not so open that she dropped the contents of her arms. The two stood there a moment so Diana could collect herself. Kaitlyn knew that this would start the waterworks for Diana. She knew Diana too well. As they parted, Kaitlyn pushed the box of chocolates into Diana's hands.

"Don't judge the container; it was the only box of chocolates at the convenience store on my way over."

"You're seriously the best. I can't believe you stopped and brought me chocolate. Why don't men understand the healing power of chocolate?"

"Don't forget wine. Wine heals wounds that cut deep down to the soul," Kaitlyn jokingly added to Diana's statement while flashing her smile. A smile that also helped cut straight through Diana's frustration and stress. She was with her friend. Dare she say her best friend? They had undoubtedly been through a lot together. Whatever distance had developed between them soon disappeared as Kaitlyn got Diana settled into her couch, a glass of wine at the ready, a box of tissues on hand, and chocolates actively being devoured.

"Oh! Fuck! This is divine. You should have one. Have two!" Diana managed to get out after relishing the taste of a salted caramel chocolate.

"Those are yours. I've got my support right here," Kaitlyn said, holding up her glass of white wine.

The two women chatted casually for a half hour just to diffuse the anxiety and tension that Diana was so clearly carrying. Kaitlyn saw it right away when Diana opened the door. Her shoulders were hunched forward. A cardigan sweater was wrapped up tightly and buttoned all the way to the collar. She was wearing pants—just pants. Diana avoided unflattering pants like the plague, but she was wearing the least flattering sweatpants that Kaitlyn had ever seen Diana wear.

Kaitlyn's intuitions about Diana had been spot on thus far. As they settled into their second glasses of wine, Kaitlyn could see that Diana was finally starting to loosen up. Her posture became more relaxed, and she pulled her legs up under her on the couch and took that horrid cardigan off. The signs were working in her favor, so Kaitlyn decided to take her first stab at dissecting the turmoil in Diana's life.

"So what all happened today? It seemed like there was more to it."

"Hah! Understatement of the century. You know, the way people act, you'd think people consider being female in public to be an open invitation to violate you," Diana replied with apparent frustration.

"Preach, sister. I know what you mean, but what specifically happened?"

"Leering, ogling, personal space violations..." Diana started as tears welled up in her eyes.

"There, there, honey. Here's a tissue. Go ahead and cry it all out." Kaitlyn came quickly to her aid.

Diana took a moment, then continued, "Fucking freaky Frank. He gave me a look that would freeze your blood. He's so creepy, but then the worst was my neighbor sneaking up on me at the gym, where we were all alone, and having the nerve to ask me out. Who does that? I had my back turned and was toweling off; it was a huge violation. I screamed in shock, but that's not enough for a man to realize he's overstepped. He went ahead and asked his question anyway. All the while, my head is running through threat analysis and ways to escape if it turns out he doesn't like my responses. FUCK! I hate men!"

"That all happened today. Yeah, fuck that. Fuck that straight to hell!" Kaitlyn offered in support of her friend. With a touch of catharsis being reached in Diana, Kaitlyn moved in and wrapped her arm around Diana to further console her.

"Totally agreed, men suck, but what about David? What's going on there?" Kaitlyn tried to push the healing and catharsis along.

"He... Well... **\*We\*** agreed to start over basically."

"That seems kind of drastic. Were things really that rough between you?"

"No. They weren't, and they still aren't. David thinks I need to be shown that his love for me will last."

"That sounds kind of sweet in a weird way. I don't get the connection to starting over, though."

Diana paused. With every ounce of her being, she wanted to just tell Kaitlyn that she had been 'David' a couple of months before. Diana's feelings of trust, respect, and loyalty to Kaitlyn made it agonizing to maintain the lie of omission. She knew it would jeopardize everything, though. Kaitlyn would be forced to report the crime of YourEssence abuse, or she could be held complicit in the crime as a co-conspirator. So, Diana steeled herself and crafted a white lie. Just a little one, one that David could see through but also carry on if the need arose.

"It's because we got married so young. He wants to show me that he'd go through the courtship process a thousand times if needed to prove his love. So he expects me to treat him like we barely know each other, and he will earn my love all over again."

"That's the weirdest and most romantic gesture I have ever heard. Men's brains just work differently. Men are from Mars and all that... Never seen an idea so 'out there' before."

"Yeah, this is a really special case. I wish he wasn't my special case, though. It would have been easier to get through today if he were around. He always knows just what to say..."

Kaitlyn pulled Diana in close, and Diana sobbed softly into her shoulder. Silently, Kaitlyn held Diana and gently swayed just the tiniest amount—enough to rhythmically reaffirm the bond and connection they shared in life and in the moment.

"How are you feeling?" Kaitlyn asked a few moments after she noticed that Diana had stopped crying.

"Better..."

"You sure?"

"No," Diana hesitatingly responded, but there was no evidence that she would continue crying. Kaitlyn's deep bond with Diana told her that Diana was on the path to healing. She just needed someone to continue to be there for her.

"I get it. I'm here for you, girlfriend."

Diana sniffled a bit and then sat more upright. "You've done so much for me tonight. You should get heading back to your home. I'm sure your hubby misses you."

"I doubt he even registered what happened when I left. He's oblivious, but he's sweet overall. He knows that I would do anything for you. So, you should know that too."

"I do! Your bona fides are clear as day. I just don't want you to have to waste any more time watching me mope."

"You can't waste time when you're with friends. That's just 'hanging,' and we're plenty good friends." Kaitlyn recognized the pity party energy Diana was prone to. She had to act fast and cut the momentum off right away. "Hey, gal pal, can I hang out and maybe have a sleepover? I think it'd be fun. What do you say?"

Diana looked surprised for a second. She hadn't had a sleepover since high school, and the gesture wasn't lost on her, in any case. Diana smiled as she realized just how far her friend was willing to go to help her out. "Fine, but I get to braid your hair first this time!" Diana said, then chuckled at the silly premise of the two grown women braiding each other's hair.

"Ugh, fine... I'm giving you pigtails, though!" Kaitlyn rolled with the idea and added her own twist to the joke.

The two returned to the pattern they had grown used to from all their time together in college. Gossiping, swapping stories about which celebrity couple was the most desirable, and generally sharing their thoughts. They didn't actually braid each other's hair, but Kaitlyn did go down to her car to grab a prepared overnight bag she had brought with her so she could change into pajamas.

"You have grandma pajamas!" Diana teased.

"These are the peak of comfort, my dear," Kaitlyn retorted.

"Ha! I bet."

"Don't knock it until you try it. I brought an extra pair just in case something like this came up," Kaitlyn replied as she rummaged through her bag.

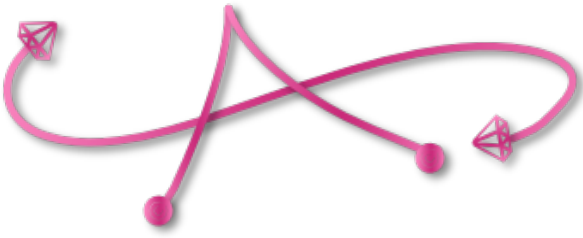
"No chance in hell!" Diana squinted her eyes and stuck her tongue out. Diana viscerally felt the cringe of having to wear something so frumpy.

"You got me... I don't have another pair," Kaitlyn replied. "I just wanted to see your face when I offered it."

The two women settled in for bed for the night. Diana offered Kaitlyn the second bedroom but insisted the couch would suffice. Kaitlyn had seen the spare room earlier. While she had wanted to broach the "having a baby" topic, seeing the spare bedroom let Kaitlyn know that was a topic for another day. Kaitlyn had heard how pregnant women 'nest' in preparation for a baby's arrival. Well, Diana had seemingly already prepared the room for a baby. The room had a crib, a nursing rocker, and even a changing table. Sure, there was a twin bed in there as well, but it was clear to Kaitlyn that this topic would need to wait for another time.

Mercifully, Diana nodded off to sleep moments after resting her head on her pillow. Day one of her life as a 'single' woman was finally complete.





## Chapter 31 - Day 1, Redux

David, formerly Diana, woke earlier than usual that Monday. The sun peaking through the blinds shone at just the right angle to warm his face. Rubbing his hand across his face and chin, David felt his facial hair was getting a tad long. *It's such an odd feeling waking up with facial hair. I can't believe how fast it grows... I need to see what it looks like,* David thought as he bolted up and out of bed. His strength and physique allowed a more rapid and powerful exit from the mattress.

Standing in front of the en-suite mirror, David continued to run his hand along his chin. Turning side to side, David couldn't help but admire the masculine image he cut. For the vast majority of David's life, he had always maintained a cleanly shaven appearance. Today, there was an urge to go a different direction. *Maybe a goatee? Or just leave it as is? It's a bit scratchy, but damn... it looks good on me,* David continued his admiration.

"Shower first. I can decide later," David said as he caught a whiff of his body odor. I sure do get smelly quicker than... before. David acknowledged his new reality and set to the task of starting the shower. A moment passed to let the shower reach temperature, and David was soon immersed under the warm jets. Looking at the shower's contents, he saw that Diana had left her loofa. It was distinctively hers. Bright pink, fluffy, feminine. A reminder to David of who was no longer living here.

David was quick to move on from these thoughts. First things first, shampoo. A light pour of the mint and spring-fresh smelling masculine shampoo that David had used his entire adult life dolloped into his hand. David closed his eyes and brought the shampoo to his hair and scalp. He rapidly massaged the shampoo in and then turned his attention to his body. Pouring body wash gel into his waiting hand, David ran his hands back and forth against each other, building up a lather. An instant later, he applied the body wash to the typical culprits. Armpits, check. Crotch, check. Ass crack, yup, check; David ran through a personal little checklist. Satisfied that he had hit the major spots, David quickly, very quickly, ran the body wash over the rest of his body and then let the water rinse him clear of any remaining suds. Barely 2 minutes had elapsed since getting in the shower, and David felt that he'd tackled the fundamental necessities. Why had this always taken so long... before, lingering on this thought afforded him no profound insight, so he got on with finishing his

shower. After a quick rinse of his hair, David stepped out to towel off.

Fumbling to unravel said towel, he first brought the bunched-up fabric to dry the water from his face and hair. A momentary urge to wrap the towel around his head was dismissed as he unfurled the fabric further and dried his hair vigorously. A quick touch test confirmed the result. *So easy, what a bonus...*

After patting his chest and legs dry, he wrapped the towel around his waist out of a lingering desire for modesty. No one else would see him, but he still felt it warranted keeping up some habits. Checking his sink countertop, the only objects on the surface were his razor and his bottle of YourEssence. Opening the bottle and downing his pill, he uttered a little mantra, "To my good health." Turning his attention to the razor, he took one more look at his reflection. *This works... The facial hair. We're going to rock it today,* David thought, returning the razor to the countertop.

Stepping into his boxers, David scanned his closet for the pair of slacks he wanted to wear for the day. "Let's go with the blue slacks and jacket today," David announced to no one but himself. Finishing buttoning up the last button on his shirt, he grabbed the matching jacket and turned to head for the kitchen. He needed a cup of coffee, and it needed to be as strong as humanly possible.

The room looked starkly empty beyond the calendar hanging on the kitchen wall. Diana had taken most of the kitchen appliances with her, but David's trusty coffee machine remained. It was at least 30 years old. His father had given it to him when he left for college, and it had been with his father for many years prior. It wasn't a fancy or particularly capable appliance, but David had a fond attachment to it. Pulling the tray out to add his coffee and filter, David went with an extra heaping scoop of coffee. He wanted it to be strong.

With the coffee machine running, David turned his attention to the calendar. Flipping pages back to last month, he noted how much had transpired in such a short time. Things had really accelerated since that fateful day almost two months ago when they came back from their first counseling session with Dr. Simms. David's attention was drawn away from his thoughts as he heard the sound of coffee pouring into the pot. *Shit, I owe Brian that write-up. I guess I know who I'm going to see first thing walking through the door.* David suddenly remembered his incomplete work assignment. *He'll just have to wait.* I'll get it done before lunch. He continued justifying his prior decisions. David had purposefully chosen to defer this work. Ever since that incident with Tom, David's drive at work to go above and beyond had dwindled. Brian's 'try hard' energy just wasn't appealing at the moment, and David was trying to reestablish a balance with his work.

Pouring his first cup of coffee, David noticed he had inadvertently grabbed two mugs. "Just me

today, but that won't be true for too much longer, heh," David said with a slight chuckle. Being the one in the driver's seat of his relationship had David feeling confident and self-assured. It was such a distinctly different perspective and experience. David felt like he could decide anything, do anything, go anywhere, and practically \*be\* anyone. Well, any man. There was no denying that his body's form and function were intrinsically linked. It was intrinsically empowering and emboldening, too, and David loved this fact. Diana would never have considered shirking a work responsibility, but for David, it was well within his reach to make that kind of decision. He was the master of his castle, craft, time, and energy.

Getting into his car to head to work, he lamented for a moment that cars were all self-driving now. He felt amped up. A little adrenaline rush during the morning commute seemed like a good release. *Too bad, I will just have to book a visit to the speedway for some horsepower-driven excitement. Maybe Diana would want to go with me? It could be a fun second date. A little thrill and excitement. Maybe even a little fear to draw her in close. It's bolder than taking her to a scary movie, at least,* David thought as his car automatically reversed from its parking spot before setting off on its predefined, ordinary, dull route.

When David arrived at his office, he was immediately ambushed by Brian. *Right on schedule...* David thought as he saw Brian approaching.

3... 2... 1...

"Hi Brian, good morning. I'll get you that write-up just before lunch. Did you have a nice weekend?" David preempted all the prompts that Brian was sure to unload on him.

Brian deflated a bit as David could tell that he had succeeded in his goal. Catching himself for a moment, Brian would not be deterred. "...Tom is asking about you. He seems to be trying to poke holes in the work you've been doing," Brian said with a wicked grin. Brian was acting bolder than usual. Given this new revelation and Brian's demeanor, David felt a bit of caution was warranted.

"Thanks for the warning, Brian. You've been with me through these last few months. You've seen the work I've done. Was I ever out of line?"

"No, never. That's what makes it all the more concerning. If Tom thinks he wants you gone, and there's no obvious reason, well..."

"Well, what?"

"...Well, he might just make it up. Then it won't matter if he can prove it or not. He'd just stick to the fabrication. If it's not something you could prove you 'didn't' do, then he'd have you right where he wants you. They might even try and claw back that big bonus you just earned."

David reeled at Brian's words. How could someone be so cold-hearted? Why would I deserve this type of treatment? Who do I have to punch to make this go away... David stood there now, visibly seething in anger. David's thoughts raced. Brian was now clearly trying to gain an advantage in the company's pecking order over him. *Thanks for having my back, Dick*. David chided his supposed work friend in his thoughts before moving on to a bleak realization. He was angry. Again...

He was not just angry because his boss was targeting him. No, 'Diana' had encountered that numerous times. Now, he was angry because he had let his success go to his head. He let his ambitions and pride cloud his judgment. He let his male body and the privilege that came attached be the source of his authority. He had been careless. After that first day, where he had revised the presentation so masterfully, David had fallen in love with the adoration that colleagues heaped on him. People listened to his ideas. They didn't make him repeat himself. His ideas were valid right away. Eventually, he kind of stopped trying as hard. He never should have let himself slip like that. He knew so much better than to do that. He had struggled so mightily at the university for the minimal improvements he could eke out. Now, he was the laggard do-nothing man who got everything he wanted without significant exertion. Now, he was a viable target for another kind of mistreatment. He was enviable, had attention, and had a bullseye on his back.

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Returning home, David sighed in relief that he had navigated the workday successfully. Brian got his write-up, Tom had been forced to publically acknowledge David's critical contributions on the most recent closing, and he had a good one-on-one with Pavan. Still, David's anxiety persisted through the day. A temporary delay would not deter Tom if he were convicted of wanting David to leave.

David, desiring a solution to his anxiety and workplace predicament, went into solving mode. As 'Diana,' his first instinct would usually be to garner support and feedback. 'She' was happy to let a problem linger as long as she was able to say her peace. Being a woman had trained this into her, or it was her nature; it was hard to say for sure. Now, as David, he wanted to move on so he didn't feel this way anymore. His thoughts were bold, big, and disruptive. None of them were dismissed. He considered going over Tom's head to Pavan. As today's one-on-one meeting had shown, his relationship was advancing with Pavan. Maybe in a month, David could begin to drop hints of mismanagement. On reflection, David evaluated this solution as likely being too slow. Had he been preparing for this eventuality, he might have been able to turn the heat up sooner, but he hadn't

done that work.

An even bolder idea was to reach out to the company he had just closed the deal with. They loved him. As a smaller company, David could probably leverage his experience and relationships to earn a Director-level position—maybe even higher. This had a lot of potential in David's mind. Several engaging evenings of wheeling and dealing had given David a chance to show his intellect and ingenuity. They had even gone as far as soft-offering him a job in jest. Maybe the jest was just for his current company.

David's last idea was to hit the job boards and refresh his resume. 'Diana' was an expert writer. She had to be as a professor. The academic community demanded it of its members. David's resume from three years ago was rough, to say the least. 'Diana' had tried to convince 'David' that she could help improve his resume, but he declined her offer. Now, that wouldn't be a problem. Ever the man of action, David had completed a refreshed resume within the hour. All he had to do was start sending it and his accompanying cover letters to senior management and director-level position postings.

Having several viable paths forward, David felt in control despite the threat of a competitive and hostile manager. David could feel the doubt of 'Diana' diminishing by the second as his bravado increased. He wouldn't pick one. He was going to do all of them. He reasoned it was better to have a lot of options than just a few. With a quick request to his virtual assistant, he had a new one-on-one series with Pavan for monthly follow-ups. He spent an hour writing a letter of interest to Henderson and Henderson Engineering's president, expressing his gratitude and interest in continuing to work with the company. And then he spent the next two hours sending in job applications.

His sense of value increased throughout the evening, and he began sending his information with a slightly revised resume to vice-president positions at appropriately sized companies. He laughed as he saw a VP job at UniGlobal come across his list. He could work for the very company that had 'made' him. He was an instant away from clicking submit before his senses returned. They would undoubtedly have more robust methods for screening candidates. He couldn't risk his and Diana's use of YourEssence being discovered. He closed the browser window and noted the time: 9 pm.

He had gone all day without a meal, but didn't hurt for it. His hunger cycles were nothing like before. He would get cranky if he went a few hours as 'Diana' without a small snack. He had gone over 24 hours today and felt only the slightest twinge. He checked the fridge and saw that there was nothing left. Diana had taken everything she needed with her, and apparently, that was almost everything... shy of mayonnaise. Only David liked that.

David decided to eat out. A local diner would suffice, as he could get a greasy cheeseburger and fries and call it good for the day. Fortunately, he had just the place in mind. JJ's diner was about eight blocks away. Grabbing his phone, David was on his way. He smiled to himself as he exited the apartment. It always took a half hour to decide on dinner with Diana. The instant decision-to-action process of being a single man was delightful.

While walking down the street, most men ignored David. He was one of them, so there was no reason for their glances to linger. However, David did notice a few women's glances move along his body. He thought he should be sure to thank Diana for her former diligence in maintaining this body. Physical fitness had thankfully been a shared interest for the Martins, but 'Diana' knew of several girlfriends whose husbands let themselves go after their wedding.

Turning the final corner to the diner, David inadvertently collided with another person, sending them to the ground. David immediately began apologizing as he realized what had happened. The sudden shock surprised and disoriented him. A woman in her mid-twenties wearing professional attire and an attractive overcoat was on the ground due to David's carelessness. David's apology intensified as he realized his gaff.

To his pleasant surprise, the woman wasn't rude or angry with him. She actually laughed it off as he helped her to her feet. David was stunned. The woman was his height in heels, blonde, and an eleven out of ten in attractiveness. David held onto her hand as she regained her composure. After dusting herself off, she looked up and made deep eye contact with David.

"Sorry about that! I wasn't looking where I was going."

"No! The fault's all mine. I turned the corner blindly and too quickly," David answered. His own eyes remained locked with hers. He felt confused staring at this woman. Something he had no familiarity with.

"I'm Amber, by the way..."

"David! Uhh, pleased to meet you," David's response came far too eagerly.

"Well, I need to be going, David," Amber said, looking down at David's hand, which was still holding hers.

"Oh, of course! I'm so sorry," David said, releasing his grip. He half expected her to run away on the

spot, but she stayed put. He couldn't explain it, but he felt an urge to continue talking with Amber, "You, uhh, wouldn't want to grab a bite with me, would you?"

"Thanks for the offer, but I do need to go. How about I give you my contact. Hold out your phone."

David did as instructed, and Amber touched her phone to the back of his. David's phone displayed the success message for having added Amber's contact. She began to walk away, having heard the transfer confirmation sound emitted from David's phone, but she turned around a few steps away.

"I don't believe in games, by the way. The correct number of days to wait before contacting me again is one. Bye, David!"

He stood there dumbfounded. He had never experienced anything like that. Even as a woman who had been hit on regularly by all sizes, shapes, and levels of attractiveness of men. "Is this what crushing feels like as a man?" David wondered. He started to walk towards the diner again but was disrupted as his crotch had become painfully constrained due to his surprise erection. David tried to adjust his penis discretely, but the discomfort continued for a few more steps until he could get his mind off of Amber.

Taking a stool at the counter, David ordered his dinner and sat reflecting on what had just happened.

I've never seen a woman that attractive before. Or have I? Am I thinking as 'David' would? Or Diana? Why does that matter? I'm married... but also sort of not at the moment. Ugh, why is this an issue at all? Stupid body... Stupid erection... Stupid male libido... Stupid me. I can't believe I'm thinking this... Diana would be furious with me. But I feel like I owe it to myself to really know. Might I click with Amber? Is it fair that I'd only ever have sex with one woman? I agreed to let 'David' have my body. I had other boyfriends and wasn't a virgin with 'David.' And I know David wasn't a virgin. Maybe we need to date other people to ensure we are ready for our new lives to be our forever lives. Is that even a thing? No! I can't do this to Diana. God! This is harder than it has any right to be.

David's food was delivered, and he plowed through it with the same pacing any single man would. He was done in eight minutes flat. Paying for his dinner, the waitress winked at him, and he caught himself smiling. Then he cringed inside, realizing he had to resist his desire to flirt. He felt embarrassed that his instinct seemed to be to try and find more sexual partners.

He kept his head down and avoided eye contact on his walk home. When he returned to his apartment, he locked the door and marched straight back to his bedroom. Stripping down to his

boxers, he haphazardly discarded his clothes and crashed onto his bed. He made no excuses nor felt any need to explain himself. He went straight for his erection.

Hand at the base, he began pumping his shaft as thoughts of the blonde beauty lingered in his thoughts. His hand was increasing the pace as his body and mind imagined the passionate sex he could have with Amber. Shortly, spurt after spurt of cum shot out of his tip, and he winced in embarrassment. His mind was freshly cleared, and he felt shameful for his behavior.

David reflected that Diana didn't deserve to be mistreated after all David had put her through over the last several weeks. He felt ashamed that he had even considered it. David tried to explain his feelings away as being caused by his relative lack of familiarity with the male libido. He had never been hit on or flirted with. There had never been an opportunity for it to have happened before.

David cleaned himself up and pulled his sheet over himself. Lying on his side, his thoughts regularly bounced back to his shameful behavior and thoughts. He struggled to find sleep. Eventually, he started to justify his attraction to Amber as being natural for a man. He found excuse after excuse to try and minimize his shame.

As he fell to sleep, his mental exercise was working. He was accepting the naturalness of his libido.