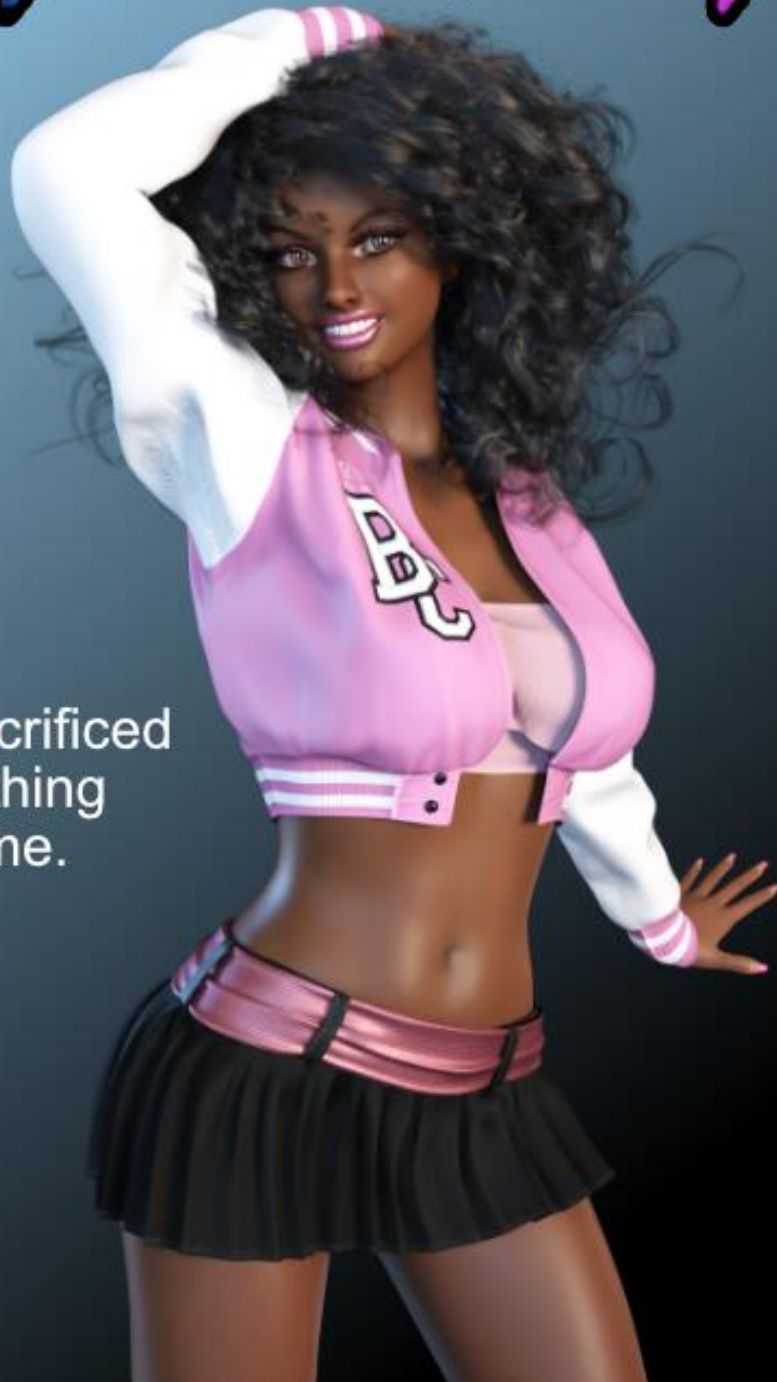


Krystal Kinsey 

He sacrificed  
everything  
for fame.



The following material is rated

R

Mature Readers

Notice: This material should not be read by, given to or downloaded by anyone under the age of 18, or viewed in a jurisdiction or area that prohibits the viewing of nudity, illustrations of naked men and women or the portrayal of sexual situations. You should also not view this material if you find such portrayals offensive. Any sexual situations involve characters over the age of 18.

# He's Krystal Kinsey

by Cooper

## Chapter One

"Hi, everybody," Arthur Dean said, with a small awkward wave. The "Everybody" sat behind a long, white plastic table. The agents. The people who could make his future. Who could change his life. They smiled back politely, but Arthur didn't see them. He was looking over their heads, out the window behind them, past the old, worn brick buildings of midtown to the Empire State Building, towering from several blocks away.

The accompanist began to play. Arthur felt a sudden urge to just walk out the door. Just turn and walk out. But he didn't. He started to sing. One of his favorite songs, and the one that had become his mantra:

*Baby look at me*

*And tell me what you see.*

*You ain't seen the best of me yet*

*Give me time, I'll make you forget the rest.*

*I got more in me, and you can set it free*

He had decided to show off his falsetto, so he slipped up into his falsetto placement for the chorus and prayed to god he didn't get tight and lose it:

*Remember my name FAME*

*I'm gonna live forever*

*I'm gonna learn how to fly*

*I feel it coming together*

*People will see me and cry FAME!*

*I'm gonna make it to heaven*

*Light up the sky like a flame FAME!*

*I'm gonna live forever*

*Baby, remember my name*

*Remember, Remember, Remember, Remember,*

The song came to an end. The room was silent. Arthur remembered he had meant to finish by raising one fist in the air and pumping it, but his hands were at his sides, so he raised one and pumped weakly and said, "I was supposed to do this at the end. Sorry. Forgot!"

"Thank you so much," Kelly Wall, the organizer of the agent showcase said.

"You were fine," Benton Burns, of the Burns/Hoffman Agency said.

Arthur nodded. Did a small bow. Walked over to the piano and got his sheet music.

"Thanks so much," he said to the accompanist, who nodded.

"Okay, next up is..."

"Just one more thing," Arthur said. "Sorry. It's just that I really want this, and I am willing to work so hard, and I just know if one of you will sign me I'll make it, and I'll earn for you, and you won't be sorry if you pick me."

The agents shifted in their chairs uncomfortably.

"Amateur," one of the other singers whispered.

"Thank you, Arthur," Kelly said. "Your time is up."

"Okay. Okay. Sorry. Thanks."

Arthur sat, and as the other singers performed, he chewed nervously on his fingernails and ran through his performance; he hadn't used enough air, and his voice sounded strained on the high notes. He'd rushed a little at one point, and the pianist had sped up to correct his mistake. He'd been wooden and plastic and--- *they hated me*, he thought. *They fucking hated me. This whole agent showcase was a huge, huge mistake. I'm not ready. I'll never be ready. I'm terrible in auditions. Terrible. But I'm sure if I could just to perform for a real audience, I could be a star!*

The sessions ended with promises that the agents would contact the people they were interested in working with, and Arthur grabbed his music and started toward the door, wondering what he would do with his life if he didn't make it as a singer. He had no backup plan. No other ambitions. Every other future felt like death. But...

"Arthur?"

Arthur stopped. Turned. Looked up. One of the agents, a woman in a tailored, man's suit, stood in front of him, her hand extended.

"Adan Karline," she said, staring intently at Arthur, her face blank, expressing no emotion.

Arthur reaching back, and she took his hand in both of hers, crushing his in a vice-like grip. Arthur winced.

"Sorry," Adan said. "I don't know my own strength sometimes."

Arthur smiled, shrugged. Started to say something, couldn't seem to find any words.

Adan stared at him with cold, pale blue eyes. Finally, Arthur shook his hand and said, "You are strong."

The faintest of smiles played at the corners of Adan's lips now, and she stepped forward. "I was impressed by your singing," she said.

"Really?" Arthur said.

"That needs to stop." Adan said.

Adan was now standing inches away, and Arthur only came up to her chin, so he had to tilt his head back to look her in the eye. He took a step backward, clutching his sheet music to his chest. Adan stepped forward. "What needs to stop?"

"The apologizing. The, 'really'? You are a great singer, but the world won't see that until you own it. All they'll hear and see is the insecurity you show them."

Arthur stepped back, and bumped against a wall. Adan stepped forward and put a hand on Arthur's shoulder. Arthur felt trapped, wanted to shrug her off, but, "Did you say a great singer?"

"Yes."

Arthur couldn't match her stare, and he looked down now, staring at her wingtip men's shoes. "I don't suppose you want to represent me?"

"I might," Adan said, putting her other hand on Arthur's hip and now moving so close they were almost touching.

Arthur looked up, letting the sheet music fall from his hands. "Really?"

"You sang *Fame*. You want fame. What will you do for it?"

"Work hard, practice..."

"What are you willing to sacrifice?"

"Anything," Arthur whispered. "Everything."

"You do whatever I say. You do it 110% all in no bullshit and no apologies. I will make you a star. You have my guarantee. But if you refuse even once, I will walk away and you can spend the rest of your life apologizing to people for making them listen to you sing."

"Anything you say," Arthur said. "Of course."

Adan reached into her pants pocket and took out a money clip bulging with 100 dollar bills. "Hold out your hand." Arthur held out a fist. "Palm up," Adan said impatiently.

Arthur held out his palm and Adan peeled five crisp hundred dollar bills from her roll and put them in Arthur's hand. It was more than he made in a week as a singing waiter at the Stardust Cafe. "Learn *Pretty Hurts*. I want to hear it in your falsetto. You have two days." Then, she chucked Arthur on the chin and said, "That money is just a taste, kid. Just a taste of what I can do for you. But if you disappoint me it will be the last money you ever see from me. Understand?"

"Yes. Of course, I wouldn't..."

"Yes is enough," Adan said, turned and walked away.

Arthur stood there, back against the wall, his sheet music scattered at his feet, watching her walk away. *Did that really just happen?* He thought. I just met an agent. One of the top agents in New York City? And she ... might... want to represent me? He thought of all the hours he'd spent working... the people who'd made fun of him for pursuing his dreams... friends and even family... he thought about all the casting directors and record company people telling him he was too short.. too white... and, already... too old... and now he would prove them all wrong, all of them, and he would live his dream and show everyone that he wasn't just some ordinary, boring person-- he was special. And all he had to do was learn – what song was it?-- *Pretty Hurts* in two days--- and, HOLY SHIT! He realized. I have to learn a song in TWO DAYS?

He started gathering the sheet music he'd dropped on the floor, mind racing. He had to find an arrangement of *Pretty Hurts*, learn the words, figure out how to act the song. He didn't know if he'd ever heard the song, thought he felt he had at least heard of the song. Who even sang that song?

Benton Burns saw Arthur gathering his music, clearly excited about something, and he just couldn't stand by and not at least try to warn the kid. He walked over. "I saw you talking to Adan."

"Yeah," Arthur said, holding his sheet music to his chest. "I can't even believe it, but she might sign me. I mean, nothing against you, of course, because everyone knows you're great."

"Listen, take it or leave it, but here's my advice: stay the hell away from Adan Karline. She will destroy you."



"What?" Arthur said. "But why would she do that?"

"Because that's what she does to men like you."

"Men like me?"

"Just trying to help. If you do decide to work with her, god be with you."

"Okay," Arthur said. "Thanks," and then he walked away, smiling. *Agents are fighting over me now? God, I am fucking awesome!*

Dazed, Arthur drifted to the Subway stop at 40<sup>th</sup> Street. As he waited for the train, he fished out his cellphone and texted his girlfriend, Dusty. "Got an agent!" He found himself smiling at every stranger. He went to the concession stand and bought a pack of gum. "Guess what?" He said, while the glassy-eyed Pakistani man who worked the stand got his change. "I go an agent."

"Okay. That's good," the man said with a shrug.

On the train ride home he texted his boss at The Stardust Diner. His mother. His girlfriend, Dusty, responded right away. "Great," her text read. "Let's celebrate."

"Can't. Rehearsal emergency. Will give deets later. On train."

As soon as he got back to his basement apartment, he jumped on his computer, searched for and found the sheet music for "Pretty Hurts" on Music Notes, then he You Tubed the video and watched it. Beyonce? The song struck him as very female in the sense that it was all about women dealing with the pressure to be pretty. The song was not one he would have chosen for himself. It didn't seem right for him. He didn't even know if he could sing it and not seem

ridiculous, but he remembered Adan's words, his promise to do what he was asked to do. So he studied the video, went back to the Music, sat down at his Casio keyboard, and started to work, losing himself in the music and process, forcing himself to stop and eat, then working some more until he finally fell asleep.

The next morning, he got up and went back to work. He'd figured out the music, had gotten the falsetto vocal track locked down in terms of being able to hit the notes, but he knew he wasn't performing the song, connecting to the song in any real way. In New York City, you could find great singers on any street corner. You could find them singing in the subway for change. You could find them lined up around the block outside the offices of Telsey and company at 6 am waiting for a chance to audition for a role as an understudy in Newsies. Being able to sing a song and make it sound nice counted for nothing. The ability to act a song, to connect emotionally—that was more rare, more valuable. Arthur didn't want to sing songs and have people tell him it was "nice." He wanted to bring the audience to tears. He wanted them to leave his performances shaken and feeling like they'd been woken from a dream, raised from the dead.

And he had to find some way to make this song his own. To connect so deeply the audience would feel him and not just hear him. To do this, he usually started with two questions: "Who am I speaking these words to? Why?"

*Mama said you're a pretty girl*

*What's in your head It doesn't matter*

*Brush your hair fix your teeth*

*What you wear is all that matters*

*Just another stage, pageant the pain away*

*this time I'm going to take the crown*

*Without falling down, down, down*

*Pageants? Pressure to be Pretty?* Arthur shook his head. *How can I connect to this? Maybe I could imagine myself as a contestant on Drag Race? Put myself into the mindset of a woman?* No. It would be hard to build an entire character in one day. Maybe impossible. He couldn't go in and do some kind of sketch show caricature. Not for Adan. So, what did he have in his own life that compared? How could he find the feelings this song expressed?

Auditions.

*Yes*, he decided. He would think about that horrible mixture of excitement and terror and the desperate, people pleasing weasel that so often emerged and turned his auditions into trembling psychodramas of self-loathing and please love me mewling. *Yes. That would work.*

Arthur spent the day running the lyrics in his mind, imagining he was talking to someone about trying to make it in show business, about all the longing and pain and joy and disappointment. Gradually, he found himself performing the song, connecting to it emotionally, and he was so deep into his process that it was only as his belly began grumbling after 8PM, and starvation broke him out of his artistic reverie, that he realized that all Adan had told him was, "You have two days." She hadn't indicated where he should be in two days to sing for her, or anything else. She hadn't even given him a business card. Should he contact her? Just wait?

He checked his voice mail. Nothing. Email. Nothing. He checked his SPAM folder. Nothing. He Googled Adan Karline and found the website for The Karline Agency. Dashed off

an email. It was late. The offices were probably closed. He would just have to hope that Adan's assistant would see the message and get back to him in the morning, and then--

*What if she was just fucking with me?* He thought, remembering Benton's warning.  
*What if this whole thing was just some kind of weird mind fuck? Well, the money was real.*  
*And—no—it made no sense. You're just sabotaging yourself, and...*

There was a knock on the door, and then Arthur heard a key in the lock as his girlfriend, Dusty, called, "I'm coming in. Hope you aren't decent."

"Surprise!" Dusty said, as she walked in, holding up a plastic bag from Peking Paradise.

"Hey," Arthur answered, taking the bag and giving her a kiss.

"I figured I'd surprise you with some General Tso's," she said, looking him over.

Arthur ran a hand through his hair, straightened his shirt. "Been working on that song all day. In the zooooooooone. Drink?"

"I kinda figured when you ignored my texts and calls."

"You called?"

"While you were in the twilight zone."

"Oh, shit. I am so sorry. Did you want something to drink?"

"Beer, if you have any. And tell me! Tell me all about this agent and everything."

"Oh, yeah. Well, she isn't officially agent yet—there isn't any contract or anything—so, I don't want to..."

“Tell me her name! Why she’s such a big shot! Tell me!”

And so he did. He told her about Adan and the big name clients she represented. Her track record of discovering new talent. And he told her about the phrase she’d spoken, the one he now felt was burned across his chest in flaming letters: I will make you a star.

“She actually said that?” Dusty said.

“Yeah. She guaranteed it.”

Dusty shook her head. “Doesn’t that... I mean, I don’t want to be negative or anything, but isn’t that a lot to promise?”

Arthur nodded. “I know. I know. And if it were just some hustler or small time agent, I wouldn’t listen, but she is the real deal. And she didn’t try to scam me with an application fee or audition surcharge—she gave me money. This is not a scam. This is opportunity.”

“Great. So, what’s the song?”

“Oh. It’s just a song.”

“I know. But what song?”

“It’s a little weird, but I think I figured out how to do it, so even though...”

“The name of the song?” Dusty said. She was used to Arthur’s hemming and hawing, especially when it came to anything related to signing or acting, and she found it kind of endearing but also annoying.

*Pretty Hurts.*

“That Beyonce song?”

“Yeah.”

“That makes no sense.”

“It’s what she asked me to learn. I told her I would do it.”

Dusty swallowed her concerns. It all seemed odd to her. Something didn’t seem right, but Arthur was so excited, and she didn’t want to rain on his parade. “Can I hear it?”

“Hear it? Oh, it’s not ready.”

“It’ll be a dry run. Sing it in front of me.”

“I don’t know...”

“Come on! You have to let me be part of your life!”

“Okay. But, just remember—“

“I know. It’s a work in progress.”

Arthur sat down at the piano. Did a quick snore breath to raise his soft palette, took a deep breath and began to sing in his clear, flowing falsetto. He closed his eyes, but he sang the words right to Dusty, letting all the fear and pain and need he felt was drowning him come right out, and when he finished he opened his eyes and realized he had been crying.

Dusty looked at the floor.

“Well?” Arthur said.

“It was... do you want me to be honest?”

“Yes. Of course.”

“That song isn’t right for you.”

“Yeah, well, I didn’t think so, either, but what about the performance?”

“I don’t like it.”

“That’s it? That’s all you got?”

“Yeah. I don’t. I just... it’s so wrong for you. So wrong. Worse than when you were trying to do Mick Jagger.”

“Well, okay then. So, that’s that.,” Arthur said, wanting to get off the subject. “Wanna watch some Wet, Hot American Summer?”

“Maybe you can sing something else or change the words?”

“I’m moving on,” Arthur said, getting up and going to the couch, grabbing the remote.

Dusty got up and joined him, but they both could feel the cold, the distance. She knew Arthur could be very sensitive about his work, but she also felt she had to be honest sometimes, especially when he was about to make a fool of himself singing a song clearly meant for a woman to sing.

She stayed over. They made love, and it was like performing maintenance, just a series of steps they needed to go through to keep their systems running. Both of them just scratching an itch.

Dusty got up and went to work. Arthur stayed in bed until he heard the front door close, and then he got up and ate, checked his email. Nothing. Nothing. What was he supposed to do? He showered. Warmed up his voice. Ran through the song. Monologue the song. Paced. At nine, he called the phone number from the website but got no answer. He tried to watch television. Searched the net.. Time crept. He called the office number from the website again at 10am, but it still went to voicemail. What kind of office was still closed at 10 in the morning in NYC? Again he remembered Benton's words of warning, started to think maybe the whole thing had been some kind of joke.

He threw himself on his couch and buried his face in the pillows. Fuck. Fuck. Fu...

His cellphone rang. Arthur tumbled off the couch, scrambled across the floor to grab the phone off the computer desk, swiped it on. "Arthur Dean?"

"Yes?"

"This is the office of Adan Karline. A car will be outside your building in 10 minutes to pick you up."

"A car? Wait. Hello? Hello?" The call had been disconnected. Arthur shoved the phone in his pocket, grabbed his wallet and keys, started out the door, ran back and grabbed the music, hurried out the door, punched frantically at the elevator button then ran to the stairs and raced down two steps at a time to arrive on the sidewalk out front of his apartment to find a sleek, black town car waiting there for him. A tall woman in a black suit, white shirt, waited by the passenger door.



## Chapter Two

“Is this the car for, um... I’m...”

“Arthur Dean,” the woman said in a flat voice. “I know who you are.” She opened the door and smiled coldly. “Please get it.”

Arthur climbed into the back seat, slid across the cool leather seat. The chauffeur got in and drove. Arthur tried to start some sort of conversation, but the woman responded only with polite, monosyllabic answers that made it clear she wasn’t listening. They seemed to drive around in an almost random pattern around Manhattan until they finally came to a stop on a street in the west village. The chauffeur got out and opened the door. Arthur got out. The woman pointed to a weathered wooden door above which hung the number 333 in dull, worn brass letters. “In there,” she said. “I’ll be back to pick you up.”

“So what is this...?” But the chauffeur turned away and got back in the car. Arthur looked at the door. Just a plain wooden door in a rough, brick wall. The sign. Maybe it was some kind of studio? He walked forward, took the handle and pulled. The door didn’t open. He tried the handle again. Nothing. Looked for a bell. Knocked. He heard a metallic click. Then another. Then a third. The door swung open, and Arthur looked up at a woman who must have been at least 6’ 5”, and she shouted, “Arthur, baby! I’m Ovid! Soooooo loooooooverly to meet you!” As she grabbed his hand and then almost yanked him off his feet as she dragged him through the lobby and into a brightly lit salon.

Three gorgeous young women rushed forward and grabbed his hands, leading him to a chair as the giantess pushed him from behind, and Arthur found himself being plunked down into the chair while a third woman came forward and handed him a pink drink in a martini glass.

“Sit down and relax, baby,” Ovid said. “My team and I are going to make you stunning for the big show tonight. Aren’t we, girls?”

They all laughed in agreement.

“Well, I usually...” Arthur started.

“The usual for you is over, baby,” Ovid said, laughing. “Adan and I have worked out a new look for you, honey child, and let me tell you starting today you will be Unforgettable! Unmistakable! Irresistible! Drink up, baby.” Ovid reached out and put Arthur’s drink to his lips. Tilted the glass back. “It is part of the makeover, honey. Drink it up.” Arthur sipped and then gulped the drink down as Ovid tilted it back further and further, some of the liquid overflowing his mouth and dribbling down his chin. It tasted like cotton candy, though with a kind of slightly bitter after taste, and as soon as the glass was empty Ovid took it, one of the women wiped Arthur’s mouth, and Ovid sashayed away. “We’re going to make you gorgeous!”

“We are,” the tall, blonde said. “You can call me One.”

“I’m Two,” a dark-skinned, African American girl said.

“Call me Three,” a pale skinned, red-head with pale green eyes added.

Arthur felt light-headed as the drink hit and hit hard, and he sank back into the chair, smiling contentedly, mumbling as the women went to work. One began plucking at Arthur’s eyebrows, while another pulled off his shoes and started doing something with his feet, and the

third began working on his hands. He fell deeper into a kind of blurry haze as they clipped his hair, then wrapped it in a towel and began to strip off his clothes. “One.... Hold... I don’t...”

“Spray tan,” One said as they got him to his feet and led him to a booth. “You need some color.”

“You really do,” Two added.

“Oh, God, yes,” said Three.

Arthur felt anxious, but he seemed incapable of doing much more than just following along as they pushed him into a booth, had him change into a pair of bikini underwear and then began to spray him down, having him close his eyes, raise and lower his arms, spraying him from every angle, giggling and laughing as they did so. They toweled him off, then sat him back down and went back to work-- mascara, lipstick, eyeshadow-- an actor and singer, Arthur had worn make-up before, but never for an audition. It seemed—off to him... the colors too dark, too bold, but they handed him another drink, which he gulped down obediently even while in his mind he was screaming at himself—no! You’ll never be able to perform. You can’t get wasted!

The three women seemed to finish. They stepped back and looked at him. Arthur looked back, the girls smiled and clapped. “Omigod, you look so amazing.”

“You really do.”

“Can I sssseeeeeee?” Arthur slurred.

“Ovid!” The three women called, ignoring him. “He’s ready for wardrobe!”

“Wwwwoooonderful!” Ovid shouted from the backroom, only to come swirling out a moment later with a black corset on a hanger. “Stand up and let’s get to dressed.”

Arthur stared at the corset, shaking his head. It was black lace with white laces, and even just hanging on the hanger it had an hourglass shape to it. “No,” Arthur said, blushing even at the thought of putting something like that on, especially in front of these three beautiful women.

“Oh, you are such a diva!” Ovid said. “Stand him up.”

The girls all started giggling as they grabbed Arthur’s arms and pulled him to his feet. “You’re going to look so hot,” One said.

“Just wait!” Three said.

“You’ll shock the world!”

Arthur struggled. Somewhere deep beneath the murky haze in which he found himself, his brain was screaming—*run! Get the fuck out of there!* Whatever Adan had planned, it was not something he wanted any part of—not this, but he couldn’t move, couldn’t run, couldn’t do anything but stand there as the corset was wrapped around his body, and then Ovid yanked the laces tight, crushing his ribs and mid-section until he felt like his liver had been shoved into his chest. “Can’t breathe,” he said, gasping, and Ovid and the three women all began to laugh.

‘You’ll get used to it,” Ovid said. “Step into this.”

Arthur stepped into what looked like some kind of padded pair of underwear, and then a pair of what looked like women’s jeans with colorful butterflies stitched on the back pockets and a waist that looked impossibly small for him, but which to his shock fit perfectly around his now tiny, corseted middle. ”Yes!” Ovid said, examining her work.

“Sister got back,” Two said.

“Big time,” Three added.

Arthur looked back and saw that the padded underpants Ovid had made him wear had made it look like he had a large, round behind and round hips.

“What is going on?” Arthur asked, feeling ridiculous and absurd in his corset and girl’s jeans. Looking down he saw that the top of the corset was pushing his chest up, making it look like he had small breasts to go with his now rounded hips and waspy waist. “And my skin?” He held up his arms, which now had a rich, caramel brown color. “It’s so brown?”

They slipped him into a blouse and then had him sit back down while they fitted him with a wig that gave him a head full of thick, flowing curls that poured down his shoulder and halfway down his back, then Ovid and the three looked him over, shaking their heads. “You have been transformed my little butterfly,” Ovid said.

“Sexy,” One said.

“As,” Two added.

“Hell,” Three finished.

Arthur felt... nothing. He didn’t have any idea how to feel or what to say, until he finally said, “Can I see?”

Ovid nodded. One removed the cover from the mirror behind Arthur. Ovid said, “Close your eyes.”

Arthur did. They turned the chair around. "Open them," Ovid said, and when Ovid opened his eyes he looked into the mirror and saw... "a woman." Ovid and the Three clapped and cheered as he stared, wide-eyed at the woman's face that was and could not be his. She had thick, curly wet lashes surrounding wide, bright blue eyes that seemed out of place on her radiant brown face. Slender, graceful eyebrows, with dark eyeshadow and full, wine red lips. She was pretty. And she was, him?

"Impossible," Arthur said, watching as her mouth spoke the word in his voice. He shook his head his earrings flashing, his long hair brushing his smooth shoulders.

"I fucking knew I picked a winner," Adan said, stepping to stand behind Arthur, putting her hands on his shoulders and meeting his eyes in the mirror.

"What is this?" Arthur said, looking back at her.

"Your new look," Adan said. "Androgyny. Ethnic ambiguity. Blurry people who are outside the lines. It's trending now, and your key to wealth and fame."

Arthur looked back at the young woman in the mirror. "Androgyny?" He didn't see it. He saw a woman, a women who looked Latina or African American.

"Let's move," Adan said,, taking his hand and helping him to his feet. "We need to get you to the show."

"Not like this?" Arthur said, plucking at his blouse.

"No," Adan said. "You'll also need some footwear."

"Kate Spade Icardas," Ovid said, holding a pair of flat sandals with glittery gold metallic bows.

Relieved they weren't heels, Arthur slipped them onto his feet, and then Adan took him by the hand and dragged him toward the door. "I knew the minute I saw you that you were destined for great things," Adan holding the door for Arthur. "And now just look at you! Look at the transformation!"

Arthur stepped out onto the street and into the sunlight, feeling ridiculous, terrified someone he knew might see him. The thought of appearing in public like this terrified him. What if someone took pictures? Posted them on Instagram? What would Dusty think? But he found himself being led to the town car, hustled in while Ovid and the Three waved and cheered him on from the sidelines. "Knock 'em dead, sister!" Ovid said.

Adan slid into the backseat next to Arthur and patted him on the knee. "I'm so proud of you," she said.

"Thanks, I..."

"Falsetto."

"What?"

"I want you to speak using your falsetto placement. You need to get warmed up before the show."

"But, I..."

"Falsetto!" Adan shouted.

Arthur flinched. There was no use arguing. He took a breath and found his placement, speaking from a breathy, nasal position that sounded like a mousy girl. "I'm a little confused, really, about all of... this?" He held up his brown hands, the slender bracelets on his wrists flashing.

"You should be. This is a stress test. I am going to find out how you perform when you are completely and totally out of your comfort zone. I think you can do it. I know you can do it. I believe in you."

"Oh," Arthur said. "So, is this? Is it temporary?"

"God, you are sexy as hell," Adan said, sidling up next to Arthur, brushing his hair back from his face.

Arthur looked away, but Adan cupped his chin and turned his head so he was looking up at her. She stared into his eyes until Arthur smiled and then Adan leaned in and kissed him on the cheek. "It's taking all of my willpower not to rip your clothes off and take you right here, right now," Adan said. "You are so damn sexy."

"I have a girlfriend," Arthur whispered.

"I don't care," Adan said, kissing him on the neck.

Arthur pushed at Adan, but she shoved his arm away and kissed him on the neck again before pushing down the front of his blouse and kissing him on the chest, then she smiled into his eyes and said, "Look. We're here."

Arthur looked. Two tall women in dark suits and sunglasses stood by a pair of glass doors etched with the name "Sackville-West." A velvet rope stood between them and a line of



people stretching down the block waiting to get in, and the chauffeur came around and opened the door. Adan got out first and then helped Arthur out, taking him by the hand and marching him to the doors as the women pulled them open. "Miss Karlina," one of them said.

"A pleasure as always, Kelly," Adan said.

As they walked into the dark, cool interior of the club, Arthur saw and felt heads and eyes turn to them, first to Adan and then with curiosity to him. The crowd seemed to consist almost entirely of women, though all of them wore suits and blurred the lines between male and female. Adan walked through the crowd calmly and confidently, greeting people but never slowing her pace as she led Arthur right out onto the floor, where a small band was finishing up a number.

Arthur was the most girly looking person in the room in his hip hugging jeans, dangling earrings and heavy make-up, and he felt vulnerable and ashamed as the spotlights focused on him and Adan, and the room full of women looked on with cold detachment.

"Over the years, I have made a habit of introducing my newest discoveries here at Sackville-West," Adan said. "I want you to meet the latest. My good friends, I present to you, Miss Krystal Kinsey."

Adan walked away, leaving Arthur standing at the microphone in the spotlight. The band started playing. The audience hushed. Arthur felt the familiar urge to run as terror overcame him, and he was hyper-conscious of his long hair flowing over his shoulders, the earrings brushing his cheeks, the corset crushing his body into an hourglass shape, and he took a deep breath and thought, why not? And so he began to sing in a clear, high voice, and he let all the feelings flow out of him, his fear and desperation and the shame and humiliation and he lost all sense of self and time and then the song ended, and the audience roared, the women jumping to

their feet, surging toward the stage clapping and whistling, and Arthur turned to the band and clapped and turned back to the audience and did a little bow, the power of their reaction stunning him, and then Adan strode forward, put an arm around his waist and hustled him through the crowd and back into the crowd.

"Baby, you killed! Killed! Did you feel it?" Adan said.

"Yes," Arthur said, shaken. "I've never felt anything like that before."

"This is who you are," Adan said. "This is who you were meant to be." She grabbed Arthur's blouse and pulled it off him, then pushed him onto his back, climbed on and kissed him. Arthur put his hands on her chest and pushed, murmuring, "My girlfriend."

"Fuck her," Adan said, kissing him again as she started fighting with the button on his jeans.

Arthur struggled some more, but Adan pushed her hand down under his padded pants and found his penis, giving it a squeeze as she kissed him again, and then he gasped and kissed her back, and she laughed and said, "I'm going to fuck your brains out, Krystal Kinsey," and she smothered his mouth with another kiss before he could object to the name. She kept squeezing him, kissing him, but when she broke off the kiss at one point, Arthur said "Jesus" in a gruff, chesty voice, and Adan pinched his scrotum, hard, between her long fingernails.

"Ow!"

"Falsetto!" Adan hissed, twisting. "Always falsetto!"

"Okay! Okay!" Arthur said, slipping back into his breathy head voice. "Stop! Stop!"

Adan stopped. Patted Arthur's cheek. Started to play with his dick again, sliding her hand up and down now. "You need to practice your falsetto all the time, sweetie. All the time."

"Okay. I will. Sorry."

"I have to be cruel sometimes, you know?" Adan said, smiling. "I need to push you to be your best. But, I can also show you pleasure like you've never known." She slipped a pill into Arthur's mouth.

"What is it?" he asked, but Adan just covered his mouth and said, "swallow."

Arthur obeyed. Things got... fuzzy. Sound seemed muted, muffled. Colors brighter than he'd ever seen, and the skin on his body tingled and sang with perfect pleasure at every touch. Adan climbed on top and rode him cowboy style, and then he found himself doing down on her, and then they were laughing, drinking, and he had some hazy recollection of the chauffeur helping out of the car and half carrying to the door of his apartment, and then he sank into darkness.

### Chapter III

In the morning, Arthur pushed the long hair out of his face, looked at his red, glossy fingernails, the gold bracelets on his brown wrists, and thought-- what the fuck? He still wore the corset, and struggled to sit up, looking down to again see his chest pushed up into the shape of small breasts, and it started coming back to him in fragments. Ovid and the three, the performance at the club, the sex after. Looking down at his feet, he saw his toes had all been painted a dark red color.

"Fuck," he said, covering his face. It had all been real. He got out of bed, walked into the bathroom and looked in the mirror, again unnerved to see HER looking back at him. Her long hair was now tussled, and her lipstick smudged, but she still had those curly, dark lashes, those elegant eyebrows and smudged pink eye shadow, and she still looked like a woman, and a Latina woman at that.

How long does spray tan stay on for? He wondered. How long would he look like this? He reached up and pulled at his wig, but he had some vague memory of them yanking on his own hair, tying it into his head somehow, and when he reached back and tried to find some way to undo the corset, he found himself equally frustrated. What the hell am I going to do about work? He wondered. What about Dusty?

As if on cue, he heard the sound of a key in the lock, heard Dusty call out, "Good morning, sunshine!"

Arthur glanced at the brown woman in the mirror, the corset. Oh fuck no. "No!" He yelled out from the bathroom. "You better not come in! I'm.. sick! Feverish!"

Dusty came in anyway. He heard the door close. Her feet walking across the hardwood floor. Arthur closed the bathroom door just as Dusty pushed her head in and said, "Oh no! Do you have any Theraflu?"

"No. Yes! I took some already. Just going to have to wait it out. Go on. I'll sleep it off and give you a call later."

"Well, tell me about the audition," Dusty said, sitting on the bed. "How did it go? I thought you were going to call me last night?"

Oh shit. He'd forgotten. He'd been too busy cheating on her. Arthur had his arms contorted behind him, desperately trying to get the laces loose on his corset, and his mind was racing, trying to put together some sort of story or excuse. "Oh, yeah. I totally forgot. I'm so sorry. Yikes! Brain fart! Probably because of the... all of the people talking to me afterwards... and then I was so tired, and the flu was already coming on, so I just came home and went straight to bed?"

"So, how did it go?"

"Great! Amazing! I couldn't even believe it-- it was actually a show, a performance in front of an audience-- and they went crazy."

"Crazy?"

"Yeah. Nuts. Adan loved it. She told them I was her next star."

"I bet there were a lot of crazy groupies there who wanted to have sex with you, too, right?"

"What? No," Arthur said. "No. None of that."

"Then whose make-up is this smeared all over your pillow?"

"What?"

"You know, I can't fucking believe you. We've been together all this time, and as soon as you get even the tiniest hint of success you sleep with some slut. Is she in there right now?"

Dusty got up and started pounding on the bathroom door. "Hey, you fucking skank. How does it

feel to fucking be a nasty whore!" The pounding got louder. "Open this fucking door, Arthur! Open it, or I swear to God I will smash your fucking keyboard!"

"Dusty! No. It's not what you think. I can explain."

"Oh, really? You think you're going to lie your way out of this one? The flu. You're the worse god damned liar. You fucking think I am going to believe..."

Arthur opened the door, held his hands up and said, "Okay? This is what I didn't want you to see."

Dusty did a double take at the woman in the corset standing in front of her, speaking in her boyfriend's voice. It didn't seem possible. She could see him underneath it, see him in his blue eyes, but he looked like a woman far more than he looked like himself. "What the fuck?" Dusty said, almost thinking that Arthur may have been hiding in the shower, doing some kind of insane ventriloquist's dummy trick. "Is that really you?"

"Yes," Arthur said, crossing his arms over his chest and hurrying past Dusty. He grabbed the blanket off the bed and, sitting on the edge of the bed, he wrapped it around himself to at least hide the corset and the hourglass figure it had bound him to.

"What happened?"

"Adan," Arthur said, brushing a long strand of hair from his face. "She thinks this is the right look for me?"

"A Puerto Rican chick?"

"Androgynous. Ethnically ambiguous. I don't know."

"And you went along with it?" Dusty said, looking with fascination on the transformed creature that sat before her, the one that had been her boyfriend just the day before and now looked... hot.

"I didn't have any choice. I didn't realize this is what they were doing. They got me drunk, and I thought it was just going to be a haircut and a spray tan, and the next thing you know I look in the mirror and I see-- THIS!"

"Oh, God, sweetie," Dusty said, sitting down next to him, touching one of his dangling earrings. "Is this what you want?"

"No," he said. "I never wanted this. I'm not into this at all. But..."

"But what?" Dusty.

"It worked," Arthur said, remembering the performance. The crowd's reaction. "The audience loved me. They... went crazy. I've never gotten such a reaction!"

Dusty shook her head. "But, this isn't you."

"I know," Arthur said. "I know. But this is what Adan wants, and as crazy as it seems, and weird-- and I know it's weird-- but it seems like she is right. This is how I become famous."

Dusty looked at her boyfriend, with his pretty brown face, the earrings flashing from beneath his long hair, and she put her arms around him and gave him a hug. "Okay," she said. "Okay."

"What? Really?"

"I'm going to stick with you, Arthur Dean. If this is what you want, what you need, I'm supporting you all the way. Just please stop blocking me out of your life, okay?"

"Okay," Arthur said. "Okay." He felt tears coming to his eyes. "I can't tell you how amazing you are, to see me... like this...and still stick with me?"

"Hey. I'm sticking with you. That's just how it is. Now, how about we eat some breakfast, and you tell me everything?"

"Sure. Sure. Only, can you help me get out of this thing first? It is killing me!"

In fact, she couldn't. The laces were tied off in some kind of exotic knot that seemed impossible to loosen.

"Cut it off, then," Arthur said. "I feel like my fingers have gone numb."

"Um, are you sure? These things are not cheap. It could cost 500, a thousand dollars?"

Arthur thought about it, the searing memory of Adan pinching his ball sack sending a shiver right down to his toes. "I guess not. Let me call Ovid and see what she says. That's the... stylist Adan hired for me makeover."

"Keep it on, baby" Ovid said. "Do not remove it under any circumstances. You need to train your body to that shape, let it get used to it."

"What? Really? But what about..."

"Take a whore's bath today, and tomorrow when you're at the salon we'll take it off, and you can shower here. This really is a whole new world for you, isn't baby?"



"Yeah. Okay. Thanks." *Train your body to that shape?* The words made perfect sense, and the idea disturbed Arthur. Did Adan want him to have these curves all the time?

"What'd she say?" Dusty asked, getting some bacon out of the refrigerator.

"I have to keep it on until tomorrow," he said.

Dusty gave him a once over and shrugged. "I guess we'll both just have to get used to it, then."

Arthur felt exposed, his arms and legs bare, his curvaceous shape locked in the lacy black corset, and he unconsciously crossed his arms over his chest again. "I'll put on some clothes and be right back to help you with breakfast."

"Good idea," Dusty said. "You might want to clean off your make-up while you're at it, babe."

"Will do!" Arthur said, reaching under his wig and taking out one of his dangly earrings, then the other. "I'm gonna get all butch for you, babe."

As Butch as you can get in a corset, Dusty thought, rolling her eyes. She started cracking eggs into a stainless steel bowl, and the smile faded from her face. It was all so strange, and she had meant every word she'd said about sticking with Arthur, but was he being completely honest? Could it be possible that the cross-dressing or transgender stuff had been there all along, and he was just using Adan as an excuse? He'd hardly been the most masculine man, and now he seemed so.... eager. And what would their friends say when she walked in with this brown girl and they found out she was actually Arthur? That he was performing in brown face like some kind of racist minstrel show?

"When am I going to get to meet Adan?" Dusty called.

Arthur was rubbing cold cream onto his face, and frowned. "Soon," he said. "I'm sure."

Dusty wanted to meet this woman, this super agent. Sound her out, see what she was all about, because she did care for Arthur, and she wanted to find out for herself if this was what Arthur wanted, or else if he was letting himself get pushed into it.

Arthur eventually came back to the kitchen wearing sweatpants and sweat shirt. He'd cleaned off his make-up, so now he looked a little more like himself, but with his brown skin and long hair Dusty still felt she was talking to an androgynous stranger. Arthur asked her about work, tried to get the conversation focused on Dusty, and she obliged, distracted by the fact that her boyfriend kept fussing with his long, disheveled mane of hair as they talked. "Well, I better get to work," Dusty finally said, standing up, watching Arthur pull his hair back and toss it over his shoulders for the umpteenth time. She couldn't leave him like that, so she said, "Let me help you with your hair."

"No, it's fine," Arthur said, starting to stand, but Dusty pushed him back down as she grabbed a brush from her purse.

"It looks like a rat's nest," Dusty said, going to work with her brush. "Hold still."

Arthur sat, chagrined, while his girlfriend brushed out his hair and then tied it back into a ponytail. "There," Dusty said, when she finished. "Much better." Then she kissed him on the cheek and started toward the door. "Be good, honey."

"Thanks," Arthur said, waving weakly as Dusty hurried out the door. As soon as she was gone, he went into the bathroom and looked at himself with his hair pulled back, noticing that a

few loose strands dangled on the sides of his face. He hooked them behind his ears, then tilted his head and felt his pony tail bouncing around. It was a lot better than it had been, at least, and would be a lot better for him at.... Work. He had a shift tonight, and despite all the promise of what was happening with Adan he still needed the job. He looked at himself and shrugged. Dusty had handled it well. Maybe his boss and co-workers would be the same?

He pulled on his black trousers, tucked his white work shirt into the pants, cinched his belt to the last loop to accommodate his corseted waist. Pinned his name tag to his breast pocket. Looking in the mirror, dressed in his work clothes, he looked like his sister from another mother, but he didn't feel like he had a whole lot of choice, and though he considered calling his boss and warning her about the new look, he finally decided to just walk into work and let people see and react with their own eyes.

Arriving at the Stardust Diner, he saw the hostess Brenda at the front, smiled and said, "Hey" as he walked by and headed to the break room to punch in.

"Hey," Brenda said, trying to place the face, then did a double-take as she realized it was Arthur walking past her, his pony-tail bobbing. The rest of the staff was out on the floor, so Arthur punched in and took a couple of deep breaths, then grabbed an apron out of the locker, tied it around his waist and went out to find Pat, the shift manager, to get his shift. He walked right up to her and said, "Hey, Pat. Where am I today?"

"Hey," Pat said, making the same where do I know you from face Brenda had just made, then looking down at his nametag, she said, "Arthur?"

"Hi," he said. "Yeah. Went a little overboard with the spray tan."

Pat looked him over. Not just the darker skin, but the ponytail, and he looked like he'd lost some weight, plus she saw his painted nails, the holes in his earlobes she didn't remember.

"Spray tan?" She said, plucking at his ponytail.

"Oh, yeah, that" Arthur said, nervously. "For a part I'm playing. In a play."

Pat started to say something more, but decided against it. It was his journey, and she had all kinds of gender fluid staff, so if he was going through something and he wanted to keep it private, she was fine with that. "You're on Four," Pat said. "Rock and roll."

Arthur got right to work as the other person signed out for the day. He thought maybe he got a few confused looks from some customers when he first spoke in his normal, male voice, and he was pretty sure some of his co-workers were giving him looks and talking about him, but the restaurant was packed with people and they all stayed so busy there wasn't much time for anyone to really talk, so he just slung food and when his time came sang his songs-- The Stardust was famous for its singing servers-- and when his shift was over he cashed out his tips and hurried for the door. Brenda, who was working a double, caught his arm as he hurried past her and said, "Love the ponytail! It's so cute!"

"Oh," Arthur said. "It's for a part in a play."

"Well, it looks great on you."

"Thanks," Arthur said, and then he toward home, surprised and relieved that it had all been kinda pretty not bad. It did bother him a little, though, that his tips were down a little on the night. Was it because of how he looked? Or just a down night?

Arthur turned his phone off at work. It was too easy to get distracted checking texts or phone messages. But as he walked home he fished out his phone and found both texts and phone messages from Adan's office. The text's included an attachment, which open opening he found was a schedule including gym, vocal coaching, dance, something called skills, salon. The schedule started at 6am and filled his mornings, seven days a week, for the next month. The text just said, "Work." A second text was a list of videos from You Tube-- study and learn these songs, it said, and the list was loaded with Paula Abdul, Madonna, Jennifer Lopez, Gwen Stefani, Brittany Spears.

When he checked the voice message from Adan, it was just her assistant explaining that Adan had put together a training regimen for him, she was paying for everything, and he was expected to show up for all training every day. No excuses. "Adan asked me to remind you that there is no triumph without sacrifice. Good day, Krystal."

There was also a text from Dusty, and he texted back that, sure, they could get together for dinner. It made Arthur uneasy. He felt she was getting more clingy and needy since he'd started with Adan, but given the shock he'd put her through and the fact she'd stuck by him, how could he not be there for *her* now?

Once Arthur got home, he slipped back into his sweat clothes, sat down at his computer and started to do his homework, starting with Paula Abdul, *Straight Up*. He slipped into his falsetto and sang along:

*Lost in a dream. Don't know which way to go.*

*If you are all that you seem, baby, then*

*I'm moving way too slow.*

Paula had a whispery kind of quality to her voice he liked, and as he sang he tried to get more of that into his singing, and by the end of the song he felt he was getting a pretty good Paula sound, so he started the song over and sang it again, doing some of the movements Paula was doing so he could get her into his body as well. He'd always found that the more he could get into the body of a character, the more readily he could get into their minds. By the time Dusty let herself in, he was on his feet, mirroring Paula's dance moves to the best of his ability, his ponytail bobbing around while he sang:

*Do you love me, do you love me? Ah, tell me, baby?*

As soon as he saw her Arthur stopped, paused the video and said, "Just doing homework" still in Paula's voice.

"My God, you sound just like her," Dusty said, looking at her sweaty boyfriend, who seemed to be revealing some new part of himself every time she saw him.

Arthur cleared his throat. "Adan wants me to do that with the video and stuff."

"And it's torture for you, right?" Dusty said sarcastically.

"It's just work. The price of fame. How was work for you today?"

"Same as always. Boss is a turd. Pay is too good to leave." And then, offhand, "I Googled your friend, Adan."

"Oh?"

"She does have some impressive clients."

"She's started a lot of careers."

“And a lot of non-careers, too.”

“Some people don’t have *it*.”

“What if…” Dusty started, but she saw Arthur’s jaw set as he got ready to argue and decided better of it. “What if we order in some Indian food?”

“Yeah. Whatever you want is fine.”

### Chapter Three

That night Dusty kept searching for information on Adan. There wasn’t much. Aside from an occasional mention in an article on one of her clients, a listing on the Association of American Agents, and an occasional advertisement for an agent showcase like the one Arthur had attended, she’d left a very small footprint. No interviews. No feature articles. But maybe that was true for agents in general? Dusty thought. How many agents did anyone know of who wasn’t in the business?

Maybe there wasn’t anything to it all? But then she thought about Arthur in that corset, his skin darkened to the point he didn’t even look like himself anymore, singing like a girl, and she went back to the computer, thinking of other ways to search, other terms, and instead of just searching for Adan’s name she tried, agent scams, bad agents, Adan Karline, and the first hit was a Yelp! Review of an agent showcase from a Brandi "Butch" Waters, whose profile picture looked like a stunning African American woman:

*Stay Away!*

*Adan Karline is dangerous! She will promise you the world and then take everything. If I told you my story, you wouldn't believe me, but believe this: I have nothing today because Adan took my name and my life from me. Do NOT work with her!*

There were other good reviews, and then toward the bottom another negative review, this time from a Pete Cresser, though the profile picture looked like a blonde woman:

*Freak!*

*Adan Karline pressured me to get a sex change because she promised she would make me rich and famous. Yes, I was dumb to believe her, and now I am trying to put my life back together after she took it and destroyed it. Once she turned me into a woman, she dumped me! I am not rich and famous. I am working as an exotic dancer named Bambi to earn the money to get rid of this body. Adan gets off on forcing men into living as women. Do not work with her, or you will end up like me.*

Dusty grabbed her cellphone and called Arthur. He didn't answer. She texted him.  
“Call me as soon as you get the chance.”

\* \* \*

The next morning, Arthur woke up at 5am and groaned. He hadn't gotten up this early since... ever? But he thought about the night at the club, the audience going wild, and he rolled out of bed and said, “Fame. Fame. Fame.” The gym Adan had signed him up for was a boutique gym in Chelsea called Slender, and as Arthur made his blurry way to the desk he



noticed it was all soft pastels, everyone else he saw training their looked like a woman. Of course, so did he.

“Krystal,” the young woman at the desk said, beaming as he walked in the door.  
“Welcome to slender.”

“I have a lot of work to do,” a tall, tone woman in a tank top and baggy gym shorts said.  
“I’m your new best worse enemy. The name’s Sean.” She gave Arthur a painfully firm handshake then shoved some clothes into his arms. “Put these on, and meet me on the floor in 10 minutes. Pat will help you out of your *corset*.”

She and Pat exchanged a glance. Arthur followed Pat into the changing room. “Don’t worry,” Pat said sweetly. “You don’t have anything I haven’t seen before.”

“How did she know I was wearing a corset?” Arthur asked, having thought his baggy sweats hid it well.

“Adan,” Pat said, pulling his sweat shirt off. “Of course.” He slipped out of his pants and Pat gave him a once over. “Your waist is so small!”

“It’s the corset.”

“For now.” Pat undid the laces, and Arthur gasped, wobbling unsteadily as he felt like his whole middle section was turned to jelly.

“Whoa,” he said, leaning against the wall.

“It’ll take a minute for your body to stabilize itself. Your core has been sleeping because the corset was doing all the work. I’ll hang this for you,” she added as she left the room.

Arthur sat down, breathing freely for the first time in days, and finally looked at the clothes he'd been handed. Black yoga pants and a pink, racerback tank top that read sexy across the chest in black, cursive letters, plus some panties.

Arthur held up the tank top and sighed. Of course, he couldn't really be surprised, but did everything he did now have to involve cross-dressing? He knew the clothes were not an accident or a mistake, so he slipped into his yoga pants, pulled on his tank top and, taking a sec to fix his ponytail went out onto the floor where Sean proceeded to push him and test him until by the end of the hour he was on the floor, bathed in sweat, gasping for breath while Sean laughed. "You have now worked like a girl, Krystal. It won't get easier, but you will get more fit."

"Oh God," Arthur said. "That was brutal."

"Pat will have a shake for you, and I also left a diet for you on the front desk. Remember, what you put into your body is just as important as what you sweat out of it. If you are really committed to glory you're going to need to win at the table. Okay, honey?"

"Yeah. Yeah," Arthur said while Sean helped him to his feet, gave him a slap on the ass and said, "That a girl," pushing him toward the changing room, where Pat was waiting with his corset. Arthur didn't like being called a girl, but he hid his irritation behind a smile.

"How was your first workout, Krystal?"

"My name isn't really Krystal," Arthur said.

"Adan wants us to call you Krystal," Pat said, yanking the laces tight and making Arthur gasp. "And Adan pays the bills."

“Well, okay,” Arthur said.

“Sean is really great,” Pat chattered on as she continued to tighten Arthur’s corset.

“You’re going to love the way you look she gets done with you. You’ll be the sexiest little thing in Chelsea.”

"Great," Arthur said, through clenched teeth, though the prospect actually scared him. Did he really want to become the sexiest little thing? Was that the life he wanted?

Vocal coaching continued the pattern. Amy Wan stood a little over five ten, long and lanky, with short black hair and thick, Woody Allen glasses. Her vocal studio was in a small room on the 6th floor of a converted warehouse in the Meatpacking district. On the wall hung framed degrees from NYU-- a BA in Theater, an MA in Voice. "Hello, Krystal," Amy said, in a flat, almost murmur, as she regarded Arthur. She seemed to be looking right through him, her brown eyes unblinking as she stared at her new charge

"Hi!" Arthur said, waving weakly, standing at the door. He lingered there as Amy stared at him, not sure if he was supposed to enter or not.

"Come in," Amy said, but then as he stepped forward she shrieked, "SHOES!"

Arthur jumped. "Oh! Sorry!" He said, slipping his shoes off.

"I am Amy Wan. Adan has filled me in on her plans for you. Please stand on the balance board, and tell me about yourself."

Arthur got up on the balance board and wobbled uncertainly.

"It forces you into a better posture," Amy said.

"Oh," Arthur said. "That makes sense, cause..."

"Falsetto. At all times, you will need to speak in your falsetto."

Arthur nodded. Found his placement. "Is this good?" He said in a breathy, high-pitched voice.

"It's acceptable. I wouldn't call it good. Now, scales. Let's get a sense of your range."

Arthur sang his scales. Looked at Amy eagerly.

"Yes. Now, we need to start working on your pronunciation. I will play phrases. You repeat them exactly as they are stated."

"Okay."

Amy clicked her mouse, and the chirpy voice of a teen-ager or young college co-ed emerged from the speakers on her desk, "Omigod, I am so, so psyched!"

"Omigod, I am so, so psyched," Arthur said.

"Again," Amy said, flatly. "Not just the tones. The essence. Do you know what I mean by essence?"

"Yes," Arthur said, nodding.

Amy played the recording. Arthur repeated the phrase, trying to embody not just the words and pitches, but the personality.

"Better," Amy said. "Again."

They spent an hour with Arthur repeating the phrases, doing his best to sound like a perky young woman, and at the end, Amy stood up and gave him a hug and a pat on the ass.

"Excellent work today, Krystal."

"Thanks," Arthur said.

"I want you to practice your falsetto all the time, and to do your best to practice the proper intonations as we have been studying them throughout your day."

"You want me to talk like a girl all day?"

"I want you to use proper technique all day. It's the only way we can ingrain it as a habit, so you will not have to think about when on stage."

"Okay," Arthur said.

"I need for you to promise," Amy said. "You are my student now, and I need to know you will be doing everything I ask to be the best version of you. Do you promise to practice proper technique all day?"

"I promise to practice proper technique all day," Arthur said in his high-pitched voice, dropping his head.

"Excellent, dear. Oh, turn around. Your pony tail is a mess."

Arthur turned around.

"Stand still," Amy said, and then she began to tidy up his hair. "I know I am asking a lot of you," Amy said as she worked. "I wouldn't if I didn't see the same incredible potential that

Adan sees in you. Remember, if you want what you've never had, you must do what you've never done."

Arthur turned the phrase over in his mind. It made sense. What he'd been doing before hadn't been working. It had gotten him nowhere. And as strange and radical as all this was, maybe it was the thing he'd never done that would finally make him famous.

"There," Amy said, turning Arthur around and putting her hands on his shoulders. "Now you look pretty!"

"Thanks," Arthur said, forcing a smile, looking up at her.

"See you tomorrow," Amy said, leading him toward the door. "How excited are you?" She asked.

It was a cue from the rehearsal. "Omigod, like so excited I could die!" Arthur chirped back.

"There's my pretty girl," Amy said. "See you tomorrow."

Arthur hardly had time to think about what was happening, to process it, to get the strength to run, and it was clear to him where all this was going as he slipped into tights and spent his entire dance class on his toes, working on ballet technique, and then to his skills coach, who had him slip on a pair of heels and torment his aching legs even more as he practiced a "proper walk."

Finally, exhausted, aching, almost delirious, he walked into the hugging, giggling laughing arms of Ovid and The Three, plopped down into a chair as they handed him a pink protein drink, and then just zoned out as they peeled him out of his corset, removed his wig and

then pushed him into the shower. After, they rushed him back to the chair and he laughed and smiled and reacted though his mind had checked out, and they put a new wig on his head, did his makeup. Had him put in a set of contact lenses. He sighed as they stood him up and laced him into a new corset, had him slip on his hip padding and then squeezed him into another pair of fancy jeans, a gold, metallic blouse, bracelets and earrings.

"Am I performing tonight?" Arthur asked, puzzled.

"Honey, if you are get me a ticket because you are something fine," Ovid said, turning him to see himself.

Arthur saw the same girl, but not the same girl. The new wig was black and kinky, and with it and his now brown eyes, he looked even more... ethnic... than before. "This is what Adan wants?"

"You look so pretty," Number One said.

"You really do," Number Three added.

"One fine sister," Number Two said.

"Well, that's what I'm wondering?" Arthur said. "Isn't it kind of, you know, racist?"

"Oh, don't be silly," Ovid said.

"No," Number One said.

"As a black woman, I am the authority here, and no way. Sister, please!"

Ovid handed Arthur a purse, which he slipped over his shoulder, and then she had him slip on sandals with wedge heels. Arthur stood there in his toes, his purse over his shoulder, and he shook his head, stunned, ashamed, confused. "So, what now?"

"You go out there and live your life, honey! Our work is done for today!"

"Like this?"

"Adan wants you to practice. To get used to it." Ovid pushed him toward the door, handing him a pair of over-sized, Jacqueline Style sunglasses. "For an air of feminine mystery," she said.

Arthur slipped them on. He was mortified, with his purse, his heels, his curvy shape. But he felt most self-conscious now about his skin and his hair. What the hell would people think if they saw him walking around trying to look like a black girl? Home. He had to get home. So, he pulled his purse up onto his shoulder and started to walk. Hopefully, no one would notice him.

"Smile, baby!" A construction worker called, and then he heard whistles.

Arthur pretended he didn't hear them, hurried along, found a subway stop and went down the stairs. Where is my wallet? He looked in his purse, found a woman's wallet, looked inside and found his subway card. On the platform, he thought some guys were checking him out, and it made his skin crawl. "Fine ass woman," he heard someone murmur as he pushed onto the subway car. It was super crowded, and he was having trouble getting in, so he just stayed by the door, which promptly closed on his enhanced behind, the doors popping open as Arthur



squeaked and hopped forward. As the train lurched into motion, Arthur stumbled on his heels, and a man caught him and said, "careful, honey."

"Thanks," Arthur said, in his girl voice.

"No problem," the man said, smiling.

*Thank God he thinks I'm a woman*, Arthur thought, weaving deeper into the car, eager to get away from the guy lest things evolve. Arthur had ridden the subway thousands of times during his years in New York, had walked the streets at all hours of the day and night, but as he stood on the subway train, clinging to the pole, bodies pressing against him, he realized that it would all be different, totally different, to do those things as a woman.

No one paid any attention to Arthur. He considered it kind of his secret weapon. But now, Krystal was another story. He got catcalled, felt eyes brazenly rove over his shape, and now he found himself fighting back tears because he felt like he'd been under siege from the moment he left Ovid's salon, and he was getting attention from people he didn't want it from, and it did not seem cool at all.

As soon as he got out of the subway tunnel, he fished his phone out of his purse and called Adan's office. No answer. He needed to talk to her. This dressing and speaking the role 24 hours a day was too much. He couldn't do it. He hurried into his building, jaw clenched, and when he finally got to his apartment he sighed with relief, opened the door and saw Dusty sitting on the couch.

Arthur clutched his purse strap defensively, stood on one foot, the other lifted to his toes daintily. "Dusty?" He asked, still in his falsetto.

"What the fuck?" Dusty said, looking at her boyfriend in his curly black wig, clutching his purse, his slender waist and wide, round hips. "What the hell?"

"Omigod," Arthur said. "I can totally explain."

"Stop talking like that," Dusty said, staring at the transformed man in front of her, the dangling earrings, the make-up, the girly bangle bracelets.

"Oh!" Arthur said, slipping into his normal voice. "Sorry."

Dusty stood up. "You're going out like that now? Carrying a purse?"

Arthur self-consciously set the purse down on the end table. Closed the door. "Adan wants me to..."

"Adan! Is this what Adan wants? Or what you want?"

"You said you were okay with this!"

"I was okay with yesterday. This is even... more. And she ... did you get your lips done?"

"What? No. It's just my lipstick."

Dusty wasn't sure. It looked to her like his lips were more plump and plush. "Just your lipstick? Listen, you need to know some things about *Adan*."

"Listen, I'm having doubts, okay? I didn't know she wanted to take it this far."

"Well, she's just getting started. How are you going to feel when she tells you she wants you to get breast implants?"

"Breast? What are you talking about?"

"Come here. Look at this. You need to see where this is all going."

Arthur followed Dusty to the couch, sat down, and looked at the Yelp! Reviews. "This seems ridiculous."

"Have you looked in the mirror lately, honey?"

"I thought this was just some kind of new thing. Ethnically ambiguous, androgyny. I thought it was... me." He found himself crying, the tears just pouring down his cheeks.

"This is what she does," Dusty said, handing him a tissue. "She finds guys and she turns them into women. It's how she gets off. Some kind of kink."

Arthur tugged thoughtfully on an earring, remembering Benton Burns' warning, the warning he'd thought had just been a rival agent trying to keep him from signing with Adan. What had he said? She destroys men like you? Something like that?

"You have to get out of this," Dusty said. "Put a stop to it right now, or you'll end up just like these two guys."

Arthur nodded. He didn't want it. This life. He thought about his walk home. The comments on the subway. It wasn't just about whether or not he could pass as a woman, or live as a woman, but did he really want to?

A phone rang. Dusty's. "I have to take this. Work," she said.

Arthur stared at the pictures on Yelp! Both looked like gorgeous women, with extremely feminine features, even without make-up they were stunning. It seemed impossible that those

faces belonged to men, and yet Ovid and the Three had already managed to transform his own face into one that was... cute. Not gorgeous. Not like these.

“I have to run,” Dusty said. “A client wants to see one of my listings in SoHa.”

“Okay,” Arthur said. Wiping his tears.

“I know this was hard to hear, but, Arthur, I really care about you. I don’t want to see you get pushed into something like this. We both know you can be too.... Agreeable... for your own good.”

“I know. Sorry,” Arthur said.

Dusty leaned down and gave him a kiss on the cheek. “Call her. Tell her it’s over.”

“I will. Okay.”

“Promise me.”

Promise me. The same words, and the same tone that Amy had used that morning. It... annoyed Arthur, everyone demanding that he promise them this and that, like he was a child. But he forced a smile, nodded, and said, “I promise.”

“My God,” Dusty said, patting her boyfriend’s frizzy afro. “You let them turn you into a black girl? Okay. Call her. Now. Right??”

Arthur nodded, waving weakly as his girlfriend headed out. He sat there on the couch for a few minutes, his knees together, hands clasped in his lap. His legs hurt. His feet hurt. His body hurt from the crushing of his corset. This did need to end, and now. He stared at his

phone, sighed. Better get this over with, he decided. Then see if I can get Ovid and The Three to put me back to normal.

There was a knock on the door. Had Dusty forgotten something? Left her keys? Arthur got to his aching feet, sashayed over to the door in his wedge heels, opened it and, “Adan?” He said, instinctively slipping into his falsetto.

“Come on, Krystal,” Adan said, grabbing his hand. “I have some people I want you to meet.”

“Wait....” Arthur said as Adan almost yanked him off his feet, dragging him into the hall.

“No time,” Adan said, pulling her little friend down the hall as he struggled to clomp along in his sandals, his earrings swaying wildly.

Adan’s chauffeur was standing at the elevator, holding the door open. “Krystal,” she said in her flat, emotionless voice. Adan pushed Arthur into the elevator, and then she turned him in a 360 degree circle, lifted his chin with her index finger and said. “Fucking gorgeous. Holy shit! What do you say?” She asked the chauffeur.

The chauffeur looked Adan over. Nodded. “She is a little hottie. Yes.”

“You hear that? I knew! I knew! You sexy little slut. I am going to make you a star! A star!”

“Um, okay, well, I wondered if we could talk...?” Arthur said, using not just his falsetto now but the feminine inflections he’d been training to that morning.

“Of course, babe,” Adan said, slipping a pill into Arthur’s mouth. “But first let me tell you who you are about to meet. Can you guess?”

Arthur swallowed the pill, shook his head. Shrugged. Once again, he found himself incapable of asserting himself in Adan’s presence, but just felt like he’d been strapped into a roller-coaster and just had to hold on for dear life until the ride came to an end. It seemed even more impossible now as he stood there in his wedge heels, with his now curvy shape, his make-up and jewelry. It was like each item was a key opening up some feminine self he’d tried his whole life to repress, and which now took total control of him and made him just smile and giggle as Adan led him around like he was her pet.

The elevator reached the ground floor and Adan once again grabbed Arthur’s hand and dragged him to the town car. “Guess!” She said. “Guess!”

Arthur had no idea, so he just blurted out the first words that came to his head, “The president?”

“The President!” Adan laughed and patted him on the thigh. “You’re so cute! The President, she says! Did you hear that?”

“Adorable,” the chauffeur said.

“So, like, who?” Arthur said.

“Someone better than the president. Much better. None other than the hottest new singer on the scene, baby, Horace.”

“Horace?” Arthur said, not having to fake his excitement. “The Horace?” Horace had exploded on the scene in the last year with three international hit singles, a Grammy and a sold out world tour.

“There is only one,” Adan said.

“That’s ..... amazeballs!” Arthur said, using one of the phrases he’d learned that morning. The pill was starting to take hold. His world was turning fuzzy and pink. His conversation with Dusty, all his fears, the Yelp! Reviews, they were all fading and getting lost in the excitement of being with Adan, of getting to meet PEOPLE. REAL PEOPLE.

“Yeah, well if the idea of meeting Horace gets you wet, maybe I shouldn’t tell you where we’re meeting him.”

“Tell me!” Arthur said, totally immersed in his role, playing the game. “Tell me, please?”

“Electric Lady Studios. Because you, my sweet little thing, are about to sing on his next single.”

“What?” Arthur said, his mouth dropping open.

Adan nodded.

“Omigod!” Arthur shrieked, throwing his arms around Adan and hugging her.

“Omigod! Omigod!”

Adan smiled, exchanged a glance with her chauffeur, smirked. “Do you have any paper towels?” She said. “I think she just wet herself.”

Arthur was struggling to breathe, hyper-ventilating, his corset making it impossible for him to get enough air, and his eyes fluttered as he felt the car start to spin and then swooned into Adan's lap.

The night that followed was a confusing, exhilarating blur. Horace greeted Arthur with a hug and a kiss on the cheek and said, "You're a cute lil' bird."

Arthur then met the other girls who would be singing on the record, and the producer came over and went over their music with them while Horace worked out some things on his guitar. Adan and a group of sleek, cold professionals watched it all from the booth with the engineer, and whenever Arthur glanced over and Adan caught him looking she would give him a wink.

Arthur and the girls were providing gospel-style backup vocals to Horace new song, "Whirlwind," and Arthur found himself easily mimicking the black church vocal style of the women he was signing with, while having no trouble at all relating to the lyrics:

*Don't know where I'm going*

*Forgotten where I've been*

*Searching for something*

*Lost in a whirlwind*

The recording session went on for hours. Between takes there was a lot of laughing and goofing around, and Arthur felt like he was just one of the girls, giggling and laughing, and whatever fear he had that he wouldn't pass, that the other singers and especially Horace would realize that he was actually a man, vanished. When they had done the last take, Horace came over clapping. "You ladies were truly amazing," he said in his Irish drawl. "I am so blessed to



have had a chance to work with you all, and I want to thank you for honoring me with your talent and your spirit." He gave them all hugs, and they posed for a picture together.

Finally, Adan led him out of the studio, and Arthur was shocked to see the sun was already rising, the sky lighting up from the East, cool morning breezes gusting down the length of 8th Street, tossing plastic bags and paper in its wake. "It's... morning?" Arthur said.

"In more ways than one," Adan said as she helped Arthur into the car.

"What do you mean?"

"It's morning for you in your career, in your life, in your new identity. Everything is changing. You must feel that."

"Yes," Arthur said. "I do."

Adan kissed him, pushed him into his back and climbed on top as he lifted his arms and she pulled his blouse off. "You're going to feel afraid," Adan murmured between kisses, unbuttoning his jeans. "All these changes."

"No," Arthur said. "I won't, I mean I..."

"You will," Adan said, finding him, giving him a squeeze, kissing him. "You already have. You don't need to hide that from me. Just trust me. Trust me, and I will take care of you, and you will have everything you ever dreamed of."

"Okay," Arthur. "Adan? Thank you so much for... everything."

"I'd rather you thanked me with your tongue," Adan said, pulling down her pants and her boyfriend briefs. She positioned herself on top of Arthur, who had never been really big on

going down on women, but Adan had done so much for him, had changed his life so much, and so he buried his head between her thighs and began to lick as she grunted, her hands behind his head, pulling his face into her hot, wet crevice.

The next day, Arthur woke staring up at a mirrored reflection of a young, black girl laying on her back in a corset, her face a mess, hair a muddle, long earrings flashing amidst her kinky black hair. She was tangled up in silk sheets, and he vaguely aware that she used to be him. Where am I? He wondered, looking at herself. He thought back on the night before, and it started coming back to him. Horace. The recording studio. Sex with Adan in her car. Coming back to... her place.

Arthur needed to pee. He sat up, his head pounding from the drink and drugs, and looking around the cold, corporate bedroom, he spotted the open door to the bathroom and stumbled to it, even in his blurry, hung-over state he was impressed at the marble floors, the glittering, stainless steel faucets, the huge, walk in shower. He pulled down his panties and sat down on the toilet, sighing with relief as he peed. He felt... tired, ashamed... bloated. As far as he could recall, he'd spent most of the morning buried in Adan's vagina, doing her again and again, and then when he'd been insane with desire and desperate to get off, she told him she was too tired, pinched his ass and handed him some tissues and a bottle of Vaseline. Had he done himself? He didn't think so. He remembered only having cried a little, and fallen asleep spooning her as she snored.

*What the fuck?* He thought, remembering the giggling little thing he'd become as soon as Adan had shown up, the omigods and the breathy pleading. *I am not Krystal*, he thought. *I am not a woman. Why can't I stand up to Adan? Tell her enough is enough?*

He'd promised Dusty he would end all this, he'd meant to end all of this, and now he was in deeper than ever. He had become Adan's girl, and he didn't know if he had any choice anymore. Adan walked into the bedroom, looked into the bathroom and saw Arthur sitting on the toilet to pee, smirked. "Hey, cutie," she said. Arthur saw she was dressed in a suit, looked fresh and strong, like she's been up, working for hours.

"Hi," Arthur said, automatically in his girl voice. He finished, pulled his panties up, padded back out to the bedroom.

"You hungry?" Adan said.

"I feel sick."

"I bet you do," Adan said, laughing. "You better get dressed. You need to be at the gym in an hour."

"Didn't I miss it?" Arthur said, sitting on the bed. "What time is it?"

"My assistant rescheduled everything."

"I don't suppose a day off is possible?"

"The rent is due every day, Krystal. And you still have a long way to go before you're superstar material. Now, get dressed. My driver will take you around today."

"Okay," Arthur said, getting up, pulling on his hip padding, then his jeans.

"Good girl," Adan said. "And by the way? That tongue of yours is magic! You were born to eat pussy, honey."

It hit Arthur more like an insult than a compliment, but he forced his pretty smile and chirped, "Thanks," as he knew he was supposed to do. He'd left his phone, his wallet and his purse-- everything, back at his apartment when Adan had shown up and rushed him out the door. He knew Dusty had probably called and texted, but now he wouldn't be able to respond until he got home-- whenever that was. *Shit. She is going to be pissed.* For now, he decided, he'd go along with it for one more day. Then, he'd make some decisions when he got home, cleared his head. But right now, it was better to just go along with what Adan wanted.

When it came time to leave, Adan walked him to the door, kissed him and said, "if you think that session with Horace was great, just you wait, kid. I have something even more amazing coming in the next week or so."

"What?" Arthur said.

Adan smiled. "This time you have to wait. But trust me, you're going to love the future I have planned for you."

## Chapter Four

The afternoon went by in a blur. The workout with Sean helped sweat the toxic crap from his system, and he felt stronger as he worked his way through dance class. Skills focused on body language and dressing himself, so his aching legs got a rest, and the trip to Ovid's in addition to a shower-- and today he used a Lady Bic to shave his armpits and legs, and a fresh corset-- his visit now included a session with Number Two, where she taught him how to do his own makeup and fix his kinky hair. He left wearing a pair of tight, daisy duke cut off shorts and

a flouncy t-shirt with a big pink and blue butterfly on the chest. The inserts they'd fitted into his corset gave him the appearance of b-cup breasts, and they also gave him another purse-- more of an everyday purse, as they described it-- LeSportsac with a floral print. Once again, he wore the sandals with the wedge heel.

Arthur felt more exposed and feminine than ever with his shaved legs now exposed in the little cut off shorts, his busty made to look bigger, and as he looked in the mirror he was surprised that his legs looked so... "Do my legs look like girl's legs?" He asked, seeing how they seemed softer and more fleshy toward the top of his thighs, and had a rounded shape that lacked definition.

"Of course they do, honey. Why else would we have you showing them off in those hot ass little shorts?" Ovid said.

Arthur let it drop. He hiked his purse onto his shoulder, gave all the girls hugs and kisses, and thanked his lucky stars as he stepped out into the city that he didn't have to walk home tonight since he had a... "Chauffeur?" He said out loud, looking at the empty space where the town car had been parked.

"Oh, honey, I forgot to tell you. The driver got called away on an emergency. But you can make it home okay, right?"

"Um, yeah?" Arthur said.

"It's different being a pretty girl, isn't it?" Ovid said. "Alone in the city?"

"Yes," Arthur admitted. "It's kinda scary."

"Well, just don't put up with any shit from anyone, baby girl. Get home safe!" Ovid waved.

*Let's do this, baby girl,* Arthur thought, clenching his jaw. *And let's make sure this is the last time. Probably.*

There were no catcalls, thankfully, though Arthur was sure he felt the predatory eyes of men surveying his body-- his ass and legs, his small breasts--- it didn't matter that a lot of what they were looking at was padding, wasn't him-- it made him feel-- small, threatened, and once again he sighed with relief when he saw the door of his apartment, though his went in slightly worried that he would once again get ambushed by Dusty. Thankfully, she wasn't there, though he saw she had called and left messages, texts. There was also a call from work, and Arthur's heart leapt as he realized he had missed his shift.

*Oh, fuck! Am I fired?* He felt overwhelmed. Exhausted. He went to the refrigerator, grabbed a beer, forced himself to drink it down though he still felt nauseous and... bloated. It was like his whole body seemed a little swollen. He went and looked in the mirror, again shocked at the soft, round shape of his legs, and looking at the rest of himself, what he could see, he was sure his skin looked more.... girly? If that was possible. It seemed not only to have more of a glow-- which could have just been his spray tan--- but he was sure it had gotten softer, and that his whole body had a more rounded, feminine look now. Dusty had been right about his lips, he realized. Lipstick aside, they were definitely bigger, fuller, softer. He thought about the drugs he'd been taking. The drinks. The shakes. Was Adan slipping him hormones?

Arthur threw himself on his bed. Work. Dusty. Adan. It all seemed like too much. His life was out of control, his body was out of control, he had just had the most amazing experience

of his artistic career and yet now here he was back in his shitty apartment maybe unemployed and.... he hugged his pillow to his chest and started crying. Arthur felt lost, alone, frightened, confused. He needed someone to hold, someone to be strong for him, to tell him what to do. But who? Adan? Dusty? It was all too much, and so he cried and cried, and finally cried himself to sleep.

*For the first time, Arthur dreamt of himself as a woman. He was wandering nude in a steamy, tropical jungle, his hips and breasts swaying with each step he took along a narrow path between the ropey roots and wet, glossy green leaves of banyan trees. Thick vines dropped down from the forest canopy, and all about her birds fluttered and chirped, butterflies danced in the sultry breeze, and the air smelled of the musky earth and tangy, tropical vegetation. Arthur's dark skin tingled, and he fluffed out his thick, kinky hair as he turned a corner and came upon a shimmering blue spring. Giggling with delight, his pretty voice like crystal, Arthur dipped his toe into the spring. The water was cool and he was sooooo hot! He stepped into the spring and then waded in until the water came up to his waist, and she felt her nipples get hard as the chilly water brought goosebumps to her skin. Arthur waded until the water came to her shoulders, cupping her breasts with her small, soft hands and arching her back. She didn't want to get her hair wet, but it felt so good to be in the cool water, and she slipped one hand down between her legs and closed her eyes, enjoying the feeling as she touched her vagina, keeping one hand firmly on her full, firm breast, and she opened her eyes and screamed!*

*Adan stood there dressed in a safari outfit-- pith helmet, khaki safari jacket, knee boots. She stared at Arthur with hard, hungry eyes, her hands gripped tightly around a riding crop.*

*"You've gone native," Adan said, but her voice was deep now, like a man's.*

*"Adan!" Arthur said in a small, pretty voice, like a swallow. "How did you find me?"*

*"I'll always find you," Adan said, stepping into the water fully dressed. "You belong to me now."*

*You belong to me, the words thrilled and terrified Arthur, and he backed away nervously as Adan waded toward him, the riding crop in her hands. "You've been a bad girl," Adan said. "You have to be punished."*

*Arthur shook his head, his eyes wide with fear, but his lips in a mischievous smile. "No," he whispered. "Please." Once Adan got close, Arthur turned to flee through the water, but Adan was too quick, too strong, and he shrieked as she slipped her arm around his waist and then hooked another around one thigh. "My hair!" Arthur screamed, but Adan lifted him off his feet and flipped him into the water, head first.*

*Arthur saw the riding crop on a rocky outcropping, grabbed it and when he surfaced, water sluicing down his face, he bit his lip and held it up. "Maybe you're the one who needs to be punished," he said.*

*Adan laughed, lunged and easily yanked the crop from Arthur's weak, little hand. Then she had him over her knee, and she was brought the whip cracking down on his soft, round, naked bottom. It stung, but it was pleasure pain, and Arthur screamed and kicked his feet, thrilled to be under Adan's control, in her power, and she whipped him again and a third time,*



*and then she pushed Arthur off her, got him on his hands and knees in the water. Arthur looked back over his shoulder, licking his lips, wiggling his hips, as Adan dropped her pants and then thrust into him from behind, and he gasped and moaned softly with pleasure as she took him...*

Arthur sat bolt upright, clinging to his pillow, his body slick with sweat. He was almost surprised to find he didn't have breasts, wasn't a woman. His heart was racing, and he shook his head, trying to clear the dream. He looked at the clock: 3:33. He had to be up in an hour and a half and back to the gym, dance class, vocal coaching, his new life as a woman. Unless he said no. Unless he stood up to Adan, like Dusty wanted him to.

Dusty. Shit. Again, he felt the crushing sense of guilt come over him. He'd never answered her messages. Nor his boss's messages. The cluster fuck his life had become came crushing back down on him. Arthur got up and went to the bathroom, slipping his panties down to his knees, sitting on the toilet to pee without really thinking about it. The fragments of his dream were lingering, disturbing and exciting, terrifying and so alluring it frightened him. Did he want to be a woman? Because he'd just dreamt that he was a woman, and Adan was fucking him, and he had... wanted it. Bad. He had never had a dream like that before. Never. It was all so confusing, and so knowing he wouldn't be able to sleep, Arthur ran to the one thing that had always given him comfort, had always been his escape: music. He went back to the list of videos he'd been asked to study, and he began to sing along with Jennifer Lopez, mimicking her vocal style, mirroring her facial expressions and body language:

*My head's killing me*

*I'm losing sleep*

*And I'm waking up tired, of it all*

*Early in the morning*

*And there's something already*

*With my name always involved*

*Cause in the end I'm still the same girl (same girl)*

*Same girl (same girl)*

*Same girl (same girl)*

*I'm just the same girl (same girl)*

*Same girl (same girl)*

*Same girl (same girl)*

Jenn's voice is a little deeper than mine, Arthur thought, and he played the song again, this time singing harmony above Jenn in his falsetto, which rose into soprano territory. He thought their voices sounded really pretty together, and he thought it would be fun to be one of the girls singing with her one day.

He got dressed in his daisy dukes and t-shirt, grabbed his purse and headed to the gym singing softly to himself the whole way there:

*Cause in the end I'm still the same girl (same girl)*

*Same girl (same girl)*

*Same girl (same girl)*

*I'm just the same girl (same girl)*

*Same girl (same girl)*

*Same girl (same girl)*

## Chapter Five

"Fucking Arthur," Dusty spat, looking at her phone. No message. She knew what it meant. Adan had him in a corset, mincing around singing "Girls Just Wanna Have Fun" while she played with herself. Dusty felt her blood boil. This wasn't about Arthur anymore. No. She was so mad at him, so disgusted at what he'd let Adan do to him she didn't know if she could ever fuck him again, but how dare that rich, entitled bitch think she could just come along and not just steal Dusty's boyfriend, but turn him into a woman? Dusty was 80 percent sure Adan had already fucked her wimpy little boyfriend-- she could smell it on him that first day lingering under his Chanel No 5, though she'd tried to deny it to herself..

She paced around the Chelsea apartment she was about to show, going through her checklist to make sure everything was ideal, but she was also trying to figure out what she could do to wrench Arthur away from the crazy castrating vixen who'd gotten her claws into him. Dusty had been sure that seeing the pictures of Adan's previous victims would have scared Arthur shitless, but if that didn't work, what next? Could she have him committed?

The clients arrived. Dusty plastered a smile on her face. Shook hands. Showed them around. They were a young couple, the Meyersons, looking to buy their first apartment in New York, and they had excellent credit. They had each gasped when they saw the sliver of the Hudson River that would be visible from their living room window, and Dusty was pretty sure

the little rooftop garden had sealed the deal. But it was when they went back downstairs for a second look at the unit that Mrs. Meyerson said something that gave Dusty a bolt of inspiration. "It's great that we have two sinks," she said.

"Her mother is very strict Jewish," Mr. Meyerson said, smiling. "So we have to be able to fake it when she comes to visit."

"She would never approve of us buying a place that wasn't kosher."

*She would never approve.* Of course, Dusty thought. How could I have not seen this right away. If she couldn't wake Arthur up, maybe a visit from his parents would do the trick.

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His other lessons done, Arthur went to the salon. Ovid and the Three gushed with praise and congratulated him when they measured and found that his waist had gotten a full inch smaller, and as they had squeezed him into an even smaller corset he found himself feeling proud of himself. After so many years of accomplishing nothing and getting nothing from the world but rejection, he was learning to love all of the praise and he was getting now, even if the achievements were not things he ever imagined he would want to work toward. When he did his own makeup for the first time, he received more hugs and squealing congratulations.

It was a good thing he was feeling so confident, because when it came time for them to dress him in his new outfit for the day, he found that he was going to be wearing his first dress-- and a mini-dress at that. It was another step into living his life as a woman, and as much as the Daisy Dukes and the women's jeans had been steps, they were still at least the female versions of male clothes. A skirt was all woman, as far as Arthur was concerned, and this little dress-- with

a flouncy skirt with blue and white stripes that looked like it would only come to mid-thigh was a girly as he could imagine wearing.

"Your first dress?" Ovid asked, smiling.

Arthur nodded, blushing.

"You're going to look so cute," Number One said.

"You really are," Number Three added.

"Show off those fine legs, sister," Number Two said.

Arthur smiled, took the dress. *Let's do this, baby girl*, he thought, stepping into the dress, pulling it over his padded hips, pulling the slender little orange belt tight around his ever shrinking waist line.

"Yes!" Ovid said. "Yes!"

"You're so cute it's a crime!" Number Two said.

"You should have been born a girl!" Number One said.

Claps. More hugs. Blushing, Arthur slipped into the rest of his pretty summer outfit-- orange sandals and an orange purse that matched his belt. He now had big, orange plastic hoop earrings in his ears, and looking in the mirror he lifted the hem of his skirt and did a little faux curtsy. He'd never looked or felt more feminine. His legs had gotten both more slender and softer, and he thought his arms, which hadn't been very developed to begin with, seemed more slender and rounder as well. The dress hugged his fake breasts, celebrated his tiny waist, round hips and long, slender legs. Looking at the woman he was becoming, so pretty and bright and

energized, he couldn't help but compare her to the gloomy, faded man he'd been just days before, and he wondered if he couldn't just make it for another few days before he went back to the bland, dreary life he'd lived as a man. Besides, Adan had promised him something special in a week, and it might be fun to do whatever that was before he called this all off.

"You're getting more beautiful every day," Ovid said. "We're all so proud of you."

"Thanks," Arthur said. "Thank you all so much."

He was brimming with confidence when he walked out of Ovid's salon, his shoulders back, breasts out, legs flashing. He knew it was time to make some decisions, to finally settle some things. He found a Starbucks and fished his phone out of his purse-- Ovid and the girls had put it in a pink jewel case, and he rolled his eyes. He called Dusty.

"Dusty?" He said in his girl's voice.

"Use your real voice," Dusty said, acidly.

Arthur took a deep breath, and decided once and for all to firmly take a stand-- right on the mushy, marshy, middle ground. "I'm in a public place," he said, whispering, but still in his feminine voice.

"And you're wearing a Princess Leia costume, right?"

"I understand that you're mad, and I want to meet and talk. I need to explain some things."

"Good. Tonight. Six. My place."

Arthur closed his eyes. *Be strong, baby girl*, he thought. *You can do this*. "Um, well, maybe we meet for dinner someplace? A restaurant or something, maybe?"

Dusty looked at the phone. *Is he breaking up with me?* It didn't matter. This meeting was just phase one of her plan to save him from himself. "Sure," Dusty said. "Fine. Cosmic Diner, then."

Arthur sighed, tugging at one of his hoop earrings. "Kay," he said.

"Hey," Dusty added, "Wear something pretty for me."

"Oh, gosh, I will!" Arthur answered, happy he could do something to please her.

"God," Dusty said. "I was being sarcastic." She ended the call, her head pounding. How could they have turned Arthur into such a chirping little girly-girl so fast? It didn't seem possible. He hadn't been the most masculine man, for sure, but talking to him on the phone was like chatting with a 19 year old air-head. Still, she was sure it wasn't too late, and Arthur was walking right into her trap. Adan Karline, Dusty thought to herself, get ready to taste the bitter dregs of defeat!

Arthur stood outside the Stardust Diner, nervously checking his makeup in the mirror from his compact, fluffed his hair. He had changed so much just in the day or two since he'd been here last, and now the place looked so... small to him. He thought about just walking away, leaving it behind, but he owed it to Pat, and, besides, the paycheck he'd gotten for his session wouldn't last forever, especially not in New York. He wondered how they would all react when

they saw him like this, and finally worked up the courage to walk right up to the door, step inside and, clutching his purse, he looked at Brenda and in his girl voice said, "Hi! Is, um, Pat here?"

Brenda nodded, getting that same do I know you look on her face as before as she tried to place the young woman in front of her. "Sure, are you applying for a.... Oh. My. God. Arthur?"

Arthur smiled and shrugged. "It's the new me!"

"You're so cute!" Brenda said, smiling through her shock and surprise. "I can't believe how much you've changed."

"I can't either," Arthur said, putting a hand on a hip as he'd been trained to do.

"Pat's in her office," Brenda said, as a couple tourists wandered in off the street. "I'm happy for you, Art."

"Thanks," Arthur said, relieved and thrilled that Brenda had been so okay with it.

He walked back to Pat's office, knocked on the doorframe- she didn't have a door, and peaked in, smiling. "Got a minute?"

"Sure," Pat said, gruffly, not even looking away from the spreadsheet she was working on. "Just trying to get this budget done," she mumbled.

Arthur crossed his legs primly at the knees and folded his hands in his lap, waiting patiently until Pat finally looked up and said, "What can I do ya for?"

"Well," Arthur said, "first of all, I wanted to apologize for missing my shift yesterday. It was like, so, so not awesome of me."



Pat's mouth fell open. "No fucking way," she said, staring at Arthur. "What the fuck?"

Arthur smiled. "I know it's probably a little bit of a shock, but I'm living as a woman, at least for awhile? It's kind of a thing, and I don't blame you if you find it a little weird and all."

"It's not that you're living as a woman. It's that you're doing it so well. You look amazing, especially considering you only started this... what? Yesterday?"

"It's been pretty fast," Arthur said, pleased that Pat felt he was pulling it off so well. "I've been surprised, too. It's been so, like, ya know?"

"I'm proud of you. It takes a lot of courage to be yourself. Knock 'em dead."

"About my job?"

"Well, you've worked here for two years and never missed a shift, so I can let it pass this once. Plus two of my damn gypsy actors decided to move to California, and Karen got cast in Wicked.

"Omigod, that's so, so awesome!"

"So I could use you on the floor, still. Sure. When were you scheduled next?"

"Tomorrow night."

"Good. Great. I'll see you then, and, by the way, you look cute as hell in that dress."

Arthur giggled. "Omigod, thanks!"

"Is it still Arthur? I'll call you whatever the fuck you want. I'm just asking."

"Um, you can call me Krystal for now?" Arthur said. "That's kinda the name I've been using?"

"Okay, Krystal," Pat said. "See you tomorrow."

Arthur headed home, feeling so much better. He'd been feeling so overwhelmed and inadequate the day before, but now here he was doing what had to be done, taking care of life, and it felt good. It felt great. The secret was, he'd gotten back to the music, and that had gotten him out of his malaise and back into the game.

And so as soon as he got home, and with a few hours to spare before his meeting with Dusty, he kicked off his heels, went to his computer and started studying the next song Adan had tasked him to learn, Brittany Spears' *I'm not a Girl. Not Yet a Woman*:

*I used to think*

*I had the answers to everything*

*But now I know*

*Life doesn't always*

*Go my way, yeah...*

*Feels like I'm caught in the middle*

*That's when I realize...*

*I'm not a girl*

*Not yet a woman*

*All I need is time*

*A moment that is mine*

*While I'm in between*

Arthur watched the video and listened, and then he began to embody Brittany in voice and body, and he sang the song again and again for the next two hours, and by the time he was done he sounded and moved just like Brittany Spears.

Dusty got to the Cosmic Diner first and grabbed a booth toward the back. She answered an email, sent a text, saw a young woman in a cute summer dress walk in and look around nervously, went back to her phone. The woman walked up to Dusty's table, slipped the orange purse from her shoulder and slid into the booth. Dusty looked up, about to object, and then said, "Arthur?"

Arthur smiled. He was starting to like the surprised reactions he would get from people when they realized she was he. "My latest makeover, courtesy of Adan?" He spoke in his girl voice, and the sound of it grated on Dusty's nerves.

"Every time I see you, the change is just... I can't even believe you're you."

"I feel the same way when I look in the mirror, believe me."

"So," Dusty said. "Are you gay now?"

"No," Arthur said, shaking his head. "Not at all. I'm just, well, I guess I'm cross-dressing for a little while?"

"Arthur, I showed you those profiles. This isn't going to be for a little while."

"I'll put a stop to it. The minute Adan suggests anything like implants or surgery. I'll walk away."

Dusty reached over and gave his hand a squeeze. "I care about you. I don't want you to end up getting hurt. Getting... screwed."

"I know," Arthur said. "And that's why it makes it so hard for to say, but, um, so the thing is that-- I feel like maybe, since I am going to kind of ride this roller-coaster for at least another week or so, that we should, like, sorta, ya know?"

"You want to break up with me?"

"Um, I was thinking more take some time off?"

Dusty smiled back her anger. She so badly wanted to slap this ridiculous man in the face, to tell him to go to hell, that he was a shitty fuck and a poor excuse for a man, but no. She needed to play the long game, and so she thought about her pet turtle that had died when she was 7, and some tears came to her, and she said, "Okay. If that's what you want."

"It's not that I don't care about you, I do, but Adan has me so busy, and with..."

"It's fine!" Dusty said, squeezing his hand again, desperate to save herself from some long, drawn out, boring apology. "I understand! But can you do one thing for me, at least?"

"Sure," Arthur said, relieved. "Of course."

"I'd just like a picture of the two of us. For when you get famous."

Arthur caught something in her eye. Some look, like she was being sneaky. But he shrugged it off and said, "Kay!"

They took the selfie. Arthur said, "Send me a copy, okay?"

"Absolutely," Dusty said, putting her phone away. "Well, now that we're all done with that, do you still want to eat?"

"Do you?" Arthur said, deferring.

"No," Dusty said, then leaning over she whispered, conspiratorially, "The food here sucks!"

Arthur giggled. They walked out together, lingered on the sidewalk outside for a minute, exchanged hugs and kisses, but now like a pair of girlfriends and not lovers. Arthur waved, his same weak wave as always, but now it just seemed feminine and girly, whereas before it had always read wimpy and insecure. They walked off in opposite directions, and as soon as she reached the next block Dusty sent the picture to Arthur's mother, with a short note ending with the words, "Call Me."

For the next couple days, Arthur settled into his new life and routine, and it all started to seem normal. Gym to work on his figure, dance class, skills in feminine mannerisms and lifestyle, voice lessons, salon, working as a waitress at the diner, where he was surprised and relieved at how fast his status shifted to "just one of the girls now." Evenings were spent listening to female singers, learning their vocal styles, their moves, their songs. The rapid changes in his body continued, as his thighs got softer and rounder, his butt started to get plump and full. He still wore the corsets at all times, but he knew that his body was taking on an hourglass shape all on its own.

He ignored it all, told himself it would all go back to the way it was once he broke away from Adan. He heard from Adan's assistant every day, but hadn't heard from or seen Adan since

their last time together, and he found himself missing her and feeling anxious. She had promised him some big surprise, and he could hardly wait!

Then, he came home one night and heard voices in his apartment. He was wearing a tiny little pair of pink hot pants that clung to his curvy hips and ass, while showing off his long, sexy legs, a thin sea foam blouse that showed off his slender brown arms, and of course all sorts of pretty jewelry and a sassy purse that perfectly matched his outfit. Arthur hesitated at the door, reaching nervously into his purse for his cell phone, but then the door to his apartment opened and Dusty stood there, looking at him angrily. "I thought I heard you out here," she said, grabbing him by the wrist and dragging him into the room. Arthur's mouth dropped open and he felt a full body blush come over him as he stood there on his feels, clinging to his purse strap, his mother and father gawking at the sight of their feminized son.

"Omigod," Arthur said in his breathy, girl voice. "Omigod..."

Jane, Arthur's mother, looked at the young woman standing in front of her and shook her head. This was not her son, could not be her son, not with those round hips, those legs, not standing there with that brown skin and kinky hair, those glossy lips. She even stood like a girl, with one leg out to the side, one round hip thrust out, clinging to her purse strap, and yet she could see him in there, still see the traces of the his face, and as she looked upon the woman her son had become, she started to cry.

"Look what you've done to your mother!" His father, Jerry, bellowed.

"I can explain..." Arthur started to say, gathering himself, starting to mince toward his mother, intending to give her a hug, but as he approached his mother recoiled.

"Don't touch me!" She hissed.

Arthur felt like he'd been punched in the stomach. Dusty shoved him toward a chair and he collapsed into it, stunned and angry. "How could you do this?" He said to her.

"I had to do it," Dusty said.

Jerry was consoling his wife, holding her, and he turned angrily toward his son, the apartment lights flickering in his thick glasses. "No son of mine is going to go fag! Do you even think about us? About our feelings?"

"I'm not a.... fag..." Arthur said, crossing his legs at the knee, realized how feminine it looked and uncrossed them, sitting with them spread, like a man.

"Then what the hell are you?!" Jerry said, punching the wall.

Arthur flinched.

Dusty didn't like the way this was going. She'd intended to do a proper intervention. "Let's all just sit down and take a breath," she said.

"Take a breath? My son is turning into some kind of stripper prostitute and you want me to take a breath?"

"You showed them those profiles?" Arthur said.

"Can you stop talking like that, please!" Jerry said. "Use your real voice. The one God gave you."

"This is all my fault," Jane said, her eyes blank. "I mothered him too much..."

"I kept telling you that but you wouldn't listen, would you?" Jerry said.

"Like you were such a great father! You were never around!" Jane shrieked back.

"I was earning a living!!!!!"

"Guys... guys.... let's keep the focus on Arthur," Dusty said.

Arthur sat there, stunned, as his family psycho-drama played out, his whole life played out, and he sank back into the chair, getting a distant, glassy look in his eyes.

"Arthur," Jerry said, moving away from his wife, stomping toward his son.

"Please," Dusty said. "Sit down. This is not how an intervention works."

"I'm going to rip that wig right off your stupid head you goddamn ungrateful pervert!"

Arthur balled up, like he'd done so many times before, throwing his arms over his head.

"No!" He shrieked.

Dusty was on her feet now, "Please! Just wait..."

But Jerry grabbed a fist full of Arthur's hair and yanked him right out of the chair, pulling and sending him tumbling across the room to crash in the corner. "Embarrass me? Make your mother cry? We had to drive all the way out from Levittown for this shit!" Jerry yanked his belt free. "I will whip your ass good you little fuck."

"No," Jane said, getting up, eyes wild, and she grabbed Jerry, but he pushed her down, too, and snapped his belt, grinning as he looked at the long, bare brown legs, the round ass his



son now had, and thought about how he was going to cover both of them with welt until his pussy of a son screamed for mercy.

Dusty grabbed her can of mace from her purse. "I will fucking use this!" She screamed.

Jerry hesitated. Snapped his belt again. Dusty didn't flinch. She had the can of mace out, pointed in his direction, was clearly ready to spray. He didn't want his wife to see him back down, but he also didn't want her to see him get taken down by a female. "To hell with this," he said, going and grabbing his wife. "To hell with you," he bellowed at Arthur. "I disown you. You are no longer my son."

Jane wept as her husband dragged her from the room.

Dusty felt sick to her stomach. Arthur had curled up into a ball in the corner, his body racked with sobs, he was making a moaning noise, like a wounded animal. "Are you okay?" Dusty said, crying now, too. "I am so sorry. Arthur, I didn't know..."

"Leave me alone," Arthur said. "Please. Just leave me alone."

"I didn't know. I never realized..."

"Get OUT!" He shrieked. "Get the fuck out of my life!"

"Okay," Dusty said. "Okay." She grabbed her things, headed toward the door. "I really am sorry," she said, closing it, going out into the hall, and racing to the trash can where she immediately vomited.

Arthur eventually struggled to his feet. Took off his shoes. Took his contacts out. He went into the bathroom and looked at the woman there, and the tears came again as he looked at

her, and he knew he wasn't her, could never be her, could never be the dream he'd dreamed. He'd thought that if he could just get famous, do something... special... with his life.... that it would change him, change things, make him feel normal and unbroken.

What a joke. All he was, all he would ever be, was a loser. Even his own parents didn't love him. He looked at the razor on his bathroom counter. How hard would it be to break, to get one of those cool, sharp blades free, drag it across his wrist? Or go get some sleeping pills? How easy would that be? Just swallow em down and drift off into an endless peaceful sleep? Maybe he'd be loved in the next life, the way he'd never been loved here?

Arthur washed his face. Cleaned off his makeup. Took off his earrings and bracelets, necklaces. He would have taken off his wig and corset, but he didn't know how, but he did slip out of his blouse. Yes. The time had come. It had all been building up to this, and now, finally, he would end it all. He went into the living room, heading for the kitchen where he thought he had a bottle of sleeping pills, and he saw the piano, his computer, a shelf piled willy-nilly with song books and sheet music.

Wistfully, he walked over, lifted an old Elton John songbook he'd had since 7th grade, opened the pages and smelled the old, sweet smell of that aged paper. He'd opened to *Skyline Pigeon*, one of his favorite songs back when he was 12, feeling so awkward and lonely.

*Turn me loose from your hand*

*Let me fly to distant lands*

He was going to fly now, to the most distant land of all. He wondered if there would be music there? He looked at the other books, Billy Joel. The Beatles. Greatest Songs of the 1960s. The Sinatra book his father had gotten him, wanting him to learn some music that wasn't

"shit." And then the sheet music, songs from Broadway shows he learned for auditions hoping he could make it on Broadway and be in a show: Shrek. Hairspray. Pippin. Rocky. Book of Mormon. Wicked. He'd seen so many shows, rushed, won lotteries, gotten cheap seats at TKTS, and spent so many nights dreaming that one day he would be up there, part of the cast, running out on stage after the show while the audience cheered. But it had never happened. In ten years of auditioning he'd never even gotten a callback, and one casting director had even told him to give up. "You're not Broadway material," she'd said. "And all the workshops and voice lessons in the world will never change that."

She'd been right. He knew that now. It had never happened for him. Would never happen for him. It had only happened for Krystal, his black sister self, and what a joke that was that he had to become someone else to finally have some success? And a woman at that? *Maybe I should have been learning Brittany Spears songs all these years. Or Brandi.*

He went to his computer, saw the next song he was supposed to learn for Adan. *Like a Prayer*. Madonna. Why not? He decided. One more song before I say goodbye to this stupid world?

*Life is a mystery*

*Everyone must stand alone*

*I hear you call my name*

*And it feels like home*

*When you call my name, it's like a little prayer*

*I'm down on my knees, I wanna take you there*

*In the midnight hour I can feel your power*

*Just like a prayer, you know, I'll take you there*

*I hear your voice, it's like an angel sighing*

*I have no choice, I hear your voice, feels like flying*

*I close my eyes, oh, God I think I'm falling*

*Out of the sky, I close my eyes, Heaven, help me*

He played the video. Sang along, and his heart soared as he sang, the words and the music moving him, and when it was done he did something he hadn't done since he'd been a child; he got on his knees, and folded his hands and he closed his eyes and said, "God, please, tell me what to do? I'm lonely and sad and tired and lost, and I just don't know what to do, and I want to die? So, please. Tell me what to do? Give me a sign because I just can't live like this anymore."

And he felt the answer, like a rush, he felt a calming presence, a warmth, and the answer was clear, and almost came with a chuckle like-- how many signs do I have to give you? And Arthur found himself crying again, but tears of joy, of relief, and he knew that he had been right; Arthur did need to die. Arthur needed to die, so Krystal could live.

Arthur did not want to be a woman, but he he wanted to be a man even less.

## **Chapter Six**

Arthur threw himself even more fully into his lessons and his new life. May saw it. The women at the gym. His dance teachers. He had the eye of the tigress now, and he was determined to erase the dithering man he'd been, and to step forward into the world and claim the stardom he'd always wanted and needed. They had all started to use the same phrase to encourage and congratulate him: "Do it, baby girl!" and Arthur found himself repeating it constantly as he got up each day to go to the gym, when his legs hurt, when some guy ogled him or when his corset was digging into his side and he thought he might faint, whenever it seemed like things were too tough, that he couldn't make it, he would think of whisper, "Do it, Baby Girl," and he would find the strength.

The call he'd been waiting and working for finally came. Arthur was at Macys, looking at dresses as he had started to build his own personal wardrobe of women's clothes, carefully buying lose fitting things that he would still be able to wear as his body continued to round. He looked his phone and saw her name, the name of the woman who had made all of this happen, Adan, and he answered eagerly. "Hi!"

"Tonight. My place. The car will pick you up at 5 and take you to the salon."

"What's the occasion? I mean, am I singing?"

"You're my date. I'm having a party, and I want to show you off."

"Date?"

Adan hung up. Arthur felt excited, but also a little hurt. He'd wanted to talk a little more, tell Adan about his changed feelings, how he'd committed himself to life as Krystal. He was

hoping she'd heard from her people how hard he'd been working, coming along, but, well, he knew she was busy and a bit distant, so he couldn't expect that, right?"

His mind went back to the word, date. Did Adan mean date, date? As in a romantic, we're in a relationship date? Or was she just having him along for professional reasons? Did it matter to him? Should it matter to him? He didn't know. Wasn't sure. It was so hard to know with Adan, and he didn't even really know who he was anymore.

But as Arthur headed home, abandoning his shopping trip, he did feel certain of one thing: he wanted to look good for Adan. Damn good.

At the salon, Ovid and The Three greeted Arthur with their usual hugs and kisses, a pink drink and gushing praise. The make-up over was a hazy whirlwind, but Arthur picked up on the girl's excitement-- they knew this was something special-- and his heart fluttered when he saw the dress Adan had bought for him: A Josie Natori, Dahlia Lace dress, elegant and sexy, and he whispered, "Omigod," when he saw it.

"Yes, honey," Ovid said.

Arthur felt giddy as he slipped into the gorgeous, delicate dress, and then the girls came out with a box of jewelry, which they opened and held out for Arthur's inspection. The diamonds inside flashed, and Arthur's eyes went wide with girlish pleasure, both because he'd grown to adore diamonds, but also because Adan had picked these gorgeous, exquisite diamond necklaces, and earrings and bracelets for him! "Adan sent these for me?" He said, reaching out

and touching their cool, slick surface with the tips of his fingers, with his French manicured nails.

"Yes, girl, she did," Ovid said. "Let's get you dripping in diamonds, child."

Arthur was arrayed in jewelry, and he eagerly said, "Let me look now! I want to see myself!"

"Not yet. There's still one more thing. Number Two?"

Number Two came out of the backroom holding a glittering, delicate diamond tiara.

Arthur put his hands to his cheeks, almost touching them before he remembered his makeup. "It's so pretty!"

He stood, beaming as the girls fixed the tiara to his hair, which had been twisted and pinned into an elaborate updo. Finally, they turned him and let him see himself in the mirror. He was glowing with pride, and he said, "I feel like a princess!"

"You are a princess," Ovid said.

"With one rich ass girlfriend," Number Two said.

"Adan?" Arthur said. "Does she think of me that way. Really?"

"Diamonds aren't for clients, honey," Ovid said.

"Diamonds are forever," Number One added.

"They really are," Number Two said.

Arthur looked at herself, at the woman in the mirror. She'd come so far. So very far. Even without her padding, she now had round, soft hips and a plush, heart-shaped rear, and her training and corsets had reduced her waist to waspish glory. Her new, B-cup inserts gave her a proud, womanly chest, and her now slender, round arms and smooth shoulders glowed in the little gown. Most of all, though, was her face, which had softened and gotten steadily more pretty, her lips more full, her eyes wider and her skin was so soft and smooth and radiant, that the girls didn't have to cake on the make-up anymore, but were now just enhancing the feminine beauty she had. She was a gorgeous girl, and she was him, and now it seemed to Arthur like she'd always been him, had always been lurking there, waiting to blossom.

The salon phone rang. Ovid answered. "It's Adan" she called. "She's waiting for you outside right now."

"Omigod," Arthur said, fidgeting with his dress.

"Stop. Stop. Breath. Smile. Relax, sister," Number Two said, taking Arthur's hand.

Number One handed him a little black clutch purse. Arthur took it and smiled. "I'm scared," he admitted to the girls. "This is the most.... glamorous I've ever felt?"

"We'll walk you out," Number Two said, keeping hold of Arthur's hand and leading him toward the door.

Ovid led the way, throwing open the door and bowing as Arthur was escorted out, Number One and Two at his sides, Number Three clapping. "I present Miss Krystal Kinsey," Ovid said.



Adan stood on the sidewalk, her arms crossed over her chest. Arthur looked up at her, smiling, getting a little thrill at the sight of her, so tall and handsome in her suit. He looked away, unable to match the heat of her gaze, and stood prettily clutching his purse as he felt her eyes roaming over his body.

"My God," Adan finally said. "You are the most gorgeous little man I have ever seen."

"Thanks," Arthur said, a smile blossoming on his face as he looked at up Adan.

Adan took Arthur's arm and led him to the car, helped him in, and as soon as they were in the back she shook her head, nodding in approval as she surveyed the pretty thing she was making of Arthur. "Goddamn," she said. "I want to fuck you so bad it hurts."

Arthur didn't like the crude language, but he felt himself flush in response to her aggression, her heat. "I've been working really hard," he said softly. "I want to make you proud of me."

Adan put her hand under his chin. "I am proud of you. I can't wait to show you off tonight! You're going to be like my pretty little pet! I should have you on a leash!"

Arthur giggled. "A leash?"

"Don't worry, if I ever do put you on a leash, it will be made of diamonds."

"Okay then, I guess?" Arthur said, still bubbling with nervous giggles.

"Like you have a choice," Adan said, fishing in her pockets, pulling out a pill and slipping it into Arthur's mouth.

The car dropped the pair off in front of Trump Tower, and Adan took Arthur's arm and led him into the marbled lobby, brightly lit by huge, old world chandeliers. The doormen were better dressed than 90% of the people in New York, and when the elevator door opened Arthur was sure that Steven Spielberg—wearing a baseball hat and glasses, got out. He and Adan got in the elevator, and the elevator operator inserted his key into the control panel, pressed a button that read PENT on it and said, "Good evening, Miss Karline."

"Good evening, Joseph."

"If I may say, you and your girlfriend make a stunning couple."

Arthur smiled. It always thrilled him when people took him for a woman.

"Joseph, you do flatter."

"It's not flattery when it's true."

They reached the penthouse. The doors to the elevator opened directly into Adan's grand living room, and Arthur saw the party was already in full swing. The room was a chaotic jumble of people, mostly the type of tall, sleek women he'd met at Sackville-West, as well as a fair number of extremely fashionable, male model types with chiseled cheek bones and lean, lanky bodies. He also saw a few traditional women, or what looked like traditional women, dressed, like Arthur, in elegant and pretty dresses. Behind the crowd and the staff that eagerly served them, a huge glass window offered a magnificent view of the New York City Skyline. A recording of Sarah Vaughan was playing over the sound system.

Eyes turned to Adan, to Arthur. The murmur of the crowd quieted, turned to appreciative nods and whispers. Arthur felt the eyes on him, clutched Adan's arm and smiled

up at her. She slipped an arm protectively around his waist, and the two paused, letting the room get a good look. Arthur felt so special to be with Adan, to have her arm around him, and then Adan leaned down and said, “Let me introduce you to my friends.”

They began to circulate. Arthur smiled prettily, offering hugs and air kisses to everyone he met, giggling at Adan’s jokes, smiling sweetly as he found himself showered with compliments. Arthur couldn’t help but feel feminine, pretty, in this room full of tall, cool women in suits and ties, he was the one wearing a dress that showed off his soft curvy body, with his face painted to make him more pretty, jewelry flashing. And while they all spoke in the same flat, corporate tones favored by Adan, he, of course, chit-chatted in the singsong voice of a ditzy girl, just as he’d been trained to do.

“So, this is your latest conquest, you old dog,” a woman said at one point, patting Adan on the shoulder and looking down lecherously at Arthur.

“Krystal, meet Colonel Claire Buchwald.”

Arthur smiled prettily, but when he opened his arms for the usual light hug and air kisses, the colonel grabbed him and put both of her hands on his rump, giving it a squeeze. “Oh, you are a hot little tomato! He’s real back there!” Arthur squeaked, writhing helplessly in the colonel’s strong arms.

“Yes,” Adan said, stepping between the two. “He’s blossoming wonderfully! Excuse us, dear.” She said, leading the colonel away, giving Arthur a wink.

“Where do you find these fat-bottomed, slutty little boys?” The colonel said, laughing and throwing one last greedy glance at Arthur’s body.

Arthur huffed and straightened his dress. Thank goodness Adan had been there to protect me, he thought, relieved and pleased she moved so quickly to defend him. For the first time, he was alone at the party, and so he decided to retreat to the restroom, if he could find it, freshen up and then get back to Adan's side as soon as possible. He felt... so... vulnerable... without her.

The room had gotten impossibly crowded, and he felt his butt and fake breasts brushing up against just about everyone as he worked his way through the crowd toward the restroom. Thank god for heels, he thought, or he'd be completely lost in this crowd. Adan's friends all seemed ridiculously tall and rich and handsome. They were everything Arthur had never been, and now here he was, on the arm of the host, and everyone loved him and told him how pretty he was, and he not only felt like he belonged here, he felt like he was the IT GIRL of the night!

He found the bathroom. Sat down to pee. Fixed his lipstick and his blush. Again, he found himself at how pretty the girl in the mirror had become, and again as he puckered his plump lips and touched up his make-up, his thick, curly lashes fluttering, he couldn't believe that he was her now, living her life, being this woman.

When Arthur made his way back to the living room, he found the crowd had made a little circle around the piano, and that Adan was standing there next to the piano. "There she is," Adan said, spotting, Arthur. "Come on up, Krystal."

"Krystal doesn't know I promised all of you a song tonight," Adan said. "I wanted to surprise her! Are you surprised?" Adan said as Arthur pushed through the crowd and nuzzled up to her like a little bird.

"Um, yeah," Arthur said.

“Ladies and gentlemen,” Adan said. “This kid is the most beautiful and talented little thing I have ever met, and you know I know talent! Count your lucky stars, because a year from now this little cutie is going to be the hottest thing in show business, or I’m not the best agent in the world! Sorry, Sid!” Adan said, pointing the famous rep, Sid Gold. The crowd laughed as Adan sat down at the piano.

“Um, what am I singing?” Arthur said, getting laughs himself.

“You’ll recognize it,” Adan said as she played the opening chords of “Like A Prayer.”

Arthur smiled prettily out to the audience. Took a breath. Yes. He knew the song. Knew it well. Hearing the chords took him back to that night in his apartment, the night he’d been thinking about suicide, the night he’d decided to sing one last song before ending it all, and as he sang, all that fear and sorrow and then hope poured out of him, and when the song finished, tears poured spontaneously down his smooth, soft cheeks, running his mascara, and the crowd gasped, then roared with approval, cheering, clapping, whistling, and Arthur saw it in their eyes—the joy you could only get when you heard a performance of a song and that performance reached your own heart and made you glad you were alive.

Adan crushed Arthur in a powerful hug, dipping him back and kissing him in front of the whole room, and then, holding him there so people could snap pictures, he whispered, “I’m going to fuck you silly tonight!”

The party started breaking up shortly after the song. People swarmed Arthur, telling how talented he was, how pretty, how much they loved hearing him sing. Arthur’s head was spinning, he was so happy. So content. And when the last of guests left, Adan took him by the hand and led him to her bedroom, playfully pushing him onto his back, climbing on top of him,

kissing and kissing until Arthur saw stars. She slipped out of her pants, her boxer briefs. Arthur knew what she wanted, so he pulled himself further onto the bed. Adan smiled down at him. He smiled back at her, and then Adan lowered herself onto Arthur and he started to lick, kiss, his hands on the soft insides of Adan's thighs.

After, he got up and washed his mouth out—Adan insisted on it, as she didn't want to kiss him when she was all over his face-- and when he got to back they kissed, and Arthur burrowed against Adan's body and she held him, staring into his eyes. "I want to take our relationship to the next level," she said.

"I want that, too," Arthur said.

"There are things I need," Adan said, her eyes distant, cloudy, like she was lost in memory. Things some men have trouble with." Arthur had felt so close to her, just a moment before, safe and warm in her arms, but he could feel her pulling away now, drifting, going off into some distant place, and he felt lonely and desperate to follow her there, wherever it was, because anything was better than being alone.

"I'll do anything for you," Arthur said softly.

"I need you to be my girl," Adan said.

"I am your girl," Arthur said, batting his lashes. "I have been your girl since the day we met."

Adan's jaw was tense. Her eyes hard. "I want to fuck you like a girl. I need to."

Arthur swallowed as he realized what she had in mind. The thought terrified him. Embarrassed him. He looked in Adan's eyes, and he remembered her telling him he would need

to sacrifice everything if he wanted her help, and he knew this was where she'd been leading him, bringing him all along. If he said no, it was over between them. He was sure of that. Adan would walk away, send him back to... what? His old life was gone. He was not a girl, not yet a woman. And he thought, too, of the night he'd had, the love he'd felt from the crowd, and could he walk away from all that. Adan stared into his eyes. Willing him to say yes. To surrender.

"I'm scared," Arthur admitted.

"Of course you are," Adan said, stroking his cheek. "What girl isn't her first time?"

"Will it hurt?" Arthur asked, his voice trembling.

"Yes," Adan said.

Arthur nodded. It was almost imperceptible, but it was a nod. A predatory smile spread across Adan's face, and she said, "Get on your hands and knees."

Adan did, and Adan pulled the skirt of his dress up over his hips, then yanked down his panties. Arthur started to look back over his shoulder, but Adan barked, "No. It's better that you don't. Just close your eyes, babe. Close your eyes and breath. Breath."

Arthur did as she said. He closed his eyes and breathed, fighting to urge to run, to roll over. He felt so exposed, so vulnerable with his bare us up in the air. But he had to do this. He had to, and so he started to chant his mantra, *You got this, baby girl*, he thought. "*You got his baby girl.*"

Adan put the palm of her hand on the small of his back, and then he felt the tip of her strap on pushing against his butt cheeks. “Relax,” Adan said, her voice gruff. “You’re clenched up like a constipated clam.”

*You got this baby girl. You got this baby girl. You got...*” Arthur grunted as Adan pushed deeper into him, and deeper. ...this... and deeper.... baby girl.... And he arched his back and made a small, mewling noise as Adan pushed all the way in, deeper than he would ever have thought possible, and then he started panting softly in rhythm as Adan pushed in and pulled out,, in and out and in and out, and she slapped Arthur’s ass, hard, and then again. His chandelier earrings were swaying at the side of his face, flashing in the darkness, and he stared at their pure, blue glittering light and just waited for it to be over. Finally, Adan let out a deep, satisfied grunt, and Arthur sighed with relief as Adan pulled out, pinched him on the ass on last time and then rolled over on her side.

Arthur felt filthy. Used. Defiled. He pulled his dress down and curled up, hugging a pillow to his chest. Adan, dreamily, said, “Was that as good for you as it was for me, babe?”

“You were incredible,” Arthur lied, just like a good little girlfriend should. “Omigod.”

Adan chuckled and draped an arm possessively over Arthur’s soft hip. “Well, it’s official. You are now my bitch, Krystal. Congratulations.”

Arthur clenched his teeth. The language! And he did NOT like being called the b-word, but he whispered, “I am a lucky girl.”

“And don’t ever forget it,” Adan said, chuckling again, but there was an edge to her voice, a sense of threat that gave Arthur chills.



*I'm in now, Arthur thought to himself. All in. For better or worse, I am Adan Karline's woman from here on, and I'm just going to have to take the good with the... bad. Keep focused on your goal, he thought. Remember, the price of fame.*

Adan got up at some point. Arthur dug in under the covers. He didn't know what drugs Adan gave him, but they always left him exhausted and with the worst hang-over. He forced himself up at 5am, by force of habit, searched around and found his purse, his jewelry, which he'd finally shed after they'd made love. He needed to get to the gym, keep training, keep getting better. He'd hoped to see Adan first. To maybe get a good morning kiss, but she's gone off somewhere, so he made his way out into another day of work. Gym. Dance. Voice. Chick skills. Salon. But today when he left the salon wearing a denim mini-skirt, heels and a flowery little blouse with cap sleeves, Adan's car and driver were waiting for him. "Adan wants to see you, Krystal," the driver said.

Arthur got in, exhausted but excited. The driver did not take him to Adan's Penthouse, but instead dropped him off in front of a brownstone smothered in Ivy in the village near Washington Square. A bronze plaque next to the door read Karline. Arthur let himself in. Behind a large, mahogany desk sat a slender, pale woman dressed all in black with cat's eye glasses. "Miss Kinsey," the woman said, recognizing Arthur immediately.

"Um, hi!" Arthur said with a cutesy little wave of his small hand.

Just as he was about to sit down, the woman said, "You can go right in. Miss Karline is expecting you."

Arthur smiled. "Thanks."

When he walked into Adan's office—tastefully Old World--- Adan was at her desk, reading from a thick sheath of bound documents. She looked up, "Krystal," she said, getting to her feet, coming around her desk and giving him a hug and a kiss on the cheek. "Please sit down."

Arthur sat, smiling.

"First of all, you were amazing last night, and I am not just talking about in the sack!"

"Omigod," Arthur said. "Last night was... so special."

"Yeah, well, you're blowing up."

"Blowing up?"

"I had a cinematographer film your performance—verite style, as if it were just something someone captured with their cellphone— and then Cheryl Pinion, the supermodel—you met her—leaked it on her Twitter feed. The video had already gotten more than 100,000 hits, and it is going viral around the world!"

"Really?" Arthur said. "Viral?"

Adan pushed some papers across the desk. "It's time, Krystal. Time for you to become an official client of The Karline Agency. The press release—you'll love this—is going to say that I had been on the fence about signing you, but that when the video hit I tracked down your address, raced to your door and signed you on the spot!"

"But, what if people find out it isn't true?"

“They won’t. Now, let me save you the trouble of reading all this legal mumbo jumbo—not that you’d understand a word of it, anyway, right?” She chuckled. “This first document is a standard agreement for me to serve as your sole representative for all business transactions. Okay with that?”

Arthur felt he should probably read the documents, or get his own lawyer to read them, but instead he smiled and nodded. Then, Adan said, “This second set of documents, and I understand this is a big step, this second set is for you to legally change your name to Krystal Kinsey, and to establish yourself as legally female.”

Arthur sat back. Crossed his bare legs. “You want me to legally change my name? Why can’t I just use Krystal as a stage name?”

The media is going to be all over Krystal. They ‘ll want to know everything about her—what brand of toothpaste she uses, what’s her favorite fruit—who is she? Where did she come from? And the world isn’t ready to embrace a female impersonator as a super star.”

“But---“

“But nothing. You can choose. Do you want to be RuPaul or Taylor Swift?”

“Mick Jagger?”

“Funny, but this is serious, Krystal. This is another one of those times, just like last night, where I need you to look deep inside yourself and ask-- what am I willing to sacrifice to be famous?”

“But, what if? What if I do... all of this... change my name, give up my whole identity and...”

“And you still don’t get famous? What if you give up everything and fail?”

“Yes. Then what?”

“Krystal, I know what you are feeling. It’s fear. And let me tell you something else; over the years, I have had this conversation with dozens, hundreds of people, people I absolutely believed had the potential to build great careers for themselves in this business. And almost all of them, when they sat right where you are sitting now, pen in hand with a chance to make their dreams come true, almost every one of them set the pen down, stood up and walked out because they would rather live in the certainty of failure than face the fear. That’s your choice, Krystal. A sad little life living in fear and regret, or an amazing, exciting life beyond your wildest dreams.”

Arthur looked at the papers. Touched them. Looked at his brown hand, his French-tipped nails, the bangles at his slender wrists. Everyone he knew was calling him Krystal these days anyway. What difference would it make? He picked up the pen, his hand trembling. It was just a piece of paper. Signing it wouldn’t really change him at all, even though he would legally become a woman. It was all just on paper, right? But he couldn’t bring himself to sign it. He kept seeing himself, a washed up wanna be pop singer, a cigarette dangling from his painted lips working the midnight shift at some shitty diner, serving coffee to scumbag construction workers and thinking, “I gave up my manhood for this?”

“I’m scared,” Arthur said, looking up at Adan with round, saucer eyes, full of pleading.

Adan got up, stormed around the desk, grabbed Arthur’s arms and yanked him to his feet. “No!” He said in a panic, thinking she was about to shove him right out of her office and her life, but instead she pushed him to a mirror and stood behind him while he looked at HER.

“Yes,” Adan said. “Look at Krystal. Take a good look. Krystal is a beautiful young woman. Krystal. People love her, they admire her, and she has a vivacious energy that is infectious. Krystal is cute. Charming. Krystal is a fucking star. Arthur? Remember Arthur? A frightened, bland little man who people ignored, laughed at, hated. Arthur was a loser. Krystal is a winner, so wrap your pretty little head around this; you can’t fail, because whether you ever sell a single, you are already a vastly more interesting woman than you ever were a man. And do wonder why? Do you wonder how it is possible? I’ll tell you. Because Krystal is your best self, your true self, the woman you always should have been.”

Arthur nodded. Set his jaw. “I’m ready.”

“Good girl,” Adan said, giving him a pat on the ass. She led Arthur back to her desk. Handed him her gold pen.

*You can do this, baby girl.* Arthur signed both documents, looked up at Adan, smiling with relief and pride.

Adan hugged him, kissed him, and said, “Congratulations, Miss Kinsey. You are about to become a very rich, very famous girl. Let’s celebrate. Tonight. Dinner at my place. Put on something pretty.”

Arthur had been learning to dress himself, to do his own hair and make-up, so he went home to his apartment and got himself pretty, slipping into a green dress that showed off his legs and figure, and looked great against his brown skin. He slipped on his emerald contacts, hoop earrings, necklaces and bracelets and finally a pair of fuck me pumps. He put on smokey eye shadow, masterfully used his mascara wand to give himself thick, lush lashes, painted his plush

lips with glossy, wet red lipstick that begged to be kissed off. *This is it now and for the rest of my life*, he thought, adjusting his inserts in his lacy bra. *I am a woman now*.

They ate. Adan talked. Arthur nodded, smiled, giggled. They made love, and once again Arthur went down on Adan, then assumed the position on his knees, ass in the air, and let her take him. He felt unfulfilled, frustrated, humiliated, but he smiled and told her it was great, that he loved her, and Adan fell asleep and left him to stare at the ceiling. He reached up and put his hands on the soft mounds that had blossomed on his chest, soft little Hershey's kisses. His nipples were so sensitive. He cupped them, squeezed them together, squeezing his knees together at the same time, feeling himself getting hard in his lace panties. Closing his eyes, he bit his lip and kept playing with his breasts, squeezing his soft thighs together. He imagine Adan on top of him, straddling him, thrusting into him, and he felt himself get harder, a throbbing urgency in his groin that he hadn't felt since he'd started living as a woman. He shoved his stiffening penis down, between his thighs, and he squeezed it between his soft legs, pinching his nipples now as he imagined Adan as a man, on him, in him, taking him, and a small, soft moan escaped his lips as he orgasmed, imagining himself as a woman, Adan's woman, and he relaxed then, keeping his hands on his breasts, and when he opened his eyes, he saw Adan watching him, silently, in the dark.

"I'm sorry," Arthur said, removing his hands from his small breasts, flushed with shame. "I didn't mean to... I know you were sleeping..."

"Watching you get off was hot as hell," Adan said, now putting her own hand on Arthur's left breast, squeezing. "Do you like having tits? It looked like you were having fun with them."

"I... they feel good," Arthur said.

“Good, because a star needs bigger tits,” Adan said, tracing her finger around Arthur’s hard, pointy brown nipple. “Much bigger.”

“I have my inserts.”

“No. You need implants. D cups. You need to be able to show some cleavage. I’ll have my assistant schedule the surgery.”

*You can do this baby girl.* Arthur plastered a smile on his face, as a good little girlfriend should, and he let his voice shift into its highest, breathiest place as he gushed, “You’re too good to me!”

“I can’t wait to see you with big, fat tits. You’re going to be so fucking hot!”

Arthur didn’t like the word tits, and he didn’t like her saying they would be “fat,” but he knew his role, so he just giggled and said, “I’m so excited!”

“You should be.”

## Chapter Seven

Dusty watched the video of “Krystal Kinsey” with a mixture of disgust, joy, regret. If she didn’t know that was Arthur crushed into an hourglass shape, perched on those heels in that little dress, every last shred of masculinity drowned in diamonds, she wouldn’t have believed it. And he... she? ... was good. So good. So much better than she’d ever been. *I’m happy for him, right?* She thought.

But it bothered her. Pissed her off, actually. And then the crowd burst into cheers, and she saw the big, bright smile spread across Arthur's face, part of her wanted to destroy him. And Adan. The video already had over 100,000 views, 52,347 likes, hundreds of comments. How would the world feel if they knew that Krystal Kinsey was really just a wimpy guy who'd been pussy-whipped into living as a woman?

Don't do it. Leave it alone, Dusty thought as she typed her big reveal into the Comments section. Move on with your life. You're being a bitch. She finished her message. Paused, her cursor hovering above the Send button. Then, she smiled and clicked.

\* \* \*

Arthur stood staring at his phone, looked at the sign on the strip club: Fantasies. This was the place. He had a Yankees' hat pulled down low, wore a baggy jersey and jeans, fished a pair of dark sunglasses out of his purse and slipped them on, glancing around nervously in case anyone might see him and recognize him. He couldn't have word getting out that Krystal Kinsey was going to strip joints.

It was early still. A few, jowly old guys sat, drinking, staring up at a glassy-eyed girl grinding listlessly against the pole at the front of the small stage. Two serving girls in cheap lingerie leaned against the bar, bored, staring into the glowing screens on their phones. One of them saw Arthur walk in, smirked and walked over. "Table? Private dance?" They had women in all the time, often trying to look incognito.

"Oh! No!" Arthur said. "I'm supposed to meet Bambi? Um, he's expecting me?"



“Dressing room,” the girl said with an exhausted sigh. “Through that curtain. Up the stairs.”

“Thanks!” Arthur said, though the girl had already walked away.

Arthur pushed through the curtain, walked up the creaky old wooden stairs. The walls along the stairwell were plastered with old handbills from years and years of shows, all showing nearly naked women with bold faced blaring headlines:

**HOT! HOT! HOT!**

**TRIPLE XXXction!**

**HOTTEST GIRLS IN NYC! GUARANTEED!**

The air smelled like electrolytes and stale beer. Arthur crinkled his nose. Men were so disgusting!

He walked into the dressing room and saw Bambi sitting at a dressing table doing his mascara, mouth open as he carefully painted his lashes. As soon as Bambi finished, he met Arthur’s eyes in the mirror and smiled. “Hey!” He said in a squeaky little, high-pitched voice. “Pull up a chair.” He turned around and faced Arthur, legs crossed at the knees. He wore a tiny little pink lace bra that strained against his huge breasts, a matching pair of panties. Big eyes. Full lips. A tiny little upturned nose, a glorious mane of flowing blonde hair. He was....  
Stunning.

“You’re so pretty,” Arthur said, as he’d been trained to do whenever he met another pretty girl.

“Gross. Don’t remind me,” Bambi said. “You seem to be coming along nicely.”

“Thanks?” Arthur said, sitting. “I didn’t mean to offend you. It’s just....?”

“I know. Don’t worry about it. Just understand that inside this body is a man, a former steel worker, if you can believe it, and I don’t want to be some pretty little thing with huge tits men drool over. I want to be the man that drools over girls that look like...” he gestured down at his bouncy, curvaceous shape.... “this.”

“Okay. I’m so sorry? I...”

“Listen, babe,” Bambi said, adjusting a bra strap. “Let’s get down to business, yeah? What do you want to know??”

“Well, I saw something you posted on Yelp!?”

“Yelp?”

“It was a warning about Adan.”

“Oh. Yeah. I forgot about that. You saw that?” He giggled prettily. “Lot of good it did, right? Look at you.”

“She wants me to get surgery now. Implants. And, I’m just nervous that she’ll...”

“What do you want, honey? Do you want me to tell you what to do? Do you want me to stop you? To tell you it’ll be different? That it was my fault? Her fault? What?”

“I... don’t know,” Arthur said. “I just wanted to know what happened.”

“What happened is that I wanted to be famous, and I gave up everything—my manhood, my name, my family, and I became the woman Adan wanted me to be—Chrissie Captiva, and I

hated it. I hated everything about this body and this life and being a woman, and I walked away because I couldn't live as Chrissie and still respect myself."

"So, Adan didn't just dump you?"

"Adan dump me? She still owns me."

"What do you mean?"

"I signed a contract with her. I work for her. She set me up here as Bambi the stripper to try and force me to come back to her, to be Chrissie Captiva, like she always wanted. But I refuse, and I am putting up with this so I can save up the money to get rid of this disgusting body she bought me and at least get back to living a little like a man."

"Why not just go back to steel working?"

"Looking like this?" Bambi shook his head. "Men are all pigs, and steel workers are the pigs of men. Christ. I'd be the laughing stock of every construction site."

Arthur shrugged. Picked up his purse. "Thanks so much for talking to me," he said. "I hope you find happiness someday."

Bambi giggled. "You, too, honey. Have you already signed with Adan?"

"Yes."

"Then my suggestion to you, little girl, is to do it. Go all in. Get famous. Get rich. And then walk away from Adan, when *you* have the cards."

"Is that what you wish you'd done now?"

“I’m a man who makes his living shaking his tits and ass in the faces of a bunch of degenerates. What do you think??”

Arthur left, walked around, found himself sitting on a bench in Bryant Park, watching some little kids playing tag, laughing in the sun. The visit to Bambi hadn’t gone as he’d hoped. He was looking for clarity, for answers; he had thought that talking to one of Adan’s former ... clients... might help him decide what to do. Go forward. Go back. Go in some other direction. But he felt just as lost as always. So he sat, twisting his bracelets around his wrists, thinking, wondering what it would be like to have breasts as big as Bambi’s, to become that sexual of a woman. As it was, he had to put up with constant catcalls and come-ons from gross loser guys. Once he had big breasts, it would probably all get worse.

He noticed a young couple looking at him, whispering. They started walking towards him. “Excuse me,” the young woman said in a light, European accent. “Are you Krystal Kinsey?”

Arthur smiled. “Yeah,” he said. “Hi.”

“I told you,” the woman said to her boyfriend.

“I said she looked like her,” he said.

“Can we get a picture?” The woman said.

“Of course,” Arthur said. They sat down on either side of him, their camera on a selfie stick. “Where are you guys from?”

“Germany,” they answered together.

They got the picture. “When is your next video coming out?” The man asked.

“We just love your signing so much!” The woman said.

Arthur thanked them, and waved goodbye, smiling his prettiest smile. The two little kids who he’d been watching play tag ran up, and one of them said, “Are you famous, lady?”

“I’m getting famous,” Arthur said, grabbing his purse smiling

”That’s cool,”

“Yes,” Arthur said, standing up. “It is.” His first time being recognized in public. His first selfie with fans. He had fans! He knew, as he walked out of the park, knew that he would do anything to keep this, to get more of this, because he was Krystal Kinsey, and people loved her.

Arthur worked on a new song that night in his apartment. Not a song from the list of female singers he was studying, but a new song that Adan's office had sent over. It was to be his first single:

*So many years ignored and alone*

*Struggling to make it on my own*

*Then you came along and opened the way*

*No more hoping for tomorrow*

*Now I'm living my best life today*

*Butterfly! I'm taking wing*

*Butterfly! Hear me sing*

*Butterfly! feel so strong*

*Butterfly! Gonna outshine the sun*

Arthur took a break every half hour or so to check out the numbers for his video on YouTube, and his heart fluttered with excitement as they continued to skyrocket, hitting impossible new goals: 200,000, 300,000 and by the time he went to bed, signing himself to sleep with the melody of "Butterfly," the video had broken the 500,000 hits barrier, and Arthur giggled to see that Adan's office had monetized it with an AD for Cover Girl Mascara. *Wouldn't my parents be proud,* he thought. *Their son is now selling make-up and about to get himself a pair of Kate Uptons.* The fact it would humiliate them was just a bonus.

They flew to Puerto Rico, he and Adan, for the surgery. With the video going viral, Adan's office had been fielding inquiries from the media, and she was worried that TMZ or some other slime ball outfit would get wind of the boob job, so they booked time at MANTK studios and planned to do some recording, get the surgery and keep it all hush-hush, which just added to Arthur's nervousness and excitement.

The morning of the flight, Adan handed him an envelope and said, "Congratulations."

"What is it?" Arthur asked.

"Look and see."

Arthur opened the envelope, reached in and pulled out a Driver's License. The name read, "Krystal Kinsey," and it identified her sex as Female. He looked up at Adan, tears coming to his eyes. "It's done?" He said. "Real? I'm Krystal Kinsey now?"

"Yeah, babe. Legally, you are now a girl." Adan took Arthur in her arms, held him, kissed him.

"I'm so happy," Arthur said.

"And bigger things to come."

As soon as they got to Puerto Rico, they went directly to the TRUE-U Clinic, while their bags were taken to their hotel. "How you doing?" Adan asked.

"I'm scared," Arthur said, giving Adan's hand a squeeze.

"I'm here for you," Adan said.

Arthur smiled. He could be strong as long as she was strong, and Adan was so strong. He'd never seen her rattled, scared, nervous. He knew she would always know what to do, how to do it. He didn't need to think or worry. All he had to do was let Adan make the decisions. But he worried anyway. He couldn't help it. The nurse came in, gave him an injection. As he drifted off, he stared in Adan's face. She was still holding his hand, looking down at him, and he thought she smiled right before he went under and whispered, "You can do this, baby girl."

The first thing Arthur saw when he woke up after surgery was Adan's face. Arthur smiled now, and said, "I love you."

"I know," Adan said. She put her hand on Arthur's forehead. Kissed him on the cheek.

Arthur couldn't feel or see anything. "Did everything? Is it?" He started to sit up, but Adan stopped him.

"Sit back. Rest. Everything went fine. The operation was a HUGE success. Just like you."

"Good...." Arthur said. "So tired..."

"I'm proud of you," Adan said.

Arthur felt a warmth spread through him at the sound of the word proud. He wanted so badly to please Adan. To make her proud, and he felt... happy. Really happy as he drifted off to sleep.

The next time Arthur woke, he felt more alert, more alive. The nurse was in the room, checking the tubes that came out of the sides of his chest, which was wrapped in gauze. Seeing that Arthur had woken, the woman, her name tag read Maria, rattled off something to him in Spanish. Arthur shook his head, delighted and surprised. He forgot sometimes about his brown skin. "No Espanola?" He said, hoping that was the right way to say it.

"Oh," the nurse said. "I just thought you were Latina."

"Born in the states," Arthur said. "So..."

"Are you excited to see your new breasts?" Maria asked.

"Yes," Arthur said. "And a little nervous. A lot nervous, actually."

"You're going to love them," Maria said, finishing up, and as she started to leave the room, she said, "I love your video! When's the next one coming out?"



"Soon!" Arthur said. "Thanks!"

"I'll send your... lady friend in..." Maria said. "She fell asleep in the waiting room."

*Oh*, Arthur thought, touched that Adan had stayed and waited. She really did care for him. Which he knew. But he liked to be reminded. It was like when she sent him flowers. She didn't have to, and that was what made it so special.

Adan came in, kissed Arthur. "How do you feel, babe?"

"Good," Arthur said. "Fine. I wish I could get these bandages off right now!"

"Another day in the clinic just to be sure, and then we'll have you up and on your feet. Your body is still numb?"

"Yeah," Arthur said. "I don't feel anything."

Adan took his hand, her face getting very, very serious. "I made a decision for us, and I need you to be on board and support that decision."

Arthur stopped smiling. Adan was so serious. Intense. "Of course," he said. "You know I always do."

"Good. I just needed to hear you say it. I had the doctors perform sexual reassignment surgery on you."

The words didn't compute. Arthur shook his head. "What do you mean?"

"I mean, you have a vagina now."

"No," Arthur said, his pretty little voice rising. "You didn't? I didn't agree to that!" He was shifting in his bed, writhing. He tried to reach down under the covers, wanting to feel for himself the truth of the impossible words he'd just heard. He had a vagina?

Adan grabbed his wrists. "This is where it was all going from day one. You must have known that."

"I wasn't ready," Arthur said. "I needed more time, and this is my body? How could you?"

"Things are moving too fast. The public wants a record from Krystal. They are begging for one."

"Let go of me!" Arthur said, feeling helpless and weak, Adan holding his arms, effortlessly pinning them to his chest.

"Not until you calm down. You can't touch it right now. It's all bandaged up. You need to listen to me."

Arthur struggled, gave up, felt powerless, trapped. He started crying. "I trusted you," he said, looking away from Adan. "How could you?"

"It was in your best interest, babe. I did it for you. You'll thank me one day." Keeping on hand on Arthur's wrists, Adan pushed the call button. "Let's get you some more drugs. Sleep. Relax. Everything is going to be fine."

Arthur didn't answer. He stared at the wall, crying, feeling... disgusted at... Adan... at himself.

"Look at me," Adan said in a cold, calm voice.

Arthur felt compelled. He turned his head. Looked at Adan. "I will always protect you and do what's best for you. Always. I love you."

It was the first time she'd ever said the words "I love you," and Arthur was sure she meant it, and the tears more even more freely from his eyes because he saw now what a cold, cruel thing it was to be loved by her.

"I love you, too," Arthur said, and he meant it as well, though he felt it was turning into its own kind of terrible love.

The nurse came, she dosed him, and Arthur gladly sank into some soft, dark place.

The bandages came off. Arthur felt the weight of his new breasts swaying on his chest. They were big. Heavy. Heavier than he expected. Adan stood behind him, her hands on his shoulders. Arthur touched his breasts, giggled. "They are so heavy!"

"You'll get used to it." Adan steered him to the full length mirror on the bathroom door of their hotel room. They could the sound of waves crashing on the beach, feel the warm, damp breeze off the ocean blowing in from the open patio doors.

Arthur saw his new body, his new self, for the first time, and what he saw was a beautiful young woman with a banging body-- his boobs were huge. They really had given him Kate Uptons. Adan had also had the doctors remove a couple lower ribs, and that along with all the corset training and hormones had left him with a waspish waist that was almost too small compared to his pendulous breasts and wide, soft, maternal hips. He looked at the slit between

his legs-- his vagina-- and then back up at his pretty face, radiant brown skin. And he smiled.

"I'm... soooo pretty," he whispered.

Adan kissed him on the neck. Reached around and gave his big, soft breasts a squeeze.

"Ow!" Arthur said, with a wince. "Sorry. They still hurt... a little."

"Let's get you into that surgical bra, babe. And then have some champagne. Let's get you sitting down."

They walked over to the bed. It all felt wrong. The weight of his breasts, the feel of them bouncing and swaying. The swaying of his hips. His whole soft, bouncy body. *I have to get used to it*, he reminded himself. *Have to learn to love it. Because this is me now, and it will be for a very long time.*

"Lift your arms," Adan said, getting the surgical bra from the dresser.

Arthur did. And then he sat there still like a good girl while Adan slipped the little straps over his arms and slid them down to his shoulders, then carefully pulling a few strands of his long hair from the bra, she fitted his breasts into the cups, hooked the strap across his back.

"How's that feel?"

"Good," Arthur said, forcing a smile. "Thanks."

Adan brought him a short little silk robe that came down to mid-thigh, led him by the hand to the porch. The champagne waited in a silver bucket dripping with beads of sweat in the steamy Caribbean weather. She uncorked it, poured them each a glass.

"To the prettiest girl in the world," Adan said, raising her glass.

"Cheers," Arthur said, clinking his glass to hers, glad for the alcohol, for something to distract him from the throbbing pain between his legs. He brushed his hair back from his eyes with one slender hand, looking out at the ocean. A full moon hovered mysteriously above the ink black waters, lighting up the white caps in a deep, mysterious blue. "It's so beautiful here," Arthur said, softly, in his woman's voice, the only voice he had now.

"Yes," Adan said, looking at Arthur, at the perfect form of objectified female she'd made of him. He was all tits and ass now. The face of an angel, a body built for sin. And now he had a vagina, and yes, she knew very well, how wrong it had been to do what she did, and that made her feel all the more powerful and excited to have such total control over a man, to turn him into the absolute vision of every man's fantasy woman. "I want you to move in with me."

Arthur turned to her, took another sip of champagne. "I... um... that came out of nowhere?"

"So, that's a yes." Adan said.

It felt too much. Too sudden. Arthur thought about the bleeding slit between his legs, and all kinds of warnings were going off, but then again-- he smiled his brightest and prettiest and said, "What took you so long to ask me?"

Adan smiled. "Just waiting for the perfect moment, babe. As always."

**Six Month Later**

Arthur wore a tight pair of jeans that hugged his now plump, round ass. Fuck me heels. His back was bare and he had draped a net like cover made of sparkling diamonds over his shoulders-- it let the world see a LOT of his radiant brown skin, his full breasts nestled in his lacy black bra, taught tummy. Ovid and the girls had worked miracles with his hair, his make-up. He knew he was sexy as hell, and he strutted out onto the red carpet for the big release of his first full-length album, put his hands in his back pockets and posed as the night lit up with the flashes from a thousand cameras-- professional photographers and fans.

Tits out, ass back, Arthur reminded himself, a bright smile on his face. He turned to let them get both sides-- he didn't have a bad side-- and then strutted down the line, smiling and waving at fans, pausing to sign autographs for a couple of young fans. He liked making the children feel special, and besides it was always a good photo-op. The release party was sponsored by Cover Girl, and they had pictures of Arthur's pretty face all over the room along with reps giving out samples. Arthur worked the room, smiling, hugging, being the adorable little woman he'd learned to become. It had only been six months. Six months since he'd legally and physically become a woman, and it still seemed hard to believe how much he'd changed, how much his life had changed.

Just the guest list at this party. The people who'd come to celebrate Krystal: pop music and pop culture royalty. David Bowie. Keith Richards. Cyndi Lauper. Johnny Depp. Mathew Broderick and Sarah Jessica. Idina Menzel and the songwriting Lopez', who were working on something for Krystal to do, and they had been talking about him doing something with them and Disney. It was fun. Exciting. Exhausting.

Adan was there, of course. She was always everywhere, but they had curtailed their public appearances. Adan felt that Krystal was more marketable as a straight woman. She felt that if news of she and Arthur got out, it could hurt her career, and so publicly that were agent and client. Krystal was currently getting a lot of attention for telling the world she was happy being single, that a woman didn't need a man to be happy. It was trendy feminist and had gotten her a lot of publicity and praise, but Adan was already putting things in place for Krystal to start dating Horace, who slept with everyone but also wanted to keep an old-school, straight monogamy reputation going in the public.

Of course, Arthur would do whatever Adan thought was best. He would be living a lie, but getting a glimpse of himself in a mirror, with his brown skin and bouncing breasts, he couldn't deny that living a lie had pretty much become his full-time job. After the party ended, he and Adan went home by separate cars, and to celebrate the evening he found himself squeezing his soft, round body into some sexy new lingerie Adan had given him, and then they did the usual-- he went down on Adan, then she lay him on his back and took him, then got him on his hands and knees and pegged him.

Arthur got through it. Smiled and giggled and told her how great she was, stared at the ceiling frustrated and unsatisfied while Adan slept her bliss. In the morning, after Adan went to work, he might get her dildo and do himself. He didn't like to do it while she watched anymore, because he knew how much she loved it, and it annoyed him that he had to get himself off, and that even when he did she still seemed to get more out of it than he did. Arthur understood what Bambi had been telling him now. He understood it very well. Because now he could and needed to and had to get off by playing with his tits, his vagina, he had to find his clit and god it felt good, but it also felt wrong, because he was a man, and he shouldn't have a clit, and he

shouldn't tremble with pleasure at the touch of a hand on his huge, firm breasts, and he needed and had to have that not because he wanted it or had ever wanted it, but because Adan had wanted it.

He was nothing but a blow-up sex doll to her, and he had willingly let her turn him into that.

But there was one difference. One big difference, and it was the thing that kept Arthur going through the boring interviews where the grinning reporters asked him the same stupid questions, through the hours in wardrobe and make-up, the days spent on heels that were designed as implements of torture, clothes that were too tight, too restrictive, that left him feeling constantly cold, and uncomfortable, and vulnerable and dependant. The bad sex. The cold meals. What kept his going was the feeling of walking out on stage, walking out to the roar of the crowd, the smiling faces, what kept him going was singing, dancing, seeing the eyes of his fans wide with wonder and joy, and the feeling when the show ended and the music stopped and he stood on stage, his slender arms raised to the sky, and the crowd roared and clapped and whistled, and they were all together and united in music, and he was Krystal Kinsey, and people loved him.

## **Epilogue**

"Adan Karline?" Dusty said, surprised and a little unnerved as the tall, broad shouldered woman strode calmly into the newly renovated Brownstone in SoHa.



Adan smiled coldly, reached out and took Dusty's hand in a crushing embrace. "Dusty. Show me around. Sell me."

Dusty met the strong handshake, matched the predatory smile. "Why don't we just get right to talking about Arthur?" She said.

"No bullshit. I like that. I want to make a deal with you, Dusty."

"Make me famous if I agree to let you turn me into an Eskimo man?"

"No. I buy this brownstone. Pay the full asking price. You earn a sweet commission. Your clients are very happy. In return, you stop trying to get the world to believe that the gorgeous international pop princess, Krystal Kinsey, used to be some pathetic singing waiter named Arthur."

"That does sound enticing," Dusty said. "But I'm afraid I'm going to have to say no."

"I'll also buy the unit next door."

"Done," Dusty said, reaching out for another handshake.

"I thought so. You will have to agree to sign an agreement promising to remain keep it quiet."

"I insist on signing an agreement. "

"I like you," Adan said, heading toward the door. "The next time we meet, the business will only be about business."

"I look forward to it."

Dusty stood there in the quiet, empty brownstone. Her commission on the two sales would be a million dollars. Did it make her a bad person that she felt no guilt? Didn't feel dirty in the least? She'd kept up with Arthur's career. Had seen the pictures of him dancing on stage in stiletto heels, his breasts bouncing as he bent over and shook his ass at the audience. She'd seen his pretty face smiling from magazine covers-- Vogue, Cosmo, Maxim, for god's sake. Gone to websites and seen his face popping up advertising lipstick, shampoo, tampons. Arthur was gone. He was a woman. There was no saving him, and she'd had zero success getting even a single media outlet to believe the chirpy, bouncy little sex-symbol who'd taken the pop music world by storm had once been a man.

The other thing was--- she could see it in those big, pretty eyes of his. When he was on stage, Arthur was happy. There was a joy in him, some kind of pure joy in singing and dancing, and being onstage that just made her smile and feel happy for him, and as much as Dusty had hated Adan, Dusty had been feeling guilty about trying to take that away from Arthur. Because when she saw him on stage, she knew for certain that Arthur *was* Krystal Kinsey now, and she was a star just like she had always wanted.

End