



Chapter 10: The Past

You've been crying. The thought of going back to work makes you feel sick. You don't want Amber to see you like this, to hear you speak in your new, squeaky little voice. You'd thought you fuck her one day, and the idea now seems laughable as you find yourself looking more like her kid sister than a man.

You sit cross-legged in your now over-sized easy chair, holding your ID in your hands, staring at the picture of what looks like a child, a feminine child, and at the name on your ID: Katherine

Rose. You will never go by the name Katherine, you insist to yourself. **Never.** It's an insult to give you this girl's name, but can the Hive actually think you would ever use it? No matter what they've done to you, you are still a man, will always be a man.

As for what to do with your life, you have three options. One: face it. Show up at work. Two: find another job. Three: Run. The idea of running, getting off the grid doesn't seem so good anymore. You remember the teen-age girl, the one who'd intimidated you on the street. You're so small and weak now, you can't defend yourself.

They all seem like bad ideas. You're stuck, and you sit there, staring at your face, your new face, trying to think of a fourth option. You have a reproduction Escher painting hanging on the wall in your living room, the one with all the impossibly interconnecting stairways that seem to lead nowhere. That's how your life feels to you now. In every direction you see hardship, climbing, struggling to go nowhere.

Your phone lights up, buzzing, and instead of your old ringtone, you hear a high-pitched voice say, "Hey, sexy. You have a call."

The fucking Hive. You wait, let it go to voice mail, and then reach over and pick the phone up to see the call came from Work. You start to put the phone down, your gut churning, then check the voicemail, half hoping, wanting it to be Amber. It isn't.

“Hey, *Katherine*...” you hear Lisa say, and your stomach churns. She knew about your supposed new name? They knew at work? It’s a reminder, again, of The Hive’s reach, the power of their system, their ability to control data. Lisa’s message went on...

“This is Lisa. So, I just wanted to check in and see when or if you’re planning on coming back to work. I know you got your inoculation. Anyway, I am making next week’s schedule, so if you want some shifts, let me know today.”

It’s decision time, but in a way you don’t decide. You just call her back because it’s the easiest thing to do, and you tell yourself you’ll just get some shifts in case, then make up your mind later. You aren’t deciding to go to work or not to go to work. You’re just making it possible to make the decision at some later time. You’re having trouble making decisions.

“Katherine,” Lisa says when she answers. It grates on your nerves, this feminine name. You close your eyes. You don’t want to speak, but you have to find the courage within you somewhere. You’re hyper-conscious of the fact your voice is so much higher than hers now, so much buzzier. She sounds like a woman. You sound like a little girl.

“Don’t call me by that name,” you say, trying and failing to put some force behind your tea kettle voice. You sound ridiculous to your own ears, like a pixie about to throw a hissy fit.

“Oh, honey,” Lisa says in a tone that mixes equal parts compassion and amusement. “It’s a Hive directive. All boys must be referred to by their legal names. Besides, you have nothing to be ashamed of. Katherine is a very pretty name. Did you know it means *pure*?”

Pure? That doesn’t make it any better, but she’s stopped you short with the phrase Hive directive. You remembered thinking earlier they couldn’t force you to use their name, but it had never occurred to you they could force everyone else, and it twists you all up inside to be stripped of your name just as you’ve been stripped of your masculinity. “I didn’t know,” you say.

“Your voice is so pretty!”

You cringe, and acid rises in your throat. You know it’s true, and you hate that you now have a pretty voice, but more so you can hear that same superior, condescending tone in her voice you’ve been hearing from women. “The shot they gave me...” you start to explain.

“Oh, I know all about it, sweetie. So, do you want some shifts, honey? I’d love to have you back. You’re a great little waitress.”

Waitress? Little waitress? You feel sick, really sick. Katherine. Waitress. Honey. Sweetie. It's like she's doing to your ego, your sense of identity, what the Hive have done to your body—shrinking it, reshaping it, making it soft and small and pretty. You want to bow up, tell her to go fuck herself, flex like the man you were, but instead you just feel yourself shrink, and you say, “Yeah. Put me on the schedule.”

“Oh, that's such good news. Done.”

“What happened to Andy?” You ask, though you're pretty sure you know.

“Oh, Andy,” Lisa says. “Poor thing. He had a hard time accepting things, so The Hive have sent him for counseling to help him adjust to his new reality.”

“Well,” you say, not able to hide your irritation. “How nice of The Hive to do that for him.”

The line is silent for a couple beats. Then, Lisa says, “Total Equality.”

You know what's expected. “Total Equality,” you say.

“I'll see you next week, Katie.”

Katie. Kate. Kathy. Every variation of your new name seems even worse than the actual name, and you are going to be sick, really sick, so you say “Bye” as you feel your gut clench.

You run to the bathroom and throw the toilet lid up, your knees against the cold tile as you vomit into the toilet. There is no way you can go back to work. None. You refuse to be Katherine. You refuse to be a little waitress, a sweetie and a honey. You refuse Total Equality.

“Omigod,” Amber says when you walk into Senor Frijoles for the first time since your changes started. “You’re so cute.”

“Don’t start,” you say, and Amber chuckles.

You glare at her.

“I’m sorry,” she says. “It’s just– that voice?”

You’d rehearsed this moment in your mind a thousand times, and you’d decided you would not be meek, mild, embarrassed. You were going to come swaggering in here and let her and Lisa know you were still the same man as always. “Tell me about it,” you say, striding up to the bar, trying to put some male swagger in your walk, fighting against your shoes. The heels are only an inch and a half, but they still don’t exactly foster a manly walk. You’d struggled so hard not to buy these women’s shoes, not to we “Fucking Hive.”

Amber looks you over, and she can’t hide that superior sense of amusement all women have these days when they see the tiny little things men have become. You’re a little disappointed in her,

but not surprised. How could women not feel that way, after having been the *weaker sex* for so long? You're the frail now, the weaker sex, the vulnerable one. She could put you right over her knee and spank you if she wanted, you think, imagining the scene, the sound of her hand whacking against your plump, soft ass and—what the fuck is wrong with me, you wonder, pushing the image from your mind, disturbed because that little flickering fantasy? You liked it.



Your clothes don't help. You're wearing slacks you bought from the girl's department and a blouse with a Peter Pan collar. They are the closest thing to male clothes you could find, but the pants have no pockets, so you have a purse dangling from your fingers. You're carrying a purse, and it disgusts you, all the more because you spent three hours drooling over handbags before you finally picked this one.

You had planned to stride right up to the bar and hop onto the stool like you used to, but when you try and hop onto the stool it's too high, and you kind of bounce off and stumble, grabbing the edge of the bar so you don't fall down, still a little unsteady on your Mary Janes.

"You're so cool," Amber says. "Like Fonzie."

"Asshole," you say, actually kinda relieved she's giving you shit at least, almost like the old days. You awkwardly climb onto the stool, feeling ridiculous, your little feet dangling free.

"What'll it be?" Amber says. "Pretty drink for a pretty boy? A Cosmo? A mojito? Oh! Maybe Vodka and cranberry juice!?"

"You are such a bitch," you say, immediately regretting it as with your little girl voice you sound just like a bitchy little girl.

“You had to know I was gonna bust your—” she hesitates for just a second, like she isn’t sure you even have a pair of “balls?”

You smirk, then decide to just lean into this new reality.

“Omigod, how about a banana daiquiri?” You say, putting on an airhead accent, a little vocal fry.

“Coming right up, miss,” Amber says, getting to work.

“I was kidding. I want--”

“Too late,” Amber says as she starts to mix your drink.

“I hate you.”

You hear giggling, and Kevin and Lisa emerge from her office. Whereas you have been fighting your urges to go full cute, Kevin has given in. He had barrettes in his now frosted hair, earrings sparkling in his little ears, and he’s wearing a little black dress, propped up on stiletto heels. “Omigod!” He squeals when he sees you, and he totters over, heels clicking, arms outstretched for a hug. “Katherine!”

You fucking hate him so much, but you open your arms and accept the hug, tolerate the air kisses. “You’re so pretty!” Kevin says, acting like he’d been born a female, all in on a new, feminine identity. His name tag identifies him as Kiera, Hostess. Kiera. Of course, you think. Of course he would be a Kiera.

“You did turn out well,” Lisa says, looking you over. “You’re a little cutie.”

“Thanks,” you say, sour, annoyed, wanting to be as unlike perky little Kevin as possible.

“Katherine,” Lisa says, narrowing her eyes. ‘Lose the attitude.’”

You meet her eyes, meaning to have this showdown, to let her know you aren’t going to be treated like some silly little girl, but then something in you breaks, you look away, intimidated. She’s so much stronger than you. When you look back, hating yourself for it, you smile and say, “Sorry.”

“That’s better,” Lisa says. “You’re much prettier when you smile, babe, and there is nothing more important for a boy than being pretty.”

She turns and walks away, Kevin trailing behind. You turn back to Amber who places your banana daiquiri in front of you. It’s a pretty drink, a girl drink. Amber winks. “Total Equality,” she says, but you hear the hint of irony in her tone.

“Total Fucking Equality,” you say lifting the drink, taking a sip. “Yum! That’s actually pretty good,” you admit with a shrug of your narrow, round little shoulders.

Amber gives you a funny look, and you wonder if this is another of those mental changes the Hive has made in you, like your obsession with makeup and cute shoes. It’s worse than the physical changes to you, the way they can get right into your head and feminize you. Have they done this to you? Will you be

ordering white wine and Cosmos now? You take another sip of your daquiri, and it is to die for. It's not The Hive, you decide. You just love it, so whatever.

Once you finish most of your drink—the alcohol hits you so hard and fast in your little body, you grab your purse and hop off your stool. “Better get ready for my shift,” you say, walking away, and you can feel Amber’s eyes burning a hole in the back of your pants as she stares at your ass.

“Mmmm... mmmmm...” she says. “The things I’d like to do to that ass of yours.”

You cringe as a mix of shame and excitement comes over you, the memory of that fantasy, you across her knee, your bare ass in the air as she spanked you, and it felt so good. It scares you, and it thrills you, because you know, as much as you don’t want to admit it, you know this is another change the Hive had made in, and this new fantasy? It’s in your future.

You want a woman to dominate you. You need it. Omigod, you want to get spanked so much it hurts.

