

Chapter Four: The Past

You hung out at the bar for a few hours, the four amigos: You, Kevin, Lisa and Amber. There is no news. Your phone just displays that same message, black text against a yellow background: The Hive Has Landed. Await Further Instructions. You drink. You feel sheepish, a little embarrassed to have the girls see you with your face all painted. Your lipstick is tacky, sticky, and you keep opening and closing your lips, trying to get used to the feeling. Amber is tense, subdued, constantly trying to call her parents. “I hope they’re okay,” she says. She’s worried.

While the three of you stress, Lisa’s got alien fever. Knee bouncing, she can’t sit still, keeps running to the window, desperately hoping to get a glimpse of The Hive. “I wonder if we’ll get to meet them?” She says. “I want a selfie so bad.”

Later, you hear gunfire— pop, pop, pop— echoing through the city canyons. You all run over to the window, and though you can’t see what sounds like a firefight, you can see the buildings a block over on Broadway lighting up with muzzle flashes. There’s a concussive thud that rattles the windows, and you all step back, all but Lisa, who has her nose pressed against the glass. “Look,” she says.

A lone NYPD Officer in tactical gear comes running from Broadway, down the street, toward you. The face plate on his helmet is shattered. "Is that them?" You say as a group of tall figures dressed all in black, wearing black helmets that fully cover their heads, comes racing after him. They carry rifles, but the rifles look like prop guns from some sci fi shoot 'em up.

"Halt by order of the High Queen." A woman's voice calls, broadcast, louder than the gunfire. "High Queen... High Queen... High Queen... echoing up and down the street.

The cop keeps running.

One of The Hive drops to a knee and takes aim.

"Shit," Amber says.

A bolt of bright blue energy leaps from the muzzle and strikes the cop. You wince, but he's lifted off his feet, and floats, flailing, but seemingly unharmed.

"See?" Lisa says, a smug smile on her face. "They didn't hurt him. I told you. The Hive is here to help."

You're not so sure as you watch The Hive race to the captured cop, grab him, push him to his knees and bind his hands behind his back. It looks to you like The Hive have come to conquer.

The message came an hour or so later. "Return to Your Homes. Go About Your Lives."

“Let me walk you girls to the subway,” you say, repeating your gallantry from earlier.

This time, they laugh. “I think we’ll be fine, sweetie,” Lisa says as she and Amber exchange an amused glance.

“You want to touch up before you head home?” Amber adds with a crooked smile.

You touch your cheek. You’d forgotten you were wearing makeup. Did it make such a difference? What the hell?

The streets are packed. Crowds have gathered, people staring up at The Hive ship with wide, glassy eyes, swaying back and forth. As you make your way through the crowd, heading for the subway station, you see a drug store, Duane Reade. You should really stop and pick up some things— mascara, lipstick, foundation—

You stop yourself. Makeup? You don’t—

And yet, you realize, you do wear makeup. You need to—

No. It makes no sense. Why are you so obsessed? And then you notice— the men on the street. They are all wearing lipstick, eyeshadow. They have rosy cheeks dusted with blush.

Just like you. You stare, thinking, I have to fight this.

You find yourself inside Duane Reade in the makeup aisle. It’s crowded with men. There are some amused looking women at the end of the aisle, taking pictures, laughing at the sight of all these

men eagerly grabbing armfuls of cosmetics. You panic as you see the shelves are almost empty. Two guys lunge for the same compact of e.l.f. cosmetics bright pink blush, the bigger one shoving the smaller one aside and clutching the blush triumphantly to his chest.

The little guy tenses, grits his teeth, and you think there's about to be a brawl as these two men get in a fight over makeup, but a woman, the manager, steps in, laughing, and says, "Girls, girls, none of that now. The Hive had just arrived with emergency supplies so you can all make yourselves pretty."

There's a roar of joy and relief – your voices hadn't changed yet– from all the desperate men who hadn't been able to get what they needed, and you're surprised to realize you shouted out right along with them, throwing a fist in the air.

You line up with the other men. There's a tractor trailer out front, and the staff of the Duane Reade are behind a table, passing out what look like gift baskets overflowing with all the things you need and want. Keeping order, making sure none of the men, literally, gets out of line, The Hive. You see them up close for the first time. They have the shapes of women, but like professional volleyball players. Tall, athletic, clad all in black, their faces and eyes hidden behind black, reflective glass. You feel intimidated, small, and you have never felt scared of a female

before, but the big, powerful looking Hive Soldier? She scares you, and you are shocked by this new reality.



Once more, there is a crowd of women watching, chuckling, taking pictures. When you get to the front of the line, the grinning woman handing out makeup says, “Hey, cutie.” She looks you over and then her hand floats over the baskets in front of her. She picks one up and hands it to you. “These are perfect for your skin tone, honey,” she says. “You’ll look great.”

“Thanks,” you mumble, looking at the label on the plastic wrap on the basket. It reads, “Peachy Princess.”

I’m a peachy princess? You think, disgusted. Fuck me.

The girl’s words have woken up a whole range of new worries and concerns. Skin tone? What are the best colors for my skin tone, you wonder? You’ve never had to worry about it before, never even thought about it before. You have so much to learn, and it’s just the first taste of how much more complicated life is about to be for you as a man, a boy, under the rule of The Hive.

When you get home, you find you keep checking yourself out, admiring how your eyes pop, how plump your lips look, how wet and kissable. Each time you check your makeup, you promise yourself this will be the last time. A guy should not be obsessing over his lipstick and, besides, you’re home alone. It’s late. You have no intention of going back out, so what does it matter?

You make dinner, which for you means you fry some hot dogs and warm up a can of Boston Beans. You sit down at the cheap, plastic table that serves as the center piece of what you like to refer to as “The Grand Dining Room.” You prop open your smart pad, your eyes immediately drawn to a new icon. It’s a basket that reads *Peachy Princess Users Guide*.

How? You wonder? You’d given out no information to anyone at all. You’d just gotten in line and received your basket, and yet,

somehow, The Hive had identified you, downloaded their APP onto your smart pad. They knew everything about you already—your phone number, name, address, skin tone.

They're everywhere, you think, getting your first taste of their technological prowess, the reach of their surveillance apparatus. Your eyes go right to the camera above your screen. It's just a dark little circle. It's been there forever, staring at you, and you never even gave it a second thought. Now, though? Now you look back warily, wondering if The Hive is watching you right now? Will they always be watching?

You have two urges at war with one another. One side of you says, cover the camera. Cover all the cameras. Smash your cellphone. Drown it in the toilet.

Paranoia growing, your eyes search frantically around the room. The blue screen on your digital refrigerator. The blinking clock on your microwave. The thermostat, with built in Alexa, and then to Alexa, herself, in the shape of the Death Star, sitting right next to your flat screen.

Pull the plug. Shut them all down. Alexa, you have no doubt, has turned traitor and joined The Hive. She's working for them. Stressed, you smack your lips, feeling the way they stick together, and that wakes up the second part of you.

The second part wants desperately to click on that APP and see what it's all about. The second part of you says, who are you that The Hive would be watching? And even if they are, so what? That second part of you thinks of Lisa saying, "The Hive are our friends. We should trust them."

The second part of you wins, and you click on the APP. A screen opens that reads, Welcome Peachy Princess! There is a menu of tutorials— lips, eyes, foundation. One reads: Start Here. You eagerly click, forgetting all about the cameras, The Hive. You're a Peachy Princess, and you can't wait to learn everything there is to know about makeup.

That night, you fell asleep watching a video on how to get butterfly lashes, and you woke with a start, panicked. One of the first things you'd learned was that you needed to clean your makeup off each night. It was terrible for your pores and leaving it on would give you bad skin.

"No...no... no..." you think, almost leaping out of bed. For the first time in your life, the thought of having bad skin terrifies you. You rush to your basket and grab the Peachy Princess wipes, hurry to the bathroom and draw one of the wipes across an eyelid, looking at it, seeing the smudged purple, silver and black. You wipe and wipe some more, clearing away all that beautiful

makeup, and when your face is finally bare, you sigh with relief to see your skin is bright, healthy, even glowing.

Your knees get weak, and you lean against the sink, sighing with relief. You know this is all wrong, that a man shouldn't be so dramatic, so worried about his skin. You don't even think a woman should be so worried about her skin, but you don't have a choice. This isn't a choice. It's who you are now. Who The Hive is making you.

You find your moisturizer nestled in the basket, Flirty, by L'Oréal for Boys, and you warm it on your fingertips as the video told you to do, then apply it evenly all over your smooth face, enjoying the feel of it, the pretty smell, and then you rub it over your hands and elbows.

Only then can you think about breakfast, your day, and how much time should you set aside now to do your makeup before work?

You spend the day watching videos, practicing doing your makeup, wiping it off, doing it again. At first it looks clownish, clumsy, and you almost want to cry because it's so hard, and you don't know if you'll ever even come close to getting it right in time for your shift.

You think back to the first video, the overview. A smiling woman in a three-piece suit, speaking directly to the camera,

directly to you: *Mastering the art of makeup requires dedication and focus, neither of which, let's be honest, scatter-brained boys are known for. Fortunately, your friends at The Hive have created these fun, educational videos that make makeup so easy, even a boy can do it! Let's get started.*

Even a boy can do this, you think, as you struggle with the eyelash curler. Even I can do this!



As you walk to work, you see all the men are now wearing makeup, just like you. You're all checking each other out,

assessing, and you exchange sheepish, embarrassed smiles with the other men as you think— good. Nice. Try harder. The women you pass are all grinning, amused, some of them leaning together, whispering and giggling. You see an old fuck buddy approaching. Rylee.

Things didn't end well between the two of you. She works around Time Square as well. Shit. The man in you is terrified to have her see you all prettied up, and you think about ducking down a side street, trying to hide your face, but she's spotted you, and she's laughing, covering her mouth, eyes dancing with glee.



As she passes, she looks you right in the eyes and says, "You look so pretty."

You cringe, the man in you withering, and she laughs some more as she walks by and then calls back, "Total Equality."