

Rom Com



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By

T.G. COOPER

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Chapter One

It started in the locker room at the gym. The whole thing. I'd just finished working out, slingning steel, building muscle. As soon as I walked through the entrance, I saw him there—the naked guy. You know that guy who just struts around completely naked? There he stood in front of his locker, hands on hips, facing way from me, and he seemed to be clenching his dimpled butt cheeks.

I rolled my eyes and headed to my locker, mildly irked at the naked guy and his need to flaunt his nakedness. Who did he think he was, and why did he think all the other guys needed to see his butt cheeks clenching, dimpling in, hard and ... the image of him clenching popped back into my mind, and I pushed it out, opening my locker, grabbing my shower kit. I grabbed the waistband of my shorts and stated to push them down before wrapping my towel around my waist, and I could feel someone watching me.

I glanced back to see naked guy, now turned to face me. He gave me a once over and nodded. "Looking good, bro," he said.

I felt uncomfortable under his gaze, and his comment confused me. Was it just a dude thing? Did he think I was gay? I didn't know, so I just grunted and said, "You look pretty good, too."

Pretty good? That was a lie. The dude was insanely ripped. He had muscles on muscles, and I had seen him doing reps with 250 pounds on the barbell. Truth to tell, I felt a little jealous of him. I'm an ectomorph—that's science for skinny. I had always struggled to put on any muscle and had just come back to the gym after years of being too self-conscious to lift with all the other guys intent on finally building a body I could be proud of. A body like naked guy.

I turned away, swallowed, and pushed down my shorts, quickly wrapping myself in my towel, feeling his eyes on me the whole time. Grabbing my bag, I headed to the showers, and immediately naked guy followed behind me, walking, like, kind of close. I tried to ignore him, ignore the feeling this guy was creeping on me, and that's when it happened.

Someone had left a sliver of soap on the floor. I stepped on it, and my foot shot out from under me, sending me falling backwards, and I would have cracked my head on the tile floor, but instead I felt myself caught in the arms of naked guy, who hooked me under the armpits and held me there, smiling down at me. I was almost parallel to the floor, staring up into his face, my mouth hanging open in shock. My legs splayed out in front of me.

“Careful, bro!” Naked guy said. “Don’t wanna hurt yourself.” His curly black hair framed his tan face, high cheek bones, and I saw he had big, green eyes. I found myself staring, stammering for words, not sure if I should thank him or tell him to get away from me. “I... um.... Uh...”

He lifted me up and placed me back on my feet as I were made of balsa wood, and then I felt him give me a slap on the ass as he walked past me. He glanced back at me, still stemming, and winked before stepping into one of the shower stalls, closing the door.

I stood there staring, started to feel light-headed and realized I had forgotten to breathe. I gasped and hurried to the shower, my heart racing, and turned on the water. The spot on my butt where he had slapped me was tingling, felt warm. I put my head under the shower water, and as I did my confusion started to turn into.... Anger. What an asshole, I thought. The whole thing was he seemed so arrogant, and he’d acted so superior. I sprayed my body lotion into my hand, sudsed away my sweat, determined that I would put that a-hole in his place. And I was also going to call my girlfriend as soon as I get out to my car. Hands free, of course.

I found myself rehearsing my next encounter with naked guy. Listen, bro, I imagined myself saying, poking him in the chest. I don’t appreciate your No no. I should curse, I thought. Hey, asshole! What the fuck is your...

It went on like that. I finished showering. Wrapped my towel around my waist, took deep breath and headed back to my locker. Naked guy was already at his. He was drying his back, dragging his towel back and forth, shaking his hips, his dick swaying back and forth in counter point to his drying. He was signing, “I write the songs I write the songs....”

My plans to tell him off completely shattered after I let myself glance at his dick. I quickly looked away, ashamed, and determined to just get the hell out of there. But, of course, as I dressed, naked guy decided to start a conversation. “Bro... bro... bro... “ he said. “That was a close call back there.”

“Yeah. Thanks,” I mumbled.

“You know something?”

I didn’t answer.

“I’m new in town. Just moved out here to the burbs. Looking to meet some people, you know? Get connected.”

“Cool... cool....” I felt myself tensing up, knowing where this was going. I steeled myself to decline what I was sure was a coming attempt to ask me out, as I was now pretty sure he was gay.

He came over, now actually dressed, thank god, and sidled up next to me on the wooden bench next to my locker. He held his phone toward me. “Give me your digits,” he said. “We’ll hang out.”

No, I thought. No way. I looked into his eyes, preparing to refuse and send him a very clear signal that I was not interested. But... my hand reached out and took his phone. I couldn’t understand it, couldn’t stop it. There was something in his eyes, an unexpected — I think it was vulnerability. I didn’t want to disappoint him, and even as I thought... NO... I found my fingers tapping in my number. I handed the phone back to naked guy. He smiled, and I stepped back, feeling so strange, scared. He seemed amused at how he was affecting me, stood and gave my shoulder a squeeze. “My name is Blake, by the way,” he said.

“O— um...I....” Why am I acting like such an idiot, I wondered? What is wrong with me.

“You’re Kelly,” he said, giving me another one of those winks. “I asked one of the trainers.”

Chapter Two

“How was your workout?” My roomie, Fiona asked. She was sprawled out on the couch bundled up under her comforter, watching Dance Moms.

“Good,” I said. “How can you watch this crap?”

“Blah blah..” She said. “While you were gone, I watched a documentary about the duckbilled platypus, so you know.”

“Something very strange happened at the gym, though,” I said, grabbing a protein shake out of the refrigerator.

“You actually worked up a sweat?”

“No. I got hit on. By a dude.”

“Seriously?” She said.

“Yeah. I think so.”

“Cool,” Fiona said, giggling. “You gonna go out with him?”

“Hell, no,” I said.

“You could get a free meal out of it, at least.”

“I’m fine. Anyway, I need to call Kate.”

“Yeah. Better reassert your masculinity, dude.”

I rolled my eyes.

Chapter Three

Two days later, I found myself sitting across the table from Blake at a Ruby Tuesday as the waitress brought out check. Blake grabbed it. I reached for my wallet. “I got it, bro,” he said.

“I’ll get my half,” I said.

“My treat. Please.”

Dinner had gone by so fast; I actually couldn’t even remember much of what we’d talked about. I’d been really nervous, at first, sputtering again, but then Blake had put me at ease. He mentioned an old girlfriend, and then made a comment on how hot our waitress was— she was actually just okay. But that had broken the ice, and we’d just talked and laughed for the whole hour, almost like we’d been friends for life. I’d been worried about whether he was into me— like that— and I am fine with that and not homophobic at all, but I am not and I was worried it would be awkward if I had to turn him down or something, but he’d just been a regular bro, and it was just two guys, you know, hanging out and talking crap.

“Let’s walk around the mall a little,” Blake said. “Work off some of that meal.”

“Sounds good.”

We walked a little, checked out the Nike store. So, he caught be totally off guard as we walked past an eyebrow threading stand and he said, “Get your brows done.”

I laughed and started to walk by, but he put his hand on my arm and stopped me. “Seriously, bro.”

The girl, who’d been sitting texting away, stood up and smiled. “Come,” she said. “Sit.”

I was not at all into the idea of getting my brows done, and just decided to play it off. I laughed. “Yeah, right.”

“Dude, don’t let your insecurities get you. A lot of guys get their eyebrows threaded.”

“Totally,” the girl said, nodding. “It’s really big these days.”

“Yeah, but...”

“Go. Sit,” Blake said, putting his hand on the small of my back. “You’ll look great.”

I was shaking my head no, but my body seemed to just let Blake guide it, and I found myself sitting in the chair, feeling like an idiot, while the girl got ready to do my eyebrows. A group of teen-age girls walked by, and I could swear they were giggling at me, and then some old dude walked by— one of those old men who walk in the mall, and he glowered.

But—

“Just sit still,” the girl said. Close your eyes.”

I glanced at Blake. He nodded. I closed my eyes and sat as I felt the girl doing something to my eyebrows. It felt like she was digging something across them, and then sort of tugging at the edges. In no time at all, she said, “All done.”

I opened my eyes to see Blake hand her some cash, and almost protested, but I decided I would just hit him back later. I had expected the girl to show me what I looked like with a mirror, but instead she was just grinning, nodding. “You look great,” she said, glancing at Blake— and I swear she gave him a little smile.

Blake nodded and raised his fist, inviting a bump. “Stud,” he said.

I tried to glance at myself in the store windows, reached up and touched my eyebrows with my fingertips. I resisted the urge to use the mirror function on my phone— it just— I mean, I thought it might seem kind of girly. We walked around some more, talked about this and that, and by the time we finally got ready to leave the mall, I had really forgotten all about it.

“Let’s take a picture by the fountain,” Blake said. The mall had a huge fountain built to look like some kind of ancient Roman fountain, fawns and mermaids frolicking.

“Nah,” I said, feeling that odd feeling again— like we were on a date.

“Come on,” Blake said, steering me toward the fountain. “Hey,” he called to a couple teen age girls. “Take our picture?”

The girls giggled and blushed, clearly impressed with Blake’s good looks. They agreed. We went over to the fountain, and I felt weird posing next to Blake, being shorter than him. It made me feel like the girl in the relationship, so I climbed onto the ledge of the fountain. “Careful,” Blake said.

“I got it.”

The girls were holding the phone, giggling. “Say cheese!”

I reached over to throw my arm around Blake's shoulder, and my foot slipped on the slick tile, sliding right out from under me. Once more I felt myself tumbling backward, yelping as I plunge toward the water. Then, I felt Blake grab my arms and yank me up, throwing me over his shoulder, my legs kicking in the air.

"Got it!" The girls said, laughing, snickering. Blake carried me over to them.

"Put me down!" I said, horrified to have the girls see Blake carrying me around over his shoulder.

Blake set me down as he retrieved the phone and checked out the picture. "Too perfect," he said.

"You guys are so cute together!" The girls said, wandering off.

"We're not—" I said, but then gave up as they hurried away.

Blake showed me the picture— Me, cradled on his shoulder, my feet kicking, eyes wide with shock, Blake grinning. "Now that's a pic!" Blake said.

"Delete it. Please," I said, mortified.

"Never! That's blackmail gold."

Blake walked with me to my car. "Thanks for hanging with me, bro," he said when we got to my Audi. And then he opened his arms for a hug.

"Um, you know...?" I started, feeling that same sense of unease at the thought of hugging him. "I'm not really a bro-hug kind of— umf!"

Ignoring me, he wrapped his arms around me, squeezing hard, actually lifting me slightly off my feet. I hung there my arms at my sides, mortified. "Bring it in," he said, even though I was already in his arms. "Come on, bro. Let yourself go." I realized what he meant and raised my arms, wrapping them around his body, squeezing him back.

"Okay. Okay," I said, my discomfort growing as he kept squeezing me.

He put me down but kept a hand on my shoulder. "Not a hugger?" He yelled. "You have to loosen up!"

"I'm just not," I said, dropping my eyes, starting to turn back to my car. I just wanted to get in my car, lock the door, but some space between us. But he squeezed my shoulder, pulling me back from the safety of my car.

"How did it feel?" He said.

“I don’t...”

“How did it feel?” He said again, his voice more insistent.

“Good,” I admitted in a whisper.

“Right? I mean, why are you denying yourself things that feel good? Does that make sense to you?”

“Hey, I gotta go,” I said, clicking the automatic door opener on my car, the car making that electronic “tweet” and the lights flashing.

Blake smiled, that big, bright white smile. He had really big teeth, I noticed. Like, huge teeth. And dimples.

Chapter Four

The whole drive home, I kept glancing in the review mirror at my eyebrows. They looked too good, too perfectly shaped. Like a woman's. They weren't super thin, but then again, a lot of women had been going with thicker eyebrows. They just looked, I don't know how to say it—sleek? And just a little arched, maybe? In between glancing at my eyebrows, I kept thinking about Blake, with a weird mixture of feelings. The conversation was great. He was a fun guy to hang out with, and he didn't really seem gay to me, and yet? That hug. I was almost sure there was something more in there, something more between us, or that he wanted to be between us.

You're just imagining things, I decided, but at the same time I resolved I needed to say no to him when he told me things like—get your eyebrows threaded. Back at home, I unlocked the door and walked into the apartment to find Fiona buried under her comforter, watching TV, as usual. This time it was *Real Housewives of Nashville*. "You stole man okra cake recipe and you know it!" Some shrill woman with big hair screamed.

"As if I would ever!" Another big-haired woman screamed back, hurling a glass of wine at the other.

"This stuff is rotting your brain," I said.

"I know," Fiona said. "How was your date?"

"It wasn't a date," I snapped, thinking about the hug, and even I thought I sounded a little too defensive.

Fiona must have noticed the tension in my voice because she actually dragged her eyes from the TV and looked at me. I turned and pretended to be getting something from the fridge, not wanting her to see my brows. I rummaged around, waiting for her to say something, but she didn't, so I grabbed a bottle of water I didn't want and headed to my room. Just as I was about to close the door, she said, "Your eyebrows are on point, dude."

I groaned and went to bed, trying to figure out if there was some way I could hide these things at work. I even thought about shaving them off, but figured that would be even weirder, so I went to bed, stressed, tossing and turning.

The women at work all noticed my new "look." To my surprise and relief, they responded with compliments, and one girl, Sarah, even told me she thought I was "brave" for getting my brows done. "I wish more guys would do it," she said. "But they are usually too insecure."

Chapter Five

Blake texted me that afternoon. "Let's work out together," the text said. "See you at 6 PM."

I frowned. Once again, he was telling me what to do, acting like it was assumed I would just agree. Time for me to set some boundaries. I tapped out: *I don't come at your beck and call! But no.* Too aggressive. *Sorry. I have something else,* I tapped out, but I didn't like feeling like I had to lie to him.

I kept tapping and deleting messages, trying to find the right words, and then Sarah poked her head in my office and said, "You coming to the meeting?"

"What? Oh, crap!" I said, flipping my phone over so she wouldn't see what I'd been typing. "On my way."

She glanced at my phone, my nervous reaction and smirked. "Sexting someone?" She said.

"What?" I said, my voice cracking with anxiety. "No!"

"Whatever," she said. "Better not be late."

I grabbed my tablet, put my phone on silent and hurried to the meeting, which of course went on forever and accomplished not much. It didn't end until 5 o'clock, and when I went back to my office, I struggled for a bit before finally deciding it was too late to cancel on the gym meet up. Blake was actually pretty nice, and I didn't want to be rude.

I found myself on my back, staring up at Blake's groin. I was on a bench, doing bench presses, and he was spotting me. I could see the impressive bulge in his shorts, and having seen the actual package I couldn't get the image of his naked self out of my mind as I pushed the barbell off my chest, my arms shaking as I grunted and strained.

"Come on," Blake yelled. "You got this! Push! Push!"

I grunted, pushing with all my strength, but the barbell stopped going up, and then slowly started to sink back down toward my bony chest. Blake grabbed it and pulled it up and onto the brackets. "Good effort," he said, clapping. "Way to fight."

I sat up, shaking my head, glancing over at the slender weights on the bar. I'd only been trying to do reps with 95 pounds. "I can't seem to really put on any muscle," I said.

"Just keep grinding," Blake said, patting me on the back. "Spot me."

I got up, while he went to the next bench, where he'd loaded up 225 pounds. He laid back and pumped it effortlessly, doing eight reps and then slamming it home. "Alright," he said. "Alright."

"You are strong as hell," I said, impressed.

"I know," Blake said, flashing that smile. "You want a better body," he said. "I can help you."

"I'm just trying to, um, you know..."

"I'm a certified personal trainer," Blake said. "Used to own my own gym. I'm going to transform your body, bro."

"Really," I said. "I'm fine. I appreciate it, but..."

Some guy walked up as we were talking—he had that rooster's peak haircut, blonde tips, a hard muscle. "You gonna lift or just talk?" He said, eyeing the two benches we'd been capitalizing. It is pretty much a rule at the gym that you don't hog the equipment. "Sorry," I said, raising my hands, "we won't..."

Blake made a cutting motion with his hand, cutting me off. He walked right up to the guy, got really close and said something, I couldn't hear what. The guy just turned and walked away. I couldn't believe what a badass he was.

"What did you say to him?" I said.

"Nothing," Blake said. "Now, come on. I'm going to show you what I want you to do."

"Shouldn't we break down these weights?" I said, but Blake walked off, and I couldn't help but follow him.

He led me over to the squat racks. "If you want to be strong," he said. "You have to start with your glutes. He showed me how to do back squats. Deadlifts. "You're going to do ten sets of ten," he said. "Lots of reps. That's the key. I'll come back and check on you." He walked away. I started lifting, doing what he'd told me. I mean, he was ripped, and I didn't have any idea what I was going anyway.

As I did my reps, hyper-conscious that all the guys around me were lifting a lot more, I kept looking over, watching Blake. He and the rooster hair guy were working together now, talking, laughing between sets. When Blake saw me glancing over, he smiled and winked.

A cute little blonde walked up to me as I finished a set of deadlifts, my glutes burning. "Mind if I work in?" She said.

"What?" I said. She had a really pretty smile, good skin, nice boobs.

"I want to do some deadlifts," she said, stepping past me and positioning herself in front of my bar. "You don't mind, right?"

"Oh, no, go ahead," I said, humiliated as she started to lift the same weight I'd been lifting. I was pretty sure I heard someone snicker.

The girl, it turned out her name was Mary, took turns with me on the back squats and deadlifts. After, Blake had me do some split squats, working on my legs, and then he put me on the treadmill and told me to run. "You're just lifting," I said. "Maybe I should..."

"Run," he said, patting my on the shoulder. Then he walked away.

"Okay," I answered.

Back in the locker room, Blake stood there, naked, of course. I turned my back to him. "How do you feel?" He said.

"Sore," I answered. In fact, my legs and butt ached, were already stiff. Walking back to the locker room I thought I looked like the tin man, hobbling on my stiff, throbbing legs.

Blake laughed. I laughed. "You did good today, but the workout is only half the equation. The other half is nutrition. I'm going to send you a diet. You need to eat right to get results."

I didn't answer. Who did he think he was, telling me what to eat? I decided I just wouldn't argue with him, but I would eat whatever I wanted.

Chapter Six

The blender whirred, shaking on the counter, shredding the kale and spinach, collagen protein and granny smith apple I'd put into it. I glanced at the diet Blake had sent me— I would be eating nothing but smoothies for the next month, it seemed. My butt ached, my legs. I'd barely been able to stand up when I'd first rolled out of bed, but Blake had sent me some stretching exercises to do that had helped. Still, I knew I would be in pain all day. The blender finished— it had a pre-programmed Smoothie function I had never used before, and I poured the radioactive looking green goo into a cup.

Fiona wandered into the kitchen, her vape pipe in hand, bleary, crusty eyes glassy. "What the hell is that?" She said, glaring at my smoothie.

"Breakfast," I said. "Eating healthy."

"Gross," Fiona said.

I took a sip and almost gagged. "True," I said, forcing myself to swallow the goo. "But it's good for me."

"Eat right, stay fit and die anyway," Fiona said, getting some coffee going.

I looked at her, saw her sallow skin, lifeless hair. Yuck, I thought, forcing myself to down the smoothie. I didn't want to look like that, to feel like that. Not anymore.

I went to the bathroom, feeling good about making healthy choice, and picked up Fiona's tweezers, cleaning up my brows. I'd gotten so many compliments I come to realize I looked good with my brows neat. Besides, I'd gone online and seen that it was true; more and more guys really were taking care of their eyebrows. I wasn't weird. I was just on the cutting edge.

Chapter Seven

Results from my workouts came fast. Blake had me working out two days on, one day off, and on my off days I did stretches he gave me to do. Every time I went to the gym, I lifted more than the time before. Mary and I became workout buddies, and she got me doing step ups and squat jumps, other stuff to strengthen my legs and core. It was nice because we encouraged each other, and it gave me someone to talk to while Blake was off lifting. We hung out more and more. My diet was so extreme I couldn't really eat out, but we went out for coffee, went to galleries. We texted all day.

I first noticed the results when I went to put on my work slacks one morning and noticed they were really tight on my butt. I went to the mirror, turned to the side and looked to see my flat, bony butt was gone, replaced by a round, firm bubble shaped behind. I felt a thrill, a sense of pride at the work I'd done, but at the same time—

Yeah. It looked— I saw that it kind of looked more like a woman's ass than a man's. Not just because it had gotten bigger, rounder, but it had a, I'm not sure how to describe it. A lifted quality to it. I mean, as much as anything else, what disturbed me is that I actually felt a little turned on looking at it, the same way I felt when I saw a woman with a hot ass. I turned to look at myself from the front, and I was almost sure I had hips. I mean, obviously, I always had hips, but now they looked rounded, wider. Not huge, but maybe like a lanky teen-age girl might have.

I felt— it made me a little scared, nervous, even at the same time my skin tingled with pride. I don't know why I didn't see what was happening, try to stop it. Instead, I just decided I would call Blake and ask him about it.

At work, I felt like people were checking out my ass— especially the women. The guys I worked with didn't seem to notice, though I felt like maybe they'd started to get a little stand-offish. It was Jane, of course, who finally said something. I was in the break room, and I'd gotten on my toes to reach up in the cabinet and get some green tea. Jane had been in there with a couple of the other girls, and the room had gone silent.

"Your ass looks amazing," she said.

I looked back over my shoulder. "Um, thanks," I said.

"What's your secret?"

“Oh,” I said, going about making my tea. “Nothing.”

“Come on,” Jane said. “What’s your secret?”

I smiled and took my tea over to the table, sitting down with the girls. “You really want to know?” I said.

“Yes!” The girls all said in unison.

I told them all about my workout and my nutrition plan, and they shared their programs with me. It wasn’t until I went back to my office, glowing from the gab session, that I wondered whether I’d been acting— you know. Not like me?

I had gotten a little lighted mirror, though I kept it hidden in my desk drawer. I pulled it out and checked my face.

Chapter Eight

“Kelly,” Blake said, shaking his head. “I told you. You have to start with your glutes, your legs, your core. You’re doing great.”

“Yeah, but I just feel like my ass looks.... Um...?”

“Fat?”

“No. Not that. It’s just... big.”

Blake laughed.

“I’m serious!” It hurt me that he was laughing at my feelings.

We were back at Ruby Tuesday. Blake told me it was okay to eat a garden salad, vinegar and oil dressing, and I was enjoying my first solid food in a month.

“I’m sorry,” Blake said. “I shouldn’t laugh.” He got out his phone. “Let me show you something.” He tapped, held out the phone to me, showing me a picture of Saquan Barkley, a star running back for the New York Giants. “Look at the butt on that guy.”

I looked it. It was big, round, lifted. He was wearing his uniform pants— they were tight, stretchy. A strange thought crossed my mind as I looked— *With an ass like that*, I thought, *I bet he could really pound a girl*. I felt myself blush and looked away.

“See?” Blake said. “That’s an athlete! And so are you.”

“Okay,” I said, not sure, but feeling better. I decided not to mention my hips.

“Do you have any idea how much better you look? Your skin is amazing! Your hair. You look like a completely different person!”

I felt my cheeks getting hot, my skin tingling from all the compliments. “Come on,” I said.

“I’m serious, dude. Don’t be shy. You look great, and you need to own that.”

“You look great,” I said, wanting to take the focus off me. “I still just have these scrawny arms!”

“You don’t need to worry about your arms,” Blake said. “If only you knew how good you look!”

“I guess,” I said, feeling like I was floating on a cloud.

“Except for that haircut.”

And just like that, it was like he'd tied led balloons around my ankles and sent me crashing to the ground. "My hair?" I said. "What's wrong with me hair?"

"Everything," Blake said. "With those cheekbones? I mean, seriously, bro. That messy bed head thing? Tell the truth. You've had the same haircut since college."

"No," I lied, annoyed he'd pegged me so easily. "It's totally different!"

"Bullcrap. That's it. We're taking care of this. Waiter? The check?"

"My hair is fine," I said.

"Come on," Blake said, throwing some cash on the table.

"I'm not getting a haircut!" I said, as I stood and followed him out of the restaurant.

"You are," Blake said. "I've decided."

"No!" I said, but of course, I soon found myself sitting in a salon chair, a bib around my neck, while Blake talked to the stylist off to the side, outside my hearing. I couldn't hear anything he said until he said, "Good?"

"Yup," the stylist said, walking over to me, a smirk on her face. "Hey, honey," she said, turning the chair away from the mirror. She ran her fingers through my hair, scratching her nails gently against my scalp. "You're going to look great."

"Just a trim," I said.

She grabbed a strip of tinfoil and started to twist it into my hair.

"What's that for?" I said, looking at Blake.

He flashed that big, toothy smile and said, "Trust me."

"Just relax, sweetie, and let me work," the stylist said.

I sat back, but I couldn't relax. Foot tapping, heart racing, I kept looking at Blake with a 'what the hell?' Look on my face as she foiled up my hair and then covered it with some gross, stinky chemical. Blake just smiled, winked, and watched.

I should have gotten up, run for it, but I just sat there, mortified, dreading what was being done to me. I knew she was dying my hair. "Please don't make me blonde," I said, because the idea scared me more than anything.

"Hush," the stylist said, giggling. "Now just relax while it sets."

Why am I just sitting here? I wondered. I should just stand up, rip the foil out of my hair and storm out of here! But, then, it was already too late. The stylist came back and let me to the sink. I caught a glimpse of myself, sparkling foil all twisted in my hair,

which was covered with some kind of white gunk. Taking the foil out, washing my hair, the stylist led me back to the chair. I tried to get a glimpse of myself now, but she put her hand to my chin and made me look away. “Just be patient, sweetie!”

I obediently sat while she fluttered around my head with her scissors, snipping and brushing, then grabbing a hair dryer, brushing my hair out as she blasted it with hot air. Finally, she finished, once more put her hand to my chin and lifted my face, so Blake could get a good look at me.

“Bro!” He said. “Yes!” He got up and walked over to me. Both he and the stylist spun the chair around, then stood over my shoulders as I gawked. Of course, my hair was now blonde, with white and brown highlights. Bangs swept across my forehead, the hair I’d had piled on my head now framed my face in a kind of pixie cut, like some fancy French girl would have.

“Does he look hot or what?” Blake said, squeezing my shoulder.

“So hot,” the stylist said, running her hands through my now bouncy hair.

“Well?” Blake said. “How much do you love it?”

I hated it. It made me look like a girl. But I smiled and said, “I love it.”

“I knew you would,” Blake said. “I knew you would.”

The night ended next to my car, with another bro hug. This one lingered even longer, and when it ended Blake held me loosely in his arms, looking down at me. I stared back, bangs in my eyes. For a moment, I thought he was going to kiss me, and I felt myself tremble. I didn’t know if I could stop him.

But, instead, he reached up and brushed my bangs back, then gave me a little chuck on the chin. “You’re coming along nicely,” he said. “I’m really proud of you.”

“Thanks,” I said. “Well, goodnight.”

I got in my car, He stood and waited for me to drive off. Glancing in the mirror as I drove off, I saw Blake waving goodbye. I wondered where all this was going, whether I wanted it to stop— or was afraid it might.

Chapter Nine

“Hey, blondie,” Fiona said from under her comforter.

“Shut up,” I said, pushing my way onto the end of the couch.

Fiona groaned and pulled her legs up, giving me some room. On the TV, an old lady was talking to some guy, telling him to change the vote or something like that. “What’s happening?” I asked.

“She doesn’t like the girl who won the dance competition,” Fiona said. “So, she’s bribing one of the judges to change the vote.”

“What the hell?” I said, outraged. “Is that what happens on this show?”

“All the time.”

“He’s not going to do it?”

“He will. Probably. The dance world is so corrupt.”

“I can’t believe it!”

We watched the diabolical machinations for a time. I was so pissed, and I felt so bad for the girl who got cheated, seeing her cry. We chatted a bit, and then Fiona said, “So, what’s the deal anyway? I mean, with the hair?”

“I don’t know,” I said, mussing my hair, brushing my bangs back. “I just— “

“Blake made you do it, right?” Fiona said.

“Yes,” I said. “I can’t seem to say no to him.”

“I know the type,” Fiona said. “So, are you gay now or something?”

“No!” I said. “That’s just the thing. It’s— I don’t know, and I am not even sure if he’s gay, anyway. I don’t understand what’s happening.”

“Cut him off,” Fiona said. “That’s what I would do.”

“I guess,” I said, though the thought of cutting him off? It left me with a cold, empty feeling inside.

“A guy like that? You either become what he wants you to be, or he’ll dump you anyway.”

“I have to think about it,” I said. “I don’t know what to do.”

“I’m going get baked. Or, more baked,” Fiona said, sitting. “You want?”

“No,” I said, getting up. “Thanks.”

“Yeah,” Fiona said. “You better not. Blake wouldn’t approve.”

“Shut up!” I said, heading to my room.

That night I tossed and turned all night. I kept thinking of Blake, how I felt when I was around him, when I wasn’t around him. I still didn’t know what to do when the alarm rang, and I got up to go to work. Walking into the bathroom, I saw my blonde bob, sparkling in the morning light. I stared at myself, putting my palms to my smooth, soft cheeks. I didn’t need to shave anymore. Hadn’t in days. My skin was bright, clear, and my cheeks seemed to have a permanent pink glow. It seemed like the shape of my face had even changed, my chin looking more pointed, my eyes bigger, though I wondered if that was just partly from my brows. I batted my long, curly lashes. Had they always looked like that?

I couldn’t deny it. I looked like a woman, and now with my curvy hips and bouncy butt? I felt like Blake was turning me into a girl, a woman. But that wasn’t possible, was it? It wasn’t, and yet the mirror didn’t lie. As I stared at the woman in the mirror, I noticed a couple stray hairs at the edges of my brows, and I instinctively grabbed the tweezers, meaning to clean them up.

But then I stopped. No. This wasn’t me. I would not become what Blake wanted.

I went back to my room, sat on the edge of my bed, my phone in my hands. I pulled up my contacts, Blake’s face appeared, that big, bright smile. Like a wolf. I took a deep breath, and I Blocked him.

It was for the best. I had to cut him off before it was too late.

In the kitchen, I decided to show Blake. I would English muffins for breakfast, smothered in jelly! He hadn’t let me eat bread in, like forever, and I reveled in my defiance as I pulled the muffins from the toaster, then smothered them in butter and strawberry jam. Jerk! I thought, taking a bite of the muffin. I can eat whatever I...

I gagged. Spit out the muffin. It tasted so good, but my stomach clenched when I tried to swallow, and I felt nauseous. I took another bite, determined, but once more spat it out. Hell. Damn! I needed to get to work, so my little act of defiance would have to wait. I grabbed a couple rice cakes, tossed my hair and headed to my car.

Chapter Ten

The girls at work all raved about my new haircut. The guys shook their heads or ignored me. They'd been freezing me out. I had a hard time concentrating all morning. I kept thinking about Blake, wondering if he'd tried to text me. It irritated me that I couldn't stop thinking about him, which only made me think about him more. I squirmed in my seat, hyper-conscious of how big my butt felt, and every time I had to brush my new bangs out of my eyes, I thought of him sitting there, smiling, winking.... Standing naked in the locker room, his junk dangling for all the world to see.

Ugh! I slammed my palms against my desk. I looked at my phone.

Maybe I should talk to him? I thought. Explain it all. Get some closure? But wouldn't he just do his weird Blake thing? Make me do what he wanted? And who knew what was next, I mean, he'd almost kissed me! But was it fair to just ghost him? I'd had a girlfriend once who'd ghosted me and...

I stopped myself. You are not his girlfriend! I reminded myself.

Be strong, I told myself. Be strong.

My phone vibrated. My heart leapt. Had he found some way around the Block? I grabbed the phone, scared, not sure if I would be happy or angry if it was him, but it wasn't. It was Mary, my workout buddy from the gym. The text read, Tonight?

Shit. I knew I would probably see Blake if I went to the gym, which made me realize I was going to have to find a new gym. I didn't want to see him. I texted back, "Can't."

My phone rang. It was Mary. Sighing, I answered. "Yeah?"

"What do you mean you can't?"

"Mary, I am really sorry, but I'm not going to be able to train at Bulk anymore," I said. I felt bad. We'd become good friends, and I knew Mary counted on me to be her accountability partner. I started to think of some lies I could tell her, though, as to why.

"Did you break up with that guy?" Mary said.

My mouth fell open. "Break up with? What, you don't think? I mean...?"

"You mean? I thought you and that guy...?"

"We're just friends," I said. "Or we were."

"Oh, sorry," Mary said. "I just..."

“I’m not gay!” I said, my voice cracking. “Not that there’s anything wrong with that, but I am totally straight.”

“Okay... okay...”

“I don’t understand why you would say that!”

The phone was quiet for a moment. I was breathing hard, shocked. Then, Mary said, “Let’s get together for coffee. You sound like you could use someone to talk to.”

I did, and though it felt like a totally girly thing to do, I said yes.

We sat across the table from each other, sipping our lattes. “I’m sorry if I seemed, I mean, earlier, I know...” I said.

“It’s okay,” Mary said, covering my hand with her own. “You were upset.”

I hooked my hair behind my ear and smiled. “It’s been... weird for me lately.”

Mary smiled. “Do you want to talk about it?”

“No,” I said. “Yes.”

“When you’re ready.”

I took a deep breath and started to talk, hesitantly at first, and then the words just poured out of me. I didn’t tell her about my fears that Blake was somehow turning me into a woman, but I told her how he’d been controlling me with my hair, my workout, even dictating what I ate. She nodded, staring my in the eyes, patting my hand with her own. Finally, after just talking and talking, I just seemed to run out of gas, and I sighed.

“So, am I crazy?”

“Not at all,” Mary said. “I’ve known guys like that.”

“So, am I doing the right thing? I mean, I feel bad cutting him off?”

“If you feel you need to cut him off, then do. But, there’s one thing. If you start changing gyms and changing your whole life, you’re still letting him control you.”

“Oh,” I said, thinking about it, feeling the truth of what she was saying. “Hmmm. I hadn’t thought of that.”

“Come back to Bulk,” Mary said. “And if he tries anything, I’ll be right there to support you.”

“Maybe,” I said. “But I need... I think I need some time. I’m not ready.”

“I understand,” Mary said, thought she seemed disappointed. “How about this, then? Why don’t you come to yoga with me? That way we can still workout buddies!”

Yoga? I thought, not sure how that was going to be part of me getting back to being more of a man. But, Mary had been so good, and I did want to keep our friendship going. I nodded. “Okay, but you should know, I have never done yoga.”

“Great. That means I will be better than you!”

“Good. Glad I can make you feel better about yourself.”

We finished up, and as I was about to leave, Mary touched my arm and said, “By the way, I love your hair!”

Chapter 11

When I got home, I found a vase with a dozen white roses waiting for me on the kitchen counter. “Your boyfriend sent you roses,” Fiona said.

I stared at them, my heart fluttering, my head filled with feminine confusion. The roses were so pretty, and I took a minute to push my nose among the petals and sniff the sweet aroma. Blake, I thought. Maybe he wasn’t so bad? But then I shook my head and reminded myself of who I was. “He’s not my boyfriend,” I said, taking the vase and throwing it into the garbage.

“You go, girl,” Fiona said.

I sat down on the couch. “What is the evil dance mom up to now?” I asked.

Fiona filled me in. I watched for a few hours, then made myself a smoothie and got into bed, looking at my phone, wondering if Blake had tried to text me. I couldn’t believe he’d sent me flowers. The jerk. Did he really think that would work? But as I lay there, I started to wonder— was there a note? And, what did it say? Don’t look, I told myself. Don’t look. But after an hour of tossing and turning, I got up and tiptoed out to the kitchen. Fiona had gone to bed, but I didn’t want to wake her and have her know I’d looked for the note, which I found nestled among the flowers.

I opened it.

When you close your eyes

I fall asleep

You are everything to me

The sun at the center of my world

I miss your smile, your laugh

I miss you

I rolled my eyes. Please. What a jerk. Plucking one of the roses from the dustbin, I went back to my room. Clutching the note to my chest, I lay down and went to sleep.

He tried to call me at work, but I refused his calls and told the receptionist to block him. He sent me chocolates. More flowers. A teddy bear with a balloon that read “Miss You.” Mary and Fiona became my squad, telling me to stay strong, that he would give up eventually. I had good days when I lived my life, had fun, and bad days when I ached for our friendship, missed him terribly, and wondered if I was doing the right thing.

I guess I was probably kidding myself, though, because I kept my blonde bob, plucked my eyebrows, drank my smoothies. I told myself I liked being healthy, that I was doing it for me, even when I had to buy work slacks from the women’s department because men’s pants wouldn’t fit my wide hips and plump rear.

And I kept his presents— the teddy bear, one of the roses, a little wooden box he’d sent full of rose petals.

Finally, one rainy night, I was curled up in bed reading *Twilight*, when I heard music outside my window. “What?” I wondered. It was “In Your Eyes” by Peter Gabriel, and I went to my window, thinking, no way.

“Kelly!” I heard someone yell. “Kelly!”

I pulled back my curtain, and there was Blake, holding a boombox over his head, standing in the rain just like John Cusack from “Say Anything.”

Oh, my God! I thought, pulling the window open. “Go away!” I shouted, though my heart was racing, my heart melting. He really did care about me!

“Kelly! I love you!” He shouted. “I love you!”

I saw lights in the apartment windows flipping on. “Stop!” I shouted back. “I don’t want to see you, you ... you... idiot!”

“I won’t leave until you come out here!” He yelled.

Fiona stumbled into my room. “Don’t go,” she said. “If you do...”

“There’s no going back,” I murmured.

“Kelly!” He yelled again.

“Shut up!” One of my neighbors yelled.

I turned and headed toward the door. Fiona grabbed my arm. “Don’t. I’ll call the police.”

“It’s okay,” I said. “I have to.”

I ran out of the apartment, out into the rain. Blake set his boombox down. "I knew you'd come," he said.

"I just came to tell you to go away!" I put my hands on his chest, pushing him toward his car. "Before someone calls the police!"

Blake grabbed my wrists and pulled my arms down to my sides. He was soaked, rain dripping from his dark black hair, down his face. I froze there, staring up at him. I could see the desire in his eyes. I tried to pull away, but he pulled me in, planted his lips on mine.

I can't describe the feeling. My whole body tingled, I curled my toes as a pleasure unlike anything I'd ever felt washed over me, then flamed like a fire deep inside me. The feeling terrified me, and I struggled in his arms, trying to pull away, to break off the kiss before I was lost forever, but he held me tight, kissed me deeper, and I fell against him, powerless, my whole body going soft and I kissed him back, our tongues finding each other, and then I was clawing at his back, wanting to be close to him, merge, my knees going weak as the heat of his passion overcame me.

Blake swept me into his arms and cradled me, carrying me back inside, out of the rain, broken with delight. He lay me gently in the tub. I stared up at him, just buzzing with pleasure, and he said, "Put on some dry things, or you'll catch cold."

"Okay," I said.

He leaned down and kissed me on the forehead. "We'll talk. Tomorrow."

"Okay," I said.

And then he left, and I hugged myself and giggled.

Fiona walked in, blowing out a cloud of vape smoke. She looked down at me and shook her head. "Girl," she said.

"I couldn't help it," I said.

"Yeah," Fiona said. "Well, he went John Cusack."

Chapter 12

When I woke up in the morning, I had breasts. I felt them as soon as I regained consciousness, swelling against my sheets, my nipples, so sensitive, rubbing against the cotton with each breath I took. They felt heavy, and when I sat up and looked down at them, then cupped them with my hands, feeling their soft weight, squeezing them. They were perky, firm, and I had pretty, pink nipples. I guessed they were about a b-cup and going into the bathroom and looked at them from the front, the side. I knew Blake wanted me to have them, that they would please him, and so they made me happy, even as I wondered if I would ever get used to having knockers bouncing around on my chest.

The girls at work would certainly have something to talk about, I thought, mentally going through a checklist, deciding I had as good a pair of tits now as any of the other girls at the office. It no longer scared me. Instead, I just remembered that kiss— my first kiss— and how good it felt, and I imagined Blake touching my breasts, fondling them, and I shivered with pleasure at the thought.

Biting my lip, I got an idea. Finding my phone, I took a picture of my boobs and texted it to Blake with a couple smiley faces. I sat on my bed for a minute, waiting for his response, but the dancing dots never appeared, so I sighed and put the phone down, excited to know how he liked my new assets.

I went out to the kitchen to make some coffee, scooping the earthy grounds into the filter, then firing up the pot. The coffee machine started to gurgle, and as I waited, I shrugged, feeling my breasts rise and fall, bobble from side to side. I did a little jump to see how that would feel, and they bounced. It almost hurt a little, and I wrapped my arms around them, hugging them. “Sorry, girls,” I said.

I heard Fiona’s door open— she usually woke as soon as she smelled coffee, and I turned toward her door, dropping my arms, throwing my shoulders back, my breasts out. “Morning,” I said, surprised at the newly feminine sound of my voice.

Fiona’s eyes fell to my chest. Her mouth dropped open. “Um, did you just pop those puppies out last night?”

“Yeah,” I said, wiggling my shoulders, giving them a shake. “Pretty cool, right?”

“I guess,” Fiona said, going to the sink, grabbing her coffee cup, rinsing it out. Her initial and out of character surprise repressed, she once more reverted to her half-lidded sardonic self. “Are you turning into a girl or something?”

“I think so,” I said. “What do you think?”

Fiona poured herself a cup of coffee, took a sip. “You’ll regret it,” she said.

“Why?”

“You’ll see. It’s harder to be a girl. Anyway, can you cover up?” She shook her head. “It’s weird.”

I laughed. “Can I borrow a bra? Some of your clothes?”

“Knock yourself out.”

I smirked and headed into Fiona’s room. I can’t believe I’m going to do this! I thought as visions of skirts and dresses danced in my head. I can’t believe I need a bra!

“Most of my bras are hanging in the closet,” Fiona called.

I walked into the closet, pulled the string that dangled from the bare lightbulb, and the close lit up. I saw her bras hanging there— she actually hung them to dry, and I giggled with excitement as I touched them with my fingers— so soft and mysterious. Hers were all black, so I just grabbed one, slipped the little straps over my shoulders, fitted the cups over my new breasts, and reached back, struggling to hook it, and when I finally got it hooked the straps had slipped down off my shoulders, so I hook them with my thumbs, pulled them back up, and felt the cups lift my soft chest, press my boobs together, the weight shifting to my shoulders. I felt a flush of feminine pride at getting my bra on— my first bra! And I shrugged and hopped again, curious how it would feel now that I had some support. My breasts still jiggled and bounced, but not as much.

Hmmmmnnn.

I started going through Fiona’s clothes. She was all about black, and I slipped into a pair of her leggings, surprised at how they seemed to hug and caress my legs, then felt a thrill as I stepped into a flouncy skirt— my first skirt! Which flustered around my mid-thighs. I found a black blouse made of some thin, clingy material, with a wide collar that hung loose around my shoulders, leaving one shoulder bare, and once more I felt this

rush of pride and joy as I plucked at the blouse, adjusting it, then did a little twirl and headed out to the kitchen, throwing a hand on my hip and saying, “How do I look?”

Fiona had her coffee cup in one hand, her vape pipe in the other. She raised an eyebrow— she should really do something about those brows!— and said, “actually pretty cute.”

“Really?” I said, feeling newly insecure, needing assurances even as I felt my heart flutter. Cute. I looked cute?

“Yeah,” Fiona said. “Cute. Do you think your boss might be freaked out by your — woman-ness?”

“Probably,” I said. “Oh! Can I borrow your boots?”

“You’ll fall over,” Fiona said.

“Not the stilettos. Yet. The ones with the smaller square heels. You know?”

“Whatever,” she said. “Just stop girling out on me. It’s way too early for all this estrogen.”

I turned and hurried back to her room, found the boots I’d remembered her wearing sometimes— they were ankle boots, with short heels, and I slipped into them, stood, felt a little wobbly, but I would make it as long as I didn’t walk too fast. Fiona wasn’t much of a purse girl, and I didn’t know how to do makeup, so I decided to just go into work like this. I mean, it was a lot for my co-workers to take in anyway.

As I left the apartment, my heart raced. I’d never gone out dressed as a woman, and what if my neighbors saw me? What if someone saw me and knew I was a man? Or, had been a man?

As I walked, I thought a couple guys gave me looks— like ‘you’re hot’ looks, and I tossed my hair, smiled, feeling pretty. But, as I got to the office, I froze outside the door, heart racing once more. This was a terrible idea. I couldn’t just walk into the office like this, announce that I was a woman now. They would all laugh or be grossed out.

“After you,” some older guy said, opening the door and gesturing for me to enter. He looked like he was wearing a toupee. It was enough. I didn’t want to see rude, so I said, “thanks” in my soft new voice, and walked through the door, feeling like a woman.

I was actually worried the man was going to follow me, try to hit on me in the elevator, but he saw some other guys and wandered over to them, talking loud.

Relieved, I got into the elevator, breathing, trying to keep myself from panicking. It felt like my heart would burst right out of my chest when the elevator reached my floor, the bell went “ding” and the doors opened.

I stepped out, fighting to urge to turn and run down the stairs, back to my apartment, to hide. But I took one step, then another, pulled open the glass doors to the office and made eye contact with the receptionist, Hailey, a pretty blonde with big eyes and always perfect make-up that made me feel self-conscious about my bare face. “Good morning,” I said, giving her a little smile as I walked toward the offices.

“Good morning,” she said, giving me an odd look, like she was trying to place me. “Pardon me, do you— Oh!”

I nervously hooked my hair behind my ear while she let her eyes drift up and down my outfit, my figure, back to my face. “Kelly?” She said, not sure of what her eyes were telling her.

“It’s me,” I said, smiling. We stared at each other, neither one of us too sure of what to say. Finally, feeling so awkward, I said, “Gonna head back. See you later.”

“Sure. Yes. Good morning,” Hailey repeated, clearly shocked.

Omigod, I thought, going to my office, closing the door, collapsing into my chair, gasping. That was so— odd, I thought. This was going to be a long day, I decided, feeling so... vulnerable. I checked my hair, once more felt naked looking at my bare face. My phone buzzed, and I looked to see Blake had responded to my text with a wink smiling face and the words, “Sexy.”

“Siri,” I said, “call Blake.” I needed to talk to him. To hear his voice. “Doll face,” Blake answered. “Your tits are fucking awesome.”

“Oh, thanks, um, but— I don’t know if I can do this.”

Our offices have glass windows that look out onto the hallway, and I noticed my co-workers start to cycle past, trying hard to act like they weren’t looking me over even as it was obvious they were. “Everyone is acting— I feel strange.”

“That’s normal,” Blake said. “This is your fist day as a woman.”

“But— Blake— I’m not a woman!”

“You are,” Blake said. “You’re my woman and don’t ever say otherwise.”

“You know what I mean. This is all...”

“Babe,” Blake said in a calm, confident voice that seemed to just wash the anxiety right out of me. I sat back, my fingertips to my cheek and nodded as he spoke. “Everything is fine. I promise. I want you to just be you and don’t worry about anything. You’re my girl now, and I’ll take care of you no matter what.”

You’re my girl. The phrase sent a tremble through my whole body! “Okay,” I said, feeling calm, confident, protected.

“I’ll pick you up for lunch at 1,” he said. “Bye, babe.”

“Bye,” I said, with a sigh, clutching the phone to my breast. How had this happened? How had I become his girl? And why did I feel so— special about it?

My boss, Ginger, walked to my window. Unlike the others, she looked right at me, kind of made small nod, then opened my office door while giving it a small knock. “Kelly!” She said. “Can we talk?”

“Sure,” I said.

“Let’s do it in my office,” she said. “More privacy.”

I got up, smoothen my skirt, and follow her to her office— which was all oak and leather, with some potted plants and paintings of mountains and oceans. I kept thinking about Blake, reminding myself that he’d promised to take care of me.

“So,” Ginger said, her face blank. “What’s up?”

“Am I in trouble?” I said.

“Trouble? No, no, no,” Ginger said. “Please. I just want to make sure you are comfortable. I just— can I ask you a question?”

“Of course.”

“Just so I can make sure not to — I’m not sure how to ask this— but how do you identify now? Which gender?”

Once more, I felt that— scared feeling— a feeling that I should just turn and run. I’d been a man for my whole life, and now I was a woman, or becoming one, but it just seemed like such a big thing to say it out loud. I know my life would never be the same. I shifted my position, felt the weight of my breasts shift in my bra, and I nodded. “I’m a woman,” I said. “A woman.”

“Wonderful,” Ginger said, with a not entirely convincing smile. “Well, let me assure you that our company embraces people of all genders and orientations, and I want to tell you if anyone here does anything inappropriate, you should report it immediately.”

The comment made me feel cold. It seemed like she was only worried about lawsuits and legalese. I felt suddenly- odd. Like I wasn’t just another girl at the office, but like a hand grenade or something exotic that was full of threat and danger. Still, I wasn’t fired. “Thank you,” I said. “But I hope I will be treated just like any other girl.”

“Well,” Ginger said, “I doubt you have to worry about being sexually harassed like the other girls!”

“Excuse me?” I said.

“Oh, just trying to lighten the mood. I didn’t mean any offense.”

I decided to let it go. As if I wasn’t as pretty as any of these girls! “I know,” I said, matching her fake smile with one of my own. “Well, if that’s all, thanks again. I look forward to continuing to doing a great job, just like always.”

“Of course, Miss O’Hara,” Ginger said.

Miss. The first time anyone had called me miss. And I liked it. Miss O’Hara. It had a nice ring to it, I decided. Not quite as good as Mrs., but for now, Miss would do.

An hour later, Jane poked her head in my office. “You got together with Blake,” she said.

“Yeah,” I said, brushing my bangs back.

Her eyes fell to the swelling of my chest. “And you’re willing to be what he wants you to be? To give up your identity?”

“Yes,” I said. “I— don’t think I have any other choice.”

Jane shrugged. “I thought you were stronger.”

“I’m not.”

Chapter 13

I met Blake outside the office. He walked right up to me, took me in his arms and kissed me, gently brushing my hair away from my face. “Hey, gorgeous,” he said, putting his hand on the small of my back, guiding me toward his black Mercedes SUV.

“Gorgeous?” I said, butterflies cartwheeling in my stomach.

He opened the door to the car for me. “Gorgeous,” he repeated, helping me step up into the SUV. I didn’t really need his help, but I wanted it. He went around and got in on the other side. “How’s your day been?”

“My boss called me ‘miss,’” I said. “And Jane told me I was weak.”

“You’re feminine,” Blake said. “Sweet. You know why?”

“Why?” I said, gazing at him, admiring his square jaw, black hair, seeing him with new eyes, with the eyes of a smitten girl.

“Because that’s the way I want you.”

I felt myself shiver with pleasure again. “I want to please you,” I confessed.

Blake glanced over at me and winked.

He took me to Bonjour. Our first real date, I guess. Blake pulled out my chair for me. Ordered my meal. Once the waitress had gone, he stared at me until I blushed, dropped my eyes. “What?” I said, my voice a whisper.

“Just taking you in,” he said. “Admiring what you’re becoming. The first time I saw you, I knew I would make you my girl.”

“Oh,” I said.

“I’m serious, but you need to understand. I have high standards. I mean, for today this is fine.” He gestured toward my outfit. “But my woman needs to be put together at all times. Make-up. Jewelry. Outfits. You can’t be seen with me looking like you just threw something on.”

The smile left my face. I felt myself tense up. “I— I didn’t have time, and these were the only things...”. It pained me to hear him judge me, to feel I had let him down.

“Hey, babe, stop talking.”

I did. Sitting back, nodding.

“Today, this is fine. I’m cutting you some slack because you’re new at all this. But, I made an appointment for you. A spa. They’ll give you a make-over, teach you some things about makeup and that kind of stuff. And after that, you’ll meet with a personal shopper. She knows what I like, so she’ll put together some looks for you to wear.”

“Okay,” I said, realizing I would have to cancel plans to meet with Jane.

“You don’t ever leave the house without makeup again. Got that?”

“Of course. Yes,” I said. “Whatever you want.” Blake seemed so different now, so much more—demanding. It wasn’t even like we were friends anymore. I felt like he was talking to me like I was his servant. I didn’t know if I liked it, but I was his girl now, and what choice did I have? I saw a woman sitting behind us glance over her shoulder, clearly disgusted with the way Blake was talking to me, but I looked away, while Blake kept talking.

“I have big plans for us. We’ll date for a time. Take a couple trips. Once I am sure you’re not going to embarrass me, I’ll introduce you around to better people than the ones you know. Show me you can perform, look good on my arm, we’ll get you out of that shitty job, that dirty little apartment.”

I smiled and nodded. He’d made it clear he wasn’t interested in hearing what I had to say. I was hurt, a little offended, but then, what did I expect? He had never wanted me for who I was— which had been a man— he wanted me to become his ideal woman. And I felt— I felt like I had to do it.

The food came. I did my best to eat in as lady-like a manner as I could muster, glancing occasionally at the women around me to how they sat, held their utensils. They were all so classy, put together, and I could see this is what Blake needed me to become. I would take it as a challenge, I decided. An opportunity. I would become the perfect feminine partner for him.

Blake kept talking the whole time. I smiled and nodded. Then, he drove me back to work, feeling bewildered, confused, even a little scared of what he wanted from me, what he expected— and the fact that he didn’t seem remotely interested in what I wanted. When he helped me out of the car, I squeezed his arms and looked up at him. I don’t know if he saw the conflict in my eyes, the fear, but he pulled me to him and

kissed me, a long, lingering kiss that erased all my fears and concerns and made me remember that I was his, and that's all the I needed to be.

I couldn't concentrate on work the rest of the day. I kept going to YouTube, watching make-up tutorials, hair tutorials. I created a Pinterest account and started to pin cute outfits, though Blake had made it clear his stylist would be picking out my clothes. I just wanted to see what women were wearing, to immerse myself in their world, my world. Blake had ordered an Uber for me— a Cadillac— and I climbed in, smiling, nervous for my trip to the spa, my makeover.

I walked in and the girl at the desk— gorgeous, I would die for skin like that!— greeted me as Apollonia. I realized this was probably going to be my name now and smiled as she took my hand and led me to a changing room, handing me a silk robe. “Take your clothes off,” she said, “and prepare to be pampered.”

Soon I found myself in a mud bath, cucumber slices over my eyes. After, I sipped cucumber infused water while a girl did my nails. She chatted away, and I listened, smiling, nodding, hoping I would remember what she was doing as she fitted me with extensions and then painted them a seashell pin. After, I held up my hands and admired my nails, turning my hands, watching how the light glistened on their smooth surface.

“You like?” The girl said.

“I love them,” I said, feeling like I had needed them, wanted them my whole life. She passed me off to another girl, who pierced my ears— three times- and fitted me with diamond studs and some small loops that sparkled when I turned my head.

She then led me to the cosmetologist, who greeted me with hugs and air kisses. I was so excited. I felt like this was one of the big secrets of the female sex, the whole world of make-up and I was about to learn the things I needed to know as a woman. She started to do my face, explaining what she was doing and why. I almost felt like I was high— no, I did feel high, buzzing as she filled my head with so much important knowledge about eyeliner, mascara, blush and lipstick. She showed me how to make my eyes pop, my lips look fuller and more kissable, and when she finished doing my face, I stared, unable to stop from giggling.

“I look gorgeous,” I said, admiring how she had accentuated the feminine beauty of my face, given my skin such a glow, the blush on my cheeks so subtle and yet so vital.

“You are gorgeous,” Nan, the cosmetologist said. “

I remembered Blake telling me I was never allowed to leave the house without make-up. It had hurt a little when he’d said that, but looking at myself now I couldn’t imagine ever leaving the house without putting on my face. I mean— seriously? When I could look this pretty?

“I’ve put together a make-up kit for you, honey,” Nan said. ‘They’ll give it to you when you leave.’”

“Thank you,” I said. “You’re so talented!”

When I finished, I headed back to the changing rooms. I felt like I was glowing. I had never felt so pretty, and yet- the thought of putting Fiona’s cheap rags on made me feel a little sick. I mean, it was almost criminal for me to wear such shabby clothes. Of course, Blake had thought of everything. He really was an amazing man— a better man than I had ever been, which just made me realize how much better off I was as a woman, as his woman.

The stylist, who called herself Jazz, met me at the door to the changing room holding a little black dress and a bag. “You didn’t think I would let you leave dressed in those faux downtown art scene dreadfuls did you?” She said.

I looked at the little dress. “Can I fit in that?” I said.

“Easily.”

The dress was short, with a plunging neckline that would leave a lot of my new cleavage out there for the world to see. In fact, I would be half naked. I felt scared. “Maybe I should just wear my other things?” I said.

“Honey, they wouldn’t let you clean the stores we’re going to dressed in those things!” Jazz said, and then she took my hand and dragged me to the dressing room. She’d also brought elegant lingerie from France, and I found myself squeezed into a balconette bra, a pair of tiny little silk panties, and then squeezed into the tiny dress with hugged my curves and let the world see what a woman I’d become. The bra lifted my breasts, and just as I feared I now had — cleavage deep as the grand canyon, my soft

breasts seeming bigger and more pillowy than ever as they threatened to spill out the top of my dress.

Jazz had me step into a pair of what she told me were Mary Janes— I called them cute. They only had a one-inch heel, and though Jazz assured me these were just my “little girl shoes” until I was ready for “big girl heels” I felt a little annoyed she wouldn’t let me try something more feminine. “I’m pretty sure Blake will want me to wear stiletto heels,” I said. “Something more feminine.”

“Trust me, doll. You are not ready for stilettos, but you will be living in them soon enough.”

We went shopping. Once more I felt high as she had been in and out of the dressing room, trying on different outfits— dresses and skirts, blouses and sweaters. She knew exactly what Blake wanted, so it was more a matter of finding the right fits, the perfect looks for me. I spent the next few hours walking out, putting a hand on my hip, turning, letting Jazz and the shop girls look me over, nod or shake their heads— no. I lingered in the dressing room and admired myself in each of the outfits, pleased at how well I filled them out, how pretty I looked. But the ultimate test wasn’t just for me to look pretty, but to please Blake, and so each time I eagerly strutted out, waiting to see if they would meet Blake’s approval, as determined by Jazz. When she nodded, my heart fluttered with pleasure. Once they had found an outfit, the girls would bring me jewelry— bracelets, rings and necklaces, and I felt giddy at the sight of all the pretty jewels sparkling, felt just like a doll as they draped me in these gorgeous pieces. Then, Jazz would take a picture.

“Use these pictures to make sure to out together these outfits exactly as we have designed them,” Jazz said. “Very important. I know you are new at being a girl, and until you learn you must defer to our judgement.”

“Of course,” I said, admiring myself in the full-length mirror, the way my earrings and bracelets sparkled, the necklaces dangling in my cleavage. I didn’t think it could get any better until one of the girls walked up with a selection of purses.

My eyes lit up at the sight of all the pretty bags. I had never noticed them before— purses- but my newly feminine eyes sparkled with excitement at the sight of them, with their sleek leather, gilded buckles. “I want them all!” I said.

“Of course, you do,” Jazz said, picking out three that she told me were perfect for my outfits, then instructing which ones to match with which clothes. She handed me a little black purse with a gold chain, and I slipped it over my slender shoulder, then clutched it lovingly to my side, looking in the mirror once more, feeling— complete. Feminine. Blake’s.

“That’s it!” Jazz said. “All done!”

I felt my heart sink. “No. Can’t I try on a few more outfits?”

“Not tonight, dear. I’m afraid it’s time to go.”

“You’re no fun,” I pouted, and then I felt a sudden stab of fear as for the first time I thought about paying for all this. “How much is all this going to cost?” I said.

“Don’t you worry your pretty little head about that,” Jazz said. “Your boyfriend is rich, and he likes to spend money.”

I sat, knees together, my purse in my lap, while Jazz used Blake’s credit card to pay. My lipstick was tacky, and I idly smacked my lips, looking around the store at all the female mannequins, the pretty dresses. This was my world now, and I supposed it would be for the rest of my life.

A girl could get used to it.

Chapter 14

Most of my new clothes would be delivered, so Jazz and I trudged to my apartment with just one clothing bag and a few shopping bags filled with my cosmetics and some jewelry. I walked in, shopping bags dangling from my arms. Jazz put my dress in my room and left in a hurry, clearly revolted by my apartment, which I now saw was gross and beneath me.

Fiona lay on the couch under her comforter, glazed eyes glued to the television. I felt bad for her. If she would just work on herself, she could have such better skin and healthier hair. I walked over to her, sat on the couch, slipped my purse off my shoulder and set it on our cheap, fake wooden coffee table.

Fiona eyed me. "You look like a Stepford Wife," she said.

I knew better than to expect a compliment from her, so I just rolled my eyes. "What's going on with the dance moms?"

"Dude," Fiona said. "I mean, you're a guy. Or, you were, and now look at you. How can you do this to yourself?"

"I didn't do it to myself," I said. "Blake did it to me."

"This isn't you," Fiona said. "I know you. You're not— a bimbo."

"I'm whatever Blake wants me to be," I said, turning to look at her. "I can't say no to him! I just want to please him! Can't you just accept that?"

Fiona started to say something, then stopped herself. "Okay, bro. Whatever. I'll try to be happy for you, I guess?"

"That would mean a lot to me," I said.

"Well, you do have a fucking incredible rack."

"Thanks," said, flush with pride at the compliment, glad I had such good breasts.

"Guys keep staring at them!"

"I bet," Fiona said.

Then, we turned our attention back to the dance moms and their endless drama.

Chapter 15

I got up 2 hours earlier than usual and carefully did my make-up, fixed my hair. I'd been given a simplified make-up plan until I got better at my make-up skills, and I was surprised and pleased at the job I'd done when I finished, batting my wet lashes, admiring my plush red lips. I dressed, careful not to mess up my make-up and put on my Mary Jane's, then slipped on the jewelry Jazz had chosen for me to wear. Blake had told me I should send him a picture of myself each morning so he could give me feedback, so I fussed and tugged and worried until I was finally out of time and took the picture, text it to him, hoping he would be pleased. Then, slipping my purse over my wrist, I headed off to work.

The girls all gushed over my outfit, and I gushed right back. The guys kept their distance, though I caught more than a few checking me out, and I felt a thrill of feminine pride at the way I was affecting them.

Blake approve, and I almost cried, I was so happy. I knew I could be the woman he wanted me to be, and I ached to see him, to spend time with him, to please him, but we wouldn't go out on our next date for three more days, so after work I went home, put on my nightie and practiced walking in heels, watching videos all night on how to do my make-up, how to walk and talk and move like a woman. I was determined that next time Blake saw me, there would be not a trace of the man I'd been left, and he would see that I was worthy to be his woman.

Of course, there was one more big change still to come for that be true. It bugged me that I was not yet all woman. I still had my junk, though it had gotten smaller. Still, I now sat down to pee, like a good girl should, and I waited eagerly for my final change, the one that would truly make me the woman Blake wanted me to be. What would it be like? I wondered, constantly, when I had a woman's sex? What would it be like when Blake made love to me?

Would I have periods?

I hoped so. I wanted it, because I knew Blake wanted it. How else could I have his babies?

Chapter 16

I found myself clicking around in my heels, dresses, a purse slung over my wrist. I heard some of the guys at work laughing at me, making fun of me, but I didn't care. I had Blake, and he was more of a man than any of them would ever be. I checked my make-up and hair constantly. Nothing was more important than being pretty, being put together at all times.

I thought of Blake constantly over those long days between dates, and I clung to my phone, desperate for each text from Blake, for the feeling of it vibrating in my palm as he sent me his messages. I slept with my phone— it was the closest thing I had to him, and I even nestled it between my breasts, thinking of him, pleasing him, being held and kissed by him.

By the time Friday rolled around I was so full of sexual tension I felt like if a warm breeze blew up my skirt I would orgasm. I longed to give myself fully to Blake, to surrender to him completely. I needed to take him inside me, but I still did not have a vagina, and I ached both with the need to be filled and the frustration that I didn't have the biology yet to fully serve my lover.

After work on Friday, I went to the salon for a full makeover— exfoliation, make-up, hair, the works. Looking at the fees, I swallowed. It would take a week's pay for me to get all the treatments I needed. I really couldn't afford it, and yet I couldn't not afford it. I needed to be perfect, I needed to have glowing skin and my make-up skills just weren't up to a Friday night dinner date with a man of Blake's status. Why did I have to be born a stupid boy, I wondered? I pulled my wallet out of my purse and fished out my credit card.

"Enjoy your spa day, Apollonia," the girl said as she processed my card.

"I will. Thanks."

"Big date?" She said, handing me back my card.

I slipped it into my wallet and slipped it back into my purse. "Huge," I said. "Oh my God, he is so hot and amazing."

"Go get your man, girl," the receptionist said.

I smiled as I went into the changing room. Go get your man. I had my man already. Or, he had me. I just had to make sure I didn't lose him!

Hours later, the spa treatment had calmed me a bit, and I walked back and forth in our kitchen, proudly perched on my first pair of stilettos, walking, turning, walking, turning. I had my phone set up to record me, and I watched the recording, pleased, giggling. I looked good. Graceful. Effortless. I was sure Blake would be pleased.

I was wearing a tight little red dress— Blake had texted me that morning. “Red Dress.” So, I knew this was the outfit he wanted me to wear. I'd gotten extensions at the salon, so I now had golden hair pouring down over my bare, slender shoulders, and I loved the feeling of it brushing over my soft skin, bouncing as I walked. In fact, I felt like my whole body had become all about the bounce— my breasts, my big, plump but, my hair— everything bounced as I walked, and my jewelry sparkled. I stared at myself in my phone, practicing different smiles, sucking in my cheeks to deep my dimples. I was pretty! So pretty! Blake would have to be pleased; he would have to want me!

Fiona watched it all from the couch, her face scrunched up in a mixture between confusion and disbelief.

The phone buzzed. I shivered. “Meet me downstairs.” “

Omigod!” I squealed. “Wish me luck!”

“My ears!” Fiona groaned.

“Buh-bye!” I minced toward the door, suddenly remembered my purse and hurried back, grabbing it, checking my face and hair one more time.

“Don't keep him waiting,” Fiona said. “Guys hate that.”

“You're so right!” I yelped with fright, hurrying to the door. The elevator ride down took forever, but I finally found myself pushing open the outer door, conscious of my posture, plastering a smile on my face and then— what?

Blake stood on the sidewalk holding a bouquet of roses in his hands, and behind him was a horse drawn carriage. He wore a dark suit, a bright red tie, and he looked like a big, hunky piece of cake. I just wanted to eat him right up!

Blake looked me over, appraised me, and when he met my eyes and winked, I tingled all over. Then, he smiled that big, toothy smile, and my knees went weak. Blake gestured toward the open door to the carriage. “After you.”

I giggled, walking over to him, eager for him to see how graceful I walked in my stilettos. He nodded appreciatively, handing me the roses as he helped me into the carriage. "You've been working hard," he said.

"Are you pleased?" I asked, batting my eyes.

"Very."

In the carriage, he pulled me to him and let me nuzzle against him as the carriage moved through the streets, the horse hooves clomping. He put his hand on my knee, then let it slide up my soft thigh. I wanted to ask him so much, I wanted to tell him everything, but I didn't. He'd made it clear I shouldn't talk too much on my own, that he would let me know if he wanted me to speak. Instead, he talked, telling me about his plans, his business. I pretended to listen, my arms wrapped around his body, holding him, breathing deeply of his salty, masculine musk.

I knew when the time came, I would become the woman he wanted me to be. I knew how to please him. All I needed to do was look pretty, perfect, and support him and be his girl. It was a simple, easy life, and one that I had never dreamt of or wanted, but now that I had it?

I was happy. I was Blake's girl, and that's all I ever needed to be.

