

From Punk to Pop - Part 2

By TheSpiralledEye

Hobbie tugged at the fishnets sitting beneath his ripped jeans shorts.

“Are these really necessary? The boots almost reach my knees and the shorts are covering the top half anyway, you can barely see them and they are so thin they are basically nothing!”

“Trust me, they add to the vibe.” Johnny insisted.

He'd arrived at the hospital just as Hobbie had been released with a clean bill of health and several appointments with a counsellor scheduled. He'd burst into laughter immediately, seeing Johnny carrying a frankly irresponsible number of bags from various shops, all filled with feminine clothes more to Hobbie's style. Which was to say, punk. Of course male clothes and female ones different wildly in that style, which was how he found himself in a crop top, shorts, fishnets and boots with Johnny encouraging him to put on a pair of gold hoops.

Luckily, his piercing holes hadn't closed when he changed so he didn't have to go to a parlour to get it redone and they were fairly easy to put in. Hobbie blushed; he felt ridiculous.

“Come on, check yourself out.” Johnny urged, trying to manoeuvre the stiff new woman towards the mirror.

“Fine, fine but I know I look-”

The words froze in his throat; he looked...amazing. He looked like all the punk girls from Rolling Stone he'd cut out and stuck into his journal as a teenager. All he was missing was some eyeliner and lipstick and he'd fit right in. Maybe it was because this body was so new it didn't quite feel like 'his' yet, but Hobbie felt confident. He couldn't find a single flaw in his appearance and that was so alien to him. A strange sort of confidence filled him and his lips turned into a smile.

Johnny threw an arm around his shoulder and grinned, poking a finger into Hobbie's soft cheek.

“See? Didn’t I tell you?”

“Yeah , yeah, alright. You win.”

“Wait till the others see you at the recording.”

Hobbie’s good mood instantly soured; the others. It was one thing to let Johnny know the truth but Cass, Iggy and Sid? He wasn’t sure, he knew for certain he didn’t want Francis Francis finding out; there was no way he’d sign a scandal waiting to happen. Besides, Hobbie had meant what he said, he cared about the music. If they became the band with ‘that guy with the rare disease’ their songs would never get centre stage like he wanted.

“No.” he shook his head, “Let’s keep this quiet for now.”

“Mate, I really don’t think that’s an option anymore.”

Hobbie thought for a minute.

“We’ll say I chickened out, that this girl, the new me, will be our new lead singer.”

“There is no way the gang will buy that.” Johnny shook his head, “You care about Solid Mercury more than anybody.”

“Francis Francis might though, he’s a producer, once he hears how good I sing in this body that’s what he’ll care about.”

Johnny didn’t look convinced but shrugged; it wasn’t his secret to tell after all and Hobbie knew he understood that.

“You have to tell the others though.” He insisted, “They’ll understand, I promise.”

Hobbie bit his lip; this could all go wrong so easily. All it would take was one of them being uncomfortable or off put and their whole band, and their friendship, would be doomed.

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Sid, Iggy and Cass were waiting for them outside the studio; Cass was pacing back and forth like a caged animal looking nervous but relieved when she spotted Johnny.

“Johnny, no offence but this really isn’t the place to bring your latest date.” She chided before turning to Hobbie, “No offence.”

Hobbie smiled nervously, he had no idea how to say this. How do you break this sort of thing to your friends; he would have to be delicate-

“This is Hobbie.” Johnny said simply, “He’s got this rare genetic condition and now he’s a chick but wait till you hear his new voice, it’s magic.”

Or he could just let Johnny blurt it out; that worked too. It took some convincing and some whispered shared secrets to convince them but eventually, everybody was on the same page. To his surprise, Sid hugged him, the giant teddy bear of a man almost crushing him with his bulk.

“It’s okay Hobbie, you’re still you! Just prettier.”

“Well thank you for the hit to my confidence.” He joked and Sid looked confused.

“I said you were pretty.”

Hobbie just shook his head, there was no point explaining.

“So you really don’t mind?” He asked nervously.

“You are who you are, it doesn’t matter what’s between your legs or on your birth certificate.” Iggy said quietly, “I don’t care if you identify as a dude or a chick, or neither.”

For a moment, Hobbie was tempted to ask Iggy which they were, this might be the only chance he’d ever get but he decided against it. Iggy was respecting his situation, he should do the same.

“Look, I won’t pretend it’s not a bit weird.” Cass shuffled, “But it’s not like you can control it or fix it. So long as we don’t blow our big shot today I don’t care.”

Hobbie beamed; this had gone far better than he'd thought.

"But uh, what are we gonna call you?" Sid asked, "Can't exactly pass you off as Hobbie anymore."

Well shit, he hadn't thought of that.

"These are my latest finds!"

A man opened the door to the studio; he was wearing an expensive three piece suit despite it being the middle of summer and his brown hair was slicked back; Francis Francis.

"You're on time, I like that, well except your leader, Hobes?"

"Hobbie." Hobbie corrected without thinking and Francis met his eye.

"I didn't see you at the shows."

"I'm new, Hobbie is...not performing anymore he decided to give me his spot because I am way better than him."

He hoped he was coming off as confident because he sure as hell didn't feel it. Francis Francis didn't look impressed; Hobbie got the distinct impression that he wasn't the sort of man who liked surprises, he liked everything planned out, specifically by him.

"Just listen to her." Johnny insisted, gripping Hobbie's shoulders, "She blows Hobbie out of the water."

"I'm not that much better than Hobbie." He replied irritated but Johnny increased his grip meaningfully.

"Come on, now isn't the time for modesty, right?"

Oh yeah.

"What's your name?" Francis asked.

CrapCrapCrapCrap!

Hobbie's eyes darted all over for ideas, eyes landing on the posters decorating the windows of the studio; blown up covers of Rolling Stone.

“Stone.” He replied lamely. “Uh, Vivienne Stone.”

Francis repeated it a few times, rolling it around on his tongue before shrugging.

“Alright, one chance. But no more replacing members, you got me?”

Hobbie nodded, sighing in relief. So far at least, they hadn't blown it. They made their way inside and set up in the studio, Cass looking a little irritated that they had to suddenly perform in a new key to suit Hobbie's new range.

“I swear, it's better this way.” Johnny insisted, “Now, ready? One...two...three!”

Hobbie opened his mouth and gave it all he had, he threw open his arms, he performed as if he were on stage. He gave the song every soulful edge he got, adding roughness and emotion to his voice when the lyrics called for it.

He could feel his voice vibrating through his chest and found his foot tapping along with it, his hips bumping in time and surprisingly, the others seemed to be getting into it as well. Johnny's head was banging as he strummed away and the others were adding a little flair to their playing as well. This was the most fun they'd had performing in ages and they only had one audience member!

After the first few songs they stopped...and waited. Francis Francis sat on the other side of the window with a few tech guys, arms crossed, deep in thought and Hobbie's palms began to sweat. Eventually the suited man leaned forward and pressed the intercom.

“That...was incredible.”

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“To Solid Mercury signing their very first record deal!” Johnny yelled, holding his beer high in the air before taking a deep swig, “And the special lady who made it happen.”

Hobbie giggled, but Cass rolled her eyes.

“We all contributed, Johnny.” She muttered.

“Of course you did!” Hobbie insisted, “You, Sid, Iggy and Johnny were amazing, especially accepting me and changing up the set so quickly in time to impress Francis! Johnny is just teasing me.”

“Yeah, we are pretty cool.” Sid smiled, already on his second beer somehow.

Hobbie couldn't wipe the smile off his face; this was it, they were finally hitting the big time. He didn't even care that he was in this female body, at least not right now, right now all he could see was the name Solid Mercury, flashing above Madison Square Garden one day.

Francis Francis hadn't wasted any time. They were fully booked doing recordings and then, the day after release they had radio visits, magazine interviews and meetings with the executives at Francis' company to give them full wardrobes. Francis insisted that half of making in the music industry was image; if they walked the walk and talked the talk while looking the part, the fame would follow.

“The trick to getting famous,” he had told them, “is to act like you already are.”

They certainly had the ludicrous spending down; Johnny was already well into spending their advance on the most expensive drinks on the menu. Normally they drank whatever was on tap but tonight they were sampling every craft beer on the menu.

The drink somehow tasted different on his new tongue, the bubbles seemed to tickle his throat more and Hobbie found himself reflecting on his new body. Everything about being a woman was so different; the way his hips moved when he walked, the way he could feel the constant weight against his chest. Nothing was overwhelming, but all the tiny changes kept building up.

A strange melancholy came over him as they drank; once again he saw his band's name in lights, their names spread across magazines. But not his. Vivienne Stone would be in his place, the world would never know Hobbie. His grip on the glass increased, he just had to wait for that new medication, once he was himself again he was sure the PR team at Francis' company could come up with something. They'd be making big bucks by that time, enough that Francis would pay anything to make sure the story never got out. Until then, he would just have to make his peace with being Vivienne Stone.

Hobbie had once seen the movie 'The Devil Wears Prada' with one of his ex girlfriends. In the film there was a scene where the main character walked into the wardrobe of the fashion magazine and found themselves in a world of colour and expensive cloth; totally overwhelmed. That's how Hobbie felt now.

The clothing department at Francis' company was twice the size of the room from the film. It was frankly huge and housed everything from formal wear to everyday clothes to something one of the stylists had referred to as 'airport fashion', whatever that was. They'd each been given a stylist that was walking them through the shelves, picking out an entirely new wardrobe for them to wear in public until they could be 'trusted to understand their own image' as they put it. Secretly, Hobbie was glad, he had no idea how to dress his new body. He'd been relying on the outfits Johnny picked out which were all quite...well they were certainly eye catching.

The stylist seemed to agree because they were adding an awful lot of fishnets and ripped items to the growing bundle in Hobbie's arms. They all met up at the changerooms and were instructed to put on an outfit.

"Your interview with Music Mash is important," The stylist said, "It's your introduction to the world, there will be a full photo shoot, so that people can get a good look at the new upstarts; remember image is everything."

Image is everything; seemed a bit much. Especially when Hobbie disappeared into the dressing room and saw what had been selected for him. A bright purple boob tube patterned with spiderwebs, some sort of strange long sleeve jacket that only covered the top of his clavicle, leaving a gap between his 'shirt' and his collar. A ruffled skirt, spiderweb leggings and a pair of shiny leather boots all done up with big buckles and chains.

When he stepped out he felt even more out of place; Sid and Iggy were in relatively low key jeans and leather jackets, Johnny was much the same, but his shirt had a neon green spray painted skull on the front and Cass was in a flannel of all things.

"Don't Vivienne stand out a bit like that?" Cass asked, looking peeved.

"Exactly the point." The stylist said as if it were obvious, "Iggy and Sid, the mysterious siblings of few words, Cass the approachable, down to earth drummer who takes no shit, Johnny, the classic headlining guitarist that makes all the girls swoon with just the right amount of edge, but not so much that it turns the older generation off and then Viv."

“Vivienne” Hobbie, corrected but the stylist waved him off.

“As the lead singer Viv will be centre stage, we want her looking bold and alternative, a little mysterious. After all, she’s been quite cagey about her history, or so Francis tells me.”

‘That’s because I literally don’t have one.’ Hobbie thought.

“It’s perfect, mysterious, cool, hot and confident.” The stylist grinned.

Hobbie blushed; he did feel oddly cool in these clothes. He walked to the mirror and spun around a few times, letting the short skirt flare with the natural shape of his ass and hips. He did look good. He felt a cocky smile pull at his lips and he struck a pose; Iggy clapped and Hobbie found himself giggling.

This was a lot more fun than he thought it would be; plus that stylist had just given him the perfect out to figuring out the answer to interview questions. If Vivienne was supposed to be mysterious, he would just answer in half truths and leave people guessing. It just might work.

He looked back to his reflection; at least he had a pretty face now. Though his good mood was soured somewhat when he noticed Cass glaring at him from the background, he turned to ask her what was wrong but before he could, she was gone.

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“Solid Mercury is a hit!” Francis cried with a wide smile.

They were all gathered on the couches in his office; the last three weeks having been an exhausting but exhilarating blur. The photoshoot had been a lot of fun; normally Hobbie wouldn’t enjoy having a camera flashed in his face but in this new body his confidence was only growing. Helped along by the fact that this persona the stylist and Francis had invented for him gave him the perfect excuse to get away without talking much.

The interview had come out and drummed up the necessary hype to make their first single a hit. It had only managed #4 on the charts that week but for a total unknown, that was great! Hobbie got to hear his songs on the radio, read online discussions about the band; he’d even cut out the magazine article and glued it to his wall, paint be damned. He wanted it there forever.

Sid and Iggy were having the time of their life, Johnny had never been happier, the only one who seemed oddly sour was Cass. She seemed to always be scowling, even when

they opened up the magazine to see their faces splashed across a double page spread. Well, perhaps that may have been because of the sheer number of 'Viv Stone' pictures. While the whole band together had taken up part of the page, Hobbie had three additional pictures of him lining the border of the second.

"You only answered half the questions and the ones you did, you barely said anything." Cass had grumbled, "Why do you get three extra pictures? People are going to start thinking we're just your backup or something."

Hobbie couldn't help but feel like there was a wedge being driven between them, one he really didn't know how to remove.

"Things are going great, the full album is set to release next Saturday." Francis continued, "So I want one big public appearance by all of you before then."

"What did you have in mind?" Iggy asked quietly, Hobbie could tell they were dreading some red carpet event.

"Roxie Sugar is having a party this Friday, I've asked her to invite you all. You can rub elbows with some industry giants, as well as their producers, have fun and get your pictures in the social pages. Just not for the wrong reasons you hear? No drugs, no sex scandals, no getting so drunk you hit somebody with your mercedes."

"Who has a mercedes?" Hobbie chuckled before noticing Johnny blushing, oh God, had he really gone out and bought a car on the royalties *already*?

He was so shocked it took a moment for him to register what Francis had even said. Roxie Sugar? The Roxie Sugar?

"The pop singer?" Cass spoke, "That sweet, louder than life, wears weird as outfits to red carpets, Roxie Sugar? We're a punk band, is that really the sort of person we want to influence our image?"

"Roxie is a massive party girl, she's also the biggest name in music right now. She's had more number one singles than anybody else at this company. She's good company in every sense of the word." Francis sniped back, "If a number one singer shows an interest in you up and comers, you must be good, right?"

“I guess...but I won't pretend to like her music.” Cass sighed. Francis grit his teeth but said nothing.

Hobbie had a strange feeling in his gut, like something was wrong. As they filed out to leave he reached out for Cass' arm, fully intending to pull her aside and ask why she'd been so mood only for Francis to grab him instead.

“Good work on that interview by the way,” He grinned, “All those mysterious answers were a dynamite idea, people are clamouring for more. Keep 'em hungry for a while won't you?”

“Uh sure.” Hobbie smiled, nodding quickly before turning back and noticing Cass was already gone.

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Hobbie only had a passing knowledge of Roxie Sugar; it was impossible not to know her name when she was on the radio and talk shows constantly but like Cass, he'd never been a fan of pop. Especially not Roxie's style of pop with over the top outfits, backup dancers galore and enough glitter to coat half the country. He'd fully intended to watch some interviews to get an idea of what he was in for but he'd fallen down an entirely different rabbit hole, reading comments about Viv Stone online.

The band's single was popular enough but most of the discussion online was about them. People loved the twins, especially Iggy, though Hobbie did get a weird vibe from just how hard people were trying to analyse their photo to figure out if they were a guy or a girl. Guys thought Johnny was cool, girls thought he was hot and Cass had a small contingent who were excited to see a female drummer in a band.

Most of the discussion though was about him. How hot he was, how mysterious, cool and confident he came off in the interviews and photographs. People were desperate for more.

‘Somewhere? What sort of answer is that when asking where somebody is from? She sounds pretentious.’

‘Nah, I think it's cool, who cares where she came from, she's here now.’

'Yeah! Live in the present, fuck the police.'

The last comment confused him a little but he had to admit, it felt pretty good to be popular. Even if it wasn't really 'him'. He leaned back in the expensive leather of the limo, dressed in the outfit his stylist had picked for him. Johnny had complained a little; having other people dress them didn't seem very punk, Hobbie agreed, it was a bit stifling. But they wanted to be big; it was just what you had to do these days.

They pulled up and Hobbie felt his eyes widen. Roxie's house was just like her; over the top, slightly gaudy and yet somehow classy at the same time. It was huge, modern and currently bathed in about a dozen different types of light. Inside music was blaring and each window seemed to glow a different hue from neon green to vibrant purple.

"This is it!" Cass squealed, almost leaning out the window, "Our first big industry party. Everybody remember to keep your cool, we don't want to get on the cover of the rags for all the wrong reasons. Make sure to show that Sugar girl what real musicians look like."

Iggy nodded and Sid was too busy drooling over several models getting out of the car ahead of them. Hobbie stepped out and was immediately blinded by the flash of a camera, despite this being a private residence the fence was crawling with paparazzi, desperately trying to sneak in with official press.

A lump formed in his throat; he suddenly felt nervous. As Hobbie he knew how to walk and talk, how to be himself but he wasn't himself right now. Not only did he have the pressure of making a good first impression on the musical elite of the country, but he had to do it as an entirely different person, in a different body. A body that he was suddenly hyper aware of. He wobbled on his heels and flinched at every flash of camera, his cheeks burning hotter and hotter with everyone. He just wanted to be him again!

An arm looped through his and he looked up to see Francis Francis there, smiling charmingly before practically dragging him away from the camera.

"You looked like a newborn lamb out there." he chided, "I took a lot of risks with this band and you especially, you're doing well so far. Don't blow it."

Hobbie swallowed the lump in his throat; he felt overwhelmed. Inside the house was hot and loud, his friends already dispersed; what he desperately needed was a few minutes to himself to get composed.

"Oh hey!"

The voice somehow carried over the entire party and Hobbie turned to see none other than Roxie herself in all her skimpily dressed, platinum blonde glory. She was dressed in a mini skirt and tank top that had been matched to the pink dyed tips to her hair. She jumped onto the golden bannister and slid down, jumping off the end and bouncing on her toes.

“Hi Frankie!” She cooed, leaning up against Francis with a sweet smile before turning to face Hobbie. “Oh! Is this the new girl you were telln’ me about?”

She surged forward till she was much closer than most people would consider comfortable; Hobbie could see the strawberry gloss glinting on her lips.

“You must be Viv!”

“Vivinne.” Hobbie corrected nervously, she was standing so close and staring him right in the eyes.

“Nah, Viv’s way cuter, suits you. Cute name for a cute gal, ya know?”

“Uh, okay?”

Hobbie felt completely out of his depth, Roxie seemed completely oblivious to any awkwardness though and just kept talking.

“Frankie here tells me this is your band’s first industry party! I hope this itty bitty party can be a good introduction to what it’s like! I wanted to throw a bigger one but I have to save something for awards season, ya know?”

“Uh-”

“Award season is when you can throw a real rager.” Roxie grinned, grabbing a pink cocktail off a tray as it passed and downing it in one go. “Now, are you having fun? Drunk? High? All that good stuff?”

“Roxie, maybe go easy on the new girl, hm?” Francis sighed, “You may be able to sell those wild party girl vibes but not everybody can get away with being a human steamroller.”

Hobbie certainly felt steamrolled right now; Roxie was one of the most popular pop singers in the western world and her being so overly friendly had him knocked for a loop.

“Oh soz, girl! Am I coming on too hard?” She cooed, “I’m just really digging the energy in here, ya know?”

“Do you end every sentence like that?” Hobbie asked before cringing, that had sounded so rude.

Roxie blinked in surprise and then threw her head back and laughed.

“Holy shit, I love that you weren’t even afraid to say that to me.” She threw an arm around Hobbie’s shoulders, “You speak your mind, I love that. Good to know you’re punk in spirit not just song and aesthetic ya-uh, you feel me?”

She burst into giggles and it was infectious because Hobbie found himself giggling as well. The nervous energy inside him had to go somewhere after all.

“Okaaaaaay, well, have fun on me sweetie! Don’t do anything or anyone I wouldn’t!” She called, practically dancing through the crowd away from them, leaving Hobbie starstruck and Francis sighing.

“She’s obviously been indulging.” Hobbie chuckled and Francis just breathed heavily.

“No, she’s always like that. Luckily the persona sells. If she couldn’t pull it off we’d have a PR nightmare every other week.”

Francis’ eyes met his; they were pointed. A warning. Hobbie smiled awkwardly and excused himself, running straight for the refreshments on a nearby table and downing several cocktails in an effort to calm his nerves. It didn’t work, it just made the whole room spin. His chest felt tight and Hobbie realised he could feel every inch of the tight, strapless bra the stylist had squeezed him into. It felt suffocating and in that moment, all he wanted was to take it off.

Paying little attention to where he was going he rushed up the stairs to the second floor where there were less people and flung open the first unlocked door he could,

slamming it closed behind him. Or he would have, had a woman not screamed and immediately run past him.

He blinked in shock and then horror when he realised exactly where he was. A bedroom, likely Roxie's bedroom given how she was spread eagle on the bed with her skirt around her middle and her panties off. Hobbie's mouth opened and closed, trying to find the words to say how sorry he was as Roxie quickly covered up. To his surprise though, Roxie smiled; but there was a glint in her eyes.

“Well,” She sighed, “I guess we'd better have a chat, huh new girl?”