

Sentenced to femininity.

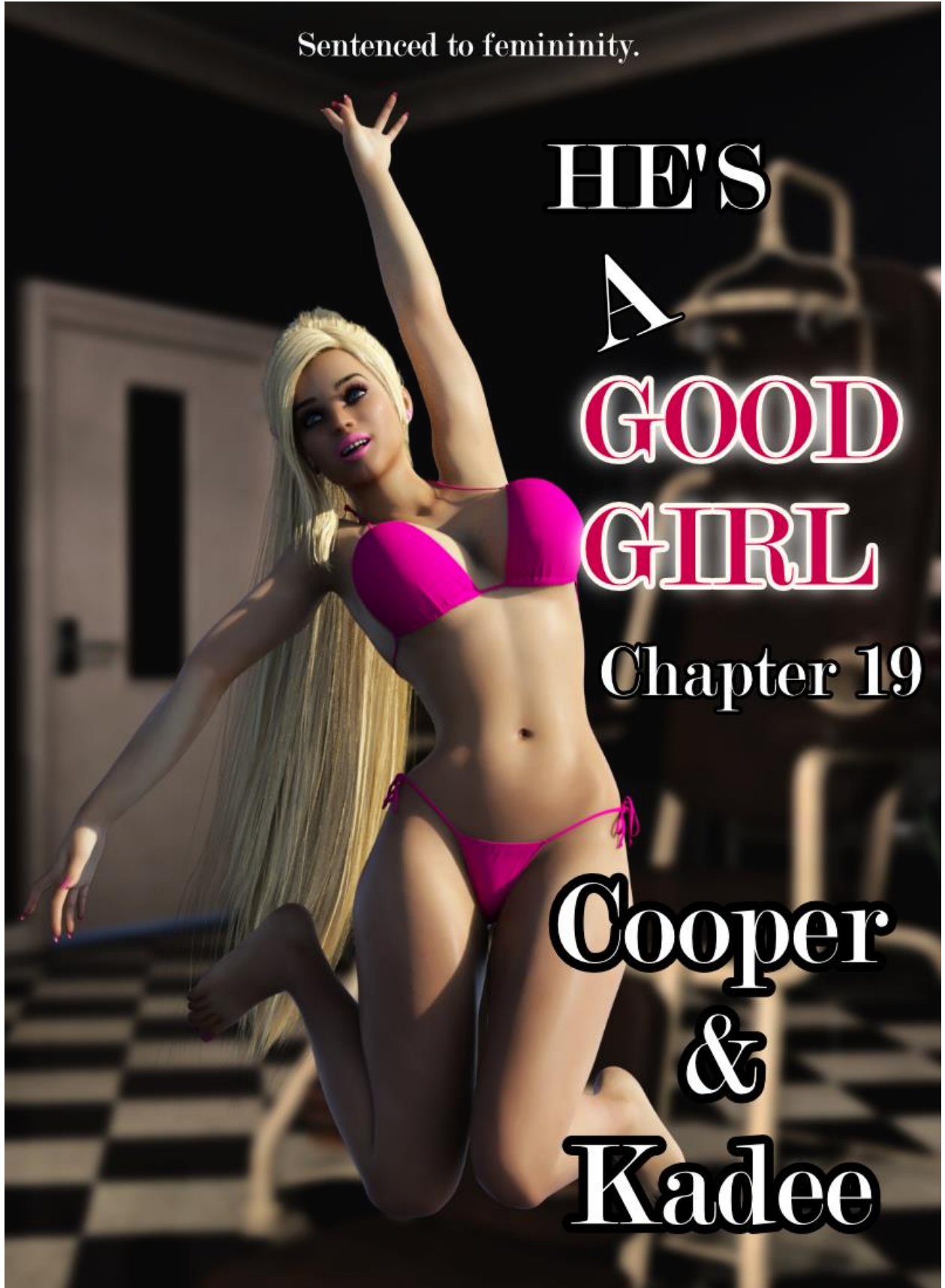
HE'S

A

GOOD  
GIRL

Chapter 19

Cooper  
&  
Kadee



“After changes upon changes

we are more or less the same.

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The same.

Paul Simon sang that way back in the 20<sup>th</sup> Century. It may be true for most people, but as I dusted rose blush onto my cheeks and then adjusted my bra straps before brushing out my long blonde hair, I couldn't exactly agree.

Changes. So many changes. The early weeks of my rectification had seemed to move so slowly, with so many changes as I slowly turned into Kathy in body and mind, all the while meeting new girls and forming relationships deeper and more meaningful than any I'd ever had in my life. These girls weren't just my friends, but they were my besties, and I knew we would love and care for each other for the rest of our lives.

Sitting at my makeup table, legs crossed, looking at the pretty girl I'd become smiling at herself in the mirror, it was almost impossible for me to believe I had once been a man. I looked over the jars and tubes and powders in front of me, the brushes and wands. This was my world now with all the pretty colors and sweets scents, a pretty world of pretty things and pretty people. I'd once made fun of women for all their silly obsessions with their nails, their makeup, even high heels as much as I loved the sight of a girl propped up on them. Now, I was the girliest girl of them all and obsessed over my nails like you wouldn't believe.

So many changes. They were all gone now: the originals. Ebony. Paige. Miko. It was just me and Trixie, and my time was coming soon. I missed them all so terribly, and even though I hadn't left yet I was already missing my little sis, worrying about leaving her here alone.

I smiled remembering the last day all of us were together. It was Trixie's birthday, and true to the teen personality that August had nurtured in her, she'd wanted a big party. For her special day, she'd decided she wanted to do a photoshoot where we would all be able to pose for a professional photographer like we were supermodels.

I guess there is a little teen girl in all of us, because we were all crazy for the idea, and her party was one of the most fun days of my life. Yes. We

had cake and dinner and presents, but that photoshoot! The camera clicking and flashing, each of us giggling and laughing, striking poses solo, together... one minute serious and sultry, the next goofy and girly... and then, while all of us were turned with our backs toward the door, looking through the props the photographer had brought, we heard a familiar voice call out, "Can a girl get a hug?"

We turned, and then screamed, running over to Ebony, throwing our arms around her and each other, overjoyed to see her again after what seemed like forever. Ebony joined right in, posing and strutting, and though I desperately wanted to just stop right then and there and talk to her, this



was Trixie's big day, and she was such a sensitive girl. We all knew to keep the focus on her.

Later, when Trixie's bedtime had come and she'd gone off, Miko, Paige and I joined Ebony by the pool, and we sat next to the shimmering blue waters, the smell of chlorine floating in the air, and she told us all about her amazing life in the real world.

Of course, she'd met a man. Evidently, he was

a real catch, a tall, handsome man who'd started his own tech support company and made in the high the six figures. "Our house is huge," Ebony said, dreamily, "but we have maids, so it's not much work for me."

"Okay. Wait. You've already moved in with him?" I said, thinking back, trying to remember how long it had been since she'd moved out.

"Well, yeah. I mean, look at me. What guy could say no to this?" He gestured down at his voluptuous body. "I didn't like living alone. I didn't feel safe." He smiled a sheepish smile.

We were all stretched out, facing different directions. "I'm happy for you," I said. "But I do have one question." I sat up and turned to face her. "Why didn't you call? You promised you would call."

Ebony looked embarrassed. I started to feel angry, thinking she was about to make an excuse, but she didn't. "I am so sorry," she said. "I just kept putting it off. I thought about you girls every day, and I kept meaning to call, but I didn't. I don't even know why, and there is no excuse. Will you forgive me?"

I looked at Miko and Paige. "I don't know," I said. "What do you girls think?"

We all made frowny, angry faces, our lower lips stuck out, but when we tried to look angry, we only ended up looking cute. We all burst out laughing. "Of course, we forgive you, but don't ever leave us in the dark again! We were all so worried."

"You sound like my mom," Ebony said, amused, but obviously relieved to be forgiven.

"I am not turning into your mother!" I screamed, and we all laughed some more.

Ebony wasn't staying the night, so we all said our goodbyes, shared some tearful hugs and went to bed. It had been a perfect day.



Then, it all changed. The next morning, Trixie refused to even look at me during breakfast. I tried to get her to talk a few times, but she was sullen, eyes downcast, ignoring me and the others. It went on all day-- at pole dancing, then later when we all went to the salon to have our nails done.

I have to admit, it hurt more than I could ever have expected. We'd been so close, and now I was completely cut off and the space between us left me cold, confused. What did I do?

Sitting in my room during the break before dinner, I couldn't concentrate, couldn't think about anything other than Trixie and what could have possibly gone wrong between us. I replayed the birthday party in my mind over and over, trying to think of something I'd said or done that might have offended her, but I couldn't think of anything other than Ebony showing up. Could that have set her off?

I had to do something, so I headed down the hall to Trixie's room. Knocked.

No answer.

I knocked again.

Again, no answer.

Was she out somewhere? My thoughts turned to Creepy Dick. Had he gone after her again? Had something happened? I walked around and around the building, but I couldn't find her.

My heart started racing. The walls closing in as I found myself breathing hard, looking around, panicking. Tears rolled down my cheeks, my mascara running, but I didn't even care if someone saw me like this. "Trixie!" I yelled, running down the hall. "Trixie?"

Just then, Calvin came hurrying around the corner, and I ran right into him. "Hey," he said, grabbing my shoulders. "Hey. What's wrong?"

I threw my arms around him, and it all just poured out of me. As always, he proved himself my hero as he listened intently, patiently, until I'd talked myself out. "Why don't we check with security?"

I nodded. "Okay. Yes."

He took my hand and led me to the security office. He was so strong, and I was grateful to have him, to be able to lean on him. He explained to the security guys what was up, and they let us go to the monitoring room. The tech there, her face flickering blue from all the monitors, found Trixie, whose image lit up one of the screens.

“What?” I said, confused.

There Trixie was, sitting on her bed, watching TV. I looked closely, trying to see if she seemed upset, troubled, but she looked fine. “I went to her room. I knocked.”

Calvin put his arm around me and kissed me on the head. “Maybe she just wanted some space?” He said.

“Why?”

“That’s just how teenagers are sometimes,” the tech said. “I have a teenage daughter. Trust me. They’re all a little crazy.”

I watched Trixie. Could that be it?

Calvin walked me back to my room and opened the door for me. “I can hang out for a little while if you want,” he said.

I thought about it, but I was pretty sure if I hung out with him in my current emotional state, we’d end up making out and I just felt like I should be focused on Trixie. “I’m okay,” I lied, touching his arm, forcing a smile.

“Maybe later?”

“Sure.” He said, and then gave me a little peck on the cheek. “Late night yoga?”

I nodded and went back to my room. It felt too big, too cold, too empty and I realized I couldn’t stand being alone right now. Half wishing I had invited Calvin in after all, I did the next best thing and went to see Miko.

“Hey, girl,” she said, as always delighted to see me, but her smile immediately melting into concern as she picked up on my emotional state.

“What’s wrong?”

We sat cross-legged on her bed, holding hands, and I told her about Trixie, how cold she’d been, how I was worried, what the tech had said. Trixie

tilted her head to the side. "She's been closed off all day," she said. "I couldn't get anything more from her than a mumble."

We decided there was only one thing to do. We knocked on the door, and as soon as she answered Paige knew something was wrong. "Omigod. What happened?" We were all so empathetic now it was almost funny.

We commiserated. We were all concerned. "Maybe we should just give her some space?" I asked, though I didn't feel that at all.

Paige, who was the leader now, thought about it for a moment, then shook her head. "What's your intuition telling you?"

"We need to go see her," I said, without a doubt. That's what my heart was telling me.

"Agreed."

"I think the same thing," Miko said.

We all three pounded on Trixie's door. "Open up. We know you're in there," I shouted.

"Okay. Fine," Trixie answered, her voice oozing teenage petulance. The door opened and she looked at us, trying to look like she was confused. "What?"

We pushed into the room. I put my hand on the small of her back. Pretty soon, we were all in a circle. "Dish," I said. "Why are you being so mean to us?"

"Me? Mean?" She made a not very convincing innocent little girl look. "I have no idea what you're talking about."

I crossed my arms and stared, waiting.

Trixie shook her head, stared back, but then, she seemed to break. "I don't know," she said. "It started, well, after the party when I went back to my room. I just started feeling scared, and then I was crying and crying, and I'm sorry, and I don't even know why, but I felt myself..." her voice trailed away.

"You can tell us," Paige said. "We're all here for each other. It's not like it was out there, before."



“I felt myself starting to hate you,” Trixie whispered.

“Hate?” The word stung. I felt like she’d punched me in the gut. I almost lashed out at her. How could she hate us, hate me, after all we’d done for her? I didn’t. I listened to my heart, and instead of trying to hurt her back, I said, “why?”

“I’m sorry,” Trixie said, and now she was crying, “and it makes me feel bad and I don’t understand why I —no. That’s not true. I know.”

She shut down again. Closed herself off, dropping her head, looking away. I looked at Miko and Paige, and none of us was really sure what to do or say, but I think we all three mentally agreed we needed to let her talk, and so we waited.

“I’m scared,” Trixie whispered, still not looking at us. “No one has ever been so nice to me. No one has ever really cared about me. Everyone I ever loved or trusted has ended up hurting me, and the party was so fun, and everyone was so nice that after, when I thought about it after, I felt sick and ashamed, because I don’t think I deserve to be happy.”

“Omigod,” I said, and I was crying now. There was so much pain in that, so much pain in her voice. How terrible that must be, I felt, to feel unworthy of love, of joy. I reached out, and Paige and Trixie and we wrapped our arms around her and each other and we all cried until we couldn’t cry anymore.

Everything went so fast after that. Paige and then Miko left. Calvin and I broke up. Then, it was just Trixie, and we got closer and closer, sharing all our secrets and dreams, reading the same books, watching the same shows, talking about boys and dating and what careers we hoped to have, what kinds of lives.

Trixie and I talked about our lives after FemRec all the time, even as we brought the new girls along, helped them through their early rectifications. The program was expanding, and there were now six new girls, so we were super busy.

The last few days, I could feel it. I knew my time was coming to an end, and I begged August not to just disappear me, to let me say my proper goodbyes, but she refused and just told me it was for the best.

“I’ll call every day,” I said to Trixie one afternoon as we lay out by the pool.

“Um, maybe not every day?” Trixie said. We both snickered. She felt like I was a little bit of a helicopter sister, and I was, so I couldn’t get mad at her for that.

The men came one night and woke me up. They removed my collar. I rubbed my neck, feeling the air on my skin there for the first time in months. I had thought that would be a big moment when I got rid of my collar, one I would remember for the rest of my life, but I felt nothing, and as I followed them out of the building all I felt was numb.

I slept in the van. I didn’t even know where they’d taken me, but they led me into an apartment, telling me some things, handing me the keys. I was groggy, not really paying attention, and as soon as they left, I went to sleep.

In the morning when I woke up, I could hear the crashing of the ocean waves outside my windows. I got up, curious, and threw open the curtains to my patio doors, squinting against the blinding sunlight. Once my eyes adjusted, I slid open the patio door and stepped out into the sun. The air smelled like saltwater and seaweed. A golden beach stretched out before me, and beyond that, a vast, blue sea rising to a cloud speckled sky.

Walking along the hot, golden sand, feeling the grains between my toes, I felt myself overcome with sorrow. Trixie would have loved it here. It was so beautiful and peaceful, but I couldn’t enjoy it. All I could think of was Trixie. I’d told her many times how much I loved her, but did she really believe me? I’d thought we’d be besties forever, sisters, and the thought of going on with my life now without her almost seemed like a betrayal.

I’d been scared to leave Trixie alone, had wondered if she’d be able to make it without me, but now I realized I’d needed her as much as she needed me. We’d promised to find each other after, to stay in touch, but Paige and Miko had already grown distant, too busy with their new lives, and we hadn’t stayed in touch. Would the same thing happen now between Trixie and me? What if I never saw her again?

The ocean was calm, and it looked inviting. Here I was, a woman now, facing this big, scary world, feeling alone, and for a moment, I had the thought of just walking into that water, deeper and deeper and just taking one last look at the sky and the sun before saying goodbye.

I raised my eyes to the sky, planning to scream, to curse, to say goodbye once and for all. I froze. There in the sky was a cloud that looked like a heart. And then, I felt Trixie's presence. She was there with me, her spirit. She hugged me, and I heard her voice whisper in the wind, the water, and she said, "It's okay to be happy."



