



## Chapter 10

You decide on the incognito look— over-sized Betty Davis sunglasses and a hoodie pulled up. It feels a little silly, dressing up like you're trying to hide your identity. I mean, you're not famous yet, but you are a little famous, right? Maybe famous adjacent? You went on a date with only the hunkiest woman in the world, so? You pair your hoodie with a flirty, pleated skirt, and you strike model poses, pouting at the mirror, and with your bubble gum lipstick and skirt fluttering around your thighs you feel like such a boy!

Your agent, George, has approved the incognito look. George has strict guidelines for how you appear in public, but they come down to two choices— you should always look very put together as befitting a star, or else like you are trying just a little too hard to look thrown together, but not actually thrown together.

You must wear makeup whenever you leave the house.

You must, and George drove this home by tapping on her desk with each word, you “Must. Always. Wear. Cute. Shoes.”

It really is so important for a boy.

You stop by Starbuck on your way to work, and a tall, handsome woman buys your drink. Of course. I mean, you're you.

But then, things get awkward. You smile up at her in thanks. “You have a beautiful smile.”

You giggle thanks. Then, uh oh, she holds out her phone to you. “Give me your number,” she says, and it’s an order, not a request.

George insisted you not date anyone unless with her approval. You are not allowed to give out your number, but she is so handsome, and it feels so rude. Still. You steel your will, remembering your dreams, your goals. “I’m seeing someone,” you say, making sure to make your voice small, apologetic. You don’t want her to feel bad.

“Maybe some other time,” she says, chucking you on the chin and walking away. She’s so confident, so sure of herself, it doesn’t bother her at all. It’s one of the things that really turns you on— confidence— and you ache with regret as she walks away because you are pretty sure she knows just how to get a boy off.

As you climb the stairs, your excitement grows. It’s the same old stairs, the same old door, but you are not the same old you, and it feels like you are a conquering hero, come home after a great victory.

As soon as you walk into the restaurant Brandy sees you and says, “What the hell?” She’s at the bar, wiping down glasses with a towel.

You grin and flip your glasses up onto your forehead as you walk to the bar, hips swaying dramatically. “I know, right?” You say, and you feel good, really good, because you can see Brandy is very impressed with you.

“How the hell do you know Ian Brooks?” She says, and now she is looking at you like you’re some kind of exotic alien bird that just landed here in her bar, preening.

“Oh, you know, friend of a friend,” you say, glancing down, modest, because a boy must always be modest.

“Friend of a friend?” Brandy says, planting her elbows on the bar and leaning forward. “I call bullshit.”

You roll your eyes up and shrug, letting her know that it is bullshit and that you can’t tell her, but you love the fact she knows it’s all bullshit.

“Fine,” she says. “Keep your little secret,” she says, “but is it a thing between you? I mean, are you guys, you know?”

“I have some other exciting news!” You chirp, wanting to change the subject.

Just then, the usual giggles as Lisa and Kiera emerge from their usual pre-work makeout session. It actually disgusts you. No couple that’s been together for so long should still be so lovey dovey. It’s gross. Kevin is already in his Curves uniform, his tight little shirt hugging his huge knockers. He’d changed just like all

men with the coming of The Hive, but Lisa had pressured him into breast implants, his C cups pushed up to a D, and she'd made him get collagen injections on his lips, giving him an extra puffy, swollen mouth. He had long, flowing blonde hair that went all the way down to his waist, and it was pretty clear to you that Lisa had gotten off on the idea of turning Kevin into a walking, talking Barbie doll.

As soon as they see you, they stop, and Kevin's eyes, framed by lash extensions, slit in feminine rage. Lisa, however, gets a smug, pleased look on her face. "Congratulations," she says, walking up to you, pulling you in for a strong, controlling hug.

"Thanks," you say, tilting your head back to look up at her.

Lisa cups your chin and stares into your eyes. "Didn't I tell you The Hive were our friends? That they would make your life better? And now, look at you!" She lets her eyes drop to your breasts, then back up to your pretty face. "You're pretty and fun, and you went on a date with Ian Brooks? What do you think of The Hive now, sweetie?"

It's a question that rattles you a little. You remember being a tall, strong man for a second, you remember a time when there was more to you than just being pretty, but isn't she right? Aren't you better off now? Aren't you lucky to have all these incredible women coming into your life, helping you succeed and reaching

the goal you'd had as a man, but were only accomplishing now that you were a boy?

"The Hive is amazing," you say, partly because maybe you are starting to believe it's true, but mostly because you know this is what Lisa wants you to say. "They've given me everything."

"That's right, doll. You just keep being a good little boy, and the world is your oyster."

Keira is looking at his nails, a sour look on his face, and he finally looks up and says, "It was only one date."

"Oh, Kiera," you say, extra sweet. "I love your hair."

"I hope you don't think this makes you special here at Curves," Kiera says. "You're still just a waitress."

Brandy and Lisa exchange an amused look, and it pisses you off. They love watching boys fight. "Didn't you say you have some other news?" Brandy asks.

"Oh, yes," you say putting your hands near your cheeks but not on them because you don't want to mess up your makeup. "I got a movie," you say in a breezy manner, with the same weight you might say, I got a mani-pedi. Like it's a thing but not a big thing.

"Are you playing a slut?" Kiera spits at you.

"Ohhhhh!" Lisa and Brandy say, smirking.

“Actually,” you say, planting one hand on your soft hip and using the other to toss your hair, “I’m the boy lead in a major motion picture,” you say.

Kiera huffs, turns and marches out of the room, hips swaying defiantly.

“Oh, I was hoping for a cat fight,” Brandy says.

“I think you’d be great as a slut,” Lisa says.

You all laugh. “I better go check on Kiera,” she says, shaking her head. “He’s probably crying his eyes out. Boys. Ugh.”

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You walk into the gym, yoga mat slung over your shoulder, wearing a sports bra and short shorts. Tom, the woman at the front desk, gives you the once over and says, “Hey, sexy,” with a smile.

“Hi!” You sing back, smiling as Tom checks you in.

“Have fun with your little dances,” Tom says. She and all the other women find it hilarious that boys are taking dance aerobics and Zumba classes these days.

It’s not like you have a choice, and as you walk past the LIFT room, where women are slinging free weights, doing bench presses, deadlifts, getting stronger, you ache a little for days gone by when boys were allowed to lift weights, to get strong. The Hive has made it illegal for boys to lift weights. They say it’s for your

own protection, that boys are too delicate and frail, that you'd injure yourselves, but you know the real reason: they want boys to be weak, to stay weak, to live in a world where they know women are stronger, dominant, where they know women are to be feared, or else looked to for protection.

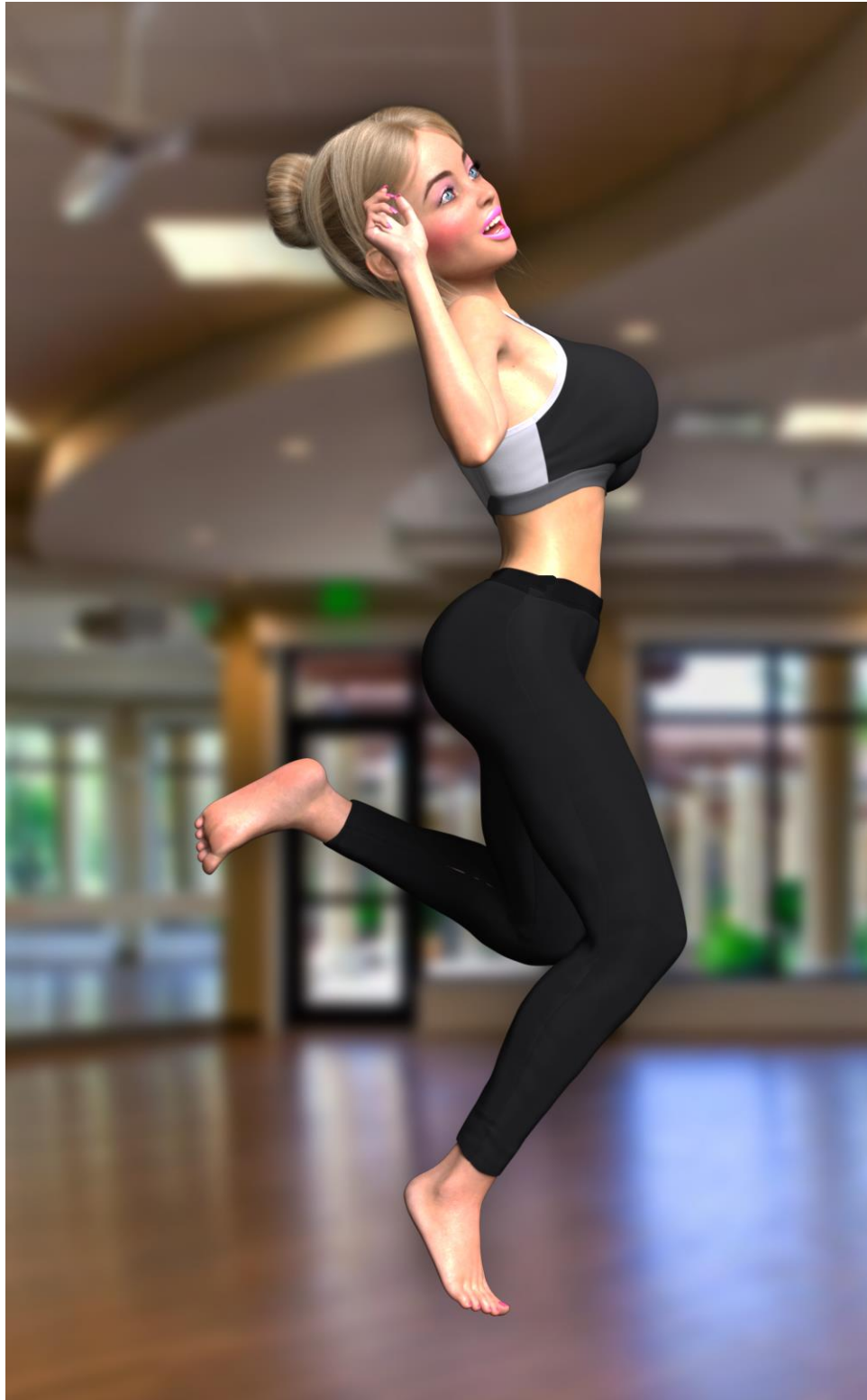
You get to the Dance room, and it's already half filled with pretty boys showing off their long legs, wearing bras, hair tied back in ponytails. You roll out your matt and stretch, and you are so much more flexible than you used to be as a man, so there is that. Some of the boys saw you on the red carpet, and they all come up to you gushing, begging for deets about Ian Brooks. "Is she as cool as she seems? Did you kiss? What's she really like?"

You giggle and defer, telling them a lot of nothing, just singing Ian's praises, talking about how great she is. The room buzzes, the boys looking at you with a new kind of respect, even awe. Your value is based on the kind of woman you can attract, and they all now see there is something special about you. You're careful, though, not to seem arrogant, or like you think you're better. "I'm just a small-town boy," you say with a little shrug. "I'm just so lucky Ian noticed me. I mean, me? It's a dream!"

Music starts thumping, and Cassie, the dance leader, comes bounding out from the back room, a big, bright smile plastered on



his face. “Okay, ladies,” he says– he always calls you ladies– “Are you ready to have some fun?”



“Yes!” You all shout in your little voices, sounding like a bunch of pre-teen cheerleaders.

Cassie starts to dance, and you all follow her moves, and she coaches and encourages as you start doing squats. “I know, I know,” she says. “Your glutes are burning, but it’ll be worth it when you’re strutting around the beach this summer in a thong!”

The boys all giggle. It’s all about your ass and legs these days, your abs. Every guy wants to have a great ass, sexy legs. It’s what women want, and they also like boys with pretty little arms, round little shoulders, so the only upper body work you ever do it just to tone. No boy wants muscle. It just looks gross! It’s not so completely awful being banned from the weightroom. You never would have learned how much you love dancing if you hadn’t been forced into these silly classes, after all.

You check yourself out in the mirror constantly, admiring your curvy shape, your bright skin. Even you are seeing yourself in a different light. You used to look at yourself and see this pretty little thing you’ve become, and think you were just another cute blonde, but now you are the girl who clung to the arm of Ian Brooks. When you look in the mirror, you don’t see just another cute blonde anymore. You see a queen.

