



## **YourEssence - Quarreling Lovers, Volume 2 - Chapter 4**

"Deep breath in. One... Two... Three... And release. Let your worries out with your breath. Every molecule carries an ounce of pain away from the body and brings in happiness and joy. The joy of your new baby, the life you've brought into the world," a familiar male voice rang in David's ears.

The sound of the voice soothed David. She felt so protected and cared for—Loved. A sharp pain disrupted the calm, and David's senses were flooded with panic. She looked down and saw she was in the hospital about to give birth. Her male self was standing at her side, holding her hand and reminding her of her Lamaze techniques, running through the breathing exercises. Pushing with muscles that she didn't know she had, David's passion for becoming a mother was manifest. She was finally doing it; with one last push, a feeling of great relief and an audible cry rang out.

David's eyes opened, and she saw the ceiling of her apartment. It was just as she had remembered it the night before and the day before that. Looking down, David's belly was its usual fit self. The curvature of growing life was nowhere to be seen. Even her breasts, a constant reminder of her femininity and form, didn't cheer her up this morning.

David got up, got dressed, and headed out the door of her apartment. Despite her qualifications in sales and management, she had been unable to secure employment as a 'trans woman.' The fact that her documentation all had her male identity led to a large number of difficult conversations. Some people were friendly, and some were supportive. A small number of individuals were cruel and bigoted. None of them were interested in hiring David.

Fortunately, David was pulled aside by a woman exiting the same office as she was and given some advice, "The mall has a no-questions-asked beauty salon. You can style hair, paint nails, manicure/pedicure, whatever. You have to clean up after yourself. They only take 15% of your take home for themselves, and you can charge whatever you think you're worth."

"It sounds too good to be true. What's the catch?"

"Well, it's not exactly easy work, you realize. Additionally, there's only so much business you can drum up with walk-ins. You'll eventually have to advertise to increase your income. So that's not cheap, and it's hard to do on top of that."

"I see; well, I'll have to check it out. I'm desperate at this point."

David did just that and began with simple nail painting services. She wasn't trained in cutting hair or giving manicures and pedicures, but many older women still preferred a hand-applied touch for nail polish. David really dedicated herself and soon had a set of regulars who would visit weekly to have fresh coats of nail polish applied. David wished her skill had drawn the customers back, but she soon realized it was the company that the women were seeking.

David spent weeks conversing with these women and managed to build relationships with them. There were three women in particular that stuck with her. Greta, an older widow with three grandchildren. Janet, a relatively young grandmother of seven. And lastly, Amy, a divorcé who never had children. David was caught off guard one day when Janet asked a particular question.

"When are you..." she paused. "I just realized, I don't think I've caught you're name. How have we gone this long without? Well, let's fix that now. Can you tell me your name, sweetie?"

David froze. He wanted to respond 'Diana' but she had agreed at her most recent couple's therapy session with Diana to stop impersonating her. Key among the asks was to stop using her name. Dr. Simms took Diana's side on this. "It will be better for your psyche to differentiate and actualize your own sense of self separate from Diana."

Looking across the room, David saw a simple arrangement of flowers at her fellow salon worker's station. Without a second thought, David responded, "Daisy is my name. That's so funny that we never swapped names," she said as she continued applying a second coat of polish.

"Such a pretty name for a pretty woman. Now, Daisy, when are you going to settle down and start a family? I know you modern women are all so career-focused, but you need to strike a balance! I did both and I'm glad I did. Plus, I can just tell by looking at you, you'll be such a great mother."

"Oh, that's so nice of you to say that. I'll admit, it is something I think about often."

"As well you should! You're practically glowing as we talk about it."

"I get pretty excited over it. I am working through some things, though. I had a... complicated relationship with a mother figure that led to some really mixed-up feelings. I have been trying to work through them with my therapist. It's slow progress, but I feel better about where I'm at than I had felt."

"It sounds like you have some complicated history, but being a mom is easy for women like us. Hell, it's harder to find the right guy than it is for two nurturers like us to raise a child."

"Isn't that the truth. My 'boyfriend,' if you could call him that, is pretty mixed up himself."

"Guys? They're all the same. Offer a BJ on your next date and they will give you anything you ask for. I got engaged twice that way just to see if I could!"

"Janet! You didn't!"

"Oh, I most certainly did! They only lasted a few days before I let the guys off the hook, but I proved my point to a friend. And now you can take my word for it, too. One BJ out of nowhere and you will have a man hooked for good."

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"Hey, Mary. Good to see you," Daisy said to her psychiatrist.

"Hello, Daisy. It's good to see you as well. Please take a seat. Where would you like to start today? Are you still having those recurring dreams?"

"Yes, I am Dr. Simms, but I was actually hoping we could talk about another topic today. It's a bit more, umm practical for day to day life."

"Well of course, Daisy. Tell me what's on your mind."

"It's been about three months now since Diana and I told you our secret. Unfortunately, we're very much stuck in the friend zone still."

"Yes, we've been discussing this in couples therapy. You know I can't violate the confidentiality of what Diana tells me in our private sessions."

"Yes, sorry. That's not where I was heading. I promise, I have a question. I just need to explain it this way for it to come out right."

"Well, I've been working at the salon and I've been doing really well. I have a number of regulars and they all have been helping me so much in adapting to living my life as a woman. A non-Diana woman. It's been weird, I still remember all the things that I did when taking Diana's YourEssence. I'm not fumbling around plucking eyebrows or applying mascara. I've got all that down still, but the part where I actually engage in a conversation, or talk about myself, is really awkward. I feel like when I was Diana I just went with the flow and everything came naturally."

Daisy noticed that Mary was taking a lot of notes as she was speaking. This led to Daisy pausing momentarily catching Dr. Simm's attention, "Go on, I'm just jotting down some notes for myself. I'm following everything you're saying."

"Well, I think I'm having a bit of an identity crisis is what I'm trying to get at."

"Hmm..."

"Hmm? What's that supposed to mean, Mary?"

"Oh, nothing. It's just I don't think you're having an identity crisis."

"Why's that?"

"Well, you just told me about how you are feeling and everything you said is distinct from how you behaved when you were Diana. I don't think you're having an identity crisis. I think you've finally found **\*your\*** identity."

"Let's not jump to that conclusion yet, Doc. I've still got a few things to say."

"Yes, of course. Please continue."

"So, I was working at the salon yesterday and my regular customer comes in. We talk about the weather, the local news, what colors look good on the customer's nails—typical stuff. Then out of nowhere the topic of dating comes up. I say I'm single, which I'm not even sure is true, but it comes out as though it were an easy truth to share. My customer then hands me a piece of paper folded over. It has her son's phone number written on it! She spent ten minutes talking him up to me. At first, I was just casually listening but as she continued to describe her son I became more and more invested. He's a software developer, trying to get a promotion to management. He plays videogames, likes superhero movies and is all around nerdy. He's like the antithesis of who I used to be. But I was captivated by the idea of this guy making his way in the world. Like he was living this life that he loved and I wanted that too. Or I wanted to be a part of it. I don't know! I'm feeling really mixed up," Daisy concluded running her hands down her skirt to straighten it

out. Her fidgeting and flushed skin was giving Dr. Simms more information to process as she began to consider her response.

"Did you call the number?"

"What?"

"Did you use the number your regular gave you to call her son?"

"Umm, I--"

"It's okay, Daisy. You can tell me anything. Remember, I'm here to help you as much as I'm here to help you and Diana."

"David..."

"Huh?"

"Diana hasn't been back to her old body in two weeks. She's trapped with Amber. I think they've moved in together already."

"Oh, umm, \*he\* hadn't mentioned anything about that when we met last week."

"So, you met with David like I said? He didn't tell you why he came to therapy like that?"

"Daisy, I can't tell you that. I've already said too much as it is."

"Well, I did call Lyle. That's his name by the way, Lyle."

"Ok, and how are you feeling about that decision?"

"Fine... I guess."

"Are you not sure? Was your time speaking with Lyle unpleasant?"

"No... I... I know how I feel about it. The conversation was really nice. It reminded me of dating David."

"Daisy, we've talked about this. You didn't date David. Diana did."

"Gosh, yeah. You're right. My mistake. I guess that fluttering kind of feeling that I have been feeling just seemed familiar and that's what my brain connects to when I think about it."

"That's to be expected, Daisy. YourEssence preserves more than just genetic information. It captures robust connectivity information of atomic positional data as well. That seems to allow it to store the state of neurons. That's not official documented behavior of the drug however. It's something I learned in my \*extracurricular\* studies these past months."

"Trust me, I'm the living proof. I can still speak fluent Spanish and make a mole rojo from scratch."

"Yes, well, the more you establish your own routines and choices as Daisy, the more that reality should fade. Speaking of which, are you going to be seeing Lyle?"

"Sigh"

"That's an unusual response. Do you not want to see him?"

"No, I do. I just feel like it's the beginning of another ending. That my marriage to Diana is ending."

"Do you want it to end?"

"No! Not at all. I love David! I want to be with him!"

"You said David though. Do you love Diana or David? Is this your Diana memories speaking? Or you?"

"Dammit. This is too fucking hard. I just want it to be easier!"

"I understand, Daisy. Really, I do. I wish there were an easier way forward through this for you. Now, why don't you tell me about Lyle?"

"He's sweet. He listens to what I have to say but he tells the funniest stories. He likes these movies that I've never even heard of, but they do sound kind of fun. I wouldn't mind watching one with him..."

"Well, that all seems perfectly reasonable. Why don't you ask him to a movie?"

"Oh, umm..."

"What is it Daisy?"

"I... uhh... already have a dinner date with him later tonight. I don't think we're going to the movies."

"Well that's great. A dinner date sounds lovely."

"It kind of does, right? I haven't decided what dress I'm going to wear yet. I was thinking something flirty but not too formal. Maybe something simple would be better, though. What do you think?"

Dr. Simms looked up at Daisy over her notebook and saw the excitement in her eyes. Dr. Simms wasn't dealing with a normal patient in the moment. She recognized all the signs, rosy cheeks, shoulders back, chest positioned forward emphasizing her breasts, her finger twirling her hair—Daisy was falling in love. Or at least crushing hard for Lyle.

"Something simple and straightforward seems appropriate for a first date, if we're speaking woman to woman. As your therapist I'd say you should pick the one that makes you feel the most like yourself."

"You're the best, Mary. Tell David that I miss him when you see him next. You know, not as my therapist or as his therapist. Just as my gal pal," Daisy said rising to her feet. She knowingly winked at Dr. Simms and let herself out of the small room.

Dr. Simms sat there bewildered by the conclusion of her session. Normally Daisy would want to sit and analyze every aspect of her choices, but this choice seemed to be one that she was looking for validation on. Mary had inadvertently given her just that. Mary took a few more notes on her patient and moved over to a filing cabinet that was behind her desk. Pulling out an old-fashioned key chain, she cycled through the keys until she reached one in particular. Using it to unlock the container, she filtered through a half dozen notebooks labeled "The Martins." She placed her latest notebook behind the other notebooks and closed the drawer.

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"Where is he?" Daisy wondered as she stood outside her favorite Italian restaurant. It was back in Daisy's old neighborhood where she had lived with Diana before moving across town to her current two-bedroom apartment. Standing outside the restaurant, the distinct aroma of roasted garlic loomed large, but Daisy's attention was on every car that approached hoping it contained her date for the evening.

Daisy had chosen a simple spring dress for her attire, but complemented it with two pearl earrings that dangled from her ears and a bronze bracelet that accentuated the spray tan that Daisy had agreed to receive as part of her own cosmetics training regiment at the local beautician academy. She rounded out her outfit with a three-inch Jon Clue heel that had cost her a small fortune. Daisy had

heard about the shoes from a customer and thought little of them until she saw them in person. The speed with which she went from indifferent to determined to own a pair was remarkable for any woman, let alone one who was still figuring herself out.

Checking her phone, Lyle was now fifteen minutes late and worse, Daisy recognized a couple walking down the street towards her. It was David and Amber. They were walking arm in arm with Amber smothering David in an overly needy way. Daisy chafed at the display. Daisy made eye contact with David about a dozen paces away but Amber kept her attention exclusively on David. As the married couple contemplated their next steps, a man placed his hand on Daisy's shoulder.

"Hi, Daisy. Sorry, I'm so late!"

Daisy turned to see Lyle dressed in a stylish yet comfortable pair of pants and button down shirt. He looked handsome, if a little bohemian for her tastes. The two had little time to greet each other as David and Amber were soon upon them. Daisy was panicking internally as her dalliance with Lyle hadn't been shared privately with David previously.

"Daisy, it's good to see you," David said stopping with Amber still clinging to his arm.

"It's good to see you too David. Let me introduce you to Lyle, he's the son of one of my regulars. She introduced us thinking we might 'get along,'" Daisy put peculiar emphasis on the last few words hoping to avoid any insinuation that she wanted to be there on this obvious blind date.

"Pleasure to meet you, Lyle. I'm David and this is Amber."

"Pleasure," Amber said in response to Lyle extending his hand to greet her. Her words practically oozed sex and registered almost as a purr.

"Party of two, Daisy. Daisy, party of two?" a waitress repeated herself looking for Daisy and her date.

"That's us!" Lyle called out. He seemed to be ready to move the date along and end this peculiar interaction on the street.

"Oh, you got a reservation here?" David asked.

"Yeah, I haven't been in ages. I wanted to get my favorite."

"Oh, huh. I guess I can't remember what that is anymore."



"Eggplant parmesan."

"Really?"

"Yeah, I fell in love with it."

David noted that this was neither his nor 'Diana's' favorite dish. "Well, we should be going—"

"Ooh! Eggplant. Let's get some too D-bear!"

"Uhh, I don't think—"

"Nonsense! Waitress! Waitress, hey. Hi, my boyfriend and I will be joining our friends."

"I see, give us just a minute and we will adjust the table for you."

"Isn't this great! We're getting an impromptu double date in, D-bear! You can tell me all about how you two know each other. I'm Amber by the way," Amber said reaching her hand out to greet Daisy.

"Oh, we've met before Amber."

"No, I don't think so. Ooh! Looks like out table is ready. This is going to be so much fun!"