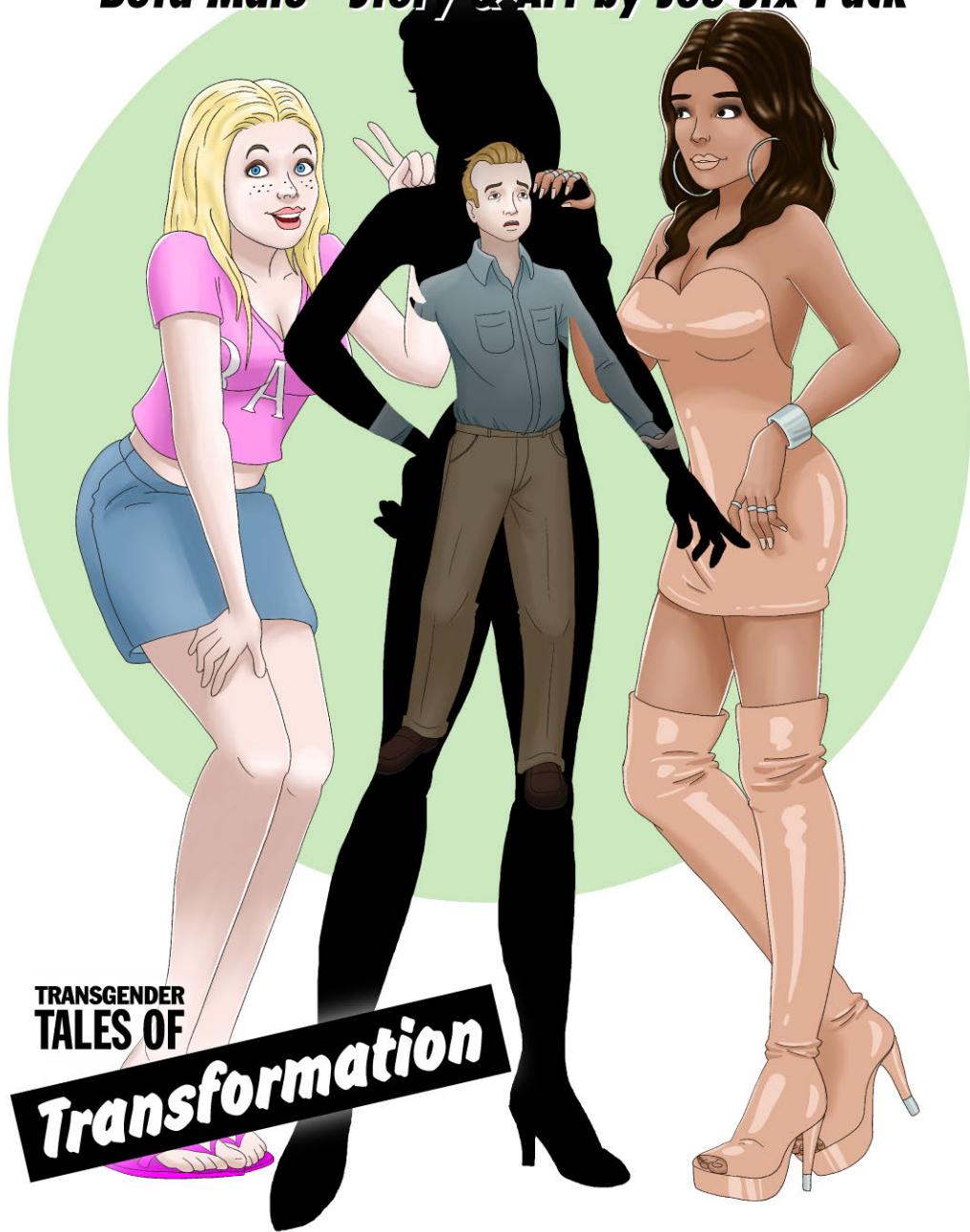


ADULTS ONLY

85 pages 25 illustrations

SWINDLED INTO SKIRTS

"Beta Male" Story & Art by Joe Six-Pack



TRANSGENDER
TALES OF

Transformation

J O E S I X P A C K

***SWINDLED
INTO SKIRTS***

**“Beta Male” Story & Art by Joe Six-Pack
A Tales of Transformation story**



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Based on the story “Sorority Girl” by himbotobe
and inspired by the illustration “A Wish for Fame” by Wrenzephyr

BETA MALE



And finally, Kyle Eastman closed the massive front door and locked it shut. The Anderson Mansion was, at last, his. This calm moment of solitude was something he had waited a little no time for.

In truth, it had been his property for over three years, but only now could he actually step inside. He had inherited it and the land around the mansion from his late great-grandmother, Esmerelda. Even though he was only 35, Kyle was the oldest surviving member of the family. He never expected to inherit the place, let alone see it again. It was three floors of old marble, big enough to have things like a “China Room” and a “Silver Polishing Room.” It was ancient, enormous, and cavernous. It felt even emptier to Kyle, as he was moving in alone.

His wife of ten years had divorced him almost one week to the day after he had been bequeathed the house in his Great-Grandmother’s will. Why? Well, she immediately began proceedings to sue him for the title of the mansion. He had loved his wife, Jaelynn, but when good fortune had finally fallen into Kyle’s lap, and made him a paper multi-millionaire, she had cut rope and gone for the money. To say he was bitter about it was an understatement. That was why he hadn’t been inside his new mansion until now. Three years of drawn-out legal proceedings had finally come to a close, and the court mercifully ruled in his favor.

He had to take out a mortgage on the place to pay his legal bills, but it felt absolutely worth it. The real-estate market in the area was depressed for now, but in three or four years it would pick back up and he’d sell the place for a fortune. He just had to be patient.

The other inconvenience was that he was starting over in a new city. He had lived in San Antonio for most of his life, but the mansion was in Southern California, specifically wealthy Brentwood. As a mid-level QA engineer in software, he managed to get transferred to the Carson office, even if he didn’t much like leaving home for an unfamiliar part of the country that was filled with tacky, self-obsessed people. He especially didn’t like that he’d be making a little bit less than he used to. However, he would be able to do repairs on the mansion and drive up the value for the sale. It would all pay off in the long run, he reminded himself.

Kyle sighed as he looked around the large, empty grand foyer, and wondered what the next few years would bring.

A symphony of tubular doorbells suddenly rang throughout the walls, echoing down the hallways, startling him to the point of nearly falling over. He caught his breath and turned around to answer the door.

Outside, a freckle-faced young woman stood, her straw blond hair waving in a gentle breeze, her pale blue eyes twinkling in the lights. “Hi!” she bubbled, bouncing on her toes. Her generous breasts bobbed in her ribbed pink tank top. “I’m Miley! We saw you moving in! Are you the new owner?”

“We?” Kyle asked, flummoxed.

“Oh! Yah!” The girl replied. “Me and my sisters. We’re across the street. Beta Alpha Epsilon house?”

Kyle didn’t even need to look. He was well aware of the presence of the sorority house across the street. It was one of the reasons the property values were down here. No one wanted to live next to a college sorority, especially one with the hard-partying reputation of the Beta Alpha Epsilons. They had regular police calls to the property, according to the neighbors he had spoken to.

Fortunately, Kyle happened to know that the sorority house was on borrowed time. It needed to be retrofitted to fit new earthquake laws, at an insane cost that was at least four times the value of the building itself, and the sorority didn’t have the money. They’d have to move out in a year or so, and whoever bought it would likely just tear the place down.

Again, Kyle’s patience would be rewarded in time.

“Oh, yes?” Kyle said, politely. “What can I do for you, Miley?”

“Like, nothing! We just wanted to welcome you to the neighborhood!” Miley said, showing her white, perfect teeth. “So, um, welcome! You gonna live here?”

She wasn’t going to fool him. He knew that the sorority had designs on buying the mansion, even though they were never going to be able to afford it. He was being scoped out by this nineteen-year-old, and not in the good way. “For a few years, at least. I hope to spruce the place up.”

“Wow! Great!” He had a distinct feeling he was disappointing ‘Miley’ as he wasn’t old and about to keel over. Nor was he some kind of porn merchant who could be tossed off the property for violating a law. No, he was here to stay, and they didn’t have any chance of getting this place. “Anyway, just wanted to say hello, and if you have any questions, ask for me. I’m the chapter president!”



“All right, Miley. I’ll do that.” He smiled back, knowing that if it were fifteen years ago, he’d have invited her in and tried to get her drunk. She was so out of his 20-year-old-self’s league, though. Kyle’s smile was met with a courtesy grimace, as the young Miley was obliged to be polite. This girl was carefully manicured femininity, raised since birth to be beautiful, and destined to live out her days in the presence of men who could afford to make her happy, Kyle thought to himself.

At five-foot-eight, pale and losing his hair, Kyle had made very few women happy, and his last real hope of ever finding love was to be rich. He had most of his future riding on the Anderson Mansion, and as gorgeous as Miley was, there wasn’t any point in torturing himself by lingering and drinking in one more drop of her magnificence.

“Thanks for dropping by,” Kyle said, as he waved and closed the door. He didn’t even wait to see her turn around so he could get a look at her butt.

This new life certainly wasn’t starting out easy on him.



If there was one thing that had been driven home to him about the LA lifestyle, it was that he was the dumpiest man alive. Not literally, but he felt like it. It wasn’t like he was overweight, but his thickening middle-aged body looked absolutely grotesque in comparison to the chiseled physiques of the men in his new office. Even the guy who verified his parking looked like he was about to rip off his sleeves and flex for him.

Fitness had seemingly run amok here. Going to the gym was a lifestyle in itself, not just something you do in between other more important things. He had yet to see some of his fellow office workers in anything but athletic wear.

The native West Texan usually began his day with a cup of coffee from the office pot, grabbed a burger for lunch and finished off his day with a can of Pepsi. In the new office, he had watched as his co-workers brewed green tea, went to a workout instead of lunch and had fizzy fitness water with lime on their desks. He tried a can of that stuff and couldn’t even choke down a third sip.

Begrudgingly, he found himself signing up for the company health package, with a gym membership included. If he was going to have to live here, he didn’t want to look like he didn’t care about himself, and it wasn’t like he couldn’t stand to lose a couple of pounds. The package also included “health awareness seminars” and “fitness of the mind” appointments he’d need to put

in his calendar. It all sounded like new age bullshit, but it was covered by the company.

After all, it wasn't like he was going to turn into some kind of workout freak, he reassured himself.

Even getting his hair cut turned out to be an ordeal, as there just weren't straight-up barbers in LA. There weren't even "hairstylists" to be found. Just to get the hair on the back of his neck trimmed, he had to talk to an "aesthetic consultant" who then took him to a "tonsorial artisan" who could do the work. Then he had to pay \$120 for the privilege. Life was very different in this city.

The drive home was just as legendarily bad as he had heard regarding LA traffic, and it was nearly seven by the time he rolled into his driveway. When he opened his car door, he was greeted by the evening air and the deep percussive thumping of club music coming from across the street. It was Wednesday, which meant a hump day party, and the sorority was already in full swing for the evening. There was a trail of emptied beer cans on the front lawn, strobe lights flickering away in the lower windows and screams and cheers coming from inside.

It was the first time he had seen one of these renown parties at the sorority house, and he did want to try and start off on a good foot with his new neighbors, so he didn't want to call the police tonight. Maybe the next time it happened, but not today.

So, with a groan he couldn't even hear over the beat, Kyle headed inside to his large, empty house. He flicked on the TV and noted that the cable still hadn't been turned on, and there was no Wi-Fi.

When he went to bed later that night, the booming beat was still going, his windows rattling, the girls still laughing, and the party still in full swing as he tried to read his book.



At work, Kyle was slowly — by stops and starts — getting more comfortable. So far, he hadn't met a lot of people on his wavelength, but remained hopeful. Being so close to Hollywood, he found that most of the chit-chat around the office centered around showbiz talk. Back in San Antonio, they might get hung up on *Game of Thrones* or some other serial for a little while, but here in La-La Land, the gossip was about weekend box office numbers and the comings and goings of executives at the big movie studios.

He stuck to work-related issues, because he had no interest in which celebrity dined at which “eatery” the previous night, or who was seen with who on the dance floor at some godforsaken dance club.

The sorry state of socializing with his co-workers drove him to following along as they went for a lunch workout one afternoon. The guys in the office liked to talk about how many curls, lifts or squats they were able to do, and although he had little interest in the subject, he at least understood the topic.

Kyle approached the workout with trepidation, not knowing where to start. His co-workers jumped on the various machines like kids to a jungle-gym, leaving him puzzled. He did what he thought was the one exercise he was sure of and got running on a treadmill. The gym wasn’t much to look at. It smelled like salt and BO and everyone was so preoccupied with what they were doing that all he could hear was a lot of quiet grunting, clanking metal and the whirring of gears.

As he ran, Kyle noted that the treadmill display in front of him was showing daytime TV, which he couldn’t turn off fast enough. Wasn’t physical exercise grueling enough without adding redneck paternity fights to watch?

After spending a few minutes on the treadmill, he realized he had no idea when he was supposed to stop or what to do next. Kyle eventually slowed down and wandered away, collecting his breath with his hands on his hips. There was a counter nearby with towels, and he needed one desperately to deal with how drenched he was.

“Hey,” said the attendant. “New here?”

“Yeah,” Kyle replied. “Could you tell?”

“Aw, you’re not doing that bad. It’s always hard to get started.” He tossed a towel at Kyle. “It gets easier from here on out. I’m Braden, by the way.”

“Kyle.” He began to swab himself with the mercifully dry towel. “I just moved to the area. I’m not used to working out.”

“Gotcha,” Braden replied. “It’s kind of a culture shock, the way fitness is so important to people around here. Appearances are everything in this town.”

“Yeah, you’re telling me,” Kyle replied, relieved that someone else saw the same thing he did. “I thought all those stories about people constantly working out, spas, saunas, botox, and doing plastic surgery and all that weird stuff was just an exaggeration.”

Braden smiled. “Maybe a little, but it’s pretty close. When I moved here a few months ago, I was about fifteen pounds overweight and white as a ghost.”



Kyle looked at the boy, not quite believing that could ever be true. Braden was only 18 or 19, but he was chiseled and tan, as if he had been produced in a test tube. “Really?” He said, making sure he sounded as skeptical as he felt.

“Yeah, I get a lot of that. Hey, I have a job in a gym, what do you expect? I work out a bit.”

“I guess that figures,” Kyle replied. “Anyway, any idea what I should do next?”

“I’m not one of the fitness consultants who work here, but I’d suggest...” He considered it for a moment. “You going for muscles or tone?”

“Which is easier?”

“Tone. Do some leg presses on that machine over by the window. You can probably kill about ten or fifteen minutes on that.”

“Great. Thanks!” Kyle said.

“No prob, dude!” Braden replied. Kyle noted that he hadn’t yet met a man who hadn’t called him dude here. LA sure was different. “I’ll see you around.”

“And thanks for the advice,” Kyle replied as he headed for the machine. He liked Braden. He seemed like a good kid with a decent head on his massive shoulders — especially since he was basically still a child.

Kyle spent another humiliating half hour at the gym, fighting his total lack of endurance and being constantly reminded how every other person he saw was ten times more fit than he was. Looking down at his flabby body fight for survival was shameful. After just ten minutes he had sworn off pizza, after twenty minutes he promised himself he’d cut out all carbs, and by the time he was headed back to the office, he was just going to stop eating altogether.

His head was still buzzing with worry as he headed in to meet the therapist he was scheduled to see that afternoon. It was all a part of the company health plan, and at the very least, Kyle was hoping for about an hour of hooky from work.

It turned out that Dr. Carpenter was just what he needed. She had him relax, lie back and just take it easy for their first session. She was a strikingly attractive woman with a soothing voice and a calm, comforting demeanor. Kyle immediately liked her. Professionally, of course.

Dr. Carpenter explained to him that these sessions weren’t traditional psychiatric appointments — but they weren’t quite therapy either. It was just a way to make sure that the stresses of the job were being dealt with effectively, and using what she called an “emotional toolkit for the workplace.”



Kyle spent the hour telling his life story, but that quickly turned into his anxieties about moving to a new place and adjusting to the new Southern California lifestyle.

“The one thing I want you to take away from this session,” she said, “is that you are always the one in control, Kyle. Even if it feels like things are never going to settle down, they will. As long as you make the effort to adapt and thrive.”

Kyle wasn't sure how he was going to use that bit of advice, but he was grateful to have someone listen to his problems.

“And I'll see you next time,” she said with a smile.

Kyle looked up at the clock on Dr. Carpenter's desk, and an hour had gone by. It felt like just a few minutes.

“Oh. Yes.” Kyle got up and shook the dust from his brainpan. He felt awfully groggy. He took a moment to look around as he gathered his wits. Like any doctor, there were certificates and awards on the wall of the office, and two stood out to him. A plaque that awarded “Dr. Stephanie Carpenter a doctorate in hypnotherapy” from UCLA.

“Hypnotherapy?” he asked the doctor as he read it again.

“It’s not something I get a lot of call for these days,” she replied. “I use traditional therapeutic methods on most of my current patients.”

The second item to attract his attention was just as he closed the door behind him, was another plaque that read “For our everlasting gratitude, your sisters at Beta Alpha Epsilon.”

The door was already closed by the time he had even processed it, and didn’t feel it was important enough to ask if it was true. He smiled, imagining that the calm doctor was once a wild party girl at the house across from his mansion. It certainly was a small world.



Even with an “emotional toolkit for the workplace” — whatever that was — work continued to be a bit awkward for Kyle. His job didn’t require a lot of interaction, as he spent most of his day in front of a computer comparing bug reports with internal bug fixes and testing them. He basically only saw people when he got up to use the bathroom or if they had to report to him.

In his old job, he had spent years building up relationships, bit by bit, in quick, short conversations. Here, he had to stat over, and it was a slow process. The one person he knew by name was Dana, the intern who would get his lists of assigned bugs together every morning and prioritize them.

She was a perky college student who always had a smile for him, and he appreciated that. He had been trying to work out a way to strike up a conversation with her for well over a week before she took the initiative. “Oh, hey,” she said one morning, after going over the priority list, “do you know anything about video games?”

“Only all there is to know,” Kyle replied. “It’s a hobby.”

“Great!” Dana said with a bright smile, as she tucked some of her long dark hair behind her ear. “I have to buy a present for my little brother and I’m, like, totally lost.”

“What’s he into?” Kyle asked.

“Oh God, I dunno. Zombies? I guess?”

“Zombie Island is by far the best in the category. He probably already has it, but it’s coming out with a deluxe expanded edition next week with all the DLC, a map and a figurine.”

“Perfect! I’m sure he doesn’t have that. Thanks, Mr. Eastman!”



That use of ‘mister’ broke his heart. Was he really so old that he was a ‘mister’ now? “Hey, lay off the ‘mister,’ okay?” He asked Dana. “You’re gonna make me feel old. Just call me...” He paused for a moment as he had a strange impulse to change things up. “...Ky. All my friends call me Ky.”

“Oh, sure! Thanks, Ky! I’m gonna look up the game online and tell me if I’m ordering the right thing, okay?”

“Just ask what platform he uses. PC, Xbox or PlayStation.”

“Oh. Is that important?”

“Really important.”

“Looks like I’m talking to the right person, Ky!” She said as she headed on to her next assignment.

He cocked his head for a moment, as he tried to process exactly why he had just invented a new name for himself. He had never called himself ‘Ky’ in his life. In fact, best he could recall, he used to have a friend who had used the term once.

Once.



From then on, the best part of Kyle’s days at work was when Dana came by. Much to his surprise, she seemed to enjoy talking to him just as much as he did, and pretty soon, she was hanging out at his cubicle whenever she had a spare moment.

Even though she was obsessed with celebrity gossip and showbiz news like everyone else, she was amused by Kyle’s lack of knowledge, and she liked teasing him about it.

It wasn’t long before they were going to the gym together to work out, chatting and laughing their way through the hour.

It wasn’t easy for him to keep up with Dana, though, as she was clearly a seasoned gym bunny, who powered through a workout with the kind of enthusiasm that made Kyle jealous. Even the pre-workout stretching was impossible to match, as Dana’s young, limber body bent like taffy.

“So how do you do it?” Kyle asked her. “How do you work out so hard?”

“When I was in high school, I was a smoker. Can you believe it? I got into that disgusting, gross habit just to hang with the cool kids. Eventually, I quit, but then I gained 20 pounds. So I started to exercise to lose the weight. Every time I get the itch to have a smoke, I just work out even harder. I never want one of these death sticks to touch my lips again!”

“You traded one addiction for another,” Kyle commented.

“Maybe. But a healthy one.” Dana snapped her fingers. “But you’re distracting and delaying. Get back to work! Let’s see that sweat! Come on, Ky!” She said, encouraging the middle-aged man to try harder, “You can do it!”

Looking at her, Kyle didn’t even think it was possible. He was perfectly willing to try, especially if he got to spend his time in the gym appreciating Dana’s young, lithe body — and her round, magnificent breasts. For these workouts, she tied her long hair in a pony tail and wore a black and electric blue outfit of tight fabric that accentuated her youthful, lean figure. He was never going to match that kind of fitness, Kyle told himself.

“Maybe you should just do this alone, Dana,” Kyle said, huffing and puffing. “I’m just slowing you down.”

“No way, Ky!” She said. “You are gonna be just as good at this as I am! Tell you what, forty-five minutes at lunch just isn’t cutting it. Meet me here after work every day, and you’ll be touching your toes and doing ten miles on the treadmill in three months. Deal?”

“I guess?” Kyle replied. He loathed the idea of being in a gym for that much time, but on the plus side, his workout partner was a shapely young girl who he was blessed to be in the presence of. “No, I’m the one in control,” he told himself. “Adapt and thrive,” he said, repeating the advice of Dr. Carpenter. “Yeah! Let’s do it!” He said, matching his partner’s enthusiasm.

“High five!” Dana said, and Kyle gave her hand an energetic slap. He felt good about it already. The doctor was right. Adapt and thrive.

After that, Kyle was meeting up with Dana at 5:15 and spending two hours in the gym with her every night. His lunch was now spent actually eating, and Dana was taking him to a new place every day, all of them serving up small, healthy, low-calorie, high-protein meals he was trying to get used to.

He almost had more pills to take than food to eat, since Dana had given him her “super secret” mix of vitamins in a giant unmarked jar. He knew they were working because he felt sick every morning after taking them. He did keep taking them, though, because the results were undeniable. Kyle had lost quite a few pounds already, and he was eager to follow any kind of advice the slim coed was willing to share.

He was already up to five miles on the treadmill, which was definitely helping the pounds melt away as he watched Maury on the little treadmill TV screen. At home, he had also been binging through *The Real Housewives* in between Wendy Williams and TMZ episodes. Yes, he hated all this celebrity talk-show nonsense, but at least he could carry on a conversation with Dana and the girls in the office. Too bad he felt so hollow after watching it. Entertained, yes, but hollow.

The Real Housewives had been a strange kind of motivator to Kyle, as most of the women on the show were older than he was, and they had the extremely trim bodies of women half their age. If those mindless twits could do it, he certainly could.

He told Dr. Carpenter all about all the changes he’d been trying to make as he adjusted to LA, and she seemed amused. He had been seeing her twice a week, and looked forward to the sessions. She had a good sense of humor, even if she

was so young, no more than 26 if he had to guess, and was was a bit “out there” in her advice.

“It’s only strange if you permit yourself to think it’s strange,” she said to him.

The sessions were always incredibly brief, feeling like they ended just as they were about to get started. That’s just what good therapy must feel like, he supposed. At least he felt rested and refreshed after each session.



Finally, three months had passed and it was time to see if Dana was true to her promise.

“So, here goes,” Kyle said as he bent over. Intent on showing that he could, indeed touch his toes just like Dana had told him he would, he shocked himself by not only touching them, but by resting his palm flat on the floor after he did. “Wow,” he said, involuntarily.

“Awesome, Ky!” Dana cheered on.

Week after week of stretching exercises and regular yoga every Wednesday had paid off in ways that Kyle hadn’t even contemplated. Not only could he stand with his legs perfectly straight and his hands on the ground, but he felt like he could go even farther.

The next test was even easier, as Kyle knew that he could go ten miles on the treadmill. He was up to twelve, actually. He barely even broke a sweat at ten.

“You’ve been holding out on me, Ky!” Dana said as she looked at the mileage count. “You killed it!” The two exchanged a high five, and Dana bounced in excitement. “But there’s one more thing I want to know, Ky. How much did you lose?”

“You know, I’ve been afraid to check,” Kyle said. “Maybe it’s a lot? I know my stomach is leaner. I really haven’t lost much weight around my hips, though. I think I may have actually put on a few.”

“Well, what were you when you started?”

“165,” he said. “...Ish.”

“Do you wanna check?”

Kyle winced. “I’m kind of worried. I don’t want to disappoint myself.”

“I understand...” Dana said. “But I *really* want to know!”

“Okay, for you,” Kyle said as he went to one of the gym’s scales. He kicked off his shoes and covered his eyes as he stood on the pad. “Don’t tell me if...”



His sentence was cut off when he heard Dana make a sharp gasp. “What, what?” He said as he uncovered his eyes. The display read 143. That was well over twenty pounds.

“Oh my God!” Dana squealed.

“Oh my God!” Kyle repeated. “That’s a lot!”

“Way to go, Ky! But don’t stop there.”

“Isn’t that enough? Isn’t that too much?”

“You could still lose a little in your hips... And the chest.”

Kyle did have to admit his disappointment with the man-boobs on his chest, which hadn’t gone away yet. “Yeah, you’re right. But can’t we just target those areas?”

“Losing weight doesn’t work like that. You have to lose all over.”

“I know,” Ky said with a pout. He brightened up, though. He had just lost a ton of weight, after all, and felt like he had incredible amounts of energy. “Thanks, Dana. You’ve been so great.” He wrapped Dana up in a quick congratulatory hug, just like she did to him at least twice a day.

“We’re going to go celebrate with some FroYo, okay? Your treat.”

“Deal,” Kyle said. As he made his way to the locker room to shower and change, he could see Dana approach Braden, the kid who handed out the towels. By her body language, it was clear to Kyle that she was sweet on the muscular boy, as she suddenly forgot what to do with her hands and swayed back and forth as they talked. She had very good taste in boys, Kyle thought to himself.

Now he had to ask himself if he really wanted to go through with this. He had promised himself he wouldn’t become some kind of workout nut, but the results were incredible. “Two inches off my hips,” he said to himself, “and then I’ll stop. I’m not an addict.”



At home, Kyle hadn’t made a lot of progress on his plan to tackle the home improvement tasks the mansion needed. The plumbing still leaked on the top floor, the window off the pantry was stuck open, the tiles in the mudroom were going to need to be replaced and... So many things needed to be repaired, it was going to take a year or two to do them all.

Kyle had purchased a few supplies, but they sat unused and pushed to the side as he laid on his couch, snacking on baby carrots while watching the latest seasons of reality shows like *Keeping up with the Kardashians* and *The Zakarian Project*. After that, he was planning on going through his DVR and finishing off the episodes of *Divorce Court* he had been saving up.

That was the way he *intended* to spend his evening, at least, as he had spent so many evenings before — but tonight it was too much. The thumping, loud beat of music coming from the Beta house was driving him out of his mind.

Finally, he had endured enough. He got off the couch, put on his sagging workout shorts and flip-flops and headed for a confrontation.

This was really more than anyone should have to bear, he told himself as he strode across the street, putting his angry face on. He balled up his fists in anger as he took a deep breath, before pounding on the door.

“Some of us are trying to relax!” He yelled when it wasn’t immediately answered. “It’s after eleven!”

Suddenly the door popped open, and Kyle was greeted with the smiling face of Dana. “Hey, Ky!” She said with her typically upbeat smile. She held out a red solo cup for him. “I didn’t know you’d be coming! Here, drink up!”

Everything he had been practicing in his mind to complain about was thrown completely out the window. He was stunned as he absently took the red cup from Dana and followed her inside.

“Dana?” He asked. “You’re a Beta Alpha Epsilon girl?”

“Didn’t you know?” She said. “I was sure I mentioned it!”

“You never said anything!” He pointed back the way they came. “I live across the street!”

“You have to be kidding me! That’s so awesome! Wow!” Dana replied as they walked through the dimly-lit house packed with smoke, which had that dizzying skanky smell of pot. Just through the fog, he could see a myriad of sorority girls and assorted boys clinging to each other. By his figuring, there had to be at least fifty students here.

“Hey, babe, don’t leave me like that,” said a young man who snaked his arm around Dana’s waist and reeled her in, possessively. He immediately smothered her mouth with his.

Dana gave in for a moment, before pushing away. “Just a sec! Look who came!” She said, gesturing to a very uncomfortable Kyle. “He lives, like right next door!”

The boy, entirely uninterested in anything but Dana and her mouth, reluctantly turned and, and then dimly began to process.

Kyle was shocked to see who it was, now that he could see his full face. “Braden?” He asked.

“Oh, hey... Um...” He was searching for a name.

“Ky!” Kyle said. “It’s me, Ky from the gym!”

“Oh yeah, Dana’s friend.” Now that Braden had finished with the introductions, he tugged Dana back in.

“Say hello to people! We’re your neighbors, after all! People will want to meet you!” Dana said, just before Braden mashed into her face with his.

With that conversation over, Kyle now had to find some way of dealing with this new situation. How could he be mad at the Betas if Dana was one of them? She was the only friend he really had here in California.

More urgently, what was he supposed to do, stuck in a sorority house full of kids making out, without anyone to talk to? He sipped his drink as he slowly made his way back to the door.

“Oh, hey!” Said another chirpy voice from behind him, causing Kyle to swing around. “You came! Great!” It was what-her-name, the sorority chapter president. “You remember me, Miley?”

That was it, he remembered. Miley. “Well, uh... Yeah. Uh, the noise...”

“What?” Miley yelled back, as the music got louder.

“The noise! It’s very loud!” Kyle shouted.

“I can’t hear you! It’s too loud!” Miley shouted back. Neither could hear what the other was saying. “We’ll go to the kitchen!”

Miley grabbed at Kyle’s arm and pulled him in that direction, and although he had no idea what she was doing, he guessed that she wasn’t throwing him out or anything, so he followed.

As soon as they passed through the doors, the music was muffled enough so they could talk. However, the thick smoke was even thicker in the kitchen, and Kyle couldn’t see from one side of the room to the other.

“Sorry about that,” Miley apologized. “Last party of the year before summer break.”

Kyle gathered himself, and got back on topic. “I understand that, but I can clearly hear all this from my living room and...”

“There’s Miley,” said one of two girls standing nearby. “Ask her.”

The other girl advanced, who was wearing a tight black bodycon minidress with a plunging neckline that showed off her deeply tanned skin.

Kyle’s attention was not only stolen by how beautiful and exotic the girl looked, with her thick dark hair tied back in a bun, and dangling gold hoop earrings, but by her familiarity. He had seen her somewhere before.

“Risa and I want to order some food, Miley,” She cocked her hips saucily and put her long-nailed hands on them. “We totally didn’t order enough for this party.”

“I can do \$200. That’s all.”

“Ugh! So much for the tilapia I guess,” she replied, rolling her eyes. “Maybe we can get some poké bowls...”

“Bianca!” Kyle suddenly blurted. “Bianca Zakarian! I love your show!”

Indeed, that’s where he had recognized her, from one of his shows. “The Zakarian Project” was one of the highest-rated reality shows on TV, and Bianca

Zakarian was the oldest daughter of the famous Zakarian family.

“Okay, yeah, great,” Bianca said, not even looking Kyle’s way. “Don’t go away, Miley. We’ll need the card for the order.”

Kyle was speechless, having never before seen a TV star so up close. If anything, she was even better looking in person than she was on video.

“Fast please,” Miley said. “I gotta check in upstairs before they burn this place down.”

As Bianca walked away into the smoke, Kyle turned back to Miley. “Does she...”

Miley nodded wearily. She had answered this question a billion times before. “Bianca and Risa are both sisters of Beta...”

“Risa!” It just clicked with Kyle. “That was Risa, Bianca’s best friend! Oh my god!”

“So what did you want to tell me?” Miley asked.

Kyle downed his drink in one swig. “Oh, nothing,” he replied. “Is it okay if I stick around?”

“Sure!” Miley said. “So you’re into the whole Zakarian show?”

“I’m ashamed to admit it, but, yes. The look, the lifestyle, it’s all so...” Kyle paused to find the word he wanted to use. Exciting? Stimulating? Capti-



vated no? No, these words betrayed too much of his deeply held emotions. A grown adult shouldn't admit how entranced he was by watching the lives of young girls. "...Interesting," was the safest word he could come up with.

"Really?" Miley replied, as if she saw through Kyle and understood his real passion in the matter. "Okay, good to know," she said, smirking, and then trailed after Bianca and Risa.

Aware that he was staring, Kyle backed out of the kitchen, eager to ask Dana as many questions as possible about Bianca. When he found them through the haze, Dana was just extricating herself from Braden.

"I'm gonna get more drinks," she said. "You're having beer, right? I'll be right back."

"Sure thing, babe," Braden said, as he dropped his hands down Dana's lithe body before reluctantly letting go. Kyle was jealous.

"So, you guys are dating?" Kyle asked Braden as he approached.

"I guess. We're kinda in a thing," Braden replied.

Kyle supposed that kids these days didn't use the term "date" for whatever reason. It had been a while since he had seen Braden, and he had built himself up even more.

"Hey, dude, you ain't gonna go all parental on me, are you?"

"No, no," Kyle said. "I'm cool with it." He noticed that Braden had cut his hair a little shorter and had obviously enjoyed a little bit of time in the sun. For a kid who had recently moved here, Braden was quickly adapting to the lifestyle, and had not only a new look, but a new attitude. "So, finding the SoCal lifestyle to be more amenable to you?"

"Ameni... What?"

"You look like you're adjusting well."

"Yeah, dude," Braden said with a smile and nod. "Found some brahs who are really into lifting and making your bod awesome."

"Huh! You said you really weren't into the whole fitness thing."

"Yeah? Whoah, I guess I did say something like that. But you know, I just didn't give it a chance."

Ky was amused and a little concerned to see the change in the boy's attitude. If it was that easy for Braden to succumb, would he do the same? It wasn't likely, he reminded himself. He was an adult, not some suggestible kid. "Did you know that Bianca and Risa from The Zakarian Project live here?" He asked, wanting to know more about them.

“Yeah, dude. This is their crib, you know? They practically run the place.” Braden stretched out his arms and yawned.

Kyle found himself transfixed at the sight. The kid had really been exercising his arms. “Wow, you sure have been working out.”

“No pain, no gain, right?”

“Can I feel your muscles?” Kyle was embarrassed to ask.

Braden shrugged and held out one of his meaty forearms. Kyle squeeze it, barely even able to wrap his hand around. “You’re so hard!” He said with a quiet little laugh. “That’s impressive! I wish I had a body like yours.”

“Like mine?” Braden said with a grin. He looked over Kyle’s thin, almost scrawny body. “Sure, whatever, dude.”

For the first time in a while, Kyle felt a little ashamed of his new slender build. It was so different than Braden’s, who had muscles seemingly bulging out of other muscles. Kyle wondered why, since he had been living out of the gym for months now, why hadn’t he put on muscles like Braden? Maybe they had different body types or something, he guessed.

They looked even more different because Braden’s tan and hairy skin was so much more masculine than Kyle’s light, hairless skin. Recently, Kyle had been keeping himself smooth and clean-shaven all the time.

He remembered when he made the decision that he wanted to keep his skin totally smooth. It was coming out of one of Dr. Carpenter’s sessions that he suddenly felt overwhelmed by a sense of itchiness, and started scratching at his skin. By the end of the day, he had bought razors, depilatory cremes, skin lotions and even a home electrolysis machine.

Now he was smooth from the eyebrows down, and liked the feel. His skin felt so much more alive without that blanket of ugly, scraggly, itchy hair. Kyle even shaved during his lunch break, fearful that his beard shadow was going to sprout during the day. This obsession had him worried that he had developed some kind of phobia, but the doctor assured him what he felt was normal and there was nothing to worry about.

Still, he felt like a totally different type of person when he compared his arm to Braden’s. They were almost two different species.

“Really, I would kill to have that for my own,” Kyle said, as he ran his fingers lightly over Braden’s arm. “I’d love to feel that all the time.”

“Here you go,” Dana said as she returned with two freshly filled red cups. She handed one to Braden who took it and drank up.

“Where do you get refills?” Kyle asked.

“Over by the DJ,” Dana said, using a cup to motion in the general direction. “So you’re gonna stay?”

“Yeah, why not?” Kyle replied. “Bianca said there’s food on the way.”



The summer break for the college students meant an easing of tensions in the community where Kyle lived. Beta house was still quite active, but there weren’t any blow-out parties to worry about.

Fortunately for Kyle, when Dana’s summer began and her internship ended, she stayed behind and took a part-time job at the company to earn some money. “Maybe I can cut my student debt to twenty years of payments instead of forty,” she remarked.

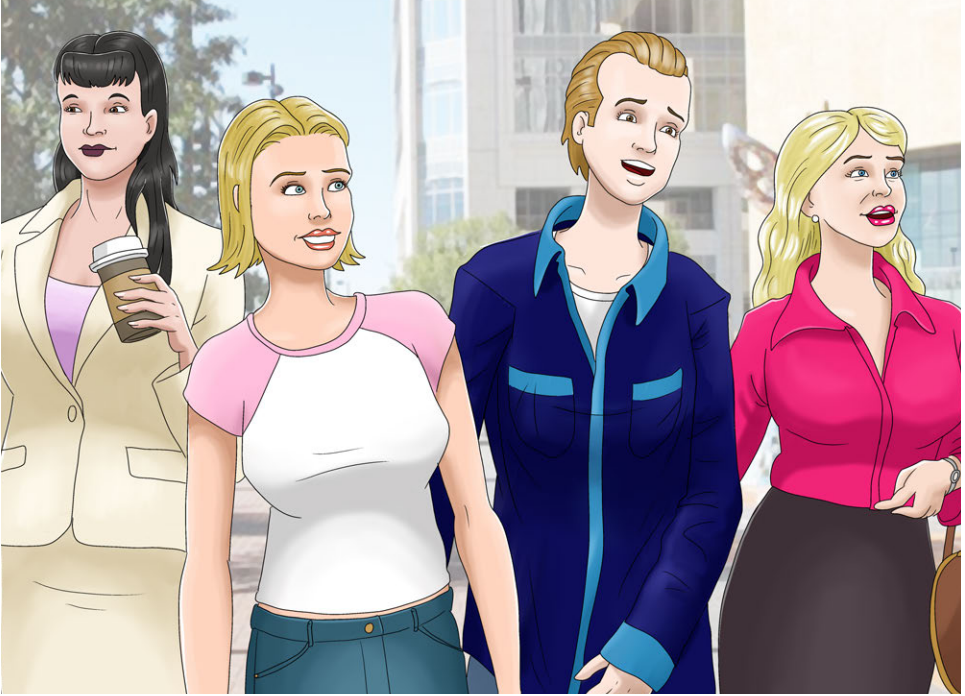
Dana and Kyle carpooled their way to and from the office on the days she worked, and on some nights, he’d return with her and stay at Beta house past midnight. The girls there were always friendly and treated him like he belonged. He even got to sneak a look at Bianca and Risa’s room once, and recognized the interior from the videos he had been watching.

When he was at home, he had gotten a little bit fixated on Bianca Zakarian, having found a ton of material about her on YouTube. He had a whole library of things she had done, from appearances on tabloid news shows, outtakes from her own show, candid video of her out on the town, and a short series of hair and makeup tutorials she had done.

Work at the office went on just as it always had, but Ky, as he was now known by just about everyone, was finding himself ostracized from the other QA engineers. His co-workers tended to be a mix of comic book nerds and computer science nerds, and Ky’s presence made them visibly uncomfortable.

Why? Since he had lost so many pounds, his clothes had become quite ill-fitting, and Ky refused to buy anything new until he was sure he had reached his “final” weight. That meant that he was wearing buttoned shirts that were three sizes too big for him, tucked into his belted pants to keep them under control, with the sleeves rolled up to his elbows. He looked like he was wearing a blouse most of the time. His pants were cuffed because the legs were too big for him, and with his hips still refusing to lose any fat, his butt was stretching out the top.

Combined with his unnaturally smooth skin, the talk around the office was that Ky was going through a “transition,” and so most of the guys wanted little to do with him. Ky was totally unaware of this, but he wouldn’t have much



cared anyway, as he spent most of his free time hanging out with Dana and a few other girls at the office.

“You should totally just let your hair grow out,” Kelley said, a twenty year old who worked in sales. “Short cuts do not go with that hot bod of yours.” Ky was inclined to listen to Kelley, as she was the hottest girl in the office, by far. She probably spent an hour on her bedhead blond hair every morning, and wore skirts and heels that were more appropriate for a night on the town than a morning at a desk.

“Kelley’s right,” said Jen, a twenty-two year old from the graphics department. “Just let it flow. You’re not in Texas anymore, Ky.”

“Are you sure?” Ky looked at his reflection in the rear view mirror of his car while he drove everyone to lunch at a new quinoa and kale place. “I’ve always had it short.”

“All the more reason,” Dana agreed. “You can always cut it if you don’t like it.”

“I guess that’s true,” the middle-aged man replied. “Hey, I was gonna ask you guys something. I really want your opinion.”

“What’s that?” Jen asked.

Ky was animated as he talked, gesturing with his free hand. “Now, I’m being totally serious, so don’t laugh, okay?”

“Okay?”

“Promise?”

“Yes!”

“All right,” Ky slumped his shoulders and exhaled. “Is it okay for a guy to wear makeup?”

Jen waved off the question as if it were nothing to get excited about. “Well, I don’t know about most guys, but you can, Ky.”

Kelley seconded the opinion. “Yeah, you could certainly carry it off.”

That meant a lot, coming from Kelley, but Ky was still cautious. “Do you think so?”

“I bet if you used a little bit of makeup, no one would even say a thing,” Dana said. “You wanna go out and get something? Like a basics kit?”

“I was going to order one off Amazon,” Ky said.

“Oh no,” Jen countered. “You should do it in person. Getting your skin type is crucial.”

“I’d be so embarrassed!” Ky said.

“What’s there to be embarrassed about?” Jen leaned forward from the back seat. “Everyone buys their first makeup kit at some point.”

“What brought this on?” Dana was curious to know.

“My skin looks so pale,” Ky said. “My face washes out, and it looks like I have no features at all.” That was somewhat true, but constantly watching the makeup tutorials Bianca Zakarian had made had skewed his perception of what his own face should look like. A part of him expected to have thicker eyelashes and colorful lips just like the faces he watched all night long.

“We can get you something after we eat,” Jen said.

“Food first, shopping later,” said Kelley. “I can’t believe I just said that, but I’m starved.”

“You know, we could try tanning, too,” Dana said.

“I don’t know,” Ky replied. “The skin damage...”

Dana had an answer for that. “They can do spray tans now. No UV, no cancer. It looks even better than the real thing! They’re fun, too.”

“I’ll think about it,” Ky said, already picturing in his mind how his new thin, sleek body would look with a tan.



When the next day began at work, Ky was relieved that no one had said a thing about the mascara he had decided to use for the day. Dana knowingly winked at him whenever they crossed paths, and Jen gave him thumbs up when she got a look at him, making him blush. He had been worried to the point of almost calling in sick, but by the end of the day, he was completely at ease, and even felt more confident.

Even Dr. Carpenter was supportive, reassuring Ky that the choices he had made were the right things for him, even if they did feel strange at first. Her advice, “adapt and thrive” had become Ky’s new motto, and he repeated it to himself several times a day. He always felt better after a session with her, and coming regularly to see her was one of the best decisions he’d ever made, in his opinion.

“I see your hair is growing back in,” his Tonsorial Artisan said as Ky was getting a trim. “That must be due to the hormones you’re taking.”

“Say what?” Ky asked, confused.

“I see it in a lot of my transgender clients,” the man snipping at hair said. “A little less testosterone, and a little bit of hair comes back. Bonus, right?”

“I’m not taking any hormones,” Ky said. “Maybe I’m just lucky.”

“Hmmm... With your skin clearing up like it has?” the man remarked. “If you say so.”

“I think I’d know if I was taking hormones, okay?”

“All right, all right! Forget I mentioned it. You said you wanted to leave it long this time, right?”

“I guess. The other girls in the office are needling me to let it grow out.”

“Other girls?”

“What?”

“You said *other* girls — as if you were one of them.”

“I did not say that.”

“Wow. Denial isn’t just a river in Egypt.”

Ky decided he needed to find a new salon. He didn’t understand why this place hired crazy people to cut hair. It took him a couple of weeks, but he found a place closer to the mansion, thanks to Kelley.

“I used to go to a place down by the beach,” she said as they walked into the building. “Then I heard about this place. They do everything here. They’re absolutely awesome.”

There was no sign on the front, as apparently they were busy enough not to need to advertise their services. Word of mouth kept them in business, and Ky understood why. He was treated like a princess from the moment he arrived. Yes, it was all very expensive, but he loved being pampered.

“Just sit back and let me know what you’d like to do today, sweetie,” said the cute hairdresser who was helping him. “And just so you know, we don’t get hung up on gender here, okay?”

“Uh, okay?” Ky said with a shrug. He wondered why they felt the need to even mention that to him. Maybe it was some kind of legal disclaimer or something, he thought. “Oh, I’m growing my hair out, so I just need it neat. Nothing big.”

“Gotcha,” the woman said. A Korean woman walked up and sat down next to Ky and tried to take his hand. “This is Ji-yung, she’ll be doing your nails.”

Ky hadn’t had a manicure before. He had always been curious, so he let it happen and gave his hand to her. “Oh, uh, one question...” he asked the hairdresser. “Just, you know... Curious if... You guys do spray tans here?”

“Sure do!” The lady said. “Do you want to do it today or book an appointment?”

The impulse to see what he would look like got the better of him. “Today,” he said, biting his lip.

“You look...” Kelley was a little at a loss for words when Ky was all done. “*Amazing.*”

“Really?” Ky asked, looking over his now lightly bronzed skin. “It’s not too much?”

“It’s perfect. You look *so* good. You could be a model!”

“Let’s not get crazy,” Ky said with a snicker.

“All right, but you do look good,” Kelley said as they walked to the car. “Your nails came out great!”

Ky looked at his freshly polished clear nails. “This isn’t what I expected from a manicure. They’re too shiny.”

“You never know, you might get used to it.”



Once again, Ky, standing at the water cooler, found himself leaning on one leg. He quickly tried to adjust his stance, and stand upright, but he knew he’d been standing that way for quite a while, which was embarrassing. Lately, he had

noticed that instead of just standing upright, he sifted his weight onto one leg and to the other, swiveling his hips as he did so. In addition, he found that he'd stick out a leg and rest it on his toes, rather than on his heel, like he was doing some kind of pose.

It was a nasty habit he'd developed lately, and it was one of the things he'd brought up in talking to Dr. Carpenter. "You used to do hypnosis, right?" He asked.

"Used to?" She replied. "Oh yes, used to."

"So maybe you can use it to make me try and stop acting like such a swish," he said.

"I don't think I'd be able to help you much, Ky. Hypnosis doesn't really work like that. It's just a tool to help you dig a little deeper when it comes to expressing your feelings,"

That didn't appeal to Ky at all — exploring his feelings. "Oh," he replied. "So maybe not, I guess."

"Don't worry, Ky. If you just apply yourself, you can do anything. Dealing with bad habits and unwanted behavior is one of the challenges we all face. Being able to comprehensively repair ourselves and correct the kinds of behavior we find undesirable..."

Ky then shook his head, unsure of when he had dozed off. He wasn't sure if he had slept for a while or just for a second. Dr. Carpenter was still talking, so he assumed it hadn't been for very long at all.

"...And really, a measure of how well you can cope with change," The doctor had continued. "So it looks like our time is up for today," she added.

Ky got up on his feet and took a deep breath. "These appointments always go by so quickly," he said, swiveling his hips and posing his leg like he had been doing lately. He took no notice of it.

"That's a compliment, I believe," Dr. Carpenter said with a smile. "So, see you on Thursday?"

"I'll see you then," Ky replied, as he leaned forward to hug the doctor, and air-kissed her by the cheek. He withdrew and then paused. "Oh, wait. I have a meeting on Thursday," he said, putting his finger to his lips, and his free hand on his hip. "Can we do it on Friday?"

The doctor consulted the small appointment book on her desk. "Friday at three?"

"Perfect," Ky replied, waving with a limp wrist. He left the room, taking short mincing steps, shaking his butt from side to side, and held his arms bent at the

elbow. "I'll take your advice and try to correct my annoying little gestures," he said to the the doctor. "And we can check my progress at the next appointment."

"Sounds good," as the doctor's reply.

"Okay! Toodles!" Ky said as he gave a roll of his fingers to wave goodbye.



Ky finally finished his final rep and took a deep breath. He popped out the earphones which were blasting Ariana Grande and dabbed his shoulders with a towel. A few long hairs were matted to his forehead, having worked their way free from his ponytail, and he used one of his long fingernails to push them away.

Ky had gained a reputation for these crazy insane workouts, and attracted a lot of attention from the other gym patrons. He also attracted a lot of attention because he was a sight to behold. He had an alarmingly thin body, one that defied his age, curves that weren't normally seen on a male, and two items of particular note on his chest.

As he walked over to his bag to get some water, he noticed all the eyes on him. Or, more accurately, on his chest, which was sore because it had been bobbing up and down, almost slapping his own torso — and undoubtedly everyone else in the gym had seen it. He then nonchalantly headed towards Dana. "So maybe I will take you up on borrowing a sports bra," he whispered.

"It's for the best," she said.

Ky definitely had the entire population of the gym confused. He was so thin and shapely that he couldn't be male, but he used the men's changing room. He talked to the other men like he was one of the boys. Yet, his voice was soft and high-pitched, and the bulge in his spandex shorts was so small, it could be easily overlooked.

Ky had asked Dr. Carpenter if he should see a doctor about his changing body, especially his shrinking penis. "Only if you're experiencing pain or discomfort," she said. "Otherwise, why worry?" And Ky had to agree with her.

"The new Ariana is awesome for workouts, isn't it?" Dana said, hearing the music coming out of Ky's headphones.

"It's pretty good..." Ky had to admit, embarrassed to be listening to sugary power-pop. "I guess it beats Dave Matthews."

"Ew!" was all Dana said about that. "Anyway, you ready for the scale?"