

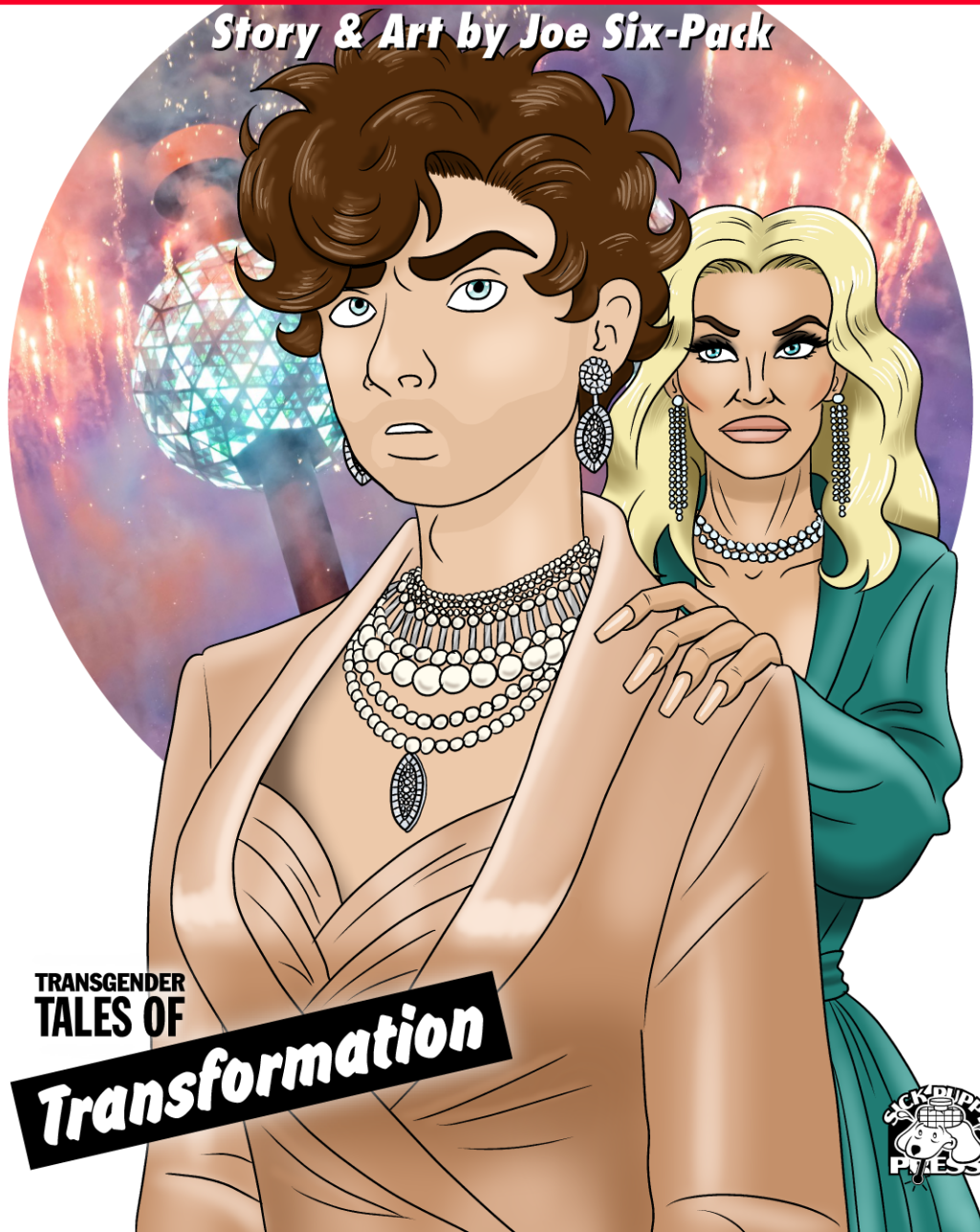
ADULTS ONLY

22 illustrations

RUINED BY RESOLUTIONS

HOLIDAY TREATS #4

Story & Art by Joe Six-Pack



TRANSGENDER
TALES OF

Transformation



J O E S I X P A C K

***RUINED BY
RESOLUTIONS***

**Story & Art by Joe Six-Pack
A Tales of Transformation Story**



2023 eBook Edition

Design & layout © 2023
Story & Art © 2023 Joe Six-Pack
All rights reserved.

The body text is printed in New Caledonia.

All rights reserved. No part of this publication may be reproduced, stored in or introduced into a retrieval system, or transmitted in any form or by any means (electronic, mechanical, photocopying, recording or otherwise), without the prior written permission of the copyright owner. All characters and situations are fictional.

Printed in the United States of America.

j6p@sixpacksite.com
www.sixpacksite.com

RUINED BY RESOLUTIONS



The elegant ballroom was bathed in a soft, golden glow, with laughter and chatter filling the air. The decor was lavish, the atmosphere jubilant and the food was incredible. The New Years' Eve party for MyBanq was in full swing. The company's employees and their spouses had gathered to celebrate the arrival of a new year, and the atmosphere was electric.

Gregory Kane, the CEO of MyBanq, stood near the grand entrance, a glass of champagne in hand, scanning the room for his date, Angelika. She was a striking woman with long, golden hair and a radiant smile that had captivated him from the moment they'd met. She was a dazzling beauty, and an elegant woman. What he especially loved about her was her no-nonsense attitude. She was never afraid to go get what she wanted, and to Gregory's delight what she wanted was him.

"Gregory, *daaaaahling!*" a voice called out, and he turned to see Angelika approaching, dressed in an angelic white gown riddled with glittering silver rhinestones. A long slit up one side exposed one of her devastatingly beautiful legs with every other step. She wore strappy silver heels, and her broad, warm smile that illuminated the space around her seemed to light the way.

Angelika came to a stop just in front of Gregory, and she tossed her thick blonde hair back with the subtlest flip of her head. She leaned in for a quick kiss on his cheek. "I'm sorry I'm so late. There were... Complications." She shifted her eyes to the side. Gregory followed her eyes and saw what she was hinting at: the complication.

Behind her was her nephew, Buck. He was 19, jobless, shiftless and listless. Despite everyone around him in the expansive, luxuriously garnished ballroom being dressed in tuxedos and gowns, Buck was wearing a hoodie and a wool beanie.

"Why is he here?" Gregory asked.

"Because I don't trust him at home alone," Angelika said. "A teenager alone on New Years' Eve with a cabinet full of liquor? When I return home, I want there to actually be a home to return to."

Gregory sighed. He had been romancing Angelika for over a year now, and she had just accepted his proposal over Christmas. He was head over heels in love with the woman, and had never loved — or lusted — after someone like this in his life.

Yet he was going to have to accept that Buck was going to be a part of the bargain.

“Hey, aunt Angelika,” Buck said, walking up to her side and lightly rapping her on the shoulder with his fist. “Where’s the food?”

“I just got here, sweetie,” Angelika said, trying to smile. “I know just as much as you do.”

“Do you know, Greggy?” Buck asked the man in the tuxedo and distinguished greying hair.

“There’s some hors d’oeuvres over by the wall over there,” Gregory replied, pointing the way while still holding his champagne flute.

“Hors d’oeuvres? Sucks. I wanted real food. Thanks for nothing.” Buck shuffled off in that direction anyway.

“Maybe letting him burn down the house wouldn’t be such a bad idea,” Gregory said. “As long as he was in it.”

“Oh, you’re awful!” Angelika said, giggling. He loved the way she giggled. “But he’s just a teenager.”

“He’s nineteen. He’s old enough for you to kick out.”

“Gregory, believe me, I think of that every day — but that horrible young man is all the family I have left after my sister died. I mad a promise.” She then pressed herself against her date. “But let’s not talk about him. I’d rather talk about...”

“Us?” Gregory said, hopefully.

“Us,” Angelika said with another big smile. “And finding the love of your life.”

The two looked into each other’s eyes for a moment as the rest of the world faded into the background. Gregory had waited a long time to find a woman like Angelika, and Angelika had worked so hard for this kind of relationship. They were both exactly where they wanted to be.

“I’m going to go find some champagne,” Angelika said. “You’ll wait for me?”

“I’ve waited a lifetime,” Gregory said.

Angelika smiled back, departing as she still held her fiancée’s hand for a moment as she walked away, releasing it only when she had to.

As he found himself alone again, the multi-millionaire CEO of MyBanq had to grunt in discontent to himself. It was 10:40, still over an hour to midnight, and he really just wanted to get to the part where they kissed. He had been picturing it for weeks now.

His thoughts were abruptly interrupted when he was bumped in the back by Buck, who was holding a plate overloaded with expensive food and stuffing it into his mouth like he was eating at a discount buffet five minutes before closing.

“Hey, Greggo,” Buck said. “I hope you’re not jealous. Seems everyone else here is more fascinating to Angelika than you. Already ditched you already to



do some networking.”

“She’s just getting a drink,” Gregory said, curtly.

Buck nodded as he finished chewing a whole canapé. “It must be a shame. You’re so important to this online banking business thing you own, but you can’t even hold the attention of your own future wife.”

Gregory tried to keep his composure. He had known Buck for only about eight months, but he’d begun to despise the brat mere moments after they’d met. The kid had never made any secret of their skepticism about his relationship with his aunt Angelika.

“She’s such a fucking gold digger,” Buck said. “She can’t wait to climb up the social ladder, even if she walks over your back to do it.”

“She’s not like that,” Gregory countered.

Buck laughed as little bits of food spat out of his overstuffed maw. “Oh, buddy. You don’t know her like I know her. Dear aunt Angelika. Can’t even spell her own name correctly.”

Gregory was going to very happy when the holidays were over and he didn’t have to deal with family anymore. “It’s a party,” he replied with a polite smile. “She’s just having a nice time.”

“You know,” Buck began, his voice low and conspiratorial, “You’re hardly ever available, and spend half the time jet-setting around the world on business. How are you going to keep her... Happy? It won’t be long until she someone who can give her the attention she needs and the status she craves.”

“Angelika and I are happy together. We have our own way of making things work. Meeting someone you can connect with is the best thing that ever happened to me. You should try it.”

“Yeah, right. Keep telling yourself that.” Buck had to pause every so often to eat more, as he prioritized the free food more than he did the man who paid for it. “You should hear her and her friends behind your back. They can’t stop talking about all the ways aunt Angelika is gonna spend all your money.”

Gregory caught a glance of Angelika as she flew from one social group to another. When he had met her, she was the most beautiful woman he’d ever seen. That she even wanted to talk him was a miracle of some sort. When he told her about this new startup, MyBanq, and the potential billions that might be made, she was fascinated. She pushed him into proposing and he felt like he was living a dream.

One of the servers held out a tray of crab puffs and Buck practically elbowed Gregory out of the way to take them all. The older man looked at his now-empty glass and set it on the tray with a sigh. Angelika certainly was taking her time getting back.

He could tell by the smug expression on Buck's face that he was getting ready to dig back in. Gregory just had to stand there and take it.

As the clock inched closer to midnight, Gregory made a mental note to discuss with Angelika his displeasure about Buck's behavior. He'd even paid for his tuition for college, only to be treated like this, and it was unacceptable.

"You gonna bang her tonight?" Buck asked. "She's wearing her lucky panties, you know."

"The relationship between Angelika and me is private, and just between us. It's not appropriate to discuss it any further." Simon puffed up his chest in defiance.

"Doesn't matter. She'll be bragging about it for days at home." Buck chuckled. "She tells her girlfriends every move you make."

Gregory had no intention of allowing his soon-to-be step-nephew's behavior to escalate into a confrontation, especially not at the New Years' Eve party. As he had to remind himself, Buck was Angelika's entire family, and he wanted to keep the peace for her sake. Choking him until his eyes oozed out his sockets would be impolite in public.

"Buck!" Angelika snapped as she headed toward the two of them. "I asked you to entertain yourself this evening, didn't I?"

"You say a lot of things," Buck replied with a shrug. "I stopped paying attention a while ago."

Angelika turned to Gregory. "I'm sorry, darling. Would you give us moment?"

"By all means. I have to call the office anyway," Gregory replied before departing. He did note that Angelika didn't have the champagne she had said she had been after.

Angelika focused her eyes on her nephew. "Listen, you little shit, don't mess this up for me!" She growled. "Do you know how many assholes I had to date before I could get to Gregory? I went through half of the Forbes 500!"

"I would have said more," Buck replied nonchalantly.

"I swear to God, Buck, this is my ticket! You lose out if I lose out!"

"Hey, it'd be worth it to see you mess up. You think you're so superior to everyone. You need to be knocked down a few pegs."

"You stupid piece of..."

"See, you don't respect me, and you never have. My mom asked you — on her deathbed — to look after me, not to shove me in the attic room and then treat me like a fucking leper, you selfish bitch!"

"You're nothing but an entitled brat! I've been paying for you for four years!" She was getting steamed. "I even begged Gregory to cover the cost of your

tuition, and then you dropped out two weeks into the term! You're selfish, disrespectful..."

"Don't get too mad, your last plastic surgery hasn't healed yet. You'll pop a seam."

"I've never had plastic surgery!"

"If by never, you mean the last three weeks, sure." Buck paused to swallow his food. "At least I don't look like my face is in a wind tunnel. You probably still tell people you're 35."

"You'll say anything. You don't care who you hurt."

"You're no better than me! You're the most selfish person on the face of the planet!"

"Selfish? Selfish?" She hissed. "I take charge! I know what I want! I'm proactive!"

"You never talk about anyone but yourself. You sit around all day on the phone, talking to your friends, doing nothing but sponging off what Gregory gives you!"

"I earned everything I ever got!"

"Your pussy earned it."

The slap was like cracking a whip in the ballroom, attracting everyone's attention. It didn't stop Buck from chewing his French pastry he was working on, though. "Stupid bitch," he said.

Angelika looked embarrassed and sheepishly turned away from the stares. She had committed a cardinal sin in her life. She had let her nephew get to her.

As Angelika plotted her next move, and as her nephew scarfed down what looked like a crepe stuffed with whipped creme, the light in the ballroom dimmed.

"Ladies and gentlemen, guests of MyBanq, please direct your attention to the stage!" A voice called out over the loudspeaker. "For your entertainment tonight, may we present: The Magnificent Mezmo!"

As a fanfare of music played, a spotlight shone against a black velvet curtain at the side of the ballroom. The company had sprung for some performances tonight to entertain their guests before the ball drop at midnight. After some weak, probably confused clapping, a puff of smoke and flash of light a man in a top hat and tuxedo appeared on stage. A magician.

"A fucking magician?" Buck said it so loudly it threatened to carry all the way to the stage. "Please," he added with a dismissive wave of his hand.

Even with his obvious disdain, Buck didn't miss a moment of the performance. The magician wasn't that unique, as he was performing an ordinary routine of familiar tricks, from card tricks to floating rings, and even

produced a proverbial rabbit from his top hat. Buck was largely correct. The magician's act was tired and worn out.

"What a tool," Buck muttered.

"I paid quite a bit for this," Gregory said, as he had returned to Angelika, and stood just a few feet away. "Would it kill you to be polite?"

"Ladies and gentlemen," the magician announced from the stage with a flourish, "I require the participation of two volunteers."

He used his black cape with red satin lining to make some theatrical moves as he paced around the stage, solidifying the impression he was a bit of a hack.

"I studied in the deepest heart of the orient for many years to decipher the mystery of the human mind," he said. "I travelled to India, to Nepal, to China and all over. I returned to civilization having learned the very darkest secrets of those who could entrance the thoughts of men and make anyone do my bidding!"

Gregory could hear a derisive chortle coming from Buck.

"I require the participation of two volunteers," the man on stage repeated. "Two volunteers to be subject to my powers!"

Angelika, sensing an opportunity to be seen and noticed, eagerly volunteered herself. The magician's eyes lit up seeing the beautiful woman who was approaching the stage.

Gregory was about to follow, when he was pushed aside by Buck. "Oh no she won't," the young man said, heading off after his aunt. "Fuckin' fame whore."

He intended just to grab his aunt and drag her back, but a spotlight was suddenly on him. Before he knew it, he was standing on the stage beside Angelika.

"Now, if you will turn your attention to the swinging pendant..." The magician said as he swung it in front of an eager Angelika and a highly unamused Buck.

It was only a minute before Buck was clucking on stage, using his feet to scratch the imaginary dirt of the illusory chicken coop he now inhabited. He was a comical display of uninhibited absurdity as he made the occasional exclamation of "Bgok!"

Angelika, meanwhile, became a ballerina, her poise and elegance a ridiculous contrast to her nephew's farcical antics. With unexpected grace, she twirled and danced across the stage, her movements practiced and fluid.

The magician had them imitate apes, get trapped in an imaginary box, struggle to lift a feather from the floor and many other familiar feats of stage hypnosis.

The audience reveled in their performance, moments of absurdity in an otherwise lackluster act. Had they known, neither Buck nor Angelika would

have endured the laughter and ridicule outpouring from the crowd of MyBanq employees and influential power brokers. They would have been mortified.

“Yes, they’ve been wonderful sports,” the Magnificent Mezmo said. “And to thank them for their efforts, a little help with their New Years’ resolutions.”

“Your name, madame?” He asked Angelika.

“Angelika Bannister,” she said, still in her trance.

“Please share with us your New Years' resolutions.”

Angelika spoke with a dissonant, disconnected voice. “My New Years' Resolutions are to teach my good for nothing nephew Buck what being an adult means — and teach him a few good lessons about growing up!”

“Ah, I see and...”

“Angelika, although hypnotized was still in the habit of interrupting people. “I also want to marry the love of my life and start again.”

Gregory, down in the crowd was touched. He really had found the right woman for him.

“And you, dear boy? What is your name?”

“Buck,” the young man replied.

The illusionist was taken aback. “Oh... Buck. I hear your aunt isn’t very happy with you.”

“Whatever,” Buck replied. “What about my resolutions, huh? Or is my aunt going to get all the attention?” Being in a trance had not dulled his innate ability to annoy people with his petty whining.

“Please, won’t you bless us with your resolutions for the new year?” the magician said.

“Well, I resolve... To show my dumb aunt that anything she can do I can do better,” Buck said with a sneer.

“Ah. Fascinating. Anything else?” Mezmo asked, unimpressed with Buck’s statement. “Go on. You must have something else.”

“Uh... Well...” Buck said.

“Oh, there must be something else. Don’t worry, it’s just between us.”

“Well, I... I... I want to know what love is,” Buck said, looking uncharacteristically uncomfortable. The audience laughed and snickered appropriately.

“Well, because the both of you helped me out here tonight, and as a reward for your help,” the hypnotist said, “I command you, under the power of hypnosis, to fulfill your resolutions. You will not let yourself slack off or be dissuaded. You will dedicate yourself to seeing your resolutions through!”

The crowd applauded the gesture, all of them aware of how difficult it was to fulfill New Years' resolutions, and somewhat envious that a hypnotic suggestion might just do the trick.

"And you will help each other attain their resolutions," the performer added, hoping to break the obvious tension between them by making them cooperate. He then snapped his fingers to break the, of the trance.

As they descended the stage, Gregory joined them, a knowing smile playing on his lips. "An unforgettable start to the New Year," he mused, his voice rich with amusement.

Angelika was confused, rubbing her temples. "I don't remember anything. Did I embarrass myself?"

"Oh *nooooo*," Gregory replied with a smirk. "Not at all."

She immediately knew something was up. "Tell me," Angelika demanded to know. "You have to tell me!"

"Well, maybe if you could persuade me," Gregory said as he put his arm around Angelika's waist and guided her away.

"I'm going to make you tell me!" Angelika repeated as they walked too far away to be heard anymore.

Buck was suspicious of what had just transpired. He was not the kind of person who enjoyed being laughed at, and he had a bad feeling in his stomach. But that was probably due to the two pounds of rich food he'd just consumed.

"You want to talk about Buck, don't you?" Angelika asked Gregory as they got to the other side of the room. "He'll warm up to you."

"Some people you just can't win over," Gregory said to his fiancée. "That's just the way it goes. And I hate to think how he's going to deal with my kids. They're so young."

Angelika sighed. "I have at least five wrinkles I can directly attribute to dealing with Buck's issues. But he's a teenager. They're just like that."

"I don't think he's about to change," Gregory asked. He looked through the crowd to see the teenager having a grand old time, laughing and scarfing down even more food. "He is incapable of change. He resists at every possible opportunity."

"I doubt..." As Angelika spoke the words, the crowd inside began to chant, counting down from ten.

It was time. Midnight on New Years' Eve. Gregory pulled Angelika closer to him.

"Five... Four... Three... Two... One!" The crowd shouted. On a big screen, the ball had dropped in Times Square and lit up the night. The magician on stage was twirling sparklers. Fireworks went off outside, and a cheer came up from

the streets of the city. The new year, flush with new opportunity and new chances, was here.

Angelika gave her date the deepest, warmest and sexiest kiss she could muster. Her lips caressed Gregory's mouth as she rubbed her hands all over his chest while she pushed her big, soft boobs into his body. Angelika Bannister wasn't going to leave anything to chance. She was going to be Mrs. Angelika Kane, and life would be putty in her hands.



It was the next morning after the party. More accurately, it was the early afternoon, but since it was a midnight party, everyone had slept in.

Angelika had been dieting for a week to fit into her dress that night, so when she woke up, her first stop was the kitchen. She was going to eat whatever she found.

In just her robe and slippers, she stumbled her way to the fridge, trying to keep her scraggly mess of blond hair out of her face. She was looking for either a hangover cure or a beer. There was nothing in the fridge but some old tortillas and a jar of pickled cocktail onions.

"Where's all the food?" She asked herself. "I had a leftover cake in here and..."

As she turned her head, she could peer across the kitchen countertops out to the TV area, where Buck was lounging and an empty plate lay in front of him. She straightened up and looked closer. It was her cake, alright. "Fucking pig," She grumbled.

Putting her hands on her hips, she had little choice but to do what she hated. She was going to have to make something. Angelika was going to have to cook.

First, she went back to her bedroom and cleaned herself up. If she was going to have to cook, she needed to be at least presentable. She combed her hair back into a reasonable shape and put on some lip gloss and eyeliner. Because she was the elegant and classy Angelika Bannister, she also put on a pair of high heeled slippers.

By the time she had returned, she found the jar of pickled onions gone, too. She scoured the kitchen for some ingredients and got to making her afternoon breakfast.

The smell attracted Buck, who wandered in. "What's that?" He asked, seeing his aunt stirring something in a frying pan.

"Do you ever stop eating?" Angelika said. "Not that you need to know, but this is my breakfast."

“What the fuck is it? It smells like shit.” He looked over at the ingredients next to the pan, which included a can of diced tomatoes, a small jar of marshmallow fluff and a tin of cloves. “Are you... What? That’s disgusting!”

“Well what do you want me to do, Buck?” Angelika said, exasperated. “You ate every other piece of food in the entire house!”

“But that... That’s just gross.” Buck said. “I... Ugh... Let me make something, okay? You’ll fuckin kill yourself if you eat that shit.”

“Like you care.”

“If you die, I gotta move out,” Buck mumbled.

“You think you can cook better than me?” Angelika asked her nephew, in disbelief.

The words triggered Buck. It triggered a command. A command he had been hypnotized to follow. *You must be better than your aunt.*

His resolution to ‘show that anything his aunt can do he can do better,’ was no longer just a promise to himself, he had been commanded to do it. Thanks to the magician’s hypnotic order, he had no choice but to prove he was better than his aunt.

“Yes,” Buck said. “You always think you’re the best at everything. Anything you can do, I can do better.”

“Oh yeah?” Angelika said, a bit ticked off. “Well listen here, you little runt...” Then the programming kicked in for her, too. Some part of her brain recalled that she was compelled to help Buck. *You must help each other with your resolutions.*

This desire to best her was something she had to help with, as she knew it was one of his resolutions for the new year. “Go for it.” She dropped the spatula, tossed her hair back and walked away, her heels clicking on the tile floor.

“Fine! I will!” Buck said, grabbing the spatula.

Soon, a pleasant aroma filled the kitchen. Buck had chopped up a potato he had found in the pantry and added seasoning and some frozen veggies.

Angelika, now seated at the table, watched him skeptically. “I suppose you think you’re some sort of chef now?”

Buck, stirring the ingredients, shot back, “Better than your... whatever the fuck that was supposed to be.”

When he slid the dish onto a plate and set it in front of her, Angelika eyed it warily. Taking a tentative bite, she was taken aback by the taste. “Well, I suppose this is passable.”

Buck, leaning against the counter, couldn’t help the hint of pride in his voice. “Told you I could cook better than you.”

Angelika, for once, seemed at a loss for her usual haughty comeback. “Like I care,” she said, a slight look of concern on her face.

Buck had an expression of worry as well. He had felt this strange compulsion to prove he was better than his aunt at cooking, and he couldn’t stop himself. It had felt like the most important thing in the world to prove it. Yet in truth, if his aunt was run over by a bus, he wouldn’t lift a finger to help her.

At the breakfast table, Angelika ate her actually delicious breakfast, worried that she was losing her mind. The last thing in the world she ever wanted to do was let that cretin of a nephew have any kind of victory. Yet here she was, letting him get a win over her. Worse yet, it was like she wanted to do it. Like she wanted Buck to prove he was better than she was. It was an unpleasant kind of feeling, the kind she didn’t want to feel again.



Angelika began her day trying her best to stick to her usual routine, even if she had already slept through half of it. She spent her mornings exercising, so she returned to her bedroom, changed into her workout gear and tied her hair into a ponytail.

One of the rooms in Angelika’s house had been outfitted as a small gym, with a treadmill, squatting machine, lifting machine and various other exercise paraphernalia. She took a seat on a mat and began her stretching routine, bending her limber body to the limit.

She was 45, but she was ruthless when it came to maintaining a slender figure. She had always been a thin woman trapped in the body of a chubby girl, and tenaciously battled her body’s desire to put on fifteen pounds in the blink of an eye. She was not going to let Gregory slip away from her, even if she had to work out eight hours a day.

Her first exercise was the squatting machine, a device that forced her to lift both herself and some weights along a rail. She grasped the handles, took a breath and got to work.

“That’s not even a real exercise,” Buck said as he walked in, munching on a stick of jerky.

“Go watch TikTok,” Angelika grumbled. “And leave me alone.”

Buck ignored her. “You’re lying down. How is that supposed to do anything?”

“What, do you think this is easy?” Angelika asked. “You couldn’t even lift this, I bet. You haven’t done anything physical since you graduated high school.”

The challenge laid down, Buck’s post-hypnotic suggestions forced him to take his aunt up on it. *You must be better than your aunt.*

“Lemme show you how it’s done,” Buck said.

Unable to prevent herself from helping her nephew, thanks to her post-hypnotic instructions, Angelika stepped aside. *You must help each other with your resolutions.*

“Don’t say I didn’t warn you,” she said with a smirk.

After a full three minutes of Buck struggling to lift the sliding apparatus, he had to give up. However, as Angelika didn’t feel like wasting her time waiting for her out-of-shape nephew to prove himself as a failure, she moved on to doing lateral lunges with barbells.

“Give up?” She asked when he walked away from the machine.

“Just need some time to warm up,” Buck said. “What’re you doing now?”

“Lateral lunges. They make my hips curvier.”

“How many can you do?”

“Think you can do more?” Angelika asked.

Buck knew he could. He just knew it. *You must be better than your aunt.*



A week later, Buck was doing Angelika’s exercise routine right beside her, as had become a regular part of his day. Every morning, he dressed in a pair of shorts and a tee shirt and was doing the very same routine his aunt was doing. It wasn’t long before he was catching up with Angelika, and after a little while, he was adding another rep or two. He had to be better.

When she did squats, he did them with twenty more pounds. When she did the treadmill, he did it faster and farther. When she did yoga, Buck would hold his pose longer. When she did anything, he had to beat her at it. He didn’t understand why he was compelled to show her that he could anything she could do but better — and Angelika didn’t understand why she was compelled to allow him to barge in on her workout routine.

Yet the two sparring family members continued on, now spending every morning in the gym, working out side by side, in silent contempt of each other. Neither could understand why — they only understood that they had to do it.



Nestled on her plush chaise lounge, phone pressed to her ear, Angelika was bemoaning the trials of high society life to her friend Marjorie.

“Marjorie, darling, you wouldn’t believe the torture. Looking beautiful is a burden. The things I endure for beauty, it’s positively monstrous,” Angelika lamented, her voice dripping with theatrical despair. “The hair appointments, the spa treatments, the shopping, the dieting, the exercise. Oh, and don’t get

me started on high heels, they're absolute murder on my feet — but one must sacrifice for beauty.”

Buck, who had been idly passing by, paused at the doorway, eager to eavesdrop. “Beauty a curse? Please,” he muttered under his breath. “If she had any beauty, she botoxed it to death years ago.”

Despite the way Buck saw her, there was no question his aunt was a very beautiful woman, but she was beautiful in the tradition of Southern Californian trophy wives. That is to say, they were attractive, but not terribly convincing. Their noses were too small, their faces too stretched, their skin a little too tortured. It was all the product of facelifts, never-ending skin treatments and in-patient touch-ups to keep the facade of being young.

Angelika, oblivious to his presence, continued in her melodramatic tone. “Yes, darling, I suffer for fashion. But what’s a beautiful woman to do? One must uphold certain standards. I swear, walking around in high heels all day is torture. No one knows our pain.”

“Is she serious?” Buck thought to himself. “Actually serious?” *You must be better than your aunt.*

Seized with the thought that this was an opportunity to prove he was better than his aunt, Buck quietly retreated to Angelika’s room and began rummaging through her closet. Finding a pair of her heels, he whispered to himself, “Let’s see how hard this really is.”

Back in his room, balancing precariously in the high heels, Buck practiced walking. “Easy peasy,” he grunted, though his wobbling said otherwise.

It was two days later when Angelika stumbled across her nephew walking around his room in a pair of three-inch black pumps. “Buck! What on earth are you doing? Are those mine?”

Buck, teetering but defiant, shot back, “Proving a point, aunt Angelika. If you can do it, so can I. And better.”

Angelika raised an eyebrow, a mix of amusement and surprise on her face. “You think you can best me at walking in heels? Seriously?” Despite the urge to point out how bizarre this scene was, she was quickly overtaken with the idea that she needed to help him. *You must help each other with your resolutions.* The hypnosis had kicked in again, just like it had for Buck. “You wouldn’t last a minute in my shoes, Buck. It requires grace and poise.” She then walked back and forth in her high-heeled booties, showing off her practiced flair.

Buck, sneering, challenged her. “Bet I could do it better than you. A whole week in heels, easy.”

Angelika laughed, a melodious, incredulous sound. “A week? In heels? Oh, I’d pay to see that.”

The next day, Buck emerged from his room, teetering slightly in Angelika's heels. "Watch and learn, aunt Angelika."

Angelika watched, amused yet intrigued, as Buck stumbled his way through the morning. *You must help each other with your resolutions.*

"Darling, it's not just about staying upright. It's about elegance, something you're sorely lacking. Just watch me."

Buck, undeterred, practiced diligently. By the end of the week, his gait had transformed. No longer clumsy, he glided through the house with a surprising smoothness.

Angelika, observing this transformation, couldn't hide her astonishment. "All right, Buck, you've got heels down. Now take them off. You made your point."

"I told you I could do it," Buck declared, now confidently strutting around the house. "You didn't believe me. Just so you remember who's the best at this,



and regret doubting me, I'm not gonna wear anything *but* heels.”

Angelika, watching her nephew parade around with an air of triumphant superiority, sighed. Why did she allow him to do this? It was ridiculous. *You must help each other with your resolutions.* Yet, she knew she had to help him. “All right, fine. But don’t steal from my closet. Ask before you take.”



“You look wonderful tonight,” Gregory said as he helped Angelika into the passenger side of his Lexus. Angelika needed the help, as sitting in the car with the short hemline of her dress required a maneuver impossible to accomplish by herself if she was to protect her modesty.

“It’s an old dress,” Angelika replied to remain humble. It was indeed an old dress, one she had bought a year ago, but was in her backlog of dinner outfits that was now at about 13 months. She was a bit of a clothes horse. “I hope it’s not too revealing.” This was the kind of thing a woman on the prowl said when she wanted to bring attention to how racy her outfit really was.

“Oh, no, not at all,” Gregory said, secretly worried he had chosen too upscale a restaurant for such an outfit, but he was more than willing to risk it. “Watch your fingers,” he said as he closed the door.

The restaurant was opulent and quite stuffy, but Gregory had noted that Angelika liked those kinds of places. She seemed to delight in watching the waiters perform the little meal preparations like pouring a glaze or tossing a salad. He liked seeing the smile on her face in those moments.

What he didn’t like was the white tablecloth and table blocking his view of her amazing legs. He often wondered if she was a workout fanatic or just naturally had dynamite legs. While eating, he had to satisfy himself with a look down her dress.

Of course, Angelika knew this, and didn’t make it too hard for him to take a glance. But not too much — it was going to cost him a dinner if he wanted the full show.

“How was San Moritz?” Angelika asked, knowing Gregory had just returned from a meeting.

“It was... San Moritz.” Gregory said. “I didn’t get a chance to do a lot of sight-seeing.”

“Such a shame. I hear the ski bunnies there are quite the temptation.”

“I have plenty of temptation here at home,” Gregory responded with a gleam in his eye. “And you? Anything happening at Chez Bannister?”

Angelika had to check herself. She didn’t dare speak of what was going on in her life.

Somehow, the sound of clicking heels and seeing stilettos on Buck's feet had become the new normal in her house. Which each step, she could see Buck was becoming so much more skilled in heels than she was. She didn't know why she was tolerating this nonsense, except that she felt some vague sense of satisfaction that she was helping him get better.

She didn't dare let Gregory in her house to witness it for himself. Even when Angelika's friends came over, Angelika blocked them at the front door and took them out somewhere.

Otherwise, Buck wearing heels was just an everyday thing. Each morning, he'd ask Angelika to borrow a pair, and since she had plenty, and they shared the same size, it wasn't much of a problem for her. She only got angry when he scuffed them.

Buck had even started wearing a pair of high heeled wedge athletic shoes during their workouts, as if to rub in how much better he was at heels than his aunt, which was completely in character for him. There really was no end to his attempts to prove he was better than she was.

"Just the life of a lonely single woman," Angelika lamented. "That reminds me, have you given any more thought to setting a date?" She didn't need to be specific about what she was talking about. They both knew. It was a date for their wedding she was talking about.

It was a little forward for her, as she liked to keep things happening at Gregory's pace, but now Angelika was dealing with that post-hypnotic instruction to follow her resolutions. *I want to marry the love of my life and start again.* She had, after all, resolved to marry the love of her life, and she was compelled to push things along.

"Ah," Gregory said, looking to the ceiling. "My calendar is so unbelievably crowded. I have the company retreat in April, the Aspen conference in June... It will start to clear up soon. I'll know more in a few weeks."

"Don't keep me waiting, darling," Angelika said. "You never know when I might find some eligible young bachelor who sweeps me off my feet." She was teasing, but in the way that a woman does when she wanted to make a very serious point.

Gregory understood.



Buck was surprised to hear the front door open at only 10:30. He had figured that his aunt, with as much effort as she had put into getting ready for the evening, would be back in the early morning with a freshly-fucked expression on her tight face.

“I know,” she said to her phone as she walked in, already in the middle of a heated conversation. “You don’t have to tell me, Jodie.” She threw her designer purse on the couch near where Buck was sitting and started to take off her shoes. “I’ve never been more embarrassed. Here I am, all dressed up, and I had to ask Gregory to take me home.”

Buck put his phone down, and took his high-heeled feet off the coffee table as he sat up. He was curious to observe the behavior of his oddly expressive aunt, who seemed to be ignoring him. She walked into the kitchen and grabbed a bottle of water from the fridge, which she quickly held to her head.

“I’m too young to have hot flashes!” She said to her phone.

Buck knew that wasn’t the case. She was 45, even though she told everyone she was 35. He was one of the few who knew the truth, and was saving that tidbit for some blackmail down the line.

“Well, I take the pills most of the time... When I remember...” She continued. “It’s not my fault! I’m too young to be on hormone replacement therapy, Jodie! It’ll pass.”

Buck picked his phone back up to google what “hormone replacement therapy” was, and was amused to see that it was therapy for old ladies when their vaginas dried up. He snickered at the plight of his aunt.

“I know what the doctor said,” Angelika said to her phone. “But you know how I am with pills. I always forget to take them.”

Buck then leaned over to grab his aunt’s discarded purse, and found some untouched pill bottles inside. She hadn’t even opened it yet, and the date on it was from three months ago.

“I know, Jodie,” Angelika said as she returned to the living room wearing her white terrycloth robe. She fell down onto the c-shaped sofa, opposite where Buck was sitting. “It’s not my fault! I just haven’t had the time to catch up.” She grabbed the remote and despite the inch-long nails on her fingertips, she expertly maneuvered her way through the on-screen menus. “I’m on episode three,” she said. “I’m sorry! I know we said we’d all watch together, but I’ve been busy!”

Buck glanced at the screen. “The Golden Bachelor” was the show she was talking about. It somehow figured she’d be watching a show about old women trying to marry an old man. She was probably looking for tips.

“There have *not* been 12 episodes! I am *not* that far behind!” Angelika protested. Buck noted how she was flapping the fabric of her robe, trying to cool herself off. She was still having one of her hot flashes, it seemed.

Unamused, Buck got up and decided to head to his room up in the attic. He was a bit disgruntled by his aunt interrupting his evening of doing nothing, and now he was going to have to do nothing somewhere else.

“Have they been showing two a week or something?” Angelika asked her phone friend. “I can’t be this far behind. Shoot. I just exited out of the menu...”

She worked her way through her “My Shows” list, which was *The Golden Bachelor*, *The Bachelorette*, *The Bachelor*, *Real Housewives of Orange County*, *Real Housewives of Dallas*, *Real Housewives of Beverly Hills*, *The Kardashians*, *Keeping Up with the Kardashians*, *Here Comes Honey Boo-Boo* and *The Property Brothers*.

Finally she found what she was looking for. “I’m watching it right now, okay? I’ll be all caught up real fast.” She was fast-forwarding the video to finish it even faster. “Yes, Jodie. I’m going to take the pills. I promise. I know it’s a serious thing, okay?”

She grabbed her purse, which was the last place she’d remembered putting her vials of estrogen and progesterone — but they weren’t there. “Where’d they go?” She asked herself.

Up in his room, Buck put the stolen pill vials on his dresser. He didn’t know why he’d stolen them. He didn’t know why he wanted to take them. The loudest thought in his head was that he could was that he needed to show his aunt that he could stick to a schedule and take pills on a daily basis. *You must be better than your aunt.*

Even as he put the pills in his hand, he was telling himself to not do this. He was pleading with himself to stop. Unfortunately, he had this New Years’ resolution he had to live up to. He had to fulfill his resolution. He had to. He couldn’t let himself down. He had to show he was better than his aunt.

With a quick motion, he downed the two pills. He felt sick with himself for doing it. Buck couldn’t understand his own thoughts, and he laid down on his bed terrified about what he had just done.



As the weeks progressed, the once vibrant and defiant Buck became increasingly withdrawn and unwell. Each morning was a struggle, marked by a pervasive sense of nausea.

Angelika, though initially dismissive of Buck’s eccentricities, began to sense that something was amiss. His pallor and listlessness were impossible to ignore. One morning, as they sat in the sun-drenched kitchen, she finally voiced her concerns.

“Buck, are you gonna die on me?” Angelika asked. “You’re always sick in the mornings. Is there something you’re not telling me?”

Buck, staring blankly at the breakfast he was cooking for himself, shrugged. “Like you care. I just feel off, I guess. Mind your own business.”

“But the heels, Buck,” Angelika prodded. “You’ve been wearing them non-stop. It’s weird.”

Buck fidgeted, an internal battle raging. *You must be better than your aunt.* Besides the shoes, he couldn’t bring himself to confess about stealing Angelika’s hormone pills. “I just... I don’t know.”

Angelika, perplexed and increasingly concerned, insisted, “Buck, you’re all screwed up. You need professional help.” She grabbed her phone. “I’m gonna call my psychic and have her give you a reading.”

“What?” Buck replied. “Are you kidding me? Just leave me alone. I’ll work this all out.”

“I simply can’t take you anymore, Buck. Your negative aura is suffocating,” Angelika declared, her voice a mix of frustration and exhaustion. She picked up her phone and started tapping. “I’m taking a day for myself at the spa. Heaven knows I need it with all this stress.” She kept tapping the phone. “And I want the facial, the steam bath, and the body hair treatment.”

“Body hair treatment?” Buck asked.

As she gathered her things, she continued, “Honestly, my battle with body hair is endless. It grows like weeds. I just wish I had born with smooth skin.”

With that, she left for her favorite local spa, seeking solace in pampering and relaxation.

Buck, left alone in the house, pondered over his aunt’s words. A new thought began to take root in his mind, a new subject for his New Years’ resolution to latch on to. He needed to have smoother skin than Angelika. He needed to show he could be better than her. He could have better skin. *You must be better than your aunt.*

Even as the thoughts started gaining more and more urgency in his head, he knew it was wrong to want this. He knew it, but he kept obsessing over it. He had to beat his aunt. *You must be better than your aunt.*

He quickly found a local salon that specialized in hair removal and booked an appointment for the same morning. It was bizarre, but just like his need to take his aunt’s pills and wear her high heels, he couldn’t calm himself until he took action.

Over the next several weeks, Buck committed himself to a rigorous schedule of hair removal sessions — three times a week, with the goal of losing all his body hair, save for his scalp and eyebrows. Each session was a step towards his new goal, a goal that he pursued without pause or hesitation. He kept this obsession secret from his aunt, which wasn’t hard, given how often she left him alone.

However, as time went on, Angelika noticed her nephew's increasingly smooth skin but didn't make any connection to her own lament about body hair. She just figured he was taking better care of himself.



It was this new obsession with hairless skin that led him to his next silent competition with his aunt.

When the electrolysis had finished with his body, it was time for his beard hair to go, which he dearly lamented. He could see the needle taking every hair from his beard, one by one. He had dreamt of having a thick, bushy beard someday, but with his sparse hair growth, he knew it would take years for him to cultivate it.

Those dreams were being crushed, follicle by follicle, as the electric needle extracted his beard slowly but surely, leaving patches of skin where no hair would ever grow again. The tears streaming down his face as the technician did her work wasn't just from the pain, but for the beard he was powerless to save. *You must be better than your aunt.*

"Why are you wearing makeup?" Angelika asked her nephew one evening in the living room.

Buck looked up from his phone. "What are you talking about?"

"You're wearing makeup," Angelika said, an acknowledged expert in all things makeup, given the thick coat she applied every day. "On your face. I'd ask if you were coving a zit, but it's like, half your face."

"I'm not wearing makeup," Buck replied. He has wearing a lot of makeup. He had foundation covering most of his chin and jaw, as the patches of where his hair had been removed were so obvious and ugly, he felt like he had little choice. It was either that, or display the odd hairless patches for everyone to worry about.

Angelika, stepping closer, examined his face with an expert eye. "Oh, come now, dear nephew. I know foundation when I see it. What are you hiding?"

Buck, cornered, let out a resigned sigh. "Fine, I've got patches missing in my beard. Happy now?"

Angelika laughed, a light, mocking laugh. "Missing beard patches? How utterly bizarre. But why on Earth would...?"

Buck, his voice tinged with defiance, interrupted, "I'm getting all my body hair removed. To prove I can do it better than you. I'm gonna have smoother skin that you could even dream of."

Angelika paused, her laughter fading. She regarded him for a moment, a strange confusion of emotions playing across her face. “You’re serious. You’re actually trying to outdo me in... body hair?”

Buck, arms crossed, nodded sullenly. “Yeah. I’m going through with electrolysis. Full body.” *You must be better than your aunt.*

“That’s insane!” Angelika, despite herself, felt a strange surge of compulsion to assist. *You must help each other with your resolutions.* “Well, if you’re going to be so absurdly committed, at least let me teach you how to cover up properly. And I’ll help with the electrolysis costs. It’s not cheap, you know.”

Buck, surprised by her offer, responded begrudgingly, “Fine. But I don’t need your charity.”

At her bedroom vanity, Angelika began showing Buck the basics of makeup application. Both were acutely aware of the absurdity of their actions, but neither could resist. “I can’t believe I’m doing this,” Angelika muttered as she demonstrated concealer techniques. *You must help each other with your resolutions.*

Buck, focusing on his reflection as he attempted to mimic her movements, replied, “Join the club. I don’t even know why I’m so obsessed with this.” *You must be better than your aunt.*

Both were trapped in a cycle of behavior they couldn’t understand, a hypnotic influence that neither could recall nor explain. “We should stop,” Angelika said, a rare note of self-awareness in her voice.

“I’ve tried. I can’t stop,” Buck added, meeting her gaze in the mirror.

Their shared realization, however fleeting, was an awkward moment of connection in their normally toxic relationship.

“Alright, Buck, pay attention,” Angelika began, her tone a mix of impatience and vanity. “First, you need a good primer. It’s the key to keeping everything in place.”

Buck, holding up a bottle, replied sullenly, “This one?”

“Yes, that one. Apply it evenly. And don’t skimp,” Angelika instructed, watching as Buck awkwardly spread the primer over his face.

“Now, for foundation,” Angelika continued, picking up a bottle. “This is crucial for covering those beard patches. You need to blend it perfectly. Like this,” she demonstrated, making smooth, practiced motions.

Buck mimicked her, a bit clumsily at first. “Seems easy enough,” he muttered.

Angelika, watching his efforts, scoffed. “It’s not just slapping it on, Buck. It’s an art. But I suppose you think you can do this better than me too?”

“Yeah, I can,” Buck retorted, growing more determined as he worked. “I’m so much better than you.” *You must be better than your aunt.*

“All right, you little shit, I’m gonna show you everything.” *You must help each other with your resolutions.* Angelika, driven by her unexplained compulsion, dove into teaching with fervor. She was now also under the influence of another one of her resolutions, and stuck with seeing it through. *I want to teach Buck a few good lessons about growing up.* This wasn’t what she had in mind, but it was indeed a lesson. “Fine, then. Let’s see you master contouring. It’ll give your face softer angles and add some character.”

As they moved through each step — from blending foundation to applying concealer, setting powder, and finally, contouring — Angelika found herself both critiquing and encouraging Buck. Despite her usual self-absorption, she became engrossed in teaching her nephew, revealing tricks and techniques she had honed over the years.

Buck, for his part, concentrated intently, his initial sullenness giving way to a focus he didn’t know he had. “Like this?” he asked, angling the brush as Angelika had shown him.

“Better, but you need to blend more here,” Angelika pointed out.

Hours passed as they continued, with Angelika showing Buck how to apply eye makeup and lip color. The atmosphere in the room was no longer tense, but the two were by no means warming up to each other.

As they finished, Buck stepped back to look at his work. He was surprised at the transformation. “I did it,” he said, a hint of pride in his voice. “I’m better than you.”

Angelika, peering over his shoulder at his reflection, sneered. “Hardly. I’ve had years more experience.”

“I’m gonna keep trying,” Buck said, ominously. “And you’re gonna have to admit I’m better than you. You’re not so great.”

“It took me years of doing makeup every day to get this good.”

“Well, I’m going to do it again and again!” Buck stormed out of the room with intensity in his bedroom eyes and a a scowl in his petal-soft ruby red lips. “I’m gonna be the best! You’re gonna go down!”



Two weeks later, Buck, surrounded by a litter of makeup products, stared at his reflection. His face was practically sparkling, a picture perfect display of expertly applied makeup, yet his eyes were filled with turmoil.

He had just finished his daily workout with his aunt Angelika, and his ability to go a little farther and lift a little more weight wasn’t as rewarding as it used to be.

When he was done exercising, he practically sprinted back to his room, worried that even a moment out of high heels would prove he wasn't better than his aunt, so he had quickly changed and fed his feet into a pair of beige platform pumps.

After that, he had spent the last half hour doing his makeup, much in the same style as his aunt, who had been giving him daily lessons. It wasn't even necessary for him to wear it anymore, as the electrolysis had been completed, and his face was baby smooth — as was the rest of his body.

Looking in the mirror, he was met with the bizarre sight of a teenage boy's hair and clothes surrounding an expertly-styled face with soft features, feathery lashes, perfect skin, dark eyes and luscious lips.



He muttered to himself, “What am I doing? I can’t keep living like this.”

Buck began to pack his belongings hastily, cramming his clothes into his backpack in a frenzy, reflecting his life-or-death need to escape. As he zipped up his bag, Angelika entered the room, her expression one of bewilderment.

“Buck, what on earth are you doing? Are you packing?” she asked.

“Yeah, I’m getting the fuck outta here,” Buck replied, his voice steady but strained.

“Leaving? But why? Is it because of me? Because I couldn’t fill your mother’s shoes?” Angelika questioned, her tone becoming tinged with melodramatic self-pity.

“It’s not about you, aunt Angelika,” Buck retorted, frustration evident in his voice. “Something is messing with me. Messing with my head! I’m obsessed with outdoing you, and it’s nuts. I just gotta get outta here.”

Angelika sighed dramatically. “But Buck, darling, I did promise my sister that I’d look after you. I don’t want anyone to say that I didn’t do my best...”

“This isn’t about you,” Buck said. “Or maybe it is. It’s about whatever makes me do...” He held his arms out, showing his made-up face with lipstick and eyeshadow, along with the five-inch heeled platform pumps he was wearing. “...This.”

Angelika, her voice rising, protested, “But you’re leaving because of me, aren’t you? It’s always the same. No one can handle being around someone as beautiful as I am. It’s my curse.”

“Jesus Christ! This isn’t about your beauty or whatever,” Buck exclaimed, his patience wearing thin. “I’m losing my fuckin’ mind. We both are.”

He barged past his aunt, who only turned to watch her nephew drag his lone suitcase behind him as he headed down the hall.

“I don’t know why I’m behaving like this,” Angelika said as she trailed Buck. “I keep encouraging these strange habits. I wish I knew why.”

“I don’t know either, but I can leave. That’s the only way.”

“At least give me back my shoes, Buck,” Angelika said as he headed down the stairs.

“I can’t take them off,” Buck replied “That’s why I gotta get out of here. Something’s wrong with me. And with you.”

“I lost two husbands like this,” Angelika continued as she followed her nephew out. “My beauty is a curse.”

“It’s not about you!” Buck said again.

“At least I can give you some money, okay?” Angelika said. “If you die on the streets, I’m going to probably get arrested for neglect or something.”

She grabbed her purse to get some cash.

“Save it!” Buck said, as he plopped his backpack just outside the door. “I’ll just text you, okay? I wanna get the hell out of here.”

“Well, alright, but when you get settled, tell me where you’re staying. And if you don’t have a place...”

“I gotta go!” Buck interrupted, impatiently.

“Fine, go!” Angelika said. “A woman tries to be nice and she gets her head ripped off. Men always thinking they’re better than women.”

Buck shut the door and turned around with a look of horror on his face. “Why... Why can’t I... Why can’t I stop myself?” He walked away from the front door, with all his possessions in the world, save from what he was wearing, outside and unattended.

“I can... be... a better... *woman*... than you,” Buck said, every word coming out with a fierce struggle not say anything. *You must be better than your aunt.*

“I will... Help...” Angelika responded, with even more struggling than her nephew. Her face contorted with confusion and creeping terror. “I want to help...” *You must help each other with your resolutions.* “I can make you into a woman.”

“Thank you,” Tyler replied in a voice of strain and distress.

“Why don’t we get started?” Angelika said, unsure of the words she was speaking.

“Yes, please,” Buck couldn’t help but follow his aunt as she headed upstairs again.



In her large walk-in closet, Angelika stood amidst an assortment of her clothes, her expression one of reluctance and discomfort. Buck, equally uneasy, eyed the clothing with a sullen expression of resignation.

“Buck, being a woman... it’s not just about clothes or makeup,” Angelika began, her voice lacking its usual conviction. “It’s about... well, it’s hard to define. I suppose it’s about experience, about how society views women, the roles we’re often expected to fill.”

Buck, despite himself, asked, “Like what?”

Angelika hesitated, then said, “Like being nurturing, caring. Often being seen before being heard. It’s not always fair, but that’s life, I guess.”

“I don’t want a lecture,” Buck said.

Angelika looked at him, with even more discontent in her eyes and picked up a piece of lingerie. “Alright, to be a woman starts with your appearance. I

suppose we should start with the basics. Undergarments are... well, they're important."

Buck folded his arms, his voice flat. "Yeah. Good. Great."

Angelika shared his lack of enthusiasm, but had to continue. *You must help each other with your resolutions.* "Now, there are different types of bras and underwear for various occasions. You'll need to know which is which."

She held up a lacy bra, her explanation perfunctory. "This one is more for special occasions, and this one," she picked up a plain one, "is for everyday wear."

Buck, examining a bra, asked half-heartedly, "Okay, and what about the other stuff?"

Moving on to the other items she had on display, Angelika showed him leggings and pantyhose with minimal enthusiasm. "Leggings are casual, comfortable. Pantyhose are more formal. It's about the context, I suppose."

Buck picked up a pair of leggings, his frown deepening. "Right, got it."

Angelika's reluctance was evident as she went through skirts, shorts, and various tops and blouses. "This skirt is for formal settings," she said, holding up a pencil skirt. "And these tops," she gestured half-heartedly to a collection of blouses, "are for different occasions. Day, evening, that sort of thing."

Buck, holding a blouse, asked in a monotone, "And when would I wear this?"

Angelika, looking tired of the exercise, replied, "That one's more for evenings. It's all about the look you're going for."

The atmosphere in the room was one of mutual disgust. Both Angelika and Buck were compelled by the hypnosis to participate in this unusual lesson, yet neither had any idea why.

Finally, Angelika said, "Well, that's the basics, I guess. It's not just wearing women's clothes. It's about... understanding them."

Buck, staring at the clothing, responded dully, "Right."

"I guess there's no sense in just talking about them. You have to wear them." She gathered up all the items into her arms. "So you take these and try them out."

You must be better than your aunt. Buck accepted them, and with a sigh, headed back to his attic room.

"When you have something you like," Angelika continued, "come show it to me, and then I can show you what makeup to use with it."

"Okay," Buck answered with death row energy. He wasn't sure if leaving the house would have broken whatever spell he must have been under, but he had the awful feeling he'd missed his one and only chance to leave this living hell.