

Amazaballs!

*By Alexander Golin
Sophomore Fall*

“You’re strange.”

“What?”

“You’re strange!”

“Why am I strange?”

“I don’t know. Your aspects. Everything about you is strange! Come, come, come, meet my friend!” she said with a shimmy and a purr as she dragged me by my hand from the lamppost I was leaning on towards the gateway to Grand Central, her diamond bracelets jingling as she moved. I hastily tucked my iPod into the pocket of my fatigue jacket, my May subway playlist still shuffling and faintly emanating from my headphones. “This is Karen, she’s amaaaaazaballs! You should see her house in Westchester, it’s positively diviiiiine.” I shifted my cigarette to my left hand and reached out to shake Karen’s. It took her a while to find it, but when she did, she held on with a soft but unyielding grasp.

“How old are you?” Karen said, swaying towards me with her pelvis. Her breath smelled of expensive liquor.

“Nineteen. Almost twenty. Nineteen.”

“Nineteen!” They both exclaimed, sharing a flirtatious glance. “I barely remember when I was nineteen!” my nameless companion purred again.

“Suzanna, just imagine what we could do to this one,” Karen said, moving her hand to the small of my back. Karen and Suzanna, okay. “Ugh, do you have a cigarette? I’m positively dying for a cigarette. I always start craving one when I drink.”

"Sure I do," I said, reaching into my pocket, becoming uncomfortably aware of how crumpled my pack looked after walking around all day. My dad smoked Marlboros so I was pretty sure they were still cool. I wish it had been a new pack. I handed her a cigarette and asked Karen if she needed a light, causing both women to glance at one another again.

"Now guess how old *we* are," Suzanna said reaching for my exposed forearm.

"You two can't be over thirty," I said with a grin, exuding the brown nosing confidence I'd had since I learned to systematically underestimate a woman's age in middle school. Both of them practically giggled and advanced their hands along my body.

"I'm thirty-five," Suzanna began, "Karen is forty-seven. And you're cute."

"Oh don't be so honest Suzanna! What do you think a nineteen year old will want to do with someone who's forty-seven? But you're right, he is a cute one!" Karen exclaimed, reaching her other hand to Suzanna's ass, completing our makeshift circle of friends.

"Hey sugar how 'bout some of that for me?" a denizen of Grand Central station yelled to Karen.

"Oh go fuck yourself you homeless pig!" Suzanna interjected before turning to me, "Us two have only fucked twice but it's not like we're a show for some pervert on the street! Plus we were both really drunk and only Karen is really drunk tonight."

"I am not that drunk!" Karen protested as she stumbled over to the nearest ashtray.

“Let’s get you into a cab hun,” Suzanna said to Karen, still petting my arm and purring at me again. The three of us strode to the street - I was in the middle – and we hailed a cab. I guided Karen into the cab as she struggled to pull herself in, and before departing I delivered a swift, distinctly out of character kiss to her hand and bid her goodnight, Suzanna purring the entire time.

“Now that that beautiful drunk is gone I have you all to myself! So tell, tell, tell what is it that you do when you’re nineteen? Do you work, do you play? Tell me, what are you doing out this wonderful evening!” She crooned, whisking me back to the sidewalk, managing to exude an alcohol-ridden grace that my tenure at college had left me entirely unaccustomed to. I, on the other hand tripped, almost imperceptibly, getting back up on the curb. I hoped she hadn’t noticed.

“I work as a bartender in Battery Park City right now, but I go to school in Boston during the year.” I said, flicking my dying cigarette to the gutter and pulling out another one. As I lit it I realized that for adults, ‘the year’ was just the year, not the school year. Fucking moron.

“Boston! Where? Tell me everything!” Suzanna said as she shuffled around her purse, clearly looking for something.

“I go to Harvard, I’m going to be a sophomore.”

“No way! I don’t believe you!” She pulled out a tube of bright red lipstick and generously applied it to her lips.

“It’s the truth.” I flicked the ash from my cigarette and crossed my arms.

“UNBELIEVABLE! My gay stepbrother did his graduate studies there.” I started to respond but she continued over me, “He’s amaaaaaaazaballs! You really

must meet him, really! He knows people.” She shuffled around her purse again until she pulled out her sleek, unscathed smartphone, and started dialing a number.

“Hellllllooooooooo my darling queer, how the hell have you been?” she jubilantly exclaimed into the phone. She briefly covered the microphone and leaned towards me to say, “It’s okay, I love my gays and they know it!” Jesus. I continued to drag on my cigarette and pulled out my phone to check my texts. It was dead. Well fuck me. “Thorin darling, what are you doing tonight, I’ve met a lovely young man that you must meet!” There was a pause in her conversation, but her purring never relented.

“Barrage? Perfect! We’re at Grand Central, we’ll be over in the blink of an eye!” Suzanna kissed the air in front of her twice and hung up the phone. “Let’s go on an adventure cutie!” she said again dragging me to the street. I can’t say I tried to resist her tugging, but my phone felt heavier in my pocket now that I knew it had died. Suzanna stuck her slender arm out to hail a cab and tightened her grasp around my arm with her other. I flexed.

A taxi pulled up and I opened the door open for her, excited for her to reward me with another purr. I wasn’t let down. I slid in next to her and shut the door. “Yes, hello, take us to 47th and 9th Avenue. Quickly please!” I hated when people order cabbies around, but I never verbalized my objection, nor did a grimace ever cross my face. The cab sped off towards Times Square as Suzanna shifted her legs toward me, not caring at all that her dress had started to ride up. “So what did you think of Karen?” she said touching her knee to mine.

“I like her. She seems quite fun.” Since when did I start saying ‘quite’?

“Even if she’s forty-seven?”

“Well of course, what difference could that possibly make?”

“Ooooooh I like you cutie. You’re smooth.” She said with another purr. My years spent as an actor in high school plays were paying off.

“You’re not so bad yourself gorgeous.” Suzanna shifted a little in her seat and moved nearer to me.

“Karen and I met outside a club two years ago. She was even more drunk than she was tonight and the bouncer was giving her a hard time, so I helped her out. A shimmy here and there can get you far.” She winked. “So anyway, I had a boy wrapped around my finger and Karen took a liking to us, so we all went back to my place and had a positively sensual threesome!” She paused for a bit, clearly proud of herself. “She’s a hot mess, but I love her for it! And we’ve only fucked one other time, so don’t go getting any ideas!” Suzanna moved her hand to my knee. “What do you think of all this cutie?” I had to think a moment about what to say, but I don’t think I was awkward. Hopefully at least.

“You’re quite a fascinating woman Suzanna, I very much enjoy your stories. I do have one question for you though. Where are we going?”

“Barrage darling! Have you never been to Barrage?”

“No, I’m afraid I haven’t, what exactly is Barrage?”

“It’s a gay bar! A wonderful, wonderful gay bar in Hell’s Kitchen! Nothing too fancy. Nothing too gay either. It’s just right for tonight!” I’d grown up in Hell’s Kitchen so I felt much more comfortable about hopping into a cab with a strange woman now that I knew our destination. Plus it got me closer to the A train for when I would have to go home.

“Sounds like a great time. Do you go there a lot?” I asked, hoping she wouldn’t catch on to my act consisting of a string of clichés and facades.

“Only when I’m seeing Thorin, my other gays prefer the gayer bars! Those bars are amaaaazaballs!” I didn’t know what to think of how she talked about “her gays” but before I even had time to let my mind ponder it, she interjected with “How do you like my dress?”

“It’s fabulously elegant.” I said, and Suzanna’s eyes narrowed as a smile crept over her face.

“It’s Chanel. You know who bought it for me?” I obviously couldn’t, but I played along.

“George Clooney?”

“Don’t be ridiculous cutie! This dress was a gift from the previous owner of the Ritz Carlton! He’s older, but he’s...” she rubbed her fingers together as if they were full of bills. She shimmied with pride.

“Good for you!” I said, my tone reflecting a wholeheartedness my mind thought was hilarious.

“Isn’t it though?! He bought me this necklace too. Tiffany’s of course. And this shawl. Gucci.”

“Well you just have yourself a sugar daddy don’t you?” I said with a chuckle.

“Oh we haven’t fucked or anything! He buys me things and I go out with him and he buys me drinks. But I’ve never seen his dick! Not once.” I’d never seen anyone so deeply satisfied with themselves, it almost seemed impossible. Suzanna started counting on her fingers. “Seven grand. In two months he’s bought me seven

grand's worth of pretty things!" She clapped a few times, more to herself than to me. I just tried to keep smiling. "Ooh ooh right here is perfect, pull over!"

We had reached 9th Avenue and 45th Street. Suzanna impatiently paid with her credit card and manually entered a tip, undercutting the 10% default button by a few dollars, and slid out of the cab. "Thank you very much," I said to the cabbie as I exited.

Suzanna trotted down the sidewalk in her high heels and I tried to keep pace. Where did she get all this energy? "I need some cigarettes," she exclaimed as she grabbed my hand and made a sharp turn into a mini mart. There was one person in line ahead of us and Suzanna wasted no time introducing herself. She immediately wrapped an arm around the man's shoulder and said, "Hey there darling, how's your night been?" The rather meek looking man shot a glance at me as if he were looking for some solid ground to stand on and all I could do was smile back and shrug, half due to a deep understanding and half due to the comical spiral that the night had become. The young man lifted her arm off his shoulder, paid the cashier, and walked out the door with his head hung. "What's his problem? A sexy woman puts her arm around him and he leaves! The world we live in!" She directed this to the entire mini mart and settled her gaze on the cashier. "I'd like a pack of Marlboro Lights. And this pack of gum." She said selecting a fruit flavored pack of Trident.

"Where are you from?" the cashier inquired of Suzanna in a heavy accent, the glint in his eye making it clear he wanted to take advantage of her outgoing nature.

"Amsterdam, and yourself you lovely man?" she replied without hesitation.

“Bangalore. Have you ever been?” he asked after seeing Suzanna’s face light up.

“Yes of course! I didn’t like it as much as Goa or Mumbai.” The cashier looked slightly hurt and feebly tried to convince her that his home deserved another chance, but Suzanna had already moved on and was on her way out the door.

“Thank you,” I uttered to the cashier before following Suzanna back to the street. She lit up a cigarette while she strode uptown, quite purposefully jingling her bracelets.

We rounded the corner of 47th and Suzanna dialed her phone. “Thorin, where the hell are you, we’re coming up right outside!” She hung up the phone without waiting for his response and within ten seconds a handsome young man wearing a green polo shirt and seersucker shorts exited a bar a few steps down the street from us. “THORIN DARLING!” Suzanna exclaimed trotting towards the man.

“Well helloooo there gorgeous, how are you this beautiful summer night?” he said with a cursory wave of his hand.

“I am positively glorious my dear. I met someone very strange this evening!” she declared triumphantly, pulling on my arm and lording me at her stepbrother like a trophy. I stuck my hand out and introduced myself.

“Thorin, it’s a pleasure,” the man said in an audibly disinterested tone. “Does anyone have a smoke?”

“Sure,” I said offering him a cigarette.

“Are those reds? I only smoke Lights. Suzanna darling do you have one?” She handed him one from her pack. “So how did you two meet?”

“Well!” Suzanna couldn’t have been more delighted to recount her tale, “this beautiful young man, he’s only nineteen! He was standing outside Grand Central smoking a cigarette and I just thought he seemed so strange! Different even! And you’ll never guess what he does with his time.”

“You’re quite right Suzanna darling, you may as well just let it go yourself.”

“He studies at Harvard! You studied there! How charming!” Suzanna was practically beside herself, and clapped in honor of her introducing the two of us.

“Oh is that so?” Thorin inquired of me, his interest finally peaked, but only slightly.

“Yes, I’m going into my sophomore year in the fall,” I said.

“What dorm did you live in last year?” He was testing me.

“Stoughton,” I said, “it was nice, but quite a shock compared to my prior living arrangement.” I pulled out my last cigarette and lit it.

“I lived in Pennypacker, and indeed I know the sentiment. Upper East Side?”

“Of course. Am I that transparent?” I lied through my teeth and let out a chuckle that Thorin harmonized with. I’d gone to school on the Upper East Side but I grew up in Harlem. It’s not like they’d ever find out though right?

“Are you on any teams there? I was on varsity fencing and polo myself.”

“I actually initiated a club croquet team this past year. We did quite well.” He was totally gonna buy it.

“If only they’d had that team there when I was attending classes! My father used to play croquet with me every weekend as a boy.” I almost lost it.

Thorin took one last long drag on his Marlboro Light and tossed it to the curb before placing his hand on Suzanna's back, "Come come, let's go back in, the bartender tonight is quite cute." My cigarette wasn't even close to being finished, but I flicked it into the street and followed the duo into Barrage.

NEW

The dimly lit bar smelled overwhelmingly of cologne and promiscuity, every table occupied by at least two people suspending their faces as close to each others' as possible without touching. At first it seemed like our trio might not find room to sit, but before I even had time to doubt the illustrious step-siblings, Thorin waved to the bartender who gestured to a few open seats and promptly began pouring his drink as we each took a stool at the bar. "What would you like darling?" Suzanna asked, petting my leg. I hadn't come prepared with something in mind, so I blurted out my fallback drink: Jameson on the rocks. "Don't tell me darling, tell this handsome man behind the bar," she said, winking at the bartender who seemed more interested in making eye contact with me than with Suzanna.

"Jameson on the rocks please." I said to the man with a smile. Never hurts to flirt with the bartender right? Suzanna ordered a glass of champagne and Thorin's Stella Artois had just arrived.

"So Suzanna, how has the week treated you so far?" Thorin inquired, more as a nicety than out of genuine interest.

"Well let's see, what's today again?" Suzanna clicked her tongue against her teeth and crossed her legs.

"Monday," I said.

“Amazaballs, yes thank you gorgeous! Well in that case it’s been lovely thus far! I woke up with a mimosa, had lunch at the Modern with Clio, then met up with Karen for drinks around three, and tonight I found this lovely young man and just couldn’t contain myself!” The bartender brought us our drinks and Suzanna and I clinked our glasses together and each took a sip. Mine was more of a swig.

“Sounds like quite the week so far dear,” Thorin said pulling out his phone, “you absolutely must see these pictures from my trip upstate this weekend.”

“Oh you went up to the house!? With whom? Harumph, I want to go up there!” Suzanna pushed her lips out in a pout and crossed her arms under her chest. Thorin’s response was to plop his iPhone in the pronounced cleavage of her blouse. Suzanna unfolded her arms and fished for the phone, giving Thorin a playful slap on the leg when she found it. She brought it to her face and quickly flipped through what must have been at least one hundred pictures.

Thorin sipped his beer and narrated some of the pictures, having of course memorized each one after countless viewings, “That one was when Eliot and I tried to cross the river in bare feet, but he stubbed his toe, poor thing could barely walk the rest of the day.”

“So how aaaare things with Eliot?” Suzanna kept her gaze on the screen.

“Oh he’s a doll, we had a lovely time this weekend. And you know how I like my men short.” He said with a wink at Suzanna. I saw the bartender gaze at Thorin, possibly finding himself uncharacteristically upset by his over-six-foot stature.

“Mmm darling I like my men short too,” Suzanna said pressing her leg into mine and placing her hand on my thigh. She stood a good five inches above me in her shoes.

“And *that* one is from the ‘20’s party my parents throw every year. This year they rented out the Apollo Theatre *and* Governor’s Island.” I leaned in close to Suzanna and peered at the pictures with her. Thorin was wearing a white suit and a felt hat and was sitting with a few other people at a table in a deeply green lawn. There were too many pictures of their meal and drinks, regardless of how *exquisite* they were. I swigged at my Jameson again.

“I like the white suit Thorin. Very dapper.” I was getting some kind of thrill out of testing my acting abilities. Seemed like college hadn’t dulled them too much.

“Why thank you!” He seemed genuinely pleased by the compliment. “I was Gatsby, of course.” Of course.

Suzanna finished going through Thorin’s pictures and ordered another round of drinks. “So speaking of boys,” Thorin began, “you’ve found quite a cute one here. Does he know all about you and your ways Suzanna, or is he still riding up the roller coaster?”

“Oh hush Thorin! Don’t listen to him cutie, I have no idea what he’s talking about!” Suzanna said laughing. A Ke\$ha music video came on the televisions in the bar and Suzanna began giggling and clapping. “Come on I love this song!”

Suzanna gulped down more of her drink, I followed suit, and she grabbed my hand and dragged me out into the middle of the bar. Thorin returned to his phone. I could feel people glancing at us – we were the only two planning on dancing in the

place. Suzanna began swaying and shimmying a little. I had never been a very good dancer so I wasn't sure how I was going to play this off. I grabbed Suzanna's hands and did my best to move in any way that wasn't overtly unattractive. At least I could keep time. "You know you aren't half bad at this," Suzanna said in my ear, "but try this!" she guided my hands to her hips and pulled me in closer to her. "Like this." She whispered in my ear. We started getting in a groove together, but just when it seemed like we were really clicking, the song ended. "Come, come, we need another drink! At least another!"

Suzanna and I rejoined Thorin, who had since begun flirting more with the bartender just for fun, but Suzanna had no problem interrupting them. "Another round of the same if you don't mind!" He seemed a little dismayed to have been called back to work but he obliged.

"Thanks," Thorin said, "he was getting a little too into me."

"What did you think of our dancing Thorin dear?"

"Huh? Oh, it was... quite elegant." Thorin hadn't looked up from his phone other than to toy with the bartender.

"Wasn't it though? This young man has some moves after all!" she said moving her hand up my thigh.

"Yes it seems like he can keep up with even you Suzanna, what if you've finally met your match?"

"Oh don't be silly Thorin, the night is still young!" Our drinks arrived and Suzanna began consuming hers immediately. I sipped at mine, being sure to keep up my guard at least a little bit. The bartender came over to us and told us that the bar

would be closing in fifteen minutes, and I became suddenly aware of how empty it had gotten.

“First one to finish gets to come home with me tonight!” Suzanna declared! Thorin wasn’t interested, and I wasn’t sure if I would come off as too eager if I tried for the prize. Before I had time to decide, Suzanna had already finished her drink, “Looks like I’m taking myself home tonight! Oh well, looks like I’ll just have to find some way to keep myself entertained!”

“Come on, let’s get outta here, it’s dead and it’s only 1 a.m.” Suzanna picked up her purse and rummaged around, pulling out a slip of paper. “Ah of course, I almost forgot! I need to pick up my sweater from the Ritz!” She exclaimed hustling out the door. So as it seemed, the night would move to the Ritz Carlton. “Come, come it’s just across the street and around the corner!” Thorin and I followed her around a corner when I saw a blue awning that proudly displayed “Ritz” in cheesy cursive letters, under which a throng of people milled about smoking cigarettes and comparing their drag. “We’re here!”

Suzanna hustled down the street, having perfectly mastered the art of running in four-inch heels. I hanged back with Thorin trying to remain subtle about watching Suzanna. “She sure is a wild one isn’t she?” Thorin mused tucking his hands into his pockets.

“Tonight has certainly been unexpected.”

He let out a low chuckle and elbowed me slightly. “She’s really taken a shine to you, kid.” By the time he finished his sentence, we’d caught up to Suzanna who was now schmoozing with the bouncer, a burly man with a double-chin-goatee.

“Are you absolutely, positively sure you haven’t run across a teeny little pink sweater this past weekend? Couldn’t you look again, just for me?”

“I come across thirteen teeny weeny little pink sweaters every weekend lady, you can go on in and talk to the bartender about the lost and found box.” He replied, crossing his arms.

“Fine then!” Suzanna said with a harrumph, “let’s go in boys.” She pulled on Thorin’s and my sleeves.

“Whoa, whoa, whoa, I’m gonna need to see some ID from the kid.”

“You’re kidding me right?” Suzanna seductively stepped closer to the man and placed her hand on his forearm. “He’s old enough, can’t you plainly see that? Come on...” She rubbed her hand along his arm.

“ID or he ain’t getting in. That’s that.”

I had lost my fake ID two weeks prior at Terminal 5 when my friend and I drunkenly tried to go to a concert and my hubris did me in. I just shrugged at Suzanna and took a place leaning on the decorative fence the bar had put up as she and Thorin continued into the bar. “We’ll only be a minute darling!” Suzanna shouted back. Thorin turned his head and gave me a wink.

“Didn’t mean to cause you any trouble, man.” I said to the bouncer.

“Don’t worry about it, thanks for not trying to bullshit me. The schtick gets old ya know? Your ‘friend’ is quite the handful...” He uncrossed his arms and loosened his stance.

“Yeah she’s somethin’.”

“How’d you end up meeting her? She must be what, fifteen years older than you?”

“She picked me up outside Grand Central,” I curtly replied, as if that sentence could possibly sum up the bizarre evening that was still unfolding.

“Damn kid. You must have some kinda game.”

Right at that moment, 2 men in tight shirts and a woman with massive curly hair trotted out of the bar amidst loud chit chat.

“The DJ tonight is absolute crap Joe. You’ll go rough him up a bit for us big boy, won’t you?” A stout well groomed man said to the bouncer.

“Why don’t you do it Verne, too scared to chip another nail?” Joe retorted.

“Oh hush up you crabby big ol’ bear. What’s gotcha down tonight?” Verne inquired?

“Yeah Joe whatsa matter hun?” One of the women asked. Her voice was quite deep. “Wanna cigarette?”

“Yeah, thanks James.” Ohhhhh. Got it. James placed a cigarette in his mouth and lit it, then passed it to Joe, leaving a ring of red lipstick on the butt. Joe began dragging on the cigarette.

“And who’s your handsome young friend mister?” the third man asked.

“Oh I didn’t even catch your name kiddo. I’m Joe,” he said extending his hand. I introduced myself and shook his hand. “These are the guys. Verne’s the short one, James is the one with the hair, and Christopher over here, well, he’s the sexy one.”

“You watch yourself Joseph. Hi Kiddo, I’m the one with the hair.” James shook my hand. He had beautiful nail polish.

"I'm Verne, nice to meet another person under six feet. You'd be surprised how hard that is around here, Kiddo."

"And last but certainly not least, if you couldn't already guess that I'm the sexy one, I'm Christopher!" He said dragging out the I. He reached for my hand and kissed it. "Pleasure to meet you Kiddo."

"You smoke Kiddo?" Verne asked handing a cigarette towards me.

"Sure, thanks Verne."

"So why are you just standing around out here with boring old Joe, come join us inside for the party!"

"He was just telling me about how a kid like this punk ended up with that leggy blonde that just stormed in."

"SHE was your date?" Christopher inquired incredulously. "Bummer." He winked.

"She must've been at least 35. And that dress must've cost a whole lot more than you do Kiddo. I should know, I try one on just like it every third Tuesday of the month as a pick me up," James said with a smile.

"Tell the boys how you ended up with her Kiddo," Joe requested of me.

"She picked me up outside Grand Central," I replied in short again.

"Well you do have a cute butt." Christopher said, craning his neck to get a better view.

"Thanks," I said with a smile, "you too baby." Everybody cracked up.

“Ohhh so you think you can run with the best of us huh, Kiddo? Well come on in and let’s see what you’ve got,” James said, grabbing my wrist and starting to pull me towards the door.

“Whoa there Jamie, Kiddo ain’t allowed in. No ID,” Joe interrupted the giddy trio.

“How old are you Kiddo? I just thought you looked young for your age.” Verne elbowed Joe in the rib.

“I’m nineteen.”

“See he’s practically older than you ya big ol’ bastard!” Verne raised his arms into the air before landing them on Joe’s shoulders and shaking. Joe furrowed his graying brow and stood still, arms crossed for what seemed like a whole minute.

“You’ll keep an eye on the kid right boys?” Joe said huskily. They all nodded vigorously, “and you’ll keep him outta trouble right boys?” They continued to nod vigorously. I was impressed that James’ hair didn’t budge a centimeter. “Alright then, but hurry on in.”

“Oh Joe, you’re such a sweetheart.” Christopher kissed him on the cheek. I caught Joe blushing the slightest bit.

The three men rushed me through the door, not even giving me time to thank Joe. The bar reeked of perfume and strong drinks and I kept getting hit in the side with handbags, feather boas, and lots of sequins. “Come on Kiddo, let’s get some drinks!” James pulled me toward the backlit bar. We hustled up to the bartender James gave him the order, “two Manhattans hot stuff! Hope you like Manhattans Kiddo.”

“Sure I’m up for it.”

“So where’s the lady of the night, hmm?” James nudged his hip into mine.

“Not sure, she ran in here with her stepbrother to find a sweater.”

“Wellllll we’d better get searching Kiddo!” James excitedly spun around to face the crowd on the dance floor and hoisted his rear onto the bar. He gazed across the sea of meticulously styled hair and searched for Suzanna.

I leaned against the bar and turned to look up the bar to the bartender who was almost finished with our drinks. I was pretty eager to see James after a drink or two. I turned my head to the other end of the bar when I saw Suzanna giggling at something, but I couldn’t see what through all the people. I tapped James on the waist and gave a nod down the bar. He looked towards Suzanna while the bartender handed me the two Manhattans. I winked at him for kicks. He smiled back.

James turned to me and I handed him his drink and took a sip of mine. I didn’t like it as much as the Jameson, but hey, who can complain about free drinks from a sexy drag queen. James didn’t drink his but instead put his hand on my shoulder and said, “Oh honey, I’m sorry,” casting a look back at Suzanna.

“Why?” I said as I turned my head down the bar. But then I understood. A well-dressed man with a big dark beard was leaning on the bar next to her as she petted his arm. She wrapped her hand around the back of his neck and pulled his face down to hers and began shamelessly making out. James stared at me with his big blue eyes and scrunched his tweezed brow in concern.

“Honey... oh honey. She’s too old for you anyway. Way past her prime!” I took another large sip from my drink and stared down at the bar. Then I took another

swig. "Let me join you baby," James got off the bar and stood next to me and gulped down his drink, promptly ordering another round. "You know, if you want we can go make her jealous Kiddo." James winked at me and put his arm around my waist. "Why don't I show you how us real men dance, and oh, maybe we just *happen* to bump into them. Whadya say cutie?" James did look hot. Hot enough to make Suzanna pissed.

"Show me what you've got hot stuff!" I said to him and we marched out onto the dance floor just as a new song came on. James did a spin and pulled me by my hands close to his body. He wrapped his arms around my shoulders and clasped his hands behind my neck. I put my hands on his waist and we started grooving with the crowd. As the music picked up, James began to move more seductively and pressed into me harder. We moved over towards the bar where Suzanna was sitting before, but by the time we came near it seemed that she had already left with Beardy McFuckface.

"James, I think she's already gone."

"Hmm, so she is," he said, pulling me back out to the dance floor. He turned his head and spoke into my ear, "so you're 19 hmm?"

"Yeah, just finished up my first year at Harvard. How old are you if I may be so forward?"

"Ooh a smarty," he said, "I'm 23, just got out of architecture school at Cooper Union."

"And you're calling me a smarty!" I knew Cooper Union was a great school because I always wanted to be an architect but never had the artistic abilities.

“Oh yeah, college was a grand time as I’m sure a handsome man like yourself must know.” He pressed his chest to mine and wrapped his arms tighter around my neck.

“It’s been fun for sure! Can’t really compare it to the gorgeous Ritz you have here though.”

“Oh well certainly not! We have quite our own brand of fun around here,” he said pulling away a bit so he could wink at me. He stared at me for a moment and then pressed his lips to mine. They were probably the softest lips I’d ever kissed. James pulled his face away from mine, and paused for a moment. I didn’t know what to say. “I’m sorry Kiddo, didn’t mean to make you uncomfortable.” He seemed slightly dejected. “I just thought we were getting along.” I still didn’t know what to say so I just sort of stood there looking at him. I’d never kissed a man before. He raised his hand to my face and caressed it. I pressed my hands a little harder into his waist, almost accidentally. His expression of dejection changed and he leaned in again, this time opening his mouth and putting his tongue into mine. He pulled away again and smiled at me, “want to go outside for a smoke Kiddo?”

“Yeah, that sounds great,” I said with a small smile back. We made our way off the dance floor, James leading me by the hand and we stepped out the door. Joe was no longer there and instead the door to the club slammed shut behind us. I suppose it was later than I’d thought. James lit a cigarette in his mouth and handed it to me, then lit one for himself.

“I hope I didn’t make you uncomfortable cutie. There’s just something about you. I couldn’t resist!”

“I mean, I can’t say I wasn’t surprised. I’d never kissed a man before.” James dragged on the cigarette and turned his eyes to the pavement. “I didn’t say I didn’t like it James. I was just surprised is all.”

James smiled at me. “You really did run with the best of us tonight Kiddo, I’m impressed.” He took out a little slip of paper and grabbed a pen that happened to be lying in the ashtray next to the door. “Here,” he said handing me the paper, “gimme a call sometime if you need something a little different than a college party.”

I dragged on my cigarette one last time and extinguished it in the ashtray. “Thanks, I might just have to take you up on that sometime,” I said with a smile.

“Well, I suppose I should be getting back, I have work tomorrow. I bet you wouldn’t even recognize me if you saw me tomorrow.” He put his cigarette in the ashtray and gave me a kiss on the cheek. “It was a pleasure meeting you Kiddo,” he said before turning and walking down the street in his electric blue heels.

I stood outside the club trying to recount what had happened that night. I pulled out my phone to check the time and realized that yes, it was still out of batteries. I don’t know what I expected. Judging by the street traffic it must have been sometime after two, probably closer to after three. Fuck. My dad would kill me, I’d planned on being home five hours ago.

I jogged down the street until I reached Broadway and I hailed the first cab I saw, no time to deal with the A after express hours. I slid into the backseat and directed the cabbie uptown. “130th and St. Nick, please.”

“Sure thing kid, easy. You look like you just had some kinda night, kid. Any good stories for a bored as fuck cabbie?”