

# Best Friends Forever

*by Paige Turner*



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**~1~**

## **Part One**

Shea's Bar was loud, crowded, and exactly the kind of place you'd expect to find two best bros having a beer on a Friday evening. Gabe Sullivan and Trace Stone had been meeting there for happy hour ever since they were old enough to drink.

Gabe pushed through the front door with obvious frustration, phone to his ear, finishing a call. He made his way across the bar to where Trace had claimed their usual table. Overhead, big screen TVs blared overlapping commentary from multiple games.

The anxious young man hunched his shoulders defensively, hand fidgeting nervously as he spoke: "Yes, Mr. Martinez... I understand... Tomorrow at ten... Yes, sir, I'll have it ready."

"Dude, you've got to learn to stand up for yourself," Trace said as the call ended, not looking away from the screen where their team was getting demolished. He was two beers down and working on his third, clearly trying to drown something that was bothering him. "I've seen doormats with more backbone."

"Shut up," Gabe muttered, taking a long pull from his waiting beer as he slumped into his chair. "What's wrong with you anyway? You look like shit."

"Dude, I'm so screwed," Trace said, picking at the label on his bottle.

"Miranda see your browser history again?"

"Fuck off. Jake's wedding is this weekend."

"So?"

"He's marrying Jenny, one of Miranda's sorority sisters. Miranda was looking forward to seeing her entire pledge class, but now she has to work. And since she can't keep an eye on me herself, she's convinced I'm gonna do something stupid."

Gabe finally looked over at his best friend since middle school. "What'd you do this time, Romeo?"

"Nothing major! Okay, maybe I didn't realize she was looking over my shoulder and I checked out some other girl's Instagram. Now she's acting all jealous and saying I'm gonna hook up with someone at the wedding."

Trace took a long pull from his beer. "I can't bail on Jake, but Miranda says if I'm going, I need to bring someone she trusts to keep me honest."

"So bring your sister or something."

"She suggested you."

Gabe nearly choked on his beer. "As your date? Dude, I know you're desperate, but there are limits to our relationship."

"Not my date. She wants you to be my chaperone."

"Great, so I get to spend an evening babysitting you so you don't hit on bridesmaids."

"Come on, man. Fifteen years of friendship has to count for something. I'd do it for you."

"No, you wouldn't."

"Okay, I probably wouldn't, but I'm not you. You're a good friend. The best friend." Trace leaned forward. "Please? I'm desperate here."

"Ugh fine. I don't have any plans anyway."

An hour and several drinks later, Trace had the worst idea of his life-and that was saying something.

"Wait. What if... what if you were my chaperone AND my date?"

Gabe stared at him. "Dude, what are you talking about."

"She wants me to bring you as a chaperone because she doesn't trust me? Fine. But she never said what you had to wear. I'm thinking... what if you went in drag?"

"Okay, you're cut off."

Trace ignored him, on a roll now. "Like, obviously you'd be a dude in a dress. Miranda's being so controlling and treating me like a child, so I give her exactly what she asked for - but in the most embarrassing way possible."

"Yeah, embarrassing for me!"

"Nah, dude. Jake will think this is hilarious - he's always been up for crazy shit. But Jenny will be so pissed and will give Miranda hell for making me bring you."

"You want to embarrass your girlfriend at her friend's wedding?"

"She's trying to humiliate me by making me bring a chaperone! This way, technically I'm following her rules, but everyone's going to be talking about my 'date' for all the wrong reasons. When word gets back to her she'll be mortified."

"And you think this is going to help your relationship how?"

"Look, she's threatening to break up with me if I don't go along with her plan. So I will. But this way, she learns not to treat me like I'm some untrustworthy kid."

Trace leaned forward. "Please? I'm desperate here. We'll just need a dress, a cheap wig, and some padding from a costume shop."

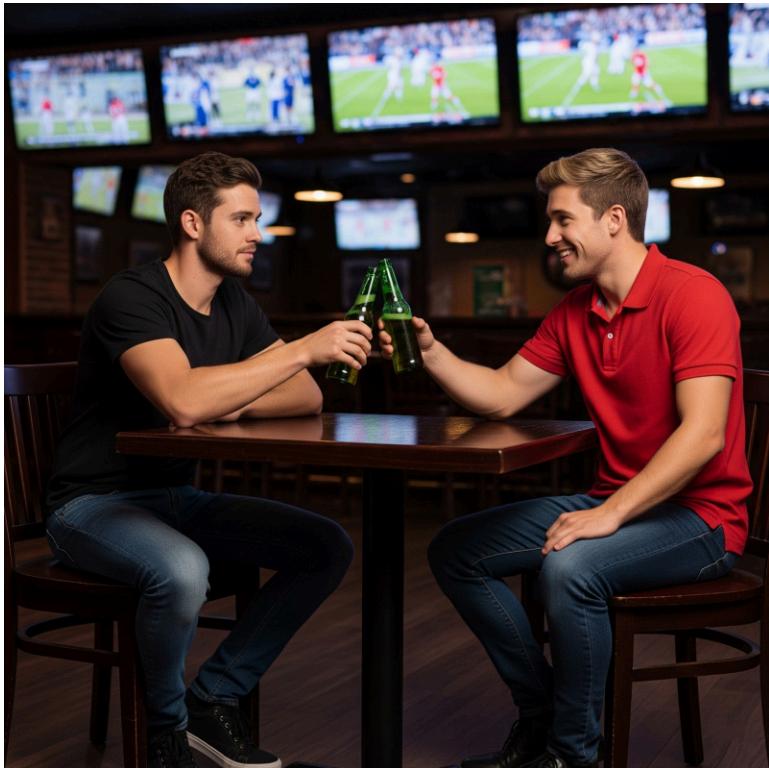
Gabe just wanted out of the conversation. "You know what? Fine. But you're going to owe me forever for this. And you're buying my happy hour drinks for the rest of the month."

"Really?"

"Yeah. And I'm not doing anything too ridiculous."

"Deal. I'll figure out the costume stuff." He held out his beer bottle.

Gabe clinked his own against it. "Don't make me regret this."



The next Friday at happy hour, Trace was scrolling through his phone while Gabe nursed a beer and his growing sense of doom. The wedding was tomorrow, and Trace still seemed convinced of the brilliance of his plan.

"Okay, so here's the thing," Trace said with a frown. "There's some sort of cosplay convention in town. Most of the costume places are sold out or want like \$500 for a crappy fake-looking wig."

"Oh well, guess we can't see your stupid plan through," Gabe said, relieved. "What a tragedy."

But Trace was already back to scrolling, refusing to give up. "Hold on, let me try one more search..."

An hour, several beers, and far more than one more search later, Trace looked up from his phone.

"Wait. Check this out - True Reflections. Some sort of high end spa or something. Look at these before and after photos."

Gabe leaned over to look at the screen. The transformations were incredible - men completely convincing as women, and vice versa.

"This has to be fake," Gabe muttered. "No guy looks that good as a chick."

"Reviews look legit. And they have an opening tomorrow morning before the wedding. Says here they use 'revolutionary bio-adaptive cosmetics and temporary body modification technology.'"

"That sounds expensive. And way more than I agreed to."

"Wait, this changes everything. What if instead of obviously looking like a guy in a dress, you actually look good?"

"Do you think you're actually helping your case?"

"Come on, you already said yes. You can't back out now just because it got more interesting," Trace said. "Look, I'll pay for the whole thing. And I'll bump those happy hour drinks up to a full year."

"This is way more elaborate than a costume shop wig -"

"It's only for one night! And think about it - if this actually works and you look convincing, it's even better because all

Miranda's friends will be there. Her whole pledge class! Word will travel back to her immediately, and when we tell her the truth, she'll lose her mind."

"So she'll break up with you even faster. Brilliant plan."

"Not after we explain to her that it was really you! Imagine her face when we tell her the truth - she'll be furious that we fooled her but she can't blame me for following her instructions perfectly."

"She's going to murder us both."

But Trace was too excited-or too drunk-to listen. "That's the beauty of it! She can't be mad that I followed her rules. Plus, what are the odds you'll actually look hot? Like you said, those photos are probably AI. This'll probably be a disaster and we'll have a good laugh about it."

"You realize this plan requires me to spend an entire wedding reception as your girlfriend, right?"

"Fake girlfriend. Or fake-girl friend, given your ugly mug."

"Gee, thanks for the confidence boost, asshole."

"You know what I mean." Trace grinned. "Seriously, think about it. It's a win-win. Either they deliver and you look good, or they don't and Jenny will be mortified. Either way Miranda learns her lesson and we'll have a good laugh about it."

"Fine. Let's go see what kind of trainwreck they can make me into."

"That's the spirit! Besides, worst case scenario, you look like a linebacker in a dress and I get some great blackmail photos of you."

"I hate you so much right now."

"Love you too, buddy."

The next morning, Gabe and Trace stood outside a sleek storefront in an unfamiliar part of town. The windows were

tinted black, and the only sign was a small silver plaque reading "True Reflections."

"You sure about this?" Gabe asked. "This place looks like where people go to disappear."

"Too late to back out now, bro. The wedding's in four hours. Besides, what's the worst that could happen?"

The interior featured white walls, soft lighting, and minimalist furniture that probably cost more than Gabe's car. As they entered, a tall, elegant woman emerged from the back, speaking with a slight accent Gabe couldn't place.

"You must be Trace and Gabriel. I'm Isabella. I understand we have an interesting project today."

"It's only one night for a wedding. Just something simple," Gabe said quickly. "Dress, maybe a wig-"

"Simple?" Isabella waved dismissively. "Darling, why settle for community theater when you can have Broadway? You have excellent bone structure. We can work wonders with this."

She circled Gabe with an appraising eye. "Yes, I'm thinking elegant, sophisticated. Those cheekbones will be stunning with the right enhancement."

"Enhancement?"

"Our bio-adaptive cosmetics and structural modification system. Much more advanced than traditional makeup and prosthetics. Everything will return to normal within twenty-four hours as your body chemistry rebalances."

Trace was clearly enjoying Gabe's discomfort. "See? Totally safe. This is going to be epic."

"That's what I'm afraid of," Gabe muttered.

Isabella led Gabe to a room that looked more like a medical suite than a salon. She pulled on gloves and gestured to Gabe's clothes. "First, we establish your base. Remove all your clothing, please. Everything."

"Whoa, I thought this was just makeup—"

"Gabriel, darling, if you want to look like a man in a dress, you can go to any costume shop. If you want to look like a woman, you trust the professional." She handed him a towel. "Here, you may protect your modesty with this for now."

Reluctantly, Gabe stripped completely. "This is already way more involved than I expected."

Trace laughed from his chair. "Go big or go home, princess."

"Easy for you to say. You're not the one standing here in a towel about to get..."

"Transformed into something magnificent," Isabella said with a mysterious smile. "We must begin with hair removal."

"Do you have a razor? I didn't agree to any waxing."

"Nothing that barbaric, darling." She produced a device that looked like a scanner, moving it slowly over his legs, arms, chest, and groin. Where it passed, hair simply vaporized, leaving his skin completely smooth.

"That's impossible," Trace said, leaning forward with interest.

"Targeted follicle deactivation. Much more thorough than traditional methods."

"Dude, you look like a hairless cat," Trace snickered. "A really pale, angry hairless cat."

"Shut up," Gabe muttered, but he was staring at his completely smooth skin in amazement.

"Then we must make you a beautiful hairless cat," Isabella said with a smile.

Moving to his head, she first applied a bald cap that covered his hairline completely. The cap fit tightly, creating a smooth, scalp-like surface. Gabe thought he could detect small filaments of electronics running through the cap's structure.

Next came what looked like a container of thick, golden-brown paste. Isabella began spreading it across his entire

body with clinical thoroughness, working it into every inch of his skin from head to toe, and covering the bald cap.

"What the hell is this stuff?" Gabe asked as the warm paste seemed to absorb into his skin, leaving behind a flawless golden-bronze complexion.

"Bio-adhesive pigmentation base. It bonds with your skin cells to produce melanin, and provides the foundation for all our other modifications. Think of it as... biological primer."

"This is like something out of a sci-fi movie," Gabe said, watching his pale complexion transform into a warm, radiant tan. "I look like I just spent a month in Cabo."

Trace grinned. "Holy shit, you look like a completely different person already. You went from pasty Irish to golden god in like ten minutes."

"The compound also allows our prosthetics to bond seamlessly with your body. Much more realistic than traditional adhesives."

"Prosthetics?"

Isabella smiled and revealed what looked like a selection of incredibly realistic body parts. "Don't worry, darling. You're going to love the results."

"This keeps getting weirder," Gabe said nervously.

Moving to his face, she began attaching several small prosthetic pieces. "First, we'll adjust your nose structure with this prosthetic overlay," she said, carefully applying what looked like a second skin to make his nose more delicate and upturned. Similar prosthetics attached to his jawline, rounding and softening the angular masculine lines.

"Slight pinch now," Isabella warned, reaching for a tray of syringes.

"Ow!" Gabe yelped as the first needle penetrated his skin. "What was that?"

"Bio-compatible filler in your cheeks and lips for definition," she continued, making precise injections. "And finally, a bit of micro-targeted Botox around your eyes and forehead to soften the masculine lines. Think of it as temporary plastic surgery."

Gabe watched in the mirror as his features seemed to shift and soften - his nose was more delicate, his lips fuller, his jaw rounded. The changes were subtle but dramatic.

Trace watched with delight. "Holy shit, you actually look like a chick. Like, a really hot chick."

"This is so weird," Gabe said, touching his transformed face carefully. "I don't even recognize myself."

"Wait until I'm finished." Isabella turned her attention to the cosmetics. "Now, let me guess your heritage... I'm thinking Latina. Yes, definitely. You have the perfect bone structure for the exotic, passionate type."

"Latina?" Gabe squeaked. "I'm Irish and German!"

"Not with your new skin tone, chica," Isabella said with a wink. "Trust me, this will be perfect."

The cosmetics that followed were unlike anything Gabe had ever seen. She began with dramatic winged eyeliner that extended far beyond his natural eye shape, creating an exotic, almond-eyed look. Heavy false lashes followed, so thick and long they cast shadows on his cheeks.

She used micro-needling to create perfectly shaped eyebrows, giving him elegant arches that framed his new eye shape. The contouring was masterful - highlighting his new cheekbones while creating shadows that made his face appear even more feminine. Finally, she applied a deep berry lip tint that made his enhanced lips look impossibly full and inviting.

"I can't even tell where the makeup ends and my actual face begins," Gabe said, his voice tight with amazement and anxiety.

"That's the point, darling. Now for the body modifications."

Isabella carefully positioned breast prosthetics on the bio-adhesive foundation she'd applied earlier. They seemed to meld with his skin, becoming warm and surprisingly natural-feeling. They were a modest but noticeable B-cup, perfectly proportioned for his frame, complete with realistic brown nipples that stood proudly at attention.

"I can't feel where they attach," Gabe said, prodding at what now appeared to be his chest. "They feel completely real."

"Bio-neural integration. The prosthetics themselves have no nerve endings, of course - they're just very sophisticated attachments. But your cap monitors when they're touched and tells your brain you're feeling it. Your nervous system is completely convinced they're part of your body."

"Dude, you've got boobs," Trace said with obvious amusement. "Like, actual boobs. This is the best day ever."

"They're not real!" Gabe protested.

"They look real from here. Can you, like, feel them?"

"That's the weird part - I can. It's like they're actually mine."

"Your new 'girls' will need this," Isabella announced, producing a black lace strapless bra.

"Absolutely not!" Gabe protested.

"The prosthetics require proper support. Without them, nothing will sit correctly and you'll be in considerable discomfort."

Trace said impatiently. "Just put it on. We're already this far. Besides, it's not like anyone's going to see it."

"YOU are going to see it!"

"Dude, we've been friends since we were twelve. I've seen you in your tighty-whities more times than I can count. This is basically the same thing."

"How is this AT ALL the same thing?"

The 34B black lace strapless bra with its structured cups and underwire support wasn't uncomfortable - somehow it felt natural, the weight of the prosthetic breasts distributed perfectly through the molded cups and silicone grip strips that held it securely in place.

Hip and rear padding followed the same process - specialized forms that bonded with the bio-adaptive base, creating dramatically feminine curves. The hip padding gave him wide, womanly hips, while the rear enhancement created what could only be described as a perfect, heart-shaped backside that would make any woman envious. His silhouette transformed from masculine and angular to soft and curvaceous.

"This feels so strange," Gabe said, running his hands over his new curves. "I have... an ass now. Like, a real ass."

"A great ass," Trace added helpfully. "Seriously, you could bounce a quarter off that thing."

"You're not helping."

"I'm being supportive! You look amazing."

"Now for the final body reshaping." Isabella produced what looked like a high-waisted body brief. "Step into this, please."

The device turned out to be a combination corset and underwear that extended from mid-thigh to just below his chest. Once he was inside, Isabella activated it with her tablet.

"Oh god, what's happening?" Gabe gasped as the device began to compress and reshape his torso. He could feel something tightening around his waist while simultaneously pushing his male anatomy up into his body through some kind of bizarre mechanical process.

"The device creates your feminine silhouette while positioning your anatomy for proper clothing fit. It also inserts micro-bands under your skin to reinforce the waist compression."

"I can barely breathe," Gabe said, watching his reflection change as his waist narrowed dramatically. He could swear he saw the slightest hint of camel toe showing through the briefer at his crotch.

"Beauty requires sacrifice, darling."

"This is the weirdest thing I've ever seen," Trace said, thoroughly entertained. "You look like you were born a girl. Like a supermodel... a really hot, bald supermodel."

"Ah yes, the hair," Isabella said with a smile. "The finishing touch."

She produced an elaborate wig - long, dark waves with subtle highlights that caught the light. But instead of simply placing it on his head, she carefully positioned it over the bald cap and activated something with her tablet. The wig seemed to meld with the bio-adaptive paste, and suddenly Gabe could feel the hair as if it were growing from his own scalp.

Gabe tugged gently at a strand and was amazed to feel the sensation on his scalp. "This feels real. Like it's actually my hair growing from my scalp."

"Bio-neural integration with the embedded electronics in the cap. Much more natural than glue or clips. Notice how it falls naturally, as if you just left the salon."

She was right - the hair had a perfect, bouncy blowout look that framed his face beautifully.

"This feels so wrong," he muttered.

Trace said with obvious amusement. "It looks so right though. Seriously, you look better than half the girls I've dated."

"That's not a compliment for me OR your dating history."

"Hush now. You are gorgeous," Isabella said with satisfaction. "Now we train your movement patterns. You'll need to learn how your new body moves naturally."

She produced several small electronic devices that looked like high-tech fitness trackers. "These will coordinate with the systems already embedded in your briefer and bald cap to provide movement guidance," she explained, attaching sensors to his wrists and ankles. The devices synced immediately with the existing electronics, tiny lights blinking in sequence.

"I've never worn heels in my life," Gabe said nervously as Isabella handed him a pair of designer stilettos.

"Do not worry, darling. The sensors will coordinate with the neural interface to make it more natural than you expect."

Isabella activated the sensor array with her tablet. "Now, walk to the far wall and back. Don't think about it - just move."

Gabe took his first tentative step and immediately felt the difference. His hips seemed to have a mind of their own, swaying in a way that felt completely foreign yet strangely natural. The heels forced his spine into a different curve, pushing his chest forward and his rear back.

"What is happening?" he asked, alarmed by how fluid the movement felt despite his conscious resistance.

"The sensors are providing micro-corrections to your nervous system," Isabella explained, making adjustments on her tablet. "Your brain is learning the movement patterns that match your new body structure."

"Walk again," she commanded. "This time, let your arms move naturally."

This time was worse. His arms seemed to flow differently, hands positioning themselves with unconscious grace. His steps were shorter, more precise, and there was an undeniable sway to his hips that seemed to happen automatically.

"I can't control this," he said, his voice rising with alarm. "My body is just doing these things on its own."

"Dude, you're swaying," Trace said with obvious delight. "Like, full-on seductress walk. This is incredible."

"Turn and pose at the wall," Isabella instructed. "Let the sensors guide you."

Without thinking, Gabe found himself executing a graceful turn, one hand naturally finding his hip, the other falling elegantly at his side. The pose felt effortless, completely feminine, and utterly horrifying.

"This is insane," he breathed, staring at his reflection in the mirrored wall. "I look like I've been doing this my whole life."

"Temporary muscle memory conditioning," Isabella explained with satisfaction. "Much more effective than trying to consciously remember how to move like a woman. You will be able to move through the wedding reception with proper feminine grace."

She had him practice sitting, standing, and walking for another fifteen minutes. Each movement became more natural, more unconsciously elegant. The way he crossed his legs when sitting, how he smoothed his hands over his hips when standing, the gentle sway when walking - it all felt increasingly automatic.

"How long will this last?" Gabe asked, disturbed by how right the movements felt.

"Like everything else, twenty-four hours. You'll go back to normal when you remove the bald cap," Isabella assured him, removing the sensors from his ankles and wrists. "Now, let's add your dress and complete the transformation."

The cocktail dress slid on like it was made for his new body. It was striking in its elegant simplicity - a black off-the-shoulder bodice with three-quarter sleeves that hugged his torso perfectly, paired with a deep navy A-line skirt that hit just above the knee. The luxurious fabrics complemented his new golden skin tone perfectly.

Isabella added delicate gold jewelry - small hoop earrings, a thin chain necklace that drew attention to his décolletage, and a simple bracelet. The final touch was a small clutch purse that matched the dress perfectly.

Looking in the mirror, Gabe saw a sophisticated woman ready for an upscale event.

"I look like someone's ultra stylish girlfriend," he said, the words coming out naturally.

Trace grinned. "You look like MY ultra stylish girlfriend. This is perfect. Miranda's going to have a heart attack when she sees the photos and realizes we completely outsmarted her controlling ass."

"I still think this is a terrible idea."

"Come on, where's your sense of adventure? Live a little!"

"This is only for twenty-four hours?" Gabe asked nervously.

"Twenty-four hours," Isabella confirmed. "As your body chemistry returns to normal, the prosthetics will detach and everything will reverse."

"What if something goes wrong?" Gabe asked nervously.

"Nothing will go wrong, darling. I'm a professional. Now for the final touch," Isabella said with dramatic flair. She fitted what looked like a high-tech collar around his neck. "This device will change your voice temporarily."

"Change how?"

"Speak normally," she said, activating the collar with her tablet.

"I don't understand-" Gabe stopped mid-sentence. His voice was completely different - higher, musical.

"Whoa, that's trippy," Trace laughed.

"Say something else," Isabella instructed, adjusting the settings on the tablet further.

"This is so... extraordinary, no?" Gabe stopped, horrified by the breathy, sultry quality that had crept into his tone. "Why do I sound like... like this?"

"The collar works with your larynx and vocal cords to raise the pitch of your voice, and syncs with the neural interface in your cap to give you cultural linguistic patterns - perfect for the passionate, fiery Latina type." Isabella explained, making final adjustments.

"But this is more than accent, no?" Gabe asked, his brow furrowing. "My English... she sounds so different. Like I learned it as second language."

"Ah, very perceptive. The system adjusts your vocal patterns to match your new identity. Your backstory is Buenos Aires - your family moved here when you were thirteen. The language patterns will feel completely natural."

"Buenos Aires?" Gabe repeated, the words rolling off his tongue with surprising familiarity.

"Trust me, darling. When people ask tonight, you'll know exactly what to say."

"But I do not even speak Spanish! How can I have accent for a language I do not know?"

"The system doesn't require actual knowledge, my dear. It simply adjusts your vocal patterns and speech rhythms to create the accent. Your English now sounds like it was learned second, even though it wasn't."

"Dude, this is so messed up." Trace mocked. "You sound exotic as hell but you're still the same guy who failed Spanish class!"

Isabella stepped back, removing the vocal collar and surveying her complete transformation with obvious satisfaction. "Perfect. Absolutely perfect."

She turned him toward a full-length mirror.

"Meet Gabriella."

Gabe stared at the reflection in shock. The woman looking back was stunning - elegant features, perfect curves, golden-bronze skin, and an undeniably feminine presence. When he turned, the movement was completely natural, unconscious feminine grace.

Trace exclaimed, staring at his transformed friend. "Holy fucking shit! You're actually hot. Like, really, really hot. I mean, I'd totally hit on you if I didn't know you were Gabe."

"This is so... incredible, no?" Gabe said, his new voice filled with wonder and terror. "I look like completely different person now."

Trace grinned. "You look like someone I'd want to date. Miranda's going to flip when she sees the photos."

"This is not funny anymore, Trace," Gabe said quietly.

"Are you kidding? This is the funniest thing that's ever happened! Wait until I tell everyone!"

"You will not be telling anyone about this!"

"Relax," Trace interrupted. "What's the worst that could happen? You spend one night as a hot chick at a wedding. There are worse fates."

"This is easy for you to say."

The wedding was everything Trace had promised - elegant, expensive, and packed with people Gabe had never met. Before long, he found himself sliding effortlessly into the role of "Gabriella."

Things went awkwardly smoothly. Despite Jenny's tight smiles and overly polite pleasantries when she greeted them, it was clear she viewed "Gabriella" as an interloper. Miranda's sorority sisters kept angling their phones for surreptitious shots

of Trace's date, surely sending them in a constant stream back to Miranda.

But despite it all, everyone maintained perfect wedding etiquette. No one wanted to cause a scene at someone else's big day, but Gabe could feel the undercurrent of tension and whispered conversations that stopped whenever they approached. After a while, he sought refuge in some of the newlyweds' more distant relatives.

"Trace, your girlfriend is gorgeous," Jake's aunt gushed. "Where did you find her?"

Trace said smoothly, clearly enjoying the deception. "We met through mutual friends. Gabriella's in... marketing."

"You're so lucky," a second cousin added. "She's stunning."

"Thank you, you are too kind," Gabe said politely, then blinked in surprise at his own response. He was disturbed by how his voice seemed to caress every syllable, making even basic conversation sound seductive.

"I love your accent," the aunt continued. "Where are you from originally?"

"Buenos Aires," Gabe said, the words coming surprisingly easily, his hand fluttering to his chest as he spoke. "But my family... we move here when I was thirteen."

"How wonderful! Argentina! That explains your elegance. You two make such a beautiful couple."

As the evening progressed, Gabe found himself getting into character more and more, and started acting in ways to deliberately cause more disapproving glares. When Trace put his arm around his waist, he leaned into him naturally. When they danced, he followed his lead without thinking about it.

"You're really good at this," Trace whispered during a slow song. "It's like you were born to be a woman."

"You must stop with these things right now, yes?" Gabe whispered back.

"I'm just saying, you're a natural. Maybe you missed your calling."

Gabe planted a stiletto on Trace's foot deliberately. "Oops."

"Ow! Okay, okay, I'll stop."

But Trace didn't stop. Throughout the night, he kept making little comments.

"Wow, you're really working that dress."

"The way you're laughing at that guy's jokes - you've got this flirting thing down pat."

"I think my uncle is checking you out. Should I be jealous?"

It finally got to be too much. When Trace made a comment about how he should "consider this as a career change," something inside Gabe snapped.

"Enough! You laugh at my fear like it's entertainment for you!" he said, his voice rising with passionate intensity, hands gesturing emphatically in the air.

"Whoa, okay, calm down there, spitfire," Trace said, taken aback.

"This is not funny thing! You are terrible friend!" Gabe continued, his eyes flashing.

"Dude, chill. You don't have to go full telenovela on me," Trace said, trying to defuse the situation with humor.

Storming off, Gabe could see the delighted expressions of Miranda's friends. He found himself wondering where that outburst had come from. He'd always just put up with Trace's teasing - usually he'd just roll his eyes and endure it quietly. But something had made him snap back with such fiery passion, his temper flaring like... like some kind of temperamental Latina stereotype.

Was he just getting into character? Or was the technology in the cap somehow affecting his personality too, making him react the way people expected "Gabriella" to react? The thought was too disturbing to consider seriously. He pushed it away and headed for the open bar to drown his worries.

An hour later, Trace nervously approached the table where Gabe was working through what appeared to be his fourth or fifth glass of wine. "You're really putting it away tonight."

"I am feeling so, so incredible..." Gabe said, his voice purring with satisfaction. It was the truth. Everything felt heightened, more vivid. Colors seemed brighter, music sounded better, and he felt more confident and alive than he ever had.

Trace slid into the next chair over and raised his glass. "I'm sorry about before. You're the best wingman ever. To the perfect plan."



"For surviving this... most extraordinary night, no?" Gabe replied, clinking glasses. He grinned widely, jumped to his feet, and pulled Trace back onto the dance floor.

The combination of alcohol, nerves, and the fact that his constricted stomach would not fit more than a few bites of food had created a perfect storm in Gabe's system. By the end of the night, he was glowing with energy and happiness, drunk out of his mind.

"Best night everrrr," he sarcastically slurred as Trace helped him into the car at the end of the night.

"Dude you're so wasted," Trace laughed. "But that was amazing. I got so many compliments on my 'girlfriend.' Some dude asked if you have a sister!"

"This is very... disturbing, no?"

"It's hilarious! Wait until I tell the guys that my hot date at the wedding was actually you."

"You will not be telling anyone about this!"

"Come on, this is too good not to share."

Gabe's voice had a warning edge that even the alcohol and his new accent couldn't soften. "Trace."

"Fine, fine. But admit it - you had fun."

"Sí- yes," he said, surprising himself that he was telling the truth. But he was ready for things to go back to normal.

Gabe's head lolled against the window as the wine and the long night finally caught up with him. Twelve more hours, he calculated sleepily as his eyes drifted closed. Twelve more hours and this would all be over.

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## Part Two

Gabe awoke well past noon on Sunday, face down on his own bed. For a moment, he thought it had all been a weird dream - until he rolled over and felt the twin weights on his chest. Looking down, he realized he was still wearing the dress he'd worn to the wedding.

Hangover pounding against his temples, he stumbled to the bathroom mirror. Gabriella stared back at him, makeup still flawless and runway-perfect despite a full night's sleep.

"What the hell?" His accented voice was still high and musical. "These things... they should be wearing off by now, no?"

He dialed Trace, but the call went straight to voicemail. Panic beginning to rise, he stripped out of the dress and examined his body. Everything was exactly the same as last night - the golden skin, the curves, the completely feminine appearance.

Gabe struggled with the uncomfortable body briefer. The tight garment clung to his skin, and he could only work it down to his hips before stopping to catch his breath. Even half-removed, he expected to feel some relief, some return to his normal proportions.

But his waist remained impossibly narrow, as if the corset was still compressing him even though the fabric had been pushed down to his hips. The hourglass silhouette in the mirror looked completely natural, like he'd been born with these proportions.

"What has she done to me?" he muttered, running his hands over the curves that should have disappeared with the shaper. This made no sense.

Determined to get the restrictive garment completely off, he wrestled with the remaining fabric, finally peeling it down over his hips and stepping out of it entirely.

He looked down and the world tilted.

His penis was gone. His testicles were gone. Where they should have been, where they'd always been, there was nothing but a small, neatly groomed triangle of dark hair above delicate feminine folds.

It wasn't real-it couldn't be real. It had to be another of Isabella's prosthetics. But he knew that his brain, influenced by the cap still embedded in his wig, would insist it was real skin. His hands trembled as he reached down to confirm the impossible.

The contact sent a jolt through his nervous system. His brain told him the flesh felt warm, soft, undeniably real under his fingertips. The wrongness of it all made his stomach lurch.

"Dios mío," he whispered, the Spanish coming naturally in his moment of absolute terror. His legs gave out and he sank to the floor, naked and shaking, staring at his reflection in the full-length mirror. The woman looking back at him was complete in every intimate detail - he could see the soft pink tissue, the realistic feminine anatomy that had replaced everything familiar.

But even worse was the realization that twenty-four hours had passed since he first entered True Reflections. And he hadn't started changing back. At all.

His phone rang. Trace's name appeared on the screen.

"Trace, thank God," Gabe answered.

"Dude, Miranda is FREAKING OUT. She got texted like a million photos of us from last night and thinks I hooked up with some random hot chick. She's threatening to dump me. This is amazing! I can't wait until we tell her the truth."

"Forget about that! I am still looking exactly the same as last night! Is not wearing off!" Gabe said desperately, his free hand gesturing emphatically even though Trace couldn't see him. He caught himself mid-gesture, startled. When had he started talking with his hands like this?

"And is much worse than I thought before. She did things to me... everything is different now. Everything."

He stopped himself, his face burning with embarrassment. How could he possibly explain to his best friend what he'd just discovered? Some things were too personal, too mortifying to share, even with Trace.

"What do you mean?" Trace asked.

"Never mind! You come over here-NOW!"

"Okay, okay. You know I can't resist when a hottie invites me to her apartment."

"You think this is time for making jokes?"

"Aw, come on! That was hilarious!"

"You are impossible!" Gabe yelled as he hung up.

Trace breezed into Gabe's apartment to find a beautiful Latina staring out the window, a forgotten cup of coffee cooling in her hands. Trace had thrown on a casual tank top and basketball shorts - the kind of outfit he'd wear to lounge around on any weekend morning.

Gabe didn't have the same luxury. He wore high-waisted dark wash jeans that hugged his feminine curves perfectly, and a black

off-shoulder wrap top with flowing sleeves that showed off his golden skin and tiny waist. Layered gold necklaces completed the look, making him appear effortlessly chic. His hair fell in perfect waves, and his makeup looked like he'd just left a professional salon.

Trace stopped, staring. "Holy shit, you're right. You still look exactly like Gabriella. But wait - why are you all dressed up?"

Gabe's altered voice emerged with passionate intensity. "Nothing of my clothes is fitting this ridiculous body! All I have to wear is this 'day after' outfit Isabella gives me!"

"But you did your makeup and everything?"

"I do not do anything! I just wake up like this, yes?"

"Whoa, okay, calm down there," Trace said, backing off quickly and pouring himself a cup of coffee from Gabe's pot.

"Look, we did it, right? We fooled Miranda, we had a good time at the wedding. I'm sure Isabella can change you back - she's a professional. We just go back, explain the situation, and boom - problem solved, okay?"

"Yes. Okay. I hope this too."

Trace raised his coffee mug with a confident grin. "Here's to getting my ugly best friend back by happy hour."

Despite his anxiety, Gabe found himself reluctantly picking up his own mug. "To being your ugly best friend again," he said, clinking mugs.



They drove back to True Reflections, Trace chatting confidently about their weekend plans while Gabe tried to ignore the stares from other drivers at red lights. If Isabella was surprised to see Gabe still transformed, she didn't show it.

"Ah, Gabriella. How was your magical evening?"

"You will change me back RIGHT NOW! You promised precisely twenty-four hours!"

"Hmm, that is indeed odd," Isabella said, examining him curiously. She briefly took his pulse and looked into his eyes with a small flashlight.

"Tell me about last night. The venue, decorations, anything that seemed unusual or different."

"Nothing really," Gabe said. "Just normal wedding, yes?"

"What about you?" Isabella turned to Trace. "Did you notice anything specific about the setting? What flowers were in the centerpieces?"

"Uh..." Trace shrugged. "I dunno, roses maybe? Standard wedding stuff."

Isabella's eyes lit up dramatically. "Roses! What color were they?"

"Um... red? Pink? I wasn't really paying attention."

"Ah, that explains everything perfectly. Certain varieties of roses release compounds that can significantly extend the bio-adaptive integration period. Red and pink roses are particularly problematic."

"What is the meaning of this?" Gabe asked, his voice trembling.

"It means, darling, that instead of twenty-four hours, you could be looking at... well, it's quite unpredictable. Could be a week, could be a month, possibly longer. Rose compound interference creates very unstable chemistry."

Gabe's voice went high with disbelief. "MONTHS! Never have you mentioned such a thing was possible!"

"It was in the fine print. Very rare occurrence, but not unheard of when exposed to certain floral environments."

"This is hilarious," Trace said, barely containing his laughter. "Dude, you might be stuck as a hot chick for a month! This will be the best story ever."

"NOTHING about this is funny!" Gabe exploded, his voice rising passionately, his eyes wide with angry intensity.

Trace grinned. "It's a little funny. Relax, even if it takes a few days to wear off, you'll be fine. You're like, super hot now. That's gotta count for something."

"RELAX? You think I should relax about this..." Gabe gestured dramatically at his transformed body, "...this disaster? You are absolutely impossible!"

"I mean, you've got to admit, the whole situation is pretty ridiculous. And I'll have something to give you shit about for years now."

Isabella watched this exchange with growing interest. "You find your friend's situation amusing, Trace?"

"I mean, it's not like it's a tragedy. Look at him - he's gorgeous, he was getting hit on, Jake's aunt even offered him a job. It being hilarious is just a lucky bonus."

"How interesting. And you, Trace, have never experienced anything... challenging... that others might find entertaining?"

"Not like this. This is comedy gold. I'm never going to let him live this down."

Isabella smiled, but it wasn't a pleasant expression. "You know, Trace, you have quite good bone structure yourself. Very similar to your friend's, actually."

"Thanks, I guess?"

"I think you need to understand what your friend is going through. From a more... personal perspective."

"What do you mean?" Trace asked, suddenly wary.

"Well, as long as you're here, perhaps you'd like to see what our treatments could do for you? Professional courtesy. No charge, of course."

"No thanks, I'm good."

"Oh, but I insist." Isabella's smile widened. "You find transformation so amusing, surely you'd be curious to experience it yourself?"

"Really, I'm fine-"

Isabella was already moving, pressing a small device against Trace's neck before he could react. "Just a little something to help you empathize."

"What the hell-" Trace's eyes went wide, then rolled back as he slumped unconscious.

"What have you done to him?" Gabe demanded.

"Your friend lacks compassion. But more importantly - what good is a male best friend to a woman like Gabriella? She needs a girlfriend who can truly relate."

"But you cannot just do these things to people!"

"Cannot what? Give him the same treatment I gave you? I think it's only fair. Though perhaps with a few... modifications."

Isabella began working on the unconscious Trace using the same methodical techniques she'd used on Gabe, but this time her choices were very different. Where Gabe had become an elegant, sophisticated woman, Trace was being transformed into something else entirely.

The bio-adhesive paste gave him a golden California tan. The hair removal was followed by more extreme cosmetic procedures, injecting much larger amounts of filler into his face. His features became dramatically more feminine - not the subtle elegance Gabe had received, but obvious, over-the-top beauty that screamed artificial enhancement. Lip injections gave him a perpetual pout, cheek fillers created dramatic hollows, and his brow was unnaturally smooth and expressionless from botox.

"What is it that you are doing to him? You did not do such... big things to me," Gabe asked, unable to look away.

"Your friend requires a more... comprehensive... education."

The breast forms she attached to Trace were significantly larger - a generous D-cup. When Isabella brought out the same corset device she'd used on Gabe, her smile turned predatory. She adjusted the settings far beyond what she'd used the prior day.

The device constricted severely, giving Trace an almost impossibly narrow waist that, combined with the oversized hip padding, resulted in an exaggerated hourglass figure that looked like a cartoonish exaggeration of femininity.

When Isabella finally peeled the shaping device from the unconscious Trace, Gabe gasped in horror as he realized that Trace now possessed the same completely feminine anatomy he'd discovered on himself that morning. But where Gabe had found delicate, naturally groomed femininity, Trace's new anatomy was perfectly waxed and sculpted to perfection - bold and bare in a way that screamed high-maintenance salon visits and left nothing to the imagination.

"He is going to kill you when he wakes up, no?"

"Oh, I think SHE will have other concerns."

An hour later, Trace awoke to find himself inhabiting the body of a stunning blonde bombshell - tall, curvaceous, with the kind of dramatically enhanced features that belonged on magazine covers. But unlike Gabe's elegant sophistication, everything about Trace screamed California party girl.

"Oh my God, what the hell did you do to me!" The voice that came out was breathy, feminine, with a valley girl accent that made Trace sound like a stereotypical airhead. "Why do I sound like this?"

Isabella held up a mirror in front of Trace. "Meet Traci. I thought the name suited your new personality."

Trace stared at the mirror in horror. The reflection showed a woman who was undeniably beautiful but in a very different way from Gabe - more overtly sexual, with a shocking mane of platinum blonde curls, dramatically enhanced curves, and pouty lips that seemed designed for trouble.

"Like, change me back! Right now."

"Oh, I'm afraid the timeline is just as uncertain for you as it is for your friend. You were both exposed to the same rose compounds at the wedding. Could be days, could be months, you never know."

"What does that even mean?"

"It means, darling Traci, that you and Gabriella get to stay what you've always been. Best friends-only best GIRL friends for however long this lasts!"

"You totally can't do this!" Trace's new voice cracked.

"I can, and I have. Consider it a learning experience in empathy."

Isabella retrieved a large duffel bag from behind her desk. "Your new starter wardrobe, Traci. I selected items appropriate for someone of your... particular aesthetic."

Trace opened the bag and immediately recoiled. Inside were clothes that made Gabe's elegant outfits look practically conservative - crop tops, micro-mini skirts, barely-there dresses, and platform heels that could double as weapons.

"I am literally NOT wearing this trashy stuff!"

"You'll wear what's appropriate for your new image. Unless you'd prefer to leave here completely naked."

"Why are you, like, doing this to us?" Trace demanded, his valley girl accent making the question sound almost childish.

"Your friend needed to learn to assert herself. And you needed to learn humility. Sometimes justice requires a firm hand."

"But this is super extreme!"

"So was laughing at your friend's distress for three straight hours."

Defeated, Trace took his new clothes to the changing room, emerging looking like he was ready for a nightclub photo shoot. The hot pink crop top barely contained his enhanced chest, the

white mini-skirt left nothing to the imagination, and the platform heels forced him to walk with an exaggerated hip-swaying strut.

"I look like a literal walking stereotype," Trace complained, tugging futilely at his too-short skirt.

"You look exactly like what you are," Isabella said without sympathy. "A shallow person who finds others' suffering entertaining."

"Ay chica," Gabe said, staring at his transformed best friend with a hint of vindication, "you look like you stepped out of... music video, no?"

"Whatever! Thanks for nothing, this is totally all your fault!" Trace whined.

"MY fault?" Gabe shot back with passionate fire, pointing accusingly at Trace. "You are the one who thought my panic attack was most magnificent fun!"

"That's, like, totally different!"

"How is this different, exactly?" Gabe demanded.

"Because... because..." Trace struggled, his breathy voice making him sound vapid. "I look like a total bimbo and you look all sophisticated and whatever!"

"Sophisticated? I look like I should be starring in telenovelas!" Gabe shot back with dramatic flair. "We are both trapped in these impossible stereotypes, no?"

"But like, this is so totally not funny anymore!" Trace complained.

"No, it really is not," Gabe agreed.

"How long do we have to stay like this?" Trace asked desperately, turning back to Isabella.

"As I explained, it's impossible to predict. The rose compound interference creates very unstable bio-chemistry. Could resolve tomorrow, could take longer."

Just then, Trace's phone started ringing. Both transformed friends could see Miranda's name lighting up the screen.

"Don't ans-" Gabe began, but Trace had already put the call on speaker without thinking.

"Miranda! Thank G-"

"Who is this?" Miranda interrupted, voice was sharp with suspicion. "Where's Trace?"

"This is... uh..." Trace looked around desperately, his enhanced lips forming a perfect 'O' of confusion.

"Oh my GOD," Miranda's voice went ice cold. "You're the slut he hooked up with at the wedding, aren't you? I KNEW it! He ditched his pathetic loser friend for some bimbo!"

"Miranda, like, wait! I can totally explain-"

"Don't you dare try to explain anything to me, you home-wrecking whore! And tell that cheating bastard Trace that we are SO done. DONE!"

The line went dead with a violent click.

"Oh. My. God," Trace said in stunned disbelief. "She totally thinks I'm the girl I hooked up with."

Isabella laughed, pointing at his new breasts. "Well, there is whole lot of 'girl' hooked up to Trace right now! So she's not entirely wrong."

Gabe let out a melodic laugh.

"This so isn't funny at all!"

"Is a little bit funny," Gabe said, unable to resist a sharp smile.  
"Karma is a... what is word... bitch, no?"

"Oh my God, you're totally enjoying this!"

"Maybe... a little bit, yes."

"Like, I can't believe you're being so mean to me right now! I just got dumped!"

"And I cannot believe you still make this about you when we both—" Gabe stopped mid-sentence and sighed. "Enough of this bickering. We are arguing like... like catty teenagers, no?"

Taking a breath, Gabe refocused on the pair's bigger problems. "Isabella, we have... practical problems. What about work? I cannot show up at my job looking like completely different person."

"You'll have to temporarily find new jobs. Traci said earlier that you received a job offer last night."

Trace looked up suddenly at the sound of his new name, his attention snapping away from the bracelet he'd been playing with on his wrist. "Wait, what? Like, what are we talking about?"

"The job offer," Gabe said with exasperation. "From the aunt of Jake's at the wedding. Were you seriously just staring at your jewelry?"

"But it's so sparkly!" Trace said defensively, then seemed to catch himself. "I mean... whatever. Yes, she totally loved you."

"The aunt, she wants that I work at her boutique with the fashion."

"Fashion!" Isabella exclaimed. "Perfect for someone with your new... attributes. I can help you with documentation. New identities can be arranged and delivered within a few days."

"What kind of... identity?" Gabe asked suspiciously.

"We'll come up with something appropriate."

"Do I get to do fashion too?" Trace asked.

"Oh no, darling. I'm thinking cosmetology would be more... fitting for your aesthetic."

"This is totally unfair! His life is all classy and sophisticated, and mine is, like, super basic!"

"Actions have consequences, my dear. Your friend was an unwilling victim of circumstances. You were an eager participant in his humiliation."

"But I was literally just having fun!"

"Well you're in luck. I'm sure Traci is going to be all about having fun."

"I can't believe this is happening."

"Believe this," Gabe said, his tone sharper than before. "Maybe next time you think before you laugh at someone's problems, no?"

"Like, when did you get so mean?"

"When my best friend spend three hours treating my panic attack like big joke. Funny how this now changes everything, no?"

Isabella dismissively guided them toward the front door. "Now, if you'll excuse me, I have other appointments. Your documentation will be delivered within a few days."

"Wait!" Trace called out. "How do we contact you if we need help?"

Isabella paused at the doorway, her smile enigmatic. "Oh, I very much doubt you'll need to contact me. You'll figure things out."

"But what if..."

"You're resourceful. You'll adapt." Her eyes glittered with amusement. "Besides, isn't this what friendship is about? Supporting each other through difficult times?"

With that, she closed and locked the door, leaving two transformed friends on the sidewalk, contemplating their uncertain futures.

Two days later, the new girlfriends sat in Gabe's apartment trying to figure out their unwanted reality. Since nothing had yet changed about their transformations, they were reluctantly accepting they might be stuck for a while.

Isabella had sent them both home with starter wardrobes, and they had reluctantly started wearing the least stomach-turning items they could piece together.

Today, Gabe wore a flowing navy blue wrap dress that hit just below the knee, paired with nude flats and delicate gold jewelry. The outfit was sophisticated and understated, making him look like a young professional.

Trace, meanwhile, was squeezed into a tight pink tank top with rhinestone lettering that read "PRINCESS" and matching velour shorts that barely covered anything. Platform sandals added another four inches to his height.

"We must make some plan," Gabe said, pacing gracefully around the room. "If this lasts weeks or months... we cannot just wait around doing nothing!"

"I literally can't get any decent job looking like this." Trace complained, adjusting his too-tight top for the hundredth time. No matter what he wore from his new wardrobe, he looked like he was heading to a strip club rather than a job interview.

"Perhaps that is precisely the point, no?" Gabe said. "Isabella wanted to teach you... most important lesson about judging people."

"This is, like, so messed up."

"We must play these parts until this wears off," gesturing between himself and Trace with both hands. "What other choice do we have?"

"Play the part?"

"Act like these people Isabella makes us. Get the jobs, live the lives."

"This is literally so unfair. I look like a total skank."

"But this is our only option! I will call Jake's boutique aunt. You must find work that... fits your new appearance."

"Like, waiting tables or something?"

"I do not think it will be as college professor!" Gabe said, gesturing at Trace's outfit with dark amusement. "We take what we can get. We just need to survive... until this ends."

"How long do you think it'll really be?"

"I do not know. Perhaps weeks, perhaps month. But we cannot just sit here... waiting!"

"I can't believe we're, like, actually talking about this."

"But we must! We need money, we need to live. And looking like this..." Gabe gestured to his transformed body, "we must play these roles!"

"It's just so weird. Like, I'm supposed to pretend to be this Traci person?"

"This is better than being homeless, no?"

Suddenly, there was a knock at the door. When Gabe answered, a messenger offered him two large envelopes.

"Delivery for Gabriella and Traci?"

They looked at each other with growing unease. "That would be... us, yes," Gabe said, accepting the packages.

Inside were complete identity portfolios - birth certificates, social security cards, college transcripts, even employment histories and credit reports.

"Gabriella Valentina Castillo," the former Gabe Sullivan read aloud, his accent making the name sound natural, musical. "Fashion Merchandising degree from USC. Graduated summa cum laude."

"At least yours sounds classy," Trace muttered. "Traci Amber Diamond? Seriously? That is a total stripper name! And I attended Hollywood Beauty Academy... for cosmetology."

Gabe flipped through more papers, his eyes growing wide. "It says I worked in fashion PR but... I quit to become full-time influencer? I am currently unemployed for six months!"

"Look at this employment history!" Trace read with growing dismay. "I worked at, like, three different salons, two nail places, and a makeup counter at some mall store called 'Glam Girls.'"

"Here is my birth certificate from Buenos Aires," Gabe said, holding up documents. "My Certificate of Naturalization from when I was nineteen years old... even an expired Argentine passport."

"This is so embarrassing!" Trace continued reading. "It says I got fired from two places for 'excessive tardiness and inappropriate attire' and got written up for 'unprofessional conduct with male customers.'"

"Mine is getting much worse!" Gabe continued, sifting through papers with growing dismay. "Bank statements showing I spent my entire savings on designer clothes and makeup. Credit card debt of \$12,000 from shopping at places like... Bergdorf Goodman and Neiman Marcus."

"Look at this apartment lease!" Trace said miserably. "It's for some gross studio in Van Nuys where my rent is cheap because the place is, like, totally sketchy."

"I live in tiny trendy studio in West Hollywood!" Gabe countered, holding up printed screenshots with dramatic flourish. "The rent... it costs almost everything I could possibly earn! And there is more! Instagram account with 15,000 followers obsessed with fashion and makeup tutorials?"

"Oh my God, I have a TikTok where I do stupid dance challenges in barely any clothes!"

"Gym membership at some place called 'Vibras Fitness,'" Gabe sighed. "I... take Zumba classes every weekday morning and salsa lessons twice a week? Who has time for such things?"

"At least you're not advertising yourself online! My dating app profile says I'm looking for 'generous gentlemen'!" Trace said,

then kept reading. "And I drive a bright pink Volkswagen Beetle? Ugh."

"At least you own a car!" Gabe said, holding up more papers with dramatic flourish. "According to this... I have subscriptions to fifteen fashion magazines, a premium account on some clothing application, and I have taken Uber to every sample sale in Los Angeles for the past year!"

"Well, in the past year, I literally have three citations for public intoxication and one for indecent exposure for going topless at some beach party!"

Gabe threw up his hands in disbelief. "This girl, she is fashion crazy! There is even detailed shopping diary tracking my... 'outfit inspiration goals,' whatever these things are supposed to mean!"

"This is literally so unfair! At least your fake life is fashionable and trendy. Mine is just trashy!"

"Fashionable? I have no job with massive debt and entire online personality obsessed with things I know nothing about! How do I pretend to care about these... 'seasonal color palettes' and 'capsule wardrobe curation,' eh?"

"But, like, at least people will think you're cool and stylish. Everyone's gonna think I'm just some bimbo."

"And everyone will think I am some shallow fashionista who cares only about clothes and makeup! But this is not just that, no? This is whole different life. I was not even born in America anymore - now I am from Buenos Aires. My whole heritage... she is completely different now."

Gabe reached the bottom of his stack of documents, and found a note in elegant handwriting:

*"Gabriella and Traci, I thought you should know - the transformations were always permanent. The rose compound story was*

*just to give you false hope while I arranged this delicious trap for you.  
Enjoy your new lives! - Isabella"*

They stared at each other in stunned silence.

"Permanent?" Gabe whispered.

"Like, PERMANENT permanent?" Trace asked, his voice cracking.

"We must go back there RIGHT NOW!"

The friends sprinted to the street, only to find both their cars had been towed. "This cannot be happening!" Gabe said, staring at the empty spaces. They called a rideshare and twenty minutes later arrived at True Reflections, determined to demand answers.

Instead, they found an empty storefront with a cheerful "SPACE FOR LEASE" sign hanging in the window.

"She is completely gone!" Gabe said, pressing his face against the glass. The interior was stripped bare - no furniture, no equipment, no evidence that the studio had ever existed.

"The whole place is totally cleaned out," Trace added, his voice small and scared. "Like they were never even here."

Tucked inside the mail slot, Gabe found another note from Isabella. She'd known they would come back to the salon.

*"Gabriella, you needed to learn to overcome adversity and find real confidence - I've given you the life of someone who must rebuild from nothing while navigating a world obsessed with appearances."*

*"Traci, you needed to learn humility and empathy - I've given you the life of someone who struggles and depends on others' kindness. You both needed to learn what it means to walk in different shoes. I hope you will see this for the gift it is. - I"*

*"PS - While you were making your way here, I took the liberty of having your former residences rekeyed and your vehicles reposessed. Your phones have been reported stolen and remotely wiped."*

*"I'm afraid your former landlords won't recognize you in your current state, so attempting to return to reclaim your old possessions would be quite futile. Your new wardrobes and belongings await you at the addresses listed in your identity packets. Do try to embrace your fresh start."*

Gabe's jaw dropped. For a long, silent moment, the two best friends stood on the sidewalk in the afternoon sun, two dramatically different women slowly realizing the full scope of their situation.

"This is, like, all your fault," Trace said finally.

And just like that, they were bickering again.

"MY fault?" Gabe exploded. "You came up with this ridiculous plan!"

"But you agreed to it! You literally could have said no!" Trace protested.

"You never would have been changed at all if you had not been laughing at me the whole time!"

"Well like, you could have stopped her while I was knocked out! You totally let her do all that stuff to me!" Trace accused.

"I did not know it was going to be permanent! She said twenty-four hours!" Gabe shot back.

"Well like, now it IS permanent! And I didn't, like, sign up to become a bimbo forever!" Trace's voice whined, becoming more emotional.

"And I did not sign up for becoming Latina forever!" Gabe declared, gesturing at his entire transformed body with sweeping arms.

"But like, at least people will take you seriously! I have to live my life looking like a joke!" Trace's eyes started to well up. He crossed his arms and stamped his platform heel-encased foot.

"Miranda dumped me! And now I have to live in Van Nuys above a tanning salon and drive a stupid pink car!"

They glared at each other, then simultaneously caught sight of their reflections in the storefront window. Two stunning women having an argument on the street, looking like they belonged in completely different social circles - one elegant and sophisticated, the other vapid and overtly sexual.

For a moment, Gabe stared at the reflection. Then, underneath Traci's ridiculous bimbo appearance, he saw something familiar. The way she gestured when frustrated. The stubborn set of her jaw, even with all the lip filler. He saw his old friend Trace, trapped behind all that artificial enhancement.

"We are so screwed," Trace said with a quiver, his voice small and vulnerable.

Gabe's anger melted away. "We are," he agreed quietly, but his tone had softened. "But we will figure this out together, yes? We are still best friends, even if... even if everything else has changed."

"Really?" Trace looked at him hopefully through his ridiculous false lashes.

"Really. We have each other. This means something, no?"

Chez Barre was elegant, sophisticated, and exactly the kind of place you'd expect to find two BFFs having cocktails on a Friday evening. Gabriella Castillo and Traci Diamond had been meeting there for happy hour ever since they'd rebuilt their lives.

Gabriella swept through the entrance with obvious confidence, phone to her ear, finishing a call. She made her way across the dining room to where Traci had claimed their usual table. Nearby, a jazz trio played softly in the background.

The elegant Latina gestured gracefully as she spoke in Spanish, her hands moving in natural rhythm with her words: "Sí,

perfecto. Mañana a las diez. Muchas gracias, señora Martinez. Hasta luego."

"Whoa, your Spanish is getting, like, really good!" Traci said as the call ended, looking up from her drink with obvious admiration. She was two cosmopolitans down and working on her third, clearly relishing how she commanded the attention of every man in the restaurant. "You totally owned that conversation."

Gabriella shrugged with a slight smile, smoothing her stylish black dress as she eased into her chair. "Is not so much, but... enough to maintain cover story, ¿sí? Clients at the boutique, they expect it. And after six months of this life..." She gestured vaguely, as if to say "it just happens."

It had indeed been six months since their transformations. The first few months had been a nightmare-doctors who could find no evidence they'd ever been anything other than women, police who looked at them like they were delusional when they tried to explain about True Reflections.

No one believed that they were two men who had been transformed. And how could they, when every test, every scan, every piece of evidence said they had always been Gabriella and Traci?

But gradually, as the futility became clear, they'd stopped fighting their new reality and started learning to live in it.

It wasn't all bad, either. Gabriella's promotion to assistant manager at Étoile Boutique had come with a lovely office and a salary that let her finally start paying down the massive debt she'd inherited. Through sheer determination and long hours, she was well on her way to financial stability while building a genuine career in fashion - something she'd never expected to enjoy.

"Any luck this week finding Isabella?" Traci asked, but from her wry smile it was clear she already knew the answer.

"Nada. Is like she never existed, ¿sabes?"

"Yeah. Would you, like, change back if you could?"

Gabriella considered the question that had haunted her for months. "I do not know anymore. Would you?"

"Ask me tomorrow," Traci grinned. "Tonight I have a date with that super hot guy from the gym."

Traci had embraced her new party girl lifestyle more fully than Gabriella had thought possible. Her new life had actually taught her humility and empathy - working service jobs, relying on tips, and being judged by her appearance had completely changed her perspective on how people treat each other.

"The personal trainer? Ay, chica, you are becoming quite the heartbreaker, ¿no?"

"Turns out this body has its advantages."

"You are impossible!"

"But you love me anyway."

"Sí, I do. Always."

"Even though I'm, like, a total bimbo now?"

"Especially because you are total bimbo! Someone must keep you out of trouble."

"That's literally what best friends are for, right?"

"Forever, hermana."

The two women smiled at each other for a quiet moment, reassured that not even the unimaginable ordeal they'd endured was enough to break apart their friendship.

"For Isabella," Gabriella said, raising her glass for a toast. "Wherever she is."

"To Isabella," Traci agreed. "The best worst thing that has literally ever happened to us."

They clinked glasses, two former bros who, through the strangest twist of fate, had discovered what it meant to be sisters.



Outside, a woman with ageless features watched through the restaurant window, smiled with satisfaction, and disappeared into the night. Her work here was done.

The best gifts, she mused with delicious irony, always came wrapped in the worst nightmares.