

I'm With the Band – Part 2

This story takes place in [DKFenger's Trust Machines](#) universe. Trust Machines are also called Venn Machines because of the large Venn diagram on the outside panel. Two people enter. Each modifies the other without seeing how the other is modifying them. When one hits the green button, the change takes place in the other. Changes can be in thirds of days, one to three days, months or years. But never permanent.

"Why do you still have those things?" Scott asked.

"I don't know," Steph replied looking down at the breasts on his chest. "I've gotten use to having them."

"I understand Ravenna seeing the need to be a woman most of the time. But your change was just a lark, I thought."

"It was. I don't know. I feel like they should be there now."

"And what about down below?"

"Oh, no. I've tried going full femme. It's not for me."

"But you usually wear skirts or dresses."

"As all men should. Really it makes no sense that the people with parts that stick out between their legs wear tight fitting pants that constrain those parts and the people with no parts that stick out wear loose dresses and skirts. It should be the other way around. Kilts really make sense."

Scott laughed. "If you say so. I'll stick to my pants."

"How about we get back to work?"

With a nod, Scott counted to four and they started playing a song Steph was showing to Scott for the first time. Scott was trying out different drum patterns each time through the verse, trying to figure out what felt right.

Ravenna arrived during their second run through and gave them a wave as they continued to play through the piece. She walked over to the music stand in front of Steph to read the lyrics as he sang them. She joined in on the final chorus. When the song ended, Scott said, "I think it should be a little slower. What do you think?"

"That might be worth trying," she said. "Sorry I'm late. Derek and I were supposed to spend the day looking for a suitable location for two weddings, back-to-back. Instead he gives me this." She shows them her hand adorned with a gold band inlaid with princess cut diamond.

"Hey, congratulations," Scott shouts as he gets up to see the ring.

"So it's official. Our little girl is getting hitched," Steph says.

Ravenna slaps at him playfully. "Stop that. The bastard drives me up to our favorite stargazing spot and I still had no clue he was going to pop the question. It was so romantic, it sucked."

"Sucked?"

"Yeah, Debra's the real girl. How am I going to top that as Kevin? I don't want to disappoint her. Now I have a standard against which I'll be judged."

"Little hard on yourself there? You'll think of something."

"Too bad there isn't a song in this. It would make no sense though with all the hes and shes."

After practice, the guys tried to get Ravenna to go out for drinks to celebrate. "No, I can't. I've joined a book club a month or two ago and I've finally read one of the books that will be discussed tonight."

"A book club?"

"I need to do stuff as Ravenna that doesn't involve Derek or you guys or stuff Kevin use to do. She needs a life."

"Makes sense," Steph said. "Let's go, Scott." Steph and Scott stopped by a bar near the practice space.

"You know, sitting here with a hot chick in a dress is really killing my ability to flirt with other women," Scott complained.

"Not my fault I'm fabulous," Steph said.

"You sure are," said the man at the next table. He was a bit over dressed for the establishment though his tie was loose. "I'm Karl." He said reaching out to shake hands with Steph.

"Steph," he said. "Were you eavesdropping?"

"Couldn't help it. I take it you two aren't a couple?"

"No," Scott said. "We have body parts in common I'm not comfortable finding on a partner."

A dark-skinned woman with long reddish-orange hair sat down next to Karl. She looked like she had been poured into the tight red leather dress she was wearing. She said, "Having things in common makes it all the better." She kissed Karl.

"This is my wife Diane. She was sure you two might like to enjoy some fine wine and company back at our place." He turned to Diane, "They aren't a couple, dear."

"They're not? They look like one."

"Well, we do play in a band together," Scott said.

"That's practically a marriage," Diane said.

Steph said, "Well, just to be clear. I'm sure what's in your pants, Karl, is closer to what under my skirt than what's in Diane's dress."

"Well, that doesn't stop someone from enjoying a fine glass of wine, does it?" Diane asked

"Of course not, dear," Karl said. "The invitation still stands."

Steph looked at Scott who just shrugged. "Sure," Steph said. "Are you joining us?" He asked Scott.

"No, I'm more of a beer guy anyway. Have fun."

Steph followed the couple to their rather large house in one of the better neighborhoods in town. Inside, they sat in what they probably called the study. After some small talk and some wine, talk turned to lifestyles and music. After even more wine, Steph was invited to stay the night and he decided to stay.

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Ravenna drove home to get her books. She realized she should have packed them in the truck earlier. Except she was overdressed for the book club, wearing a blue evening dress, dark hosiery, thin black belt, matching shoes and clutch, and jewelry. She felt the need to be more casual at the book club. Finding appropriate clothes was a chore as she had two sets of wardrobes, male and female, and only one closet to store it all in. Most of the closet space was women's wear since that clothing could not be dumped in a drawer.

Sara knocked and entered, "Going on a date?" She looked at the pile of rejected clothes on the bed.

"What? No, it's my book club night."

"I have to say, you've acclimated to feminine ways rather well."

Part of her wanted to join Sara in gently teasing herself for being such a girl. While the other half felt there was nothing wrong with wanting to look nice. "There's nothing wrong with wanting to look nice."

"I'm just needling you. Have fun." Sara said as she turned and closed the door behind her.

Ravenna sighed. Then she looked at the clock and realized she had no time for reflection. She grabbed the purse she had been using and looked at her clothes. Quickly she transferred the contents of the purse into a purse that matched her outfit.

She rushed out of the room and downstairs before turning around and going back upstairs. She grabbed the books for the club and repeated her journey downstairs.

Climbing into her truck had gotten easier over the last few months but no less awkward. With all the stuff she was doing she guessed buying a new car would have to move up on the to do list sooner than later.

The club was in the local library. She took a seat in the circle of chairs and put her books on the chair next her, reserving it for her friend.

Laurie arrived a few minutes later and they greeted one another with a hug. Laurie was tall and lanky. She looked like a runway model but she did not dress fashionably. She preferred garish colors. Today she was wearing an orange and dark green striped top with a white and pale green striped skirt. "At least the stripes are going the same direction," Ravenna thought.

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In the morning, Steph found himself spooned on the outside of Diane and on the inside of Karl. They were both still asleep and there was no way he could get out from between them without waking them. After shifting his weight a few times he felt Diane stir.

"I've got to know," she said as she rubbed her back against his chest. "Who did your implants? They are so perfect."

Steph laughed. "No one. They're vanned."

Diane turned around to face him. "Really? I can't get Karl into one of those machines. He'll pick up some stranger in a bar but he doesn't trust the Venn machines."

"Well, they're like black magic," Karl said groggily. "Where do they come from? How do they work?"

"You didn't care when you were fondling my breasts," Steph said.

A large hand reached around and gave one a good squeeze as he said, "And I still don't care as long as I'm not in the machine. Though, if they're vanned, they could be bigger, right?"

"That would ruin the vibe I was going for."

"He has no sense of style, Steph."

Steph did not mind the grope but he did need to get to work. "I really should be going. I have work at ten."

"No, please stay," Diane said. "We're not just about swinging sex."

"Speak for yourself," Karl said.

"All right. He is. But I'm not. Let's have breakfast and talk," she said getting out of bed. "Let the man get up, you ogre."

"Rawrrrrr," Karl said as he rolled off of Steph somehow slapping his behind as he did so.

Steph got up and before he could look for his clothes, Diane was handing him a bathrobe. It was frilly and partially see through but Steph did not mind as he put it on. As they left the bedroom, Karl could be heard snoring softly.

Steph and Diane spent the morning chatting about various things until Steph finally left after lunch. He had been planning to quit his job anyway and today was as good a day as any to quit.

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A few days later the band's west coast tour kicked off. Scott and Steph were at the airport in a VIP lounge waiting for their chartered flight when Derek, Ravenna, and Sara arrived.

"Do they know?" Sara asked.

"They knew before you knew."

"Oh, poo."

"Congratulations," Scott said, shaking Derek's hand.

"Thanks."

"Rav, do you know what today is?" Steph asked.

"What?"

"Six months."

"Happy Birthday, Rav," Scott joked.

"Six months?" Derek said. Everyone gestured at Ravenna and Derek nodded. "Oh, right. It's still two days from now for when she and I met."

"It's only been six months?" Sara asked.

"I was feeling like six months passed a long time ago," Ravenna said.

"I was right about a female singer getting us attention," Steph said.

Alicia, their new manager, arrived just then, "Do you know who we're flying with?"

"We're flying with someone?"

"Monica Jones," she said.

"Is that our Monica?" Steph asked Sara.

"Our Monica?" Alicia asked.

"Yeah, Monica Jones kind of discovered Ravenna's Libido," Sara said to Alicia.

"You never told me that."

At this point they were escorted onto the tarmac and the plane. The rest of the stage band were boarding the plane as they arrived: Terrance, the lead guitarist; Kate, keyboards and acoustic guitar; Regina, backing vocals and percussion; and Gary, backing vocals, flute, and tenor saxophone. Regina and Terrance were accompanied by their spouses. Gary had a friend along with him. Ravenna's wardrobe, hair, and makeup girl, Chance, was also there as was the band's security chief, Randall. Ravenna was always amazed at the size of the crew. This did not count the instrument techs, the sound and lighting guys, and the roadies who had left a few days ago on a few buses along with the stage equipment and instruments.

The charter plane was designed like a long, narrow parlor. Monica met them as they boarded and immediately pulled Ravenna, Steph, Scott, Alicia, Derek, and Sara to a sitting area near the front of the plane. The other passengers took seats in the back. Monica gave Sara and Ravenna big hugs as they arrived.

"It's so good to see you again. Especially with your single doing far better than expected. Alicia, that off day next Wednesday, is canceled. They're shooting a music video at Tarpin Studios. The label is paying for the director, Jan Holland."

"He's good," Steph said.

"Yes, he is," Monica said. "Also when you get to San Francisco, you're having dinner with S-Seven that first night. He wants to produce a song with you guys."

"Really?" Scott said. "S7 wants to work with us?"

"Yes, and hopefully we can get that done and out by Christmas." After some additional small talk, Monica looked at Ravenna's hand and said. "Are you two

engaged?"

"Oh, yeah, he asked last night."

"Try not to get pregnant," Monica said.

"You sound like my Dad."

* * *

Their first gig was in a twenty thousand seat arena and they were all nervous. They arrived at the arena straight from the airport. They were opening for one of the label's bigger acts, Retro Turkey. They had just finished their soundcheck and were relaxing in their dressing room when there was a knock.

Steph opened the door and said, "Drew Whyte?"

"In the flesh," the man said as he breezed into the room like he owned the arena. "How is the opening act feeling? Nervous?"

"Who's this?" Derek asked.

"Singer for Retro Turkey," Ravenna said as she continued to tune an acoustic guitar.

"Well, aren't you a beauty? Are you a fan?" Drew asked.

"You have a few tunes I enjoy."

"Just a few? Why don't you stop by my dressing room and maybe I can convince you we have more than just a few good tunes?"

"I'll have to pass."

"Suit yourself, Babe," he said. "So you can't all be in the band. Who's who here?"

"Well, you just hit on our singer," Scott said standing up and getting in Drew's face. "I pound things. I'm the drummer."

"Hey, easy, big boy. I was just being flirty."

"You were being an ass."

"Scott, settle down," Steph said.

"Don't say I didn't try to give you guys some advice," Drew said as he headed for the door. "Friendships fade. But enemies last a lifetime."

As the door shut, Scott said, "What a jerk!"

Later, Ravenna was leaving the bathroom when she ran into Drew again. He caught her near a wall and put his hand on the wall so his arm was between her and the direction she wished to go. "Sorry about earlier, Babe. I can't help it if you're beautiful."

"You can't help it?"

His other hand touched her waist. "No, I love your look, sort of punk, sort of goth. You should smile more."

"I think you should keep your hands to yourself," she said brushing his arm down.

"What's your problem? Chicks dig me. Are you lezzy? You just need a real man

to fix that.”

“I have a man. Derek. You saw him earlier.”

“None of those punk asses got what I've got.”

“That's true,” she said as she kneed him in the groin. “My knee's never done that to them.” She ducked under his arm and moved away.

He grabbed her arm and pulled her face right into his. She had gotten use to being short but now it felt like a liability. “Listen you two-bit tramp. I put in a bad word for you, the label might just drop you and your band. So let's go someplace quiet and I'll let you show your remorse.”

“You're fucking sick.” She stomped his foot and when he let go, she ran. As she came around a corner, she ran past Scott. Scott said nothing. He just started moving the direction she came from.

Scott and Drew collided at the corner and Scott picked Drew up and slammed him into a wall.

“Hey, hey, wait a sec before you pound him,” a voice called as two guys came running up. “What's he done now?”

“He won't take no as an answer,” Scott said.

“Yeah, he's like that. Let him go. We'll take care of him and you won't get in trouble. You're in Ravenna's Libido, aren't you?”

“Scott,” he said holding out a hand.

“Mark.” Mark replied. “I'm a fellow drummer. You are so lucky you don't have a douche lead singer.”

“We had a douche lead guitarist. It wasn't really that hard to boot him.”

“Hey,” Drew said.

“Shut up, Drew,” said the other man. “I'm Ken. Thanks for letting us handle this idiot.”

“Don't make me regret it.”

Scott went back to the dressing room.

“You didn't do anything permanent did you?” Ravenna asked.

“No, his bandmates said they'd handle him. You okay?”

“I'm trying to decide if being hit on is better or worse than being asked to go get some coffee since a girl can't be a musician.”

Alicia walked in the room. “What happened?”

After they filled her in, she called Monica and made sure she heard their side of the story before Drew called her. Monica apologized and said there was nothing they could do as long as he was selling out arenas. That's business.

* * *

This tour was crazier than the prior tour because *Dilation* hit number one the second week it was out. Every third day or so, Ravenna was doing radio interviews or meeting a photographer and interviewer for a magazine. The second

week of the tour they were filming a music video for *Dilation*, which was due out a week later. In Los Angeles, Ravenna had an interview on KVNN-FM.

“So, today fans, we have a treat for you,” Cameron Blok, the DJ, said. “Straight from the tour bus of Ravenna's Libido. How are you doing, Ravenna?”

“I'm doing great, Cameron.”

“Great. That's an interesting look you are sporting.”

“This? I don't know. I'm not really a fashionista. I just like clothes that are comfortable.”

“Well, compared to what I saw you wearing at the show last night, this is almost a conservative outfit.”

“You make it sound like I wasn't wearing clothes on stage. I think I would remember that.”

“No, of course not. For the listeners, she's wearing a tight, denim skirt with dark leggings and a long sleeve tee under a denim vest. You're nearly covered from head to toe here. Last night you were showing off your legs and midriff. The shirt was a tank top and there was no jacket over it.”

“Stage lights get hot very fast. If I wore this on stage I'd be soaked half way through our set.”

“I suppose so,” he said. “Moving on. Your rise to stardom has been rather fast.”

“Well, I'm so short any rise would seem greater than it probably really was.”

“You are a little thing, aren't you?”

“Yeah, just a bit over five feet.”

“Well, being short never stopped a star from shining.”

“I doubt I'm a star. We only have the one single.”

“You're selling out large theaters and opening for other acts in arenas. That's not easy without some star power.”

“Well, maybe I don't know what star power is.”

“Well, let's play your song to show the audience why you have star power.”

“If you insist.”

“Ladies and gentleman, *Dilation*, from Ravenna's Libido.”

The engineer in the adjacent room said, “Clear,” and Cameron lifted one side of his head phones off his ear.

“You aren't nervous, are you?” He asked.

“Should I be?” Ravenna said with a laugh.

“No, no. This is just fluff. I'll be right back.”

Ravenna sat there listening to the song. Cameron returned with a bottle of water for her. She opened it and took a drink.

“And we're back with Ravenna, live in the studio.” Cameron said into his microphone. “So, I'm sure you get asked all the time, but what are we supposed to know about your libido?”

Ravenna laughed. She had answered a question like this many times. She used a sultry voice at first, "Sometimes it's hot and fast. Sometimes it's slow and patient." She laughed. "Actually, the name was an accident. We were originally Ravenous Libido but someone misheard the name and thought it had something to do with me."

"And now it does."

"And now it sort of does. They're just words."

"You did a video for this song?"

"Yeah, we filmed it just the other day."

"How'd that go?"

"Good. I didn't know what to expect. I ended up sitting on raised platform for about three hours while the director was shooting all these things going on around me. It's hard to describe and we won't see the finished version for a few weeks while they add some special effects or something."

"So the video wasn't designed by you?"

"No, the record label hired the director, Jan Holland. I'm told he really loved the song and approached them about doing the video," Ravenna said. "Frankly, I didn't realize we would be making a video at all."

"Why not?"

"As I said before, we only have the one song and it's not like it's top of the charts."

"It will be. Trust me."

"If you say so."

"I've heard you've been inside a Venn machine before."

Ravenna had never been asked that before. "I have."

"Well, this is Kay-Venn-Eff-Em and we love to hear Venn stories. Do you have a good one?"

"Let me think," Ravenna said to stall. "I use to go onstage with a pair of vanned boots. They were thigh high and glittered like a disco ball. You mentioned I was short. These boots had an eight or nine inch high platform sole to help with my height. I still wear similar boots. But the boots I wear today were custom made and are no longer named Megan."

"This Megan let you turn her into disco ball boots on stage."

"She works at a store where they do custom venning. I probably wore her for over a fifty gigs before I could afford real boots."

"Don't name the store. We have sponsors who might get mad if you do."

"It's an east coast store. I doubt anyone would know it out here anyway."

"Are you vanned right now?"

"Yes." Ravenna met the eyes of her manager, Alicia, in the control room.

"How do you normally..." Cameron began.

"I'd rather not say," Ravenna said, interrupting him.

"Oh, okay, we need to go to commercial now any way. This is K-Venn. Back in two."

"Clear," said the engineer.

"You don't want to talk about being vanned right now?" Cameron asked.

"I think I made that clear."

The door opened and Alicia entered, "Are you okay, Ravenna?"

"I'm fine."

"You got your venn anecdote, move on." Alicia told Cameron.

"Chill. You're probably gonna get asked that question again so at some point you need a better answer than that, you know?"

"I did answer the question. I said Yes." Ravenna said. "As to what I normally look like, I use my normal look to avoid paparazzi and overzealous fans. I'm not going to talk about how I normally look."

"You just should have said that."

"I guess I should have. For now, the question is off the table."

"Back in 5," the engineer said. Alicia left the room.

"Hey, we're back with Ravenna's Libido's one and only Ravenna." Cameron said. "I've heard you use to have fourth band member."

In the control room, Alicia threw her hands up in frustration.

Ravenna said, "That's true. But I can't really elaborate."

"Why not?"

"The break up was ugly. Lawyers got involved. And we're not allowed to discuss the terms."

"What was ugly about it?"

"The most I can say is there were four songs that Stig wrote or co-wrote that were bought out by the band. And none of us are allowed to discuss anything beyond that."

"Okay, I was hoping you might talk more about that but I guess you can't. Tell me about the other members of the band. You said this Stig was the fourth member but at your show last night, there were seven people on stage."

"Well, Steph, Scott, and I are Ravenna's Libido. Steph and I do most of the song writing and Steph plays bass on stage. Scott is our drummer. The others on stage are part of our touring band. But they aren't in the band, *per se*. Terrance plays lead guitar. Kate plays keys and some rhythm guitar. Regina and Gary are our back up singers, who also add some percussion to some songs. Gary also plays flute and stuff like that. And of course, I sing lead vocals and occasionally strum a guitar."

"I heard Steph used to be named Steve," Cameron said with a smile.

"Yes."

"Why the change?"

"You'd have to ask Steph. I wouldn't presume to answer such a question for

Steph."

"How long have you known Steph?"

"Over ten years now. And before you ask, I've known Scott for at least five years." Ravenna was obviously unhappy with the interviewer. She could see Alicia in the control room conversing with the programming director of the station. So she hoped this would be done soon.

"And in those ten years, how long has he been known as Steph?"

"Maybe six or seven months."

"Isn't that around the time when you joined the band?"

There was a short pause before Ravenna said, "Yes, I joined the band around the same time."

"You replaced someone named Kevin?"

"Yes, the band decided to try a female vocalist."

"So that separation was more amicable than the separation with Stig."

"I suppose you could say that," Ravenna said flatly.

"Let's talk about your love life. I'm sure the men out there want to know if you're single."

"I do have a fiancée. Sorry, fellows."

"That's a nice ring," Cameron said. "You two met in a book store?"

"How do you know that?" Ravenna asked. "Yes, we met in a book store where I use to work."

"That appears to be all the time we have. You've been a wonderful sport, Ravenna," he said and when she made no comment he continued. "Ravenna's Libido will be at the arena tonight and I believe up in San Francisco tomorrow."

"I think that's right."

"You're listening to Cameron Blok on K-Venn FM Los Angeles. I'll be right back."

"Clear," said the engineer.

"Where did you hear all those things you heard?" Ravenna said.

"Listen, kid," Cameron said. "I don't care what you're hiding. I went easy on you. But if you don't want your secrets revealed in a random radio interview, you're going to have to get on top of your story. It's very easy to find out Ravenna didn't exist a year ago. At some point someone is going to tell your story if you don't tell it first. I hope you don't hate me. Good luck."

Cameron offered his hand for a handshake and Ravenna accepted it. He held the door open as Ravenna walked out of the studio in a daze. Alicia took her back to the hotel. Steph was bad mouthing the DJ when she arrived.

"No, he was right," Ravenna said. "We need to get on top of this."

"That's up to you," Scott said. "I don't think anyone will care. You seem so comfortable as Ravenna, I forget sometimes about Kevin."

"No, she can't tell," Steph said. "We'll end up some kind of novelty band."

"I'd like to agree with Scott, but Steph has a point," Alicia said. "There will be music listeners who value 'authenticity'. Usually that has to do with playing your instruments or not. But this might also qualify."

"You should make sure any future radio spots she does are properly vetted," Steph said to Alicia.

"Actually, all three of us should go on these radio spots," Scott said. "We should be performing songs live in the studio to show off Ravenna's voice and so we're there to deflect any bad questions."

"That's true," Steph said.

"I've had a hard time getting spots for the whole band," Alicia said. "They want to Ravenna because they think it's her band."

"Well, you should explain to them that it's our band," Steph said.

"I will. As for today, frankly, Cameron is an old friend," she said. "I think that's why he didn't press you, Ravenna. He pushed gently and backed off each time you asked him to. That interview could have been much worse. He may have done us a favor by giving us time to get on top of this."

Ravenna quietly slipped away to her room to think. She realized in the six or so months since her first venning she had only spent a handful of days as Kevin. She was just sitting in her hotel room with the lights out when there was a knock on the door. She let Sara in. Sara set down a package and gave Ravenna a hug. "You okay?"

"Who am I?"

Sara did not respond. She just held her sister close.

"When I'm Kevin, I'm very aware of when I'll be turning back into Ravenna," She said. After a moment she continued, "And unless I'm with Debra, I'm looking forward to venning back into Ravenna. But I can't figure out if that's because I want to be Ravenna or Ravenna's life is more interesting than Kevin's."

"And how do you feel about being Kevin now?"

"I don't think about it. Unless I know it will be happening soon, it's far from my thoughts."

"If you could, would you stop being Kevin?"

Ravenna thought for a moment, "Maybe? I don't think it would be fair to Debra if I gave up Kevin forever. And I've never really thought about being a woman when I'm older. Of course, Ravenna can stay 21 and hot forever."

"So you think you're hot, huh?"

"I turn a lot of heads," she laughed. "I never realized how creepy even the nice guys can be."

"Perfect, let's go to a club tonight."

"I'm having an identity crisis and you want me to go dancing."

"Crisis? Are you a woman?" Sara asked.

"Well, yes."

"No hesitation. Are you a woman?"

"Yes."

"See, no crisis. You aren't a man pretending to be a woman. You aren't a part-time woman. You are a woman. Now let's go out and paint the town red."

"I don't think Derek will approve."

"Derek sent me in here. He's found a Venn machine and is going to be Debra when we go out after the show."

Ravenna finally noticed the box. "What's that?"

"Oh, I forgot. Ravenna's first fan had herself shipped to the hotel so you could wear her to a show and to a club."

"Megan's in the box?"

"I assume so. That's what the email said." They opened the box and there were the platform disco-ball boots Ravenna use to wear on stage.

"So she's finally going clubbing with us?"

"I suppose so."

Ravenna seemed to suddenly have an idea. "Do you know where this machine is and what time it is?"

"It's a little after five and yes, I know where the Venn machine is. You need to get to the theater soon."

"Perfect, call for a car. I'll tell Alicia I'm arranging my own transit to the arena."

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The set went off without a hitch that night. Ravenna felt like it was old times playing the gig while wearing Megan. She was so fired up she even played a couple solos that Terrance usually played. Backstage, she met up with Debra and Sara and told Alicia she was going out to a club. She had arranged a separate car. Invitations were offered to the rest of the band and crew but most just wanted to go back to their partners at the hotel. Only Steph decided to tag along. Scott had already disappeared with a groupie or two.

The four of them piled into a minivan and were taken to an upscale nightclub. Ravenna's name was all they needed to get in quickly. It did not hurt that they were four good looking women arriving at a club together. They danced and drank. Around two in the morning, Sara tapped Ravenna on the shoulder and Ravenna nodded. She whispered something to Debra and the four of them moved into the VIP area and a private room.

"How did you manage this?" Debra said.

"I'm a rock star. I've got some pull."

Sara closed the door behind her and looked at her watch. "Five seconds," she announced.

"What's five sec—..." Debra asked. She turned and saw Sara toss something in the air toward Ravenna. As she followed the flight of the object, Ravenna was

suddenly replaced by Kevin and Megan. Kevin caught the box and knelt down.

"Debra, I just wanted to tell you in front of my sister, my closest friend, and my favorite pair of boots how much you mean to me. You are my guiding light, my morning sunrise, my everything. And I hope you will be my bride too."

Debra's eyes welled up as he held out the ring. "Yes, you fool." He stood and they kissed.

The three watchers applauded.

"That was beautiful," Megan squealed. "Where are we?"

"Let's give them some space," Steph said and they left the couple alone in the room.

* * *

"So just before six Ravenna put on the boots and got into the Venn machine and we set it for eight hours. We got in and I immediately hit the green button. Forty seconds later Ravenna and Megan's existing venn durations were reset to eight hours. So at the club around two I made sure we were in a private room in time so Kevin and Megan didn't suddenly appear on the dance floor," Sara was explaining for what seemed like the third time when they arrived back at the hotel with Kevin.

"And you are?" Alicia asked Megan.

"Ravenna's favorite pair of boots."

Sara said, "Oh, yeah, Megan'll need a room for the night. Or I suppose we could share."

Alicia shook her head. "So we have to make a detour to the Venn machine before we head up to San Fran tonight."

"Yes."

* * *

Kevin woke up spooned with Debra. It had been a while since he was the outer spoon. Thinking that, he was reminded of the prior afternoon's thoughts about his own identity. Holding Debra like this felt so natural. But being held by Derek also felt so natural. As his inner thoughts ran in circles Debra stretched and snuggled closer to him.

"Good morning," he said.

"Morning. If it means we wake up like this, you need to propose more often."

After a moment of silence, Kevin said, "Deb?"

"What?" Debra turned slightly to face him, hearing something disturbing in his voice.

"I know I've asked this before, but does Ravenna..."

"You hush and you listen," Debra turned fully around and faced him. "I love you. Not what you look like, not what parts might be between you legs, not how

tall you are or not. I love you. When I created Derek I never expected to spend so much time as him. But if that's the best way to spend time with you then that's what I'll do. I've seen how attached you've become to Ravenna. That's fine. I love being Ravenna's man. I love being your woman. Why? Because I love you."

"How can you be so sure about this?"

"Have you ever had a partner you could share your total self with? Masculine and feminine sides? We are so lucky."

"Oh, I suppose we are."

"I'm so amazed by you," Debra said.

"What?"

"I was just thinking about your run-in with that Drew Whyte guy."

"I'd rather forget that."

"But that's the thing. I have to admit. Part of the draw of being Derek is not having to worry about self-important morons getting grabby hands with me. An encounter like that might have left me curled up in a ball for days. But you could stop being a woman forever and avoid those situations forever. But you're going to go out there and be a woman and suffer sexist men in pursuit of a dream. I don't know that I could do that."

Kevin did not know how to respond.

Debra kissed him on the forehead and went into the bathroom to shower. Kevin stared at the door she went through for a moment before picking up his notepad. It contained all his lyric and song ideas. He flipped through it. All the songs and partial songs in there recently were started by Ravenna. As he read through them he realized how much his lyric writing seemed different than it was before. He flipped to a blank page and wrote the time and his location in the upper corner, a habit he developed as part of a creative writing class. He added a K after the time. Lyrics to a song called *All of You* flowed neatly onto the page. Snatches of the conversation he had just had with Debra slipped into the stanzas naturally.

He did not hear her step out of the bathroom and stand over his shoulder as he was finishing the final verse. "You see?" she said. "You get it better than you think."

"I do," he said, setting the pages aside. He pulled her into a hug and kissed her. "I'm just surprised that I have someone at all. The venning stuff doesn't make that realization easy."

"It's no different than any other pass time."

"Venning is different than just about all other pass times."

"Okay, yeah, it is. But still, you can just think of it as something we do together."

"I suppose."

* * *

The first thing the band did after checking into the hotel in San Francisco was have dinner at a fancy restaurant with S7, the famous record producer. He was a man in his early forties, tall, confident, charismatic. He asked the band members questions and seemed to listen intently to their ideas. He offered his opinion about some things as well. He was most insistent that the song they worked on the next day be fresh. Not something they had been playing for months. Derek said "Ravenna wrote some lyrics just this morning. What was it called?"

"*All of You*. I haven't even shown those lyrics to Steph and Scott."

"Even better," S7 said. "Do it have a melody yet?"

"No."

"Perfect. You can bring this song to life in the studio tomorrow."

The next day, they did just that. The lyrics were well regarded by all involved. S7 mostly watched as Steph and Ravenna created the general chord structure for the song. When they were ready to start the instrumentation, S7 suggested sounds and effects the band never considered before. Soon they had the foundation of a Ravenna's Libido song that fit perfectly into their repertoire yet also sounded new and fresh compared to their other material.

At the end of the day, they had a new single, as well as a song they had to teach to the road band.

"You're great to work with, I hope you enjoyed it," S7 said.

"I'm glad we got to work with you," Steph said. "I don't think we've pulled a song together so quickly."

"I have a disappointing secret," S7 said. "That only works a few times and from then on, it takes days or weeks to get a chorus exactly how you want it. This is why I switch up the bands I work with all the time. New relationships work best in the studio. I don't know why."

"I'm just glad you didn't suggest autotune," Scott said.

"Heaven and your record label forbid," S7 laughed. "I was told not to even bring it up. And they're right. You don't need it."

* * *

"So she's just supposed to take it?" Sara fumed. She threw her hands up in frustration, nearly smacking one into the overhead storage on the tour bus.

"Unfortunately, there's not much we can do about it," Alicia said. "They banned the band from the venue."

"Well, that's fine as we want nothing to do with that venue ever again," Scott said.

Derek was holding Ravenna as the bus pulled out of the venue's parking lot. Ravenna sat up. "So what do you do when you fight back and you get overpowered?"

The two women just looked at her with sorrow. "Nothing," Sara said. "Just hope he doesn't maim or kill you."

"What?" Steph exclaimed.

"You heard the police officer. It's her word against his. He even said there was little chance of jail time since it was 'only' unwanted groping. Only!" Sara said.

"He was a manager at the arena, an upstanding citizen in the community. And we're just people passing through. The faster we get out of town, the better it is for them." Alicia said.

Ravenna lay her head on Derek's shoulder and one by one the others drifted away from the couple. When they were alone, he said, "Are you sure you're okay?"

"Do you know how often you ask me that?"

"You get into a lot of trouble."

"Most of it is self-inflicted. I don't have to be a woman."

"I don't know if Chance feels that way. Or Randall. Or the roadies. Or the stage band. They all have jobs because you decided to be a woman."

"Steph or actually Steve warned me I wasn't thinking about everything this change would mean."

"Yeah, like how we are going to fit four full wardrobes into our home eventually."

"I'd like to think we have all these people depending on me because of talent but you've seen the pictures the magazines print and music videos. I'm treated like a sex object in them and that gives men the idea they can treat me that way in person."

"I suppose your mother never gave you the talk. The talk about how the world isn't fair to women."

"No, she didn't. I've experienced it first hand now though."

"You could walk away."

"And hurt my crew?"

"They would find other jobs."

"I suppose they would. Well, then self-inflicted or not, this is what I wanted and I have to take the good with the bad."

"I hope I'm in the good."

"You're the best."

* * *

For the rest of the west coast tour, Alicia ended up canceling several of Ravenna's radio appearances. She rebooked a few of them with all three members of the band. Ravenna used the suggestion Cameron made about venning to be anonymous off stage at several of her radio appearances if the question came up. Right as the tour was ending, the video for *Dilation* was released resulting in

another bump in sales of the single.

On the commercial flight home, Debra, Ravenna, and Sara shared a row of seats.

"You were right, Sara. Flying home as three smallish women was the best way to fly coach," Ravenna said.

Sara laughed, "Next time I might have you shrink me to like four and a half feet tall. Anything for extra leg room."

"Great, then I won't get the middle seat," Ravenna said.

"It's going to be a busy six months. We have two weddings to plan," Debra said.

"I thought you two had that well in hand."

A man walking by pointed at Ravenna, "Hey, aren't you that woman from that video? Um... *Dilation*?"

"Yes, I am."

He reached over Sara to shake Ravenna's hand. She accepted the handshake warily. "Great to meet you. Wish I could remember your band's name."

"Ravenna's Libido."

"Right. I knew it was something sex related." He straightened up and continued down the aisle. "Nice meeting you."

"That turned out okay," Ravenna said.

"I was worried for a minute when he shook your hand," Debra said.

"I've gotten use to being small, I think. Just have to roll with what fans say and do."

"That's awful."

"That's the price of fame."

"The price of fame is fear?" Sara asked.

"I wasn't afraid, just cautious. Most fan interactions are just awkward. They've listened to my songs and read stories about me. They think they know me well. I know nothing about them. It has to be awkward. Besides, it was you who hired the band's first bodyguard."

"True." Sara said, "What were you saying about being busy?"

"Well, when we planned to take a few months off for the weddings, we didn't have a hit single with a popular video attached to it. Alicia stayed behind to hammer out a schedule for filming our next video and finalizing the art on our first album."

"I thought the artwork was finalized," Debra said.

"No one showed me anything," Ravenna said.

"Oh my. Alicia asked me about a photo and while we were looking through some of my photos, she saw the sunrise photo and thought it was perfect."

Ravenna shook her head. "It is perfect, but I don't know that I want to be topless on my first album cover."

"Oh, you mean that photo," Sara said. "Maybe they can put it a bit out of focus."

Ravenna was texting as she said, "I'm asking Alicia about the album cover now."

"Where is the rest of the band?"

"Most of them are taking later flights. They wanted to enjoy the warm weather a bit longer before returning to the fall weather we're having back east."

"We have to find places for the weddings, arrange for flowers, catering, etc. I'm wondering if we can get a discount for booking two weddings at once," Debra said.

"I just got an image from Alicia." Ravenna showed the image to the girls. It was the sunrise photo centered on her face. Her chest was along the bottom of the image and apparently some soft focus blur was added in the outer part of the image to add a touch of modesty. In green calligraphy, it said Ravenna's Libido across the top.

"It looks great," Debra said.

"I like it," Sara said.

"It works, I suppose."

"Sara," Debra said. "Maybe you can plan our weddings."

"You put her up to this."

"But you're so good at managing stuff."

Sara sighed.

"At least you won't have to deal with any bridal showers," Debra said. "Kevin's family will attend mine. And mine will be thrown by my bride's maid, my dear friend Rebecca."

"Yeah, Ravenna doesn't have family unique to her. I figured I'd put a note in her wedding invitations that says there was no bridal registry and that the couple would prefer charitable donations to any of several causes listed on the note," Ravenna added.

"Though, Rebecca might need help since she lives so far away and won't be in town until the day before my shower," Debra said. "If you could help with that..."

"Fine, just fine." Sara said. "I'm too nice."

* * *

Among Debra or Derek, and Ravenna or Kevin, and Sara, two or three of them would go out together each day and look at stuff related to booking a wedding. Eventually a hotel ballroom was booked twice, an officiant hired, florists hired, a decorator, a caterer, two bakers, and others were hired. The date for the family wedding was set for a traditional Saturday four months away. The following Monday, Ravenna's wedding was set. Kevin felt it was only fair that their real

selves get married first.

Amid the wedding planning, the couple also went looking for a place to live. They could not decide if they should buy a house or if they should rent. So they saw a wide variety of apartments and houses.

Also during this time, Kevin met Debra's parents and her brother. They drove downstate around sixty miles to get together at her parents' house. Debra's family knew about the couple's vanned personas, which added to the usual awkwardness of the meeting her parents. Her brother, Greg, was wearing a Ravenna's Libido tour shirt when they met. Kevin promised to do a selfie with Greg the next time Greg and Ravenna were together. On the ride home, Debra kept apologizing for Greg's behavior.

"It's no big deal, Deb. Greg's a fan. I'm not going to get upset that he's a fan."

"He probably crushes on Ravenna like I do."

"That's a bit creepy."

"I know," Debra said.

"Still, when I'm on stage. I know some percentage of the audience have probably imagined or are imagining right then and there having sex with me. You can't let thoughts like that get you down."

"I'm sure few of them are as gentle as Derek."

"No doubt about that," Ravenna said.

Ravenna managed to attend her book club meeting a couple months in a row. During the coffee breaks, she solidified her friendship with Laurie. They even met a few times for coffee outside of book club. Laurie liked photography and was fascinated by the idea of Ravenna dating a photographer. She did not listen to music much and was indifferent to Ravenna's work.

Ravenna and Debra were working on the guest lists when she saw the name. "Who's this?"

"Who? Oh, Laurie. She's from my book club."

"You made a friend at the book club?"

"You sound surprised."

"No, that's wonderful."

"Next time you're Derek, I'll introduce you. She's into photography."

"Cool. Neither Kevin nor Ravenna have a lot of friends."

"Well, most of Kevin's friends moved away right out of high school. The band was where I had my friends. And even that didn't last with Stig."

"I have to add a few names for Derek. Most of them are professional acquaintances."

"Of course."

In the end, the guest lists for the two weddings did not overlap very much beyond their parents, siblings, and the band. Extended family, Alicia, and friends were going to the family wedding. The showbiz wedding would include people

from Liberty Records, the stage band and crew, Derek's boss, and friends of the vanned personas.

* * *

"You don't have to do this," Steph said.

Ravenna was wearing little more than a nude body stocking in a private garden. "It's my fault for approving the album cover."

"It is an amazing album cover," Scott said.

The three of them were getting ready to film a video for their second single, *All of You*.

"And this is such a nice garden the director found."

"She's known for her nude singers tastefully filmed."

Ravenna did not respond as the director, a woman in her late twenties, stepped into their circle. "We're coming close to golden hour. Are you ready?"

"Will it matter that this is the evening and the cover pic was taken at dawn?" she asked.

"No, no one will know which way is east or west, dear. Are you nervous?"

"Yeah."

"Well that's good. Though if you weren't we could lose the body stocking," the director, Mila Donovich said with no hint of humor. She added. "I'm kidding."

At the appointed time, they ran through the song a dozen times. Each time the band was positioned in a triangle with one person close to the camera and the other two in the back on either side. Ravenna lip-synced through each of the twelve takes. By the fourth run through she was willing to try not wearing the body stocking. For half of the stagings, Ravenna was in the front. For the other half, the guys traded off in the front. When Ravenna was not in front, she was sitting or standing facing away from the camera showing off her nude posterior. She did one shot on the right point of the triangle where she was facing the camera covering herself with her arms and hands. In solidarity, Scott was just wearing tight shorts in the video. Steph ended up being the only modestly dressed person in the video.

"Thanks a lot, Honey," the director said from outside Ravenna's makeshift changing area. "I'm glad you were willing to get out of that body stocking for the distance shots. You are beautiful and should never be ashamed to show it off."

"I wasn't always this good looking," Ravenna said as she got dressed.

"Late bloomer?"

"Something like that."

"Well, as I told the boys, we'll get this edited and send a copy to your manager as soon as we can, probably Monday."

* * *

Kevin and Debra signed the lease to an apartment shortly thereafter. The primary feature of the apartment was its close proximity to a Venn machine. They spent the first week swapping between Kevin and Debra or Ravenna and Derek so that all the neighbors would think all four of them lived in the apartment.

Kevin's parents dropped in for dinner once they were settled. Ravenna answered the door.

"Mom," she said as they hugged. "Dad." They hugged. It was less awkward than Ravenna expected.

"Dad, Mom, this is Derek. You've met Debra. This is her other side," Ravenna said.

"It's a pleasure," her father said shaking Derek's hand.

"I love what you've done with the place," his mother said giving Derek a hug.

"Yeah, we call it shipping chic," Ravenna said pointing at the cardboard boxes all over the place.

"Thank you, Mrs. McNichols," Derek said. "Kevin has no furniture and my old place came furnished. So we are still finding our style."

"We figure we'll be able to fill out the rest after Debra's bridal shower," Ravenna said.

"You can call me Mom or Ellen, I won't mind."

"I prefer Mr. McNichols," her father said.

"Frank!" her mother exclaimed.

Derek led them on the nickle tour of the apartment. When they returned to living/dining area, Derek went to the kitchen to serve dinner. At the table, Mom asked them about the wedding plans. She knew mostly what was going on from talking with Sara, but she offered ideas for the song she and Kevin would dance to. And which Ravenna and Dad would dance to.

When dinner was over, Derek started clearing the table.

While Derek was in the kitchen Dad whispered to Ravenna, "He cooks, he cleans, and he's easy to look at. I can see why you switched sides."

* * *

The video was a huge smash. The single and video were released as they started their three month southern tour. The tour was a little longer than the last tour and would end on the east coast. Ravenna did more interviews and no one grilled her on venning or any other topics. She always made sure to mention her engagement in these interviews to try to cut down on the more aggressive groupies. Neither Sara nor Derek were with her on this tour and she found herself spending more time with the band.

The band had a special appearance for New Year's Eve. Monica had arranged for the band to broadcast their performance of *Dilation* during one of the network New Year's Eve programs live from their concert venue.

Everyone was a bit nervous that night. The video crew did not help as they wanted to rearrange the staging. The usual stage setup included a riser in back with Scott's drums in the center; Kate's keyboards and spare guitars on stage left; and the backup singer on the right. In front of the riser, Terrance was on the left, Steph was in the center so he could easily interact with Scott, and Ravenna roamed the stage unless she was playing guitar in which case she was usually to the right of center. The production assistant wanted to know if Ravenna could be in the center and lose the guitar. Kate usually played Ravenna's guitar part as well so nothing was really lost with Ravenna not playing guitar.

So as the prior song ended, Ravenna removed her guitar and grabbed a microphone. She announced, "Thank you. We need to delay for a minute or so before the next song. We're gonna be live on national television for this next song." Terrance plays the opening three chords to the song and crowd went wild. "No, no, not yet." Terrance pantomimed being disappointed and the crowd made a loud "Aw" sound. "Don't encourage him," Ravenna continued. "Okay, someone just said twenty seconds into my ear piece. So it's not much longer. Anyone know a fast joke just shout it out." She held the microphone away from her and pantomimed listening to a joke. "Good one. Okay, just 5 seconds left. Be sure to give a good roar to all the folks at home who couldn't be here tonight. Two. One."

The crowd erupted. Terrance started the song again. The intro was twice as long as normal as the band listened to the national announcer introducing the band in their head pieces. Ravenna ad libbed, "Happy New Year, Houston," to juice the crowd again. After that the song played out as it normally did.

* * *

When they landed at their home airport, Steph was greeted at the airport by Karl and Diane. Each of them gave him a kiss. Scott shook Karl's hand, "Long time, no see. It's cool you're still in touch with Steph."

"We've gotten pretty close," Steph said. He then introduced them to Ravenna.

"Oh, the Karl and Diane? Pleased to meet you finally." Ravenna said.

"She is just scrumptious, Steph," Diane said.

"Would it be awkward to invite Karl to Derek's bachelor party? He has so few friends," Steph said.

"Derek's the groom?"

"Yes, he's new in the area and doesn't have much family either," Steph said.

"Oh, there's Sara. I'm sure Derek won't mind Karl being there," Ravenna said.

"Nice meeting you." She ran off to hug her sister.

"Well I'd love to attend," Karl said. "I don't mind being filler."

"Wish I could come too," Diane said.

"I have an idea," Steph said.

* * *

Steph had to throw two bachelor parties. Derek's bachelor party was the week after they arrived back from the southern tour.

Steph picked up Karl at his house. Diane had apparently gone out earlier that day. Steph was wearing a women's business suit that gave him a somewhat masculine look even though he was in a pencil skirt and nylons. Scott was in charge of getting Derek there and they arrived on time. Derek's boss, his brother, and Ravenna's father were also there. It was a small party in a back room at a bar. Aside from a stripper-gram it was also rather tame as bachelor parties go.

Ravenna showed up at the end to rescue Derek from the masculinity of the event. Greg was there and finally got his selfie with her.

Afterward, Karl and Steph went back to Karl's house and went directly to the bedroom. Steph did a striptease for Karl, making sure to drape each article of clothing over Karl as it was removed. Steph insisted that the clothing remain hanging on Karl. With only a bra and a bulging pair of panties left to remove, the clothing turned into the naked body of Diane and she vigorously kissed Karl. The bra and panties also disappeared when she reappeared.

"I can't believe you were Steph's clothing tonight," Karl said when she finally came up for air.

"I told her she could attend the party," Steph said, joining the two on the bed.

"No talking, too horny," was all Diane said as she started undressing Karl.

Steph caught Karl's eye. He pointed to the revved up Diane and mouthed the words, "This is why we venn."

* * *

The next day Ravenna attended Debra's bridal shower. It was a bit torturous as she and Debra had to pretend to just be friends as not everyone attending the shower knew Ravenna was Kevin. Additionally, while Kevin had met some of Debra's friends, very few members of her family had met Kevin or Ravenna.

Anne pulled Ravenna aside, "Should you be here?"

"I don't know what you mean," Ravenna said with a grin, then added, "Like you care about rules. Just don't tell anyone who I am. Not everyone knows."

"Like I'd rat you out. Do you want me to introduce you to everyone? I don't think many of these people know Ravenna."

"Okay."

One of the first people they bumped into was Rebecca, the maid of honor.

"Rebecca, this is Ravenna."

"Oh, I've heard about you. It's amazing how my shy little Debra knows a rock star," Rebecca said.

"I don't know if I'm a star."

"My young daughter is always dancing when that song comes on the radio. Now she wants thigh high disco boots."

"That's... that's amazing," Ravenna said, surprised to hear about such a young fan. "How do you and Debra know each other?"

"Since elementary school. We use to pretend to be a part of one another's weddings. Debra had to fly out to Oregon for my wedding eight years ago. My parents were glad Debra was finally getting married. It was a good excuse for me to spend time with them too." Someone called Rebecca's name and she said, "Gotta run."

Anne continued introducing Ravenna to Debra's side of the family. She said, "These are Debra's cousins whom I only met once and have forgotten their names."

"Mary," the cousin said. "You're her roommate, Anne, right?"

"Former roommate. Those crazy kids have shackled up. This is Ravenna. She's a friend of Kevin's, not an ex-girlfriend."

"Nice to meet you," Mary said. "You look familiar."

The other cousin agreed. "I'm Marla. Yes, I've seen you on TV. You're in a band."

"That's true," Ravenna said. "Ravenna's Libido. But please don't make a fuss. This is Debra's day."

"How do you know Debra?"

"She took some photographs of me for our first album," Ravenna said. "And I've known the groom for a long time."

As the introductions continued they found themselves on Kevin's side of the room. Anne paused as Ravenna said, "My mother, Ellen, on the right and my Aunt Sophia on the left. Introduce me like you know who they are."

"And this is the groom's mother, Ellen. And his Aunt Sophia."

"The Aunt Sophia?" Ravenna said. "Oh, Kevin just doesn't shut up about his favorite Aunt. It's a pleasure to meet you. Is it true you once punched a horse?"

Ellen put her hand over her mouth to hide her smile.

"I did. But I have no idea why he would tell someone that. It was a bit embarrassing. Who are you?"

"Oh, I'm a friend of both parties. I've known Kevin for years and Debra was the photographer on my band's first national album."

"Well, um excuse me I need to go to the powder room. Would you join me Ellen?"

"Certainly," she said.

"What was that about?" Anne said.

"Oh, Sophia and I love to prank one another. The horse punching story is my way to telling her I got a stranger to walk up to her with an embarrassing story. She's probably asking my mother if Kevin is around. I hope Mom will leave Sophia dangling till I fess up about this one later."

Anne laughed.

Later, Ravenna was in a bathroom stall when two other women entered the bathroom.

"I just had to get out of there for a moment."

"What's the matter?"

"Deb was gushing about something Kevin did. Ugh. I don't see what she sees in this guy. He's never around. And I heard he doesn't work."

"I thought he worked at a book store."

"He quit a few months back. Now he just mooches off of her."

"Oh, you're just jealous because she doesn't spend as much time with you."

"It's not just that. Did you know Debra venns a lot?"

"She does?"

"She frequently turns into a man named Derek. She says it's because people respect a male photographer more than a female one."

"That's probably true."

"I think Kevin is gay and she venns to be desirable to him."

"That's ridiculous."

"Is it? She spends a lot of time as Derek."

They left the bathroom at that point. Ravenna was not sure if she should laugh or cry.

* * *

The bachelor party for Kevin was hosted by Steph and Scott. This was a bigger party. Scott insisted on booking a party room at a strip club. Kevin was so glad Derek was not attending. Debra's father got drunk early.

During the party, Debra's brother, Greg, pulled Kevin and Steph out to the main room of the place. *Dilation* was playing over the sound system and the stripper on stage looked a lot like Ravenna. Kevin was intrigued by how the woman interpreted the song as an erotic dance. Shortly after that, Steph and Scott pulled Kevin into a room and Scott said, "We got you a lap dance."

"Seriously? I don't want a lap dance."

"You want this lap dance," Steph said as the woman who had danced to *Dilation* entered the area.

"Which of you ordered the private dance?" She asked. Her voice was lower than Ravenna's.

"He did," Steph and Scott said in unison and then they ran off.

"Hi, I'm Ravenna," she said as she sat on his lap. She was taller than Ravenna and even bustier. But her face looked very similar to his Ravenna face.

"Um, Kevin," he said. "You have no idea how awkward this is."

"I don't bite," she said. "What's awkward about it?" Her hips gyrated and her body undulated to the background music. Her hands ran up and down her body lingering on her breasts.

"I'm getting married tomorrow."

"Doesn't mean you're dying? We're just two people chatting."

"While you grope yourself, yep. Perfectly normal."

She laughed. "It's normal here. Are you still feeling awkward?"

"Well, you see. Don't tell anyone. I actually know the real Ravenna. So this is a bit awkward."

While her focus had been directed toward him, her focus immediately intensified. "Really?" She swung around and straddled his legs so she was facing him. As a consequence, her breasts were floating near his face. The strong fragrance of heavy perfume wafted off her breasts. "I love her so much. I saw you were watching me dance to *Dilation*. You should see what I do with *All of You*."

"I'll tell her I met a big fan and look-a-like."

"You will? Can you get her to meet me? That would be so awesome." She said quickly. "Oh, but don't tell her I'm a look-a-like. This is a wig. And I don't want her to think I'm trying to get a job as a body double or something like that. That might weird her out."

"Oh, I doubt that would be what weirded her out."

"How do you know her?"

"She replaced me in the band."

"Seriously?"

"Yes. They decided they wanted a female singer and I helped them find my replacement. You saw Steph and Scott. They're in the band."

"I thought they looked familiar. But frankly I only pay attention to Ravenna. I saw her at the Bunker Bash Festival and I had to start dancing to her music."

"That was an interesting gig."

"I'd ask what was interesting about it but my boss is standing over there tapping his watch. I've got to go."

"Farewell, um, Ravenna."

"Oh, call me Stacie. Ravenna's my stage name," she said as she walked off.

"Mine, too," Kevin thought.

* * *

Kevin's father brought Kevin back to his childhood home a bit tipsy that night. Debra was staying in their apartment and Kevin was not allowed back there until after the second wedding. As it was after midnight, it was the day of the first wedding and his father made sure Kevin ate something and drank a tall glass of water before going to sleep.

"Go take a shower. You don't want your mother smelling that cheap perfume all over you."

"Did you see the girl they had give me a lap dance?"

"Yeah, she looked awfully familiar."

"She gave me a business card. She's hoping I can hook her up with Ravenna."

"Are you going to do it?"

"I don't know. I'm still a bit drunk."

"Go to bed."

Later that morning, Kevin was having breakfast when Steph and Scott arrived. After eating, they helped Kevin get dressed in his tuxedo. Steph was actually wearing a tuxedo jacket, white shirt, cummerbund, and an ankle-length straight skirt in tuxedo material. Scott was also in a tuxedo, his shirt was less ruffled than the others. They played video games until the limo arrived.

The weather was sunny for the ride to the wedding venue. Eventually, Kevin, Steph, and Scott were standing in a gazebo next to the officiant. Music played and Sara walked down the aisle, followed by Rebecca. On the dais, Sara was opposite Scott and Rebecca opposite Steph. A trumpet flared and everyone stood and turned as Debra and her father started walking up the aisle.

Debra was radiant with perfect makeup and hair. Her dress was mermaid style with a longish train. It fit her like she was sown into it. As her father returned to his seat and Debra turned to look at the groom, Kevin whispered, "That's a vanned dress, isn't it?"

"It's Megan."

The officiant welcomed everyone and spoke for a few minutes about the rite of marriage. "The couple have written their own vows so, if you would, Kevin?"

"Debra, it feels like we've known one another for centuries. In a year's time, we've each taught the other who they are as we've learned who we are. You make me a better me than I've ever been before. And I know you will continue to do that. I can only hope I can help you be the best you with time."

"Kevin, the stars have always had a place in my life. But you have shown me constellations I've never known. The stars brought us together. But we discovered a light between us no star can match. Today is a formality, as we have never been two souls. We are one."

"Kevin McNichols, do you take this woman, Debra Richards, to be your lawfully wedded wife, in sickness and in health, till death do you part?"

"I do."

"Debra Richards, do you take this man, Kevin McNichols, to be your lawfully wedded husband, in sickness and in health, till death do you part?"

"I do."

They exchanged rings. "I now pronounce you husband and wife. You may kiss each other." And they did.

After retreating down the aisle, the wedding party and parents set up a receiving line to greet all their guests. Afterward, the guests were escorted to a ballroom while the wedding party took pictures.

Soon the DJ announced the entrance of the bride and groom and they danced

their first dance. Once the dances were done, Debra, Rebecca, and Sara disappeared for a few moments. Debra came back first wearing a simpler dress for the reception. Rebecca accompanied her. Sara returned a moment later with Megan in tow. This place was picked as the wedding site because there was a Venn machine in the building next door.

After a few hours of dining and dancing and tossing bouquets and eating cake, Debra and Kevin retired to the bridal suite. Kevin carried her over the threshold and all the way to the bed room. He helped her out of her dress and got undress.

"Rebecca was so happy you gave Gabby the autographed CD."

"She told me Gabby loves dancing to the single. I never thought about young girls being influenced by me."

"More prophetic truth from Steve," Debra said. "So how was the bachelor party?"

"Really? That's what you want to talk about?"

"Of course not, but I heard you met someone named Ravenna."

"I might incorporate some of her moves into my onstage performances," he said as he gyrated to unheard music. He looked ridiculous and knew it.

"Gabby's or the stripper's?"

"Funny. I'm sure it'll look better when I'm Ravenna."

They climbed into bed.

"We should actually get some rest. It's after midnight so it's Sunday. We have to do this all again tomorrow."

"My part's much easier tomorrow," Debra said.

"You wore a vanned dress and I'm sure most of your makeup and hair styling were done by Sara in the venn machine."

"That's what you're going to do."

"But I do that all the time," he said. "If I wear Megan does that mean we will have worn the same wedding dress?"

"Kiss me, you idiot."

* * *

Sunday was spent as a lazy day. Around noon, Sara stopped by the suite to take them to lunch with their parents and close family.

"Where are you honeymooning?"

"St. Lucia. But we aren't going until next week. Ravenna and the band have a television appearance on Wednesday. So we had to push it back." Kevin said.

"Better question is who's honeymooning?"

"We are," Debra said.

"Yeah, we're the ones who are legally married. Tomorrow's wedding is for show."

"Besides, Ravenna's getting famous. It'll be nice to be unknown to the general public."

"Is Debra's last name changing? Or Derek's?"

"No, I've spent too much time getting a reputation with that name."

"Who's going to be Derek's best man?"

"My old roommate, Arthur," Debra said.

"Arthur?"

"It's really Anne. She's been venning me into Derek for years now. It's finally my turn to turn her into Arthur."

The day passed by faster than anyone wanted it to and soon Anne arrived to drive Debra home. They would venn at the machine near the apartment.

Kevin spent the night in the bridal suite as they had booked it for all three days. He and Sara would meet Megan at the hotel venn machine to get Ravenna ready.

The wedding was scheduled for eleven in the morning on Monday. Around nine, Kevin turned Megan into a shirt and pants. Then wearing her, he got into the booth and Sara turn them into the perfect bride and bridal gown. When Ravenna stepped out, Sara asked, "Are you all Kevin or is Megan mixed in with you?"

"I don't feel like I'm part of the dress and I can't hear Megan in my head. I think it worked."

"How do you like the updo?"

"The veil makes it hard to say," Ravenna said. "Did you see yourself?"

"You did a great job on my makeup. You've been studying, I see."

"Debra loves to give me lessons."

They returned to the bridal suite to get Sara ready. Her maid of honor gown was vanned the day before at the shop where she worked.

There was a knock on the door and their parents came in.

"Oh, I thought I'd only ever say this once, but you are the most beautiful bride I've ever seen," her mother said.

The photographer arrived half an hour later and took pictures of the bride, the bride and the mother of the bride, the bride and the father of the bride, etc.

Soon there was a knock on the door. A man in a tuxedo said to Sara and their mother, "You're due downstairs now." He turned to Ravenna, "And you two are due outside in five minutes."

"Arthur?"

"Yes?"

"The tux looks good on you."

"Thanks."

Alone, Ravenna straightened her father's boutonniere. "Are you crying?"

"Do you think I'm made of stone?" he replied. "I might give you a hard time."

But you are still my child. And I have to thank you for giving me the chance to possibly do this twice."

"The chance?"

"Well, I thought I only had a chance to do it once with Sara. Now I'll have one in my pocket if case she never settles down."

Ravenna laughed. "That's more than you've said to me in one sitting ever. Even your birds and bees talk was shorter."

"Speaking of that. Remember, you rule the roost. And if he ever strikes you in anger, you get out there and tell me immediately."

"Dad."

"I mean it."

There was a knock on the door.

"I can't say I ever expected to hear anything like that from you."

"What were you expecting me to say? Don't get knocked up?"

* * *

Arthur escorted Ravenna's mother to her seat and the music started and Sara was once again a bridesmaid walking down the aisle. The music swelled and Ravenna was escorted to the dais by her father. She was surprised by the number of cameras flashing at her. There were paparazzi at her wedding standing behind barriers but still they seemed a part of the wedding.

This distracted Ravenna for only a moment until she saw Derek standing at the front of the aisle wearing a well-fitted tuxedo. Her heart fluttered. She wanted to laugh at herself. She was already married to the man and yet the weight of tradition made it feel like she really was a bride for the first time.

At the head of the aisle, she turned to her father. He raised her veil and kissed her on the cheek. Before she turned away she saw a tear run down his face. It was her first father-daughter kiss and it made her eyes swell but she held back any tears. Derek took her hand and she wanted the ceremony to be over, the people gone, and to be alone with her man.

The officiant had no idea he had married the couple just the other day. And so the words he spoke about marriage sounded familiar to several people attending. They decided trying to write two sets of vows would be difficult and had the officiant make up the vows. Soon they said their "I dos" and were pronounced husband and wife. This kiss was less chaste than the one the other day.

Lined up again for a receiving line, Alicia stood nearby to introduce the recording industry folk to everyone. Soon the wedding party and parents were being photographed while the guests had hors d'oeuvres. After they were introduced, they danced. Derek danced with his mother. And Ravenna danced with her father. He would not discuss the tear she had seen.

Sara and Ravenna disappeared to the suite where Ravenna removed her dress

and put on a simpler one. Then they went to the venn machine where they tossed the dress in and watched Megan step out.

"Saturday's ceremony was beautiful. But this ceremony was more meaningful," Megan said.

"It was?"

"To me it was. You'll always be Ravenna to me." Megan said. "I love being your clothes, Ravenna. You have to take me on tour sometime."

"If you really want it, sure."

Megan left to go join the party.

Sara and Ravenna entered the machine and Sara redid Ravenna's updo without the veil and turned her dress into a sexier party dress. She also scaled back her makeup. Ravenna did the same thing to Sara's makeup.

Stepping out of the alcove where the venn machine was located, their picture was taken by two paparazzi who scurried away to see who could get the photo on social media first.

"You want to be a rock star?"

"Yes, I do."

They returned to the party. The rest of the event felt like a dance party. Around four o'clock, Ravenna was being carried into the bridal suite by Derek. Ravenna tore her dress off as soon as they closed the door: it was vanned after all. They left the suite for dinner around nine.

* * *

Wednesday, the band was in New York City to play *All of You* on one of the morning news shows. A stage was setup on a street outside the studio and the whole band was there. After the performance, still on the air, one of the hosts said to Ravenna, "I heard you got married."

"Yes, Derek and I got married two days ago." She waved toward the backstage area. "Hi, Honey."

"Congratulations. Shouldn't you be on your honeymoon?"

"And miss this show?"

"That's what we like to hear. We're talking to Ravenna of Ravenna's Libido. Are you going to play another song?"

"Should we play another song?" she said into the stage microphone and the crowd on the street went wild.

Terrance played to opening chords of *Dilation* while the host said, "Once again, Ravenna's Libido."

When the mini-concert ended, most of the band and crew went their separate ways. Alicia said to Ravenna, "When's your honeymoon?"

"We fly out Saturday."

"You'll be on you honeymoon for Valentine's Day?"

"Yep. Kinda cool, I guess."

"Well, I have a radio interview for you Friday morning before you disappear into the Caribbean on me."

"Not a problem."

Alicia left to go take care of something else.

"Remember when I said we could just disappear in the city by hitting a venn machine?" Ravenna said to Derek.

"Yeah, I'm guessing that's not happening."

"We'll still have fun."

Ravenna and Derek spent the rest of the day walking around the city. She was only recognized a few times. They did have fun.

* * *

A few weeks later, Debra and Kevin were back from their honeymoon. Kevin had promised Debra they would spend some time without Ravenna and David interfering with their lives as newlyweds.

Even though their apartment together had been furnished and lived in before the weddings, they spent time after returning to the states a few weeks redecorating, reconnecting with family, and having fun together. They had a large wedding photo print hung in their living room. It was one of the serious photos from Debra's wedding. It really showed the detail of Megan, her dress.

About a month after the honeymoon, Debra went on an assignment for one of the magazines she freelanced for and Kevin was at home. For once, she had the busy job and he was the stay at home spouse. He could have returned to whirlwind life and schedule that Ravenna led but he had promised to take a month off after the honeymoon and there were still a couple days to go. He decided to visit his old job at the bookstore. He needed something to read anyway and he wanted to see how Mrs. Cache was.

When he got there, he found her behind the cash register. "Need your job back?" She asked, a bit too eagerly.

"No, I'm just a customer today."

"Too bad. No one likes this morning shift like you use to."

"Sorry to here that. But I've been busy. Got married."

"Oh, really, I'm surprised to see you looking like that. Last couple months you worked here, you were a woman if I recall."

Before he could respond, his stomach was suddenly ill. He turned a bit green and asked as he pointed to the back area, "Um, do you mind if I, um..."

"Sure, be quick about it."

A few moments later, he returned feeling much better. "That came on all of a sudden and now I feel, well not fine, but well enough."

"If you were still a woman I suggest it was morning sickness."

"Oh, I doubt that," he said, but he was not so sure. After perusing the stacks,

he bought a couple books. The next morning he had a similar episode and after much internal deliberation he went to a pharmacy. When he got home, he went into the backroom where he read the instructions to the pregnancy test. After he followed the initial instructions he felt a bit silly. There was no way he could be pregnant, was there? Five minutes later, he checked the test and found two bright pink lines. "I'm going to be a mother."