



AKANDO RÄDERER

Tripping to Fade

AKANDO RÄDERER

Tripping to Fade

AKANDO RÄDERER

Tripping to Fade

CHAPTER 1

Brilliant White

The sun was beating, mid-summer was hot, and the air conditioning on full blast. The café half full. A sweet smell of fresh bread. Small chitter chatter was to be heard without it being too much. The waitress came over with a platter of baked goods and three coffees, and laid them all down on the round table in front of her. I managed to press a smile together and thank her. Aaron took a slow sip from her cup, making sure not to burn herself. All the while Kylie was talking away about some new family or boyfriend problems. Neither me nor Aaron cared about what she was saying. As soon as she realized this, she snapped her fingers and got our attention back. “As I was saying, in Paris

they eat their croissants by first dunking them into their coffee, and since we're hot like the Parisian girls, we are going to dunk our croissants into our coffees." I pushed a hair strand back behind my ear and gazed out of the window past the intersection on Lexington Avenue and 88th street to watch the cars so perfectly mesh from all four sides to go in that direction in which they needed to. Just as I was going to take my croissant and dip it in my cup, Aaron disagreed and went into a monologue on why not to do that. Kylie just rolled her eyes and kept on doing it, whereas I was split, both had good reasons. My croissant went into my latte. It wasn't bad, definitely added some taste and freshness to the kind of dry croissant. The coffee was good aromatic and fruity and earthy taste, eased up by milk. Kylie and Aaron went on with a discussion about school, grades, guys and girls.

Aaron was rather short, smart and the nerdy one in the group. She was very invested in getting excellent grades and being irreproachable. The least interested in popularity and boys, or as she would leave us to believe. She wore round glasses and had black hair with blue eyes and pale skin. Her style wasn't great, but she didn't put much effort into it either. She generally

didn't care much of other people's opinions. She was the thoughtful one, the one who was always there for you.

Kylie was the opposite, tall, beautiful and popular. She was down to earth, but her public appearance was very important to her. She didn't care much for school and university, as long as she got through the year. She also had a love for spending her parents' money on designer clothes. She was a blast to be around, always an animator of the group she was with.

My head was lost, empty, figuring out what I wanted which has always been hard, not with small things like what I wanted to eat or who my ideal boyfriend would be, but more of where this dullness in me came from or what I truly wanted from life. A sense of not belonging, or not being loved, the difference isn't very clear, I felt. I couldn't say exactly when it started or why it just gradually came. All I knew is that as a child I had a clearer mind. The thoughts started to spiral, got wacky and crazy, my eyes could see but didn't connect with me. "Yo, look at the guy who just came in, at the counter." Aaron's words made me snap out of my head and look at the counter. Standing there was a very handsome man, probably in his mid 20's, well-dressed, thoughtfully

groomed and as he turned toward us to go and sit down, I could see his face, a very pretty face with strong facial features, a straight nose, thick eyebrows and beautiful sparkling hazel eyes filled with life and ambition like a flame dancing on a log. My heart fluttered.

All three of our gazes were glued on him. Kylie was the first to break the silence “I’ll just say this-- he is so my type” me and Aaron just nodded in agreement. “Do you think he already has a girlfriend?” Aaron asked, to which Kylie responded “I’m not sure. I definitely feel like I know him from somewhere, but I don’t remember. Look at him. He’s wearing a Breitling and club or family ring, the outfit is simple yet elegant. My guess is he also studies at Columbia and is part of some high society club.” I didn’t care for the money or the status of this guy but his elegance, and his eyes, especially his eyes had drawn me in. “Do I stand a chance with him?” I blurted out a bit too loudly, I really hope he didn’t overhear that. Kylie suggested I just go up to him and ask him, I’m not sure, fuck it.

The next part for me is a blur, but from what Aaron explained to me is that I asked him if he wanted to have dinner or drinks some time. His answer was a quick

and cold, and no, he wasn’t looking for a girlfriend at the moment. I felt sick, my stomach flipping itself over, so I downed a glass of water. And I started debating in my head, why always me, is it just me, do others get rejected like I do as well? But I have never actually seen it happen. Is it my way of talking, the vibe I give off, my looks?

A couple hours later we arrive at The Roof which is an excellent rooftop bar in downtown Manhattan. We took our seats at our table and ordered some cosmopolitans with burgers. The view from up here is beautiful especially in the evening, you can see the New Yorker skyline stretch far and the sun reflecting on the buildings. The atmosphere is also very enjoyable and chill. The temperature was still a bit too high, but there was a small breeze, making it no problem at all. We were sitting at our table listening to the lo-fi beats that are being played mixed with the sound of the streets from down below, talking about the future, gossiping, and so on.

We were sipping on our Cosmo’s, their proportions were simply perfect, you could taste the alcohol, but it wasn’t overly dominant, you could get a whiff of the lemon out of the absolute citron vodka that was prob-

ably used, making the cranberry juice well balanced with the lime juice and the small sugar crust on the rim of the glass purifying it into one of my favorite drinks. Suddenly, I got the need to use the restroom, so I let my friends know and made my way to the restroom. Once I had relieved myself, I took a moment to touch up my makeup and freshen up before heading back out.

In the meantime, the food had arrived, and I took a huge bite. I was starving, and it was delicious. The bread from the bun was freshly baked, and slightly toasted making it so much easier to eat the burger without it falling apart. The meat was a fresh medium rare, slightly spiced patty. The cheese was a top tier Swiss Gruyere nicely melted on top of the burger. The vegetables were fresh and juicy, and the avocado really made the burger whole. Then I heard it, a giggling behind my back, and a familiar voice.

I turned around and saw the same handsome guy we had met before, grinning. With him sat a lady, probably a model, beautiful as one can be, shining white teeth, perfect face and hair glimmering in the sunset, and most of all thin, her body was perfect. They all looked so perfect- **ugh**. And the words sunk in, deeper and

deeper. I couldn't bring myself to say anything. It felt like opening a box which gave the solution I desperately wanted to my biggest problem for which I had had till now no answer, and with it came a whole load of other things, disgust, pain, grief, envy and guilt. Those I already knew. Anxiety and doubt had just become stronger; how could a couple words cause this all. While I was drained of thought and energy, Aaron and Kylie pulled me inside and sat me down on one of the couches. I told them I wanted to forget and ordered a line of shots. Things blurred out and not much remained in my memory.

CHAPTER 2

Antique White

Eyes fluttered, throat was groggy and hurt a bit, due to the alcohol and bad sleep. I turned around in bed, impossible to fall asleep again. I slowly rolled out of bed. I had a headache. I forgot to take my makeup off last night. As the warm water of the shower ran down my body, I tried to remember what had happened last night, don't know much, although I couldn't shake the idea that I had to lose some weight. I dried off in a clean soft white towel and stepped on the scale, 155 pounds, not great.

Then it hit me, shit, I had promised my parents I would be coming home for the weekend. I called an Uber to come and pick me up half an hour later. I threw on some comfy clothes, packed a couple essentials in my bag and ran down the stairs of my dorm to catch my ride.

The ride was a long one-and-a-half hours down to New Jersey and the driver was dull. This gave me time to think, which wasn't really what I wanted to do right then. but it kind of just forced its way through. The grey and rainy sky didn't help the mood either. What if I had to lose weight, become slimmer? Would he accept me then?

The landscape whizzing by too fast to take in. Water droplets on the window getting pulled to the back of the car, the chic smell of new leather and mustiness of the rain, letting you feel depressed. It seeps into you, through the skin over and past the muscles and into the core of your bones. This bad feeling held through the whole ride.

When we arrived, my father was there to greet me standing on the doorstep of his mansion. Arms wide open and a big smile on his face he took me in his arms. Soon after we were sitting around the kitchen island and catching up on all that had happened in the last months.

Eventually my sister came in and sat down with us, smiling, she had become very beautiful. Her hair was as always tied up in a bun, but her face had changed. It was more defined, her jawline was like a clean cut, her

neck gracious, not too long or too short, no excess fat hanging under her chin. Her lips were pursed together and her cheeks hollow, her cheekbones strong and visible. The skin around her eyes was smooth with no puffiness at all. And under her clothes I could sense her body, sleek and gracious. My father must have realized my thoughts, because he proudly told me that Ashley had made it onto the high school Volleyball team and was training almost every day.

Family is love, and hate at the same time. It's enjoyable, fun to see relatives you haven't seen in a while. But they can also be annoying, not knowing much about how your life is going around, asking intrusive questions, or worse, making stupid comments, that just aren't appropriate.

Saturday night, big family reunion at my parent's place. Everyone was there except Ashley, who was unable to make it due to more important matters as she would say. And Patrick wasn't here because of his fight with my parents, that ended up with his leaving to go and live up in Colorado, where no one knows what he is up to. I had a drink with my cousins and then went over to get some food off the grill, but the odor, greasy and

fatty, disgusting. Not appetizing at all. So, I decided to go light with just a salad. Till my grandmother started a conversation with me about what designer was currently in, just rambling away. Normally I wouldn't have cared, but I continued to listen and engage. I hadn't really been that active doing exercise ever since I had arrived at Columbia, which was noticeable. I had gained almost ten pounds. And my grandmother always having been the beauty queen, asked me "How's school going, you still have enough time to stay fit and healthy, you're chubbier than I remember." These words hit as hard as if I had just run into an invisible wall, suddenly, and out of seemingly nowhere, I responded, not wanting to be impolite, that school is doing great, and I am at the top of my class but that it took me almost all my spare time to do so. Result was that I ate junk but didn't work it off, I always thought that it wasn't much of a problem, thanks to my genetics I couldn't gain an insane amount either.

Before going to bed that night, I weighed myself, 154. It made me feel some sort of pride that my couple drinks, a sandwich, and a salad had already made an impact, but it was going to have to be more. I thought,

it's not going to be that hard. Just embrace it. It's for my own good.

Sunday, 7:00, alarm hit, annoying, I didn't mind, I got out of bed full of energy and got dressed, checked my phone, new posts, stories, and what not. This motivated me to go for a run. It was hard, my feet hurt after only a couple minutes, but I kept on going. When I had gotten back home, I was sweating, my face was red and I felt sore, but accomplished. I went to use the restroom, shave in the bathtub and weighed in, 153.

I went back downstairs to have breakfast. My mother was already sitting there, on her laptop working. I took a plate, a knife, a grapefruit and a grapefruit spoon. As I was sitting down, I asked her how work was going and what she was doing. She tells me that, in general, not too bad but she keeps having to take care of stupid little arguments between her different secretaries, so she ended up firing them all, and that now she is looking for a new one. At this point I had finished cutting my grapefruit in half and had started spooning out the delicious fruit, with its sweet and a bit acidic taste, fresh and cooling, as its juice packed in natural fruity flavors ran down my tongue and my throat, it's flesh

tender. My mother kept on talking and mentioned she had one application that really stood out from the rest. It was well organized, had by far the best qualifications and was just generally a lot better than the others. One problem though and that being the only reason she didn't want to take her was that she was, in my mother's eyes, obese. She didn't want that, and when I asked her why, she said it was because when clients, friends or business partners come in to meet and talk with her they would pass in front of her secretary first and this would damage her reputation and image. I could feel how that same sweetness took a sour turn, and the freshness became old. I swallowed the bite I had just taken and put my plate to the side. The rest of the conversation was actually quite nice.

Ashley came in, helped herself to some pancakes which she devoured, and then asked me if I would like to join her on the court to play some games with her friends. I hesitated for a second and then realized it had been ages since I last played volleyball and that I was burning to play again especially together with my younger sister.

I had a blast, really. Every point I scored gave the same joy as every drop of sweat I lost. The joy I felt tingling through my body, and the shower after that, was just as good. Ice cold and even though I usually hated cold showers, this one was amazing. But with that done and the weekend coming to its end, it was time for me to head back to New York, to my dorm, to my friends, and to a life that is grey and unclear.

CHAPTER 3

White Sand

The temperature wasn't cold outside, but I was still wearing a sweater and a coat. I liked these late afternoon strolls through Central Park after classes. They helped me focus. Pumpkins were starting to get lined up along the paths, scarecrows were being put up, and some men were preparing the floating jack-o-lanterns for the lakes. I got a smell up my nose. It was one of those numerous Billy's hot dog stands. It didn't smell good, it disgusted me. I didn't know if it's the meat, the bread or just the ketchup and the mustard. Then the wind started to rise, my coat stretched itself out in front of me and flattered around, as well as my hair that was being thrown around and in my face. I could see as some strands were being ripped out and carried away, but it didn't hurt. I exited the park by the

natural history museum and walked the last couple blocks back to my dormitory.

When I got back, Aaron was up in the kitchen cooking avocado pasta. She asked me if I wanted some. I thought about it, I was kind of hungry. So, I decided I would have something to eat in order to focus better during class tomorrow. But I couldn't eat any of what Aaron made though, way too many calories and carbs. I thought a small salad wouldn't do too much harm. I knew I had the situation under control and knew perfectly well what I was doing. But I wasn't decided, a mental war was going on between the rational, logical and the passionate. In the kitchen while I was digging my hands into the salad head and cutting off some small pieces, one of my nails chipped, which seemed odd since I had just done them.

"Girl don't let out your anger on some vegetables" came Aaron amused of watching me fail.

"How did I even get hurt by this nothingness, how embarrassing" I replied calmly, pissed on the inside I had shown signs of weakness.

I mixed the salad with some chunks of carrots and a very small amount of dressing. I got myself a glass of water in which I mixed some essential minerals, vitamins and antidepressants. The food wasn't great, it tasted like rubbish, or more like nothing. It was at that point that I started seriously having self-doubts and asking myself questions like if there was still a point in food? The taste was horrible, and it made you ugly, I couldn't see the downside to limiting yourself, to stay in a healthy body.

"You sure you don't want any pasta? It's going to be too much for me anyways, and it's really good" Aaron asked me. I shook my head and explained to her that it simply wasn't possible or else I would start gaining weight again, and that I was happy with the progress I had made, but that I was still fatter than the average person, and that I must lose this fat. She was going to open her mouth to say something, but I snapped at her and told her to mind her own business. Those days, she had been giving me her opinion on my diet quite frequently. I mean who is she even to judge, she's three inches shorter than me and wears round glasses. She's one of the nerdiest people I know. Her interest in fashion wasn't great.

I finished up and went to my room without saying another word. I closed the door and got undressed. I had thought of my short conversation with Aaron, I felt bad for being such a shitty friend and telling her some of the things I thought of her, but then I also felt proud for having held my ground. There I was thinking about my choices standing in my room completely naked contemplating myself in the mirror. What I saw there was the body of a 50-year-old mother. There I was looking at myself, but unable to recognize myself, a bit overweight and round. I had gained weight.

I panicked, and broke down on the floor, my behind, legs and lower back shattered on the cold stone floor with pain coming from my eyes that were unable to water, and with that let it all out. It crushed my chest, with the pounding of my heart, hard and loud. My heart was oozing out all the feelings I had bottled up for way to long, but they didn't leave my body, they couldn't. They were leaving alright but like with an overfilled highway that was completely blocked off. The only way out was through the tedious countryside roads. These took much longer but also had the time to enjoy the beauty of the ups and downs of the trip. Then I stepped in the shower and turned on the water, hot steaming

hot, hotter than usually. It was burning, I didn't mind, it filled a gap in me, a void. For an instant I had stopped worrying about my next exams, my friends, my family and the boyfriend I would love to have. The water felt healing, it always has, running down my body, covering me up. Even though it weighs you down, it feels as if you are being lifted up and you become lighter. It takes a weight off your shoulders, and rebirths you into a cleaner and purer form. It takes away your burdens for a moment.

I fell asleep to prerecorded sea sounds, they were soothing, relaxing, but they had this sort of unsteady hiccup like the wailing of a seagull. I ignored it.

CHAPTER 4

Lace White

As I woke up, I felt proud of myself, I felt like I had finally been able to lose some fat. It wasn't enough, I felt like it was only the beginning. Which it was. I got up, got dressed and went for a cardio session in our building's gym.

When I was done, I felt relieved and ready to start work with a good conscience knowing I had already done something, but my energy levels were low. I was fatigued. I forced myself, I had to, or else I might have fallen behind and it would be impossible to be top of the class. I had to be top of the class. What would my father think of me. He was already disgraced at my fatness, so I couldn't let him down, or Ashley, or Patrick, or Chloe.

I tried to concentrate on my work but as well as my mind, my eyes also drifted away, and they landed

on the new Vogue magazine. Taylor was on the cover; she is beautiful. Her nose is thin and pointy, the eyes sparkling, the cheeks nicely formed, her lips are thin but with volume, her jaw is nice, the eyes not puffy, and in one line. I finished staring at Taylor's face and looked in the mirror to compare it with mine. My face was puffy, my eyes sunken, and asymmetrical, my facial contours not sharp like hers, my eyebrows thin. How could I get this kind of beauty? I was fascinated and depressed.

Later that day I went to the Polo Bar with Jessica, Katlyn and Mckenzie. They were the cool hot girls, I was kind of friends with them, I thought. They were all eating the famous cheeseburgers. I was disgusted, that greasy smell, uhhh. And they didn't even care about the calories, not that they needed to. They all look gorgeous, tanned white teeth, nice face. And a body in perfect shape. I envied these three so much. Add to that that they got all the guys, when all I wanted was one. The talk was small and shallow, I thought to myself, they're probably doing this because they don't like me and want to get rid of me. But they're nice and much fun to be around.

I sat there contemplating the bar, the golden counter tops shining bright and reflecting like perfect mirrors, the luxurious oak wood frames paired with the golden touches. Champagne glasses with gold rims lined up behind the bar. I was craving a glass of some fine alcohol. I started thinking of which is the best one to go with, but I had absolutely no idea, so I googled it, I found a whole list and decided to go with a gin and tonic. The taste was medium, not what I had expected from the Polo bar, the gin tasted old and the tonic bitter, the mix together didn't do it. But I could feel the alcohol rising, fast, and with it a light headache came.

Then there was a guy who sat down next to me, a bit older than me, nicely dressed but not in the typical rich kid fashion, no, thoughtfully, there were some big names, but I could tell he was more going for the aesthetic of the fit and not the price. A pair of high black docs paired with a straight dark brown baggy dress pant that was as far as I could tell at the time a no name. He had a beige cashmere turtleneck, a necklace with a weird ring at the end over the turtleneck, and a long brown fleece trench coat from Gant. What struck me most were his beautiful, sparkling eyes. I had a bit of a small talk with him, all the while having this feeling

that I had already met him somewhere. We were talking about favorite bars to go to in downtown Manhattan, when he told me about this very niche bar that he loved to go to which was a rooftop called The Roof. And it hit me, but I wasn't sure yet, I had to know. So, I asked him what he did, and he told me he went to Columbia.

And it all just faded away. I ran out of the bar, stumbled into a cab and told the driver to take me to campus. I slid my phone out of my purse and called Katie and Aaron, telling them to meet up at Columbia in 30. I watched the buildings fly by, flashing glimpses of streets, but it all seemed absurd. My mind going ten times faster than the car, but I felt completely dulled off. My chest was pounding, and I couldn't tell the fright from the excitement. I asked myself if just I had recognized him or if he knew who I was all along. Our conversation was nice, and super sweet. He really seemed like a caring guy.

I got out of the cab and walked to the stairs of the library on which Kylie was already sitting. I sat down, greeted her and just sighed. Took a deep breath. I was so anxious to tell her everything, but I decided to wait for Aaron. "Have you switched your skincare routine? Your skin has gotten worse lately, not by a lot really,

you really must look at it to see." She asked me. I shook my head, "You do look in amazing shape though, have you joined a gym?" "No, not really, but thanks so much it really means a lot" I replied. She had never had the same problems as me even though she was very similar to me, coming from similar households having similar interests and even looking quite similar. When Aaron finally arrived and both asked me what the hurry was, I noticed Aaron's outfit was much more thoughtfully picked than usually; it still wasn't perfect, but it wasn't bad. Then I started rambling out words in a spew so fast even I was losing track. Kylie put her hand on my shoulder and looked me straight in the eye, "deep breath, deep breath" she said. And then my mouth opened again and told the whole story in a fluid steady stream of words, well-articulated and thought through. I knew they had understood, but I don't have the slightest idea of how exactly I had told them the story.

A moment of silence. Aaron shrugged, Kylie sighed, the wind was blowing, my feet were cold, and my hair spun around in waves. Aaron's intuitions were that I was being played with, and I should just leave it be. Whereas Kylie thought there might actually be

something there, but that she wasn't sure, and she couldn't explain why I had gotten rejected a couple months ago and now suddenly there was a jump in interest from his side. I much more liked the second option but the first was still there in the back of my mind gnawing at me.

Aaron lost it and went off on why I was hanging out with Jessica, and Katlyn, and McKenzie, those rich snobby perfect looking bitches. Aaron had never liked, but still always admired them, ever since she had gotten completely rejected from their group while me and Kylie were sort of part of it, had tormented her. This probably made her biased.

My phone chimed, it was an insta notification. Griffin Grey had just requested to follow me. Not knowing who he was I opened my phone to look at his profile, and there I saw his face, smiling, a real genuine smile. My heart jumped. Kylie stared at me, and ripped my phone out of my hands, gave me a, or rather the look, then burst out laughing. "Gimme that" Aaron blurted out. She had decided it was her turn to rip the phone out of someone's hands. "Oh, so you gave him your insta? You didn't mention that before." she asked. I explained

that I had no idea and didn't know how this happened. "Then let me give you an explanation, it was one of those bitches you were hanging out with before, probably to trick or hurt you in one way or another" the reply was fast and dry, fueled by the fact Aaron couldn't stand them, and was jealous of not being accepted by them. Though it did seem quite possible that it had been one of the girls back at the bar, I doubted they would do something mean like that. I had trust in them.

One thought I couldn't shake at the time was: why he was all of a sudden so interested, where a couple months earlier he couldn't have cared less about me? I had this feeling that it was about the fact I had lost maybe 5 or 6 pounds in that time frame, and that in that moment in time I resembled a fat woman which is bad, but at least I was no longer, in my eyes an obese. I was convinced I had risen a bit in my parents' esteem. But fright set in as well. What if this was only temporary, and I was soon to gain the weight back plus more.

CHAPTER 5

Taupe White

The following morning, I was awakened by an ear shattering alarm noise, awake. It was quarter past six, I got up, moaned and headed into my bathroom, turned on the shower and took out a new skincare mousse. Cold shower, Philip B conditioner, La Roche Posey skin cleanser, Ahava exfoliating sea salts care, Susanne Kaufmann clarifying body wash. I got out of the shower and noticed a lump of hairs in the drain of the shower. Fresh and awake stepped on the scale, 137, I blinked twice and pinched myself then looked again, hadn't changed. I was startled and looked in the mirror but there I couldn't see those 137 pounds, convinced there was a problem with the scale, I made a mental note to go and buy a new one later that day. In the mirror I saw a slightly obese women with a very chubby face, huge hips, and fat thighs. This hurt. I thought that all these

walks and gym sessions would transform my body into a more muscular one. But I was still determined to not stop, till I actually had hit 140. I made myself a facial mask and cooled my eye bags with ice packs. Rinsed it all off and blew my hair dry thanks to my new Dyson air wrap and curled them. Once I was done, I noticed some hair strands had gotten ripped out and were still curled around the hair dryer. They had a nice wavy texture and made the blond sun kissed strands pop out from the darker ones in a soothing blend, but they looked too dry, so I put in some dry conditioner. I spent the next hour putting on my make-up but taking it off after not all too long, not satisfied with the result. This was no doubt, not ideal with my skin already being so bad. I finally put on some transparent lip gloss, a light layer of blush, touched up my eyebrows and some mascara. Three squirts of Black Lotus, Floral Street, one on either side of the neck and one on the left wrist, which I smeared on the right wrist, deodorant. Next, I got dressed. I decided to go with a simple dark blue Bogner knit sweater and a Dolce Gabbana shirt, a crème pant and white converse.

I went into the kitchen to check in on Aaron. She was unpacking a couple croissants and a baguette. I got

asked if I wanted one and even though I knew I would love the sweet soft and fatty pastry, it really wasn't hard to brush it off. I took a glass out of the cupboard popped an all-in-one vitamins pill in and filled it with water. I sat down at the table and took a sip of my mix. Aaron asked me how I was feeling, and I answered that I was ok. Not really satisfied with my answer, she asked again. I didn't respond differently than first time. Now she was starting to get mildly annoyed, and asked me if I wasn't hungry, which was weird because now that she mentioned it I did feel kind of hungry. Then she came with "I fully support you working on yourself and your body, and I know you should have full freedom of what you want to do but you really seem light especially for your five foot nine. I think you're going a bit far, depriving yourself of breakfast and stuff..." she was still speaking, faster than a rapper actually, but I just turned off my ears. She was starting to get offensive and illogical. I didn't know where she was getting all these ideas from, maybe the fact that Griffin might be interested in me and not her. I just left.

The walk to class was short. I could have probably taken a cab or something, but these morning walks help clear your mind. My first class was in a small round

auditorium. I was one of the first ones to arrive. I took a spot in one of the center rows. I opened my Mac, selected the file on uni, then in that file, the one on law, and in that one on transactional law. I created a new page of notes for this file, wrote down date, name, class and professor's name; 10.20.2022, Jordan, criminal law, Maxwell Oakmont. Then I placed three highlighters and one Mont Blanc pen on an open notepad perfectly aligned with my Mac and the table. My phone lay in the corner of my part of the table, and my Sennheiser head soothing me in the new Gorillaz album. The songs were songs perfectly balanced between melancholy and music. The last song just flew by, and I still had over half an hour to burn, so I, to continue in the same mood, let the Billie Eilish essentials run. All the while I was researching and preparing my course and taking notes on essential elements. Letting time fade by.

Ice White

The breeze was cool and refreshing. Salty smell in the air. Relaxing. Boats were coming and leaving. The grass soft. It was sunny with clouds out. Leaves in the brightest colors were flying around like a wildfire, rich dark purple red, red, orange and yellow. I sat there in the grass finishing assignments. I contemplated the figures walking by. One stopped, came over to me. Old guy, open wavy white greyish hair bouncing on his shoulders, surfer cut. Strong nose and facial features, dark eyes hidden under the strong eyebrows. Walk gracious but dominant, thin one though. Wind slapping his clothes around him. The outfit simple.

“These fall colors are always beautiful, especially here in South Cove Park. Do you come here often?” came his question.

I answered “No, but I definitely have to come back, I’m really enjoying myself here, it makes you feel free.”

“I try to come here daily for a small stroll especially during Indian summer. How do you feel?”

“I’m doing fine, I guess. I don’t wish to be that kind of person but, you are aware that the term Indian summer is slang and offensive to the native Americans.”

“Ah thank you, my excuses, I should have known that. Anyway, the reason I approached you was to ask if you have ever been interested in modelling. I think you could fit in very well into one of my next collections”

“Thank you so much. Of course I have thought of modelling. I just figured it was never realistic for me. You think this can work out?”

“Well, if you like you can even come down later today to my office, I can give you a free shoot, and we can get your measurements, then I could tell you more about what it would require.”

“I’ll think about it.”

He handed me his business card and left. The card was sleek, and the design was simple. It had a silver star

with a black symbol in the bottom right corner, nothing else on the front. I turned it over: Lance Northwest, 32nd 6th avenue New York.

Later that day I was there in front of the door that might open up a whole world of new opportunities for me. I rang. I stood there for an eternity. The door unlocked, light flooded out. A tall, thin woman let me in, took off my coat and hung it up. The whole place was modern with an industrial look. A biting cold was present. I was taken to a side room in which the temperature was more adequate. There I met up with the man I had encountered before and a couple other people, though I could tell by the way he was in the center of the room and people were around him, he was in charge. The welcome was neutral. It was decided to start with a photoshoot, and then the measurements. Everything went all right, the shoot felt natural, as if I was meant for this, and I had some fun. The measurements, I don’t really know. But I soon figured out, I was going to have to lose at least 15 pounds if I wanted to do this. The voice of Mr. Northwest was much harsher than this morning. He still assured me that he would like to have me work for him, but coldly said I would have to lose a lot of weight to become somewhat attractive enough

to wear his clothes. I nodded, but was unable to reply, out of discomfort of the rawness that came out of his mouth. I let the thought go through my mind. “Look, you can still work with us and learn some things on how the fashion industry works, until you hit the weight we need you at. For that, though, we will have regular check-ins on your weight and sizes to see if you’re on track. Otherwise, no need to waste any more money on someone who can’t control themselves. But before you are in a somewhat decent shape, we have no use for you.” he said brutally. I felt like shit. This was basically taking back the nice feeling I had before coming in and my self awareness. But it felt so tempting, all I had to do was stick to the imposed limits. But that would be like selling my soul. As long as I had control of the situation it should be doable, and such an opportunity would never come again, especially for something I would so dearly like to do. “I agree” was my answer. All I had to do was make it through the weight cut and half a year with them, then I would be free to go work for anyone that pleased me. I just had to survive this icy environment for a small while.

CHAPTER 7

Ultimate Grey

I had begun following the designer's diet. I hadn't changed that much to my lifestyle thinking it was already more than enough, I just added a regular walk and a workout to my daily program.

About two weeks into this I decided I would allow myself a break.

It was Friday evening and I decided to go out with Kylie and McKenzie, we went to lower Manhattan. The club's name was Ohm, which is quite an unusual one. It's one of the few where the reputation is still ok, and the crowd management is good. Lights were flashing on our blingy outfits. The smell was quite neutral, except for the fog which was piercing in the eyes and nose. The music hit hard but wasn't ear ringing loud. Up at the bar we ordered a round of tequila shots and continued

it with falcon fuels. Tequila, sharp and quick, no hind taste, the lemon soothing out the tongue with the salt calming it all out. The falcon fuels, light and fruity with the curacao really having a huge impact on the overall flavor. My teeth were hurting, the lemon from the shots and the alcohol, felt like acid disintegrating my teeth. I washed it down with some cold water that helped, but my teeth hyper sensitive to the cold felt like they were frozen icicles, like when you drink a slushy too fast, your teeth as well as your brain get frozen. I waited till the pain dulled, and then we made our way over to the dance floor switching colors on the beat of the music. In the center were the two DJ's calmly laying on old time discs and keeping the whole club under perfect control; no overflow nor disinterest could be felt in the crowd. They were truly the head and heart of this whole room. Looking the part wasn't a problem either. The man and the woman were both dressed in a spacy single ring sunglasses that resembled blindfolds, clearly inspired from daft punk. Long fur coats were draped over their body's hiding any other piece of clothing they might have been wearing.

Dancing to the music your mind, body and soul disconnected. You were one with the music, in a trance.

I felt relieved. I was no longer having to care about my body. The DJ's had taken care of that.

Mckenzie tapped me on the shoulder. This shook me out. "Come get a drink with me," she roared over the sound. I hadn't realized how thirsty I had gotten, from the probable hour we had just spent in there. I reluctantly agreed. We made our way over to the bar through the labyrinth of people. "A gin and tonic, twice" I ordered still twitching to the music a bit. One of the biggest Offenbach hits was playing. While I was waiting for our drinks, a man came over. This time I recognized him. As always, he looked magnificent, his teeth sparkling white reflecting the flashing lights coming from the DJ booth. "Hi, I didn't think I was going to meet you here, but what a pleasant surprise it is to see you" he started. His dressing was immaculate and neatly put together for the situation. "Last time we met, I believe we were cut short in our conversation" he continued "I hadn't even been given the chance to introduce myself. I'm Griffin, Griffin Grey. Though I am fairly certain you already know this. Would you mind introducing yourself to me?" I blanked, then replied, a bit nervous but not all too much. "Jordan Black, it's

so nice to meet you again. I saw you on insta but didn't really know what to make of it".

"What are you doing here?"

"Well, isn't it obvious, I'm here to have fun and decompress a bit"

"Yeah, seems quite logical now that you put it that way".

"How about you?"

"Same reasons as you".

"But why of all the clubs in New York, this one?"

"Oh, because Mckenzie and another friend both told me to come here tonight. Where is she actually. I haven't seen her yet?"

"She was just with me, but by the looks of things she got bored and left".

"You know what, it's a bit chaotic here. Why don't we continue this conversation tomorrow at this neat café on the corner of Lexington Avenue, let's say 3:00. If you need to contact me, I'm pretty sure you'll be able to figure it out."

I was in awe, and like that he left without waiting for an answer. The gin and tonics arrived, and so did Mckenzie out of nowhere. "What did you talk about with Grey?" she asked. "Nothing much" I replied. "Damn these drinks are amazing, they're so refreshing. C'mon down. Let's hit the floor. Just talked with one of the DJ's, and he said he will be playing the Kungs next. You don't wanna miss this" she said while dragging me back on the dance floor. I immediately locked back into the music and lost myself under the beat.

When all three of us were completely exhausted and decided we needed a break, we got ourselves a table. We fell into the chairs and just sat there for a minute recovering. "I can't believe who they are letting in these days. Just look at them, they look like dorks and they're so lost" it came out of Mckenzie. "Yeah, I know, horrible isn't it. This place used to be so much more exclusive," Kylie replied. I was the same mind as them. The only thing grudging about this though was that we ourselves had only been admitted here for the first time a year ago. Now Mckenzie and Kylie were laughing at insider jokes, probably mocking those very young-looking newcomers, that were definitely, not attractive. I was third wheeling, they had lost me.

“Mckenzie, how come you invited Griffin here without asking me?” I asked. She replied, “I wanted to do you a favor. Am I not allowed to do something nice”?

“For starters, you could have invited Aaron”.

“Oh, now all of a sudden you’re interested in bringing her, you could’ve asked”.

“Never mind that, but you still haven’t answered my question.”

“I invited him because Kylie told me that you were fond of him but couldn’t bring yourself to talk to him, and I know for a fact he would like to get to know you, but you kind of ignored his messages”.

“You know what, I’m out of here. I don’t want to listen to this, and all you do is judge other people anyways,” I said angrily, got up and left, but not before she could reply, “As if you’re so perfect yourself. Just think of all the times you’ve hurt other people without even realizing it.”

I left, didn’t care about which one of the two paid. I would wire them money later. I felt enraged and terrible; I had started a fight over nothing, accused a friend

of being a terrible person, and had called her out on something I very clearly did as well. Maybe I was the terrible person, maybe she was, but I didn’t want to let this slide, on either side. I had to pull myself together and start being more considerate. I had to show her I wouldn’t be toyed with. No matter how blingy or flashy she was.

CHAPTER 8

Griffin Grey

I was out of the building at two. In the café at three. In between I walked, a stroll around New York. Just wandering around, trying to find something I wasn't aware of yet. It was relaxing and wholesome. It gave a lot of time to think. Of what I can't recall. My fight of yesterday, maybe. Personal accomplishments and failures, maybe. The meaning in life and love, maybe. I arrived at Lexington Avenue, entered the café at the corner, and got hit by the odors of fresh bread and coffee, a familiar smell. I hung up my coat and scarf. The interior was well heated by flames. I sat down in a small booth. It was cozy and neatly decorated. You could tell winter was on its way but not quite here yet. I was right on time and decided to order a glass of water. I was strumming my brand-new fake nails on the table, when one of them ripped off, and with it a terrible pain.

It was all cracked, dried out and had a big tear in it that was now swelling red and droplets of blood forming. I was so embarrassed, more than my nail hurt. Which was hurting badly.

He came in a couple minutes later, wearing a Ralph Lauren beanie, a grey and purple high school hoodie from New Castle, a black coat from Moncler, grey Boss Russel sweatpants and black air force ones. He took off his hood and jacket, as well as the beanie and sat down after giving me a hug. Gave it a moment.

“So why the rush to meet?” I asked.

“Always this straight forward when you meet new people” he gave off with a bit of a chuckle.

“Nah, I wanted to get to know you a bit more. I think you’re interesting, and haven’t always been given the possibility to say all you wanted to.”

“Aw thank you. That’s actually one of the most considerate things I have ever been told. How do you come to that conclusion”?

“The way you react when you are given the chance to fully articulate your thoughts”

“What does this mean”?

“This means I would like to get to know the full Jordan”.

“Where does that even start?”

“Hi, I’m Griffin Grey, 24 and currently studying law and ethics to become a prosecutor. I come from a small town up in Michigan, my favorite season is winter, and I love to ski, especially up at Aspen in Colorado. I wouldn’t call myself wealthy, but my parents earn well, and it is thanks to them that I can afford to do all that I like. I have an older brother, and two younger sisters. I care a lot about my physical shape as well as my mental, and I am quite a fan of art and design. Your turn. You don’t have to give me details like I just did”.

“Jordan, Jordan Black, 22 from New Jersey, Belmar. I used to be very invested in volleyball. Now I kind of stopped, not enough time. Favorite season is probably summer since I am a big fan of the beach and of surfing, though I do love snowboarding in the winter. I am currently studying law at Columbia to become a criminal defense attorney and follow in my parents’ footsteps. It’s funny you mentioned having a brother

and two sisters, so do I. An older brother and sister, and a younger one. And I am currently in modeling”.

“Modeling, that’s so cool. I love the fashion industry especially the Avant Garde designers. It is mind blowing to me at which point you can push what is considered clothing. You work for one company only, or under management?”

“The story is kind of unusual, I guess. The main designer of this very high-end company approached me in a park. I just do shoots with him, but I’m hoping to get on his fall/winter show.”

“Unusual yes, but very interesting, I would love to come and see that show if you think you can get me in”.

“I’ll see what I can do.”

There was a blank before he spoke out again.

“Let’s change subjects, how do you feel in life?”

That twisted my mind. I didn’t even really know myself. I had ideas in my head but so unclear I couldn’t even form words in my mind to describe them.

“I don’t know. Such a complicated question. If I were to tell you I knew exactly, that would be a lie. I’m not sure, but there are some elements there.”

“It’s ok, you don’t have to answer this. It’s a complicated question that requires you to be honest with yourself, and vulnerable towards me. It’s easy to be open to someone, but extremely hard to be vulnerable. Especially if you know the person well.”

“I don’t know how to respond to that, but I’d like to think about it and give you an answer later on”.

Our discussion differed and we talked just about anything, passing from clothes to love and even of the future.

When it got time to leave, he elegantly helped me put my coat back on, and we strolled through central park where we parted. I got into a cab and got out at the Avenue of the Americas to walk the last bit. I went into the building next to the intersection. Lance Northwest was already there measuring out a model. I waited my turn, went into a side room and got my measurements taken. The tape was cold, and wrapped itself around my bust. It felt like the claw of an icy wolf wrapping

itself around me and having full control of me including the air flowing through my mouth throat to my lungs. Waist and hips followed up next. Last was the scale. The scale was digital, and the sluggish black numbers formed a 125. Following up I was brought into a photo shooting room and was asked to take off my clothes, which I did. The photograph looked me up and down, held up a dress in front of me, and said “she won’t fit.” I was asked to wait outside in the industrial cold room. I left. I waited. An assistant passed by and looked at me with a disgusted look. L. Northwest came over. He gave me a quick glance. Looked at a sheet of paper probably containing all the information they had of me on it. Sighed, looked me up and down. There was an utter silence in the room. “You are average. Now you might be thinking that’s good, it’s not. Average in this industry is the worst thing we can have. There is nothing at all setting you apart from anyone or making you special. Your body is 19-20 BMI, for a model that is not bad. Here we search for exclusivity and perfection. Ninety five percent of ideas are made for the bin, because they aren’t perfection, so if the model isn’t perfection, the result won’t be perfection.” He had broken the silence.

I nodded. “I don’t like, tolerate or want any fat people in my clothes. It is like a piss stain in the snow, it has nothing to do there. So come back when you’ve lost 15 pounds.” He snapped like an angry wolf.

“It is better to end up with no energy in the hospital after a show, at which you are magnificent, than having a mediocre show because you were unable to control yourself.” He added like a gust of icy wind filled with chunks of ice.

I left. I knew what had to be done, I wanted to be on that show in five weeks, so I had to hit the weight in three and a half. I was determined to get this, felt like the path was clear. Models were praised by everyone, and Griffin loved the idea of seeing me on a runway. I wouldn’t let him down. I wanted to become a model. Badly.

CHAPTER 9

Shadow Grey

After quite some research I had been able to figure out the perfect routine. I started the day with forty-five minutes of bike erg and a quarter hour of steam sauna. Showered off the sweat, while taking care of my skin. For breakfast I had some vegetables and vitamin and mineral pills, I fasted though the day, and dinner consisted of something different every day while always making sure to stay under a total of 700 calories a day.

This weight loss journey had also really helped me for uni. I had a fix routine that didn't budge, which really helped with organizing work that had to get done. Concentration also went up quite a bit when I was on an empty stomach. I was also a lot more focused on the tasks ahead of me. And I had become mentally at peace the moment I hit the weight required and been confirmed on this season's runway for L. Northwest.

I had been able to get a reservation for Griffin on the runway. We had started going out regularly, though I still didn't know how we stood.

I was in my room finishing up a group project when my parents called. We talked about how things were going, my general ranking in the class and what we were thinking of doing for Christmas. At one point we started talking about fitness, and my mother asked me if I had been working out because last time, we had met I was a disaster. I assured them that I was and that I had lost a couple pounds, and that I was feeling great. Then my father told me not to overdo it and that it shouldn't become an obsession, with school clearly having a big priority over everything else and that it was extremely important I finished at the top of my class. We talked on for a bit, and I finished the call telling them I had work to do. It had become quite regular for me to call my family these last few weeks. This was the first time I had gotten a call from them.

Volcanic Glass Grey

November 18th, about two weeks before the big show. I weighed in at around 115. I was going out tonight, to the club called Insomnia. I went with Aaron and Katie. We arrived there after dinner at Tao's, at about eleven. I ordered to dishes, pretending to eat them, for Aaron and Kylie not to be suspicious or ask questions. I'd been fatigued a lot lately and decided I wouldn't stay long. Sleeping was hard, though. My mind couldn't rest at the same time as my body. It was very cold outside. Luckily Kylie knew the bouncer and got us past the line without wait. The interior was mysterious and had mystique, weird and interesting. The air was clear and sharp, smell of sweat and alcohol were present but dominated by invigorating peppermint. There was as well ambient still lighting, as wild flashes of rainbows from all sides. The outfits of anyone were sublime, out of this world,

mixes and matches of fabrics, tones, accents, matt and shining and blingy metal. The styling was amazing; the make-up went from nothing to total body paint. Like the summoning of an unreal god in a postapocalyptic dance of glowing neon beings filled with radioactive radiations. The club wasn't packed but still full. The music a mash of industrial techno and 80's/90's disco hits. The bartenders put on a show for any drink ordered, spinning, twirling and balancing bottles and glasses without a single breakage. Fire occasionally spat. We were a bit stiff at the beginning but quickly got into the mood after having a Jäger bomb. Weird lights started spinning, mandalas formed and dissipated into thin air. All the while body jerking out in all directions. Too many lights effects and feelings getting taken, I closed my eyes. My head continued spinning on emotions, colors psychedelic like and blinding. Body got spiny. Then the head got spiny. Wobbly, freaky, animal like, no control. Emotions heightened but not in functioning. Highs lows all at once. Flashbacks and glimpses into the future colliding, fucked up ones and dearest dreams, deepest nightmares. Being hunted, hunting down the hunter. The music became art, motivational and mind freeing. The visions hallucinations, everything flowing

apart into black goo. Fade. Black became grey just to turn into white, then transform into yellow. Lights out the show was over, I was disappointed, already. Out.

Splash, wet and dripping my face was, shortly after so was my throat. I was being dragged where to, I didn't know. I was immobile, memory and mind weren't functioning, only glimpses passed through the nonexistent barrier that had formed itself in my mind. I was lain down somewhere soft. I was on my side. Whiteness all around. A reassuring and familiar voice. Turquoise. Black. I was lifted up gently, wrapped, fell. Black.

Sun beams shone through the window and landed on my forehead. The kiss of the sun woke me up. I rubbed my eyes, that had very little lashes, and brows. I tried to get up, fell back down. Lips were busted and cracked. Head was pounding, the brain not having enough space in my skull. I opened my eyes and recognized my room, groaned. The door squeaked, footsteps were heard. The same voice spoke, then a second "How are you feeling. You pulled off one heck of a show yesterday." "Yeah, you got us real scared there. How did one drink knock you out that hard?" I Waited a bit before digging for the strength to sit up, open my eyes, and just

blink. I looked straight into Kylie's turquoise eyes and then into Aaron's grey ones. I moaned, "That was no ordinary drink you guys. I can't recall much, but it had me tripping balls," I finally said. "Yeah, you collapsed in the middle of the crowd. We had to drag you all the way back. You occasionally muttered something but not much more than that," Kylie answered

Aaron replied with "You had us freaking out, and it was so embarrassing having to heave you home. We even met people we knew."

That wasn't good. I slowly got out of bed and walked across the hall to the kitchen where I slumped down in a chair. Kylie handed me a detox drink, which I sipped. I took a shower, cleansing me of my dirty self. I noticed my arms legs and stomach. I definitely needed to shave. Then we went out for a walk though it was quite chilly. The fresh air did some good, my head pounded a bit less, and I felt a bit less dizzy. Leaves were crunching under our feet and twirling and whirling around us. "Jordan, I'm not really in the mood to talk about this, but we must talk about your health and weight. Both of us realized how light you were yesterday while carrying you home, which was probably the reason alcohol had

such an effect on you. Now I don't know the reason for this, maybe it was because we were all drunk, and you had eaten nothing at Tao's," Kylie said

"Yeah, that's pretty accurate, this worries us. Are you not nourishing yourself correctly? I mean often when I asked you if you wanted something to eat, you always responded with the negative. You have also been working out a lot lately," Aaron added.

"I appreciate your worries, but I'm all fine. I just had a bit too much to drink yesterday, and, yes, I'm currently losing weight, but everything is under control. I am doing this with a professional, and it's only for this modeling gig I've been telling you about," I lied.

"You've probably lost 20 pounds in the last month. There is no way I can think of, that that can be healthy," Aaron said.

Kylie added "Look, don't take this the wrong way or something, we're just worried. Just know that we will always be here if you need us".

"Just let it be, I got this," I replied.

I hated lying to my friends. It ate away at me, and just didn't sit right with me. My feet were hurting because of my toenails being cracked as I later found out, so I went back to my dorm alone. We spent the rest of the day with few words. But the fact they thought there was something wrong with me was gnawing at me. It didn't feel right, as if they had taken something, leaving me vulnerable.

Anthracite

Lights were bright, pressure high. People running around everywhere. Tension was high. Models undressing and redressing everywhere and anywhere. An ant nest, a specific job for everyone and everything, scrambling around. I was brought into a room in which an insane number of outfits were displayed, taken and placed back. I met L. Northwest, he handed me an outfit without a word. I was told to go change in a corner. I was standing there in lingerie trying to figure out how to put on the pants when a young woman came over and helped me out. I was wearing a crazy number of layers of light weight clothing, with over the top a turtleneck and a spiked blazer, and a Gore-Tex Mountain exploration ski jacket over the whole. The pants were a puffer pant in diamonds. The shoes were some sort of technical Dr. Martens with a four-inch heel and a two-inch sole. The

whole outfit was different tones and shades of black with small accentuations of sky blue. The lady told me to walk up to LN and pace in my catwalk. I did so. His only reaction was “Andy make those pants two inches wider in the diameter, the rest is good.” the lady gulped. I took the clothes back off and handed them to Andy who sighed, I asked her why, and she said, “Because of you not being at the weight you should be, I am about to spend a sleepless night making these corrections.” Why did stuff like this always happen to me? I was already able to make 105. How was that not enough? I decided I would weigh myself at home to be sure.

I left assuming there was no reason to stay. I weighed myself, 100. I took a quick shower, got ready for bed sloppily, kind of depressive, and couldn't sleep. I felt bad for everyone but myself. I had let them down, and mainly Griffin, who was so excited of tomorrow. I was too, but even more scared of somehow messing up. Maybe my body wasn't sufficient.

The air felt fresh and new. I was standing on backstage waiting for my turn, monotone beat of Paris madness hitting, one model after another walked in, in perfect timing. I was freaking out. What if my timing is bad,

what if I walk too fast or slow, what if I fuck it up in front of Griffin? And this heat, even with the cool air around me. I was so hot in this mountain of clothes, I started feeling dizzy, nausea. I had to stay focused. It all went out; it was my turn.

My walk felt a bit wobbly at first, then it came naturally, exactly how I had been rehearsing it over the last few weeks. I can remember the searing lights on my face and continuing on. I was told I was good. I got compliments as I hurried out of the overly hot outfit, as soon as I was out, I got hit by a wave of hard cold. My knees buckled, Griffin caught me. Pressure left my head, everything spun. Things stabilized, I came back. He gave me a hug and I was already feeling better.

“You might want to go get your waxing done, you have what seems like a thin coat of fur on your back, doesn't look good.” One of the modeling managers said to me, while I was putting my own clothes back on.

Then a woman I didn't know came up to me and asked me to speak in private. I agreed. We went to the side of the crowd of people all happy from the successful show.

“First of all, congrats on what I understood was your first show. Your walk was good. I’m not the kind of person to stir around the pot a lot. So let me get to the point. My name’s Anja Miller, I work for the house of Prada. You are gaining a lot of internet traction after only half an hour of the show being over, and my company is missing a female model in your dimensions for a shoot next week and a show the week after. I think your weight will do; you just have to maintain it. Here’s my card if you’re interested. You have to heat it up to get to the information.” Anja handed me a pitch-black card and left. I was perplexed, pocketed the card and went to find Griffin who was talking with Andy and L. Northwest. “...I would really like for you to think about it. It would be a one-time thing that could actually be fun, and it would be a good payday,” L.N. just finished. “Hey, babe, Mr. Northwest just asked me if we wanted to do a shoot together for him. I told him we would think about it this week at Aspen.” Griffin explained.

I thanked everyone, and we left.

CHAPTER 12

Night Black

Snowflakes were falling, the alarm woke me softly, I did my routine and bag. The doorbell rang, I opened, it was Griffin. He greeted me with a French kiss and went in to take my bag and brought it down in the big black van standing at the doorstep. Two hours later we were sitting in the plane in our sumptuous first-class seats, a glass of champagne in our hand, relaxed. The temperature was suitable, and the smell of freshness dominated. The pilot made a small announcement and briefing of the emergency exits. I was already no longer listening; my mind had drifted to Colorado and my eyes were outside the window. The plane went into motion, aligned itself on the runway, and took speed, more and more. The front wheel jerked into the air, then the rear. We shot through the sky. My heart was pounding hard as with every flight departure, this time

a bit unregular though. I was compressed into my seat, unable to breathe. I started to fade away with the pressure building, Griffin put his hand gently on my thigh. My ears popped, I calmed down, we arrived at cruiser height. The flight was short but enjoyable, sweeping through the air and clouds, the snowing had stopped, over city's lit lights, grass fields spotted with bits of snow here and there. The attendants were polite and nice. The flight was enjoyable and smooth, no turbulence. We got there in a bit over four hours. We arrived at three and had a taxi waiting to pick us up. At four we were settled in in Griffin's family's Swiss chalet style wooden lodge. It was rich but simple. Exhausted from the trip we decided to have a quick walk-through town and then just order in food to the lodge, to avoid the public eye and be more relaxed. We had pizza, which tasted good. I couldn't allow myself to gain any weight because of it, but I didn't want to upset Griffin by not eating any, so I had a small slice. I chewed slowly and ate even slower, chewing on every bite as if it were chewing gum to make it seem as if I ate more than in reality. Very fatigued I went to bed early and Griffin showed me to my room. Even with me being sleepy,

the temperature being nice and not many disturbing sounds, falling asleep was hard.

On the first day, I was awakened to a fresh tea served to me in bed, and then we went out to buy new equipment for me since I had forgotten literally everything back at my parents' place in New Jersey. Taking into count the blistering cold, I went with a Patagonia jacket and pant, and undercoat from Mammut, the helmet was a Poc and the glasses Oakley. I went with Salomon boots and self-warming gloves. I bought a whole load of Odlo and the north face base layers, due to me feeling extremely cold. The board Griffin insisted on paying, I chose a Nitro.

With our shopping spree done, Griffin absolutely wanted to hit the slopes on the first day already. We didn't go at it too hard, and mainly enjoyed ourselves. The snow was soft and had a good grip, no snow canons obliterating your face were on, and the landscape was beautiful, the mountain chains going on forever and ever. The sweet breeze of cool fresh air. I was quite surprised at myself for managing to not fall down during the whole day.

The rest of the week was quite similar, but not boring. The weather couldn't have been better, and the life in the lodge was relaxing and warming. We shared some very funny evenings and had deep talks. Our first Hollywood like kiss we had on the slopes at an old hut, away from the public eye. I met up with Patrick for the first time since he had left the house in a fury. He was living his best life up here in Colorado, smoking weed, skiing, being part of his hippy movement and having fun making clothes for his label. When I told him I had started modeling, he first congratulated me, but then asked me if it was because of them that I had lost all that weight. I replied that I hadn't lost that much weight lately and the weight I lost was only due to me exercising regularly. I was very happy to have met up with Patrick. We had been keeping contact but hadn't seen each other in person. I promised him I would make a name for myself in the modeling industry, and then model for him to help him get some exposure. All the while I felt like I was growing weaker and weaker, not really thinking clearly all the time, and I had sleepless nights. My weight wouldn't budge. This was worrying.

The short week came to its end, so we packed our things and headed back to the airport to catch our flight.

I wasn't feeling well, my stomach was churning, and I felt sick and dizzy. The ride in the cab was long and depressing, trees were flying, by snow was whirling. The cab smelled old and musty, the snowflakes that hit the window and melted grew to droplets and ran down the window, some making it through the cracks of the shattered window and spilling in. I felt lonely in a big wide world of unknown, all alone, as if I had nobody there for me, which I assured myself was false. I had my best friends Aaron and Kylie, my I-guess boyfriend Griffin, my friends Mckenzie, Katlyn, Jessica and so many others, and my siblings Patrick, Ashley and Chloe. My parents were there as well and I knew there was no reason for this, but I was alone.

Icy gusts of wind were swirling around filled with icy chunks of snow visible from 100 yards away. We got seated in the plane and I immediately had a bad feeling about it. I didn't want to bother Griffin with it. He had already done so much for me and been so sweet to me this week, nor did I want to be that passenger, so I just kept it in myself. I thought of the fact I had not had my periods in the last three months. Maybe this made me unwell, feeling it may be the cause to this feeling. In that moment the rear wheels lifted off the ground,

I felt it. I was getting pressed into my seat, and with my life, oozing out of me till I finally stopped fighting it and let go. Dark.

Onyx Black

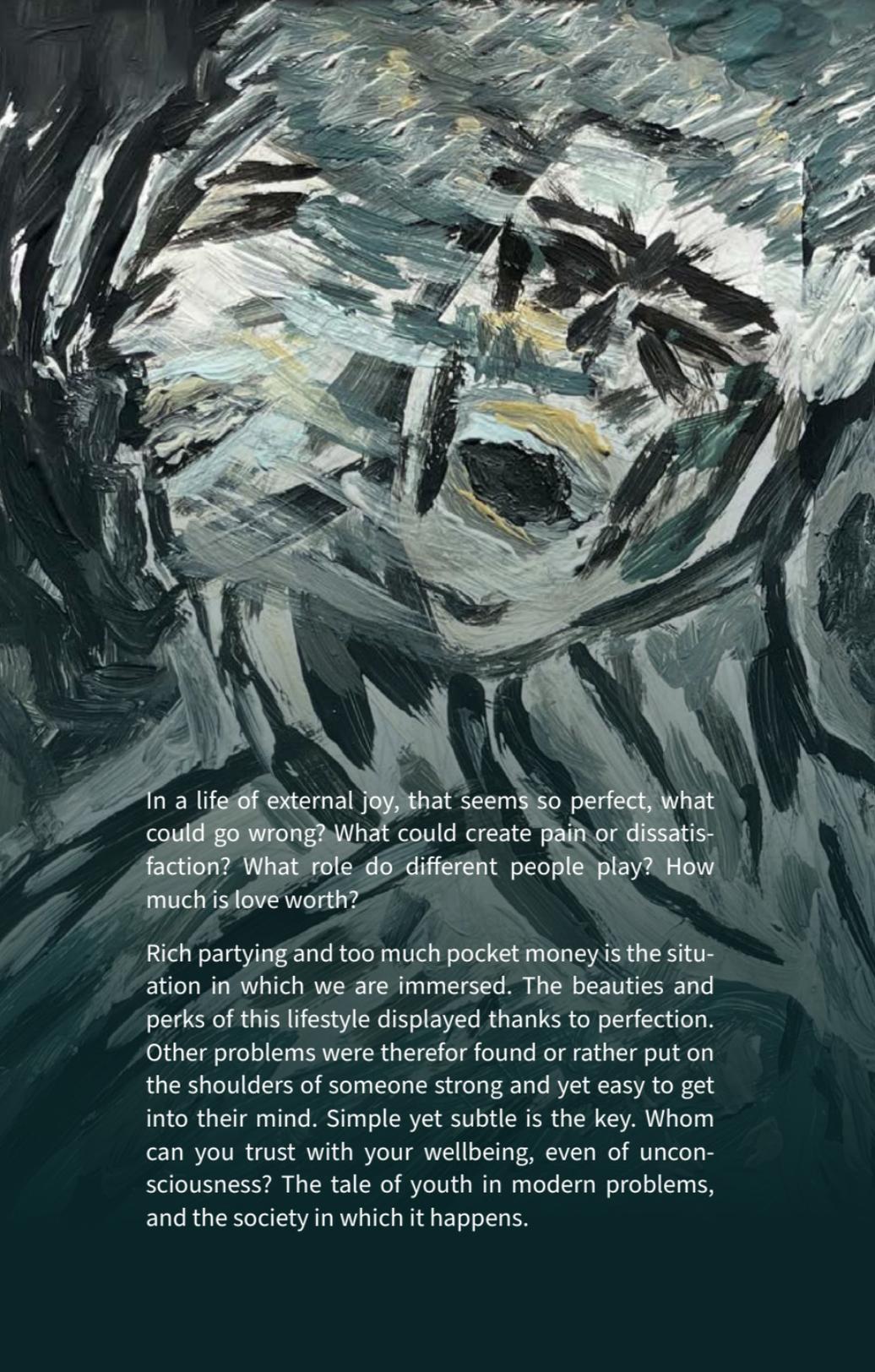
White blouses were swinging around and flying up and down. Artificial and sterile taste in the mouth and up my nostrils. Cool environments, heated up just by the aluminum blanket around me. I had lost track of where I was. Alien voices around me. Beeping and bleeping of electronics. I was alive, but not by much. I couldn't see clearly, everything was a blur. A blur I couldn't hold on to. I felt it slipping. The beeping stopped, distant voices were to be heard, and things started to fade. I saw the faces of the ones I loved, those whose voices were disappearing, and those who tormented me, all drift away, flowing down. The essence of my life flowing down a river unable to retrace the route back up, till purified by sun and misted back to where it began. Grey.

Black

Acknowledgements

I would like to take the time to thank all those who helped me. Laura Brillard, who helped me understand the place of eating disorders in the modeling industry. My family and friends, for reading, and rereading to give me their opinions on every part of the process. A big thanks to my mother who helped me with every part of the way by always giving me her opinion and helping me put this novel into the right format. I would also like to thank Carolyn Whittle for pointing out the small grammatical details and editing the story as a former New Yorker and graduate of Columbia.

And lastly, but not least, I would like to thank my representative for this Travail de Maturité, Marie-Claude Guerry, who helped me with an enormous amount with understand eating disorders and the human psychology, as well as helping me lay out and plan this story and giving me a vast amount of constructive comments and opinions.



In a life of external joy, that seems so perfect, what could go wrong? What could create pain or dissatisfaction? What role do different people play? How much is love worth?

Rich partying and too much pocket money is the situation in which we are immersed. The beauties and perks of this lifestyle displayed thanks to perfection. Other problems were therefor found or rather put on the shoulders of someone strong and yet easy to get into their mind. Simple yet subtle is the key. Whom can you trust with your wellbeing, even of unconsciousness? The tale of youth in modern problems, and the society in which it happens.