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PART 1

THE SHOOT

JUNIPER

1

When I got the news that Matthew Malone wished to make my acquaintance, I was rereading the script for *Andy Warhol Never Gets Old* in a bare-walled apartment the studio had rented for me. Matthew, I was told, wanted to meet in the lobby of his hotel. We'd all just moved to Pittsburgh, a city not known for its hotels, but Matthew had found the good one, of course. So I took an Uber there, pounding Altoids the whole way, thinking about what I'd say to the one and only Matthew Malone, who was playing Warhol in the movie. Matthew and I had exchanged phone calls and a couple of text messages, but my friends all wanted to know what he smelled like, how he walked, what kind of emotion his eyes held, whether or not he was a typical Pisces, and so on.

The first time we talked, a few months after my mother died, he called me and said, "I'm so excited to work with you on this," and I said, "Me too," and then he said, "I know you've been crossing through a hard time, and I'm sorry." What a phrase. *Crossing through a hard time*. I was indeed crossing through a hard time.

In the first weeks after Mom died, I mostly felt relief that it was over. I felt like I was coming up for air after a long time underwater. But

eventually, I learned that it was not, in fact, over. The dead are not in the past, not really, because you carry them around with you.

When I got to the hotel, I walked into the lobby—absurd chandelier, abstract paintings with flashes of neon. I scanned the room for Matthew, but didn't see him. I noticed instead a beautiful boy—slight, unstyled brown hair, impish green eyes—slumped into a semicircular couch. He was writing in a Moleskine notebook. He looked—I don't know how else to say it—like a movie star. I am attractive in a way gossip blogs sometimes call *interesting* or *surprising*. I have a slight overbite. My eyes are just a bit too far apart. I have a face built for the screen: an expressive but not particularly symmetrical one. This boy, though, in his fitted black jeans and his baby-blue button-down shirt, almost seemed to have a visible aura. Plenty of people are attractive. Precious few are genuinely magnetic. I wanted to buy stock in him immediately, even having never seen his acting. I took a few steps toward him and managed to say, "You must be Kai."

He looked up from his notebook. He was chewing gum, and he smiled shyless and broadly as he removed AirPods from his ears. "Juniper," he said, as if we'd known each other for years. He stood, and offered me a hand. I shook. Stronger than I expected.

Not long before, I'd gotten out of a relationship, except I hadn't *gotten* out of it so much as I'd been cast out of it, like a fallen maiden cast out of the church's good graces. On the dude's way out, he'd told me there's a word to describe what I felt for him—that the word isn't *love* or *lust* but *limerence*, a state of involuntary obsession. I was twenty-two. He was thirty-six. He'd been the cinematographer on my last movie, which had sort of flopped, and now he was moving on to the next one.

After the movie did a paltry seven million dollars in its opening weekend, I had nothing lined up, so I enrolled in college and took a

course in modernist literature and art. I kind of suspected my life as an actor could be over, but then along came Matthew Malone to save me.

If there had been room in my life for new limerence, I might have started to feel it toward Kai in that hotel lobby, but I'd learned that true love cannot coexist with true ambition. I was not looking to get laid on the set of *Andy Warhol Never Gets Old*. I was looking to do my job well enough that I became undeniable, that I ceased to be, as the phrase turns, a *former child star* and became something else.

"Is that your character notebook?" I asked.

"This? Oh, yeah, no. This is just, like, a sketch pad, I guess. I just draw. You keep one?"

Always. Even when I played the daughter of the Guy Who Didn't Do It on a network procedural, I found a way to make her worthy of a hundred pages of notes. The less serious your job, the more seriously you must take it. "Yeah," I said.

"I read you're like that," he said. "Not quite method, but pretty hardcore, right?"

"I guess," I said. Fucking hell he was handsome, especially standing now, back straight, plenty tall enough for me.

I just looked at him for a minute, let my eyes settle on his. "You're very comfortable with eye contact," he said.

"Part of the job," I answered, my eyes still on him. At last he laughed a little and glanced away.

"I'm glad one of us is fearless," he said. "I'm fucking terrified."

"Of what?"

He listed the reasons, counting them out on his long, thin fingers. "Fucking up my lines, not being able to forget about the camera, not being able to share a screen with Matthew Fucking Malone. I'm scared that I'll look scared. I only ever went on a movie set once before and that was as a PA. I got fired after one week."

About these things, I *was* without fear. I'd been on sets since I was six. Most comfortable way for me to live, really. When I wasn't shooting or promoting something, I didn't know what time to wake up or how to meet people or what to eat. On set, all of those questions are answered for you.

"You'll do great," I said. "What were you drawing?"

"Um," he said. "You, actually. Since he's trying to fathom you and everything. Jude, I mean." He opened his notebook and showed me the loveliest little line drawing of me on the red carpet for the premiere of my last movie. In his rendering, you could hardly see my face through my hair, and my dress cascaded down to my ankles.

"That's so nice, Kai. Really. Also, that's a really important picture."

"Oh yeah?"

"Yeah, I wore open-toed shoes to that premiere and someone put the pictures up on WikiFeet, so I have the great honor of a WikiFeet page all to myself."

He laughed. "What the fuck is WikiFeet?"

I heard a voice just behind me say, "A website where foot and toe enthusiasts rate celebrity feet. I'm a 4.6." It was Matthew, of course. "Out of five," he added after a beat.

Skin pale. Hair black. All shadows and angles, his eyes furiously vital. He looked more like Warhol than I expected, the thin face and pronounced cheekbones, like even before the shoot he was becoming his character. He hugged me, then Kai. He held Kai by the shoulders for a moment, then turned to me, then back to Kai. "I used to be twenty-one," he said.

He said it like being twenty-one was a debilitating illness you only sometimes survived, which had more or less been my experience.

2

Matthew brought us up to his penthouse suite in the hotel, which featured a view of Pittsburgh's skyline and the Allegheny River. Our director, Kathryn Johnson—tall but still wore heels, blond hair cut into a bob—was there, and Matthew poured everyone champagne, except he'd bought sparkling grape juice for me because he knew that I didn't drink. Of course he knew.

After a while, we sat down on a huge U-shaped couch, where Matthew and Kathryn started talking about Andy. Kai, sitting next to me, asked, "What do you know about Carly?"

I liked that Kai put it that way. Directors often ask, *What's your thought process here*, or *What's your impulse*, because they don't want to accept that you, a mere actor, might know the character in a way no one else can.

"She's self-destructive," I said, "but she's also dedicated. She knows you have to want it worse than everyone else. What do you know about him?" I asked. Kai's character, Jude, was an intern for Andy at *Interview* magazine.

"I think he would rather feel almost anything than feel alone," Kai

answered. I had expected Kai to be a sort of a standard Hollywood Guy, but in that moment I knew I was dealing with something else entirely.

“Yeah,” I said finally.

Next to us, Matthew Malone was talking. “Every industry is in the business of eating human time and consciousness and shitting out money, but in Hollywood, they’re not using your labor to turn iron into steel or whatever; they’re using your labor to turn *you* into something. They’re turning you into movie tickets or Netflix subscriptions. You’re not just the labor; you’re also the raw material.”

I pulled out the little notebook I always kept with me and wrote.

*Not just the labor but also the raw material. Like that for
Carly as well. Women are often seen as A Thing That Will
Transform Him, A Thing He Must Save to Become His Full
Self. How thrilling to meet someone like Andy, who wants
things from you but not those things.*

Matthew was still talking, and I was enthralled. This comic book actor obviously thought so deeply about craft, about the relationship between art and the artist, and how strange that relationship becomes when your own body is both your canvas and your paint. “Warhol was fascinated and repulsed by his own humanity,” he was saying. “Fascinated and repulsed by feeling *in extremis*. And that is my point of connection with him.”

After Matthew ordered room service, Kathryn had us watch an old Alfred Hitchcock movie called *Vertigo*. Matthew told us all about the movie’s star, Jimmy Stewart, who was already a celebrity when World War II broke out but insisted on signing up for the most dangerous form of combat duty in the European Theater—flying B-24 bombers over Nazi-controlled territory. “I’ve been thinking a lot about Stewart

in preparing for this role,” he told us. “What was it like for him being a public figure in a setting like a crowded barracks? How strange it must’ve been for someone like Andy Warhol to be in a hospital bed, without his wigs, without his clothing, getting gallbladder surgery. Fame is a kind of armor, and you need the armor to survive fame. What does it look like to refashion yourself into a normal person, like Stewart was willing to do but Warhol never was?”

“What does it mean to adhere to the true self?” Kathryn added.

“Warhol was making himself the whole time. That was the real art project. The constant construction of the self.”

I felt lucky just to be in this sprawling hotel suite where Kathryn had pulled all the shades so we could see the movie in a manner befitting its purported greatness, a room where Matthew Malone said things like “the constant construction of the self.” What a job for actors, or for anyone, to construct selves. Kai was sitting next to me, close enough that I could smell his skin. He was as silent as I was, taking in the surreality of being in Matthew Malone’s suite with promising young filmmaker Kathryn Johnson. Like, what lottery had we won?

Vertigo felt, well, vertiginous. I kept thinking about the class I’d taken, Modernism at Night, which explored how modernist writers and artists captured nighttime. How do you paint night when it is essentially invisible? How do you display, or articulate, what can’t be seen or heard or smelled or felt? In the class, we’d read Gertrude Stein and Jean Toomer and looked at paintings by Jean-François Millet and Anita Malfatti and J. M. W. Turner. I loved college, but I also knew that Hollywood forgets about you quickly. In my business, when your last project is *An A- in a Class at UCLA*, that’s a sign of weakening demand for your face. There’d be time for school when the Industry retired me.

Kathryn kept pausing the film to point out this Jungian metaphor or that innovative shot. But I was mostly watching the actors, especially Kim Novak, who plays two different women in the film who are

intended to be mirrors of each other, and whose personalities are quite different even as their appearances are obviously similar. It was fascinating to watch a film where the male protagonist is trying to destroy the individuality of a woman but never quite manages to. For Novak, it was a complicated trick to pull off, and I was disappointed to learn that she wasn't even nominated for an Oscar. Never been easy to be a Bright Young Thing in Hollywood.

It was past midnight when the party broke up. Kai and I shared an Uber back to our building. "Do you want a quiet day before rehearsals or a busy one?" he asked.

"Quiet, I think. I might try to find some art, or go to a record store to buy some album covers. I need something on the walls of my apartment. Right now it's too depressing."

He opened up his backpack, reached in, and found his notebook. He carefully tore out the page containing his sketch of me and said, "Here's a start."

3

I ended up buying a bunch of records from a three-dollar bin in a massive record shop in Squirrel Hill and got some frames to go with them. I got some posters, too, for bands I'd never even heard of—Michael and the Argonauts, The Bitter Pill—and put them up around the apartment. The walls felt slightly less oppressive afterward. I took a nap. I wrote in my notebook. My quiet afternoon reminded me of being a kid with my mom and my brother, how we'd kill time by playing this game we called "advanced charades" where you'd try to get someone to guess a movie by silently acting as one of the characters. Hero Walk just so, with your shoulders back and a slight slouch in your legs, and Mom might correctly guess *Reservoir Dogs*. I remembered once my brother extended his arm out from his face like an elephant's trunk and made himself seem so light, up on his tiptoes, like something was pulling him up into the air, and even though Mom and I both knew it was *Dumbo*, we didn't say anything, because we were so astonished by him. He's a nursing student now in Dallas.

I then scrolled Instagram for a while and posted a picture I'd taken with Kai. I tagged him and went through his posts. There were only a few pictures from the past year, all in New York City with friends. No one