It was at least an hour before Mike had calmed down. He felt violated, like all his dignities and rights were just stripped away for no reason other than to humiliate him. He sat hugging his knees and looking forward but not really seeing anything.

“Yo, everything alright?” Al asked tentatively. He seemed to be rather careful and making sure not to upset Mike.

“They… They…” Mike couldn’t bring himself to go through all the memories again. It was all too raw.

“You went to classification.” Al said softly, “Mind if I come over there?”

Mike shook his head slightly and Al stood up and walked across to Mike’s bed. He sat down at the opposite end to make sure he didn’t invade Mike’s space. He had been through classification as well, he knew what it was like.

“Classification sucks ass.” Al said softly, “I know it takes a lot out of you but it’s quite important to read the rules and stuff before they move you.”

Mike wondered if Al knew that the way the latter was sat on the bed, with the light of the main room flooding the cell, his increased chest was very much obvious. Mike couldn’t stop looking at them, there was no way that was a natural thing for a guy. They weren’t huge but they were enough to be noticeable through the thin material they were given to cover themselves.

Al had obviously noticed Mike’s staring and although he would normally be annoyed by it he just smiled ruefully.

“I guess it’s not just my mind making them feel big.” Al said with a deep sigh.

“I’m sorry. I don’t mean to stare it’s just… Well, unusual.” Mike said as he looked away. His own problems faded from view slightly.

“Estrogen.” Al said with a shrug before acting like a sales person, “It’s a hell of a drug!”

Mike frowned and looked at Al in confusion. It seemed like instead of things becoming clearer, things were just getting harder and harder to comprehend the more he heard and saw.

“Do you know why this place exists?” Al asked Mike.

“Because the prisons are overcrowded.” Mike replied. That was what he had always been told. One of the reasons he elected to come here instead of jail was because it would be less crowded and, theoretically, a better place to stay.

“That’s one reason.” Al nodded, “But do you really think they care enough about the prisoners that overcrowding would be an issue for them?”

Mike shrugged.

“They could have just built more prisons.” Al said, “But they chose to build institutions like this. This isn’t about serving a sentence which is why we have no definitive sentence length. This is about rehabilitation.”

“Well, that’s good isn’t it?” Mike asked.

“It sounds great!” Al replied before his face turned dark, “Until you learn their methods.”

Mike watched as Al pointed at the feminine products on his desk, the women’s magazine he was wearing and then his own long hair and breasts. Mike looked away when Al squeezed the two breasts together a little.

“The Venus Institute decided that some males are simply predisposed to crime.” Al said, “They had some research to back it up but I think it’s bullshit. Anyway, they are all about feminising the people that come here.”

“F-Feminising?” Mike replied in confusion. Surely this didn’t mean what Al was suggesting.

“Just read your folder.” Al finally said as he returned to his bed, “It will tell you more than I can. It will tell you what is coming next for you too.”

Mike looked down at the folder he had brought in with him and hesitantly opened it up. He was unsure if he wanted to know what was coming next, he saw Al’s chest and shook his head in denial. He didn’t want anything like that to happen!

The first sheet of paper just had Mike’s basic details. His age, weight, height and other statistics were there including name, Mike was concerned to see the name listed as Michelle rather than Mike. He really didn’t want to accept this new name, that wasn’t who he was. Just looking at felt like his past was being erased right in front of him.

“Classification A?” Mike read out loud. It was written in big and bold letters, the only thing on an otherwise plain page.

“Huh.” Al said curiously as he looked over from his bed. Mike thought he looked quite confused as if he hadn’t expected that, “I’ve not heard of that one before. I’m classification C and I’ve seen loads of B’s and C’s come through but no A’s.”

Mike turned another page and began to read the usual welcoming spiel. It did little to say anything that Al hadn’t already said. There was a lot of technical language for why the Institute did what they did but a lot of it flew over Mike’s head. He got the basic idea of things though and Al was right, they planned to reduce crime through reducing masculinity.

The next page had more details of what “Classification A” entitled and Mike took a second to steady himself and gain the courage to read about his fate.

“Classification A is our least invasive treatment program.” The statement began, “Hormones are not required at this level and neither is surgery. This classification is for people who have had a troubled childhood and can be rehabilitated without invasive procedures.”

This didn’t sound too bad, Mike thought. Maybe he had got lucky, it seemed they didn’t think he would need any body altering treatment like his cellmate or many of the others here. That had to be a good thing.

“Rehabilitation for “Classification A” patients involves regression and re-training. It involves taking the patient back to the beginning of life and allowing them to start again. To grow up with a normalised second childhood and correcting morals. This can take months or sometimes even years depending on how much resistance is meant, it can be hard for some to accept their treatment.”

“What the fuck!?” Mike exclaimed loudly. What the hell were these people planning? Regression? Re-training?

“Can I look?” Al asked as he reached over.

Mike nodded mutely as his mouth hung open in shock. He watched as his cell mate read the paragraphs with furrowed brows.

“Wow. Lucky you!” Al finally said when he finished reading and handed the paper back to Mike.

“Lucky!?” Mike repeated with a frown, “You call that lucky!?”

“Look at it this way, Mike… Or should I say Michelle.” Al puts his hands up as a peace offering when he saw the death look Mike gave him, “You need to get used to your new name.”

“Just call me Mike…” Mike replied carefully. He was pissed off but also aware that his cell mate was bigger than him.

“Fine.” Al replied with a roll of the eyes, “But look at it this way. You will be getting no invasive procedures. No surgery, no hormones… You could come out the other side without any significant changes. I mean I don’t know what they do there but I’d trade places.”

Mike didn’t see it that way. He hated any thought of regression, he hated any thought of being changed by this place. Panic was rising through him and he could almost feel the adrenaline in his veins. He realised he was looking around rather wildly as if desperate for an escape.

“Mike…” Al said slowly, “Keep calm. I know this is a shock but…”

“I can’t do this!” Mike almost screamed, “I have to get out. I need my mom!”

“Mike if you make too much noise and commotion they will come and get you and, well, you don’t want that.” Al seemed rather worried. Mike figured he was concerned that the staff would take him away as well.

Mike grabbed at his face with his hands. He could feel himself sweating and it seemed like the walls were closing in. His breathing was becoming more and more ragged. He was in full on fight or flight mode but he had nowhere to run.

Al suddenly sat up straight and turned to face Mike. He sat cross-legged across from Mike and put his hands on Mike’s shoulders.

“Look at me.” Al said authoritatively, “Look at me, Mike.”

Mike slowly looked up from his bed and looked at his cellmate. He lingered briefly on Al’s distracting breasts before looking him in the eye. Al was smiling rather serenely at Mike and breathing in and out very deeply.

“Breathe with me.” Al said, “In and out. Come on Mike, match my breathing.”

“I… I can’t!” Mike said hysterically.

“Yes you can.” Al replied strongly, “Slow and deep breaths like me. Do what I do.”

Mike did as he was told. Under times of extreme stress having someone give you very clear instructions was very persuasive. Mike breathed slowly and eventually he felt himself regain control of his body and his mind.

“Feeling better?” Al asked after a minute or two of slow breathing.

“I think so.” Mike replied as he continued the breathing.

“Good. My last cellmate taught me that technique. It can get overwhelming at times.” Al said as he stood up and stretched.

Mike found himself looking up at Al and the small bumps in his prison clothes. As he stretched his arms over his head the shirt pulled closer to his body and accentuated the budding breasts.

“Sorry.” Al said as he lowered his arms, “I’ve been here so long and I’m still not used to these damn things.”

“It’s… It’s fine.” Mike replied as he looked away.

“It sucks that we won’t get to stay together though.” Al continued, “You seem cool, not like a lot of the people that end up here.”

“I’ll be moved?” Mike asked.

“I imagine so.” Al replied with a shrug, “There aren’t any Class A’s up here. They will probably move you through to a different part of the building.”

Mike hadn’t thought about being moved. He was only just getting used to being here and after a rocky start it seemed like he was getting along with AL quite well. He didn’t really want to be moved again.

It was hard to believe this wasn’t all some kind of nightmare. Mike walked to the front of his cell and looked out into the room. He could see people in similar cells all over in various states of dress and progress. Some could be mistaken for female if you didn’t know better whilst others looked unchanged and had evidently not been here long.

“Do you mind if I have a look at your folder?” Al asked from behind Mike.

“Go ahead.” Mike replied without looking away from the window.

Mike was starting to feel really homesick. He missed his mom and his friends, he started to wonder when he would see any of them again. Would he be allowed to contact home? They hadn’t really told him anything about how the place operated on a day-to-day basis.

“Yeah it looks like you’ll be moved tomorrow morning.” Al said as he read one of the papers.

Mike looked around at Al. Since he had arrived, Al had been the only person who was even remotely friendly to him and he really wished they weren’t about to be separated.

“I don’t suppose I could convince them to let me stay here?” Mike asked more in hope than expectation.

“Well… You can try but I’ve never seen them change their minds once a decision is made.” Al replied. He put the file down and walked back over to his bed to lay down, “They have a system and they would rather watch the building burn down than deviate from their plans.”

Mike looked out the window again and saw another person who seemed new getting led out of his cell and towards the examination rooms. Mike noticed the poor guy seemed to be crying.