Rachel loved theatre, ever since she was a little girl. The live performances, the stage, the props, the dramatic acting. Everything about it just fascinated her. So much so she had participated in many a play since elementary school, and even known in her junior years in college as she studied drama she continued to do so.

Of course, it bore mentioning her role in plays ranged from stagehand to minor roles, seldom did she go for the bigger roles. Because when the spotlight was shining down on her, Rachel felt she would just burn to a crisp. That she’d shake like the frailest leaf on a nigh-naked branch in a windy autumn, forgetting all her lines and crumbling on live stage.

She knew she couldn’t continue like this. If she truly wanted to focus on this craft, to live and breathe theatre like so many of her idols, she needed to overcome this fear and sense of inadequacy. Rachel needed to be in the center stage if she truly wanted to learn and grow as an actor.

And now her chance approached. She landed one of the big parts in the upcoming college play.

She had impressed the director/teacher and was given the role of the tyrant queen. This was it, this was her chance!

…And then the nerves came back.

Rachel kept telling herself this would be good for her. That this play would be the type of ‘push’ she’d been needing to actually work on her confidence issues. She managed to do well in auditions and rehearsals, but once the audience stood before the stage, with the spotlight shining down on her, would she be able to actually do her part?

She didn’t know… but she still had to try.

It didn’t help the protagonists were essentially everything she was not. The leading female role was taken by a drop-dead gorgeous blonde beauty, of tall stature and endowed bosom. A sharp contrast to Rachel’s mousy looks, with her short curly brown locks, freckled face, thick-rimmed glasses, and almost flat figure. Looks were 50% acting if you lacked the talent after all…

Not to mention the main male role went to Ethan, the olive-skinned handsome guy with a beautiful Greek complexion and devilishly handsome smile, he looked like he came straight out of a Calvin Klein cover, with his lean yet toned body and that perfect hair…

Rachel wished she could have been the romantic interest in the play, for at least *one* shot at him even if it was not real… but alas, it was not to be. She first had to focus on herself, she had to make sure she could do this.

Her nervousness was so palpable that Ethan approached him with a kindly offer for her, an impromptu practice on the stage, just the two of them. Rachel’s mind whirled with the possibilities of such an encounter, but she knew it was only a fantasy, he was just a nice guy helping her out, nothing else…

While Rachel strived to improve on her issues, she was self-aware enough to know one single play wouldn’t magically ‘fix her’. So she turned to a few… supplements. Something a friend recommended to her, meant to boost confidence and suppress anxiety. Her friend began taking them to get the necessary energy to work out and improve her health, now she looked like a crossfit model.

So Rachel couldn’t be blamed if she had started partaking of a few… dozen, per week.

For the last two weeks.

She wasn’t sure if the effects had been working, but hey, in the past she wouldn’t have so readily agreed to Ethan’s offer.

Now it was the two of them, sitting over the stage as they went through their lines, picking the next scene they should practice. “Okay so, this one is just you and me” He pointed at the script. “Hero confronts the queen. Queen does a whole spiel to intimidate him”

“Hero is having none of it,” Rachel finished. “Could show some nuance and go with the hero being frightened but still facing her. Protagonists don’t have to be perfect”

“Well it’s one of those ‘paragons’, there’s still a place for those” Ethan shrugged, “’Sides, teach wrote it that way”

“Right, right” She looked over her dialogue, “The queen is meant to be commanding and proud, I’m… not sure I’ve gotten her quite right yet”

“You got the part, didn’t you?” He encouraged her with a smile. “You’ve been doing well during practice”

“Haven’t done it in public yet,” Rachel replied with a sag of her shoulders. “I guess I’m worried I’ll just… freeze up. I really don’t want to mess this up, this will be my first big role”

“You’re talented, you know the lines, and you get the character. You’ll do great” Ethan said with certainty. Certainly far more than what she had right now. “Look at all this,” He waved at the empty rows of seats. “Next week it’ll be packed, and everyone will see just what good of a job you’ll do. Years down the line they’ll be able to say this is where your career started”

Rachel let out a soft laugh. She wanted that, she wanted it so *badly*.

“So,” He stood up, “How about we practice that scene?” He offered her a hand. And after some hesitation she took it, relishing the contact even if for a brief moment as he helped her up.

God, she wanted to impress him so much, to actually be the actress Ethan saw her as…

She needed a boost.

“How about this?” She prompted, jabbing her thumb at the stage props, “I’ll come from there as the scene says, get in character”

“Oh, good idea!” He nodded eagerly and went to the other end of the stage, “I’ll do the same”

Rachel quickly went behind a fake castle wall, making sure Ethan couldn’t see her as he prepared to go into character. She reached into her jacket’s pocket and pulled out a pill bottle, it still had at least six or eight inside.

In a fit of desperation, Rachel popped them all into her mouth and swallowed. She was sure it’d be fine…

Hurriedly, she put the empty bottle inside the jacket again and took the item of clothing off, leaving it behind the stage just in case. She stood wearing only her red shirt and loose jeans, her sneakers squeaking over the stage’s wooden floor she waited for Ethan to set the scene, holding the script in her hand.

“Avast, witch!” He shouted dramatically. “I’ve heard tales of your foul deeds, slain the slaves you called army! Dare you face a man who will not bow?!”

Rachel took a deep breath, feeling her tummy go warm of all a sudden. It felt… different from her usual nerves.

“A witch you call me?” Rachel called out from behind the stage, slowly walking out to meet Ethan in the center stage. “What an insult, what trifle title, to fully grasp what I am… the queen” She intoned dramatically as she stood face to face with Ethan. Well, as much as his 5’8 to her 4’9 allowed.

Even if physically she didn’t measure up, she still had to give it her all. She put Rachel aside. The weak, cowardly girl. Instead, she focused on her role, on the character she had to bring to life. She had to be the villain, the mistress, the great ladyship.

“A queen you call yourself” Ethan quoted, “Yet I see a liar, a fake, a coward who sends her minions while she is safe in her castle”

Rachel’s emotional response was… surprising. She did not like being called those things, even if it was in the script. Those were her flaws, not the queen’s. The queen was powerful and in control, those who defied her would soon know just how much strength she wielded.

She *had* to be the queen, she couldn’t allow insults to go unpunished.

Her skin was tingling, the heat spread further through her limbs. “For those insults, I would have your head on a spike. You, who hath defied me time and time, again, do you not see?! Do you not grasp the majesty before you?!”

The queen was beautiful, she was stunning, she commanded hearts with just a look of her smokey eyes…

Her shirt and jeans started to feel a little bit more snugly.

“Your majesty is empty! You command fear, not… not…” Ethan slowly trailed off as he dropped character. “Rachel you feeling okay? You’re sweating a lot”

“Silence!”

She stunned both him and herself with the sheer volume of her voice.

“I will not stand for your defiance, your insults are petty, your words dull barbs!” She gritted her teeth as the words felt harder to pull out. “I’m… going to show you… show you…!”

The sound of leather stretching was heard, and Rachel gasped as her arms and legs started *swelling*. Like a case of a bad allergic reaction, but these weren’t just balls of inflated flesh, these were *muscles*. Hardened, toned, *muscles*.

Rachel grunted, “Why I am the queen!” She script rumpled under her suddenly tight grip.

“Rachel, what…?”

“M-M’not Rachel!” She snapped, panting hot breaths. She ran a hand over her face, almost knocking off her glasses. She removed them with a trembling hand and found she did not need those thick lenses to see properly like she had to all her life. “I’m… the *queen!*”

The glasses were crushed in her hand, breaking the thick rims and sending splintered glass all over the floor, yet none of them managed to cut her skin.