

# *Godiva*

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*Inspired by "Lady Godiva's Operation" by the Velvet Underground*

The storm had stopped hours ago.

Nevertheless, hundreds of small, shiny raindrops still clung to the window. His eyes traced one from the top of the pane, following as it inched forward. Each time it touched another droplet it would absorb it, gaining not only more mass, but momentum. It moved faster and faster, zigging and zagging through the crowd until it was gone.

The glint of the lamplights on the wet street became clearer through the small trail the droplet had left. He blinked a few times to try and erase the line from where it had become embedded in his vision. His lashes felt like they were leaving papercuts across his lids, and he wished the pounding in his head would go away.

He blinked a few more times as his eyes swept the room. Everything looked the same. Gray.

And dull.

He didn't remember it all being so colorless, so soulless and...boring. But they said he had been asleep for a while.

He reached a hand up to tuck away a stray loop of gauze that had fallen across his ear. The wrappings itched terribly, but he somehow knew removing them would cause more trouble than it was worth.

As he was righting himself, sitting up against the pillows and shifting under the heavy, morose comforter, he caught a flash of color across the room.

It was shiny, whatever it was. He could just see a bit of it, peeking out from underneath the dresser in the corner of the room. He decided to investigate, slipping his legs from beneath the covers and, slowly, rising to his feet. He fumbled across the room like a toddler and had to hold back the bile rising in the back of his throat as he lowered himself to the ground.

It was no bigger than a Pekingese, with lumps and bumps and what seemed to be arms, like an octopus, flung out in several directions. He extended a hand, moving slowly towards the *thing* wedged in the small, dark space. He braced himself for a growl or a bite, but as his hand came to wrap around it, the creature had gone limp.

He tugged it carefully out from beneath the dresser, only to discover...

Hair.

Long, blonde hair.

His heart began to rattle feebly in his chest as he combed his fingers through the locks.

He lifted it to his face, closed his eyes, and took a breath in.

The eclectic collection of smells emanating from the hair only made him more confused, more disoriented. His brain was screaming in protest as he continued to inhale, the scent of perfume and cigarettes and citrus overwhelming him and mixing with something else...something he knew, inherently, but couldn't name. Like how a fish just knows how to swim.

He knew this scent. He was sure of it.

His heart beat even faster, and his head ached so much it felt as though his skull was being sawn in half. He closed his eyes, begging for the pain to dissipate or to pass out, whichever came first. He took another long, shaky breath and-

“Jude.” He whispered.

...

The first time he ever spoke to Jude was in the cafeteria, about forty minutes into their rigidly delegated lunch period. He was sitting at a lonely, sticky table shoved in the back right corner of the room. Jude asked if he could sit down. He nodded.

Jude was beautiful.

Jude had a rich, golden-brown complexion that seemed to sparkle, even under the terrible fluorescent lighting, and cheekbones sharp enough to cut glass. His entire face was delicate, but not weak. There was still strength to his jaw, and an air of architectural precision to the angle of his browbones.

It reminded him of Michelangelo.

“What’s your name?” Jude asked, pushing back the curls from his forehead.

“Simon.” He replied.

A smile tugged at the corner of Jude’s lips. “Hmph.”

“What?”

“I dunno. I just thought your name was Peter.”

“It’s not.”

“Well, you look like a Peter.”

“Thanks?”

“I’m Jude. I’m new.”

“I know.”

They stared at each other a moment. Jude began to tap his fingertips on the table.

“What do people do around here? For fun?” He asked.

Simon caught flashes of purple nail polish.

“Nothing.”

“Nothing? People do nothing around here for fun?”

Simon shrugged.

“What do *you* do for fun?” Jude shifted again on the bench, fingers drumming faster.

“I...read.”

“What do you read?”

“Books.”

“What kind of books?”

“Long, boring ones.”

“Like the Bible?”

Simon snorted. “We all have to read the Bible.” He nodded in the direction of the lunchroom crucifix, proudly perched beside the wall clock. “Did you miss that bit?”

Jude chuckled. “I’ve never read it.”

“Well, you’re about to.”

A bell rang in the distance. Two long, mournful tones that startled all the boys spread across the room into action. Simon stood and collected his tray. Jude remained seated.

“We have theology.” Simon offered.

“I know.” Jude answered, pushing himself away from the table and slowly moving towards the doors. Simon followed, placing his dishes among the others on the stainless-steel bench.

He started to drift left, following the herd in the direction of the east wing, but stopped as he saw Jude float away from the corner of his eye.

Simon turned to get a better look, but Jude was gone.

One of the large, oak doors leading to the chapel bobbed in the doorframe a moment before, once again, becoming still.

...

He found Jude scrunched between one of the pews and the wall, smoking, beneath the stained-glass window of Saint Anthony. He was thumbing through a magazine while a small radio garbled beside him.

“Why aren’t you going to class?” Simon asked.

“Why doesn’t anyone like you?” Jude replied, flipping to the next page of his magazine.

“W-What?”

He looked up from the glossy, colorful pictures.

“No one talks to you; therefore, they don’t like you. Why is that?”

Simon could feel it slithering in his chest, tightening itself into a knot around his heart.

“I just...keep to myself. That’s all.”

Jude studied him, carefully set down the magazine, and rifled through his bag.

“Sit.” He called. Simon complied, sliding down the wall to sit beside him.

Jude turned to face him. “May I?” He asked, hand inches from the other’s face.

Simon nodded.

Jude ran his fingertips across the lines of his face, measuring the distance between eyebrows and cheekbones and jawline. After a few moments of concentration, he produced three small makeup brushes and compacts from his backpack.

Jude took ahold of a brush, swiped it across a powder, and brought his hand up to position his canvas.

Simon flinched. “Wait I-I’m not-”

“You’re not what?” Jude asked, a skeptical quirk to his eyebrow.

“Uhm...like you.”

“And what am I like?”

They stared at each other, the brush still resting between Jude’s fingers.

“You know,” Jude began to study his nails. “David Bowie wears makeup.”

“Who?”

“David Bowie?”

Simon shook his head.

Jude’s eyes lit up as he reached for the magazine, frantically searching for the right page.

“David Bowie,” He repeated. “The Rockstar. Well, actually he’s more of an alien.”

Jude pointed to a...man? With flaming red hair and golden eyelids.

“He wears makeup, and sings, and all the girls love him. And boys, too.”

“Huh.” Simon leaned closer, studying the photo.

“If he can wear makeup, then anyone can.”

Simon glanced up to meet Jude’s eyes.

His heart felt like a bird trapped in a wind tunnel.

“Okay.” He said. Cautiously.

Jude smiled and gently cupped the other’s chin in his hand. He first dusted each of Simon’s eyelids a pale gold, then added some highlight to his cheeks and, finally, a sweet, shimmery gloss to his lips.

“Smells good, doesn’t it?” Jude held the wand out for Simon to smell, and he took an experimental breath in. He was suddenly overwhelmed by the smell of-

“Chocolate.” He murmured. “It uh, smells like chocolate.”

“Think so?”

Simon nodded.

Jude brushed the tip of his thumb just below Simon’s lower lip, gently rubbing away the gloss that had smeared there. He then lifted his thumb to his lips, swiped his tongue across it, and grinned.

“Tastes like chocolate, too.”

...

Jude had found a bar for others...*like him* forty minutes and a train ride into the city. Over the course of a month, Simon and Jude spent Saturday nights surveying the club from the alleyway, making notes of each entrance and exit, and just who was allowed into the establishment.

They had come to realize that women were less likely to be turned away at the door. But they weren’t the same type of women as those at home, women who wore thin-lipped smiles and brought cookies to the Sunday School bake sale.

No, these were women with power.

Women who wore bright colors and sequins and feathers, women whose throats danced with laughter, and women who had hair stacked high enough to pierce the atmosphere.

They were women with love in their eyes and joy in their hearts.

And Simon envied them.

That night Jude had persuaded him to wear the dress stolen from his sister’s closet.

“It’s because your legs are longer,” Jude said, matter-of-factly, as he tugged the zipper along the fabric up his back. “Longer legs look better in dresses. And with heels.”

“I’ve never worn heels.” Simon said.

“Well, you’re about to.”

By the time they had made it to the front of the line, Simon had lost feeling in his toes. The heels were too small, and the cheap wig they’d found in the dumpster was suspiciously itchy, but he resisted the urge to rip them off and sprint down the sidewalk. This was important. He was doing this for Jude, to help Jude find people like himself.

It was all for Jude.

“Here, put these on.” Jude pressed a pair of sunglasses into his palm. “And don’t say anything. I’ll talk.”

Simon gave a feeble nod as the pair of men in front of them entered the club. Jude started to follow them, and Simon followed him, but they were stopped by an enormously large man.

“Ah,” Jude attempted to walk past him. “Excuse me just trying-”

“I.D.” The man grunted.

Jude looked up at him and blinked. “I’m sorry?”

“I.D.”

Jude let out a laugh. The man continued to stare.

“Are you serious?” Jude asked.

The man didn’t answer.

Jude puffed out his chest. “Do you know who this is?” He gestured to Simon.

The man shook his head.

“Why, how unprofessional!” Jude took a step closer and whispered “That’s...*the Lady*.”

The man frowned. “Huh?”

“*The Lady Godiva*.”

The man turned to get a better look. Simon stiffened.

“Never heard of her.”

Jude gasped. “How *dare* you! *Thee* Lady Godiva.”

The man shook his head.

“Crowned royalty of the West End Drag scene? Winner of more than thirty consecutive balls, just this year?!”

“Why’s she called Lady Godiva?”

He could see the gears turning in Jude’s brain, working overtime.

“Well, she...she treats the world like her candy bar! Living life to the sweetest, going where she wants with... *whom* she wants.” Jude tucked a hand around Simon’s waist. He felt his face flush.

“Of course,” Jude continued, “We don’t want to keep the lady *waiting*.”

The man stared at them a few seconds, before letting out an indifferent *Hmph*, and stepping aside. Jude grabbed Simon’s hand and tugged, forcing Simon to stumble forward like a spring foal through the double doors.

...

The lights were the most disorienting part.

Every surface seemed to be a different shade of pink or blue or green, and the music was so loud Simon could hardly hear himself think.

“I’m going to find us drinks, okay?” Jude shouted over the noise. He squeezed Simon’s hand and Simon nodded, taking a second to glance down at where their palms met.

There was a small stage in the back of the room the crowd seemed to center around, and a woman was pacing back and forth on it, gesticulating wildly. Simon wandered closer, edging his way through the bodies of people until he had a clearer view.

The woman was middle-aged with thick, toned arms and a sharp jaw. She performed trick after trick, mouthed word after word, and the audience went wild for every second of the performance. The energy was electric and heady, so much so Simon already felt drunk. People

were dancing and holding one another close, chanting words of praise for the woman on stage, and one man even stopped to tell Simon how *absolutely gorgeous* he looked. By the time Jude had returned with drinks, Simon felt like he was floating.

“Are you okay?” Jude asked. “I’ve never seen you look like that...”

He tried to force his eyes to focus on Jude as he handed him a drink, but the edges of his vision were fuzzy from the lights. “It’s because I-I...I think I’m happy?”

Jude grinned. “Yeah?”

“Yeah!”

“Well, you look beautiful.”

Simon shook his head. “Oh, well I-uh...”

The protest died before it could even reach his lips, devoured by his heart.

“Thank you.”

He took a moment to study Jude. The lights painted him in great swatches of color, like a cathedral window, and his eyes seemed to sparkle. Simon felt that same, strange flutter from within.

“Jude?”

“Yeah?”

“I like you.”

Jude chuckled. “I like you too.”

“No, I...I *really* like you.”

He glanced at Jude’s lips. By the time he glanced back up Jude was closer.

“Can I kiss you?” He asked, gently.

Simon nodded.

His lips were sweeter than chocolate.

...

The bricks bit into the skin of his back and shoulders, their small, dull teeth sinking through the baby-pink fabric, and he could feel the puff of warm breath on his cheek as Jude crowded him against the wall.

The alley was dark and quiet; the stars peering down on them as silent witnesses.

Simon sighed as Jude ran a hand up his thigh.

“You’re beautiful,” He breathed against Simon’s neck. “So-beautiful...on-stage tonight. Every night.”

“Don’t stop.” Simon groaned.

“Fuck, I knew it,” Jude panted, now kissing the skin beneath his jaw, “S-since I first saw you.”

“Oh, *God*.”

“Now look at you...a lady.” He grazed his teeth against Simon’s collarbone, causing the other to writhe beneath him.

“A proper lady,” Jude continued, “*My Lady. My Lady Godiva.*”

“Say it again.” Simon fumbled with the buttons of Jude’s shirt.

“Hmm.” Jude hummed. “Lady Godiva, dressed so *demurely*.”

Simon ran a hand up Jude’s bare chest. Jude stopped him.

“What do you want?” He asked, tipping Simon’s chin upwards with a thumb.

Simon took a shaky breath. "I-I want you to call me that. And nothing else. Forever."

"Yeah?"

"Yeah."

Jude moved closer again, slipping a hand up and under the hem of the pink, frilly dress.

"Anything for you, Lady Godiva."

She smiled.

...

It had been a month since he'd last seen her.

A month since they stumbled home in the dark after a show. A month since they'd fought in the alley outside of her house. A month since he'd let her blindly walk through the kitchen door, defenseless and alone.

"I want to tell them." She'd whispered against his neck. "I'm sick of it. Of only being myself around you. I want them to know they have a daughter."

"Then you'd be killing their son."

He shouldn't have said it. He wanted to take it back the moment it left his lips.

"Is that what you think?" Her eyes were blue and tearful.

"No," He stumbled. "No, I swear it's not what...It's what *they'll* think." He pleaded.

"They won't understand."

"You never know--"

"I do know." He said it sternly, meaner than he'd meant it. "They'll never understand."

"But I have to try."

So, he let her try.

Jude had heard that they'd taken her to a doctor the next day. Convinced her that who she was wasn't real. It was a malfunctioning of the brain, they'd said. Imbalance of hormones.

Something they could fix.

He tried to visit her, waiting by the bus stop or driving past her house, but anytime he got close enough he was shooed away.

Until tonight.

Jude had been waiting for a sign for hours. A shifted curtain or a faint light in the window, but there was nothing.

Growing desperate at about two in the morning, he picked up a small stone and hurled it at the window. It bounced off the glass with a sharp *crack*.

He waited.

After a second, he picked up another rock and threw it.

Another *crack*.

As he bent down to pick up a third rock, the curtain moved.

He could just see the edge of her head. Bandaged, and bruised.

He threw the stone again.

The window opened.

He looked up.

"Godiva?" He called.

She leaned over the windowsill and promptly threw up.