

# THE QUARRY

## Nude Lipstick By Q.A.C

**Jodie Ramodien**

A golden-haired man with glossy wings stared sexily into the distance holding a designer bag. His picture, plastered to the wall of the station, loomed majestically over the morning commuters. Rarely, if ever, would you spot an Avian catching the train. Their presence was made known through the flashy slogans and airbrushed posters covering the carriage ceilings and walls. The man modelling was backlit by a glowing horizon, breathlessly gazing at some unknown wondrous point in the distance. Had he looked forward he would have seen a small figure, about the size of his diamond encrusted ring, gritting her teeth against the morning chill.

Sylvie stepped onto the 6:45am train with the rest of the rabble. A rotund man squeezed into the seat beside her. He displayed no signs of animality save for the two impressive horns that protruded from his forehead and curled back behind him in a semicircular arc. In her experience Bovines tended to be a loud, troublesome group, who personified the male ego. Put two male Bovines into a room together and they were bound to butt heads.

It wasn't their fault though. Animality wasn't a choice. A fact she knew better than most. Overnight one might develop feathers, antennae, or hooves. Usually it was in adulthood that one's trait emerged. Most thought Sylvie hadn't got hers, but that wasn't quite true. To her mother the arrival of her animality had been akin to a death in the family. It was treated with somber acceptance and a healthy amount of self denial. Naturally it ended up being her father's fault.

'I should have known this would happen, your brother's a rat. This is your doing, you've dirtied the genetic line!' her mother had started.

'He's my brother-in-law, besides there's nothing to suggest that these things are genetic, and it's "Rodentia" hon.'

'This isn't the time for political-correctness Henry, did you see that thing on her ass, she's a rat!'

Sylvie readjusted her loose pants with a furtive movement at the memory. Rodentia were a plague on the suburban bliss of her childhood community. Other poorer areas might have been infested by those with Rodentia but she'd been raised with private tutors, yearly ski trips, and branded fashion. There were no rats where she lived.

The buildings grew taller as she crossed the bridge and entered the city. Sitting by the window, one could observe the peak hour air traffic. Men and women in black blazers and sensible shoes beat their wings and soared to work on gusts of wind. Sylvie spotted one of the Swanae, those who had glorious white wings like the heavenly Gabriel of old scripture. The big boss of her company, Gavin, was one of these iridescent beings.

Leaving the train, and arriving at the skyscraper where she worked, she took the elevator to the top floor. The office floor offered a three-sixty view of the cityscape, giving its occupants a bird's-eye view. A series of giggles was emanating from the production space, where they shot commercials for some of the largest international makeup brands. A herd of long-legged Gloria's Secret models were traipsing about in lingerie, each wearing a different shade of lipstick, and flaunting a pair of shimmery wings. Since not all the models originally had wings, they'd had to synthetically manufacture some for the purpose of the shoot. Turning away Sylvie plopped down at her desk next to Pearl, one of the design assistants like herself. She opened up Adobe Photoshop, and InDesign, and flicked through the current marketing campaign they were creating for the new lipstick range at Q.A.C.

At the early morning hour Pearl had given up the pretense of work and was flicking through a dating app called RAWR on her phone. Leaning over, Sylvie read the current profile Pearl was scrutinising. The caption read: ‘Sampson, twenty-two, Ursine, gives bear hugs and mates for life.’

Noticing Sylvie’s attention Pearl commented, ‘He’s cute enough but mirror selfies are a red flag,’ she swiped him.

Another guy appeared but it took Pearl only a split-second to decide he was also a no.

‘What was wrong with him?’ Sylvie asked.

‘Rodentia,’ Pearl supplied, as though this was explanation enough.

Returning to her own monitor, Sylvie browsed through the morning list of emails. One in particular caught her eye, its subject line read: ‘What if your animality was a choice?’ Opening up the email she skimmed through: John Cannon, CEO of Cannon Cosmetics, wished to partner with her company, and was offering a ‘mutually beneficial partnership’ and free access to their services for ‘a limited time only.’

She immediately googled the man’s name and found a glowing list of testimonials on his website. He was CEO, cosmetician, and plastic surgeon all in one. The man himself was stunning. Yet none of the images gave any hint of his own animality. She dismissed it, some things were too good to be true.

‘Ladies! How are we today?’ Sylvie and Pearl both gave a start, and Sylvie swiveled to face their boss Gavin as Pearl slipped her phone into her pocket.

Not bothering to stop for an answer, Gavin continued, ‘we’ve got a bit of a crisis with Chantelle, one of the models, she hasn’t showed up! Sylvie could you step in again?’

She nodded, she handled a lot of the photo editing and usually had to remove the ‘unsavoury traits,’ as Gavin put it, of models in post-production. Sylvie had no visible animality making it easy to edit herself.

In preparation for the shoot a makeup artist dabbed, poked, and prodded her face before yelling to one of the assistants, ‘get me some falsies!’

A gorgeous pair of golden prosthetic wings were placed on her back. She looked in the mirror and her reflection shocked her. She had transformed from the extra in a movie into the

star of the show. The wings seemingly gave new purpose and potential to her life. They spoke of success, beauty, and excitement.

After the shoot had concluded she looked up John Camnon's number and gave him a call.

Dr John Camnon, for as he'd informed her, he was a doctor, gestured for her to lie face down on an operating table. As requested, she was wearing a papery hospital gown which was tied in a flimsy bow at the back. The sterile white walls gave her no distraction from her thoughts.

Sylvie's thick flesh-toned tail flicked back and forth, dislodging the gown slightly. Her cheeks burned as she felt the doctor's gaze land on her tail.

'Can you fix me?'

With a critical look in his eye he gave a quick nod.

'Will it hurt?'

He buckled her wrists and feet into some padded restraints.

'I'll put you to sleep before we start, these,' he gestured to her locked limbs, 'are just to ensure you don't move during the process.'

'How many times have you done this before?'

Dr. Camnon picked up his clipboard and pen and started to write something down, 'many times,' he said in answer to her.

She twisted as far as she could in order to see what he wrote. In the place of the name slot he had written 'Rodentia #162.'

'I specialise in facial reconstruction, if my attempts at shifting ones animality succeed it will be a monumental step forward in the field of animal research.'

'If you succeed? This is experimental?' her voice rose in pitch, the reality of the event beginning to dawn on her. She tested her restraints, the shackles held firm.

He gave a moment's pause.

‘The scientific progress I could achieve by doing this is immense, do you still wish to go through with this?’

Sylvie could physically feel the pulse of terror in her neck. Closing her eyes, she envisioned the life that lay ahead. No man could love her like this, she’d end up living in a share house no doubt, splitting the rent with a dozen other deadbeats. As one of the Rodentia, rising high enough in the ranks to earn a decent wage was unheard off. Hiding her tail would also inevitably become suspicious.

Her gaze levelled on the doctor.

‘Do it.’

He picked up a syringe and walked toward her. With a sharp pinch he thrust it into her neck and she drifted into unconsciousness.

The world dipped and swirled around Sylvie as she blinked about the lab. What looked like a madman’s collection of torture devices lay atop a metal trolley: Scalpel, drill, chisel. Her eyes locked on a butcher’s knife covered in blood and jerking her face to side she expelled the contents of her stomach onto the tiled floor.

My tail, she thought in a moment of clarity as the sleepiness of the drugs began to subside. Arching her back she twisted around to look at her backside. She jolted as she noticed the two white wings sewn onto her shoulder blades. They could be seen but not felt, had she not looked she wouldn’t have known they were there. Lower down bandages covered the wound where her tail had been. Lightly she prodded the area. Nothing. It was a feeling akin to when she had her wisdom teeth removed, everything in that region was numb.

‘Checking out your new appendage I see.’

Dr. Cannon entered the room and gave her a once over.

‘How are we feeling then?’

Sylvie’s tongue lay limp and heavy in her mouth, she couldn’t think of how to answer.

‘It’s a bit of a shock,’ the doctor conceded, ‘do you feel ready to stand?’

She nodded.

He walked her over to a full length mirror at the end of the room. The woman in the mirror wasn’t her. Not as she’d known herself. The wings he’d given her were like Gavin’s. Two fluffy white shards from heaven. They gave a slight twitch when she tried to fan them out.

‘It will take a few days before they have full functionality, your body needs time to adjust.’

‘And when it does, I’ll be able to fly?’

‘Like a bird,’ he chuckled, gesturing for her to follow him.

They walked down a corridor where the doctor opened up a thick metal door. Inside a massive room stretched out before them. The wispy fabric of her hospital gown was useless against the cold that hit her as she entered the room. It had to be at least below freezing. Like a hunter with his trophies, the doctor had scores of removed animal traits filling the room. Horns of all shapes and sizes lined the walls, wings of every kind were stretched out and on display in glass cases, and on a rack holder in the corner lay her discarded tail. The speckled appendage sat atop a mountain of other rat tails which were overflowing on the rack.

‘So many have come to you,’ she murmured, so many had been ashamed, disgusted with themselves, as she was.

‘Why did you keep the tails?’ she asked.

‘Trends,’ he replied, ‘it’s unlikely I know, Rodentia have never been “in,” so to speak. Yet you never know, to a Reptilian or Amphibious the allure of Mammalia, even if it is Rodentia, could appeal. Who knows what the next decade of hipsters will latch on to?’ he snorted softly.

‘And the wings? Which Avian would give up their wings?’

The doctor didn’t reply immediately. When he did answer he spoke slowly and carefully.

‘Difficulty with Avians is that most are too well-off to bother with what I can offer. A few are desperate and do it for a hefty price. I find ways. Speaking of prices let’s head to my

office. Money's not needed from you, of course, a pairing between our companies will bring that in anyway.'

She nodded in agreement, with an even greater outreach he'd make a fortune.

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Sylvie called in sick for the next week to fully heal. By the weekend she could move and fan wings and had barely been able to drag herself away from the mirror. Briefly she managed to on Sunday as she splurged on an Uber that took her into the city to a high-end shopping district. There was no need to worry about anyone recognising her and spoiling the surprise as she'd never been there before. As she walked down the street, she noticed a change in the demographic. Unlike other parts of the city which were more diverse, only Avians shopped here. She shopped here now, she thought with a flutter of her heart. Sylvie started from the ground up, buying overpriced lingerie and later moving to outerwear with a gorgeous trench coat, slitted of course, to make room for her wings. On the ride home, she rubbed the red marks on her arms, made from the mass of perfumed shopping bags she'd accumulated. Her bank account had taken a blow it couldn't realistically afford today. Something that seemed inconsequential as the prospect of a promotion loomed on the horizon.

As the elevator doors dinged open on Monday morning, she heard the office give a collective gasp of shock. Gavin, slack jawed, barely managed to string a sentence together. When he found his words, they were, 'you've joined the flock I see.' She was officially one of them. He went on to invite her to lunch, which she accepted. In a seamless formation each of her coworkers jumped off the skyscraper and into the air. She followed suit, the wind in her wings was glorious right up until the moment she realised she didn't know how to fly.