


HALF SISTERS

by
Emory
Ahlberg

Episode #2

Barely There Swimwear



I STOOD NEAR THE COFFEE SHOP, WAITING FOR NICHOLAS. HE WAS ALREADY TWENTY MINUTES LATE, AND I WAS GETTING ANNOYED.


STANDING ON A STREET CORNER LOOKING LIKE A *HOT GIRL* WAS NOT MY IDEA OF FUN. ALREADY, I'D GOTTEN A TRUCKLOAD OF LEERING GLANCES FROM MEN, WHICH BOTH PISSED ME OFF AND SCARED ME. ONE OLD COWBOY EVEN TRIED TO START A CONVERSATION. I POLITELY TOLD HIM I WAS WAITING FOR SOMEONE, BUT HE WOULDN'T GO AWAY, SO I LESS POLITELY TOLD HIM TO FUCK OFF. THAT WORKED, BUT NOT BEFORE HE CALLED ME A STUCK-UP *BITCH* AND A FEW OTHER CHOICE NAMES.



FINALLY, I SPOTTED HIM JAYWALKING ACROSS THE STREET. EVEN IN HIS PREDICAMENT, HE STILL ACTED LIKE HE OWNED THE WORLD. UGH. JOCKS.

I WAS SURPRISED TO GET A TEXT FROM NICHOLAS, ASKING IF WE COULD "CHAT." WHEN WE FIRST MET AT THE RESTAURANT, I'D SPILLED MY GUTS TO HIM. I TOLD ALL ABOUT MRS. FERRIS, MORTIMER, JOSH, THE TERRIBLE YEARS AS A MAID BEING SLOWLY CHANGED INTO A GIRL -- EVERYTHING! HIS RESPONSE? "THE GAY STUFF WEIRDS ME OUT." I MEAN, WHAT THE HELL? AND I WAS ALREADY HAVING A BAD FUCKING DAY, WHAT WITH WAKING UP WITH BREAST IMPLANTS AND NO TESTICLES!

SURE, I COULD TELL NICHOLAS WAS **SCARED**, BUT HE WAS ALSO RUDE, ARROGANT, AND EGOTISTICAL.



HE WAS THE KIND OF GUY WHO MADE MY HIGH SCHOOL YEARS AN ABSOLUTE **NIGHTMARE** AND WHY I NEVER EVEN CONSIDERED COLLEGE. I'M NOT SAYING HE DESERVED WHAT WAS HAPPENING TO HIM, BUT, WELL, MAYBE HE NEEDED TO BE KNOCKED DOWN A COUPLE PEGS.

"HEY," I SAID WITH A WAVE. "OVER HERE."



HE BARELY LOOKED AT ME. INSTEAD, HIS EYES SCANNED THE STREET. WAS HE WORRIED ABOUT SOMEONE RECOGNIZING HIM? IF SO, HE NEEDED TO TAKE ANOTHER HARD LOOK IN THE MIRROR. NOBODY WOULD EVER BELIEVE THIS SLENDER YOUNG *COED* ONCE WAS ONCE THE TOWN'S STAR QUARTERBACK.



NICHOLAS WALKED UP AND SHOOK MY HAND. THE GRIP WAS MORE THAN A LITTLE FIRM. "HEY."

HIS GIRL VOICE WAS A LITTLE HUSKY BUT FEMININE ENOUGH TO PASS. MOSTLY, I WAS STILL WORKING ON MINE, BUT NOBODY SEEMED TO CARE HOW I SOUNDED. HELL, WITH THESE FAKE BOOBS STUCK ON MY CHEST, I DOUBT THEY LISTENED TO A WORD I SAID.

"HI, NICHOLAS," I SAID, TRYING TO SOUND FRIENDLY. "NICE TO SEE YOU AGAIN."

"NIKKI," HE CORRECTED. "YOU CAN CALL ME NIKKI. AND I'LL CALL YOU SOFIA. OKAY?"

"UH, SURE. I JUST FIGURED SINCE IT'S JUST THE TWO OF US..."

"NOPE," HE SAID, CUTTING ME OFF. "IT'S NIKKI. EVERY TIME."

"OKAY," I SAID. "YOU GOT IT. NIKKI."

HIS GAZE WENT TO MY CHEST AND LINGERED. WAS HE CHECKING ME OUT? I MEAN, YEAH, TITS ARE NICE, BUT WE BOTH KNEW WHAT WE REALLY WERE.

"WHAT'S WITH THE DISPLAY?" HE SAID AT LAST. "THE *CLEAVAGE*, I MEAN."

I WINCED. "NOT MY IDEA."

"YOUR 'MOTHER' MAKES YOU DRESS LIKE A SLUT?"

I FROWNEED AND CROSSED MY ARMS. "SHE THINKS SKIMPY CLOTHES, SHOWING OFF MY CHEST, AND THAT SORT OF THING WILL MAKE ME FEEL MORE FEMININE."

NICHOLAS SNORTED. "IS IT WORKING?"





I SHRUGGED, BUT IN FACT, I WAS COMING TO REALIZE THE GENIUS OF MRS. FERRIS' APPROACH. BECAUSE IT TURNS OUT, A BIG PART OF FEELING "FEMININE" WAS FEELING VULNERABLE. ONCE THE WORLD LABELED YOU A *GIRL*, IT WAS LIKE STEPPING INTO AN ALTERNATE *REALITY*. MEN HAD THE FREEDOM TO OGLE YOU, CAT-CALL YOU, AND EVEN TOUCH YOU. AND 'OTHER' WOMEN TREATED YOU LIKE ONE OF THEIR OWN.

AND THAT WAS THE PROBLEM: BECAUSE I WAS STILL ME. STILL *SCOTT*. SURE, MY TIME WITH JOSH HAD BEEN A CRASH COURSE IN FEMININITY, BUT I STILL FELT LIKE A GUY. ONLY NOW, I WAS A GUY WITH TITS AND NO NUTS.

"LET'S, UH, GO GET THAT COFFEE," I SAID. "OKAY?"



AS MIGHT BE EXPECTED, NICHOLAS COMPLAINED ABOUT THE 'FOREIGN' NAMES FOR THE DRINKS. "WHAT THE HELL IS *MOCHA*, ANYWAY?"

"CHOCOLATE," I TOLD HIM.

"OH. I'LL HAVE ONE," HE SAID TO THE GIRL BEHIND THE COUNTER. "WITH WHIP CREAM."


"HEY," SAID THE GIRL. "I KNOW YOU?"

"NO WAY," NICHOLAS QUICKLY REPLIED, THEN WALKED AWAY WITHOUT WAITING FOR HIS DRINK. THE GIRL DIDN'T SEE, BUT HE LOOKED *TERRIFIED*.

WE SAT DOWN AT A TABLE NEAR THE FRONT. I WAS UNCOMFORTABLE WITH SO MANY PEOPLE LISTENING TO OUR CONVERSATION. "SO..." I SAID. "HOW'S...THINGS?"

"NOT GREAT," NICHOLAS REPLIED. "BUT I'M GETTING BY. MOSTLY. IT'S MY MOM I'M WORRIED ABOUT."

"OH?"



NICHOLAS SEEMED TO CATCH HIMSELF AND SHOOK HIS HEAD. "FORGET ABOUT IT. THAT'S NOT WHY I WANTED TO SEE YOU. I, UH, MIGHT HAVE BEEN KIND OF A DICK TO YOU WHEN WE MET THE OTHER WEEK. THE TRUTH IS, I COULD USE SOMEONE TO TALK TO WHO'S GOING THROUGH THE SAME BULLSHIT. LIKE, WE COULD SWAP TIPS ON HOW TO FOOL PEOPLE INTO THINKING WE'RE REAL GIRLS. BECAUSE IF WE GET FOUND OUT, THAT SHIT WON'T BE PRETTY. I KNOW YOU'RE NOT FROM HERE, BUT **TEXAS** AIN'T EXACTLY TRANNY FRIENDLY. HAVE YOU, UH, GOTTEN '**CLOCKED**' YET?"

"WHAT?"

"CLOCKED. FOUND OUT. LIKE, WHEN SOMEONE FIGURES OUT YOU AIN'T REALLY A GIRL."

"OH. UH. NO. BUT ALMOST. THAT WAS SCARY."

NICHOLAS LEANED FORWARD. HIS INTEREST WAS OBVIOUSLY PIQUED. "YEAH? TELL ME ABOUT IT."

"WELL, MRS. FERRIS HAD THIS DUMB IDEA THAT WE SHOULD GO TO THIS POOL SHE USED TO LOVE AS A GIRL..."

"OBVIOUSLY, I WASN'T EXCITED BY THE IDEA. FIRST, I WASN'T SURE IF I WAS GOING ALONG WITH THE WHOLE 'BECOME MY DAUGHTER AND YOU'LL INHERIT ALL MY MONEY' ANGLE. I STILL HAD HALF A MIND TO CALL JOSH AND ASK HIM TO COME PICK ME UP, AND I KNOW HE WOULD."

"WOW," SAID NICHOLAS. "STARTING TO THINK LIKE A CHICK ALREADY, HUH? JUST GONNA CALL A MAN TO RESCUE YOU."

"HEY, I THOUGHT YOU WERE SORRY FOR BEING A DICK BEFORE?"

"RIGHT, RIGHT..."


"NOW," I CONTINUED. "DON'T GET ME WRONG, I'VE ALWAYS BEEN A FAN OF MONEY. BUT THE IDEA OF HAVING TO CROSS-DRESS FOR THE REST OF MY LIFE, OR AT LEAST UNTIL MRS. FERRIS DIES, IS PRETTY SHITTY."

"AND SECOND?" ASKED NICHOLAS.

"SECOND IS THAT I HAD TO GET A BATHING SUIT! AND I WASN'T MUCH TOO KEEN ON SHOWING OFF THESE TITS TO THE WHOLE TOWN. BUT MRS. FERRIS WAS INSISTENT, AND THAT OLD LADY CAN BE DAMN PERSUASIVE -- THAT'S HOW I ENDED UP IN THIS MESS -- SO I AGREED TO AT LEAST GO SHOPPING WITH HER. SHE SEEMED SO DELIGHTED. AND THAT'S WHERE THE TROUBLE STARTED."



"PICK OUT ANYTHING YOU WANT," MRS. FERRIS SAID. "I CAN'T WAIT TO SEE YOUR FASHION SENSE. DON'T WORRY, MY DEAR, I'M NOT EXPECTING TOO MUCH OF YOU AT THIS STAGE. AND I'LL MAKE SURE YOU DON'T LOOK LIKE A HAG. WE WANT TO IMPRESS EVERYONE WITH YOUR *DEBUT!*"



HALF-DRESSED, I GAZED AT MY REFLECTION IN THE MIRROR AND TRIED TO FIGURE OUT HOW IN THE HELL THING HAD GONE SO WRONG. MY BODY WASN'T REMOTELY MALE. RECENTLY, MRS. FERRIS EVEN MADE ME WAX MY GROIN.

"ALL THAT HAIR IS TERRIBLY UNTIDY AND FAR TOO *MASCULINE*," SHE'D CHIDED. "GET RID OF IT IMMEDIATELY."

I OBEYED. WHY? BECAUSE, WELL, I HAVE MY EYE ON THE PRIZE.

BUT, STANDING THERE, I COULDN'T HELP BUT THINK OF MYSELF AS A FREAK. SURE, I HAD THE CHANCE TO BE A *RICH* FREAK IF I PLAYED MY CARDS RIGHT, BUT HOW MUCH IS YOUR IDENTITY ACTUALLY WORTH?



SHE HATED THE FIRST SUIT I PICKED OUT. I WAS JUST TRYING TO BE MODEST! DID SHE WANT ME TO LOOK LIKE A SKANK? I WAS SUPPOSED TO BE HER DAUGHTER! BUT, THE MORE I ARGUED, THE MORE UNREASONABLE SHE BECAME.

"TRY AGAIN," MRS. FERRIS SAID. "WEAR WHAT YOU WOULD IF YOU WEREN'T ASHAMED OF YOUR BODY! YOU'RE NOT AN OLD LADY LIKE ME."



FOR THE SECOND SUIT, I HONESTLY DID TRY. SURE, I CHOSE A ONE-PIECE, BUT WHAT DID SHE EXPECT? I WAS A GUY, AFTER ALL, AND STILL DAMNED ASHAMED AT WHAT SHE'D DONE TO MY BODY.

"NO," SHE SAID. "YOU HAVE A FIGURE, SO SHOW IT OFF."

"SHOW IT OFF?" I SAID. "MRS. FERRIS--"

"HOW MANY TIMES DO I HAVE TO TELL YOU? IT'S 'MOM' OR 'MOTHER!' GET IT RIGHT, PLEASE."

I ROLLED MY EYES. "I DON'T UNDERSTAND. MOST MOTHERS WANT THEIR DAUGHTERS TO BE MODEST."

"YES, WELL, I'M NOT MOST MOTHERS. AND YOU'RE NOT MOST **DAUGHTERS!** I PAID FOR THAT BODY, AND I WANT EVERYONE TO SEE HOW GORGEOUS MY SOFIA IS!"



WELL, THAT DIDN'T SIT RIGHT WITH ME AT ALL. SO I LOOKED HER SQUARE IN THE FACE AND SAID, "I'M NOT A DOLL FOR YOU TO DRESS UP. I'M A PERSON."

SHE LOOKED BACK AT ME, AND THERE WAS A STRANGE GLINT IN HER EYES. "SOFIA, I'M TRYING TO HELP YOU. I WON'T LET YOU MAKE THE SAME MISTAKES AS BEFORE. BEING A *WALLFLOWER* IS NO WAY TO LIVE. YOU NEED TO BE ASSERTIVE, ASSERTIVE, ASSERTIVE! THAT'S HOW YOU CATCH THE GOOD ONES. YOU CAN'T BE LOW-HANGING FRUIT. THAT'S HOW YOU GET GOBBLED UP BY WOLVES."

I DIDN'T UNDERSTAND. ALL I KNEW WAS SHE WAS BEING A BITCH. AND THAT'S WHEN I SAID SOMETHING I'D REGRET: "IF YOU WERE THIS CONTROLLING BEFORE, IT'S NO WONDER THE REAL SOFIA *KILLED* HERSELF."

MRS. FERRIS'S FACE TWISTED INTO A VICIOUS MASK. "HOW DARE YOU! SOFIA DIDN'T--" THEN SHE STOPPED AND SHOOK HER HEAD. "WAIT HERE."

SHE RETURNED A SHORT WHILE LATER WITH THE SKIMPIEST BIKINI I'D EVER SEEN IN MY LIFE. "YOU'RE WEARING THIS...SCOTT."

THAT TOOK ME BACK. MRS. FERRIS HADN'T CALLED ME BY MY REAL NAME IN OVER A MONTH. "I WON'T," I SAID SIMPLY. "YOU CAN'T MAKE ME."

"NO, BUT I'VE ALREADY THROWN AWAY THE CLOTHES YOU WALKED IN WITH. SO, IT'S EITHER THIS, OR YOU'LL HAVE TO GO TO THE POOL NAKED. YOUR CHOICE."

I WAS HORRIFIED, AND I JUST STARED AT HER. SHE RETURNED MY GAZE COLDLY. "I'M WAITING."

"MOM," I SAID. "PLEASE..."

SHE SHOOK HER HEAD. "NO. YOU'VE LOST THAT PRIVILEGE FOR NOW. I'M NOT YOUR MOTHER, AND YOU'RE NOT MY DAUGHTER. YOU'RE A MUTILATED, FEMINIZED **CRIMINAL** WHO DESERVES NEITHER MY RESPECT NOR MY PITY. AFTER THE COMMENT YOU MADE, YOU'LL HAVE TO DO A LOT MORE BEFORE I LET YOU BE MY SOFIA AGAIN."

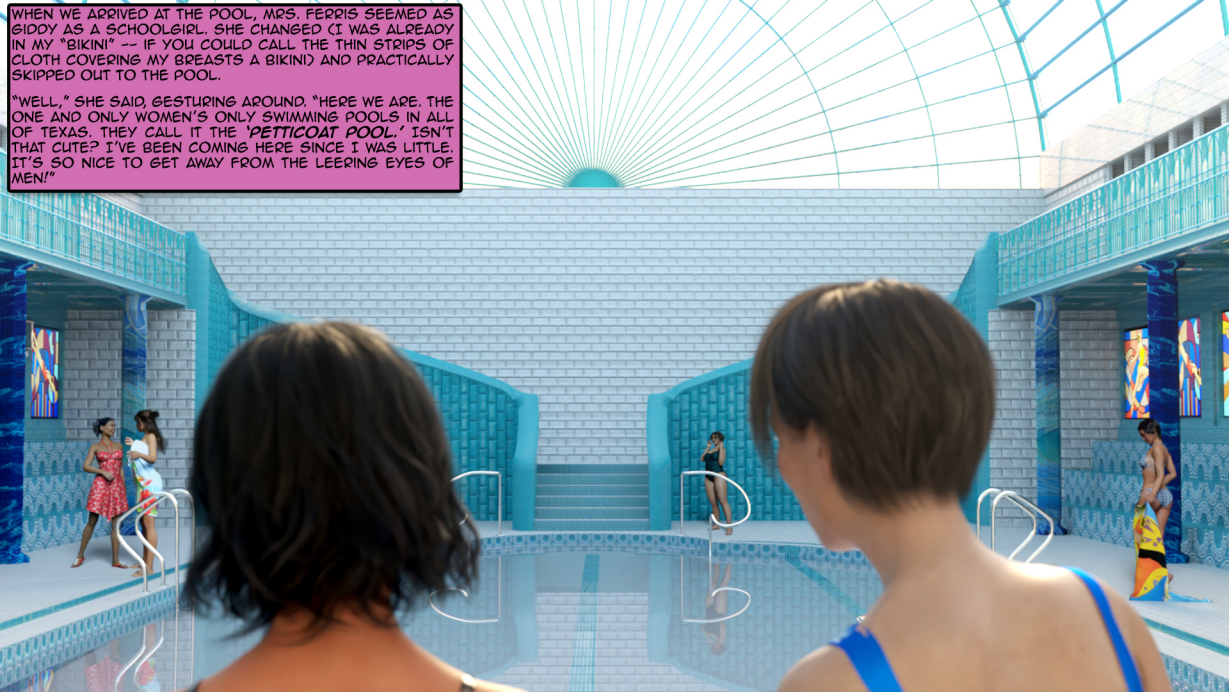
"WHAT THE FUCK KIND OF CRAZY BULLSHIT IS THIS?" I SNAPPED.

SHE GAVE ME A WRY SMILE. "YOU HAVE NO IDEA, SCOTT. NOW, WILL YOU BE WEARING THE BIKINI OR NOTHING?"



WHEN WE ARRIVED AT THE POOL, MRS. FERRIS SEEMED AS GIDDY AS A SCHOOLGIRL. SHE CHANGED (I WAS ALREADY IN MY "BIKINI" -- IF YOU COULD CALL THE THIN STRIPS OF CLOTH COVERING MY BREASTS A BIKINI) AND PRACTICALLY SKIPPED OUT TO THE POOL.

"WELL," SHE SAID, GESTURING AROUND. "HERE WE ARE. THE ONE AND ONLY WOMEN'S ONLY SWIMMING POOLS IN ALL OF TEXAS. THEY CALL IT THE '*PETTICOAT POOL*.' ISN'T THAT CUTE? I'VE BEEN COMING HERE SINCE I WAS LITTLE. IT'S SO NICE TO GET AWAY FROM THE LEERING EYES OF MEN!"





SHE LOOKED OVER AT ME AND GRINNED WICKEDLY. "OH, DON'T LOOK SO ANXIOUS, SCOTT. WITH YOUR LITTLE WEASEL ALL TUCKED AWAY IN YOUR BIKINI, NO ONE WILL SUSPECT YOU'RE A MAN. WHICH IS ALL WELL AND GOOD BECAUSE, LET'S FACE FACTS, WITHOUT YOUR PRECIOUS **TESTICLES**, YOU BELONG IN HERE WITH US, NOT OUT THERE WITH THE FELLAS!"

SHE LAUGHED AT HER OWN JOKE, AND I FELT SICK.

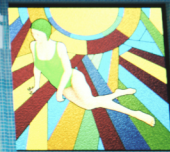
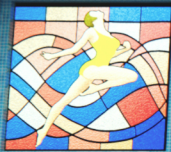
"NOW," MRS. FERRIS SAID. "LET ME INTRODUCE YOU TO THE GIRLS, LADIES! I'M BACK FROM MY TRIP. AND DON'T YOU KNOW WHO I BROUGHT BACK WITH ME? COME ON OVER AND SAY HELLO."



MRS. FERRIS WAS ALL SMILES AND SUNSHINE AS SHE INTRODUCED ME TO HER FRIENDS.

THIS IS MY FRIEND SOFIA. YES, THAT'S RIGHT, SPELLED JUST LIKE *MY* SOFIA. WELL, FOR NOW, SHE'S JUST A FRIEND, BUT I'M THINKING OF *ADOPTING* HER! ISN'T THAT MARVELOUS!

MY EARS PERKED UP **ADOPTION?** DID SHE REALLY MEAN SHE WANTED TO LEGALLY ADOPT ME? AS IN, RENOUNCE MY REAL PARENTS (DEAD THOUGH THEY MAY BE), CHANGE MY NAME, AND GIVE ME A NEW BIRTH CERTIFICATE? MY MIND RACED. I DON'T KNOW IF I COULD DO THAT. IT'S ONE THING TO PLAY ALONG WITH THIS CHARADE, BUT TO ACTUALLY GIVE UP MY OLD LIFE FOR GOOD?



WHY? WELL, FRANKLY, I NEED AN HEIR! I KNOW, I KNOW, I'M STILL RELATIVELY YOUNG, BUT YOU NEVER KNOW. AND I CERTAINLY DON'T WANT TO LEAVE MY MONEY TO THAT SON-OF-A-BITCH BROTHER-IN-LAW OF MINE. ANYWAY, SOFIA'S OVER EIGHTEEN, OF COURSE, SO SHE'S... WHAT'S THE RIGHT WORD...AH, YES, AUDITIONING FOR THE PART OF MY FUTURE DAUGHTER. WHAT DO YOU THINK? I THINK SHE'S A PERFECT LITTLE DOLL. DON'T YOU? ANYWAY, I WANTED TO BRING HER HERE TO OUR POOL -- ONE OF MY FAVORITE **WOMEN-ONLY SPACES** -- AND INTRODUCE HER TO ALL THE AMAZING TEXAS WOMEN HERE IN TOWN!



THE WOMEN SMILED, BUT BEHIND THEIR EYES, I COULD SEE THEY WERE THINKING: "SHE'S THINKING OF MAKING THIS *SLUT* HER HEIR?"

BLOOD RUSHED TO MY FACE. I WANTED TO RUN. I WANTED TO CRY OUT: "I'M A GUY! I DON'T REALLY WANT TO BE A GIRL!"

AND THEN, I FELT SOMEBODY STARING AT ME. WELL, MORE SPECIFICALLY, STARING AT MY ASS.




I WHIRLED, EXPECTING TO CATCH SOME
LECHEROUS OLD LESBIAN GAWKING...



...BUT IT WAS A BEAUTIFUL RED-HAIRED GIRL, MAYBE NINETEEN OR TWENTY YEARS OLD. SHE HAD THIS SORT OF DREAMY, APPRECIATIVE LOOK ON HER FACE. I'M EMBARRASSED TO ADMIT IT TOOK ME TOO LONG TO FIGURE OUT SHE WAS CHECKING ME OUT!

SUDDENLY, WHEN SHE REALIZED I WAS STARING BACK AT HER, SHE SNAPPED OUT OF IT, TURNED RED...





...TOOK A DEEP BREATH, AND DISAPPEARED UNDERWATER.

UNFORTUNATELY, I DIDN'T HAVE TOO MUCH TIME TO THINK ABOUT THE GIRL, BECAUSE SUDDENLY MRS. FERRIS GRABBED MY TIT.

REAL? NO, SADLY, THESE AREN'T REAL. SOFIA'S BEAUTIFUL, AS YOU CAN SEE, BUT SHE WAS ALMOST AS FLAT AS A BOY BEFORE I GOT A HOLD OF HER. SHE PRACTICALLY **BEGGED** ME TO GET HER BREASTS DONE. HOW COULD I SAY NO? AND I DO THINK THEY CAME OUT QUITE NICELY. JUST LOOK AT THEM. SHE'LL HAVE TO BEAT THE BOYS OFF WITH A STICK.





DECIDING I HAD TO GET AS FAR FROM MRS. FERRIS AND HER GAGGLE OF OLD BIDDIES AS POSSIBLE, I MUMBLED AN EXCUSE AND TURNED AWAY. NONE OF THEM WERE WET (THEY CAME TO GOSSIP, NOT SWIM, I GUESS), SO THE POOL SEEMED SAFE.

I COULD'VE JUST JUMPED IN, BUT FOR SOME DUMB REASON, I DECIDED TO CLIMB THE HIGH DIVE.



I MEAN, I'VE ALWAYS BEEN A BIT OF A DARE-DEVIL. THAT'S PARTLY WHY I STARTED BURGLARIZING BIG HOUSES IN THE FIRST PLACE: THE SENSE OF DANGER.

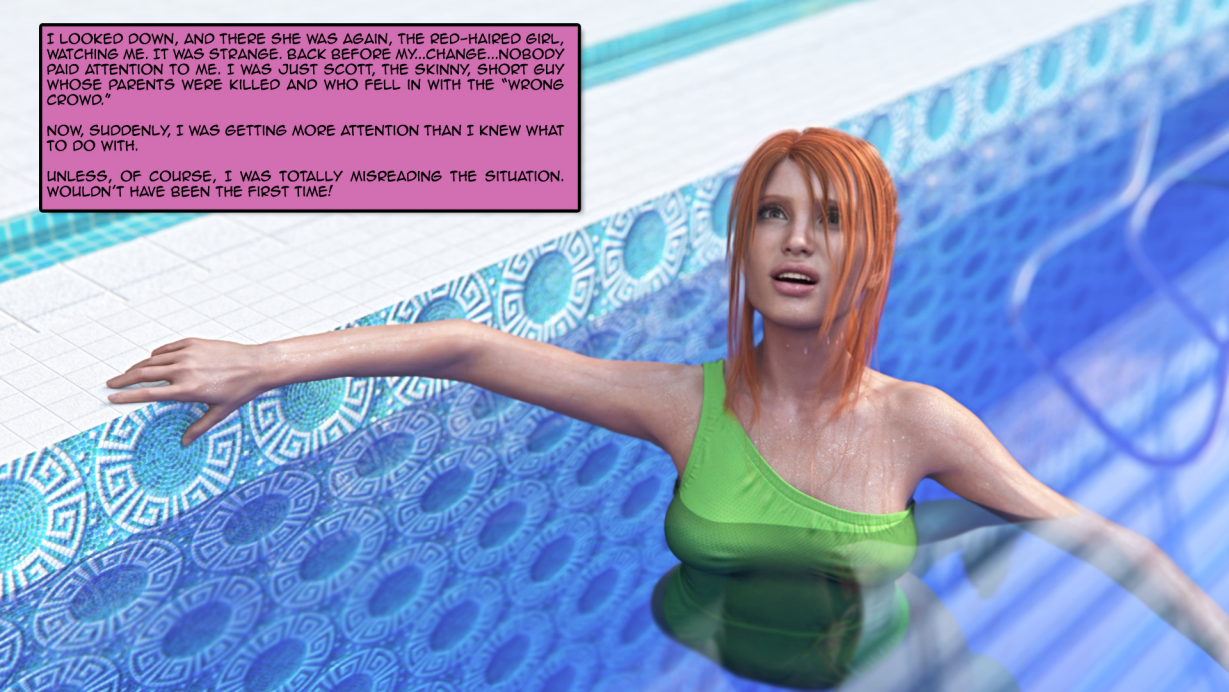
BUT I'D NEVER BROKEN INTO A HOUSE WEARING THE SMALLEST BIKINI ON EARTH.



I LOOKED DOWN, AND THERE SHE WAS AGAIN, THE RED-HAIRED GIRL, WATCHING ME. IT WAS STRANGE. BACK BEFORE MY...CHANGE...NOBODY PAID ATTENTION TO ME. I WAS JUST SCOTT, THE SKINNY, SHORT GUY WHOSE PARENTS WERE KILLED AND WHO FELL IN WITH THE "WRONG CROWD."

NOW, SUDDENLY, I WAS GETTING MORE ATTENTION THAN I KNEW WHAT TO DO WITH.

UNLESS, OF COURSE, I WAS TOTALLY MISREADING THE SITUATION. WOULDN'T HAVE BEEN THE FIRST TIME!



TOO BAD ANY CHANCE OF IMPRESSING HER FLEW OUT THE WINDOW WHEN I JUMPED. MY CENTER OF GRAVITY IS SO ENTIRELY DIFFERENT FROM WHAT IT USED TO BE, NOT TO MENTION THE DISTRACTING WAY MY BOOBS BOUNCED AS I LEAPED INTO THE AIR THAT I COULDN'T CONTROL MY FALL.



I BELLYFLOPPED, MAKING AN ENORMOUS SPLASH. MY STOMACH AND BOOBS STUNG LIKE HELL, AND WHEN I BROKE THE SURFACE, SPUTTERING, THE RED-HAIRED GIRL WAS LAUGHING. SHE SWAM OVER.



SHE WAS GORGEOUS, AND I WAS TERRIFIED. I'D BEEN WORKING ON MY "GIRL VOICE" (MRS. FERRIS INSISTED), BUT I WASN'T SURE IF IT WOULD FOOL ANYONE. I DECIDED TO KEEP MY RESPONSES AS SHORT AS POSSIBLE.

HEY, UM... NOT TO BE WEIRD... BUT...

YEAH?





YOU'VE POPPED OUT.

OH MY GOD!



THAT MY BOOBS WERE EXPOSED WAS EMBARRASSING, BUT THAT WASN'T WHY I YELLED.

I YELLED BECAUSE SOMETHING *ELSE* HAD "POPPED OUT" TOO!


MAY I...?

SORRY?

DO YOU NEED HELP WITH YOUR
TOP?

I DIDN'T EVEN KNOW THIS GIRL'S NAME, BUT SHE REACHED UP GENTLE TUGGED THE BIKINI SQUARE BACK OVER MY NIPPLES. MEANWHILE, UNDER THE WATER, I DESPERATELY TRIED TO TUCK MY PENIS AWAY WITHOUT LOOKING TOO CONSPICUOUS.






I WAS FURTHER DISTRACTED WHEN HER FINGERS BRUSHED MY *PUFFY* NIPPLES... AND LINGERED. THAT COULDN'T HAVE BEEN A MISTAKE.

THERE WE ARE. ALL FIXED.

THANK YOU.

NO PROBLEM. I HAVEN'T SEEN YOU AROUND BEFORE. YOU'RE NEW?

YEAH, UM, I'M NEW.




WELL, THEN LET ME BE THE FIRST TO WELCOME YOU TO ONE OF THE MOST BACKWARD, RACIST, HOMOPHOBIC, MISOGYNISTIC, RED-NECKED, IGNORANT, BIBLE-THUMPING TOWNS THIS SIDE OF THE MISSISSIPPI. EVERYONE WILL PRETEND THEY'RE AS SWEET AS SUGAR AND EDUCATED BECAUSE WE HAVE A COLLEGE, BUT IF YOU'RE DIFFERENT -- FOR INSTANCE IF YOU ENJOY SHOWING OFF YOUR BODY -- YOU WON'T BE ACCEPTED. SO, BE WARNED. OH, AND MY NAME IS *JESSICA*.

I'M...I'M SOFIA.

SO I HEARD. AND THAT'S YOUR REAL NAME?

SURE. I MEAN, WHY WOULDN'T IT BE?

UH-HUH. DAMN, BUT YOU DO LOOK LIKE HER. ER



SOFIA, DID YOU MAKE A NEW FRIEND? OH. IT'S YOU, *MS. AKIN*.

HELLO, MRS. FERRIS. MY MOM TOLD ME YOU HAD MOVED BACK TO THE OLD HOUSE, BUT I DIDN'T BELIEVE HER. DID YOU FINALLY LOSE ALL YOUR MONEY?

THANK YOU FOR YOUR...*CONCERN*, YOUNG LADY. BUT, NO, I ACTUALLY HAVE MORE MONEY NOW THAN I KNOW WHAT TO DO WITH. I'VE COME BACK BECAUSE, WELL, THIS TOWN HAS ALWAYS FELT LIKE HOME. AND THE HOUSE UP NORTH IS FAR TOO LARGE FOR ME, ANYWAY.

I MUST SAY, JESSICA, YOU'VE GROWN INTO FAR MORE **LOVELY** A YOUNG LADY THAN I EVER EXPECTED. WHY, WHEN I LAST SAW YOU, YOU WERE JUST A GANGLY, AWKWARD GIRL WITH BAD ACNE, AND THE GRACE OF A COW.

YES, WELL, I'VE CHANGED A LOT SINCE THEN.

THAT'S SO GOOD TO HEAR. YOUR MOTHER WAS ALWAYS SO CONCERNED ABOUT YOU, YOU KNOW. AND ME, AS WELL! WEREN'T YOU ALWAYS SAYING HOW YOU WOULD LEAVE THIS TOWN AS SOON AS YOU TURNED EIGHTEEN?

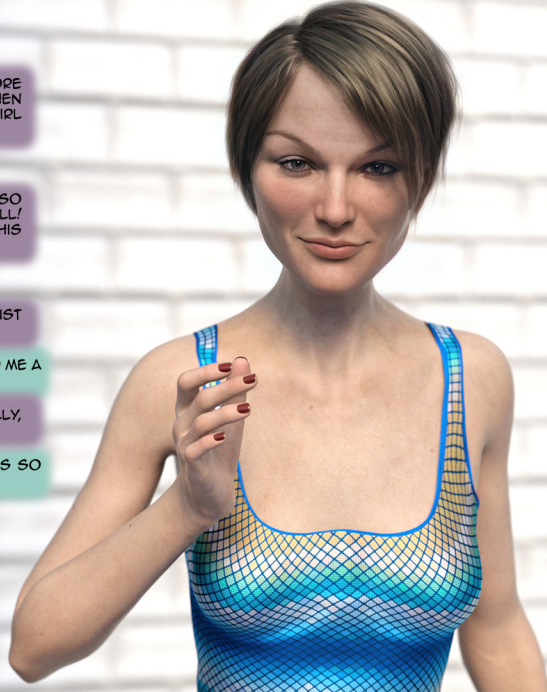
YES, I DID SAY THAT.

AND YET, HERE YOU ARE. I GUESS SOME PEOPLE ARE JUST MEANT TO BE IN ONE PLACE.

I TRANSFERRED TO ST. CHRISTOPHER'S. THEY OFFERED ME A FULL-RIDE SCHOLARSHIP.

FOR YOUR FIELD HOCKEY? HOW WONDERFUL. PERSONALLY, I ALWAYS FOUND THAT SPORT FAR TOO **MASCULINE**.

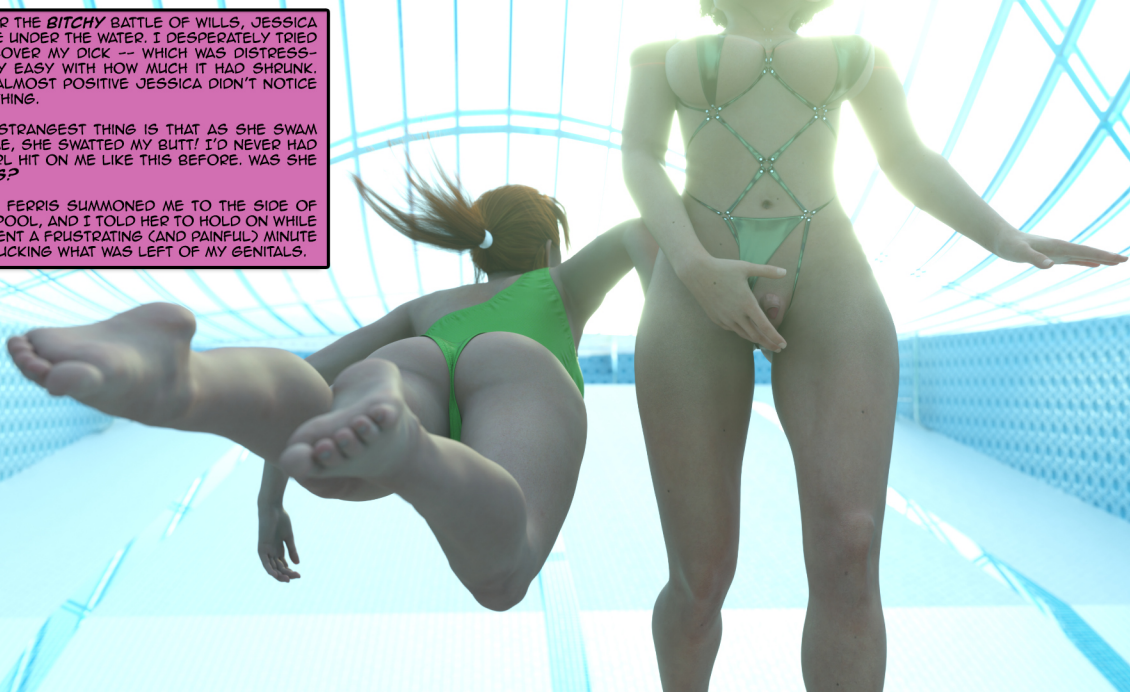
THANKS FOR THE CONVERSATION, MRS. FERRIS. IT WAS SO LOVELY TO SEE YOU AGAIN.



AFTER THE *BITCHY* BATTLE OF WILLS, JESSICA DOVE UNDER THE WATER. I DESPERATELY TRIED TO COVER MY DICK -- WHICH WAS DISTRESSINGLY EASY WITH HOW MUCH IT HAD SHRUNK. I'M ALMOST POSITIVE JESSICA DIDN'T NOTICE ANYTHING.

THE STRANGEST THING IS THAT AS SHE SWAM BY ME, SHE SWATTED MY BUTT! I'D NEVER HAD A GIRL HIT ON ME LIKE THIS BEFORE. WAS SHE *NUTS?*

MRS. FERRIS SUMMONED ME TO THE SIDE OF THE POOL, AND I TOLD HER TO HOLD ON WHILE I SPENT A FRUSTRATING (AND PAINFUL) MINUTE RE-TUCKING WHAT WAS LEFT OF MY GENITALS.



CROSS YOUR LEGS. THERE'S A **GOOD GIRL**. NOW, LISTEN, I WANT YOU TO STAY THE HELL AWAY FROM THAT GIRL. JESSICA AKIN IS A BAD INFLUENCE.

REALLY? SHE SEEMS...**NICE**.

WELL, OF COURSE SHE DOES! LOOK, I KNOW YOU DON'T UNDERSTAND THIS QUITE YET, BUT THE FEMININE WORLD IS MUCH MORE SUBTLE THAN YOU'RE USED TO, MY DEAR. WE WEAPONIZE NICENESS!

HUH? WHAT DO YOU MEAN?


THERE WILL BE TIME TO TEACH YOU ABOUT FEMININE WILES LATER. FOR NOW, ALL YOU NEED TO KNOW IS SHE'S A **DEVIANT** AND A BULLY. AND, ALTHOUGH I COULD NEVER PROVE ANYTHING, I'M CONVINCED THAT GIRL KNOWS FAR MORE ABOUT MY SOFIA'S DEATH THAN SHE'S ADMITTED. NOW, GET SOME LAPS IN -- IT'S GOOD FOR THE FIGURE!





I DIDN'T DO ANY LAPS, BUT I FLOATED WITH MY EYES CLOSED, TRYING TO RELAX AND FORGET WHAT I WAS WEARING. I DE-SPISED MY FAKE 36D TITS, BUT AT LEAST THEY ACTED AS A FLOATATION DEVICE.

THE MYSTERY OF THE REAL SOFIA'S DEATH HAD *HAUNTED* ME FOR YEARS, EVER SINCE I BEGAN WORKING AS MRS. FERRIS'S "MAID." HELL, ONE OF THE FIRST THINGS I NOTICED BACK AT THE MANSION WERE THE STRANGE, SLIGHTLY *TERRIFYING* BARS ON MY BEDROOM WINDOWS. WHAT HAD HAPPENED TO THE GIRL WHO'D LIVED THERE BEFORE? AND WAS HISTORY REPEATING ITSELF?

A woman with dark hair, wearing a black bikini with thin straps, is walking towards the camera in a locker room. The room has purple lockers on the left and a wooden bench in the foreground. In the background, another woman in a white bikini is walking away, and a third woman is partially visible near a colorful beach bag.

AFTER MRS. FERRIS HAD FINISHED GOSSIPING WITH THE OTHER OLD LADIES, SHE TOLD ME IT WAS TIME TO LEAVE. DESPITE MY APPEARANCE, THE LOCKER ROOM WAS AN SCARY PLACE. ALL AROUND ME, WOMEN WERE SHOWERING, CHANGING, AND PRIMPING -- AND THEY DIDN'T EVEN BAT AN EYE AT MY PRESENCE. TO THEM, I WAS JUST ANOTHER (*SLUTTY*) GIRL. IT WAS HUMILIATING.

WORST OF ALL? DESPITE THE NAKED WOMEN, MY COCK NEVER STIRRED. I'D ALWAYS BEEN A HORNY BASTARD, BUT NOW? I FELT NOTHING. IN FACT, I REALIZED I HADN'T GOTTEN HARD OR FELT LIKE MASTURBATING MUCH SINCE THE CASTRATION. WOULD I EVER FEEL DESIRE AGAIN? OR HAD MRS. FERRIS TURNED ME INTO SOME KIND OF *SEXLESS* BARBIE DOLL?

WHAT THE...?

I know what
she's doing.

Meet at the
old factory
on Salvation
Road

Saturday
2 PM

JESSICA WAS LEAVING THE LOCKER ROOM WHEN I LOOKED UP. SHE TURNED AND LOOKED AT ME WITH A STRANGE HALF-SMILE AND...SOMETHING ELSE IN HER EYES. WAS THAT PITY?

HOLY SHIT, I THOUGHT. DOES SHE KNOW *WHAT I AM?*

BEFORE ANYONE ELSE COULD SEE IT, I CRUMPLED UP THE NOTE AND TOSSED IT IN THE TRASH. EVEN SO, I DECIDED I'D MEET HER. MAYBE SHE WAS CRAZY, AND MAYBE I COULDN'T TRUST HER, BUT IF MRS. FERRIS DIDN'T WANT ME TO SEE HER...

WELL, THAT WAS A GOOD SIGN, WASN'T IT?





A DOZEN BOXES FROM THE CLOTHING STORE WE'D VISITED EARLIER THAT DAY ARRIVED A FEW HOURS AFTER WE GOT HOME. MRS. FERRIS MADE ME OPEN THEM, AND I WAS MORTIFIED. THE OUTFITS WERE NOT ONLY GIRLY BUT ALSO...*IMMODEST*, TO PUT IT POLITELY. MRS. FERRIS CLEARLY WANTED TO HUMILIATE ME UNTIL I STARTED ACTING THE PART OF "SOFIA" EXACTLY THE WAY SHE WANTED.

THAT NIGHT, DRESSED IN MY MOST CONSERVATIVE NIGHTGOWN, I SAT ON MY BED, WONDERING HOW I'D EVER LET THINGS GET SO OUT OF HAND. I STARED AT THE PHONE, MY ONLY CONNECTION TO THE OUTSIDE WORLD, AND CONSIDERED CALLING THE COPS. BUT WHAT COULD I POSSIBLY SAY? THAT I'D BEEN ABDUCTED? AND HOW MUCH OF MY STORY WOULD THEY BELIEVE ANYWAY? MRS. FERRIS HAD A LOT OF MONEY AND INFLUENCE, AND MY PAST WAS FULL OF PETTY CRIME.

IN AN ATTEMPT TO RELAX, I TRIED TO...YOU KNOW...
JERK OFF. THE NIGHTIE WAS ALL SILK, SO EVEN IF IT
WAS *DEMEANING*, I FIGURED IT'D BE GREAT FOR
RUBBING ONE OUT.

FOR NEARLY AN HOUR, I TRIED AND TRIED. BUT I
COULDN'T GET *HARD* OR EVEN CLOSE. SO I DID
THAT OLD TRICK I SUGGESTED TO YOU AND BEGAN
FONDLING MY NIPPLES, BUT THE SENSATION WAS
MUTED AND EVEN A LITTLE PAINFUL. EVEN THAT
PLEASURE HAD BEEN TAKEN AWAY BY THESE FUCK-
ING IMPLANTS!





I REMEMBERED MY TIME WITH JOSH. THAT WAS MY FIRST SEXUAL ENCOUNTER WITH ANOTHER GUY. I'D BEEN CONFUSED, BUT HE'D BEEN GENTLE AND PATIENT WITH ME. AND, TO BE HONEST, THAT WAS SOME OF THE BEST SEX I'D EVER HAD.

NOW I WONDERED IF I'D EVER FEEL ANYTHING LIKE THAT AGAIN. OR ANYTHING AT ALL.

IN FRUSTRATION, I CRIED MYSELF TO SLEEP. I'D BEEN HUMILIATED AND *EMASCULATED*, AND NOW I COULDN'T EVEN GET OFF.

I MISSED MY OLD TOWN, MY OLD LIFE, MY OLD BODY, AND MOST OF ALL, MY OLD DICK.


I MISSED BEING SCOTT. AND EVEN IF I DID INHERIT MRS. FERRIS'S SUPPOSED WEALTH, ALL THE MONEY IN THE WORLD COULDN'T BUY BACK WHAT THAT *BITCH* HAD STOLEN FROM ME.

ON SATURDAY, I WOKE UP EARLY AND HAD A SHOWER. I'M SURE YOU ALREADY KNOW WHAT A TRIP THAT IS, RIGHT? RUBBING SOAP ALL OVER YOUR BOOBS, TRYING TO FIGHT BACK THAT STRANGE MIX OF HORROR AND CURIOSITY. LIKE A DREAM THAT ONLY BECOMES A **NIGHTMARE** ONLY WHEN YOU REALIZE YOU CAN'T WAKE UP.

IN THE PAST, WHEN I WAS CHANGED BUT STILL...YOU KNOW...HAD MY BALLS, I COULDN'T GET THROUGH A SHOWER WITHOUT GETTING AN ERECTION AND, UH, WELL, YOU KNOW. THAT'S NOT A PROBLEM THESE DAYS, THOUGH.

ANYWAY, I WAS DISTRACTED BY SOMETHING ELSE THAT MORNING: **JESSICA**.



A woman with dark hair, wearing a white lace bikini, stands in a bedroom. She is looking slightly to her right with a serious expression. Her hands are on her hips. The room features a large arched window in the background, a wooden cabinet on the left, and a wooden dresser with a mirror on the right. The mirror reflects her back. On the dresser, there is a bottle of perfume and an hourglass.

WHO WAS SHE? WHAT DID SHE KNOW ABOUT MRS. FERRIS? DID IT HAVE SOMETHING TO DO WITH SOFIA? I MEAN, OBVIOUSLY, MRS. FERRIS WAS A **PSYCHOPATH** -- JUST LOOK AT WHAT SHE'D DONE TO ME. BUT, YOU KNOW, I BROKE INTO HER HOUSE AND TRIED TO STEAL HER SHIT, SO AT LEAST I'M NOT ENTIRELY INNOCENT. NOT THAT I DESERVE THIS, BUT STILL...

WHAT I'M TRYING TO SAY IS, YEAH, MRS. FERRIS IS CRAZY. BUT IS SHE CRAZY ENOUGH TO HURT HER OWN **DAUGHTER**? THAT'S WHAT I HAD TO KNOW.

I GRUNTED AS I HOOKED THE BRA AT THE BACK. THIS MANEUVER WAS STILL WEIRD, UNCOMFORTABLE, AND DOWNRIGHT HUMILIATING. THE WORST PART? THE BRA WAS STILL SLIGHTLY TIGHT ON ME -- EVEN THOUGH IT WAS A D-CUP!



AND, OF COURSE, TO LEAVE THE HOUSE, I HAD TO BE "**PRESENTABLE**," AS MRS. FERRIS PUT IT, WHICH MEANT AN EXTRA HOUR OF BLOW-DRYING MY HAIR, PUTTING ON MAKEUP, AND ALL THAT OTHER CRAP. MRS. FERRIS WOULD HAVE A FIT IF I REFUSED. TWICE ALREADY, SHE'D ADDED EXTRA TIME TO MY PUNISHMENT FOR FAILING TO ACT LIKE THE DAUGHTER SHE WANTED ME TO BECOME.



THAT MEANT I'D HAVE TO KEEP DRESSING "PROVOCATIVELY" FOR AT LEAST THREE WEEKS LONGER. MRS. FERRIS, MEANWHILE, BOASTED TO HER FRIENDS ABOUT HER EFFORTS TO "CURE" ME OF THIS FLAW. SO, OF COURSE, HER FRIENDS SPREAD RUMORS ABOUT ME BEING A WILD SLUT FROM THE NORTH WHOM MRS. FERRIS WAS ATTEMPTING TO REHABILITATE.

ONE NIGHT, AS AN ACT OF REBELLION, I WENT OUT WITH MRS. FERRIS WITHOUT A BRA. I THOUGHT IT WAS ODD THAT SHE DIDN'T MAKE A FUSS, BUT I SOON REALIZED WHY: EVERYWHERE I WENT, MEN STARED AT ME WITH THESE HIDEOUS, PREDATORY SMILES, AND THE WOMEN LOOKED AT ME LIKE I WAS TRASH.

THAT WAS THE LAST TIME I TRIED THAT. I KNOW WE'RE REALLY GUYS, AND WE SHOULDN'T HAVE TO WEAR THIS STUFF, BUT AS LONG AS I HAVE BOOBS, I CAN'T GO OUT WITH THEM BOUNCING ALL OVER THE PLACE. AND, YEAH, I'D... I'D RATHER WEAR A BRA THAN BE *HUMILIATED*. AT LEAST, HUMILIATED IN THAT WAY.



ANYWAY, I'D BE LYING IF I SAID I WAS ONLY GETTING *DOLLED UP* SO MRS. FERRIS WOULDN'T YELL AT ME. BECAUSE, IN REALITY, I...I WANTED TO LOOK NICE FOR JESSICA. SHE'D ACTED SO FLIRTY AT THE POOL. AND, WELL, IT HAD BEEN YEARS SINCE A WOMAN HAD LOOKED AT ME LIKE THAT. IT WAS A NICE FEELING, EVEN IF SHE MISTOOK ME FOR ANOTHER FEMALE.



YOU EVER LOOK DOWN AND FEEL LIKE YOU'RE LOOKING AT A STRANGER? LIKE, I KNOW THIS IS MY BODY, BUT AT THE SAME TIME, IT'S LIKE... I DON'T KNOW. LIKE I PICKED THE WRONG CHARACTER IN A VIDEO GAME. ONLY IN REAL LIFE, YOU CAN'T PRESS RESTART. THIS WAS ME.



I TURNED AND LOOKED AT MY ASS IN THE MIRROR. NO MATTER HOW OFTEN I DID THAT, I COULDN'T GET USED TO THE VIEW OF MY SOFT, CURVY BODY. SOMETIMES I WISH I HAD A COMPLETELY DIFFERENT FACE. YOU EVER HAVE THAT FEELING, NIKKI? LIKE, WOULDN'T IT BE EASIER IF YOU COULD ERASE ANY RESEMBLANCE TO THE GUY YOU USED TO BE? MAYBE THAT SOUNDS CRAZY, I DON'T KNOW.






60234

MTA

ANYWAY, I STILL DON'T HAVE A *TEXAS* DRIVER'S LICENSE, AND MRS. FERRIS' HOUSE IS OUT IN THE MIDDLE OF NOWHERE, SO I HAVE TO WALK HALF A MILE TO THE BUS STOP -- WHICH IS JUST A SPOT WITH A SIGN -- AND THEN RIDE THE BUS ALL THE WAY INTO TOWN. AT LEAST I'M GETTING MY PRACTICE IN WITH THESE RIDICULOUS BOOTS.

AND, OF COURSE, I'M THE ONLY PASSENGER ON THE BUS EXCEPT FOR THIS CREEP WHO GETS UP AND SITS NEXT TO ME, ASKING DUMB-ASS QUESTIONS ABOUT WHERE I'M FROM AND WHAT I'M DOING IN TOWN. WHEN I IGNORE HIM, HE JUST STARES AT ME, UNTIL OUT OF THE CORNER OF MY EYE, I CATCH HIM...*RUBBING* HIMSELF.





MAN, IF I STILL HAD MY **BALLS**, I'D HAVE PUNCHED HIM IN THE FACE RIGHT THERE. BUT NOW...

I JUST STARED OUT THE WINDOW, HOPING HE'D GO AWAY. I GUESS I HAD NO IDEA HOW TERRIFYING IT WAS TO BE A WOMAN. NOT REALLY, I MEAN. I'M NOT SURE IF YOU'VE HAD TO DEAL WITH SOMETHING LIKE THAT YET, BUT IT'S FUCKING SCARY.

I FINALLY ARRIVED IN TOWN AND BEGAN WALKING TOWARD SALVATION ROAD. I FOUND **HER** WAITING FOR ME AT THE OLD FACTORY.

BUT SHE LOOKED DECIDEDLY
LESS FRIENDLY...

WELL, I WASN'T SURE YOU'D HAVE THE GUTS TO SHOW UP. USUALLY, ONLY **MEN** ARE DUMB ENOUGH TO FALL FOR THE FLIRTY-GIRL ACT. I GUESS YOU MUST BE THIRSTY, THOUGH, HUH?

WHAT? NO. I, UH, AM REALLY HONESTLY CURIOUS ABOUT WHAT YOU WROTE --

CUT THE **CRAP**, BABE. WHO ARE YOU AND WHY ARE YOU TRYING TO TAKE SOFIA'S PLACE, RIGHT DOWN TO HER BEAUTIFUL NAME? AND IF YOU DON'T TELL ME WHAT'S GOING ON, I SWEAR TO GOD I'LL KEEP LOOKING UNTIL I FIND OUT WHO YOU ARE, WHERE YOU CAME FROM, AND WHY YOU'RE TRYING TO STEAL MY FRIEND'S LIFE.

I'M NOT TRYING TO STEAL ANYTHING! THIS WASN'T MY IDEA, I PROMISE. I'M, I'M NOT! I'M NOT EVEN...NOT EVEN...

NO EVEN **WHAT?**

NOT EVEN A **BRUNETTE!** I'M A BLONDE. BUT MRS. FERRIS MADE ME DYE MY HAIR.



AND GET A BOOB JOB? I KNOW FAKE TITS WHEN I SEE THEM, AND YOURS ARE GORGEOUS BUT A LITTLE TOO *PERFECT*. SO TELL THE TRUTH. WHO THE HELL ARE YOU? WHAT'S YOUR REAL NAME?

MY REAL NAME IS, UH, *SANDY*. IT'S SANDY. AND THE ONLY REASON I'M HERE IS BECAUSE MRS. FERRIS MADE ME AN OFFER. I DON'T KNOW ANYTHING ABOUT THE REAL SOFIA.

WHAT KIND OF OFFER?

SHE PROMISED ME THAT SHE'D ADOPT ME AND MAKE ME THE HEIR TO HER FORTUNE.

THAT'S IT? THAT'S THE ONLY REASON YOU'RE HERE? *MONEY?*

Y-YEAH. THAT'S THE ONLY REASON.

THAT BITCH. BUT I GUESS I SHOULDN'T BE SURPRISED. EVERYTHING THAT WOMAN DOES IS FOR THE SAKE OF MONEY.

PLEASE, TELL ME, WHO WAS SOFIA TO YOU? YOU SAID SHE WAS YOUR FRIEND BUT, UH, WAS THERE MORE?

DID YOU EVER MEET SOMEONE WHO COMPLETELY CHANGED WHO YOUR THOUGHT YOU WERE?

Y-YES, I HAVE, ACTUALLY.

WELL, THAT WAS SOFIA FOR ME. SHE WAS MY BEST FRIEND. MY ONLY FRIEND, REALLY, FOR MOST OF HIGH SCHOOL. AND, WELL, EVENTUALLY, I FELL IN *LOVE* WITH HER.





OH. WAS SHE ALSO A, UH, A LESBIAN?

NO. SOFIA LIKED MEN. LIKE, REALLY, REALLY LIKED MEN.

WHAT HAPPENED TO HER?

I GUESS I'LL SHOW YOU. FOLLOW ME, SANDY.

HEY, BABY, YOU NEW IN TOWN?
WANT ME TO SHOW YOU AROUND
TO ALL THE HOT SPOTS?

LEAVE HER ALONE AND GO TO
HELL, CRAIG.

FUCK YOU, *DYKE*.





GOD, THAT'S AWFUL. WHY DO THEY DO THAT HERE?

HERE? HAVE YOU BEEN ANYWHERE THAT GUYS *DON'T* DO THAT? LIKE, TEXAS IS AWFUL BUT MEN SUCK EVERYWHERE.

YEAH, I...I GUESS YOU'RE RIGHT. I'M JUST NOT USED TO THE ATTENTION. I USED TO BE, UM, PRETTY FLAT BEFORE MRS. FERRIS GOT A HOLD OF ME.

HAVING NICE TITS ISN'T ALL IT'S CRACKED UP TO BE. GUYS HAVE NOTHING BETTER TO DO THAN STARE, AND SOMETIMES THEY GET GRABBY.

WHERE ARE WE HEADED?

MY APARTMENT. IT'S JUST A FEW BLOCKS FROM HERE.

WAIT, I THOUGHT YOU WERE GOING TO SHOW ME WHAT HAPPENED TO SOFIA.

THAT'S WHAT WE'RE DOING. NOW, LET'S HURRY. I DON'T WANT CRAIG TO CALL HIS FOOTBALL BUDDIES TO HARASS US.

THIS IS A NICE PLACE.

NO, IT'S AN ATTIC ABOVE AN OLD BANK. BUT IT'S CHEAP, SO I'M NOT COMPLAINING.

MAYBE, BUT YOU'VE REALLY MADE IT HOMEY.

STOP TRYING TO BUTTER ME UP. YOU SOUND LIKE A *DUDE* WHO WANTS TO GET INTO MY PANTS.

I WASN'T TRYING TO BUTTER YOU UP, I'M JUST COMPLIMENTING YOU.

WHATEVER. WE'RE NOT HERE TO CHIT-CHAT. YOU ASKED ME A QUESTION, AND I'M GOING TO ANSWER IT. THEN WE'LL GO OUR SEPARATE WAYS.



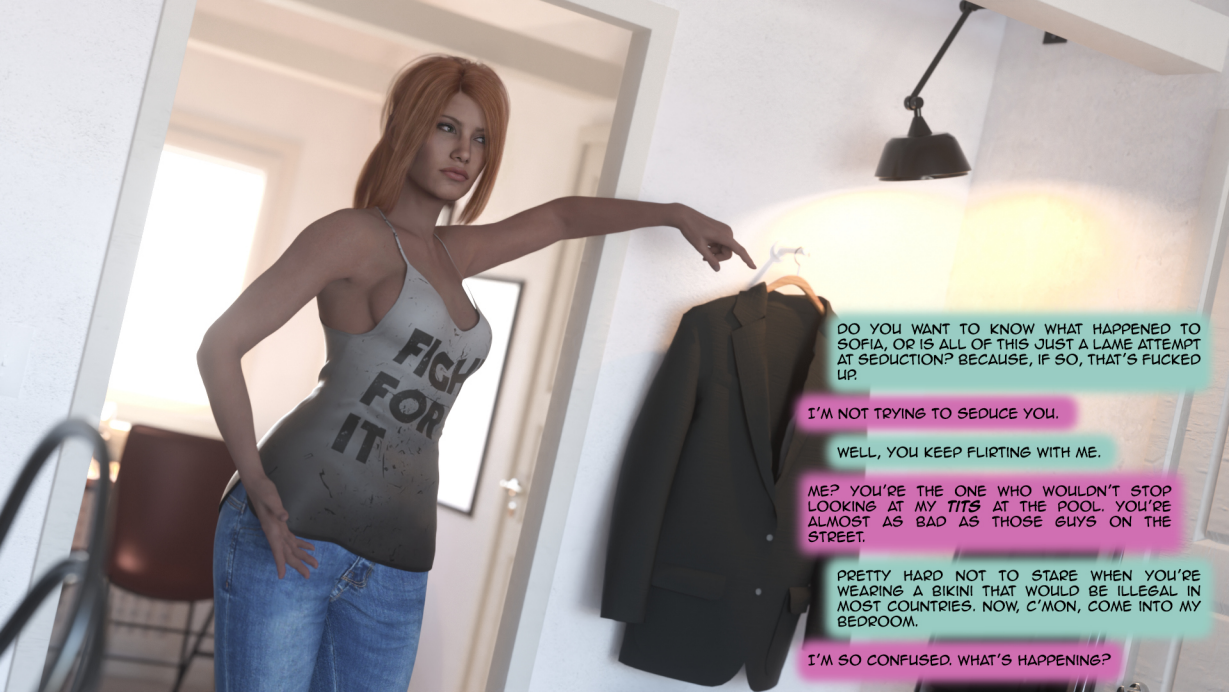
LIKE, LOOK AT THESE PAINTINGS. WAIT, IS THIS YOUR SIGNATURE? YOU'RE AN ARTIST?

JEEZ, YOU DON'T QUIT. YEAH, I USED TO BE. AND I USED TO BE GOOD.

WHY'D YOU STOP?

BECAUSE ART SCHOOL TURNED OUT TO BE AS FAKE AS EVERYTHING ELSE. JUST A BUNCH OF RICH KIDS HANGING OUT AND JERKING EACH OTHER OFF WHILE THEY MAKE FUN OF PEOPLE WHO ACTUALLY CARED ABOUT THEIR WORK.





DO YOU WANT TO KNOW WHAT HAPPENED TO SOFIA, OR IS ALL OF THIS JUST A LAME ATTEMPT AT SEDUCTION? BECAUSE, IF SO, THAT'S FUCKED UP.

I'M NOT TRYING TO SEDUCE YOU.

WELL, YOU KEEP FLIRTING WITH ME.

ME? YOU'RE THE ONE WHO WOULDN'T STOP LOOKING AT MY **TITS** AT THE POOL. YOU'RE ALMOST AS BAD AS THOSE GUYS ON THE STREET.

PRETTY HARD NOT TO STARE WHEN YOU'RE WEARING A BIKINI THAT WOULD BE ILLEGAL IN MOST COUNTRIES. NOW, C'MON, COME INTO MY BEDROOM.

I'M SO CONFUSED. WHAT'S HAPPENING?



THIS CHEST USED TO BE IN MY BEDROOM AT HOME. DAD GAVE IT TO ME WHEN I WAS A LITTLE GIRL. I KEPT EVERYTHING I LOVED IN HERE, AND A LOT OF THEM ARE MEMORIES OF SOFIA.

THAT'S HER?

YEAH. I USED TO TAKE THEM OUT TO LOOK AT SOMETIMES BUT I STOPPED. THEY JUST REMIND ME OF HOW MUCH I MISS HER.



WHEN WE FIRST MET, SOFIA ONLY LIVED IN TEXAS DURING THE SUMMER WHEN HER MOM WAS HERE. BUT I LIVED FOR THOSE SUMMERS. WE WERE NEIGHBORS. I USED TO LIVE RIGHT ACROSS THE STREET.

HUH? THERE ARE NO HOUSES ACROSS THE STREET.

NOT ANYMORE. ANYWAY, WE'D HANG OUT EVERY DAY FROM SUNRISE TO SUNSET. WE'D PLAY OUTSIDE, OR WE'D GO SWIMMING. OR WE'D DREAM ABOUT GETTING FAMOUS AND LIVING IN **HOLLYWOOD** TOGETHER IN A MANSION. EVENTUALLY, WHEN WE WERE BOTH TEENAGERS, SOFIA MOVED DOWN HERE WITH HER MOM FOR GOOD. IT WAS LIKE A DREAM COME TRUE. I...I DIDN'T HAVE MANY OTHER FRIENDS. NEITHER DID SHE. PEOPLE ALWAYS KNEW THERE WAS SOMETHING...**DIFFERENT** ABOUT US. EVEN IF WE DIDN'T KNOW OURSELVES YET.



I GUESS IF YOU'RE GOING TO TAKE OVER SOMEONE'S LIFE, YOU SHOULD AT LEAST KNOW WHAT SHE LOOKED LIKE.

I'VE SEEN HER. MRS. FERRIS HAS A GIANT PAINTING OF HER IN THE HOUSE UP NORTH.

USH. I SAW IT AT THE FUNERAL. I WASN'T INVITED, OF COURSE, BUT I SNUCK IN. THAT PAINTING MADE HER LOOK LIKE SOME KIND OF SAINT. FUCK THAT. HERE'S THE REAL SOFIA.



THAT WAS HER FAVORITE DRESS. I BOUGHT IT FOR HER, ACTUALLY. SHE CRIED WHEN I GAVE IT TO HER, AND AT FIRST, I THOUGHT I'D REALLY FLUCKED UP. THEN SHE PUT IT ON, AND SHE TOLD ME IT WAS THE FIRST TIME SHE'D EVER FELT BEAUTIFUL.



OH GOD. I...I KNOW THIS DRESS. MRS. FERRIS STILL HAS IT. AND YOU'RE RIGHT, SOFIA IS BEAUTIFUL. BUT I DON'T UNDERSTAND WHAT THIS HAS TO DO WITH HOW SHE DIED--

YOU WILL.



HERE'S SOFIA TWO YEARS BEFORE THAT OTHER PICTURE WAS TAKEN.

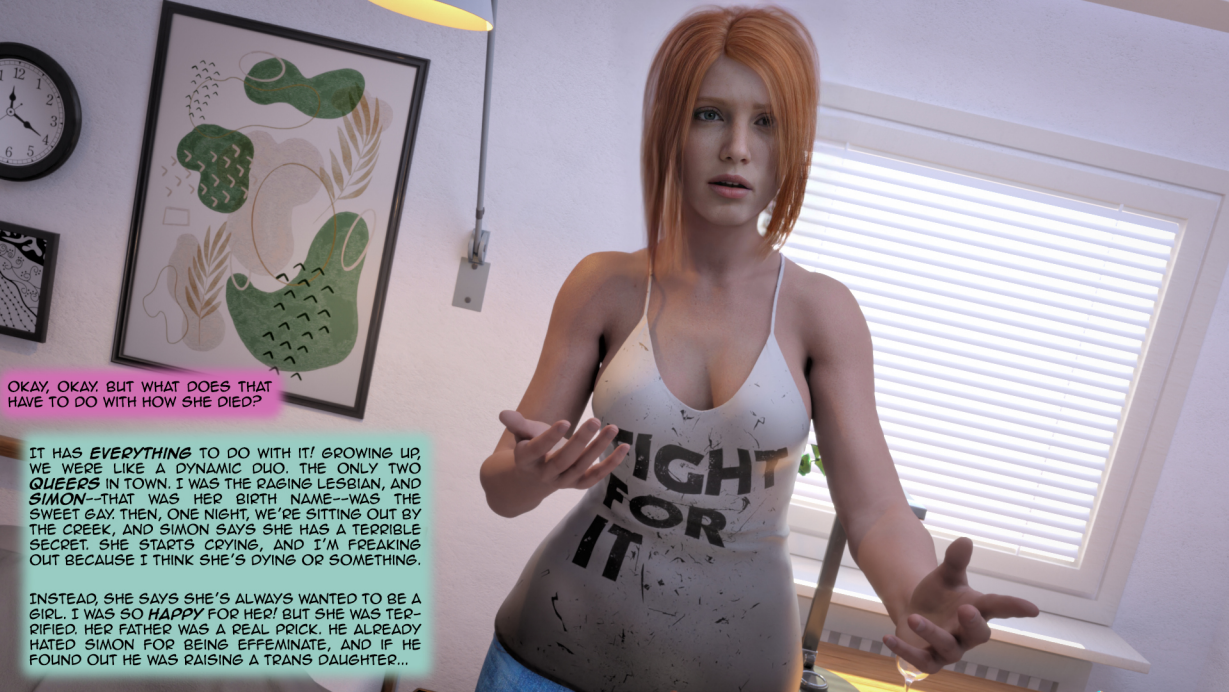
W-WHAT? *HOLY SHIT.* ARE YOU SAYING--



--MRS. FERRIS TURNED HER OWN SON INTO A GIRL?

WHAT? NO, DUMMY. SOFIA WAS **TRANS**. SHE WAS ALWAYS A GIRL. SHE JUST HAPPENED TO BE BORN INTO A BOY'S BODY.

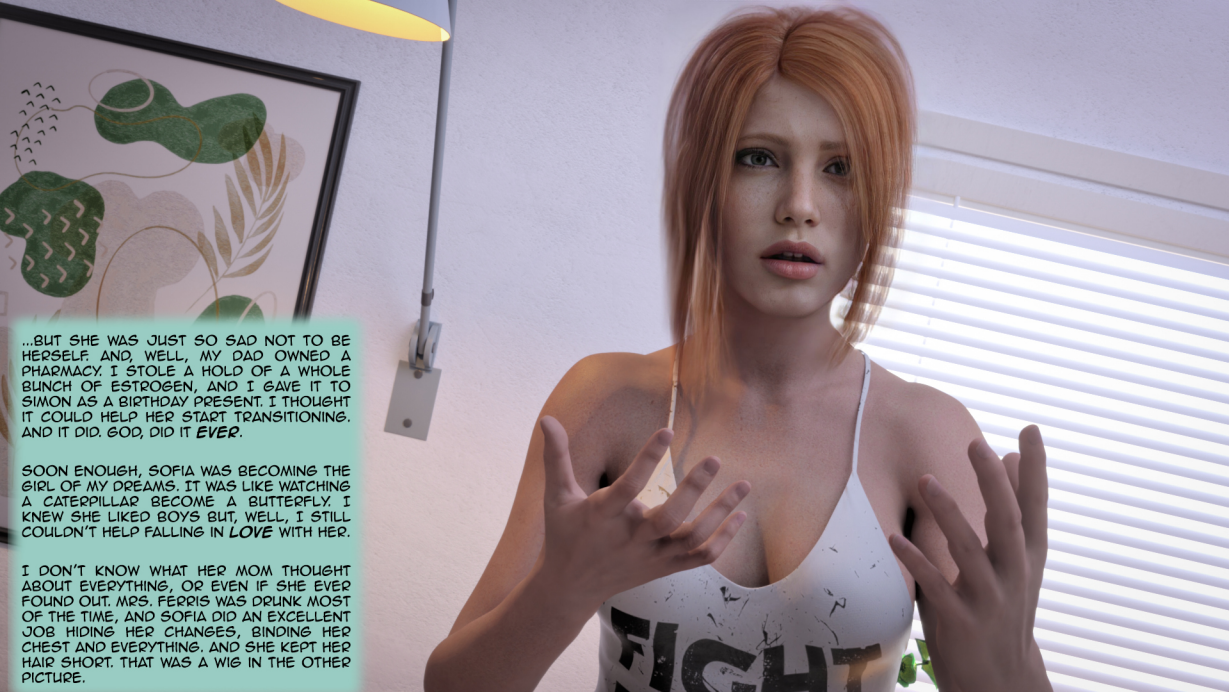




OKAY, OKAY. BUT WHAT DOES THAT HAVE TO DO WITH HOW SHE DIED?

IT HAS *EVERYTHING* TO DO WITH IT! GROWING UP, WE WERE LIKE A DYNAMIC DUO. THE ONLY TWO *QUEERS* IN TOWN. I WAS THE RAGING LESBIAN, AND *SIMON*--THAT WAS HER BIRTH NAME--WAS THE SWEET GAY. THEN, ONE NIGHT, WE'RE SITTING OUT BY THE CREEK, AND SIMON SAYS SHE HAS A TERRIBLE SECRET. SHE STARTS CRYING, AND I'M FREAKING OUT BECAUSE I THINK SHE'S DYING OR SOMETHING.


INSTEAD, SHE SAYS SHE'S ALWAYS WANTED TO BE A GIRL. I WAS SO *HAPPY* FOR HER! BUT SHE WAS TERRIFIED. HER FATHER WAS A REAL PRICK. HE ALREADY HATED SIMON FOR BEING EFFEMINATE, AND IF HE FOUND OUT HE WAS RAISING A TRANS DAUGHTER...



...BUT SHE WAS JUST SO SAD NOT TO BE HERSELF. AND, WELL, MY DAD OWNED A PHARMACY. I STOLE A HOLD OF A WHOLE BLUNCH OF ESTROGEN, AND I GAVE IT TO SIMON AS A BIRTHDAY PRESENT. I THOUGHT IT COULD HELP HER START TRANSITIONING. AND IT DID. GOD, DID IT *EVER*.

SOON ENOUGH, SOFIA WAS BECOMING THE GIRL OF MY DREAMS. IT WAS LIKE WATCHING A CATERPILLAR BECOME A BUTTERFLY. I KNEW SHE LIKED BOYS BUT, WELL, I STILL COULDN'T HELP FALLING IN *LOVE* WITH HER.

I DON'T KNOW WHAT HER MOM THOUGHT ABOUT EVERYTHING, OR EVEN IF SHE EVER FOUND OUT. MRS. FERRIS WAS DRUNK MOST OF THE TIME, AND SOFIA DID AN EXCELLENT JOB HIDING HER CHANGES, BINDING HER CHEST AND EVERYTHING. AND SHE KEPT HER HAIR SHORT. THAT WAS A WIG IN THE OTHER PICTURE.



BUT THEN, ONE DAY, SOFIA'S DAD 'RECALLED THEM' UP NORTH. I...I NEVER SAW HER AGAIN. I DON'T KNOW WHAT THE FUCK HAPPENED IN THAT MANSION OF THEIRS, BUT THE OFFICIAL STORY WAS SOFIA DIED OF A DRUG OVERDOSE. THAT'S A LIE! SHE NEVER EVEN TOUCHED A BEER, LET ALONE HARD DRUGS. BUT THE FERRIS FAMILY IS WELL-CONNECTED AND RICH AS GOD, SO IT ALL JUST KINDA HUSHED UP. BUT I JUST KNOW THAT BITCH MRS. FERRIS KNOWS EXACTLY WHAT HAPPENED.

I'M SO SORRY, JESSICA. FOR WHAT IT'S WORTH, MRS. FERRIS SAID SHE BELIEVES YOU KNOW WHAT HAPPENED TO SOFIA, TOO.

YEAH, WELL, SHE'S A LYING CUNT. IF YOU'RE SMART, YOU'LL STAY THE FUCK AWAY FROM HER. WHATEVER DEAL SHE OFFERED YOU IS BULLSHIT.



DON'T WORRY, I HAVE MY OWN REASONS NOT TO TRUST HER. BUT IF SHE HURT SOFIA, WHY WOULD SHE WANT ME TO *BECOME* HER?

FUCKING GUILT, PROBABLY.

MAYBE. LISTEN, I UNDERSTAND IF YOU DON'T WANT TO HAVE ANYTHING TO DO WITH ME, BUT MAYBE TOGETHER, WE CAN FIGURE OUT WHAT REALLY HAPPENED TO SOFIA.

I...I'M NOT SURE. IT'S BEEN SO LONG, AND I DON'T KNOW IF I WANT TO GO DIGGING UP THE PAST.

THIS ISN'T ABOUT THE PAST. THIS IS ABOUT THE *FUTURE*. I KNOW I'M LIVING WITH A CRAZY WOMAN. I WANT TO KNOW IF I'M ALSO LIVING WITH A KILLER.

OKAY. YOU HAVE A PLAN?

I WAS NEVER VERY GOOD AT THOSE.

WELL, YOU BETTER COME UP WITH ONE. BECAUSE YOU CAN BET YOUR GLORIOUS TITS THAT MRS. FERRIS WILL KNOW YOU'VE BEEN HERE. THAT OLD BITCH HAS EYES AND EARS EVERYWHERE IN THIS TOWN.