Jack & Jill

Phase 9
Part 21


Well, this is appropriately theatrical, I guess.

Because nothing says 'competition between traumatized victims' like waffles and mimosas.

¡Gracias a Dios! I was so worried you wouldn't be here yet.

Good morning, Adele. How are you holding up?

Very bad! I couldn't sleep at all. All I could think about was what you said - about getting away from Kaschak if you win. He told me this breakfast is where we meet the other competitors, size each other up. They are sick!


They told me this breakfast is a tradition. That it's when the competitors start playing mind games with each other. Kaschak said... he said the real contest begins here, trying to get in each other's heads.
Hey, look at me. None of that matters. We're not playing their game - we're playing our own. And in our game, we stick together.
But what if something goes wrong? What if you don't win? Jill, I can't go back to him. The way he looks at me, like I'm just a... a thing he sculpted. His masterpiece.
That's not going to happen. I promise. Now, c'mon, how could we say no to waffles?


Josie! I know this is an awful thing to say considering the circumstances but, well, it's good to see you.
Hello, Jill. And you are?
I am now called Adele. You two know each other?
From before. When Josie was still... working here.
I was a guard. Didn't like what I saw happening on the island. Tried to do something about it. You can guess how well that worked out.

Wait - if you worked here, maybe you know what we'll have to do? Nobody will tell us anything!

It changes every year. The Platinum Stars pick a theme, usually based on whatever twisted entertainment they're craving. Last year was singing - full American Idol setup, complete with judges and everything. Year before that was a fashion show.

God forbid the billionaires get bored while shopping for humans.

That's exactly it. And the theme usually connects to why you were chosen in the first place. You were a bodybuilder, right, Adele? And Jill, you were a surfer...

But what does that mean for tonight?

Could be anything. Athletics? Beauty pageant? Though from they usually avoid anything too... predictable.

You seem to know an awful lot about this.

When I worked security, I saw three Coming Out events. You learn things, whether you want to or not.

Oh, great. The fucking social hour before the slave auction. Real classy.

Good morning. You must be Liza, right?

The name's *Liam*. Don't care what that Russian psychopath calls me.

Por favor, sit with us...

Sit with you? What is this, the Stockholm Syndrome breakfast club? Look at all this shit. They mutilate us, parade us around, and then expect us to eat fucking croissants and make small talk?

Wait a minute... The photo shoot. You were there that day, weren't you? On the beach in California. Two-thousand five hundred bucks to have our pictures taken. What a fucking joke.

I remember. You were wearing a green sweater. Said you were saving up for grad school.

Yeah, well... instead of grad school, I got this. Some asshole Russian oligarch decided I'd make a better decoration than a computer scientist. Did you figure it out? That it was a trap? Because I did. Right before they grabbed me, I knew something was wrong. But by then... Whatever. Ancient history now, right? Just like my balls.

Good morning, everyone. I hope I haven't kept you waiting.

Oh great, who's this? Little Miss Perfect. What's your story, Barbie? Did you actually volunteer for this shit? Because you look like the type.

My name is Hannah. And no, I didn't volunteer. My employer decided I would be more valuable to him in this body. He was quite *insistent* about it.

You worked for your... owner? Before?

I was his executive assistant. He always said I had potential. I just didn't realize what kind of potential he meant until it was too late. I live with him now. He's been... preparing me for this competition for quite some time. He's very determined to win.

Anyway, it's very nice to meet you all.

It's good to meet you all. Look, I know this is fucked up. But we don't have to play their game.

Oh really? And what game should we play instead? Truth or dare? Never have I ever been forcibly turned into a woman?

Anybody who thinks they're getting out of this with their dick intact is fucking delusional. Even you, Miss Jack & Jill. Yeah, I've seen your show. Real *inspirational* stuff.

Jesus, Liam. I'm not asking us to hold hands and sing. I'm saying we can choose not to be complete assholes to each other before they parade us around like show ponies. You think I'm some kind of poster child? That I'm happy about any of this? I've been here four years, just like you. I know they want us to be bitches to each other. What's the point? Let's just eat our waffles and drink our champagne.

With that in mind, there's something I need to mention. I've heard…rumors. In previous years, the winner was bought by Xu and given some version of limited freedom - a fancy apartment, spending money, that kind of thing. Still owned by Second Dawn, but with longer a leash. But this year, it's supposedly something new. *Unprecedented.*

Oh, that's very interesting. My employer mentioned something similar. He said this year's prize was... special. Something that would make all his preparation worthwhile. Everything from the deportment lessons, voice coaching, learning to anticipate his needs. He's very thorough! He says I'm his masterpiece now, much more useful than when I was Henrik. But maybe I can be made better, in some way.

Jesus Christ, they really did a number on you, didn't they? You know what the Bear - that's what my idiot kidnapper calls himself - told me last week? That I should be grateful. Grateful! Said I was wasting my life as a man, sitting in my apartment with my cat, coding and playing video games. Like that was some kind of crime. Like that justified kidnapping me, destroying my body, my life...

Whatever this 'prize' might be, you can be sure it won't be something any of us want. It'll be for their amusement, that's all.

You know what I miss? The smell of my grandmother's kitchen. Garlic and olive oil always in the air. She'd make me eat before every training session - said I was too skinny. I never thought I'd miss being called too skinny. Or having her pinch my cheeks and tell me I needed a girlfriend. I used to roll my eyes, you know? Now I'd give anything to walk into that kitchen and have her fuss over me. To go to the *mercado* with her and argue about which tomatoes are the best. To sit on her couch and watch her stupid telenovelas. I just want to go home and be her grandson again, even if it's just for an hour.

Those memories aren't gone, they're yours forever, and they're part of what makes you strong right now. Your grandmother taught you to fight for what you wanted - that's why you made it as a bodybuilder. That fight is still in you, Adele. Different body, same heart.


Morning, girls. It's tradition for me to join the competitors' breakfast. Though I suppose this will be my last time - I'm officially retiring after tonight's event.
For those who don't know me, I'm—

And there it is.

Jill, what—

You just turned this into a performance. Because they're watching us, aren't they? Thirty seconds ago we were actually talking to each other, but we're not even allowed to have brief moments of real connection.

You know what? Thank God I'm supposedly a 'staff member' now. At least that means I don't have to sit here and pretend this is some quaint little tradition instead of a psychological mind-fuck designed to make us perform for whoever's watching the feeds.

Jill, wait—

Jill, stop! What the hell is wrong? I've been gone for a months and this is how you greet me?

Oh, I'm sorry. Was I not performing correctly? Should I throw my arms around you and tell you how much I missed my big sister? Is that what the script calls for?

Script? What are you talking about?

Davis told me everything, Holly. About how befriending me was your job. How you and Xu discussed the best ways to "mold my resistance" and get me to adapt, by coming up with that bullshit story about me getting close enough to Xu to…what? Kill him, I guess?

Jill... that's not... it wasn't like that.

Wasn't it? All those nights you held me while I cried? All those nights we *fucked*. Was any of it real, Holly? Or was I just another project?

It started that way, yes, but—

But nothing! Do you have any idea what it's like to find out the one person you trusted on this godforsaken island was just following orders? The one relationship I thought was genuine was just another fucking manipulation!

You don't understand. Yes, when I was assigned as your handler that was the plan, but everything after that was real. My feelings for you, my care for you—

How would I ever know the difference? How would *you?* Is there anything real about you, Holly? Or are you just a collection of performances? The caring mentor, the seductive handler, the queen bee of the coven - they're all just roles you play. Just pieces of different women you've studied. Perfect little fragments you've collected to build this... this character.

You know what's funny? I actually believed in you. Even after I learned what this place really was, I thought, 'At least Holly found a way to help people through it.' But you're not helping anyone. You're just making it easier for them to break us. Making the cage feel comfortable.

That's not fair—

No? Then tell me who you really are. Not who Xu made you into. Not who you pretend to be for the clients. Just... you. Can you even tell the difference anymore?

I... I'm trying to—

You can't, can you? Because there is no *real* you. There's just this... performance. This perfectly crafted illusion that changes based on what everyone needs you to be. For Xu, you're his success story. For the new acquisitions, you're their caring mentor. For me, you were... You were supposed to be my friend.

I am your friend!

You're whatever Second Dawn wants you to be. And the worst part is I think you actually believe your own act. That's why you're so good at it.

That's what I've been trying to tell you since I got back! I don't want you to become me. I don't want you to wake up one day and realize you can't find yourself beneath all the masks. Being a handler... it changes who you are. Every person you help break, every life you help destroy - it takes a piece of your soul until there's nothing left but the performance.

Well, you're in luck. You're the last person I want to become.

Good. Because one hollow woman on this island is enough.

I... I won't bother you anymore. I'm sorry.



Your dad is on the island

For the contest.

