



In the time after cheating on James, I felt more like a girl than I'd ever felt before (or since, if I'm honest). I lived an insulated sort of life where James never even referenced the fact that I had a penis. I think it scared him a little, the thought that he might be gay-adjacent. To him, I was just a girl – one he loved deeply, mind – but a girl nonetheless. It was refreshing, especially after my time as a prostitute.

The sort of man who pays a girl like me for sex does so because of what I am rather than in spite of it. He likes that I have a dick, even if he'll never admit it to himself. Now, there are dozens, if not hundreds of reasons, he might like it, but one thing is absolutely certain – to a client, I'm different than other girls. And that sort of otherness – the constant references to my tiny equipment, the subtly insulting names, the carefully concocted roleplaying games - it's all so exhausting, especially when I just want him to fuck me like he would any other girl.

Whether or not James understood that I needed that was irrelevant. He gave it to me, regardless of his reasons. And that, more than anything, was why I stayed with him for as long as I did. Whatever other problems I might have, that, at least, was something he did right.

It was during that time that I realized just how fucked up my situation was. For most transitioning girls, it's a long, drawn-out process. They know from an early age who – and what – they want to be. Certainly, it takes a lot of steps between that realization and the actual transition, but they know. For most, it's part of the very core of who they are.

With me, though, it was so very different. I wasn't able to come to it on my own terms. Rather, it was forced upon me. And regardless of how I might have felt about it, that's a difficult pill to swallow. But James, he helped. He gave me the time and support I needed to figure out who I was. And for that, I'll be forever grateful.





“What the fuck?” I asked the man. As he stood in front of the garage door, I recognized him. How could I not? But I couldn’t let on that I knew who he was. “Who are you? And what are you doing here?”

“I’m sorry,” he said, his voice nasally. “I didn’t know what else to do.”

“I asked you who you were,” I repeated. He looked horrible – like he’d been sleeping under a bridge or something. “If you can’t tell me that much, I’m calling the fucking cops.”

“Y-you don’t recognize me?” he said. “I know it’s been a long time, but I thought...I thought you’d recognize your own father.”

“My dad’s a piece of shit who’s in jail,” I said.

“Look – I know you’re skeptical,” he said. I scoffed, but he continued, “I do. But I can prove it.” He reached into his back pocket, retrieving his wallet. He handed it to me, and I opened it up. There it was, plain as day on his driver’s license. He was exactly who he said he was.

I threw the wallet at his feet. “What do you want? A medal?” I asked. “I don’t know you, and I don’t want to, okay? So it was a nice little family reunion, but just fuck off.”

“I’m afraid that’s not in the cards, kid,” came another voice. Following it was a man who seemed to suddenly appear from around the corner. “Sorry, Bob. This isn’t working. She needs to know the truth or there’s no way we’re going to get her help.”

“Y-you...” I muttered, surprised. Standing before me was the motorcycle-riding man who’d picked me up in the bar. “W-what are you doing here?”

“My job,” he said, pulling something from his pocket. He held it aloft, revealing a police badge and I.D. “Detective Jack Givens. We need your help, Carly.”





I grabbed the man by the shirt. “What the fuck is going on here?” I hissed. “Who the hell are you, and what is my dad doing here?”

“I told you,” Givens said. “I’m a detective with the —”

“I got that part,” I said, cutting him off. “Just explain everything. Right now. Or we’re done. Finished. I can’t handle this shit.”

“Fine,” he said. “Just sit down. I’ll tell you everything I can.” I leaned against an old ladder, and he continued, “The first thing you need to know is that the woman you think is your mother isn’t. She’s your stepmother.”

“Not even that,” my father chimed in. “We never married. But when I went to jail, she became your legal guardian. At the time, I thought it was best. One of many mistakes I made along —”

“I don’t care about your mistakes,” I said. “Just tell me the facts.”

And he did. He explained how he and Trish, the woman I’d long thought of as my mother, had embezzled millions from Epoch. “We were in love,” he said. “Thought we were Bonnie and Clyde or some other stupid shit. But she was playing me. As soon as I went to jail, she moved on. Took you and most of the money with her. But I’d hidden a lot of it away. I wasn’t stupid, you know.”

“She’s been blackmailing him ever since,” Detective Givens said. “Trying to get the money.”

“Blackmailing him?” I asked. “How?”

“You,” my father said. “She’s been using you. The prostitution, the feminization...all of it was to get at me. I-I’m sorry, Carl. I’m so, so sorry. If I’d had the money, I would’ve given her what she wanted...”

“This isn’t productive, Bob,” said the detective. I barely heard him, I was so distracted by the fact that my father had just laid the whole of my transition at my mother’s feet.

“She didn’t...I chose...I was...”

“I’m so sorry,” the man said. “But it’s true. All of it. I tried to give her what she wanted, but the government, they took everything. They found the stash. They found it. And when she realized I wasn’t giving her a dime, she started to change you. She sent photos. She sent videos. And when she said she was p-pimping you out, I had to do something. I made a deal. I told them that I’d help them get her, that I’d help them get her boss. That we’d help them.”

“Her boss?” I asked, already knowing the answer.

“James McCarthy,” the detective said. “That’s who we’re really after.”



I looked down at the comforter, devastated by the depth of my “mother’s” deception. At first, I hadn’t believed it. Who would? I’d thought I was in control of my own actions, at the very least. But it all fit together so perfectly, and with the weight of a real, live police detective behind it, I had little choice but to believe the story. However, knowing in my heart that it was the truth didn’t make the manipulation any easier to accept. And what’s more, James was somehow involved.

According to the detective, James and my mother had been working together for years, embezzling money from Epoch. In fact, my father had followed their blueprint – at his then-girlfriend, Trish’s insistence – to plan his own scheme. He’d only been caught because of a random audit. To the detective, James’ involvement in that particular scheme was irrelevant. They wanted him for decades’ worth of crimes, not just one incident. But to me, it made all the difference.

I lay there, trying to understand my role, all the while trying to ignore the questions burning their way through my mind. “I can’t do it,” I muttered to myself. It wasn’t that I believed in James’ innocence. I wasn’t so naïve as to think that. But I felt guilty, plotting behind his back. “I just can’t.”

I jumped when James, who silently leaned against the doorframe asked, “You can’t what?” I hadn’t heard him come in, I was so focused on the day’s many revelations.

I looked back, my hand on my chest. “You scared me!” I said with mock enthusiasm. The role felt comfortable to me. Natural. I slipped right into it. “I was just thinking about my mother. I know I should make up with her, but –”

“But you just can’t bring yourself to do it,” he said. “I understand. What she did...it wasn’t right. But if you want my advice, I’ll tell you that you’ll regret it if you don’t somehow make peace with her. She’s your mother, Carly. And you only ever get one of those.”

Except, it seemed, I never even got the one. It suddenly struck me that I had no idea who my real mother was. In the chaotic afternoon, I’d never even thought to ask.

“I’ll tell you what,” James said, sitting on the edge of the bed. “I’ll invite her over for dinner. That way, if you’re at all uncomfortable, we can kick her out. How’s that sound?”

“Great,” I said, forcing a smile. “It sounds great.”







I was lost. There were no two ways about it. I had no idea what to think, what to do, or how to do it. I didn't want to believe what my father and Detective Givens said, but I knew in my heart it was true. She'd never treated me like a son, no matter how I chose to remember it.

"Deep thoughts?" came the familiar voice of our neighbor, Dr. Kincaid. He was an older man, bald, wrinkly, and bespectacled. Most of all, though, he was, to a fault, a kind man. Leaning against the fence, it was easy to imagine that he was the sort of man whose grandchildren might come to for advice.

I smiled – it was an involuntary reaction around him. "Not really all that deep," I admitted.

"If you say so," was his only response. I wanted to tell him everything, to get someone's opinion on my situation. I knew he'd be impartial. But I also knew what he'd tell me. "If you'd like a piece of advice, I'll say this: it's probably a lot simpler than you imagine."

They were all looking out for themselves, without a care for what happened to me. That much was as plain as day. I didn't owe any of them anything, no matter what they might think. Trish – I couldn't think of her as my mother – had used me as a tool to blackmail my father. Certainly, she'd fed me. She'd clothed me. And at times, she'd shown me some semblance of affection. But it was all a lie, I knew. She was looking out for her own interests.

And my father, well, he was no better. What sort of man with a small child and a stable job puts himself into a position where he might be arrested? Certainly, he thought he was making a decision for my benefit, but that wasn't true at all. He was hypnotized by the bright lights of wealth, and he wanted a piece of it. And when he failed, he never so much as looked back. He was a stranger to me, and I struggled to think of a reason why I should care about him.

James was another story because I knew he loved me. Or at least, he felt what passed for love in his cold heart. It was an obsession over a possession, I knew. It wasn't selfless – not like real love. It was completely self-centered, a piece of the puzzle in pursuit of pleasure, nothing more.

Detective Givens might have been the best of the bunch, but even he'd used me. I'd used him, too, of course, but when I did it, I'd been ignorant of his identity. He knew exactly who I was, and still, he seduced me.

"You know what?" I said. "You're right, Dr. Kincaid. It's simple. It's all so very simple. You're a genius."

"I won't argue with that," he said.





“Well, well, well,” said Trish. She kicked her shoes off at the door. We both knew she’d been in the house before; she obviously had little interest in concealing that fact. “Don’t we look cozy. Tell me, how long has this little thing been going on?”

I may have been imagining it, but to me, it sounded like she put a slight emphasis on the word “little” while pointing in the general direction of my groin. Or perhaps it was my imagination. I certainly wanted to think the worst of her, and a subtle jab at my miniscule manhood would go a long way to fulfilling that desire.

“Almost six months now, Trish,” said James. I was thankful for the fact that he’d spoken up because I couldn’t quite figure out how to make the words get past the lump in my throat. “Ah, but I’m being rude, aren’t I? Why don’t I get a couple of drinks while you two catch up?”

I fixed him with a not-so-subtle glare, but he ignored it. When he’d finally gone other room, Trish said, “That didn’t take long. He’s usually a lot more talkative.”

“Maybe it’s the company,” I said, finally finding my voice. “Why didn’t you tell me?”

What had I just said? God, I wasn’t supposed to reveal anything, and I hadn’t planned to. But the words had just bubbled out of me, followed by, “I know you’re not my real mother. Why didn’t you ever tell me.”

I expected a lot of things. Anger. Denial. Frustration. Tears. I would’ve been okay with any of those. But she surprised me by laughing. “He got to you, didn’t he?” she said between chuckles. “Your idiot father. He never could keep his mouth shut, could he?”

“You don’t deny it?” I asked, my voice hoarse.

“Of course not,” she said. “It wasn’t a secret. Sure, I wasn’t going to volunteer anything, but if you’d ever asked, I would have told you. But that’s not the point, is it? Everything’s clicking into place right now. I can see your little mind churning.” She pushed her forefinger between my eyes. “Churning away for all it’s worth. He told you about the blackmail, I suppose. I knew it would happen eventually.”

“W-why...”

“Because I could,” she said. “And I wanted the money. And a hundred other reasons. But most of all? I hated you. I did. It took me a while to realize it, but every single time I saw you, I saw your fuck-up of a father. His pretty face. That cocky smile. The inability to get a single fucking thing right. You were going down that path. I could see it. I just took you in hand, gave you a direction. You did the rest.”



I hated her. I hated him. And I hated myself. God, there was so much of that terrible emotion floating around my mind, and I saw no good way to get rid of it. The dinner with Trish had been an unmitigated disaster, if not an overtly apparent one. James knew nothing, of course. He was blissfully unaware of the tension between us or the reason for its existence. He thought we were simply a family at odds.

But in addition to her spoken insults, the indignant response to my first question, and the general entitlement with which she spoke, there were far more subtle jabs at me. A look here, a not-quite-insult there. An insinuation. A too-hearty laugh at my expense. I heard and saw it all. And I hated her for it.

And James, sitting there smugly throughout, so frightfully unaware. I wanted him to know. I wanted him to see what I saw. I wanted his protection. But he just sat there, laughing at her bad jokes, trying desperately to act like we were normal.

I wanted to be stronger. God, I did, though I knew that was a complete waste of time. I wasn't strong. No, I was weak, just like my father had been. I could see that as clearly as I saw my feminine reflection each time I looked in the mirror.

So, I let the weakness take over. I played the part I'd come to know so well. I was the whore – that's what they'd made into – and that's what I'd always be. There was nothing I could do to change it, so I just let it happen.

For a few days, I wondered if James knew. He must have. I hadn't made much of an effort to hide the fact that I'd picked up a guy, that I'd let him fuck me. He had to know something was going on when I got home at three in the morning, clothes disheveled, and smelling like sex. He had to care. I wanted him to. I needed it.





“Hey,” I said, my hand wrapped around the pool boy’s long, hard cock. He was naked, but I wore a bikini. “I’m so glad you’re home.”

James didn’t say a word, but I could see a brief flicker of anger in his eyes. I suppose I wanted to get a rise out of him, to elicit some sort of reaction. I guess I’d been doing it a lot, making my philandering more and more obvious by the day.

Finally, he said, “Come inside when you’re finished. We need to talk.” He turned on his heel, and went inside.

“W-what was that all about?” the pool boy asked. “Was that your dad or something?”

“Or something,” I said. Looking down, I said, “Jesus – are you going soft? What the fuck is wrong with you?”

“I...uh...this is too weird,” he said, pulling away. “I’ve got to go.”

Before I knew it, he’d climbed out of the pool, grabbed his clothes, and hustled to the gate. He didn’t even look back before going through.

“That didn’t go well, did it?” James asked. I looked up to see him leaning against the doorframe, sipping from his favorite tumbler. “You really should pick them better.”

“I picked you,” I said.

“My point exactly,” he said. “Now get cleaned up. We’ve got guests coming over this evening.”

“I was going to go out,” I stated. I didn’t really have plans, but I had no desire to attend one of his stuffy dinner parties.”

“We don’t always get what we want,” he said. “Cancel your plans. I insist.”







“Jesus, Carly – what’s wrong with you?” Maria asked. “Do you know how many girls – especially ones like you – would kill to be in your situation?”

“If they knew the whole truth?” I asked. “None. Not a single fucking one, Maria. You don’t get it. Nobody does.”

“Help me understand then,” she said. “Tell me why you’re cheating on your boyfriend. Tell me why you’re rubbing it in his face like you want him to snap. And please, just tell me why you’re acting so weird lately.”

“Fine,” I said. “You want to know the truth? You want to know what’s going on? Then sit down. It’s a long story.”

And then I told her everything. I told her about my father, about his crimes, and about Trish not being my mother. I told her about Detective Givens. I told her about James’ role in it all. I didn’t hold back, and I didn’t sugarcoat a damned thing. I explained the whole scenario – the blackmail, the cops’ plea for my cooperation, the disappointment in my father. And when I was finally finished, she just looked at me the way I’d expected – with a mixture of pity, anger, and empathy.

“God,” she said. “I mean, Jesus Christ, Carly.”

“I know,” I said. “It’s crazy, huh? And now the cops want my help. I’m not sure how yet, but I’m going to guess that it’ll have something to do with spying on James or my mother. I don’t know. I mean, I’d be gone now if it wasn’t for that. I’d be halfway across the country by now, and I wouldn’t have looked back even once.”

And then I saw something else. Pain. Maria was hurt, and it took me a long moment to realize why. Nowhere in that scenario did I even mention her. She’d just never crossed my mind. That’s when I realized that she valued our friendship a lot more than I did.

“I thought about telling you sooner,” I said. “I wanted to. And we could’ve run away. Me and you. It would have been an adventure, Maria. But that ship’s sailed, hasn’t it? There’s no way it’ll work now.”

She perked up at the lie, and I felt a little better about myself.





“I needed to see you,” said Detective Givens.

“Obviously,” I responded. “What do you want? Is it something about the case? I’ve already told you that they don’t talk to me about –”

“It’s not about that,” he said, interrupting me. “It’s about you and me.”

“There is no you and me,” I said. “You know, since you lied to me.”

“I never lied to you, Carly,” he argued. “Omitted a few things, sure, but I never lied.”

“Whatever,” I said. “You were dishonest. Is that a better word?”

“More accurate, at least,” he said. “I’ve been watching you.” He shook his head.

“That came off creepy, huh? I’ve seen you. During surveillance.”

“Yeah?” I asked. “You see everything?” He nodded. I pulled my skirt up, revealing the fact that I hadn’t worn any panties. Even as I did it, I wondered had come over me. I knew, of course. He was sexy, and I was numb. I needed something – anything – to take my mind off of my fucked up life.

He grabbed my arm. “Do you really want this?” he asked.

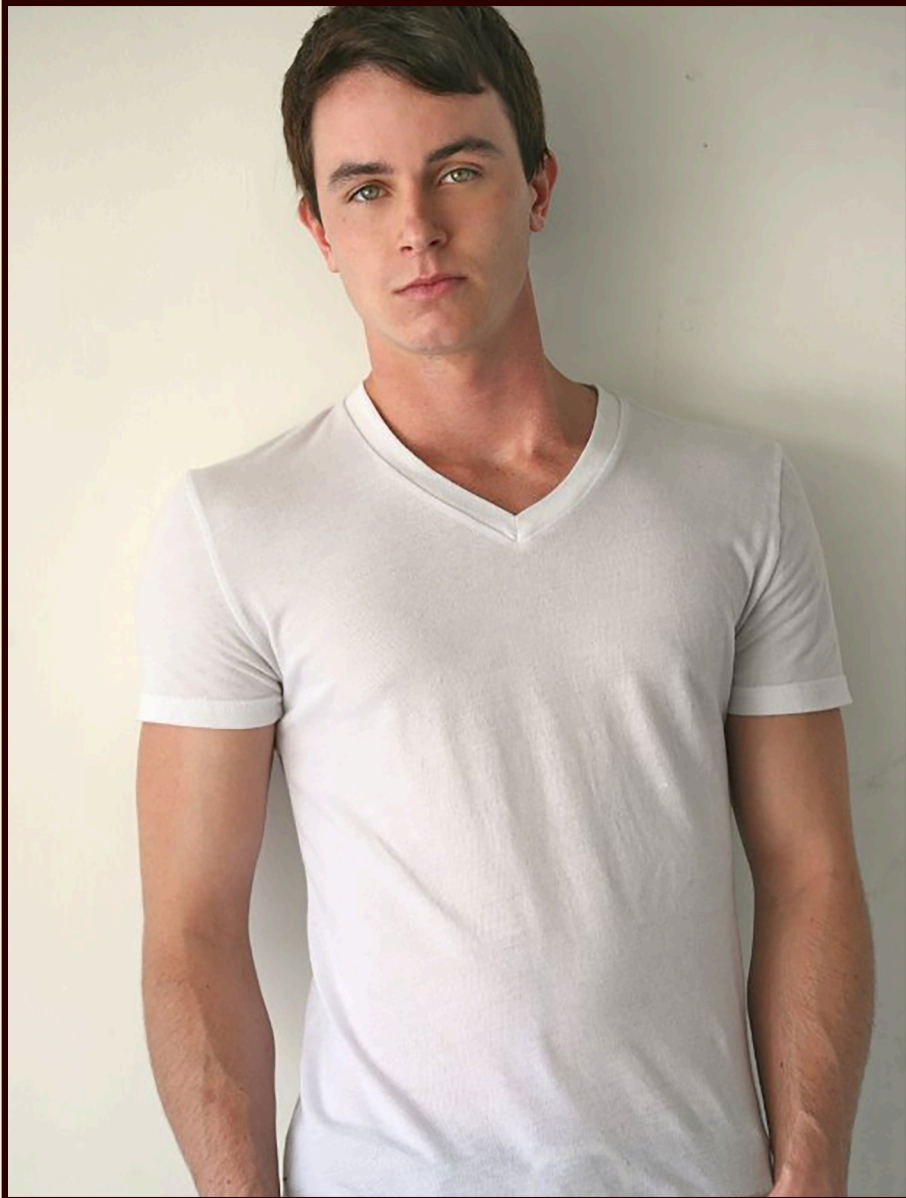
“Don’t you?” was my response.

“That wasn’t the question,” he said. “I’m asking if you want it. Not whether you think I do. I’m not asking if you’re willing. I’m asking what you want.”

The question took me by surprise. “N-nobody ever asks me that,” I said, realizing how true the statement was. For two years – probably longer – I’d been someone else’s tool. For the men I slept with, it was for their pleasure. For Trish, it was to get what she wanted from my father. For James, it was to have a pretty, sexy young thing to fuck whenever he wanted.

“Maybe they should,” he said.





“I owe you an apology,” I said, wringing my hands.

“I know,” was Keith’s response. He tucked his thumbs into his pockets. “I’m waiting.”

“You’re really going to make me say the words, aren’t you?” I said. “Fine. I’m sorry. I’m sorry for treating you like shit when you were trying to help. I’m sorry for disappointing you. I’m sorry for \_.”

“Fine,” he said, cutting me off. “Accepted.” He rolled his shoulders beneath the tight, white shirt he wore, making his muscles bunch in interesting ways. “What changed?”

“What do you mean?” I asked.

“What changed?” he repeated. “I mean, what’s different now? Because before, you were dead set on hating me. You didn’t want help. You didn’t want support. So what’s different now?”

“A lot,” I said. “First off? Trish isn’t my mom. Not my real one, anyway. And she kind of, sort of, you know, was my pimp.”

“Wait, what?” he asked. “Your mom pimped you out? Like for real?”

“Yeah,” I said. “But it’s okay now. Well, it’s not okay. God, it’s definitely not okay. There are a hundred reasons why it’s not okay. But it’s getting there, I think. In a few months, I’ll be clear of all of this.”

“All of what?” he asked.

“You wouldn’t believe me if I told you,” I said. When he asked me to try him out, I said, “Fine. My mom’s not my mom. And my dad’s not in jail anymore. Oh, and they stole like five million dollars from Epoch – the company I used to work for, by the way – with the help of the guy I’m currently living with. And then there’s this detective, Givens – well, he’s the lead on the investigation that’s trying to put my boyfriend in jail, and oh, yeah...I’m fucking him, too. And all I want – God, all I want is to be through with all of this. My life...my life right now, it makes prostitution look downright normal.”

He stood there, processing it for a long moment before saying, “What do you have to do to be finished with it?”

I shook my head. “I don’t know,” I said. “Get James thrown in jail, maybe? Find some incriminating evidence?”

“Well, the first thing you need to do is figure out how you’re supposed to get clear,” he said. “Then worry about making that happen. Simple. One step at a time.”





“It’s going to be over soon,” the detective said. “I just need you to trust me.”

“It’s difficult to trust anyone when I don’t think I’ve gotten a straight story out of anyone in the past three years,” I said. “I just want to know how I can make this all end. I want to get through this. I want to help. And I don’t ever want to see any of these people again. How do I make that happen?”

It was a bit of a gambit, asking a straight question like that – mostly because I knew how much he wanted to arrest James and Trish. I’d never asked his motivation, and I didn’t care. I just wanted to use that drive to get me free of a horrible situation. And if it meant that I’d have to take a more active role, then so be it. I was tired of sitting around, waiting on something to happen.

“You won’t like it,” he said.

“I don’t like any of this,” was my response. “Just tell me what you need.”

“It would mean going back to your mother, and –”

“She’s not my fucking mother,” I said. “And I’ve burned that bridge. I can’t go back.”

“With what she was making off of you?” Detective Givens said, smiling wryly. “She’d take you back. You have a lot more power than you know.”

“Fine,” I said. “Okay – let’s say I go back. I start doing all of that again. How does that help us?”

And then he laid it all out for me, step by step – each a little more dangerous than the last. While I didn’t think either James or Trish would physically hurt me, I’d proven over the course of my whole ordeal that I was not the best judge of character. In the end, I agreed. I was fed up with waiting; I’d decided to create my own opportunity, for better or worse.





“You’re really going to cooperate with them?” Maria asked. “What do they want you to do?”

“I’ve already done some of it,” I said, trying to sound as casual as I wished I felt. The bottom line was that I was incredibly nervous about the fact that I’d only recently finished bugging nearly every room in James’ house. They were unobtrusive things, and they were hidden quite well. However, I couldn’t shake the feeling that they would somehow be found, and James would inevitably connect me to their placement. “And I’m going back to Trish tomorrow.”

“You can’t,” Maria said. “That’s just —”

“Necessary,” I said, a bit of steel in my voice. “I can’t keep living like this. I can’t, Maria. I have to do something. This is the only way out.”

“What about what you said before?” she asked. “About us leaving? Going on an adventure, remember? What about that. I can be packed and ready to go before —”

“No,” I said. “Just...no. I can’t.”

“Why not?” she asked.

“Because it’s wrong,” I said. “And they fucked me. They took my life, and they molded it into what they wanted. I have to see this through.”

“You could get hurt,” she said.

“I know,” was my answer. “But it has to be done. It has to, and I’m the only one who can do it. Besides, it’s not as dangerous as you might think. We’re not talking about drug lords or something here. We’re talking about white collar criminals. I don’t even think James owns a gun.”

“Just be careful,” Maria said. “For me. Just...you know...just be careful.”



I hated that my first assignment was with Lisa. Apparently, she'd been calling Trish for months, requesting me. And no matter how many times she said that I wasn't available, Lisa kept calling. And as I knelt in front of her new boyfriend, I knew why.

"You see how much bigger he is than you ever were?" she asked, stroking him through his pale blue underwear. "That's a real man's dick. I should have known what you were as soon as I saw how pathetically small yours was."

"Lisa, don't be –" started her boyfriend, but she cut him off with a quick squeeze of his package.

"She doesn't mind when I point how inadequate she was as a man," Lisa said. "Do you, Carly?"

I wanted to slap her. I'd forgotten how demeaning some of those sessions could be, especially when it involved someone who knew me before my transition. However, I had a job to do. I was a professional. I knew how to act. I knew how to push myself into that numbness so that muscle memory could take over.

Trish's willingness to take me back had been something of a surprise. She hadn't argued. She hadn't complained. She hadn't even made any sarcastic comments. No – she just welcomed me back, asking if the old percentages were okay. When I said that they were, she'd seemed almost relieved. Maybe she was, given that I'd seen that her brand-new sports car had been replaced by a sensible sedan. It also looked like the cleaning service hadn't been in the house for weeks – maybe more. Those, and a dozen other little signs told me that she'd fallen on hard times. Good for me, bad for her. But it meant that I had no excuse but to fall back into my old life.

I smiled, looking at the man's dick. It was impressive. "I don't care what you say about my little thing," I said. "So long as I get to play with this BIG thing."

"See?" Lisa said. "It's all good, baby. She's a cock-hungry whore who –"

I didn't want to hear another word, so I yanked his underwear down, and started to suck his cock.







I poured myself into the role, hating myself for getting backed into such a corner. It wasn't the physical act of sucking the man's cock. No, I did that willingly and with genuine enthusiasm. It certainly scratched a very prominent itch. However, the fact that Lisa was there, that she constantly whispered degrading insults into my ear, that she couldn't leave me to do my business – that, I absolutely loathed.

I got it. I really did. I understood why she hated me with such tangible passion. Once, she'd loved me. I knew that as plainly as I knew that I didn't share her feelings. Even back then, when I'd fooled myself into believing that I actually liked girls, I knew in my heart that I was simply using her. I was with her because she was popular, because she was pretty. It was the sort of coupling everyone expected. But I never cared about her. She, on the other hand, had no doubt imagined some sort of future with me. She may as well have erected a white picket fence around our lives.

And when I'd broken up with her, it had been devastating. I knew it when it happened, though I chose to ignore it, that look in her eyes. Love can turn to hate in an instant, and so it was with Lisa's feelings for me. That I'd turned out like I had only threw fuel onto the fire. In her mind, I hadn't just rejected her. No, she'd driven me to reject all women. She was the reason I'd gone down the path I'd chosen.

It was all bullshit, of course. After we'd broken up, I'd spared very few thoughts for her. I'm ashamed of it, sure, but that's the honest truth. I cared so little for her that she just didn't rate a moment's consideration, save when she thrust herself into my life.

Even as I took her new boyfriend's balls into my mouth, I wondered what was going through her mind. Was it a moment of victory, somehow? Was it cathartic, knowing that I'd given myself so thoroughly to my transition? Or was it torturous, seeing me so enthralled by her most current lover, to see him moan with each subtle flick of my tongue?

I think it was the latter, because she practically shoved me aside to get at his cock. I didn't mind so much; as the client, what she wanted was paramount. I had but to adjust.



Outwardly, I ignored the look on her face as she saw her boyfriend choose me, but I knew what she was thinking. Even as he pushed himself inside me, she couldn't help but wonder if there was something wrong with her. After all, I wasn't even a real girl as far as she was concerned. So, why had her boyfriend chosen to fuck me when she, a real girl, was so ready and willing? A million doubts were no doubt going through her mind as I moaned in pleasure.

I admit, I was a little more vociferous than my passion dictated. I was a little louder. I shouted and screamed, my high-pitched voice cutting through her thin veneer of self-confidence. She couldn't ignore what was happening. Her boyfriend, the man with whom she'd wanted to torment me, preferred my ass to her pussy. And I wasn't going to let her forget it.

Of course, I knew the truth of it. Given the opportunity – and in this case, his girlfriend's blessing – a man will always choose novelty over familiarity. I was new. I was different. He fucked her nightly, no doubt. But me? I was special. That's simply how the male mind works. It's a question of masculinity rather than sheer preference.

Even so, I knew she couldn't see it. Nor did I want her to. While I might have been professionally obligated to participate, that didn't mean I couldn't torture a woman who hated me. And I did. God, I did.

She tried to salvage it by making me service her with my tongue, and I did my duty. But no amount of oral gymnastics could rob either of us of our perceived truths. My face buried between her thighs, she couldn't help but see the look on her lover's face as he plowed into me. She could feel every thrust, traveling through my body and into hers. She was still surrounded by the sound of his flesh colliding with mine.

And I know – God, I know she regretted it all. I knew – even as she clenched involuntarily, as she went careening over the edge, falling into an orgasmic abyss – I knew she hated the author of her pleasure. She hated me. She hated everything I'd become. She hated everything I once was. And she hated everything I represented in her life – an ocean of inadequacy from which any shred of self-confidence could never hope to escape. And I reveled in it.

She'd begun the day trying to shove my own masculine failings in my face, but the session ended with her questioning her own self-worth. It was appropriate, I think, and I loved the turnaround.







“I don’t get how that’s going to work,” Maria said, concealed only by a towel. She’d just done her makeup, and looked gorgeous. “And if they want him so badly, why didn’t they just put the bugs in themselves?”

I shrugged. “I don’t know,” I said. “I honestly don’t understand any of it. All I know is that if I do what they say, I can get clear of all this. My dad will go free. And I won’t have to see or hear from James or Trish ever again.”

“But that’s what I’m saying,” Maria stated, her smile fading. “Your dad’s already out of jail. And you could always just go, you know? Just leave and don’t look back. Like we talked about.”

“And be looking over my shoulder for the rest of my life?” I asked.

“I think you overestimate how much these people care about you,” she said. “You were already out of Trish’s house. And James is hardly dangerous.”

“First of all, do you honestly think Trish didn’t know where I was the whole time?” I asked. “Of course she did. She knew. She always knew that I’d come back. She thinks I do that stuff because I like it, Maria. She thinks I want to be a whore.”

“Don’t you?” she asked.

“That’s not the point,” I said, purposely changing the subject. The fact was that, most of the time, I did like it. It was good money, and given my tastes, easy work. But that wasn’t all of it. I liked the power it gave me, just like I liked the fact that James was obsessed with me. I knew being with him was walking a razor’s edge, that that kind of crazy can go bad in an instant, but I loved knowing that he would do almost anything for me.

“Yeah – what is?” she asked. “Seriously – what changes if you do this? What do you get out of it?”

“You wouldn’t understand,” I said. Neither did I, but I wasn’t about to admit it. If someone pressed me, I would’ve said that it just felt like the right course of action.

“Clearly,” she stated.

“I have a surprise for you,” James said, smiling.

I returned his smile as I sat on the counter. “A surprise?” I asked. “What kind of surprise?”

“Look – I know things have been strained between us lately,” he said. “And I know it’s partially my fault. I shouldn’t have pressed you to make amends with your mother. I should have known that it would put you on a path to working for her again.”

“We discussed this,” I said. “And you were fine with me working.”

“Fine isn’t exactly the right word,” he stated. “I accepted it. I know that’s part of who you are, and I can’t change that. I don’t want to. But that doesn’t mean I have to like it.”

“I’m not having this argument again, James,” I said. “I made it clear that I was going to do it. Whether or not you accept it is irrelevant.”

He held up his hands. “I know!” he said. “I know, okay? I just want to move past it. I’m not trying to start a fight here. I just wanted to tell you that I booked a trip for us.”

“W-what kind of trip?” I asked.

“To the Caribbean,” he said. “White sands. Perfect beaches. Five-star hotels.”

“And you want me to go with you?” I asked. James often went out of town on business, but he’d never asked me to go along. It was a huge step in our relationship.

“I wouldn’t go if you weren’t going too,” he said. “Now – what do you say? Do you want to take a trip to paradise?”





I looked up at Detective Givens, past his thick cock, past his strained expression, and into his eyes. I could see a good person in there. A soul. But on the edges, there was darkness. I can't really explain how I knew, but I could see that he could be driven to acts of pure evil, that he could give the criminals at least as much as he got.

And then he came, sending thick ropes of semen rocketing towards my face. I couldn't help but wince, though I was well used to it at that point. I couldn't count the number of men who'd cum on my face. But even so, the I flinched, then quickly covered it with a smile. The performer in me couldn't let the façade be breached.

Neither of us said a word as I stood up, went to the bathroom, and cleaned myself. When I emerged from the bathroom, he was half-dressed in a pair of jeans and a tee-shirt. His feet remained bare.

"It's a good thing," he said. "The trip, I mean. He trusts you now."

"He's always trusted me," I said, pulling on a pair of panties.

"It's not a vacation," Givens stated, slipping his foot into a white sock. "You know that, don't you? None of his business trips are really about business. Or at least, it's not about Epoch. If I had to guess, he's going down the Caribbean to access an offshore bank account – maybe even make a deposit."

I shrugged. "What does that mean for me?" I asked.

"It means that you shouldn't let him out of your sight," Givens said. "Where he goes, you go. And you tell us where he went. Simple."

"Yeah," I said. "Really simple. And what should I do when he doesn't want me along? I don't want to make him –"

"Something tells me that you know how to get a man to do exactly what you want him to do," the detective stated. He pushed his foot into a big, black boot. He looked up at me. "You'll be fine."





“C’mon,” I said, looking back at James. “Don’t you want to get in the water with me?”

I couldn’t help thinking that he was on to me, that he knew. I’d insisted on accompanying him along every step of the trip; he’d rarely left my sight, and when he had, it hadn’t been for more than a few minutes. Even now that I’d gotten the information I needed – the name of his bank, I didn’t dare give him too long of a leash. But my sudden clinginess had come with a price – no doubt, he’d grown suspicious.

He shook his head, smiling as he said, “No – I think I’ll just watch your cute little ass from here. Besides, I’ve got a little work to do.” He held up his laptop.

“You said no work,” was my response. I sat down in a beach chair beside him. “You said this was all about us. But every time I turn around, you’re on that computer. Or you want to go run business errands.”

“Those errands are paying for this trip,” he said.

“I know,” I said. “But...I...you know...there are some things we can do in the water.” I reached over, caressing what was beneath his shorts. “Nobody would even know. We could be out there in the water, doing whatever we wanted. And they’d only see what we wanted them to see.”

He grinned. “You make a compelling argument,” he said, setting his laptop on top of his bag. He rose, saying, “Lead on.”

And I did, all the while hoping that his libido was more potent than his ability to recognize betrayal.





I averted my eyes as soon as I saw she wasn't wearing any underwear, a reaction which drew a peal of laughter. "Come on," she said. "Aren't we past this false modesty? We both know you've seen all of this and much, much more."

"It's wrong," I said, knowing that she did it to make me uncomfortable. Walking around the house in various states of undress had become something of a favorite past time for her.

"Why?" she asked. "It's not like we're related."

I seethed. Almost as soon as I'd gotten back into town – fresh from the vacation – she'd called me in, saying that she had booked an urgent appointment with a high-dollar client. But judging by her nonchalant attitude, that had been a lie. To say that her demeanor made me uneasy would have been an understatement.

"I've just had an interesting conversation," she said. "With a deliciously handsome young man named Givens. I believe you know him." She didn't wait for me to respond, but instead, kept going. "He's a detective, you know. State police. But you know that, don't you. You've known that for quite some time."

"I-I don't know what you're talking about," I said, trying to sound as convincing as possible.

"Sure you do," she said. "He's that hawk-nosed biker you've been fucking for a few months now. I wonder – did you think I wouldn't find out?"

"I...I..."

She slapped me across the face. "If you'd told him anything – and I mean anything of consequence," she said. "You'd be dissolving in a bathtub full of acid you stupid little cunt!"

"I...I-I don't know –"

Another slap, and I fell to the ground. She loomed over me, saying, "You talk to him again, and you're dead," she said. "I don't care who you are. I don't care about what James wants. You talk to the cops again, and I'll kill you my-fucking-self. Are we clear?"

I could only nod, my heart beating out of my chest as tears flowed freely down my cheeks.



It had all happened so suddenly. One day, I'm trying to plan for life after prostitution, and the next, I'm staring down a long, long road leading to more of the same. She'd shaken me, Trish, and I had no idea how to react. That she knew what I'd done, that she knew I had been in contact with the police was surprising. Her reaction to that reality was absolutely shocking.

I'd rarely seen such fury, and I'd never been so afraid in my entire life. I don't know how long I sat there on the floor, crying as she went about her business. It might have been minutes. It could have been hours. I honestly have no idea. All I could think of was the fact that she'd said she would kill me. And I believed it. God, I believed she wouldn't hesitate to end my life. The act would be little more than an inconvenience.

I was weak, I know. I should've spat in her face. I should have hit her back. I should have done a hundred other things. But I was paralyzed with fear. Until that moment, I didn't realize how much I valued my own life. But as I sat there, weeping, I realized just how much I wanted to keep on living.

So, I did what she said. Over the next couple of days, I slowly recovered some semblance of composure. I never looked at Trish the same way again, but I was able to keep myself from flinching at her sudden movements. That, I think, was a testament to my willpower.

I severed ties with the detective. When he called, I ignored it. When he texted, I deleted the messages. I saw him following me a couple of times, but I lost him. He wouldn't understand, I'm sure. He'd expect me to be brave, to continue the mission. I didn't care about any of that; my only goal was to stay alive. And I did.

I went on a multitude of dates – I don't know how many because they all blurred together. But they were strangely comforting. There, with a man, I knew the stakes. I knew who I was supposed to be. And more importantly, I knew exactly what they wanted. There was little danger and less suspense. I just did my job, got paid, and went home.

I knew it wouldn't last, though I'd convinced myself that hiding from my problems was a viable solution. Eventually, the detective would make a move. At some point, I'd piss Trish off. And then, I'd be dead. Gone. Finished. And the most depressing part was that James was the only person who might mourn my death, and I neither liked nor respected the man.







“What do you mean?” Keith asked. “Just slow down, okay? Tell me everything.”

“Jesus – didn’t you listen to a word I just said?” I asked, my voice hoarse. “Fine. Whatever. It all started when I went to work at Epoch.”

And then I told him everything – about how I’d dated Cameron so I could keep my job at Epoch, about how I’d been fired because I cheated on him. I explained how going out with a few other guys had quickly turned into prostitution with a quick stop at porn along the way. I told him how my mother – who wasn’t really my mother – had pushed me deeper and deeper into that world until I was completely immersed. I explained how I’d started my relationship with James, how I’d met my father, and how I’d learned that Trish wasn’t my mother. I went on to tell him how I’d agreed to work with the cops, and then, finally, how Trish had threatened me.

“And now I’m trapped, Keith,” I said. “I don’t know what to do. I’ve got James on one side – the cops said he was dangerous. And then on the other, Trish – who I know will kill me if I talk. And then there’s this cop, Givens, who’s following me almost everywhere I go. I had to meet you here so he couldn’t single me out.”

“What do they want?” he asked.

“I don’t even fucking know anymore,” I admitted. “God, Keith – Trish just wants to keep me working. Or maybe she just wants to keep me from spying on her. I don’t know. And James...well, James just wants me. Forever.”

“And the cop?” he asked. “It sounds like you gave him enough to arrest someone. What’s he waiting on?”

“I don’t know!” I said. “That’s why I’m here with you. I just...I just need somewhere to stay for a couple of days. I just need some help getting out of town. And then I’m gone. I just...I just can’t take any of this anymore.”

“Whatever you need,” he said. “You know I’m here for you. I’ll do whatever you need me to do.”



“Where do you think you’re going?” James asked, nodding at the bag on the bed.

“You weren’t supposed to be home for a few hours,” I said. “I’m sorry, James. I really am. But I can’t stay here. I can’t really explain why, but —”

“This is about Trish, isn’t it?” he asked, moving in front of the door. I couldn’t help but notice that he was blocking the exit. “Jesus — she’d never actually hurt you. You know that, right? She just wanted to scare you a little. I’d never let her —”

“W-what?” I asked, interrupting him. “S-so you knew about...you knew that...are you saying that you knew about her threatening me?”

“Please,” he said. “Just sit down. I can explain.”

“I’ll stand,” I said.

“Fine,” he stated. “Have it your way. But I just want you to keep in mind that I did all of this for you. I’ve loved you for longer than you know, and —”

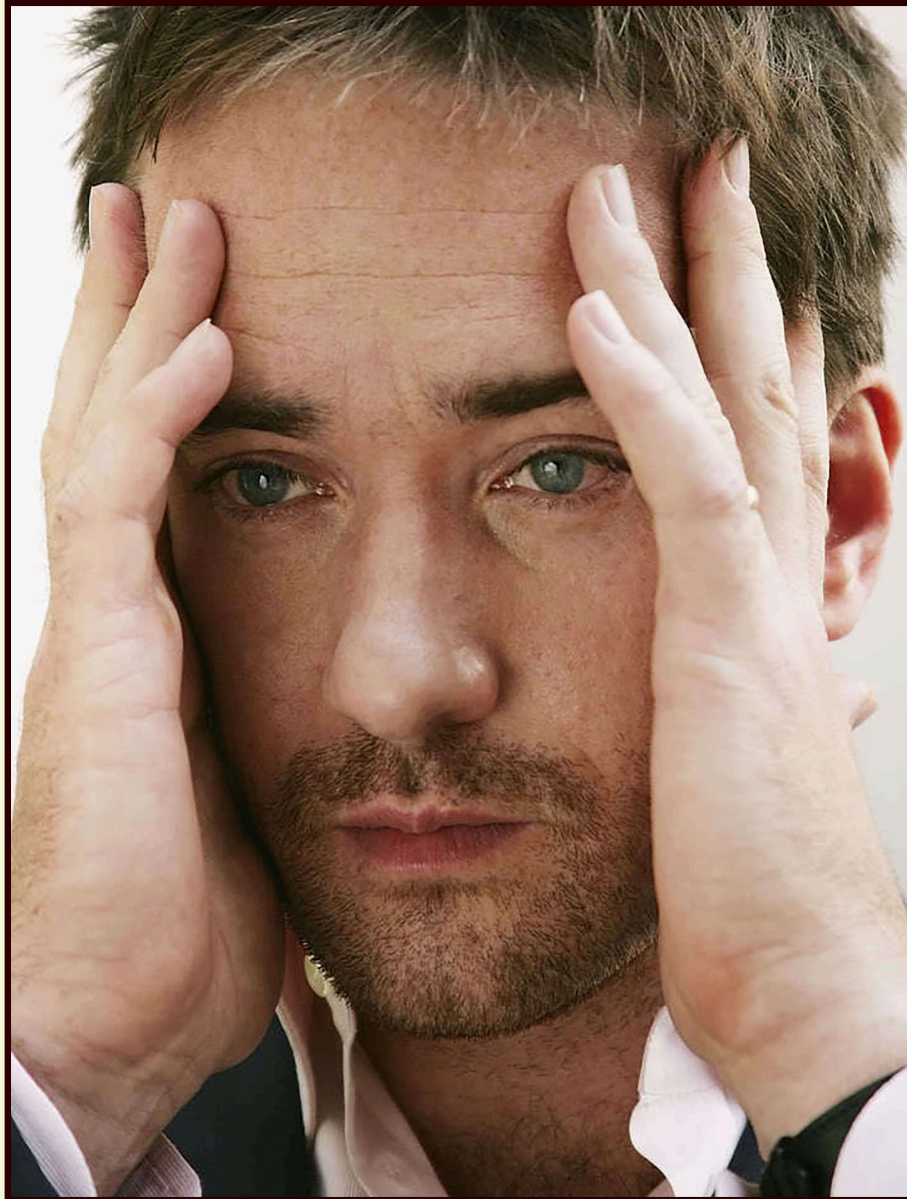
“Just spit it out, James,” I said. “Or I’m leaving right now.”

“In your underwear?” he asked.

“If I have to,” I said, my spine as rigid as it could be. “Just tell me what’s going on.”

“It started the day you came to work at Epoch,” he said. “I know you probably don’t even know, but I saw you there — in the lobby. I mean, back then, you were such a pretty boy. You had such potential. I knew I had to have you.”





“W-what?” I asked. “I don’t...I don’t understand.”

“Of course you don’t,” he said. He rubbed his temples, saying, “I’m so tired. All the lying, the deception – all of it. I’m exhausted, Carly.”

He seemed like such a different person as he went on. “Like I said, I knew I had to have you,” he repeated. “And in the end, I got exactly what I wanted, didn’t I? I thought that given time, you’d grow to love me. I just knew you’d come around. But you didn’t, did you? You never loved me, and you never will.”

“I...I...”

“Don’t lie,” he said, sounding so very tired of it all. “There’s enough of that going on that we don’t need to add your denials to the list. No – I thought the biggest barrier would be the fact that you didn’t like men. That’s why I created Cameron. And to my surprise, it worked. I –”

“What do you mean you created your son?” I asked, confused.

“I don’t have a son,” James stated bluntly. “The Cameron you know was a prostitute, hired specifically to drive you down the proper road. There were others guiding you along the way – Adam and Michael were eager to participate. They both hated you so very much.”

“I don’t understand,” I said, hating my ignorance. I felt like I’d said those three words quite a lot, and it was getting very frustrating.

“It was all a lie!” he hissed, suddenly vicious as he slammed his hand on the table. “All of it, Carly. You’ve been carefully manipulated into every single decision you’ve made since coming to Epoch. And the key player, the one at the center of it all, was Trish. It was her idea, if I’m honest.”

He stood, turning to stare at the wall. “I suppose you and I aren’t so different,” James said. “We were both manipulated – you by me, and me by Trish. She knew I hated him so much. She knew I’d jump at the chance to hurt my old partner. And I did. I took his son, his pride and joy, and I turned him into...you.”

He turned, staring at me with red-rimmed eyes. “He loves you, you know,” he said. “Your father, I mean. I knew, even as I demanded his cooperation, that he’d do anything to spare you. He constantly bragged about your accomplishments. Between you and me, he was a broken man by that point, living vicariously through his son. And I stole even that small pleasure. It wasn’t enough that I put him in jail. No, I had to steal his only source of satisfaction.”





“Just explain it to me,” I said. He’d been babbling for what felt like hours, going on and on about his sins. And once I’d gotten past the initial revelation – that he had, along with Trish, authored my transformation – I couldn’t help but feel frustrated at his distinct lack of clarity. “Just start from the beginning, okay? No detours.”

He sighed. “Like I said, it started when you came to work at Epoch,” he said. “I wanted to make my move then, but Trish said we should take it slow. I trusted her. Why wouldn’t I? Cameron was her idea. So was my wife.”

“Wait, what?” I asked.

“My wife,” he said. “Also doesn’t exist. Look, Carly – you know what happened. You lived it. Just trust that each step of the way, every person who pushed you down this path, they were employed by me to do just what they did. And you turned out so well. God, you’re far more beautiful than I ever could have hoped.”

I didn’t know what to say, so I remained silent as he paced back and forth. “None of it would have happened if your father hadn’t given the money to the police,” he said.

“Trish was convinced – she still is, actually – that he’s got it stashed away somewhere. But I know the truth. I saw it in his eyes. If he could have saved his little boy, he would have.”

He turned on me. “I tried to stop it,” he said. “I wanted to tell you everything a long time ago. I really did. You have to believe it, Carly. But Trish – by then, she was in charge. She had you, and so, she had me. By that point, she knew your father would never give up the money. So, she changed gears. She focused on me.”

“What do you mean?” I asked, my ears perking up at the new information.

“She made me buy you,” he said. “Three-and-a-half million dollars. That’s why I went down to the Caribbean. I had to make good on the deal. She backs off, and I get you. Money well spent as far as I’m concerned.”

“Y-you bought me?” I muttered, the realization echoing in my mind. Not only had I been manipulated into transforming my entire sexual identity, but I’d been bought like a piece of property. I sat down on a white, leather ottoman. “You bought me.”





I stared at myself in the mirror, wishing I didn't know the things I knew. James had gone on for hours, alternating between apologies and explanations, and eventually, I'd gotten the timeline straight. And I was horrified to learn that my entire life over the past three years had been a complicated pattern of manipulation that I could only begin to understand.

It had all started when my father had betrayed his partners, Trish and James. For years, they'd embezzled money from Epoch, using my father's expertise to conceal their efforts. When he left, taking the spoils of their most recent endeavor with him, the whole operation had fallen apart. I suppose he must have intended to pick me up at some later date, reasoning that Trish wouldn't hurt a child in the meantime, but he was arrested long before he had the chance, leaving me with a woman who hated everything I represented.

But she raised me. She even loved me to the degree she was capable of love. But in the end, with so much money on the line, with a decade and a half of resentment under her belt, she decided to blackmail him with my feminization. But he didn't have the money, and so, she was forced to make good on her threats.

Meanwhile, James had developed an unhealthy obsession with me. I had no way of knowing it, but he'd been watching me for months. It had started as concern for his friend's son, but had quickly developed into something far less innocent. And when he learned of Trish's plan, he started making his own.

I suppose he probably thought he was rescuing me from a life of prostitution. And in a way, he was right. He'd never treated me as property, though that's exactly what I became the moment he paid Trish. That I hadn't seen through the ruse, that I didn't see the manipulation was quite a blow, but it was nothing compared to the realization that I had no idea who I could trust. Who was part of it? Who wasn't? There was no way to be sure.

Of course, those panicked thoughts served another purpose: distraction. I didn't want to think about the fact that I hadn't chosen my own path. Given freedom, I would never have become the person I became. I would have lived my life as a normal guy rather than as a...whatever I was. And I didn't know what to think of it all.

Before I'd learned the truth, I was mostly satisfied with who I'd become. I thought I was confident that I was exactly who I was meant to be. But after? I wasn't sure. I didn't know how deep the manipulation went. I couldn't. And it's a difficult thing to grasp, knowing that your entire life is a lie, that you are only who you are because that's what someone else wanted.





I didn't know what else to do, so I simply went on with my life as I'd come to know it – with one key exception: I refused contact with James. It's strange, I know. Trish had betrayed me just as thoroughly, and hers was arguably worse. She'd pretended to be my mother, a person I could trust beyond any other, and she'd treated me like little more than a commodity, a pawn to be moved from one square to another. The fact that I'd known of her betrayal for longer was probably why I didn't hold her to quite as high of a standard.

And I needed her. She was the gateway to all of my clients, who in turn were my path to freedom. I'd saved a little money, but I knew it wasn't enough to get away, to build a new life. So, I continued to work for her.

I tried to tell myself that I was using her just as she was using me, but even as the thought echoed in my mind, I knew it was a lie. She had all the power, and we both knew it. That much, at least, hadn't changed appreciably.

I found myself wanting to go back – not to being a man – that ship had long since sailed. There was no going back to that, even if I wanted it. Rather, I wanted to go back to ignorance. I wanted to once again believe that my life was my own, that I hadn't been thrust into my current role. It was an immature dream of a silly girl, I knew. I could never forget. I could never go back.

And so, I did everything I could to hide it. I smiled at my clients. I tried to enjoy our sessions as much as they seemed to. What I quickly learned was that they didn't really care. My popularity had very little to do with my personality, like I'd previously thought. No – they wanted my look. I was a prop in their fantasy, a toy. And as long as I wasn't so fucked up that I broke immersion, they didn't care one little bit.

As depressing as this may sound, there's freedom in knowledge – even when it's a horrible, horrible truth. And so it was with me. For months – maybe years – a pall had hung over my life. I knew things weren't real, that I wasn't who I appeared to be. And I took solace in the fact that I wasn't, at the very least, crazy. So, I smiled. I performed. I played the part.



"I wondered how long it would take you to discover the truth of it all," Maria said, smiling. "If I'm honest – and I rarely am – I thought it would have been sooner. I certainly wouldn't have signed on if I'd known it was a nearly three-year commitment."

"W-what are you saying?" I asked, dreading the answer. As soon as she'd opened her mouth, I knew that she was in on it. I probably knew earlier, but I'd buried that realization deep in the darkest corners of my mind. I didn't want to believe it.

"You know exactly what I'm saying," was her answer. Her expression didn't change, but my perception of it did. Her smile, once so warm and comforting, had transformed into something darker, something sinister and fake.

"You knew the whole time," I reasoned. She nodded, and I asked, "Why?"

"Because McCarthy paid me a shitload of money, bitch," she said. "It wasn't personal – not like it was with those two little faggots from your high school. They were barely paid at all, by the way. Me, though? I don't come nearly so cheap."

I looked away, tears gathering at the corners of my eyes. It wasn't that I was incredibly close to her. I wasn't. I'd long known that our relationship was one of convenience and habit. She was there, and she listened. It wasn't a close bond. But knowing that it had all been a lie? That our entire relationship had been one more manipulation? It was enough to send me careening over the cliff and into a deep valley of depression.

"If it's any consolation," she said. "I really did like you. Not at first, mind you. Back then, you were insufferable. Always whining about how straight you were – God, it was all I could do not to slap you. But over the past year? I thought we were really making a connection. Given the time, I think –"

"Fuck you," I whispered.

"What?" she asked.

"Fuck you!" I said, my mind finally snapping. "Fuck you. Fuck James. And Fuck Trish. Fuck my father. And Adam. And Michael! Fuck you all! I fucking hate every last one of you! You go on and on so calmly, like manipulating my life was just another day of work. It wasn't! It's my fucking life, you bitch! And you...y-you just...you just...just fuck you, okay? Fuck you! Now get the fuck out of my house!"





“I want you to come back home,” James said. He looked horrible; he hadn’t shaven in God knew how long, and he wore a ratty sweatshirt that looked like it hadn’t been washed in at least a week. It was such a stark contrast to the fastidious dress of the man I knew. “I’ll do anything. Anything at all. I just need you to come back to me.”

I didn’t answer. I couldn’t even think. No, as I looked at him, it was all I could do not to vomit. To say I hated him would be a vast understatement. But there he was, offering me whatever I wanted and more. He was my way out.

“How much did you pay Trish?” I asked.

“Almost four-million dollars,” he said. “After expenses.”

“I want the same,” I said. “Four-million, and I’ll come back to you. I’ll do whatever you want.”

“I don’t...I don’t have it,” he said. “I gave her everything I’d saved. And I’ve already paid for...”

“Paid for what?” I asked. “You’ve already bought me? Is that what you were going to say? Well, I wasn’t for sale then. She sold you something she had no right to sell. But me? I do. And this is my price. Four-million, or you never see me again.”

I’d come up with it just after going off on Maria. If James was willing to pay Trish for my company, then he’d pay me as well, I reasoned. And if anyone was going to profit from my slavery, it was going to be me.

“I’ll get it,” he stated. “Give me a week.”

“I’m leaving in three days,” I said. “You’ve got until then.”

“I can’t —”

I stepped closer, my hand on his chest. Our faces were inches apart when I whispered, “I think you’ll find a way.”



I know it sounds like a dramatic exit, but as soon as I had the money in hand, I ran, far and fast, with the surety that nobody dared follow. Why would they? After all, any relationship I valued had been revealed for the lies they were. Everyone – save James – had gotten what they wanted from me. What else was there? And as for James, I'd rejected him. Completely. Irrevocably. And without remorse. He'd have had to be a glutton for punishment to pursue me further.

I'd left it all behind. James, Maria, Trish, my absentee father, the detective – everyone was gone. Those ties had been severed cleanly. The only one I regretted leaving behind was Keith. He'd done nothing to deserve my desertion. He'd tried to be a good friend. But I needed space. I needed a fresh start. I couldn't even bring myself to say goodbye.

As I stared at my reflection, at the person I'd become, at the woman I would be for the rest of my life, I wondered what was supposed to come next. For the first time in my life, I was alone. There was no one to guide me. There was no more manipulation. At twenty-one years old, I had a bank account full of more money than I could hope to spend in two decades and more freedom than I'd ever known. So, why then did I feel so trapped?

Was I woman? That was the question that kept floating to the top of my mind. I couldn't ignore it, even if I wanted to – which I didn't. No, instead, I wanted to pick at it. I wanted to explore it. I wanted to scratch it, knowing full well that I would only make it worse. It was better to simply accept myself as I'd become, and move on. But I couldn't.

Maybe I never would.

Later, I would discover that James and Trish were arrested soon after my departure; apparently, the bugs I'd planted, along with the information I'd provided had been enough for Givens to make his case. It was a fitting, but unsatisfying end. I wanted to leave my feelings about it all behind; I'd escaped, after all. I needn't dwell on the past. But I wasn't quite there yet. Like the acceptance of my gender, of who I'd become, I don't know if I'd ever truly get past what they'd done to me.



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