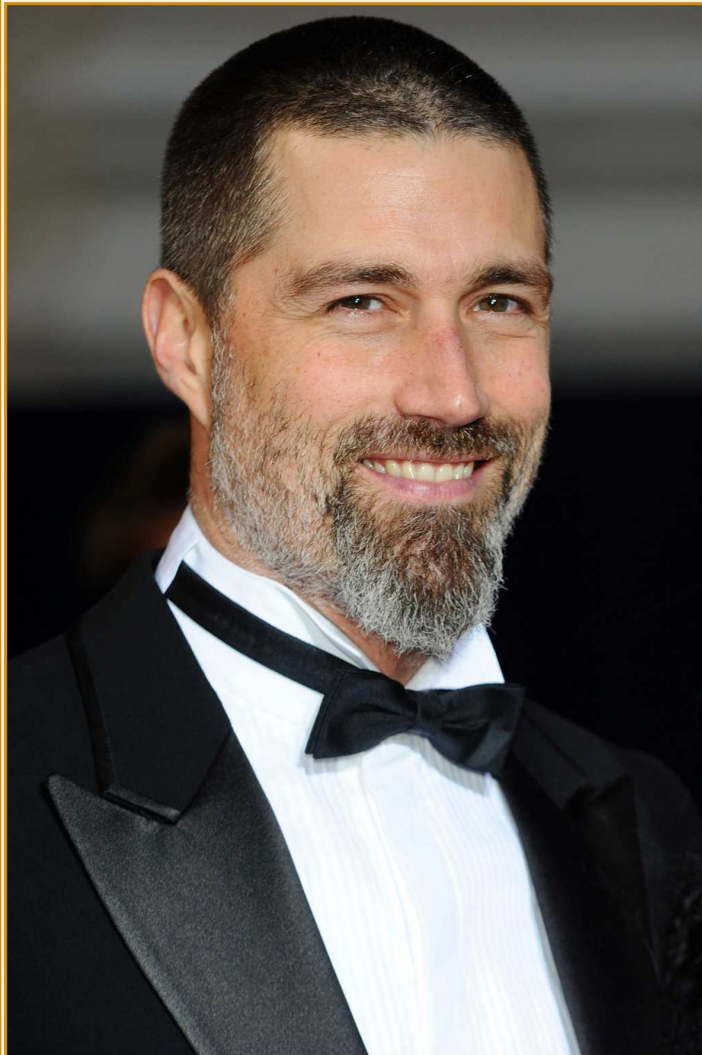




A Different Perspective



"Congratulations, buddy!" I said, forcing a smile as I extended my hand. My best friend, Andrew Dunn, took it, pulling me in for a hug. I patted him on the back. "You deserve this, man. Really."

"Nice," said Andrew, pulling away. He smiled broadly. "I almost believe you're not insanely jealous." He held his thumb and forefinger a half-inch apart. "That close to believing it."

"What?" I asked innocently. "I'm happy for you."

"Again - you're almost there," he said good-naturedly. "If you practice for a few hours in front of the mirror each night, I might believe you in a couple of years."

I shook my head, my grin broadening as I beheld my friend. He was, by anyone's measure, a good-looking man. Tall, broad-shouldered, and with the sort of features that reminded me of a young, more refined Clint Eastwood, he had always had his pick of women. But I had always been more successful - until he decided to win a stupid award. I hated him. But I also loved like a brother. To put it mildly, our relationship was complicated.

"The Dubois award, huh?" I asked, veering away from the topic of my own jealousy. "Who knew living in the projects for a year would net you that kind of recognition?"

"I did," he said. "That's why I do it. Every sociologist is in it for the fame and glory. You know that."

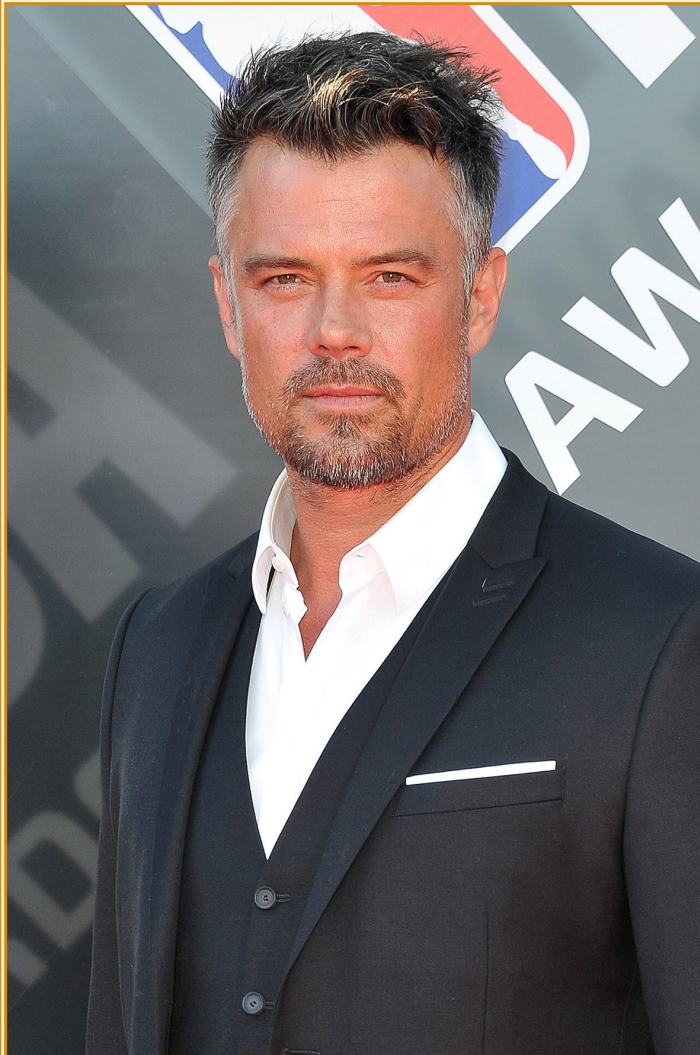
"Ah, so it's similar to political science," I bantered. "Just can't get enough of that rock star lifestyle, right? The long nights, teaching a bunch of college kids who don't want to hear what you have to say, the constant oversight - who wouldn't want to live the life of an academic?"

"And don't forget the low pay," he said.

"Ah, but we're above such monetary concerns, aren't we?" I countered. "We're basically philosopher kings - selfless and -"

"Lacking the good sense to do something more lucrative," he said, laughing. I joined in. "Seriously, though - thanks for being here. I just wish Natalie could've come."

"Wouldn't miss it for the world, buddy," I said. "Now let's go eat this overpriced steak and get you an award."



"I still don't get it," I said, rubbing my temples as I tried my best to avoid the harsh glare of the sun. I was way too old to stay up all night drinking, but after the award ceremony, that's exactly what my friend and I did. "You look like you just got eight hours of sleep, a nice breakfast, and a couple of cups of coffee. How do you do it?"

"Clean living, I guess," Andrew said. Even his shirt seemed freshly pressed, whereas my own clothes were decidedly worse for the wear. And I was pretty sure I smelled like a distillery. "But I'm glad we did this, man. It's been too long since we just hung out."

I nodded, rubbing my temples. "Yeah," I said. "Probably ten years or so."

"Where does the time go?" he mused. "Seems like yesterday we were still in grad school. And now look at us. You've got a daughter who's about to go to college herself."

"Stepdaughter," I corrected, though there was little point in pointing out the difference. I'd been the only father Skylar had ever really known, and for the past ten years, I'd done everything I could to live up to that moniker. In fact, I don't know why I even bothered correcting Andrew. "But time does seem to be going by a lot faster these days. If only I could go back, knowing what I know now..."

"You'd still be a hopeless dweeb," he said. "While I would end up as king of the world."

"Is that so?" I asked. "And what's the king of the world got up his sleeve for his next act? You've already tackled - what was it again? An examination of racial hierarchies and inequalities? Did they make you an honorary black guy for that? Are you now 'woke'?"

And yes - I did use air quotes. The fact of the matter was that, despite my friendship with a bonafide social justice warrior, I didn't think there was nearly as much racial or social inequality as the media would have us believe. There were good reasons people acted the way they did, and it wasn't always because of some racist agenda.

"Actually, I'm pretty excited about my next project," he said. "It's a pretty ambitious project where I'm going to be studying the effects of socioeconomic status and gender on a person's self-image, confidence, and prevailing values."

"Sounds...fun," I said. "Where are you getting funding for that?"

"Private donor," Andrew said. "And it is going to be fun. I wouldn't be surprised if, in a couple of years, I'll get another Dubois award."

"So confident," I said. "I suppose I'll allow it, given that, as of right now, you're the best damned sociologist in the world. But don't let it go to your head, buddy."



"Wow," I said, staring at my wife. We'd been married for ten years, but Natalie still had the ability to take my breath away. It wasn't so much that she was beautiful; I'd been with much better-looking women in my life. Rather, it was the way she carried herself. It was some indefinable quality that made her so attractive. "You're spilling out of that dress, aren't you?"

"It's too much, isn't it?" she asked. "I thought it might be." She gripped her breasts. "I'm still not used to them being this big, and they make clothes shopping a pain."

"Second thoughts about the boob job?" I asked, a lopsided grin on my face. I knew she'd gotten the implants for her own confidence, but I could never deny that I liked them.

"No - nothing like that," she said. "It's just different, you know? People at work look at me differently now."

"Speaking of - how was the conference?" I asked.

"As interesting as a pharmaceutical conference can be, I suppose," she stated. "I don't know why they insist on having them in those exotic locales. With my schedule, I didn't even leave the hotel."

I stepped close, putting my arm around her waist. "Not all that different from our honeymoon," I said, swaying back and forth to a soundless rhythm. "Remember? Aruba? We had all these plans..."

"That we never quite got around to," she finished, smiling. "I remember."

"We could've had a repeat," I said. "We could have ignored another pristine beach - and conferences to boot - while we spent all week in an expensive bed."

She pursed her lips, putting her hand on my chest. "I think you might need a cold shower," she said. "How was Andrew's thing?"

"Boring," I answered. "He got an award. Everyone clapped. And then we got drunk. Not a bad Saturday night, honestly. The only problem was that he was the one getting the award."

"So competitive," Natalie said. "I like it. Now - how about we have a little fun? We've got about an hour before Skylar gets home."

"As you wish," I said before we collapsed onto the bed, ravishing one another like we were twenty-year-olds.



"What?" I asked. Suddenly, the crowded restaurant felt claustrophobic. "I don't understand."

"You had to know this was coming, Edgar," said Oliver Reynolds, the dean of my department. He was a tall man who looked every inch the academic he was. He even had tweed on his coat. "After all the complaints..."

"We're taking those seriously now?" I asked. "They're the opinions of a bunch of brainwashed, stupid kids, Ollie. They're not well-reasoned arguments. They don't -"

"It doesn't look good in this political climate," Reynolds said, interrupting me. "You can understand that, at least."

"I don't understand at all!" I barked, slamming my hand on the table. The flatware rattled. "I've got tenure, Ollie. Tenure. You can't fire me - especially not because some snot-nosed kids can't take a little dose of the truth. All I said was that illegal immigrants are still just that - illegal, and they should be treated just like any other criminal. It's not exactly a hot take, Ollie."

"It is these days," the man said. "And we're not firing you, per se. You're suspended without pay."

"For how long?" I asked.

"Indefinitely," he answered. "I'm sorry, Edgar. The university just doesn't have a choice here. If your students hadn't been recording, maybe it wouldn't be so bad."

"When I started teaching here, you all had backbone," I said. "Not much, but a little. I see that's changed."

Oliver began to speak, but I cut him off by abruptly standing. "Next time you're going to fire someone, have the decency to do it in your fucking office, Ollie," I said. "Not in a goddamn restaurant."

"I'm sorry," he said. "It's out of my hands."

"That's what cowards always say," I spat before turning and leaving. Everyone within earshot stared at me as I strode out of the restaurant.



I shook my head, leaning back against the wooden walls of our sauna. "I'll be okay," I said. "If I want a job, I'll get a job. I literally wrote the book on Latin American politics. I'm not worried about that."

"Then what is it?" asked my wife, Natalie. Like me, she was completely naked, and her body glistened with sweat; to say that I appreciated how much work she'd put into it would be an understatement. She was gorgeous, and, in that respect at least, I knew I was a lucky man.

"I don't want to leave Austin," I said. "If I got a job teaching at another school, I'd have to move. And I have absolutely no interest in uprooting you and Skylar. We've built a life here."

"Then don't teach," she suggested. "You could write that book you've always wanted to write. The one set in the Spanish-American War."

"It's not as simple as that," I sighed, tilting my head back and staring at the ceiling. "But I'll figure it out. I know I will."

She sat next to me. "We'll get through this," Natalie said. "I know we will."

I didn't respond because I wasn't so sure. I knew I'd screwed up the moment I'd started talking about illegal immigration, but I hadn't been able to help myself. It seemed like such a simple issue to me. The media kept referring to the border-jumpers as immigrants, leaving off the "illegal" part, but I knew the truth. They weren't asylum seekers. They were simple opportunists fleeing the countries they screwed up in the first place, and they had every intention of taking advantage of our lenient legal system to better their lives, all on the backs of tax-paying Americans.

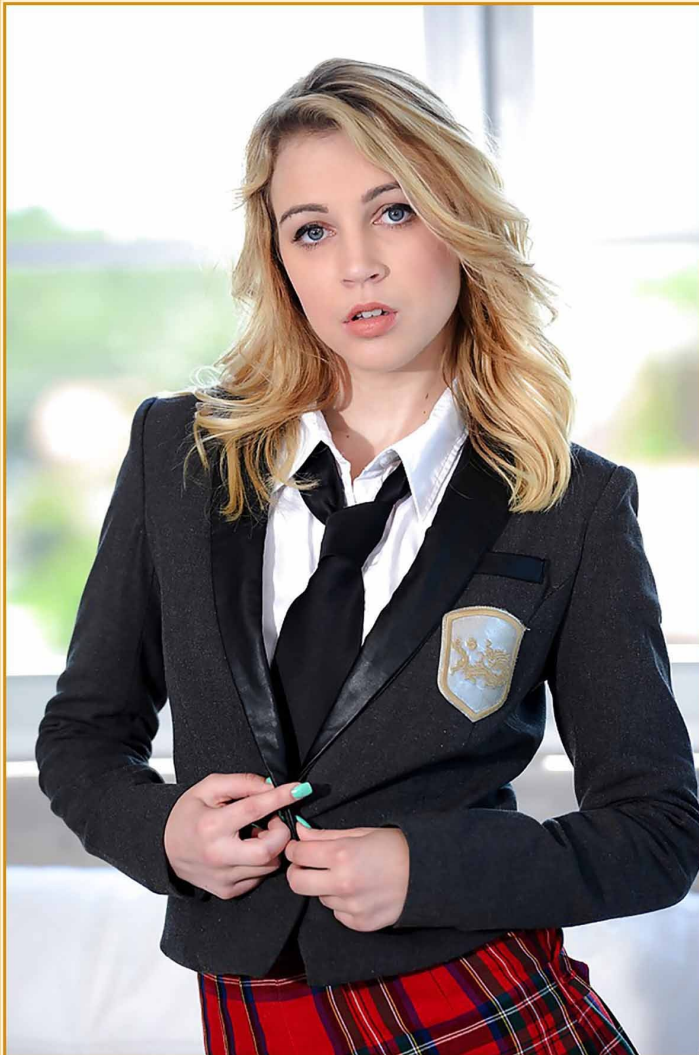
It was infuriating, and I'd been unable to contain myself when my eighteen- and nineteen-year-old students tried to argue with me on the subject.

And despite the fact that my own arguments were well-reasoned and based on fact, I'd been fired. Me, the country's leading authority on Latin American politics. I'd been published more times than I could count. But I'd been undone by a snot-nosed teenager with a recording application on his phone. It was depressing, and not just because of my personal stake in the matter. It made me wonder whether or not I even knew what our country stood for anymore.

"At least I still have my sugar momma," I said, patting her bare leg. "You going to take care of me, Nat?"

"You could be my boy-toy," she said. "I kind of like the sound of that."

As I leaned to kiss her, so did I.



"Jesus Christ, dad," said my stepdaughter, Skylar, buttoning her blazer. With the plaid skirt, white, button-down blouse, and black tie, she looked every inch the schoolgirl she was. Suddenly, I was reminded that in only a few weeks, she would be graduating. "You got fired?"

"Suspended," I said, sipping my coffee. "For telling the truth."

"Did you go on one of your Trump-inspired rants?" she asked, putting a piece of bread in the toaster. The girl had obviously gotten her looks from her biological father, as she looked almost nothing like Natalie. Blonde hair, blue eyes, and fair skin, she was the very picture of the all-American girl.

"I pointed out that we can't support the entire world," I said. "A kid recorded me and sent it to some news channel. The university didn't like the bad press, so they suspended me so they didn't have to admit that I was telling the God's honest truth."

"Sounds like you put your foot in your mouth," was her response. A second later, a lightly toasted piece of bread popped out of the toaster. She grabbed it, smeared some preserves on it, and took a bite. "This better not affect my scholarship to UT."

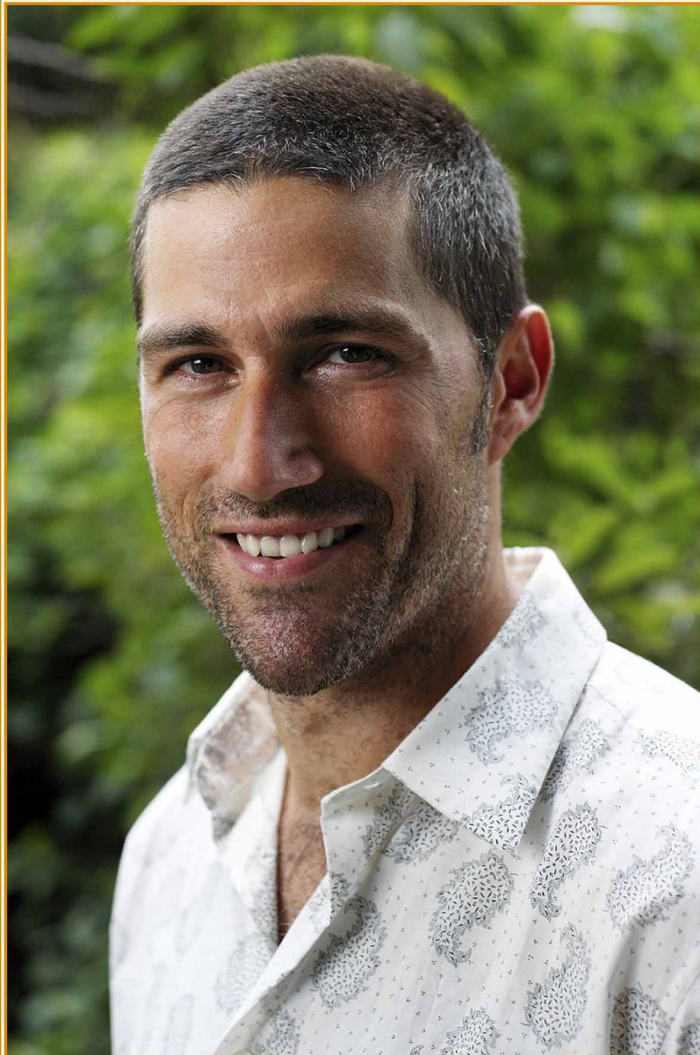
"It won't," I said, taking another sip as she nibbled on the bread.

"What are you going to do?" Skylar asked, taking her phone out of her blazer's pocket. She looked at it, and her eyes widened. "Shit. I'm going to be late for school. Tell me later, okay?"

"Language," I said as she leaned in, kissing me on the cheek. "If your mom hears you talking like that, she's going to flip out."

"Our secret, right?" she said, grinning mischievously. I couldn't help but return the smile. "Love you. See you later. And don't say anything else stupid."

I raised my hands, intending a witty retort, but she was already out the door. I sighed. She was growing up way too fast.



"What's up?" I said, approaching the table. I pulled out a chair across from Andrew. "I came as soon as I got your message."

"Thanks," he said. Waving at the server, he asked if I wanted anything. I was famished, so I ordered a sizable lunch consisting of brisket, macaroni and cheese, and a couple of rolls. I topped it off with a beer. After the server brought me my drink, Andrew said, "I was sorry to hear about what happened. That was a shitty thing of them to do."

I took a long, deep swallow of beer. "Yeah," I said. "Their loss. That all you wanted to talk about? Because you made it sound like it was urgent."

"No," he said. "I want your help with my research."

"What? I'm not a sociologist, Andrew," I said. "I'm a political scientist. I mean, I could help with methodology or arranging statistics, but that's your field, man. I'd just get in the way."

"No - you misunderstand," he said. "I want you to be the subject."

I almost choked on my beer. "W-what?" I asked, wiping my face with my hand. "You want to study me?"

"I do," he stated. "Listen - I can't answer too many questions, but basically, this would have you live the next two years as...well...there's no easy way to say this..."

"Just say it, Andy," I interrupted. He hated when I called him that.

"Okay, you'd live the next two years as a domestic," he said. "A...female domestic."

I laughed. "You're joking," I said.

"I'm not," he said. "Let me explain..."

And then he did, leaving me wondering if I was on one of those prank shows. In the end, he added the one condition that might get me to do whatever he wanted me to do. "If you do this, my connections can get you your job back," he said. "In fact, if you do this, I'm pretty sure you'd be running the political science department."

"Your connections?" I asked. "Since when do you have connections?"

"Since my private funding came from Dr. Mario Russo," he said. It was all I could do not to gasp. Having the CEO of the largest biotech company in the state in my corner would go a long way to getting me reinstated.

"I've got to talk to Nat," I said. "I'm not saying I'll do it. I don't know yet. I'm just saying I'll discuss it with her."

"Don't take too long," Andrew said. "You're perfect for this, but we can always find somebody else."

"Noted," I said just as the brisket arrived. Suddenly, I wasn't all that hungry.

"This is a joke, right?" asked Natalie, grinning like she wasn't quite sure whether or not I'd gone a little crazy. "If so, it's not funny."

"Can you please put some clothes on?" I asked, pacing back and forth. "It's really distracting having your tits hanging out like that."

"Fine," she pouted, grabbing a tee-shirt from atop the bed. She slipped it on, but it did little to disguise her body. It was almost worse than when she was naked. "Now - serious mode. Are you really considering this?"

I shrugged. "Hard not to," I said. "I mean, it's two years, right? I don't know what all is involved, but if it can get me my job back, I have to at least think about it."

"And Mario Russo is somehow involved?" she asked.

"He's funding the whole thing," I said. "And he's giving Andrew enough to fund his research for the next ten years."

"Why you?" was her next question. "I don't think it's because you're going to look good in a dress."

"I said the same thing," I stated. I was a lot of things, but feminine simply wasn't one of them. Even if they employed a team of Hollywood makeup artists, I'd still come off looking like a guy in drag. But Andrew had assured me that that wouldn't matter. "Andrew said that I was perfect because of our relationship, actually. At least in part. He needed an accomplished person in a healthy relationship. Look - I'm not sure why he offered this to me. Maybe he felt sorry for me and wanted to help. In any case, I think -"

"You should do it," she said. "I know it's weird. And I'm not really sure what any of it even means, but I think you should take whatever chance you have to take to get your job back. That position means too much to you to ignore this opportunity."

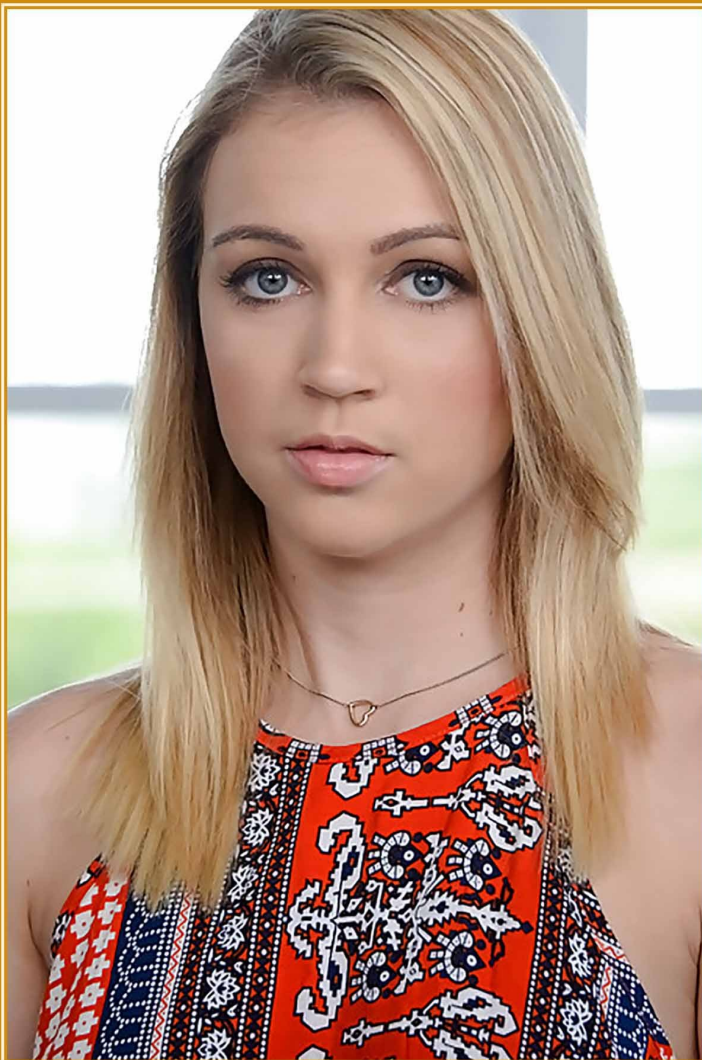
"That...that's what I was thinking," I said.

"You sound surprised," Natalie stated.

"Honestly? I am," I said. "But I guess I should've guessed you'd jump at any chance you could to get a maid around here. You've been whining about hiring one ever since Ava moved back to Florida."

"I can have more than one reason for doing something," she said, smiling. It was far more genuine than before. "Just call Andrew. Tell him you'll do it."





“W-what?” asked a clearly devastated Skylar. “You’re leaving?”

“I have to,” I said. “And I’m going to be gone for a while.”

“How long?” she asked.

“Two years,” I answered, choking on the words. Everything was moving so quickly that I hadn’t even had time to consider how my participating in Andrew’s study would affect my stepdaughter. For me, I was leaving for a couple of months. But she was losing the only father she’d ever known for over two years. It wasn’t fair, and I almost backed out then and there.

“He has to do this, Skylar,” Natalie interjected. “We talked about it, and –”

“You talked about it!” the teenager screamed. “Nobody even bothered to consult me. But who cares what Skylar thinks, right? I mean, I’m just a kid. I don’t deserve to be included in family decisions.”

“Skylar, I didn’t mean to –”

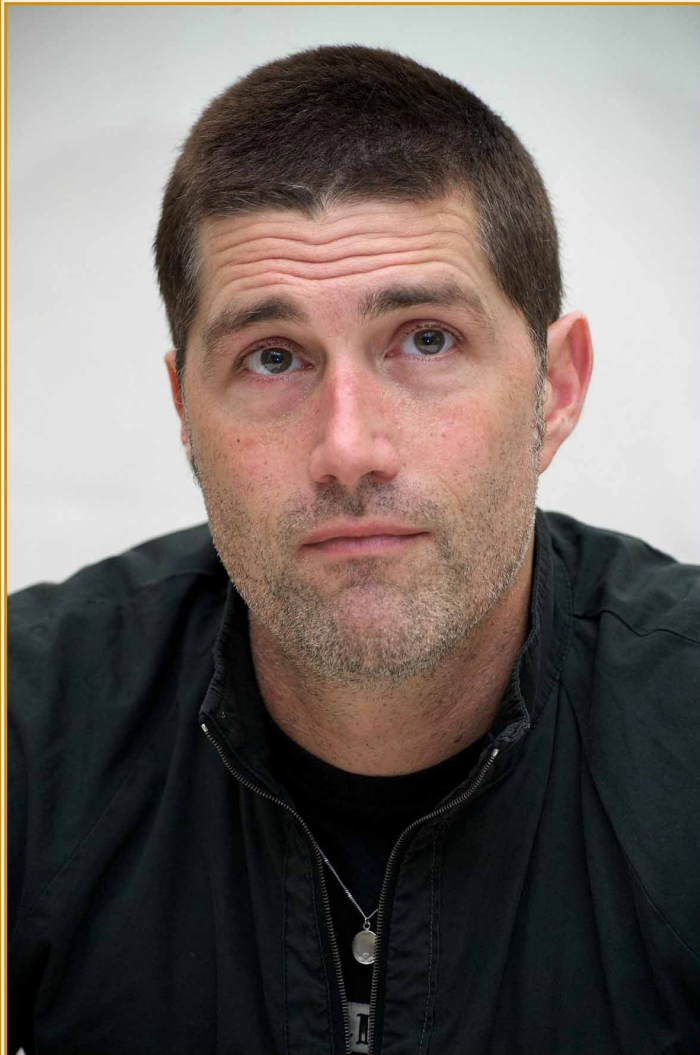
“No,” she interrupted. “Just no, Edgar. You know what? Go ahead. Leave. I don’t even care. It’s not like you’re my real dad, anyway.”

I tried to say something. I tried to stop her. But she was out the door in an instant. I winced as she slammed it behind her.

Turning to my wife, I asked, “Should I do this?”

“Yes,” Natalie said. “You can still email her. And she’ll get over it. I promise, it’ll be okay. She’s just a dramatic girl.”

I sighed. “I guess you’re right,” I said.



I leaned forward, "Excuse me?"

"Just answer the question, Edgar," Andrew said, leaning back in his chair. He had a notepad propped on his lap. "Have you ever crossdressed?"

I shook my head. "Once," I said. "In high school. It was a womanless beauty pageant. But never before and never since."

"Good," he said. "No homosexual encounters?"

Again, I told him that I hadn't. We'd been at it for the better part of eight hours, and there didn't seem to be any end to the interviews in sight. I knew what he was doing; Andrew was trying to formulate a baseline for my personality so that, when everything was said and done, he could compare the results. And while I thought the whole thing was silly – I was who I was, and there was nothing that could change that – I was willing to jump through whatever hoops he deemed necessary. That's how I found myself answering endless questions about everything from my political beliefs to my religion and everything in between. As someone who'd never even gone to so much as a single structured therapy session, I felt a little exposed.

Finally, after another two hours of questions – some of which required me to wear a harness on my head which would "measure my brainwaves" – he declared the interview over. Then, Andrew asked if I had any questions.

"More than I can count," I said. "How is this going to work, man? I mean, I'm never going to pass for a woman."

"A Latina woman," he said. "Specifically, Adriana Flores, illegal immigrant from Mexico. And I assure you that it's possible. When we're done in a couple of months, you won't recognize yourself. Neither will anybody else."

"But it's all reversible, right?" I asked. "Whatever they're going to do, it's reversible."

"Of course," Andrew answered. "But you'll find out more tomorrow when we go to the facility."

"Facility?" I asked.

"Dr. Russo's personal laboratories," he responded. "That's where the magic's going to happen."

The facility, as Andrew had called it, looked like something out of a particularly kitschy video game. Or something made out of Legos. As I stared at the two buildings that comprised the small campus, I couldn't decide which was the better descriptor. In any case, it didn't look intimidating.

So, why was I so afraid?

"It's going to be okay," Andrew said, standing on the other side of his black BMW. "It's all legit. I promise."

"Yeah, I know," I said. "It's just that this isn't what I expected."

"That's almost a hundred million dollars' worth of lab right there," he said, pointing to the nearest building.
"The other's worth probably twice as much."

"That doesn't seem right," I said, trying to do a mental calculus. It didn't add up. The buildings, for all their showy exteriors, were still little more than an upscale office park. And those didn't cost that much money.

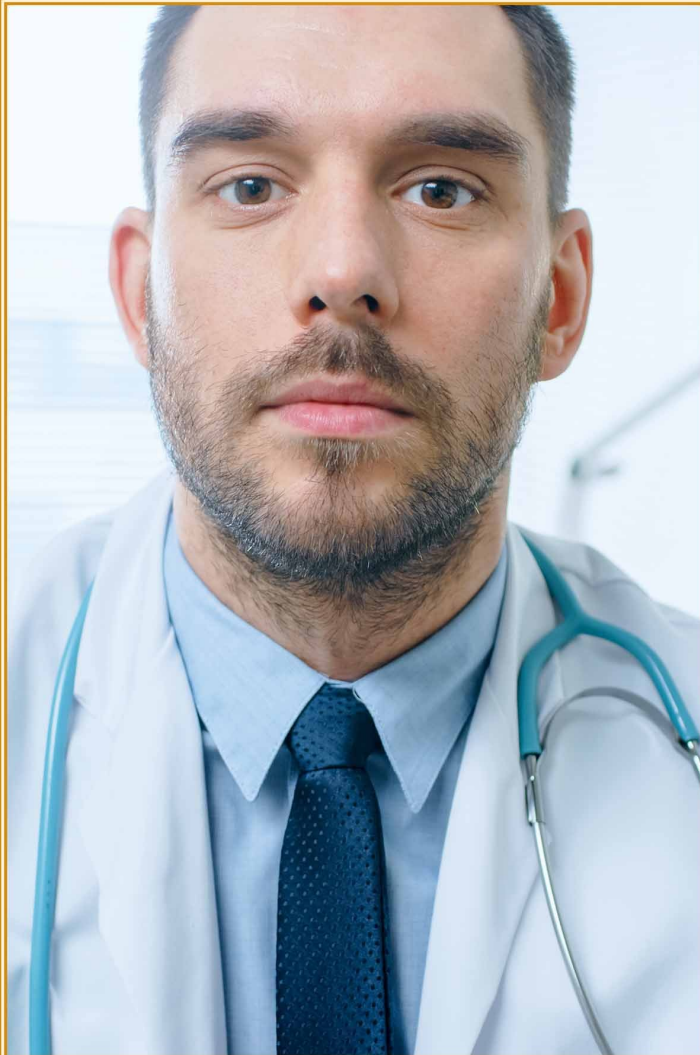
"It's all the equipment inside," he said, reading my intent. "Genetic sequencing and advanced nanocomputing doesn't come cheap, apparently."

"Apparently," I agreed. "So - should we get this over with?"

"You can still back out," Andrew stated. "I won't think less of you. This is a big decision, and -"

"I said I'd do it, and I am," I said, starting forward. "I just hope everybody knows what they're doing."





"You're going to what, now?" I asked, trying to wrap my head around what the doctor, a man named Barry Forrester, had just said to me. "A computer chip? In my brain?"

"Multiple, actually," Barry said. He spread his hand, saying, "Five, to be precise. Each in different parts to control different things."

"What things?" I muttered, feeling a sense of trepidation washing over me. Sitting in front of the doctor, everything seemed far more real than it had before.

"Three will change the way your body produces hormones," he explained.

"The other will alter the way your mind processes language. It's truly interesting technology – the language part, I mean. We developed it to help people who've suffered brain injuries which rendered them mute. But in your case, it's going to give you a pretty thick accent. It'll also make Spanish your primary language."

"My...my primary language?" I asked. "What does that even mean?"

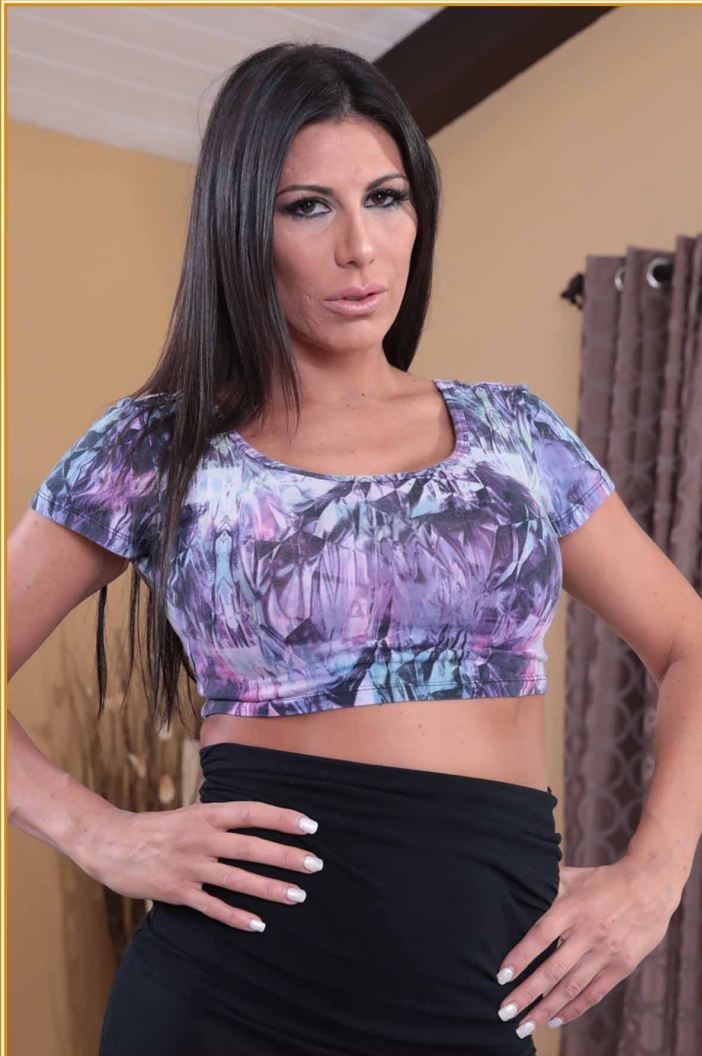
"People with different native languages think differently," he said. "It's pretty complicated, the way it works, but it's based on patients who've experienced Foreign Accent Syndrome. You'll still understand English, of course, but it'll be through a filter of Spanish, much like how you currently perceive Spanish. You are fluent in that language, yes?"

I nodded. I'd been speaking Spanish since I was twelve, having learned it from my childhood nanny. I had also spent large chunks of time in Mexico and its surrounding countries doing research. "Is this safe?" I asked. I didn't want to admit it, even to myself, but the idea of someone messing around with my brain truly frightened me. Having watched my own father descend into dementia, I knew precisely how delicate the mind was.

"Of course it is," he said without hesitation. "We've been doing testing this on humans for nearly two years, and we haven't had a single problem in that span. It's perfectly safe; I assure you."

"O-okay," I said. "Now – what else is being done to me?"

He smiled and began to explain. If I was honest, the whole thing sounded like it belonged in the realm of science fiction, but I couldn't help but think that if anyone could engineer such a transformation, it was Dr. Russo's people.



"You're kidding, right?" said Natalie, her hands on her hips, her tone stern. The effect was somewhat ruined by the fact that she was wearing a top that looked like it belonged on a girl half her age. I almost asked if she'd been borrowing Skylar's clothes, but I wisely thought better of it. It was one thing to antagonize her when things were going well; it was quite another to tease her when she was upset. "That doesn't sound possible."

I'd just recounted the Dr. Forrester's explanation of what I could expect, and she'd listened with disbelief. If I was honest, I didn't want to believe it was possible either. Or perhaps I was simply afraid that it was. In any case, I knew what to expect.

"They said it's all been tested extensively," I stated. "The microchips, the genetic changes – everything."

Basically, after the chips had been implanted into my brain, I would be subjected to a series of genetic treatments which would target the hallmarks of individual ethnicity. Skin tone, facial structure, eye color, hair texture – apparently, everything would be altered. After a few weeks, those changes would solidify, and I'd be given a complete sex change.

"But that last bit sounds permanent," she said. "A real sex change? Like, they're going to turn your penis inside out and craft a vagina?"

I shook my head. "No," I said. "I asked the same question, and Forrester laughed. He said that their methods weren't so crude as that. But he assured me that when it was all over, I could go back to normal. I don't know how it works, I admit, but all the contracts say that if I'm not able to resume my old life, Gentech will be liable for serious damages. We're talking seven- or eight-digits' worth of damages."

"So, you're seriously going to have a pussy?" she asked. "Like a real, live pussy?"

I nodded. "Wild, isn't it?" I said. "But this is a great opportunity, right? You're still fine with it, aren't you? Because I'm sure I can still back out."

She shook her head. "No," she said. "The reasons for doing it are still the same, right? They're still going to get you your job back."

"And there's a stipend, too," I said. "For the sake of the experiment, I won't be able to touch it until after the program's finished, but when I'm done, I'll get close to two-hundred thousand dollars. I know we don't really need the money, but it couldn't hurt, right?"

"Like I said, there's every reason to do this," she said. "And who knows? Maybe it'll teach you some perspective on how the other half lives."

"Maybe," I agreed.



"I think the shape of your nose is the biggest difference," said Natalie, looking over my shoulder as I stared at my own reflection. I resisted the urge to reach up and touch my face, and she ran a hand along my scalp, smiling. "And the hair."

"Not the skin color? Or the fact that I look like a totally different person?" I asked, my voice sounding funny in my ears.

"You're speaking Spanish again," she chided.

"Dios mio," I muttered. Clearing my throat, I consciously forced myself to think in my version of heavily accented English. "That has to be the biggest thing for me. It's like I don't even have to think to speak Spanish. It just comes out."

"That's the point, isn't it?" Natalie asked. "You can't very well be a Mexican immigrant and speak perfect English, right?"

"Right," I said, still staring into the mirror. Everything was different, and even though I'd seen the progress over the previous month, I still scarcely believed that I'd been so thoroughly transformed. And more changes were in store. Once the racial changes solidified, I would begin my transition into femininity.

"When does your tutor arrive?" Natalie asked.

"Dos semanas," I said. "I mean, two weeks. Sorry."

"Not your fault, sweetie," she responded, leaning in to kiss my cheek. "When do I have to go?"

"When she gets here," I answered. "And then you won't see me for two months, and by that time, I'll fully be Adriana Flores, your new housekeeper."

"Well - let's make the best of it while we can," she said, kissing my neck. "I always wanted a sexy, Latin lover."



"I'm delaying the inevitable," I said, tugging at the scarf. "The way I figure it, I'm going to be wearing dresses and skirts for two years, so I may as well wear guy's clothes until I absolutely have to change."

"It's remarkable," said Andrew. "Absolutely crazy. You don't look a day over twenty."

"I actually feel pretty damned good too," I said. I was forty-four years old, and until the procedure, I'd had the body of a middle-aged man. My joints had ached. I hadn't had the stamina I'd once possessed. But now? I felt better than I'd felt in twenty years. I truly felt like a twenty-year-old.

"And that accent - is it fake?" he asked. "I know they said -"

"I couldn't talk the way I used to, even if I wanted to," I stated. "Even now, I have to consciously choose to speak English."

"Amazing," he said. "I knew Russo had a plan for this, but I didn't think it would be so..."

"Complete," I provided. "I know. It's crazy."

"What does Natalie think of the new you?" my best friend asked.

"The jury's still out," I said. "I think she liked the novelty at first, but I can see that she wishes the old me was back. So do I, if I'm honest. You have no idea what it's like to look in the mirror and see someone else staring back at you. And listening to my own voice? I feel like a stranger in my own body."

"Second thoughts?" he asked, cutting his eyes at me.

"No," I said. "I signed up for this, and I'm going to see it through."

"That's what I wanted to hear, buddy," he said. "I just want you to know that I appreciate you doing this. I know you're not doing it for me. I get that. But it's still a big deal that you're willing to devote two years of your life to this. So, thank you. Really."

"Aww," I said, faking a shy smile. "You're going to make me blush."



"I'm Carmen," said the beautiful girl sitting before me. She wore a red, floral print dress and looked like she was in her early twenties. "And I'm going to guide you into your new life."

"My temporary life," I said, sitting across from her.

"Right," she agreed, crossing her legs. "Wine?"

I nodded, and she poured a pair of glasses. I took a sip, and she asked, "Did you say goodbye to your wife yet?"

Again, I nodded. "She wanted to stay," I stated.

"It wouldn't be conducive to the program," Carmen said. "When you return to her, she has to see you as a completely new person. Watching the transformation would undermine that."

"I know," I said. Then, it suddenly dawned on me that we'd been speaking Spanish. With a conscious effort, I switched to English. "I really need to focus on speaking English."

"That's partially my fault," Carmen stated. "The way your implants work, you'll almost automatically default to Spanish when you're speaking to someone else who uses the language. It's all part of the -"

"Program," I said. "I understand. It's just a little frustrating is all."

"Yes," she said, taking a sip of her wine. "If you don't mind, can I give you some advice?"

"That's why you're here," I said.

"Stop fighting it," she said. "And definitely stop thinking of this as some temporary thing. As far as you're concerned, this needs to be the new you. I know it's difficult, but you truly do need to live your life as if this is who you are."

"I know," I said. "I get it. It would just be a lot easier if I knew a little more about who I was supposed to be."

"For now, I think it would be enough if you simply started going by your new name," she said. "From now on, I will refer to you as Adriana Flores."



"No lo sé," I admitted, not even bothering to stop myself from speaking Spanish. It was clearer that way. "I'm just not sure, okay? I have no idea what to expect, honestly."

Carmen, who was also speaking Spanish, said, "This is Texas. You've lived here for the past fifteen years, right? You watch the news. You know good and well what it means to be an illegal immigrant in this part of the country."

"Fine," I said. "Okay - I expect to be harassed by I.C.E. or something. Maybe deported if I'm not careful. What happens if that happens, by the way? What do I do?"

"You fulfill your end of the bargain," she stated. "Which means you'll have to make your way in Mexico. The fear needs to be real, Adriana."

I didn't respond. What would I do if I were deported? It wasn't like I had any family to lean on. My entire backstory had been concocted from thin air. If I ended up being sent to Mexico, I'd be completely on my own.

"Tell me again - how many siblings do you have?" she asked.

"Seven," I said. "Three brothers. Four sisters. I'm the youngest."

"And how old are you?" was her next question.

"Nineteen," I said. She'd been drilling me on my - or rather, Adriana's history - for the past week, and I thought I'd gotten it down pretty well. "My birthday is September sixth., nineteen ninety-eight. And I was born in Juarez, but my family lives just outside the city."

"Good," Carmen said. "And what do you want to be when you grow up?"

I sighed. "A hairdresser," I said. "But I can't afford the school, so I'm working as a housekeeper."

"Very good," she said before continuing to drill me on my backstory. The goal was to make my responses natural, instinctive. And I was well on my way.



“What the hell are you wearing?” asked Carmen, speaking English. Her tone was one of severe annoyance. “And where have you been?”

“Out,” I said, running my hand through my much-longer hair. It was growing at an extremely rapid pace, which was probably the least troubling transformation I’d endured.

“You know you’re not supposed to leave the facility,” she chided.

“Okay, mom,” I sneered before giggling. For some reason, it seemed incredibly amusing to think that the I looked like her younger brother.

“I’m fine. It’s not like anybody out there would recognize me or anything.”

She sighed. “That’s not the point,” she stated. “And are you high?”

I held up my hand, spreading my thumb and forefinger a half-inch apart. “A little,” I admitted. “But it’s not my fault. I was just hanging out at this _”

“I don’t care!” she said. Reaching out to grip the series of chains around my neck, she asked, “And what the hell is all this?”

I shrugged, pulling away. “Isn’t this what the kids are wearing these days?” I asked. “I just wanted to blend in.”

“No,” she said. “Just...no. That’s not what anybody’s wearing.” She sat down, shaking her head. “God, I’ll be glad when we get to the next phase. Maybe then you’ll stop this kind of nonsense.”

I sat down next to her. “I just wanted to blow off some steam,” I said, my tone serious. “I’m sorry.”

“It’s okay,” she said, patting my thigh. “I’m sure you were careful. And I get it. You’re going through a lot. So, why don’t we just put this behind us? I won’t tell anybody, okay? But you have to promise you won’t just wander off again.”

I nodded solemnly. “I won’t,” I said.



“Just relax,” Carmen said, standing in front of me in a short, satin robe. “This is supposed to be enjoyable.”

I attired almost identically, save for the fact that her panties, which I could clearly see, were lace while mine were simple cotton briefs. Even so, they felt restrictive and wrong, and I wasn’t very comfortable. Most of my discomfort had nothing to do with my clothes; rather, it was rooted in my expectations of what was to come.

“It’s just a makeover,” she said when I didn’t respond.

A makeover. Sure. No doubt, when I was finished, I would feel like a new man. Or rather, a woman. My fears, such as they were, made no sense. I knew it was coming. Far sooner than I cared to think about, I’d be completely female, and I’d be sent off into the world as such. So, getting my body hair removed, having my eyebrows professionally plucked, and getting my now-shoulder-length hair styled shouldn’t have been a big deal.

But it was. Before, everything all seemed so hypothetical. It was one thing to look like a Mexican man. Or rather, a boy, if I was honest. It was something altogether to become a woman. I felt nauseous.

Leaning on a massage table, I said, “I need a minute.”

“No,” she said.

“W-what?” I asked, looking up at her.

“I said no,” she stated. “It’s easier if you just do it. Try not to think about it too much. That comes later. You’ll feel better once you look the part.”

“But -”

“No ‘buts’,” she said. “Now - follow me. You should be excited. This is the first day of Adriana’s new life.”



"I think you look amazing," Carmen said. "And your breasts are definitely coming in."

I smiled, gathering my hair in a bunch. I didn't necessarily like the idea of "developing" as a woman, but her compliments had begun to mean so much to me. Despite her youth, Carmen was a strict teacher, and any praise was cause for celebration.

"I still feel stupid," I said. My new body chemistry had begun to do its work, and my body had started to change in kind. "Wearing this girly underwear."

"Girly?" she asked. "Seriously? Those are about the blandest I could find. Just wait until you start wearing thongs and such. They're not really all that practical right now because of your...ahem...bulge, but soon, you'll be able to wear the skimpiest panties."

I didn't really have anything to say to that because I didn't know how I felt about having a vagina. It scared me, sure. It was terrifying to think that I'd spend the better part of two years without the thing that made me a man. Hell, it was a big part of what made me who I was. Which,

I suppose, was the point in losing it. I could never truly become Adriana if I still had that thing swinging between my legs.

"How long?" I asked. "Until I finish this and start my life in the real world?"

"Eager beaver, huh?" Carmen asked. "A few months at most. It really depends on how well you progress."

"With what?" was my next question. "I thought I was going to finish the transformation as soon as my body could handle it."

"That's part of it," she said. "But we can't put you out there until you can act the part. And you're not even close to there yet. It can't just be an act. There can't be a single chink in your armor or the whole experiment will be invalidated."

I sighed. It made sense. "Well," I said. "Let's get started then."



I hated wearing stockings. I'd only been "female" for a few weeks, and I knew that for an absolute fact. They weren't comfortable. They constantly wanted to fall down my thighs. And they were incredibly prone to tearing. In short, as much as I'd loved seeing Natalie wearing a pair of thigh-highs, I'd grown to loathe the things with almost every ounce of my being.

As I looked in the mirror, though, I couldn't deny that they made my legs look good. And I mean, really, really good. I eyed the rest of my ensemble, which was lying on my bed. White, satin panties and a matching camisole. I dreaded putting on the ridiculous outfit, but I had little choice in the matter. Carmen wanted me familiar with "nice" lingerie, and so I would follow her instructions.

I grabbed the skimpy panties, noting that at least they had a full back. I dreaded the day I'd be expected to wear the stringy thongs Carmen had often described. Slipping the panties up my stockinged legs, I was at least relieved that my body hadn't continued to change. I still had the same, barely-there breasts and boyish hips I'd had a week before, which I knew was a sign that my body had begun to settle. Soon, I'd be ready for the next phase - physically, at least. Mentally and emotionally, though, I didn't know.

My one solace in all of this was that I'd been finally been allowed the use of a computer, which in turn gave me the opportunity to email my stepdaughter. I wasn't thrilled with leaving my life behind, but one of the worst parts was abandoning Skylar. I'd concocted a story about studying a Colombian political campaign, which explained my absence. And she had bought it. However, I felt horrible about lying to her. She'd had enough of that from her biological father.

I pulled the camisole over my head, letting it fall into place, and again, I looked in the mirror. I looked good. Not quite like a girl - especially given the bulge between my legs - but more feminine than I'd ever have thought possible.

"And this is only the beginning," I said, bending down to put on my heels. At only two inches, they were modest, but they might as well have been stripper heels for how well I managed to walk in them. But I was getting better. At all of it. Soon, Carmen would declare me a finished product, and I'd be on to the next phase. But not yet. No - to get there, I had to wear ridiculous lingerie and learn to walk in heels.

I sighed, balancing on the heels. One step at a time, I told myself. Un paso a la vez.



It was definitely getting smaller; there was no denying that it had shrunk considerably in the past week. It shouldn't have been alarming, especially given the other changes wrought on my body. But no man – even one who would soon be a woman – could look at his own shrinking penis and not worry about it, and I was certainly no exception.

Each day, I stared at myself in the mirror, naked or with my panties around my shins, wondering if I'd somehow made a horrible mistake. When I'd agreed to go through with the transformation, I had been confident that my masculinity could survive. My body wasn't what made me a man. It was my mind. However, the reality was so different than my expectations. I was a long, long way from completion, and already, I was beginning to forget what looking in the mirror and seeing a man felt like.

Carmen didn't help matters, constantly referring to me as Adriana and using feminine pronouns. It was so easy to simply fall into the state of femininity when I was around her.

The girl, despite her apparent youth and cute visage, was a harsh mistress. She rarely let up, constantly chiding me about the way I walked, the way I talked, and the way I carried myself. Carmen obviously took her role seriously and wanted me to become the most convincing woman I could be.

However, it wasn't all bad. There was something almost hypnotizing about bending my mind to the task. I'd always been a focused person, and that hadn't changed just because I'd begun to look more feminine. That, and the last thing I wanted was to walk around out in public looking like a man in a woman's body.

I slipped my panties up my legs, settling myself into place before saying, "You can do this, Adriana."

I don't know if I believed it or not, but referring to myself by my adopted name felt surprisingly good. In any case, "Edgar" didn't seem to fit anymore. Not for me and not for the woman I would soon become.

"Sure you can," said Carmen. I wheeled around to see her standing in the doorway, a smirk on her face.

"W-what...how long have you been standing there?" I asked, automatically reverting to my natural Spanish.

"Long enough," she said in English. "Come on. We've got work to do."



“Your first bikini,” said Carmen. “How does it feel?”

“Embarrassing,” I admitted in heavily-accented English. I had started to force myself to use my own native language. It wasn’t easy, but I thought it might get better over time. Or maybe it was simple hope. In any case, my mind certainly was not on what language I spoke. Rather, I couldn’t focus on anything but my humiliating outfit – a fairly modest bikini in pink and black.

“It shouldn’t be,” she said. “It should feel natural. Normal.”

“I’m trying,” I said.

“Try harder,” was her counter. “Like, perhaps you should start with not hiding behind trees every time you see someone walk by the pool.”

“Y-you noticed?” I asked. Our trip to Carmen’s apartment’s pool wasn’t my first outing as an apparent female, but I certainly wasn’t used to it. The place wasn’t particularly crowded or anything, but it felt like every single eye was following me wherever I went. My almost subconscious decision to confine myself to a shaded corner of the pool area made me it far less likely someone would fixate on me.

“I noticed,” she deadpanned. “Look – you can’t be a hermit. You can’t hide. You’re a woman. And when Dr. Russo’s finished with you, I’m willing to bet that you’ll be quite a pretty one. And pretty girls like to be looked at.”

“Not all of them,” I argued.

“Most,” she said. “And you need to be like most girls. You can’t be an outlier. Now, follow me. We’re going to get some sun.”

I sighed, realizing that she was right, and followed her toward the most populated part of the pool. We settled into a pair of deck chairs, and I did everything I could to quiet the veritable hurricane of emotions – embarrassment and humiliation chief among them – swirling through my mind.



"I just realized that I barely know you," I said, standing before Carmen and wearing a dress that I never would've picked out for myself. It was comprised of garishly colored fauna and felt so short that I feared complete exposure every time I moved. But Carmen had insisted that it was the sort of dress "Adriana" would have chosen, so I had little choice but to acquiesce to her stylistic choice. However, nothing she could say would ever make me like the stupid thing.

"What?" she asked, locking eyes with me. We had been practicing my walk. Or more accurately, I'd been trying and failing to live up to what I'd come to think of as her incredibly unrealistic standards. I had been walking like a man for forty-six years, and she expected me to change overnight.

"We've spent the past three weeks together," I said. "And I don't know anything about you."

"You don't need to know," she said. "All you need to know is that I'm here to help you. That's it. Just do what I say, and you'll be fine. Now walk. Move your hips. No – not like that. You look like a drag queen trying to imitate a fashion model. Subtle sway."

I groaned, trying to follow her directions. "Where are you from?" I asked.

"All around," she said. "We moved a lot so my parents wouldn't get deported."

"They were illegal?" I asked, not daring to stop my practice. As long as I kept going, she would talk, but if I stopped, she would light into me without a hint of mercy.

She nodded. "Yeah," she said. "So was my oldest brother. My parents eventually scraped enough money together to afford the naturalization process, but my brother was out of the house by then. He was sent back to Mexico a couple of years ago. Got caught up in an ICE raid. His wife and daughter are still in El Paso trying to scrape by."

"I see," I said.

"No," she said. "You don't. You might look like a Latina, but you're not. You have no idea what people like my parents go through, what my brother's been through since he was sent to Mexico. He'd lived here his whole life, and now he's in a dangerous, unfamiliar country trying to earn enough money to buy his way back. That's why I'm doing this. One of the reasons, at least. Dr. Russo's going to get him his citizenship."

"What's the other reason?" I asked.

"None of your business," she said. "Now, try not to walk like a fucking caveman for two steps. Just two steps, Adriana. That's all I want from you today."



I missed my wife. We'd only been apart for a little over a month, but I craved her presence in an almost visceral way. I wanted to see her face, so full of character and expression. It wasn't beautiful – not in the traditional sense – but it was to me. And her body – God, I wanted to kiss every inch of her, to run my tongue along her skin, to kiss her nipples and nuzzle her neck.

Of course, I wanted to make love to her, too. Sensuously. Slowly. Lovingly.

But I also wanted to push her down to all fours and fuck her like a jackhammer. I wanted to hear her screams of passion, to revel in her every exclamation of pleasure. I wanted to cum all over her glorious breasts and see that satisfied look in her eyes.

I came, stroking my shrunken, but still hard cock for everything I was worth. The semen didn't come out in a jet – not like it used to. Rather, it was more of a drip – pitiful in both its volume and its ferocity. But it was all I could manage.

My post-orgasm thoughts drifted to less sexual memories of Natalie. I think I missed her mind as much as anything else. She was a brilliant woman – a veritable genius in her own field and one of the lone women I'd ever found who could win a reasoned debate with me. That's why I loved her, I think. She was my equal, and I was hers. We'd formed the perfect partnership of love, respect, and desire.

Suddenly, the door of my room swung open, and Carmen barged in. Hurriedly, I tried to put my male equipment up, but she saw it nonetheless.

"Good – get that out of your system now," she stated. "In a few weeks, you won't have that thing to play with."

"Haven't you ever heard of knocking?" I asked, frowning at my mentor. "It's this new thing where –"

"Shut up," she said. "I'm not here to listen to you make snide remarks. Pull your panties up. Today, you're going to learn all you could ever want to know about shoes."

I sighed. It never stopped. Idly, I thought that Carmen was going to mold me into a woman through sheer force of will.



"I don't know if I can do this," I said, hanging my head as I sat on Carmen's couch. My curly hair fell in curtains around my face. "It's so much to think about. Sway your hips, but not too much. Smaller steps. Gesture when you talk. No – not that much. Smile. Arch your back. Cock your hip out when you're standing still. Relax your shoulders." I gripped my scalp, growling, "God – it's all so frustrating!"

"Don't forget to blink," she said. "And let's not get into the way you sit."

I shook my head. "That's my point, Carmen," I said. "I don't know if I can do all of this, especially before I go into the final phase."

"It's going to be okay," Carmen said, her tone softer than at any point since I'd met her. I looked up to see her smiling. "I know you're trying. And even now, you're close enough that you won't really arouse suspicion – not with the way you're going to look."

"But you keep saying that I have to be perfect," I stated.

"You will be," was her response. "For instance – think about the way you sit, the way you stand. Part of it influenced by the fact that you still have a dick between your legs. Once you have a real vagina, it'll be a lot easier."

"I don't know if that's comforting or distressing," I said, sitting in the chair. I was careful to keep my knees together. "Can it be both?"

"It can be," Carmen answered. She looked a lot nicer when she smiled. "I'm not telling you this so that you quite trying. I'm telling you this so that you can relax. Don't pretend that you're Adriana. Really be her."

I sighed. "I'm not sure I know the difference," I admitted. "But I'm not going to stop trying. The last thing I want is for someone to see through all this."

"They won't," Carmen assured me. "They won't."



“I think you’re ready to move forward,” Carmen said. Her compliments were infrequent enough that it caught me by surprise.

Kneeling on the couch, wearing what had easily become my least favorite (and not coincidentally, the most feminine) ensemble – the baby doll nightgown paired with thigh-high stockings and white panties – I smiled. “Do you think so?” I asked. “Has it been two months?”

“A little more, actually,” she answered.

Time had flown by. I suppose that’s what happens when you’re busy. In any case, I was ecstatic to hear that I’d progressed a little closer to going home, even if when I returned, it would be as “the help”, and I couldn’t keep my happiness from invading my expression.

“What’s next, then?” I asked.

“You meet with Dr. Russo,” she stated. “He’ll be overseeing the rest of your transformation.”

“And how long will that take?” was my next question.

Carmen shrugged. “That’s up to him,” she said. “I’m just a graduate assistant, so I’m not sure of the exact details. All I know is that Russo is a genius, and when he’s done with you, there won’t be any physical trace of the man you were.”

“That’s the point, I guess,” I said. “I just wish I knew exactly what to expect.”

“Russo will be able to tell you more,” she answered.



"You would be Adriana," said the wild-haired man in the dark clothing. He extended a gloved hand. "I'm Mario Russo."

I took it, gripping his hand limply. Some women had strong handshakes, but Carmen had drilled it into my head that it wasn't proper. "Yes, sir," I said, my tone of deference genuine.

He was one of the most important scientists in the country and had revolutionized our understanding of genetics. He'd been on the cover of Time, Newsweek, and a dozen other influential magazines. In short, he was everything a scientist hoped to be - influential, rich, and well-respected. I admit that I was in awe of the man.

That said, I couldn't help but feel a little discomforted by his appearance. In fact, he looked a little crazy. Wild, mostly gray hair. Suspicious eyes. Layered clothing even though it was close to eighty degrees outside. I'm not sure what I'd expected, but it wasn't someone who looked like he'd escaped from the nearest asylum. But that's what I got, and I forced myself to ignore it. After all, he was Mario Russo - a veritable legend.

"Come with me," he said, and without any other preamble, he walked away. I hurried to follow him into the building, up a flight of stairs, past a high-tech looking laboratory, and into a nearby office. Despite its size, its décor was spartan in nature. Bare, white walls, an expensive desk lacking ornamentation, and a pair of chairs were the room's only decoration. He sat down on one side of the desk and gestured for me to take one of the seats across from him. I did, and he said, "Thank you for your participation in my latest trial. I see that young Miss Morales has tutored you well."

It took me a moment to realize that he was referring to Carmen. I'd only heard her surname once, and I'd all but forgotten it. "Gracias, señor," I said, accidentally slipping into Spanish. I shook my hand. "Thank you, sir."

He waved away my thanks and ignored my slip-up. "Do you understand what's going to be done to you?" the scientist asked.

"Some," I said. "I'm going to become a woman."

He grinned broadly. "Precisely!" he said excitedly. "Of course, you won't be a true woman - not on the inside, at least. Your organs will remain the same, regrettably. However, for all practical purposes, you will be a fully functional woman. You will have breasts and a working vagina. You'll even experience menstruation."

"W-what?" I asked. "I'm going to have periods? How does that work?"

"They won't be real," he said. "Rather, they will be simulated. A little blood. A few cramps. Various other symptoms. But we're not changing your actual plumbing! That's still beyond my talents, sadly."

"Oh...okay," I said. "I guess that makes sense."

And then he launched into a further explanation of the science behind my transformation.

He talked a lot about genetic editing, CRISPR, stem cells, and a wide variety of other biological terms I only vaguely understood. By the end of my first meeting with Mario Russo, I had less of an idea about what was actually in store for me than I'd had before I'd started the day.



“Is he stable?” I asked.

Carmen looked at me like I was the crazy one. “Of course he is,” she said without a moment’s hesitation. “He’s one of the greatest minds of his generation. Of any generation. Mario Russo is -”

“A little off,” I supplied. “I’m not saying he isn’t brilliant. He is. But there’s just something a little different about him. Like that outfit he was wearing? Did you see it when you dropped me off? All black, a heavy coat, and a turtleneck sweater? He looked like he was about to head out into the Wisconsin winter. It was almost ninety degrees outside yesterday, Carmen.”

“So?” she said. “He’s cold-natured. That doesn’t make him crazy.”

I didn’t know how to respond because, in order to not see how weird that was, she had to be experiencing some industrial-grade denial when it came to her boss. Nothing I could say could penetrate that, so I just said, “Okay. Fine. You’re right.”

“I know,” she said. “When do you finish your transition?”

“A couple of weeks,” I said, not bothering to force myself to speak English. “They took a lot of blood. Bone marrow samples - that’s incredibly painful, by the way. The lab technician who did it actually punched through one side of my hip bone and into the other. And then, when they actually extract the bone marrow...ugh.”

“I’ve heard,” she said.

“Yeah, well - anyway,” I said. “They have to tailor the treatments to my genes, and that takes a couple of weeks. So, I guess you’re stuck with me a little longer.”

“I suppose so,” she said, not sounding particularly excited about the prospect.

“You’re scared,” said Carmen. “I can tell.”

“Of course I am,” I sighed, leaning back in the chair as I tried not to notice her attire – or rather, her lack thereof. However, I wanted nothing more than to stare at her near-nudity. I may have been preparing to enter womanhood, but that didn’t mean I wasn’t still very much attracted to women. Carmen, of course, knew that, and had embarked on a campaign to get me to at least act like I’d grown up seeing near-naked women. It was debatable how much her efforts had helped.

“It’s okay to be afraid,” she said. “You shouldn’t be ashamed of it. You’re going into a new life. A new gender. A new race. The whole world’s going to treat you differently.”

“I’ll be fine,” I said, mostly because I thought the idea that men and women were treated all that differently was absurd. Certainly, women had to deal with a few extra issues, but they also got benefits men didn’t. For every terrified walk through a dark parking lot, there was a situation where a woman got something free just because of her gender. I didn’t voice my opinion, though, because something told me that Carmen was one of those women’s liberation types who wanted to blame every problem she had on a man who’d oppressed her.

Or it could be something else. Race was a touchy subject with her as well. It wasn’t hard to imagine that she might blame the government for her brother’s deportation. It didn’t matter that he had ample opportunity to apply for citizenship or, failing that, at least a visa. They handed those out like candy. But to someone like Carmen, her brother’s failure to follow the rule of law constituted an injustice. It was insane and illogical, especially for someone clearly as intelligent as her.

Still, I had no desire to argue with my mentor. I simply changed the subject to something more mundane and pretended that I was just like her. That was the whole point of the exercise in acting, after all.



"I am sorry for the discomfort," said Russo, stroking his patchy beard. "I do wish there was another way."

I looked over at the author of my torment, tears in my eyes, but I didn't respond. I was afraid of what might come out of my mouth if I dared to open it. Instead, I forced my eyes shut and gritted my teeth. I didn't need to see to know that a dozen, large-bore needles protruded from various points on my body. I could feel them. Intimately. Completely. And I wanted to scream.

"I wish anesthetic was possible," he stated, his voice traveling around me. He circled me, continuing, "But it would negate many of the processes we depend on. In any case, this is by far the most painful part of the procedure. The rest will seem easy by comparison."

I could only hope that he was telling the truth. I'd come into the laboratory that day, completely unaware of what lay before me. In my ignorance, I'd expected the whole thing to take a couple of hours, and then I could go back to my quarters. I longed for that belief to have been true.

Instead, the process of getting the new cells, and subsequently, the new genetic material, injected into my body was incredibly painful. It called to mind my experience with the bone marrow extraction, except that instead of one needle, there were twelve. And then there was the shooting, fiery pain of having the material injected into the hollows of my bones so it could mingle with my marrow. It was the single most painful thing I could imagine, and I felt like I was in a living hell.

For what it was worth, Russo seemed genuinely empathetic. He didn't relish my pain. To him, it was simply a necessary evil. But his empathy didn't stop it from hurting, and eventually, I passed out from the agony.

When I awoke, the needles were gone and only the barest remnant of my pain remained. I opened my eyes to see the scientist sitting in the corner, watching me like a hawk.

"Good," he said. "Good. You're awake. I feared the pain might have been too great for you."

"I'm fine," I croaked, my voice raw and uneven. "I'm fine. What's next?"

"Twenty-four hours," he said. "And you'll be ready."

I sighed. "Good," I said, my desire to be finished far outweighing my fear of the unknown.



I looked through the observation window to see a series of lab-coated scientists conversing. On the numerous screens surrounding them were various pictures, x-rays, and scans of what I assumed was my brain. The eldest scientist – a man I hadn't met – seemed to be explaining something to the younger crew. I had seen such a gathering a dozen times, and the only thing that had changed were the displays on the monitors. Some had shown my circulatory system. Others focused on my endocrine system. Still others had focused on my skeleton. With the flick of a switch, they could monitor any part of my body.

I sighed, wanting nothing more than to rip the dozens of electrodes from my naked body. They were necessary, I know, but they were incredibly annoying.

And I itched. God, I itched. My skin. My gums. Even my hair. I wanted to scratch my freaking bones. It was almost as agonizing as the pain of the needles. Almost.

The door opened, admitting the lead scientist. He was tall, with white hair and a matching goatee. Over his eyes were a pair of stylish spectacles. He smiled, asking, "How are you feeling? Has the itching eased at all?"

I narrowed my eyes. "No," I answered, feeling exposed. He'd seen my naked form a half-dozen times since I'd been put into his care, but that didn't make me feel any better about it. "And I feel like my insides are moving around."

"Does it hurt?" he asked, checking a tablet he produced from an overlarge pocket in his coat.

I shook my head. "No," I said. "None of it hurts. Not exactly. It's just...weird."

"You'll only have to endure it for another twelve hours," he said. "When it subsides, you will be ready for the final step. That is quite painful, so –"

"D-dr. Russo said I wouldn't have to endure any more pain," I said, trying to resist the panic.

"You won't," the man said. "While your body shifts into its final form, you will be in an induced coma, which will last a little more than a week. After that, you will be outfitted with a specially designed suit to solidify the changes. Your recovery will last another five days. Then, you'll be free to assume your new life."

"But I'm going to be like this for the next twelve hours," I said, sighing. "Great."





The itching had stopped, and I was on the verge of entering the next final phase of my transformation. Standing in that small, windowless room as I waited, I stared at myself in the mirror. I'd done it a lot over the previous weeks, and it never ceased to amaze me that the reflection looking back at me was what I'd become.

"And it's only going to get worse," I muttered. Soon, the penis that I'd once considered so important to my identity would be gone, replaced by the ultimate symbol of femininity. And that new vagina, manmade though it was, would signal the complete and utter loss of my masculinity. I didn't know if I was ready for it.

I sat on the nearby table, which was covered in a fresh, white sheet, and I wondered if I could go through with it. Could I surrender my manhood without so much as a fight? I'd made the initial decision so hastily. I had barely thought it through. Was I truly prepared to spend the next two years as a woman?

No. I wasn't. Nothing could prepare me for that, and I knew it. However, the benefits were too great. Not only would my job be restored, but I would regain my reputation. I would leave the ugly business of my unpaid leave behind me. And Russo assured me that I could never be fired again. That was too enticing to pass up.

"Two years," I whispered, staring at the pristine, tile floor. "I can endure two years of anything."

However, in the back of my mind, I imagined the world saying to me, "Challenge accepted." I did my best to ignore the thought, and a few moments later, one of the unnamed scientists opened the door. That was the signal. Soon, I'd be in a coma, sleeping while my body transformed itself.

"I'm coming," I said, grabbing the hospital gown. I slipped it on, not bothering to tie it closed in the back, and followed him to my fate.

The blue-clad doctors wheeled me into an operating room, and I resisted the urge to ask questions. I wouldn't have understood their answers, anyway. A pair of the scientists wore what looked like futuristic, virtual reality headsets, which I assumed would help them with the surgery.

Idly, I hoped they weren't playing video games. It was a silly thought, but then again, I'd just been given some sort of medication to help "calm my nerves". It was doing the trick quite nicely.

One of the men in the headsets removed them, revealing his face. I still didn't know his name, but he was clearly the man in charge. Pulling down his surgical mask, he asked, "How are you feeling?"

"Honestly?" I muttered. "Terrified. And strangely okay with it." The second part was clearly due to the medication. The first was because I was facing down an incredible change I knew wasn't even remotely prepared to face. I couldn't help but wonder if they'd let me back out. It was a stray thought without substance, but it started to latch onto my brain, inciting a sense of panic. The doctor clearly saw it in my eyes, and he patted my arm.

"Calm down," he said. "Take a couple of deep breaths. It'll be over before you know it."

I did, but it didn't help the rising panic. Suddenly, I felt claustrophobic. I wanted to get some air. I wanted to see the sky. I wanted to keep my dick. However, before I could move, there was a rubberized mask over my face, and the unmistakable scent of ozone filled my nostrils. I tried to stop them. I tried to tell them I didn't want to be a girl. But I never got the chance; the anesthesia did its job, and mere moments after the mask found my face, I succumbed to the deep darkness of unconsciousness.

I'm certain I dreamed. I must have. But what felt like an instant later, I awoke, and I didn't remember a thing. For the briefest moment, I was confused. The room was different. I felt different. And the doctors were gone, replaced by a single, familiar face.

"D-dr. Russo?" I asked. "Did something go wrong?"

He smiled broadly. "No," he said. "Everything went perfectly."



"I...I have to wear this for how long?" I asked, stroking what felt like the latex mask that covered the majority of my head. I almost winced at the sound of my own voice. I'd been practicing sounding like a woman, but Dr. Russo had done something to my vocal cords that gave me the voice of a teenaged cheerleader. I sounded positively cute.

"A few more days," he said. "In that time, your body's hair will grow back. We've programed a brief accelerant into the follicles on your head, so it will grow back much more quickly."

"I see," I said, looking up at him. I had never been a tall man, topping out at a little under 5'10". But before the final procedure, I'd been able to look Russo in the eye. I judged that I'd lost at least six inches in height. Maybe more. I nodded to the nearby camera operator. "Why is he here?"

"Documentation," said Russo, sounding giddy. "We must record this resounding success."

I sighed, letting my arms fall to my sides. I felt wrong. Different and wrong in a way I couldn't quite articulate. It felt like my body, but everything was so unfamiliar. I didn't know what to think. I didn't know how to react. And that fact only added to my fear.

Not only was the day of my reintroduction to the world rapidly approaching, but soon, I'd have to look in the mirror and see still a different person. I didn't know if I was prepared for that.

"Come," said Russo, no doubt sensing my unease. He gripped my arm, and suddenly, I felt so small. Weak. I knew he didn't mean me harm, but if he had, I knew I was almost powerless to stop it. I wanted to jerk away, but I feared his reaction. So, I let him guide me to the bed, where I sat down. "Rest, little one. You've experienced a change few other people have. You're special."

"Because I let you make me into a guinea pig?" I asked.

"No," he stated flatly. "Because this method would only work on a fraction of a percent of the world's population. A fraction of a fraction. Maybe two- or three-hundred other people could have undergone such a transformation. That's what we're trying to change."

"Why?" I asked.

"To stave off old age, of course," he said. "Think about it. You have the body of an eighteen-year-old now. Imagine that. You could live an entirely new life now. And it would have been the same if you'd been a hundred-year-old man. We are trying to conquer death, Miss Flores. Immortality. That's the goal. And you've provided us with a big step toward achieving that goal. I hope you appreciate it."





"What do you think of your new body?" asked Carmen, sitting near my bed.

"I've tried not to notice," I answered, lying on my stomach. I propped myself up on my elbow, peering over at her. She stared at me with a knowing smile.

"The suit's only been off for a day."

It wasn't entirely true. The oppressive thing had come off, I had explored my nether regions, hoping against hope that I'd find something other than a vagina. I hadn't. I'd been with plenty of women in my day, and I couldn't tell the difference between what was between my legs and what they'd had. After venturing a glance into a full-length mirror, I realized that I looked completely different.

I hadn't bothered to look again since.

"You need to get ahold of yourself," she advised.

"Really? You think?" I asked, veering into Spanish. "Thank you for your wise words of advice."

"Don't be a bitch," Carmen said. "You knew what you were signing up for. This is who you're going to be for the next two years."

She was right. I had known. However, knowing it and living it were two very different things. At least the feeling of wrongness had faded, a result of my body settling into itself. "Just leave me alone," I said, burying my face into the pillow.

"No," she said. "You've got a visitor."

"W-what?" I asked, looking up. "Who?"

"Your friend," Carmen said. "Andrew. He's here to check up on you. He's also going to give you your new identity. So, put some pants on and try to remember to act like a lady. He can kill this whole project if he doesn't think you're ready. And if that happens, you'll get nothing for your trouble."

I sighed again. "Fine," I said. "But you have no idea what this is like. You should be more understanding."

"You don't need understanding," was Carmen's retort. "You needed a kick in the ass. And I'm perfectly willing to play that role."



"I'm sorry," Andrew said, looking away. "I don't mean to stare. It's just..."

"Dramático," I said, lapsing into Spanish. I sighed. "Sorry. I don't mean to do that. It's just my brain, it kind of works in Spanish now. I said the change was dramatic."

"I caught that," he responded, smiling. "What are you now? 5'2"?"

I nodded. "Something like that," I said. "I guess I won't be reaching the top shelf anymore."

"Yeah," he agreed, clearly uncomfortable. He shook his head. "Jesus, Edgar – I don't know how to react to this. I mean, I got the progress reports, but I barely believe it's you."

"I get that," I stated, feeling more than a little uncomfortable under his gaze. "I feel the same way when I look in the mirror. But it's definitely me in here. Just a very different package."

"Right," he said. "So, I guess we'll get this over with. From here on out, you're Adriana Maria Flores." He handed me a stack of papers. "You came here on a student visa, but it's only good for six months. After that, you're going to be illegal."

I shuffled through the documents, finding a passport, a driver's license, and various other forms of identification. With that, I was officially a new person.

"This is really happening, isn't it?" I asked.

"It is," he said. "You're going to get a couple of weeks to get acclimated to the new you. Carmen will set you up with your new apartment. Once that's done, you'll have a job interview with Natalie. She'll hire you, and then –"

"And then I get to live as a maid for the next two years," I said. "I get it."

"You'll check in with me once every two months," he said. "But other than that, I have to insist that you don't contact me. I'm Edgar's friend, not Adriana's."

I sighed. "I guess I understand," I said. "So, this is goodbye for a bit?"

"It is," he said. "Good luck. I hope it all works out."

"Me too," I said, not really knowing what that meant.



"I'm not interested," I said, looking down on a sitting Carmen. "Can we just watch the football game? Girls do that too."

"Not you," she said. "If you must watch a sport, it's either going to be baseball or soccer. American football is not something Adriana would enjoy."

"I am Adriana," I said. "And I enjoy football."

"If you'd like to watch it once you're on your own, fine," she stated. "But here, now, you're going to behave like a normal, Mexican girl. And that's final."

I groaned. I'd been a diehard supporter of Texas football for as long as I could remember. The sport was practically a religion in the state, and working at the university only made my fandom stronger. So, it was incredibly irritating that Carmen wouldn't allow me to watch the games on television. However, I was in no position to argue with her, so I had little choice but to accept her rules, stupid as I thought them to be.

"Fine," I said, sitting down. "Let's watch another one of those Mexican soap operas, then. I'm sure it'll be less ridiculous now."

"They're very popular in Mexico," Carmen said. "You should make an effort to enjoy them."

I didn't answer. The reality was that I didn't so much mind the soap operas. They were silly and unrealistic in the worst ways, but I could stomach them. And I wasn't really all that angry about not watching the football game. Her reasoning made perfect sense. I was just frustrated, about what, I had no idea. I really just wanted to hit something.

"Lo que sea," I said, plopping down on the couch. Consciously switching to English, I said, "I don't even care anymore."

"If you don't care, quit pouting," she said. "And cheer up. It won't be long before you're moving into your new apartment."



My fingers drifted down to my now-hairy pussy. My bush wasn't '70s-level excessive, but it was substantial nonetheless. It covered my entire groin and most of my lips.

But I didn't care. Nothing said I had to groom down there. In any case, I wasn't overly concerned with hair removal at the moment. No – I'd finally decided that I couldn't delay exploration any longer. It'd been almost two weeks since I had been released from Russo's care, and the closest I'd come to examining my new genitalia was when I wiped it after going to the restroom. So, I'd locked the door to my room, removed my blue bikini bottoms, and settled onto the couch.

It felt normal. I wish I could say it didn't. Or that it was malformed. Something that would be evidence of my former gender. But I couldn't. It was perfectly formed. It was sensitive. And it felt as natural as any other part of my body.

I almost cried.

I wanted to jerk my hand away, to pretend that I hadn't felt what I'd felt. I wanted to ignore the distinct absence of a penis between my legs. But I couldn't. I needed to face it. I needed to accept it. If I didn't, it was going to be an incredibly long two years.

I slipped my finger inside, brushing my clit while I did. It felt good. Not great or anything, but definitely not bad. I worked my finger in and out, trying to place the feeling. Once, when I was much younger, an old girlfriend had convinced me to let her stick her finger up my ass. I hated it. But at the time, I thought it was probably akin to what a woman felt when she was penetrated. However, as I fingered myself, I realized that that simply wasn't the case. It was so, so different, and in ways I can't really articulate.

My other hand soon found my clit, rubbing it while I fingered myself. My masculine ego wants to say that, in that moment, I didn't imagine being penetrated by something more substantial than a finger, but that would have been a lie. I suppose it was the hormones. Or the new, female body. Or maybe I'm a lot kinkier than I thought.

But as I closed my eyes, playing with myself with both hands, I couldn't help but imagine what it would feel like to be fucked by something far bigger than my slim fingers.

I felt the pressure build. It wasn't really like when I'd felt an orgasm coming as a man. That was sudden. And eruption of pleasure that faded almost as quickly as it came. But as a woman? It was more like a flood of pleasure and emotion, a rising tide that eventually reached its crescendo, peaking into a tidal wave that washed over my entire body.

I lost track of time. Hell, I lost track of who or what I was. In those moments, I felt like I was drowning in a sea of intense pleasure. I didn't resurface until only the aftershocks of my first female orgasm remained. I cupped my breasts, feeling a delicious exhaustion, knowing that I'd found the first advantage of being a woman.



"That new body of yours is just begging to be shown off," said Carmen. She'd already taken her seat at the restaurant table. "You should be proud of it."

"Proud?" I asked, sitting across from her. Wearing the slinky, black dress, I felt anything but proud. In fact, I felt incredibly embarrassed, especially considering the fact that, in the right light, you could practically see through the thin material. And, at Carmen's insistence, I hadn't worn any panties.

"Yes, proud - you can be proud of your looks," she said. "Most women would be happy to look like you. Most of the guys here certainly appreciate what they see."

I blushed. Or at least, I think I did. I wasn't quite sure if, with my new skin tone, I could. In any case, I didn't want men to ogle me. "Why did you make me come here with you?" I asked, looking around the restaurant. It was time for Sunday brunch, so most of the other patrons were couples. However, that didn't keep the male part of those couples from sneaking glances at the two pretty girls who'd just showed up.

"Because you need to get used to people - men, especially - noticing you," she said. "It's been happening all your life."

"I don't know if I'll ever get used to that," I stated. It made me sick, thinking of what all those men wanted to do to me. "I know what they're all thinking."

She smiled. "So do I," she said. "They want to fuck you. Almost all of them. They want to bend you over this table, and -"

"Stop!" I hissed. "That is not appropriate."

"But that's what they want," she said. "And if you let yourself, you might want it too. You're a woman now. That means you have all those same urges women feel. You'd better accept that, because sooner or later, you're going to have to face it."

"Can we just eat brunch?" I asked. "I'm not going to talk about sex with you. That's where I draw the line."

"Fine," she said. "But you know I'm right."

"I don't want to do yoga," I said, looking away from Carmen. She wore set of figure-hugging tights and a matching, red sports bra. "I've got a perfectly fine body. I don't need to work out."

"You really don't understand a think about what they did to you, do you?" asked Carmen, unrolling her yellow yoga mat. I'd done a little of it before the final procedure, but I hadn't felt like working out since my transformation had been completed.

"I understand enough," I said. "And I don't like yoga."

"Do you want to get fat?" she asked. "Lose that shape? Because you will if you don't do something. Girls your age that look like you work out. That's just a fact of life. And just like everything else, you need to accept that."

"You sound like a broken record," I said, crossing my arms below my breasts. I hated the things. They weren't huge or anything, but they kept getting in the way. "Accept this. Accept that. Maybe I don't want to be the kind of girl you want me to be."

"Maybe you're afraid of being a girl at all," she argued, her hand on her hip.

"What's that supposed to mean?" I demanded.

"It means that you're half-assing this," she stated. "It means that you're trying to keep one foot planted in the past. It means that you're still afraid of being too 'girly'."

I barked a harsh, sarcastic laugh. "Too girly?" I scoffed. I spread my arms. "Look at me. I have a pussy. I have tits. I walk, talk, and act like the perfect little Mexican girl you want me to be. As far as anybody's concerned, I am a girl. Saying that I'm afraid of being too girly is stupid."

"I didn't say it made sense," she responded. "It doesn't. There's no reason for you to cling to that old identity. In fact, there's every reason not to. But you're still doing it. And until you choose to just be Adriana, you're going to struggle with this. So, work out with me or don't. I don't care anymore. This is your show now."

I sighed, wondering if she was right. Was my aversion to yoga simply a symptom of my inability to discard my masculine identity? I didn't know. Or maybe I didn't want to admit that it was. In any case, it didn't make much sense to continue my resistance.

"Fine," I said, rising. "Let me put on my workout clothes. Let's do some stupid yoga."





“Rosa,” said Carmen. “This is the girl I told you about. Adriana.”

I smiled nervously as I said, “Hola.”

Rosa, who sat on Carmen’s blue couch, wore a pink dress and high heels that looked like they were made for a stripper. A pretty, petite girl, I couldn’t really see the family resemblance between Carmen and her. However, I knew that they were cousins. Maybe it was a distant relation.

“Hello,” she said in English, her accent just as noticeable as mine. She smiled. “I hear you need a place to stay.”

I nodded, but before I could answer, Carmen interjected, “She’s here on a student visa. Flunked out of UT. She’s looking for work, too.”

“Aren’t we all,” said Rosa, smiling. “You can stay with me for a few weeks without paying rent, but after that, you’re going to have to contribute.”

“I...I can do that,” I said in my heavily accented English. “I think I have a job lined up.”

“All the better,” she said. “But my place – it isn’t as nice as Carmen’s. It’ll be a bit cramped.”

“That’s...that’s fine,” I said. “I’m used to small spaces.”

Carmen made some comment about my – or rather, Adriana’s – history, but I ignored it. Then, Rosa explained how the expenses would be divided. After I agreed, we shook hands. And that’s how I started my new life.



“You are so pretty!” exclaimed Rosa. “And I love that skirt.”

She was a lot more sociable after Carmen left. Ostensibly, my mentor had left to run an errand, but it was a ruse to let me get to know my new roommate. Dishonest, sure, but it was effective.

I spread the skirt wide. “This? I just got it last week,” I said, deciding to tell the truth. “I wasn’t quite sure if I liked it...”

“It’s gorgeous,” she assured me. “I love it.”

“Gracias,” I said. “For everything. I don’t know what I’d do if I didn’t have somewhere to live.”

She waved away my appreciation. “De nada,” Rosa said. “I was new here before too. I know what it’s like.”

I nodded. “It’s all so different from home,” I said, clinging to my memorized history. “Good, but different.”

“I know the feeling,” she said, not bothering to ask where I’d grown up. I practically itched to spill my entire character history to her. However, I restrained myself. “I grew up in a tiny house in west Texas with twelve other people. So, I’m actually glad for the company. Being alone is...well...it’s lonely.”

I smiled, and in that instant, I decided I liked the girl. She was optimistic. She was honest. And she was generous. Apparently, she thought the same thing, because almost as soon as the thought crossed my mind, she said, “I’ve got a good feeling about you. I think we’re going to be really good friends.”

My grin widened. “Me too,” I said, hoping I wasn’t mistaken.



"S-say something," I said, crossing my arms beneath my breasts and gripping my elbows as I sat in front of my wife. Given my current body, I don't know how valid it was to think of her as such. Soon, she would be my employer.

"I...I don't know what to say," was her response. "I don't even know if it's really you."

"You knew this was going to happen," I said. "This was the point."

"I did," she agreed. "But this...this is way more than I expected. You sound like Salma Hayek's little sister, for God's sake. And you look like you're Skylar's age."

"Eighteen," I said. "That's what all my paperwork says."

Natalie shook her head, sitting down. "I don't know how to react to this," she admitted. "I was expecting...I mean...I don't know what I was expecting. But this...you look like a different person."

"I am," I said. "For the next two years, I am. That's how you're supposed to treat me, at least. Edgar's gone for now. I'm Adriana."

"Adriana," she repeated. "My maid. That's going to take some getting used to."

"I know," I said. "Think about how I feel."

"I want to see it," she said. "All of it. Just this once."

"They said not to -"

"I don't care," Natalie said. "I want to see how good this disguise is. After today, we can play whatever roles we're supposed to play. But for now, I want to see what they did to my husband."

Nervously, I looked around. I don't know what I expected to find. Nobody else was in the house. But I was nervous all the same. "Fine," I said.

"H-how do you want to do this?"

"Follow me," she said, rising. I took her hand, and she led me out of the den.



I followed my wife up the stairs, anxiety chipping at my composure. I gripped her hand tightly and said, "I like your hair like that. Blonde suits you."

She murmured a thanks, but I don't think she truly heard my compliment. As I followed her up the steps, I couldn't help but notice that she was quite a bit taller than me. Or rather, she was bigger in every single way. To my new, smaller-skewed perception, seemed a practical giantess. I had never thought of Natalie as a big woman, but that changed pretty quickly.

We went into the bedroom we'd once shared, and I couldn't help but notice that, in the few months since I'd been gone, the décor had changed. I thought about remarking on the light blue bedspread but reconsidered almost immediately. Small talk seemed inappropriate, given the context.

Turning to me, she said, "Take off your clothes. I want to see you."

I hesitated. "Are you sure?" I asked. "You might not like what you see."

"I'm sure," she said. "Do it."

I didn't say anything before slipping the straps of my purple dress over my smooth shoulders, and it fell down my torso without any effort. Gripping it with my pink-painted nails, I dragged the garment over my hips, past my panties, and to my ankles. Stepping out of it, I said, "See? I'm -"

"Panties too," she said. "And take those ridiculous shoes off."

I knew that tone well, and I knew better than to argue. She'd get her way eventually, either way. So, I hooked my fingers under the skimpy waistband of my panties and pulled them down my soft, hairless legs. She gasped when she saw my pussy, but I ignored it. Instead, I immediately unbuckled the straps of my heels and kicked them off.

Standing before her flatfooted, I felt even smaller. More submissive.

"On the bed," she said. "On all fours. I want to see it."

I obeyed and was rewarded with another gasp of surprise. I knew what she was seeing. I knew what she was thinking. So, I did the only thing I could think of to break the ice. I looked back, smiling as I said, "See? All woman now."

She didn't return my smile. In fact, her face was almost completely unreadable. Finally, after an uncomfortable few moments, she said, "Get dressed. Be here on Monday morning at six o'clock. And don't be late."

Without another word, she turned and left me wondering what had just happened.



I wasn't sure what to make of Natalie's reaction to my body, but on the drive back to the small apartment I'd just moved into, I couldn't help but think I'd crossed some sort of line. I wasn't sure what I'd done wrong; in fact, I'd done everything exactly as she'd told me to do, and I was perplexed as to what I should have done differently. Those thoughts occupied my mind as I drove east down I-35, passing the chemical plants that made my new neighborhood so undesirable. I parked in front of the apartment building and got out of the car.

Rosa pulled into the parking space next to mine. When she got out, she said, "Nice car."

I laughed at what was obviously a joke. My transportation was anything but nice.

Acquired for five-hundred dollars at a used car lot, it had more miles than the odometer could count, was riddled with rust, and could barely get over fifty miles per hour. But it ran, which was all that was important.

I followed my roommate into the building and up the stairs, and along the way, we chatted about nothing. She was happy to hear that I'd gotten a job, and I was surprised that she also worked as a housekeeper. The conversation was enough to distract me, however briefly, from my meeting with Natalie. In fact, Rosa's presence kept me mostly occupied until Monday morning dawned, and I went into my new job.

When I arrived at the house I'd helped pay for, I was surprised to see Natalie already dressed. She wore a short, floral print dress that displayed her cleavage nicely. She let me in and asked me to sit down. I did.

"Okay, Adriana," she said. "We need to go over some ground rules. First of all, your compensation. I won't pay more than twenty-five a year. If that's not acceptable, you can leave now." I didn't, and she continued. "Second, you will refer to me as Miss Butler or Miss Natalie. My daughter is Miss Skylar. Do you understand?" I nodded, saying that I did. "You will arrive here each day at six in the morning. You will not leave until after I eat dinner. Some days, you will be required to stay late. That is part of the job. You will cook. You will clean. And you will run errands. But your job will not be limited to that. Whatever I tell you to do is your job. Do you understand?"

"Yes, Miss Natalie," I said. The words felt strange in my mouth.

"And through it all," she said. "Remember - you wanted this. If you refer to your old life while you're in this house, I will fire you. Is that clear?"

I swallowed hard. "Yes, Miss Natalie," I said, suddenly very aware of the shift in our power dynamic.

"Good," she said. "Now - go in the kitchen and make breakfast. I'm craving eggs. Make enough for my daughter and me."

I nodded, scurrying into the kitchen as I wondered if I'd made a huge mistake.

My first day on the job was a nightmare. Natalie, for all her sweet disposition when I was Edgar, was a hellish boss. I couldn't do anything right. The eggs weren't properly prepared. The coffee was too strong. And the toast was too "toasty". I wanted to throw it in her face and tell her to do it her damned self. But I didn't. I couldn't. I needed the job because I was stuck as Adriana for two years, and I didn't think the job market for eighteen-year-old illegal immigrants was very strong. So, I endured, but I spent the entire drive home that night cursing the woman I was supposed to love.

The next day, I endeavored to do better, but encountered similar judgment. I was gathering my stepdaughter's dirty clothes when she came into the room and plopped down on the bed.

"She's just putting you through your paces," said Skylar, who'd all but ignored me the day before.

"I'm sorry, Miss Skylar?" I asked.

"Miss Skylar," the teenaged girl said, the moniker rolling out of her mouth. "I like that. But yeah - my mom. She's just making sure you can cut it. Think of it like hell week or something."

"Hell week?" I asked. I knew full well what she meant, but Adriana probably had no concept of the reference.

"Oh - right," she said, propping herself up on her elbows. "Okay, so in American colleges, there are these societies called sororities and fraternities. Well, before you can join, you have to pledge. If they choose you, you have to go through what's called hell week. They want to weed out the people who don't really want it, so they treat them all like trash. That's what my mom's doing. She wants to make sure you really want this job."

"I...I see," I said, holding the clothes basket against my hip. It made a certain kind of sense, especially if Natalie had resolved to treat me like a completely different person. I could practically hear her voice describing the plan of action.

"My point is that you shouldn't take it too seriously," Skylar stated. "She wouldn't have hired you if she didn't want you here. But God knows we need a housekeeper. I've been bugging her to get one for a while."

I didn't know what to say, so I continued to work. I grabbed a used towel, and was surprised to see a long, cylindrical, and phallic object tumble to the ground.

"Oh, shit," she said, moving faster than I'd ever seen her move before. She grabbed the vibrator almost before I could even figure out what it was. "Sorry. I won't...you know...I won't leave this out for you to find anymore."

"G-gracias, Miss Skylar," I said, trying my best not to freak out.





I sat on the bed, rolling my eyes. "You can't expect me to know that," I said, crossing my arms. Almost as an afterthought, I added, "Miss Natalie."

"I do," she said, her hands on her hips. "That's your job."

I fumed. I had no idea that she would want her delicates handwashed. She knew it. I knew it. The whole damned world knew it. So, there was absolutely no reason to chastise me for washing them in the machine.

Summoning what little composure I could, I said, "I'm sorry, Miss Natalie. I won't make that mistake again."

"Damned right you won't," she said. "Or you'll find yourself on the next bus back to Mexico."

My mouth fell open. Did she really mean that threat? Did she know that, legally speaking, I had no way to prove that I was really an American citizen? Andrew had made it perfectly clear that, should I run afoul of the authorities, I was on my own. He would not vouch for me. I needed to feel like an immigrant, which meant that, functionally, I had to be one.

"I...I said I was sorry," I stammered. "I won't...I'll do better, Miss Natalie. I will."

"Good," she said. "You're a hard worker, Adriana. A little stupid, but I'd hate to lose you."

I hated being called stupid by my wife. I wasn't stupid. I was ignorant. There was a huge difference, and she knew it. However, I was in absolutely no position to argue with her on the subject, so I took her chastisement as graciously as I could. I apologized a few more times, and she finally finished her scolding. I went back to work, angry and a little afraid. Suddenly, it all seemed a lot more real than it had the day before.

"I'll be going out of town," said Natalie, looking incredibly distracting in lacy, black lingerie. In my experience, she hated it because it was uncomfortable. Having worn something similar, I could sympathize. However, I couldn't help but wonder why she was wearing it. It wasn't like she had someone to show.

Unless she'd done it for me. Though, that made almost no sense. In the two weeks since I'd been working for her, she hadn't once treated me like anything but her housekeeper. I decided to ignore her sexy outfit.

"Where are you going?" I asked.

"None of your concern," she said. "And I'll thank you to keep that familiar tone to yourself."

"Sorry, Miss Natalie," I said. "Did you need me to do some laundry? Or perhaps I can –"

"No," she said. "But while I'm gone, Skylar is in charge. If she tells you to do something, you do it. No questions asked."

"Of course, Miss Natalie," I said.

"That's all," she said, lying on the bed. She shooed me away. "Go clean something."

I nodded, then left the room to do my work. Though I had never been much of a housekeeper as a man, I'd started to get the hang of the job. It was more difficult than I might have expected, but it was more than doable. For the first time since I'd taken the job, I almost felt optimistic about going the distance.

But later that day, as I cleaned the master bath, the question of where my wife was going – and more importantly, with whom – loomed large in my mind. She didn't have a business conference. Those were scheduled months in advance. Perhaps she was visiting her parents in Florida. That made sense, didn't it? But if she was, she would have probably taken Skylar to see her grandparents, right?

By the time I went home that day, I'd run through a thousand different reasons for Natalie's trip. I was frustrated and angry, and I wanted nothing more than to act the part of her husband and demand answers. But I wasn't her husband. Not anymore. And not for a long time yet.



“Dios mio,” I said, walking into the house. There were red party cups everywhere, pictures had fallen off the walls, and more than one teenager was passed out on the furniture. And the place reeked of alcohol. “What happened here?”

“Shit,” came one of the teenagers’ groggy voice as he woke up. He looked vaguely familiar, though I couldn’t recall his name. I remembered him as one of Skylar’s high school friends. The teenager locked his eye son me and smiled sleepily. “Mmm...you here for me, sexy?”

“Where’s Miss Skylar?” I demanded.

He shrugged, muttering, “Dunno,” before collapsing back into unconsciousness. I stood there, rooted in place, for a long moment as I tried to decide what to do. Clearly, Skylar had thrown a party. And just as clearly, it had gotten out of control. She was eighteen-years-old, and so were the majority of her friends. They had no business drinking.

But that was the father in me. I wanted to march around the house, kicking kids out of my house, but as Adriana, I had no right. No – Adriana was a housekeeper. And she was the same age as Skylar. We were supposed to be contemporaries. I had no business telling her what to do. So, I sighed, went into the laundry room and found my cleaning supplies. When I reappeared in the living room, I saw a mostly-naked Skylar descending the staircase.

“Oh,” she said sleepily. “Good. You’re already cleaning. Make sure you get everything, okay? I don’t want mom to know I had a party.”

I stood there, shocked as I watched her casually strut around the house, wearing nothing but a skimpy pair of panties. I wanted to scream at her that there were other people in the house. Boys. She needed to cover up! But I didn’t. I couldn’t.

After letting out an exasperated sigh, I could only start cleaning. However, as I did, I wondered if I even knew my own stepdaughter. Clearly, there was way more to her than I knew.





"So," said Rosa, opening her locker. I'd been roped into signing up for a "family" membership at a local gym with her. We weren't family, but most white people can't seem to tell the difference between wildly different facial structures of different ethnicities. And I think the gym manager liked looking at us. In any case, it was cheap, and I had to work out anyway, so I'd decided to simply tag along with her. "Are you going to tell her mother?"

"About the party?" I asked in Spanish, opening my own locker. I turned to my bag, opening it. "I don't know, honestly. Is it even my place?"

I was vaguely aware of a pair of women - both looking like the "I want to speak to the manager" types. Jaw-length blonde hair, decent bodies that suggested that, decades ago, they were probably cheerleaders or something, and expressions that just screamed upper middle class - they were practically stereotypes. I wouldn't even have noticed them if it weren't for the fact that they were staring at Rosa and me like we'd stolen something. I did my best to ignore them as I reached into my bag, retrieving my gym clothes as Rosa did the same.

Slipping off her shirt and jeans, Rosa said, "I wouldn't say anything. That's not your job."

I tried not to stare when Rosa slipped on a pair of socks. She was, by that time, completely naked; she didn't like wearing panties all that much, and modesty seemed like a foreign notion to her. I distracted myself by dressing in my own gym clothes.

"I know," I agreed. Of course, Rosa didn't know that I wasn't what I seemed. I thought of Skylar as my daughter. She wasn't blood, but she might as well have been. And as a father, I knew Natalie would want to know about her daughter's wild night. But it definitely wasn't something Adriana should worry about. To say I was torn on the matter would have been a vast understatement.

"Seems like an easy choice then," Rosa said, having slipped on a pair of shorts that barely covered her ass. Mine were little better, but it seemed so much more scandalous on her. I pulled on a sports bra, and I was about to respond to Rosa when one of the blonde women approached us.

"I don't mean to get into your business," she said, her voice sickly sweet. "But here in America, we speak English. What you're doing is very rude."

"W-what?" I muttered, taken aback by how little sense her statement made.

"We're sorry," said Rosa in accented English as she nudged my arm. I knew she didn't want to make a scene, so I echoed her statement. However, as the woman smiled a horribly patronizing smile and thanked us, I wanted to slap her across the face for her impunity. When the two women had exited the locker room, Rosa said, "Don't make a big deal out of it. That's the type of person you'll call La Migra on us. It's easier just to give them what they want."

I sighed, thinking that what that woman really wanted was for us not to share a locker room with her.



"You are so pretty," said Rosa. "But I guess you know that, huh?"

Standing atop my beach towel, I was embarrassed by the compliment, I answered, "Thanks." At least there was no one at the cheap pool behind our apartment complex. More than once, she and I had come down only to be harassed by various men. Some were well-meaning and were just trying to make friends. Others were decidedly worse and saw a couple of vulnerable girls who looked prime for the poaching. On those days, Rosa and I had quickly retreated back to our apartment's small balcony where we could relax in peace.

"You said you grew up in Juarez?" she asked, lying back on the towel. I nodded, and she said, "Wow – tough town. I bet you're glad you got out."

Again, I nodded, adding, "I don't like to talk about it, but yeah – it's a bad place to grow up."

I had an entire backstory about brothers joining gangs, getting shot at, and overcoming the threat of kidnapping, but I had long since decided to be vague about Adriana's upbringing. It was easier that way, and being cagey about the details had the added benefit of being totally realistic. A tidbit, here and there, but Rosa would never get the full story.

My real upbringing in a small Oklahoma town was far less dramatic. I'd grown up a normal kid doing normal things. I played just about every sport, I dated girls, and I had fairly happy childhood. My parents had died in a car crash when I was seventeen, but outside of that, my life was blissfully free of tragedy. I couldn't even begin to relate to people who might have grown up with a similar history to Adriana's fictional one.

"I think I liked Mexico," she said. "I've been here since I was a kid, so I don't remember all that much. But what I remember seems pleasant. And my cousins who still live down there don't have to deal with much violence. Then again, we didn't live anywhere near as bad as Juarez, so I guess that helps."

"Why did your parents move here then?" I asked, a note of bitterness in my voice. Fleeing violence or persecution, I could understand, but leaving a perfectly good home and illegally invading another country because it was better run seemed wrong to me. Rosa took my sour tone as a note of jealousy; Adriana grew up hard, and no doubt, she would have something to say about someone who fled a good, stable home.

"Money," Rosa said. "It's always money, isn't it? Mi papa had an opportunity to make almost ten times as much money here, so he packed up and moved when I was very small. When that job panned out, we all started trickling over. One by one until the whole family was here. It took almost five years. My mom and I were the last over the border."

"Makes sense," was my only response. It seemed to satisfy her, and we lay by the pool in silence.



“Thanks for not being a narc,” said Skylar as I balanced atop a ladder, dusting the ceiling fan. She wore a simple, blue lingerie set, which wasn’t all that uncommon. I’d seen more of my half-clothed stepdaughter in the past month than I’d seen in the entirety of the ten years I’d been married to Natalie. “You’re okay.”

“Thank you, Miss Skylar,” I said, trying my best not to get dust in my mouth. I’d come very, very close to telling Natalie about her daughter’s indiscretions, but I’d decided against it at the last minute. For one, I had no idea how Natalie might react to what she could easily deem impertinence. A good housekeeper doesn’t get involved in her clients’ issues. She cleans. She cooks. But she doesn’t get involved.

For another, I’d begun to feel less and less like a part of the family. Most days, I didn’t even think of being Edgar. I was far too busy, and everyone treated me like the girl I appeared to be – or rather, like the girl I’d become. Despite only being on the job for a little over a month, Edgar’s life seemed like a hazy memory. Most of the time, I was aware of it, but it was so easy to ignore.

Most of the time. Until it wasn’t. Usually, those moments of torturous clarity occurred when I was one-on-one with Natalie – not when she was telling me to do something or anything. Rather, it always happened when she was distracted or working on something. I’d catch a glimpse of her and have this sudden urge to step behind her and kiss her neck.

It was a stupid fantasy. No doubt, she’d fire me on the spot for something like that. But that didn’t mean I wasn’t thinking about it.

“We’re the same age, right?” asked Skylar.

I looked down. “I’ll be nineteen in two months,” I said.

“We could be friends, you know,” she said. “I know it’s a little awkward, being as how you work for us. But I think I’d like to be your friend.”

I smiled down at her. “I’d like that too,” I said.

"Have you ever been...you know...with a girl?" asked Rosa. We were sitting on her bed, watching Spanish soap operas when she'd asked.

Without thinking, I responded, "Of course I have." It actually took me a long second to realize that I'd responded as Edgar and not as Adriana. That had happened in weeks, maybe months, and it took me by total surprise. However, that surprise was nothing to the shock I felt running up my spine when she smiled at me.

"I don't know if you know this," she said. "But I'm a lesbian."

Honestly, I'd never even thought about it. Until that moment, I hadn't considered her sexuality at all. I suppose I simply assumed that her lack of a dating life was tied to her work schedule. That said, it suddenly dawned on me that I'd never heard her so much as mention an ex-boyfriend. Neither had I, which I guess had given her certain ideas.

"Why are you telling me?" I asked, my voice quivering slightly. I could feel the sexual tension crackling in the air.

"Because I think you are too," she said, pulling off her shirt. I wanted to look away from her bare chest, but I couldn't. Instead, my breath came a little faster. My heart beat a little faster. And a warm, moist feeling bloomed in my groin. I was horny – so, so very horny. I hadn't had anything even remotely resembling sexual relations in months.

She saw it. I felt it. And Rosa acted, leaning forward to kiss me lightly on the lips. It felt perfectly electric, and as she withdrew, a million reasons not to keep going rocketed through my mind. To my shame, I ignored them. Smiling, I said, "Don't stop now."

It was all the invitation she needed, and she practically launched herself at me. We collapsed onto the bed with Rosa on top as she thrust her tongue into my mouth. I could taste her strawberry lip gloss. I could smell her herbal shampoo. And I could feel her probing hands gripping my breasts. It was intoxicating.

My own hands seemed to have a mind of their own, roaming all over her petite but curvy body. She felt so different than Natalie. I felt so different than I'd ever felt. Before I could really process my actions, we were both naked, and God – she was beautiful. So was I, I remembered. So was I.

With a practiced motion, she shoved me back to the bed and mounted my face. Her lovely pussy was inches from my mouth. I couldn't have stopped, even if I wanted to. And didn't want to stop. I wanted to part her lips with my tongue. And even as her own face descended into my nethers, her tongue lashing out with expert dexterity, flicking my clit as her fingers slipped inside me, I returned the favor.

I made myself forget that I had a family, a wife. I forced myself to ignore Edgar's voice, deep in the back of my brain, as he shouted for me to stop. It was far easier than I imagined it would be.



I wish I could say that I resisted. I'd never cheated on my wife, and I regarded the practice with a wealth of disdain. But in the moment, I couldn't stop. I didn't feel like Edgar anymore, so why should I follow his rules? Natalie had made it very clear that, at least for the duration of my time as Adriana, we weren't together. She wasn't my wife, so it was silly to think that I was cheating on her.

The guilt, however, would come later. But during our impromptu coupling, all I could think about was Rosa, her perfect body, and how talented her tongue was. And God, it was. She had clearly had plenty of practice along the way, and I was more than happy to reap the benefits of her sexual history.

In my life, I'd had sex with quite a few women. Some, in my youth, were at least as gorgeous as Rosa. And my sex life with Natalie had always been robust. But as Rosa and I shifted positions so we grind our pussies together, I felt like a neophyte. This wasn't sex - not as I knew it, anyway. It was different. More playful. And it was easily as satisfying as any of my previous experiences, which I admit was a bit of a surprise for me.

It amuses me to think that, if the old me had seen what transpired in that eclectic bedroom, he would have been incredibly turned on. And so would almost any guy. In retrospect, I don't know how I should have felt about that. Nor did I know how to feel about being the pursued. Clearly, Rosa had planned our liaison. She came onto me, not the other way around. It was a novel situation, there's no doubt. Not bad - just new.

When we'd both had multiple orgasms, we collapsed next to one another, sweat slick and smelling of sex. I couldn't keep the smile off my face.

"I guess you liked that, huh?" asked Rosa, lying on her back and staring at the ceiling. I didn't answer, and she said, "Me too."





"Make me something Mexican," said Natalie.

"Like, tacos or something?" I asked, hooking my thumbs in my red apron's pockets.

She shook her head. "No," the seemingly-older woman stated. "I think I want something a little more exotic. Some family recipe or something."

"Oh," I said. "O-okay."

I didn't have any family recipes, and she knew it. Or maybe she was so invested in the farce of my new identity that she'd simply forgotten. I don't know, but I was just about as good as cooking traditional Mexican food as any other upper middle-class white man. However, as Natalie left the room to leave me to my cooking, I had some insight. I wasn't a real Mexican, but Rosa was. And after the day before, I knew she'd do whatever I asked of her. So, I found my cheap, pay-by-the-week cell phone and called my roommate.

"You've got to help me," I said after a perfunctory greeting. As was often the case, I spoke Spanish exclusively with the other girl. "I'm in a tough spot here, and I need you to help me."

"Yeah?" she asked. "What's going on?"

I told her the situation, asking, "Do you have anything you can help me with? I never really learned how to cook that well."

For a second, there was pregnant silence on the other end of the phone. Just before I was going to ask if she was still there, Rosa said, "I've got it. Mi abuela's enchiladas. I'll text you a picture of the recipe."

I sighed in relief. "Thank you," I said. "Thank you so much. I'd be lost without you."



I stood in the bathroom I'd once thought of as my own, wearing a robe which belonged to my stepdaughter, and spending the night in the house I'd helped pay for but couldn't claim as my own. It was all so surreal.

"I can go home," I said. "I don't need to stay."

"Don't be stupid," said Skylar, wearing a pair of panties and an old tee-shirt emblazoned with a tiger – the mascot of her old high school. I could remember watching her study wearing that same shirt. And now, she was in college, and I barely saw her. It hurt, though I masked the pain with a smile. "It's too late, and I know where you live. It's better if you're not out in that neighborhood after dark."

"Is it okay with your mom?" I asked.

She shrugged. "She didn't say no," was Skylar's answer. It was a typical teenager's response and an argument she'd used on multiple occasions. It threatened to spawn a warm, fuzzy feeling in the pit of my stomach. "You're a lot smaller than me, but I left some fresh clothes out for you in the guest room. You can wear those."

"Um," I said. "I've got...you know...I've got some...ah...sanitary problems."

My period, such as it was, had just started the day before, and I knew I was in for a particularly heavy flow. However, I'd only brought one tampon with me, which I'd used earlier that day. Once I showered, I was going to need another.

"Sanitary problems?" asked Skylar. Almost as soon as the question left her mouth, her eyes widened in recognition. "Oh – you're trying to say you're on the rag. Don't worry about it. Check under the cabinet. There are some pads and tampons under there, whichever you prefer. There's also some Midol in the medicine cabinet."

"Oh," I said, the surreality of the situation kicking into high gear. I'd just asked my own stepdaughter for help with my period. "O-okay. Yeah. That'll help."



"I can't wear these out in public," I said, resisting the urge to tug my incredibly tight, ridiculously small shorts down. If I did, they'd threaten to expose more than just my ass. "They're too short."

"A simple thanks would be good," said Rosa. "But yeah - insulting a gift works too."

"Come on," I said. "You know this isn't my style."

"No - you prefer to hide that perfect body of yours," she said. "The gift isn't the outfit. It's the advice: don't cover up so much. People like to look at pretty girls."

People like her, maybe? Since our encounter, Rosa had shown little interest in rekindling that romantic flame, and I'd come to suspect that she'd simply used me for sex. I didn't think she had any intention of making a relationship out of what we shared.

That should have been a relief. I wasn't looking for a girlfriend. Hell - I was already married, and I definitely felt guilty about my moment of weakness. I was completely geared up to refuse any and all of Rosa's advances, should it come to that. However, there was a big part of me that wanted her to try. I wanted to be wanted. Sue me.

"Not covering up and going out half dressed are two different things," I argued.

She shrugged. "They don't have to be," was her answer. "Listen - I know you've got some problems. I'll never pry into your personal issues, but sometimes, you act like you're forty-years-old or something. Let loose. Live a little. You'll have a lot more fun if you do. You'll be a lot happier."

I knew it was good advice, just like I knew that, even though she'd exaggerated, she was right about how I acted. I'd let Edgar infect Adriana's life, and that simply wouldn't do.

"Okay," I said. "Point taken. I get it. And thank you for the birthday present, okay? It's nice that somebody cares."

She smiled, and I melted. "I think I have another present for you," she said, slipping her own top off. "How about we go to the bedroom and have a little fun?"

I couldn't refuse, and soon enough, I found myself with my face buried between her legs.



I hummed to myself as I swept the upstairs landing. My earphones blasted some Mexican dance music Rosa had put on my phone, and I was in my own little world. So, when I looked down at the living room and saw Skylar sprawled on the couch, naked but for a pair of blue panties, I actually dropped my broom. I looked away swiftly, but I'd gotten more than an eyeful.

Her legs were spread, with her thong panties pushed aside, exposing her sex. It was almost an invitation. She said something, but I could only hear the muffled semblance of language over my music. I removed my earbud, and asked, "I'm sorry, Miss Skylar? What did you say?"

My gaze remained pointedly elsewhere, which I'm sure she noticed. "Look at me," she said. Reluctantly, I did, and I was horrified to see that she hadn't covered up. In fact, she'd spread her legs wider. "Do you like what you see?"

I didn't know how to answer. On the one hand, yes. Part of me definitely did like what I saw. My lovemaking with Rosa was still fresh in my mind, so it, being its dirty self, immediately jumped to the idea of tasting that glorious slit between her legs. It was short-lived, quashed by Edgar's morals, but my lust was still impossible to ignore.

"You are very beautiful, Miss Skylar," I said, feeling my cheeks redden. Or darken. I still didn't know if, with my skin tone, I could blush. In either scenario, I was clearly embarrassed.

"So are you," she said. "Why don't you come down here, and we can talk?"

"I...I have a lot of work to do," I said, knowing full well that it was a pitiful excuse.

"Come on - I won't bite," she said. Then, she added, "Much."

"I...I...I'm going to clean the bathrooms," I said, scurrying away. As I strode down the hall, my mind whirling with conflicting desires, I could hear her laugh echoing throughout the house.

"Suit yourself," she called.

She shoved me onto the bed, her eyes furious. "You have the audacity to lie to me? To me?" Natalie screamed. I still don't know how she found out about the party, but she had. And she wasn't happy about my keeping secrets from her. "She could have gotten arrested! Or pregnant! How could keep that from me?"

I cowered on the bed, the much-bigger woman towering over me. For the first time in my life, I was truly afraid of a woman – and for good reason. She probably had thirty pounds and a solid four inches worth of height on me. And I knew for certain that she spent quite a lot of time at the gym. As a man, I'd liked being partners with a strong woman. She kept me honest. But as her housekeeper? I was truly terrified.

"Lo siento, Miss Natalie!" I said, lapsing into Spanish. With an effort of will, I forced myself to speak English. "I didn't mean to upset you. I didn't know what to do!"

She took a deep breath. "You deserve to be punished," she said.

"What? No!" I said. "Don't...don't have me...don't call La Migre!"

"I won't call immigration this time," she stated. "But you will be punished. Take off your shirt and pants." I hesitated, and she repeated the order, but at a much higher volume. I obeyed immediately, exposing my petite body and pink panties.

Natalie fished around in one of her nightstand drawers, withdrawing a thick, black ruler that looked more like a paddle. I'd never seen it before. Sitting down on the bed, she said, "Over my lap."

I hesitated, and she grabbed my arm, pulling me over her lap, face-first. I should've known what she'd planned, but the idea of being spanked by my wife had never occurred to me. But as soon as I felt the burning sting of the ruler on my ass, my mind finally caught up to the situation. I let out a squeal of surprise, mixed with pain, but that didn't stop her. Indeed, she seemed to redouble her efforts.

The paddle descended, over and over, with every increasing ferocity. The room was filled with my cries of pain and the telltale slap of the ruler against my bare ass. The pain of it all was bad enough. The embarrassment was much, much worse. By the time she'd had her fill, I was weeping uncontrollably.

Shoving me off her lap, Natalie said, "Let that be a lesson to you. No more secrets from me about my own daughter. If she steps one more foot out of line, I'm holding you responsible. And next time, you won't get off so lightly."



"This is so much nicer than the pool at home," said Rosa, who lay on a pool chair only a few feet of where I was doing the same. "No beer cans in the corners. The pool doesn't smell like pure chlorine. And the refrigerator is stocked with just about anything we could ever want to eat. I could get used to this."

"Are you sure your boss isn't going to mind?" I asked, looking around at the clearly-expensive pool. "I mean, you're eating his food and everything."

"Tommy doesn't care what I do," she said. "As long as I wear short shorts and flirt with him a little, he'll let me get away with murder."

"You're so bad," I said. "I could never do that."

"That boss of yours is pretty enough," Rosa stated. She'd seen both Natalie and Skylar a couple of times when she'd come to pick me up while my car was going through one of its less-than-operable phases. "And the daughter is straight hot."

"It's not like that," I said. "I just work there."

"You should work for a man," Rosa said. "They're so much easier to manipulate. Tom actually offered to buy me a car for Christmas, if you can believe it. I almost let him."

"He knows you're not going to do anything with him, right?" I asked. "I mean, that seems kind of silly, considering that he has no chance with you."

"First of all, he doesn't know that," Rosa said. "Second, you have to understand about guys like Tommy. He hasn't had a real date in probably two years. He's rich, but he's also kind of a dweeb. It took him almost two months before he could even look me in the eyes. As far as I'm concerned, I'm doing him a favor by helping him talk to women more easily. And if he wants to be a lenient boss, so be it."

I tried to wrap my head around her logic, but I quickly decided that it didn't matter. Rosa's life was her own, and I had no right to try to rule it.





I hated doing overnights in my old home, but Natalie was a demanding boss. Often, I'd spend all day working and then have a dozen more tasks thrown at me that simply had to be done before I left. Often, it was far easier to simply work until just before bed and stay in the guest room. I'd even started bringing a change of clothes in case Natalie demanded too much of me.

However, that wasn't so bad. I was used to working long days, and there was a certain catharsis in cleaning that I'd come to enjoy. It wasn't something I wanted to do for the rest of my life or anything, but it wasn't as bad as I'd originally expected.

But Skylar made the whole thing incredibly uncomfortable for me. When I was in the shower, she'd "accidentally" burst in, hoping to catch a glimpse of my naked body. She had also taken it upon herself to undress in front of me without a single shred of modesty. I had seen far more of my stepdaughter than I ever thought I would.

Of course, I knew what she was doing. Or rather, I knew that she was doing one of two things. Either she simply enjoyed tormenting me. I was completely unable to hide my embarrassment at seeing her in various states of undress, and I wouldn't have put it past her to exploit that. The other option was that she'd developed something of a crush on me. I didn't think Skylar was lesbian, but then again, I also didn't know she had a collection of vibrators (which I'd found under her bed) and a bit of an exhibitionist side.

But those thoughts flew out of my mind when she cornered me in the bathroom. I was wearing the robe she'd given me and nothing else. She had on a tank top that left her midriff bare down to her low-rise panties. If she'd had even a hint of pubic hair, I would have easily been able to see it, they were so skimpy.

"Show me," she said.

"W-what?" I asked.

"Show me your body," Skylar said, echoing her mother's tone that I knew so well. "And before you say no, remember, one word from me, and mom will call - what is it you call immigration? La Migra?"

Her threat was clear, and I all but gasped in surprise. But I had little choice but to do as she said because, at the end of the day, she was right. So, I untied the robe, spreading it wide and exposing my body.

She stared at me for a long, long moment before saying, "Very nice. I knew you had a great body under there."

And then, without saying anything else, she walked away, leaving me wondering what, exactly, had just transpired.



“Look,” said Natalie, patting my knee. “I like you. I just want you to take more initiative.”

“How?” I asked, terrified that my wife was about to fire me. It was my three-month performance review.

“Cook different dishes,” she said. “Don’t just clean things when I tell you to. And we don’t want to talk about the incident with my daughter’s party.”

I blushed at the memory of being spanked by the woman I loved. It was, to date, the most humiliating experience I’d ever endured. I had felt completely helpless, and I had been entirely at her mercy. She had used that to dominate me so completely that I sometimes had trouble going to sleep because my thoughts wouldn’t stray too far from that humiliation.

“My point is that a girl like you doesn’t have all that many options,” she said. “You should work a little harder. Again, take some initiative. Be more than the bare minimum. If you do that, you can get ahead in this country.”

I’d said much the same thing concerning poverty in America on so many occasions that I thought the parallels must have been intentional. Was she trying to teach me a lesson? I worked twelve our days, six days a week, and for relative peanuts. I was doing everything I could to get ahead. The situation was simply too great to overcome quickly.

I wasn’t like the other poor people across the country. I’d been dropped, fully grown, into a bad situation. I didn’t have the benefit of working for years and years to achieve a goal. I was told to be a housekeeper, so that’s what I’d become. It was simple.

“I’ll try to do better, Miss Natalie,” I said, trying hard not to argue with her. I didn’t want to go down that road with a woman who, I thought, wouldn’t hesitate to call immigration on me.

“See that you do,” she stated. “I’d hate to have to lower your pay.”

I'd gotten used to seeing Skylar naked, a fact that, if I let myself think about it, was quite disturbing. So was the unmitigated desire I felt each time I saw her nubile body. How had I never noticed that? Because you're her father, I thought. Stepfather, I corrected my thoughts. I was her stepfather. That made me feel a bit better about it all.

However, I couldn't ignore it when, as I was cleaning one afternoon, I walked in to see Skylar lying on her favorite blanket – which I'd bought her for Christmas one year – her legs spread, and working a clear, plastic, and ridged dildo out of her young pussy.

I stopped, staring. She had the good grace not to notice me, though I knew she had seen me come into the room. If my lust-colored thoughts were a little clearer, I might have realized that the entire thing had been staged for my benefit. But with my skin flushed, my breath coming in quick, shallow pants, and that familiar arousal spreading throughout my groin, I could think of little else but the beautiful girl in front of me.

I watched for far longer than I should have. In fact, later, I would chastise myself for not speaking up. I should have told her to stop, or at the very least, to go to her room. But I didn't. I stood there, mesmerized by her masturbation for the fifteen minutes it took her to orgasm. She was so adorable – tiny, high pitched gasps filled the room as she bit her lip, working the sex toy faster and faster until, finally, she came.

That's when I realized my hand was down the front of my yoga pants, and I'd been massaging my own pussy. I let out a wordless gasp, retracted my hand, and scurried into another room, wondering when I'd gotten so perverted.

That night, as I was washing the dishes after their evening meal, she approached me from behind and whispered in my ear, "You could have joined in if you wanted. I wanted you to."

I didn't have the composure to even reply as she walked away, giggling to herself.





"I feel like a racoon," I said, trying to resist the urge to run to the bathroom and wash off the heavy eye makeup. "This is stupid."

"You look good," said Rosa, brushing past my complaint. "And besides, you said you'd let me practice."

"When are you going to have enough money for cosmetology school?"

I asked, referencing her dream. She'd often talked of getting her license and opening her own hair salon. It skewed so closely to my own "dream" that it was a bit frightening. Of course, that was just a backstory. I didn't really want to fix women's hair for a living. Rosa, on the other hand, did, and as her friend, I owed it to her to support her dream.

She shrugged. "A year," she said. "Maybe two. Less if Tommy gets a little more attached to me and gives me a raise."

I shook my head. "I wish I had your job," I said. "My boss actually threatened to cut my pay."

"I've had bosses like that," she said, a knowing expression on her face. "They think that just because we're illegal, we don't deserve a fair wage."

The way they see it, whatever they give us is probably ten times what we'd get back in Mexico. They think we should be grateful they gave us a job in the first place."

"That's just...so...wrong," I said. "It's unfair."

Rosa shrugged. "That's just the way it is," she said. "People take advantage of us. My brother's working on some orchard out in California for, like, three dollars an hour. He has to live with six other guys, just to afford a crappy trailer. But there's nothing we can do because if we complain, we get the attention of La Migre. As bad as it sometimes is, none of us wants to go back."

"Yeah," I said, having felt that very same fear on multiple occasions. "I just wish it was different."



“Get in,” said Rosa, looking up at me from the expensive tub. It looked so luxurious that I almost couldn’t imagine sitting in it. “We can have a little fun.”

“What about your boss?” I asked, looking around. “Doesn’t he mind you taking a bath in his tub?”

She shook her head. “I think he gets off on it,” she said, scooping a handful of bubbles out of the tub. “The idea of me being naked in his tub gets him going.”

“You’re taking advantage of him,” I said.

“We both know what’s going on,” she argued. “We’re both adults.”

I shook my head. I’d never met her boss, Tom, but I had known men like him in my other life. Too scared to talk to women, he probably developed a crush on nearly any of them that showed him even the slightest bit of kindness. No doubt, he’d spent much of his life being friend-zoned by women who considered him a “dear friend”. All the while, he spent his life imagining a future where he somehow got one of them to see him as a man. It was sad, and I wanted to admonish Rosa further.

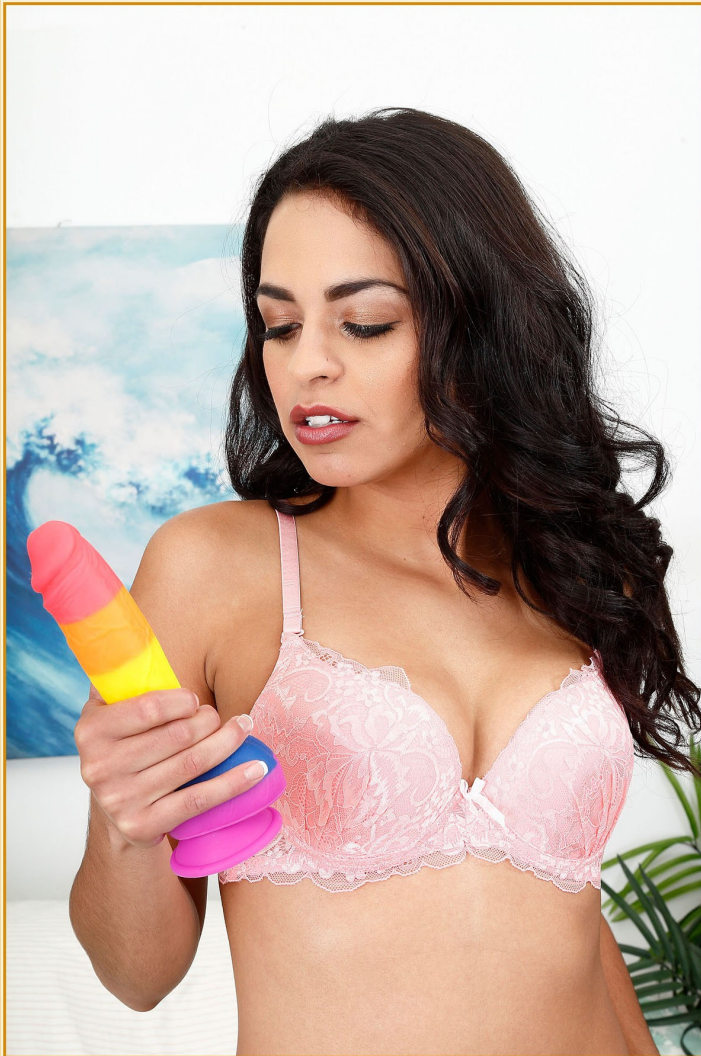
But that bath looked incredibly enticing, especially because Rosa was in it. So, I threw aside my pity for the man and slipped out of my clothes. As she licked her lips, Rosa’s eyes never left my body. I stepped into the tub, luxuriating in the hot, soapy water.

“Turn around,” she said. I did, backing up to her. I could feel her breasts on my back and her legs wrapping around me. And then, she started massaging my shoulders.

“God, that feels good,” I said, stretching my neck. I had no idea how tense I was until she started kneading my muscles. We stayed there for a while, just relaxing amidst the bubbles. It was pleasant, but I knew she was teasing me.

Finally, she said, “Let’s go have sex on Tommy’s bed.”

I was in no position to argue, so, after we dried off, we did just that.



"I...I don't know what to say," I said, holding the rainbow-colored dildo. Other than its garish color, it was a reasonable facsimile of the real thing, complete with a scrotum jutting from its base. Completing the thing was a suction cup. "Thanks?"

"You needed one," said Rosa. "I hear you in your room every night. I know what you're doing in there. This will help."

I looked away, embarrassed. I thought I'd been quiet. It never occurred to me that she might know that I masturbated so much. But then again, part of that was her fault. If she wasn't so unpredictable when it came to sex, I wouldn't have needed to take care of myself. I didn't know what she wanted out of our relationship - friendship, to be girlfriends, or something in between - and I was quickly realizing that she didn't know either. It was a sobering thought.

"So...you bought me a dildo," I said. "Because I masturbate too much?"

"Not too much," she said. "Just wrong. But it's okay now. You'll love that thing. I have one almost just like it. The only thing that's different is color."

"R-right," I said, unsure of how a conversation like that is supposed to go. How is someone expected to react when her roommate gives her a sex toy? Did she want me to use it in front of her or something?

"Also, there's really good news!" she said, her smile widening.

"You got me two dildos?" I asked, making a bad joke. She laughed politely, but I knew it wasn't funny.

"No," she said. "I got into beauty school. I start next month!"

"Oh - wow," I said. "That's...that's great. Really great. I'm proud of you."

In truth, I felt like I was stuck in a rut. I knew I couldn't make plans for my future because, for Adriana, there was no future. After my two years were up, I'd go back to being Edgar. That meant that I was just treading water. And I hated it.



"Can we be serious for a second?" asked Skylar, sitting on the bed with a towel wrapped around her chest. She looked beautiful.

"If that's what you want, Miss Skylar," I said.

"Don't call me that," she said. "Call me Skylar, okay? I'm not your boss."

"O-okay," I said, adding "Skylar."

"Do you find me attractive?" she asked. I said that she was beautiful. "Then why won't you do anything with me?"

I didn't immediately answer her direct question because I'd never really considered the possibility that she might ask something like that. I'd comforted myself by believing that her actions were meaningless flirtation. As long as I maintained my discipline, nothing would come from it. However, I hadn't counted on her coming right out and asking to be with me. Finally, I spoke.

"You're my boss' daughter," I said. "If she finds out about anything that's already happened, I'll get fired."

She reached out, clutching my hands. The towel slipped a bit, exposing her breasts. I struggled not to look at them. "I wouldn't let her fire you," she said. "Come on. It would be fun. We could only do it when she's not here. And _"

Gently, I pulled my hands away, interrupting her, saying, "I'm sorry, but it can't happen. I can't afford to take the risk."

And then, she surprised me by standing up, pulling me close, and kissing me on the mouth. Her towel fell completely off, and she pressed her body against mine. I'm ashamed to say that I lost myself in the kiss. Her lips were so soft, so inviting, and her tongue mingled with mine perfectly. My hands were already playing over her ribcage, creeping towards her breasts when I realized I was kissing her back.

Panic rising in my throat, I pulled away, gasping. "I'm sorry. I c-can't," I said. "I just...I just can't."

And then, I ran fled out of the room, down the stairs, and into my beat-up car, where I sat for a long moment, trying to catch my breath and order my thoughts. It didn't work.

"Just go with me, okay?" Rosa had said. "It'll be fun."

As I looked around the house party, I couldn't help but feel a distinct stab of anger toward my roommate. First of all, she'd practically begged me to wear some ridiculous, revealing camouflage-patterned shorts and an equally promiscuous pink tank top, through which, everyone could see my nipples. And everyone did. Repeatedly.

But that wasn't the worst of it. Truly, I could have handled if it she hadn't abandoned me amidst the strangers. The last time I'd seen her, she was following some guy upstairs to do God knew what. I didn't know a single person there, which, if I'm honest, isn't terribly surprising. I barely knew anyone in that age bracket, aside from my stepdaughter-cum-stalker and Rosa. More, I had no idea how to mingle with my apparent peers.

"Can I get you a drink?" asked a shaggy-haired deviant of a boy. He wasn't much older than Skylar, but he had that look in his eyes that told me exactly what he wanted from me. I wasn't so naive that I was ignorant of the dangers of accepting drinks from strange men. The last thing I wanted to happen was a date rape.

I shook my head, grabbing my cup of beer from the nearby sofa table, saying, "I've got my own, thanks."

"Ah," he said. "I see."

"Good," I responded shortly, looking around for Rosa. I didn't see her.

"Smart," the boy said. "Not taking drinks from strangers, I mean. There are a lot of creeps out there."

"You saying that you're not one of them?" I asked, the alcohol thickening my accent almost to the point of incoherence. "Because that's what a creep would say."

He laughed, and suddenly, he didn't look so bad. He was kind of cute – you know, if I was into that sort of thing. "Touché," he said. "Fair enough. I'm Brett, in case you were wondering."

I smiled. "Adriana," I said. Before I could say anything else, however, Rosa practically tackled me. If I hadn't seen her coming at the last instant, we'd have both tumbled the ground.

"We've got to go," she said, slurring her words badly. I could clearly see that her hair was completely mussed and that her denim shorts were unfastened and unzipped. "Now."

"What's wrong?" I asked, hugging her to me. "Did somebody hurt you?"

"Let's just go, okay?" she said, lapsing into Spanish. "I want to go. Let's go."

And we did. She passed out in the passenger seat of my car.





“Aaand, there,” said Natalie, after filling her tumbler with wine. It was her third such glass. “That’ll do.”

In the other room, there were a pair of men in suits that I knew were from the FBI. From what I could glean via overheard conversation, they were asking questions about Edgar Butler and his mysterious disappearance. So, I couldn’t blame her for drinking. It wasn’t like she could tell the truth. They wouldn’t believe it, and even if they might, it would ruin the experiment.

For the first time since I’d become Adriana, she looked at me like she wanted to talk about something important. In that instant, I almost felt like her husband again. But it passed almost instantly, and she said, “Make sure this all gets cleaned up before this meeting is done.”

“Yes, Miss Natalie,” I said, and she walked back into the other room. I crept closer to the open door, just out of sight, and listened.

“He’s in Colombia,” Natalie said. “Doing research.”

“We have reason to believe that he isn’t,” said one of the FBI agents. “In fact, there’s nothing to suggest that he’s anywhere at all.”

“He is,” said Natalie. “I just got an email from him last week. And there was a courier that dropped some legal documents he’d signed a few days ago at my office. I can get them if you like.”

“Please do,” said the bulky man, and Natalie disappeared down the hall. She returned a few moments later, carrying a briefcase. She set it on a nearby table and fished out a manila envelope, which she handed to the agent. He opened it and started reading. A couple of minutes later, he said, “Divorce papers. Signed. Witnessed. This is exactly what we needed. Thank you, Mrs. Butler.”

“Owens,” she said. “I’m reverting to my maiden name.”

He nodded, saying, “In any case, we’re sorry to have bothered you. Clearly, everything’s fine.”



"You heard," she said. It wasn't a question.

I nodded. "I did," I said.

"And?" she asked. "What do you have to say?"

I opened my mouth, intending to yell. I was going to scream. I was going to berate her for not even speaking to me about what she'd done. Not only did she want to divorce me, but she'd forged my signature on a series of legal documents. It was wrong on so many levels. But my time as her servant asserted itself, and I bit my tongue. Instead of an outburst of emotion, I asked, "What do you want me to say?"

"Honestly?" said Natalie. "I don't know. This all seemed so easy at first. But the moment I saw you like that, I stopped thinking of you as my husband. You're not. Body or mind, you're so different. And I don't even like thinking about it."

"Me neither," I agreed.

"That's the thing - I don't know if I believe you," she said. "It's all so natural to you. Most of the time, I forget that you're not who you are. But that's not why I did the divorce thing."

"Why did you, then?" I asked.

"You're missing," she said. "Officially. What happened to all those emails you were supposed to have sent Skylar? Or me, for that matter? There's supposed to be a trail. But you didn't do any of that. And look - I know this is hard on you, but it's what you wanted. I'm just picking up after your mess."

"You divorced me to prove that I was still, you know...alive?" I asked.

"Mostly," she said. "There are a lot of other feelings there, but that's mostly why I did it. And look - when you get back to being...him...we can figure this all out. But until then, this is the way it has to be."

"I...I understand," I said, though I didn't like it. My marriage to Natalie was sacred, and I'd been blindsided by the news of the divorce.

"Don't tell Skylar," she ordered, her tone changing. Whatever truce we'd established, it was gone. I was back to being a maid. "And this little heart-to-heart, it won't happen again. Know your place."

"Y-yes, Miss Natalie," I said.



I don't know what I was thinking. Maybe I was angry at Natalie. No - I was. But that wasn't all of it, not by a long shot. I was angry at myself, too, for not seeing what was under my nose. Natalie loved Edgar. Not Adriana. To Natalie, I was just an employee for as long as I looked the part. It had been apparent from that very first reunion, and I had simply ignored it because I was too afraid of what it meant.

I guess it could also have been sheer arousal. After all, Rosa hadn't wanted anything to do with sex after the incident at the party. She didn't explicitly say she'd endured a rape attempt, but the signs were clear. She was vulnerable and in no mood for anything but friendship. The byproduct of that was that I hadn't had sex in weeks.

And Skylar was right there. She was more than willing, eager even. And it wasn't like we were related. Even our tenuous familial connection was dubious as long as I was Adriana. I wasn't her father. I wasn't her stepfather. I was just her housekeeper. Why not add lover to that list?

I planned it carefully, knowing how Natalie would react. Most of the time, when she threatened to call immigration, I didn't take it too seriously. But if she caught me with her daughter? That would have been crossing the line. I'd be in Mexico before the day ended. So, I made sure she would be gone for quite a while before I slipped into the bathroom, put on my favorite lingerie set, and went to find my would-be seductress.

I found her in the game room, lying on the couch, flipping through some streaming service as she looked for something watch. She was so beautiful. Blonde hair. Perfect body. And those soft, soft lips. I stood there, waiting for her to notice me. It didn't take long.

"Well," she said, sitting up. I couldn't help but notice that she was dressed for the occasion as well. No doubt, she'd had the same thought as me, and had intended to make one more move on me while her mother was away. Great minds think alike, I suppose. "Isn't this a surprise."

"I...I want...this," I said, approaching the couch. She stood. "I've thought a lot about it, and I -"

Without hesitation, she cut me off with a deep, passionate kiss. When we broke apart, I said, "I forgot what I was going to say."

"You were going to say that you want me to fuck you," she provided, pulling me close. "I know. I've known since the moment you showed up. It was only a matter of time."

We collapsed onto the couch, our lips locked in fervent passion. As Skylar ripped my panties down my legs, I struggled to remove my top. I was so nervous that it took me far longer than it should have, and by the time I looked up, Skylar was completely naked.

And I couldn't help but feel lucky. She was the epitome of youthful beauty. Everything was exactly where it should be – tight and perky and perfect. She didn't say anything before crawling on top of me, where we continued to kiss while feeling one another up. It didn't take long for one of her hands to creep down to her eventual goal.

She started fingering, working her digits in and out of my soaking wet pussy. I let out a soft moan of appreciation and pleasure, and she redoubled her efforts. My own hands found her full, round breasts. They weren't huge or anything – not like her mother's manmade tits – but to me, they were perfect. Size didn't matter all that much, anyway.

After a couple of minutes, during which I actually came close to climax – she was quite skilled with those fingers – she sat up, her pussy resting on my stomach. "I'm going to sit on your face," she said. I nodded eagerly. Whatever would get my mouth closer to her tight pussy, the better.

Flipping around, she lowered her sex onto my face, and I began to eagerly lick, using every bit of technique I'd learned from Rosa in the process.

"No," she said. "My asshole."

I hesitated for a brief second before deciding my course. She shifted a bit, putting that slightly brown ring directly in my sites. My tongue snaked out, teasing it for a moment before beginning in earnest. Before long, I was eating her ass like I'd been doing it all my life.

Obviously, she was happy with that result, because she bent down to kiss my own pussy. I was in ecstasy – not just physically, but mentally as well. Ever since I knew she wanted me, I'd been thinking of Skylar in a decidedly-not-parental way. And the sexual act simply sealed it.

We went on like that for a long while – far longer than I might have expected – and in the end, we were both completely, exhaustedly satisfied.



"I love your little brown pussy," said a nude Skylar, crawling toward my spread legs. I massaged my labia with fingers tipped in electric blue nails – Rosa's suggestion.

"That's racist," I said, only half serious. She crept forward until she was inches from my pussy.

"Almost as much as I love the sexy accent of yours," she said. "Especially when you're so indignant. That means –"

"I know what it means," I said. "I speak – oh...oh!"

My sentence had been cut off by her expert tongue, and angry thoughts of indignation followed suit. She was a great pussy licker, and I was certain that she had been doing it for quite a while. In retrospect, maybe Natalie and I should have paid a little more attention to her sleepovers.

I let out a low moan, and Skylar's head bolted upright. "Be quiet," she hissed. "Mom's still downstairs, you know. If she finds out..."

She let the possibility hang in the air because we both knew the consequences. At the very least, I would be fired if Natalie found out what I'd been doing with her daughter. At worst, she would call immigration. I didn't relish either scenario.

But the threat was part of what made it so deliciously naughty. Thinking that her mother – my now-ex-wife – was so close made our adventurous tryst feel so much more taboo than it really was. I'm not sure exactly what that says about either of us, but that's how it was.

Skylar resumed her licking, and I successfully stifled my lustful exclamations by putting a pillow over my face. I won't say I was completely silent, but I was confident that Natalie couldn't hear us – unless she decided to venture upstairs to the infrequently used guest bedroom. That would have been a disaster.

Pulling up, Skylar said, "My turn, slut. Get on the floor."

I did, and almost gratefully thrust my face between her legs and gave at least as good as I'd gotten.



"I got us something to play with," said Skylar, holding a bundle of leather and a long, thin package. "I think you're going to like it."

I smirked. "You think?" I asked. Natalie had just left for work, which meant we had the house to ourselves for most of the day. And Skylar had planned accordingly, it seemed. "Do you plan to keep me in suspense?"

"Suspense," Skylar mused. "Big word for a poor, Mexican housekeeper."

"Shut up," I said. "Just show me what you got."

And she did, opening the package first to reveal a long, pale dildo. After untangling the bundle of leather, I guessed what it was – a strap-on. She wanted me to wear a strap-on.

"For me?" I asked.

"I'm going to fuck you so hard with this," she said, already stepping into the harness. "That's what you want, isn't it? You want this big dick inside you?"

I was stunned. I'd just assumed that, as a onetime man, I'd be the one to wear the dick. But then again, I realized I'd had the relationship all wrong. I was clearly the submissive partner and had been from the very beginning. It made more sense for her to wear it. But even so, it struck whatever was left of my male ego hard.

She fastened the dildo to the harness, then sat on the couch. "I want you to ride me," she said. "Reverse cowgirl. I want to see that sweet little ass of yours."

Part of me hated when she used such foul language. It shattered the image of the little girl I'd seen grow into a beautiful woman. But the other part, the female part, loved it. And she was definitely in control.

So, I did exactly what she told me to, and climbed atop the thing. I'd had a lot of practice with my own, gifted toy, so I took it without any trouble. And then, I rode. Up and down, over and over, screaming for more the whole way. I think I even called her "daddy" once. I don't know. It was a strange encounter, but it was definitely one I wanted to repeat.



"Look," I said in Spanish. I always spoke my "native" tongue when it was just us. "I'm sorry, okay? I should've told you sooner."

"I think you misunderstood our relationship," said a confused Rosa. "I'm not, like, gay-gay. I'm bisexual. And I could never be in a real relationship with a girl. It's fun, don't misunderstand. We have fun. But I never thought of us as a couple."

"Oh," I said, feeling a sense of relief mingled with a touch of anger. For weeks, I'd been laboring under the impression that my tryst with Skylar was a betrayal of what I shared with Rosa. Obviously, I had been completely wrong. "I guess I didn't get that memo."

"I don't know what to say," she said. "You like this girl, don't you?"

"It's complicated," I admitted. "She's...my boss' daughter."

"The cute blonde?" asked Rosa. I nodded. "Well, she's definitely worth getting fired over."

"You're assuming we're going to get caught," I said.

"And you will," Rosa stated. "I've seen it a million times. You're going to get careless. Or you're going to make the girl angry. If you do, she's going to tell. And then, you're out of a job."

And probably deported, I thought, but I left it unsaid. I didn't want to think about what would happen if Natalie decided to pull that trigger. My only hope was to keep her happy. And something told me that having repeated sex with her daughter would go a long way toward preventing that.

If I could have stopped, I would have, but Skylar was addictive. And forceful. If she wanted me, she was going to get me. There was no resisting her, not really.

"All I'm saying is that you should be careful," Rosa advised. "Don't get too involved with these people unless you know it's real. They'll fuck you over the first chance they get."





"Today is officially naked day!" I announced, grinning as I threw my clothes on the floor. "And if you can last through the first hour without bending me over a couch, then I'll -"

"Lick my pussy for two hours," said Skylar, grinning. "And if I can't, well - the fucking you is reward enough, right?"

I smiled. "You know me so well," I said.

I had become very, very attached to Skylar's strap-on. Pussies were made to be fucked, and mine rigidly adhered to that basic characteristic. It was one thing being licked and fingered. And playing with my own dildo was nice. But having a partner gripping my hips as she thrust her rubber cock deep inside me - that was heaven. And I'm perfectly aware how that sounds, coming from someone who'd once been a man.

"So - what's keeping me from just fucking you right here, right now?" she asked, quirkily as mile.

"Willpower?" I asked. "Don't you want to win?"

"Not really," she answered. "Do you want me to?"

"I do love you - oh, shit!" I said, looking out the window to see Natalie's blue Mercedes pulling into the driveway. I didn't hesitate before grabbing my discarded clothes. "Pick up this blanket. Your mom's home."

I felt a rising panic as I sprinted to the bathroom where I quickly dressed. As I did, I heard the front door open and close, and Natalie called out, "Anybody here?"

I took a few deep breaths before tying my hair back into a ponytail, then exited the bathroom. I went into the kitchen to see Natalie there. "Oh," I said. "You're home. Did you forget something?"

"No," she said. "I'm going to be working from home for a couple of weeks. Just go...clean something. And tell Skylar I want to talk to her."

"Yes, Miss Natalie," I said.



"Is all that for me?" I asked, looking Skylar up and down. She wore a white garter belt, matching panties, and a pair of thigh-high stockings. No matter how irritating the things are, there's no denying that they're sexy. And so was she.

"No," she said. "I'm sorry, but I can't play tonight."

"But your mom's not here," I pouted. "I thought we could -"

"I have a date," she said.

"W-what?" I asked. "A date? With who?"

"A boy I graduated high school with," she said. "I ran into him at Starbucks yesterday, and he invited me to dinner."

"But...what...what about us?" I stammered.

"What about us?" she asked. "We both know what this is, Adriana. You and me, we're not a real couple. You did realize that, didn't you?"

"I...um...yes," I said. "Of course I did. I just thought you were...you know...a lesbian."

"Sometimes I am," she said. "Sometimes, like when David picks me up, I won't be."

"Oh," I said, looking at her ensemble with fresh eyes. A girl didn't wear underwear like that unless she expected someone to see it. And clearly, I wasn't the intended target.

"Aww," she said. "Don't be sad. Tell you what - I've got a few minutes before I need to finish getting dressed. Why don't you lick me for a while? That'll make you feel better."

She unfastened her garters and removed her panties. Obediently, I knelt before her and started eating her out. It didn't make me feel better.



“Come with me,” said my ex-wife, Natalie. She wore a black lingerie set and a pair of high heels. It wasn’t necessarily abnormal; sometimes, while she was getting dressed for the day, she walked around the house half-dressed. As Edgar, I thought it was cute.

But as Adriana, I resented it for some reason. Still, as much animosity had built up between us, I knew better than to disobey. The last thing I wanted was a repeat performance with her ruler.

So, I followed her up the stairs and into what used to be our bedroom.

“What do you need, Miss Natalie?” I asked, my tone as polite as I could make it. “I’ve already made the bed, and I plan to wash your delicacies this afternoon.”

“It’s not that,” she said, bending down to retrieve something out of a drawer in her dresser. It didn’t take me long to recognize the object. I’d used them often enough to know a dildo when I saw one. “I want to fuck you.”

“W-what?” I asked.

“I said I want to fuck you,” Natalie repeated. “Right here. Right now. I want to fuck that pussy of yours.”

I looked around, confused. I knew we were alone in the house; Skylar had gone on another date with the boy she knew from school, so for the duration of the night, it would just be Natalie and me.

“Take off your clothes, slut,” she said, fastening the dildo to a harness I hadn’t noticed she was wearing. How I had I missed that?

I didn’t hesitate to obey, stripping down in what I thought was record time. She stared at me the whole time, her eyes drinking in every naked curve of my body. She nodded toward the bed, and I quickly crawled atop it.

“Suck it, bitch,” Natalie said after climbing onto the bed and positioning herself in front of me. The rubber phallus jutted obscenely from her crotch. I had to admit that, as off-putting as the whole situation was, she wore the strap-on like she’d been born with a dick. Maybe, I thought, she’d had some practice of which I was unaware.

Still, there was little time for idle thoughts. When Natalie told her housekeeper to do something, she’d better jump to it without hesitation. And in that particular instance, I did, wrapping my lips around the phallic toy. I tasted rubber as I bobbed my head up and down.

“That’s it,” Natalie said, her hand on the back of my head. “Suck my dick, slut.”

I did. Up and down, I moved my head, sucking as I pulled out. Physically, it was ridiculous. I hated the taste of the thing, and what’s more, I knew it was pointless. However, mentally, I could see the draw. I’d never felt so submissive in my entire life, and I had to admit that it wasn’t an unpleasant state of mind.

Take initiative. The words sprang into my mind, and almost immediately, I knew what to do. I popped the cock out of my mouth and began trailing tiny kisses up my ex-wife’s flat, muscular stomach. She shivered at the pleasure, and I kept going until I reached her bra. With a deft motion, I pulled her tits out of the cups, letting them hang atop the bra. It was probably a little uncomfortable, but I didn’t care. I was starting to get into it.

My mouth descended onto her nipples with expert precision, and just like her daughter, Natalie responded quite well to my ministrations. She let out a soft moan as I kissed her areolas, flicking her nipple with my tongue. It drove her wild.

“Back down to the cock,” she breathed. “I want it nice and wet before I fuck you.”

I leaned back down, and resumed the blowjob, wondering all the while what I was doing. She didn’t like me – not as Adriana. And she’d never displayed lesbian tendencies before; in fact, she’d often talked about homosexuality in derogatory terms. So, why did she suddenly want to fuck me?



Natalie looked at me in a way I'd never seen before. There was lust there, sure, but there was also disdain. Anger. Superiority. I couldn't even tell if she liked what we were doing. Whether she did or not didn't really matter, though. I didn't have a choice in the matter, and I got the feeling that it was something she had to do as well.

After I sucked her rubber cock for another few minutes, she picked me up and pushed me toward the headboard.

"Get that little ass up in the air," she growled, gripping my hips and pulling them to her. I arched my back, and she pushed my head into the pillows. Then, without any other delay, she pushed inside of me. I gasped. She grunted. Thrust after thrust, in and out, she fucked me hard and fast, slapping my ass more than once.

"Dios mio!" I screamed, my English temporarily forgotten. "Si! Si! Follame! Follame mas duro!"

No doubt, she didn't understand the language, but she got the point. I wanted her to fuck me harder and harder. I didn't want sensuous and loving. I wanted a jackhammer. And Natalie was more than eager to provide.

I wish I knew how long it lasted. Minutes? Hours? It was all the same to me. Time blurred. Minutes blended into hours, the passing time accompanied by screams of passion, grunts of effort, and moans of pleasure. And in the end, we were both exhausted, both having cum more than once.

After, I collapsed, face-first onto the bed, breathing heavily and with a smile of contentment on my face. But my mind whirled. What did it mean? Why had she chosen to fuck me? Did she want me back? Were we going to be a couple again, experiment be damned?

Natalie slapped my naked ass, saying, "Get up. You're still on the clock."

"W-what?" I asked, turning my head.

"You've got work to do," she answered. "I expect the house to be spotless when I get home."

Nothing. Nothing had changed. I nodded, standing as I said, "Yes, Miss Natalie."





"I'm not sure what you want from me, Adriana," said Skylar. "I've told you that this is just about us having fun. I don't want a relationship, and it's not just because you're a girl. David has nothing to do with it, either, because he's in the same boat. I have no intention of getting tied down. I thought I was upfront about that."

I looked away, confused, embarrassed, and a little teary-eyed. Part of it was that I was on my period; nobody told me how wildly emotional I could get during my mimicked menstruation. But in addition to the cramps, the flow itself, and feeling bloated the entire time, I had almost no control over my moods. For someone who'd never had to even think about such things, it was a nightmare.

The other part of the equation was that I really did like Skylar. She was smarter than I'd ever known, beautiful in a way most girls weren't, and she had a great, biting sense of humor that matched my own. In short, it felt like we'd been made for one another.

But we weren't, I thought. Nothing about our relationship was natural. Despite my appearance, I was more than twice her age. I was her stepfather, for God's sake. What I wanted was absolutely wrong, but that wasn't a barrier to my desire. I was entranced by her, and it frustrated the hell out of me.

"I just...I don't...I-I don't know what I want," I admitted. "I wish I did."

"Why can't we just have fun from time to time?" she asked. "Nothing has to change. Not really."

I was worth more than that. I knew I deserved to be more than a sometime plaything. But I didn't care. If that was how it had to be, I could accept it.

"You're right," I said, wiping my eyes. "We can do that."

"Good," she said, leaning in to kiss my cheek. "I knew you'd see it my way."

"Yeah," I muttered. "I understand."

"Do you want to go again?" I asked, running my fingers along Skylar's upper arm. We lay on the couch, naked, with her back to my front.

"You're horny today, aren't you?" she asked, turning her head. "We've been at this for hours."

"Is that a bad thing?" I asked, trying to mask my frustration with playfulness. I'm not sure how well it worked, because I couldn't quite shake the idea that I simply wasn't good enough for Skylar. To her, I wasn't relationship material. Certainly, she liked having sex with me, but you don't need a person for that. You just need a warm body with a talented tongue, and as far as Skylar was concerned, that's all I was. It was depressing.

"Not at all," she said, grabbing my hand and pulling it to her pussy. Closing my eyes, I began to massage it. I was so engrossed in the act that I didn't even hear the door open. However, I jerked my hand away from Skylar's groin when I heard my ex-wife's voice.

"So," Natalie said. "Isn't this an interesting turn of events?"

I started to spring off the couch, but Skylar stopped me. "Stay," she said. "We're not doing anything wrong."

"Nothing wrong?" demanded Natalie. "You're...y-you're sleeping with the help!"

"So did you," Skylar said. "Or did you think I didn't know? I came back during my break between classes, and I saw you with her. So, how is what I'm doing any different than what you did?"

"It's different," Natalie stated. "More different than you could possibly know."

"Yeah," Skylar said. "Sure. You just want her all to yourself, right? Well, I like having sex with Adriana. And she likes doing it with me, too!"

"You don't understand," Natalie said.

"I think I do," was Skylar's cold response.

"I just want to -" I began but was quickly interrupted by both Natalie and Skylar.

"Shut up," they said in unison. Then, Natalie said, "Why don't you get dressed and get to work. I'll figure out how to deal with you later."

I didn't know what else to do, so I extricated myself from where I lay on the couch, grabbed my clothes off the floor, and hurried out of the room. Before I even shut the door, I could hear the two women arguing with one another.



"And she still hasn't done anything?" asked Rosa from the passenger seat of my car. The vehicle truly epitomized my fall in social stature. Not only was it older than my apparent age, but it hadn't been well taken care of. Where the paint still clung to the body, it was faded. The headliner was gone. The seats were torn. The windshield was cracked. And it barely ran. But it got me from here to there. Most of the time. Thankfully, it was cooperating that day. I don't know if I could have taken any more stress.

"No," I said. "She's just going on like it's normal. Skylar hasn't said anything either."

"I'm not sure if that's a good sign or a bad one," Rosa responded. "What do you think they'll do?"

I shrugged. "My student visa expired two months ago," I said. "She could call immigration on me."

"Would she do that?" Rosa asked.

"No," I said. "I mean, I hope not. Maybe."

"She might not have the chance," she said, pointing off into the distance. A quarter-mile up was a Border Patrol checkpoint.

"Mierda," I muttered, panic setting in. I slowed the car to a crawl. "What do I do? Turn around?"

"No," she said. "They'll see you. Just cooperate with them once we get there. And follow my lead."

I nodded and urged the vehicle forward. It only took us a few more seconds to reach the checkpoint, which was comprised of three Border Patrol agents, a multitude of orange cones, and a giant stop sign. On the side of the road were a pair of white-and-green patrol SUVs. We pulled to a stop and one of the agents approached my open window.

"Ladies," he said. "Can I see some identification?" I reached into the backseat and grabbed my purse. After rummaging around, I fished out my driver's license, which I handed to the agent. He peered at it for a few seconds before asking, "And your papers?"

"I...um..."

"We forgot them at home," interrupted Rosa. "I'm sure we can come to some kind of arrangement. Maybe there's something I can do for you."

He peered at the girl, taking her meaning quite clearly. Then, he smiled. Pointing at me, he said, "You. Stay." Then, nodding to Rosa, he said, "Get out of the car and follow me."

As Rosa did as she was told, the agent said something to his colleagues which elicited a great deal of laughter. I tried to sink lower in the seat. A moment later, Rosa was trailing the agent to his SUV, and they both climbed into the back. I sat there, waiting for almost ten minutes while Rosa "took care of the problem", and when they finally emerged from the truck, Rosa bore the telltale signs of recent sex. Her clothes were askew, her hair mussed, and she had an unreadable expression on her face that said quite clearly that she was trying to mask her shame.

As Rosa got into the car, the Agent slapped the hood, saying, "You two drive safe now."

I pushed the accelerator, and we pushed through the checkpoint. I drove a lot faster than I probably should have, but I couldn't stand to be near that place anymore. For her part, Rosa remained silent, and I didn't know what to say. It was easily the most uncomfortable experience I'd ever endured.





"Do you want to talk about it?" I asked when we finally arrived at her employer's house. As was so often the case, he was away on business, which gave Rosa and me free run of the place for a few days. Before the incident with the Border Patrol, I had been looking forward to it. But as I sat, staring at my friend's expressionless face, I could have imagined a thousand other places I'd rather be.

Rosa turned toward me. "No," she said, her voice monotone. "What's there to talk about?"

"What that man did was disgusting," I stated. "You know that, right? People – especially law enforcement – aren't supposed to be like that. We're supposed to hold them to a higher standard."

She barked a harsh laugh. "Are you kidding?" she asked, a tone of incredulity coating her voice. "They're La Migre. This is what they do."

"It's not supposed to be," I muttered.

"You can't be this naïve," my roommate said. "You've been here for years. You should know better. They don't see us as people. We're not worth respect. Or human dignity. We're garbage. Trash that needs to be taken to the border and dumped into Mexico. That's what we are to them."

"Most of them are just doing their jobs," I argued. "They are just following the laws."

"And some of them take advantage of the situation," Rosa said. "And all the rest of the assholes protect them. That makes them just as guilty. I've seen them beat a man half to death because he had a pocket knife. I've seen other women do exactly what I just did. I've seen them tear crying babies from their mothers' arms. And they still think they're doing the right thing. It's disgusting."

"You didn't have to –"

"I did!" she said. "You know I did. He had that look in his eye. He saw a couple of pretty Mexican girls, and he knew he was going to have a good day. Either he was going to deport someone, or he was going to get himself a nice piece of ass. I offered the second option so we wouldn't have to deal with the first."

I knew she was right. I'd seen that same look in his eyes, and I knew good and well that it wasn't going to end well for us. Rosa had simply had the wherewithal to take charge of the situation. I should have been thanking her.

"Thank you," I said, rectifying that lack. "You saved us there."

"I know," she stated.

"I have been thinking about what happened," said my ex-wife. She stood in the center of the room, wearing a peach-colored wrap skirt and a floral print, white top that did nothing to hide her cleavage. "With my daughter."

"I'm sorry," I said. I knew it had to have been coming. She could let a lot of things slide, but me coupling with her daughter was not one of them. Natalie had changed, especially when it came to her attitude towards me, but I still knew her well enough that I fully expected my actions to have severe repercussions. "I didn't -"

She held up a single finger, silencing me. "What you did was reprehensible," she said. "I'm sure you realized that the moment you seduced her."

"I didn't seduce anyone!" I argued, raising my voice. I knew it was a mistake by the look on her face, so I softened it by adding a quiet, "Miss Natalie."

"I don't know how you thought this was going to go," she said. "Did you think you'd run away together? Just live the rest of your life like this? Or did you think I wouldn't discover what was going on? How did you see it playing out?"

She had a good point. I hadn't thought any of it through - not really. Or maybe I was just too weak to refuse something I wasn't prepared to admit I wanted. I don't know. But I couldn't disagree with her that the whole thing was ill-thought-out and unequivocally wrong. I just hoped that whatever punishment Natalie might dole out didn't result in me trying to make my way in Mexico.

"What are you going to do?" I asked.

"I thought about calling immigration," she said, and my breath caught in my throat. "I looked up the phone number and everything. But then I thought about it, and I decided that a different sort of punishment is in order."

"And?" I asked. "What are you going to do to me?"

"The next few days are going to be incredibly humiliating for you," Natalie said, an evil grin stretching across her face.





“Strip,” she said. When I hesitated, she barked, “Now!”

My clothes started coming off less than a second later. I couldn’t disrobe quickly enough, I was so nervous and afraid. But after only a minute or two, I stood before her, completely naked and trembling in grim anticipation.

“Stand there until I return,” she stated. “Do not move. Remember, I still have the number for immigration.”

Then, she disappeared down the hall, and I obeyed her order, afraid to test her patience. I felt so exposed, and I couldn’t help but wonder if that was the extent of my punishment. Did she mean to humiliate me with my own nudity? Or did she have something else planned?

The answer to that question came a moment later when she returned, clutching a black and pink bag. She tossed it onto the floor at my feet. “Put those on,” she said. I bent down to open the bag and was relieved to see that it was a fairly mundane lingerie set in all black lace. There was a garter belt, matching panties, a bra, and stockings. I quickly donned them.

“Get the remaining piece out of the bottom of the bag,” she said. I looked to see what I’d missed and saw a glittering, metal chain. I picked it up and quickly surmised that it was a leash connected to a vinyl collar. I hesitated only a moment before buckling the collar into place.

When I was full dressed, she said, “Now – on your hands and knees, dog.”

I obeyed, and she said, “For the rest of the day, you are my sexy, little puppy. You will not speak, but you will be expected to bark. If I see you using your hands for anything but walking, I will punish you. Do you understand?”

I barked a high-pitched bark.

“Good,” she said. Then, she patted her thigh, saying, “Come here girl. We’re going to have so much fun.”

“Oh, I love this!” I said, picking up the bra-and-panty set. “It’s so cute!”

“Are you trying to impress someone?” asked Rosa. In the three weeks since the incident with the Border Patrol agent, she’d begun to act more normally. I knew it still bothered her, but she hid it well. In any case, every time I tried to speak to her about it, she snapped at me. So, I’d decided to ignore it. “Someone special maybe?”

“You know there’s not,” I said. Skylar was staying with a friend just off campus, no doubt the result of her mother discovering our affair. She had the option of running away from the problem. I didn’t. So, I’d endured what Natalie had come to refer to as my “puppy days”. It was humiliating and frustrating, but if I was honest, she was nicer to me when I was on all fours than she’d ever been before. I don’t know what that says about her, but it isn’t good.

“You should get out there,” Rosa said. “Try to find a nice boy. Or girl. We never actually talked about whether you’re into both or not.”

“I’m not,” I said. “I like girls.”

“Don’t I know it,” was her response. “But you can like both. Have you ever been with a boy?”

I shook my head. “Never had the desire,” I stated.

“That just means you haven’t met the right guy,” Rosa stated. “Can I give you some advice?”

I nodded, saying, “Sure.”

“Don’t limit yourself,” she said. “Try new things. You might like it.”

I didn’t respond, maybe because, in the back of my mind, I’d often wondered about being with a man. It wasn’t like I was attracted to them – not really – but I could easily imagine losing myself to a particularly handsome man. And I couldn’t help but wonder how different a real dick might feel as opposed to one of my dildos.

But I was definitely not going to cross that line and find out. That was off-limits.





“This is a special day for you, isn’t it, puppy?” asked Natalie, looking over her shoulder. She looked great, wearing a black lingerie set. “Your big debut.”

I barked in response, which elicited a smile from my ex-wife. She was enjoying my humiliation far too much. And in the very near future, she would get so much more of it to enjoy. Natalie had set up a small party with a few of her friends, and the way I understood it, it was intended to be quite risqué. However, as embarrassing as it promised to be, it also carried with it a sliver lining. If I behaved myself, meaning I did everything she told me to do without even a moment’s hesitation, it would be my last “puppy day”. So, I’d resolved to do what I could to make her happy.

A moment later, she took a short, black dress from her closet and stepped into it. It was extremely tight, hugging her every curve. It was as good as I’d ever seen her look.

“When the guests arrive, you are to behave as a dog,” she said. “Greet them as a dog would.”

I barked.

“You are going to be the center of attention, whether you like it or not,” she said. “You know the consequences for disobedience.”

It wasn’t a question. She’d repeated her threats dozens of times, and I couldn’t help but think of them. I hated being so powerless, but there was little I could do about any of it. So, if she wanted to show off her new puppy, then so be it. I would be the best damned puppy I could be.

I crawled across the floor, clutching the dildo between my teeth, and people laughed. On its surface, it was embarrassing. However, deeper than that was the fact that I knew almost every person there. Some had even been Edgar's friends. And clearly, they all thought they were better than me.

I think that's what angered me the most. They couldn't see past my skin tone. They couldn't hear anything past my accent. All they knew was that I was a poor, little Mexican girl who'd been roped into demeaning herself for the promise of a payday. It was the worst kind of intersection between racism and classism. But as had often the case, I had no choice but to go along with it. A day's worth of humiliation was worth not being sent to Mexico.

I looked up at my temporary "owner", Jessica, who'd led me by my leash around the party. I knew her, of course. She'd once been my department's secretary. In the corner was Oliver Reynolds, the man who'd fired me what felt like an eternity past, staring at me with undisguised lust. Given that I was mostly naked, I couldn't blame him.

And across the room was my ex-wife, blatantly flirting with one of her own colleagues. It was all I could do not to stand up and slap her. But I cowed my anger and played my part because, in the end, I didn't have a choice.

The rest of the party was much the same - a long line of one embarrassment after another. I was groped. I was fondled. I was insulted and demeaned. But I endured, and when the party was over, Natalie told me that I wouldn't be required to be her puppy anymore.

That night, I got home, and Rosa asked me about my day. I didn't answer. Instead, I simply went into the bathroom, turned on the shower, and undressed. I stepped under the cascade of water, and I wept uncontrollably. I don't know how long I stayed in there, but by the time I'd finished, I had no more tears left.

I went to bed that night, pure hatred in my heart. What I'd done was wrong. I accepted that. What Natalie did was sadistic. She was evil. And I hated her.





"You've been acting weird," said Rosa. "What's wrong?"

"What? Nothing," I said, toying with the waistband of my shorts. She and I had just finished doing some yoga; despite my initial resistance to the discipline, I'd become quite fond of the exercise regimen forced on me by Carmen. "I'm fine."

"I've known you for a little while now," Rosa said. "Over a year. And I know when there's something wrong. Spit it out."

I wanted to tell her that I'd recently endured a host of embarrassing, demeaning situations. I wanted to spill the beans about how much it hurt me that I'd come to literally hate the woman I'd married. I wanted to scream and shout about how I felt used and abused by my own stepdaughter. I wanted to tell her that I wanted to end the whole charade, right then and there, and go back to my old life like nothing had happened.

But I couldn't. I thought she'd understand most of it, but I was far too humiliated to give it voice. And that was the most frustrating thing. I had never been the type of person to care about other peoples' opinions of me. I'd gone through life, cloaked in the confidence that I had nothing to fear from anyone else's judgment. I did care, though. I was afraid of what they thought. If any of my old colleagues or friends at that party knew who I was, I would have died of embarrassment.

"It's that woman, isn't it?" reasoned Rosa. "She finally punished you, didn't she?"

I nodded slowly, then blurted, "She spanked me."

"She what?" asked Rosa. "Like, bent you over and hit you with a paddle?"

"A ruler," I said. "I cried."

"Dios mio," she said, shaking her head. "You need to leave. Quit. You can come work with me or something. I'm sure my agency would hire you."

"I can't," I said. "I...um...I just can't, okay? I have to stay until at least the end of the year."

"You know what we should do, right?" she said. When I didn't answer, she continued, "We should drop everything and open our own salon. I'll be finished with beauty school in a few more months. And I can teach you what you need to know. I mean, you already know how to do hair. It's just about the certification now."

"Yeah," I said noncommittally. "Maybe when you graduate. Maybe we can do that."

“Oh,” said Natalie as I walked into the room sunroom. She wore a short, kimono-style robe and nothing else. I could clearly see the prominent outline of her nipples beneath the garment’s silk fabric. “You’re still here.”

“Would you like me to leave, Miss Natalie?” I asked, staring at the young, bearded man in the center of the room. Beside him was a fold-out table.

“No,” she said. “Don’t mind us. Liam is just going to give me a massage.”

I nodded and went about my task, trying to ignore them. However, I couldn’t help but see Natalie disrobe and lie on the table. As soon as the man’s hands touched my ex-wife’s naked body, I felt a deep-seated, almost visceral rage well up inside of me. Who was he to touch her like that? What gave him the right?

No – he’s a masseur, I thought, trying to calm myself. It was his job. The whole thing was chaste. Wait – why was he gripping her breast? There are no muscles there. And his hand was dangerously close to her pussy.

“Right there, Liam,” Natalie said, gripping his wrist and pulling to her sex. “Don’t be shy. This is part of the package I paid for.”

“Are you sure, ma’am?” he asked. “With her here?”

“She doesn’t matter,” insisted Natalie.

“I’m not comfortable with an audience,” Liam stated. “If she’s here, I can’t do anything other than a normal massage.”

Natalie sighed. “Fine,” she said. “Adriana, you may clean elsewhere for a while. Liam and I need some privacy.”

Fuming, I couldn’t get out of that room quickly enough.



"I'm sorry," said Skylar, lying nude on the bed. I wanted so badly to touch her, to kiss her. It had been a while since the last time I'd had sex, and I craved physical contact. And her talented tongue. "I made it perfectly clear what it was."

"I know, but -"

"But you got attached," Skylar stated, rolling over to show off her body. I knew she was teasing me, but I didn't care. My eyes greedily drank in the sight of her naked flesh. It was all I could do not to rip off my own clothes and jump into the bed with her. I was sure that once we got started, she'd be unable to stop. "I understand it, Adriana. I really do. I've had crushes like that before, too. But I don't want you like that anymore."

"W-what?" I asked, taken aback.

"I've had you," she said. "Look - it was fun while it lasted. It really was. But it's over now. The sooner you accept that, the better off you'll be. We can still be friends, though."

"I...I don't want a friend," I said. "I want you."

"We don't always get what we want," was her retort. It ripped my heart in half. "Now, you'd better get finished with whatever you needed to clean in here before mom realizes you're up here. You don't want her to get the wrong idea, do you?"

I was silent for a long moment as she stared at me expectantly. "No," I finally said. "I...I just need your dirty clothes."

She nodded to the floor. "Well," she said. "They're all right there."





I was more than angry. I was furious. There was a jealous rage brewing inside me, threatening to erupt. But it was impotent. Useless. Flaccid. I couldn't lash out. Nor could I even comment. I simply had to ignore the fact that my wife was clearly about to sleep with another man.

Ex-wife, I told myself. You're divorced. And even if you weren't, you're a different person right now. I kept telling myself that I had no right to be angry, but the moment I saw him groping her lingerie-clad body, logic faded, leaving nothing but ire.

It was all a show. I knew it, and so did she. I thought my punishment for sleeping with Skylar would be limited to my "puppy days". It wasn't. She was far too complicated a person to end there. Natalie would make me pay for at least the entirety of my time as Adriana, and probably once I returned to being Edgar as well. No doubt, I'd blown any chance of ever being with her again.

It was a hard pill to swallow. It's difficult enough, knowing that a person you love is sleeping with someone else. But when you have to see it, day in and day out, it's even worse. So it was with Natalie, who'd taken to parading a line of young, handsome men through the house. I'd have been surprised if she even knew all their names.

On the few occasions when I'd be forced to stay overnight, my ears were assaulted by the sounds of their passion. I tried to muffle my ears with a pillow, but that only made it worse. And the next morning? Running into the half-dressed, mostly hungover men was a special kind of torture. Each had that satisfied look on their faces. They'd had the times of their lives, and I couldn't help but think of it like it was at my expense.

I hated Natalie. And I loved her. I wanted her back, but I also never wanted to see her again. She was cruel. Heartless. And dismissive. She'd spent most of my time as Adriana demeaning me. And what's worse, she seemed to delight in my humiliation and emasculation. But I couldn't forget the woman I knew before everything changed. Back then, she was kind. Happy. We had loved one another from the moment we met.

I tried to cling to the memories, but the present has a way of discounting the past. And for me, the present was working for a woman who clearly hated me. It was only right that I return the favor.



“What?” I asked.

“I said you’re dressed inappropriately,” said Natalie.

“I’ve got somewhere I need to be,” I said. “I just wanted to change before I left. I told you about this a week ago. It’s my friend’s birthday, and she –”

“I don’t think this is working out,” Natalie stated, interrupting me. “You’re fired.”

“W-what?” I asked, surprised. “What did you just say?”

“I said you’re fired,” she repeated. She handed me a check. “That’s your pay for this last week. I’m sure you’ll land on your feet, and –”

It was my turn to interrupt her. “You can’t fire me!” I half-yelled. “This is my house! I paid for it.”

“I can fire you,” she countered, stepping close. I was suddenly far more aware of the size difference. If she’d wanted to, she could have physically tossed me out the door. “And I don’t see the name ‘Adriana Flores’ on the deed to this house. Or anything else, for that matter.”

I didn’t know what to do. I was stunned. Angry. Frustrated. And worst of all, I knew she was right. Legally, I had no recourse. For all anyone else knew, I was only Adriana. She had me, and she knew it. That’s why she was smiling.

I took the check. “You’re going to regret this,” I said. “I did everything you wanted me to do. I stayed late. I worked hard. I did everything...”

“And there are a thousand other girls out there who would kill to do the exact same thing,” Natalie said. “For less money, too. You’re not special. You’re not uniquely qualified to do anything. And you slept with my fucking daughter. I’m sure that you think you’re being mistreated. That’s how your mind works. It’s always someone else’s fault. But this is on you. You made a choice, and now you’re going to have to live with the consequences. So, go. Now. Before I call the police.”

I did, wondering if there was any way I could ever go back. The answer seemed to be an obvious no.

“That fucking bitch!” I screamed, driving Rosa’s new car. While she wasn’t on the paperwork or anything, her boss had assured her that it was hers. It wasn’t fancy, but it was new. “I swear to God, I want to murder her!”

“Calm down,” she said. “It’s just a job.”

“Just a job?” I asked. “Just a job? How am I supposed to pay my rent? You can’t afford it on your own.”

“It’ll work out,” Rosa said. “Like I said, we can start that salon. My aunt has a space we can rent really cheap, and –”

“I’m not certified,” I said. “And neither are you.”

“Not yet,” Rosa stated. “But I will be next week. And then, I can have you as, like, an apprentice or something until you can take the tests. I can teach you what you need to know after we close. It’ll be great.”

I sighed. I hated the idea of getting her hopes up. I only had six more months as Adriana. That meant that, if I started a business with her, I’d leave her high and dry when I returned to being Edgar. But what choice did I have? I didn’t even know how to go about getting another job. And even if I did, I didn’t know if I wanted to go through that again.

“Do you really think we could make it work?” I asked.

She nodded. “I know we can,” she said. “It’ll be tough at first, but we’ll make it work. I promise.”

“Okay,” I said. “Let’s do it, then. Let’s be hairdressers.”





"Wow," I said, looking around the space. It was far more spacious than I'd expected and seemed perfectly suited to becoming a salon. "It's a lot nicer than I expected. How much is this costing us again?"

"Less than you think," Rosa stated. When she told me the number, I gasped, and she laughed. "We're getting a discount from mi tia. She said she believes it's her obligation to help a couple of young, hard-working Latina entrepreneurs. It's probably a quarter of what she could get on the open market."

"I believe it," I said. "What about chairs? Supplies? What about -"

"I've got it covered," Rosa answered, interrupting me. "Tommy's agreed to look at our business proposal and give us a loan. It won't be enough to get everything new, but the cosmetology school has a lot of surplus that the auction off at the end of the year. If we get Tommy's loan, we'll be set."

"He'd do that for you?" I asked.

"It's Tommy," she said. "He loves me."

"Like, love-love?" was my next question. "Or, like, puppy-dog love?"

"Yeah - I probably should have told you sooner, but Tommy and I are...well...we're together now," she said. "Have been for about two months."

"Really?" I asked. I'd mistakenly thought that she had no secrets from me. "How did that happen?"

"It's complicated," she said. "But after what happened with those Border Patrol agents, I kind of broke down. You saw me. You knew. And he helped me get through it. He even called a friend he knows in the District Attorney's office, and that disgusting puta got fired."

"I...I don't know what to say," I responded, surprised. She felt comfortable opening up to Tom, but not to me? Were we as close as I thought we were?

"Neither did I," she admitted. "But ever since then, Tommy and I have been getting closer and closer. I think he's going to ask me to marry him soon."

"Wow," I said, feeling a stab of jealousy. I didn't want a man to marry me or anything, but I would have killed for some sort of stable relationship.

"I...well...I mean...congratulations. Really. I mean it."

"He's going to be so impressed," Rosa said, tapping the enter key on her laptop as we waited for her boyfriend. "I didn't know you were this smart when it came to budgets and stuff."

I knew she didn't mean it as an insult, but it was hard not to take it as such. It was so easy for people to get the wrong impression of my intelligence, based on the way I looked. She had no way of knowing that I'd been a key component in compiling my department's budget for going on fifteen years. By comparison, doing the financials for a salon opening was a piece of cake.

"Thanks," I said. "I just hope Tommy can see how good of an opportunity this is."

"We'll find out soon enough," she said. "I think I just heard his car pull up."

Sure enough, she was right because a few moments later, Tommy walked into the house. He was nothing like what I expected. Sure, he was a little older than Rosa, but he wasn't ugly. In fact, his looks were the definition of average. But he was fit enough, and he looked like he smiled a lot. I could see why Rosa was comfortable with him.

"Hello, ladies," he said in broken Spanish. Switching to English, he laughed as he said, "Sorry - still learning."

"It wasn't bad," I said as Rosa and I stood. She made introductions, and soon, we were back on the couch.

"So - you want to open a salon with my Rosa," he asked. "Do you have a business plan? A budget?"

I nodded, handing him the papers. "I have a Powerpoint presentation too, if you want to see it," I said. He nodded, saying that he did, so I turned the computer to him and launched into it. I don't know why I was so nervous; at one point, I spent the bulk of my time teaching college students, and some of those classes had sixty or seventy kids. Making a presentation for a single person shouldn't have been so nerve-racking. But it was.

However, I got through it without stumbling too much.

"That was very inclusive," he said, leaning back. "How much do you need?"

"It's on the last page," Rosa said.

He flipped to the last sheet of paper in his packet, read the pertinent line, and said, "Yeah. I think I can do that. Unless you need more?"

I smiled, and Rosa said, "No - that's plenty, sweetie. Thank you so much."

She hugged him tightly, and suddenly, I felt out of place.





"You didn't come in for your last interview," Andrew said, referring to my bi-monthly visits to his office, during which I was asked a couple hours' worth of questions while hooked up to a machine which would read my brain waves. It was onerous but necessary for his study.

"Why?"

"It must have slipped my mind," I answered. "I've got a lot going on."

"I heard," he said. "I never thought she'd actually fire you."

"Well, she did," I said. "And she cheated on me. Multiple times. Oh, and we're divorced now, too. Did you know that?"

"L...I didn't," he admitted. "I'm sorry. I didn't mean for that to happen."

"Not your fault," I said. "There were some FBI agents that came by looking for me. I'm still not a hundred percent why they cared where I was, but Natalie preempted that by forging my signature on the divorce paperwork. That got them off my trail."

"That...that might have been my fault," my oldest friend stated. "Or rather, it was Russo's. He might have been implicated in some illegal human testing, and the FBI is investigating it. Your name is in their records."

"Oh," I said, trying to wrap my brain around the fact that the more I knew of Russo, the more I thought of him as a mad scientist. I couldn't help but wonder if my own transformation was as well-tested as they told me it was. "Is everything okay?"

"It's fine," Andrew said. "Russo's lawyers squashed that investigation pretty quickly. But I'm not here to talk about that. I need you to come back to my office so you can be tested. We can't miss a single session or it might invalidate the results. And neither of us wants that."

"Right," I said. "Sorry. Let's go now."



"I'm sorry," said Skylar over the phone. "I never thought she'd fire you."

"Me neither," I said, looking out the window of the apartment I shared with Rosa. "But she did that and more."

"I didn't mean for anything bad to happen," she said. "I just wanted to have some fun. I didn't think she'd take it so poorly. She thinks you corrupted me. Like, you turned me lesbian or something, I think."

"It wasn't about that," I said. "You slept with...the help. In her world, that's unacceptable. I'm not good enough for you."

I knew that was only partially true, but it wasn't really false, either. I'd learned more about the type of person Natalie was in the past eighteen months than in the previous ten years of our marriage. She was petty. Vindictive. Rude. The only reason I hadn't seen it before was because she'd seen me as an equal. Without that armor, her true colors shown. If I was honest, her reaction to my tryst with Skylar was exactly what I should've expected.

But that didn't make her betrayal any easier to swallow.

"What are you going to do?" Skylar asked. "Do you have another job lined up?"

"My friend and I are opening a salon," I said. "We should be up and running in a few weeks."

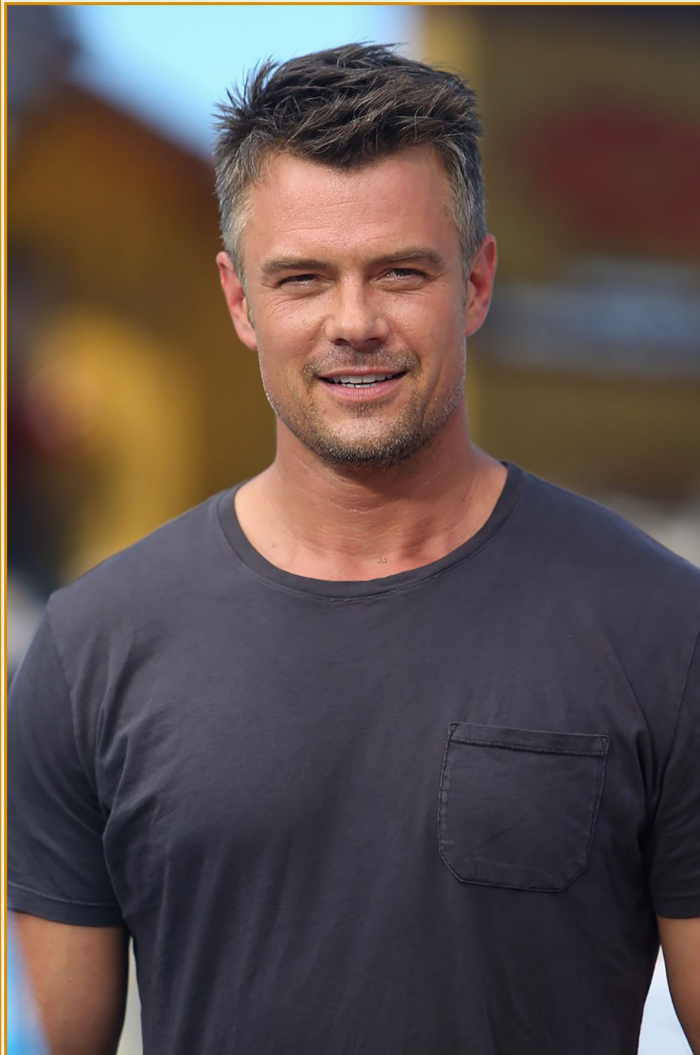
"Cool," she said. "I didn't know you did hair. That's so cool."

That's when I realized that Skylar wasn't much different from her mother. I'd talked about my dreams of being a hairdresser multiple times, but she had never been listening. I was just there to "play" with. I wasn't there to be listened to.

"Yeah," I said. "Look - I've got a lot to do today. Thanks for calling, but I've got to go."

"I really am sorry," she said. "I wish it had worked out differently."

"Me too," I said before saying goodbye and hanging up. Then, to myself, I muttered, "Me too."



"We can't keep meeting like this," said Andrew. "If we talk too much outside of the context of our interviews, it could corrupt the entire -"

"I know," I said. "I just need somebody to talk to. Nobody else really knows who or what I am. You're the only person who knows me for me."

"What about Natalie?" he asked. "She knows."

"I'm not sure she does most of the time," I said. "At first, it was just an act. I could tell that she was trying hard to treat me how she would any other employee. But I think it just got easier as time went on. Honestly, I don't even think she fired me for what happened with Skylar."

"Wait - what happened to Skylar?" he asked.

"Oh," I said, realizing that he didn't know the whole story. "That. I sort of had a thing with her."

"What kind of thing?" was his next question.

"A sexual thing," I said. "Look - I know it was wrong, but it wasn't really my fault. She came onto me. She threatened to call immigration if I didn't do stuff with her. And I guess I got tied up in the whole 'being Adriana' thing. I don't know. I was so confused. I still am. But Natalie found out. She made my life a living hell for about a month, and then she fired me."

"That sounds like she fired you for what you did," he stated.

"I know how it sounds," I said. "And maybe that was part of it. But I think it was more that she fired me because she could. She's a horrible person, Andrew. I never noticed it before, but she's pure evil."

"Natalie?" he asked. "We're talking about the same person, right? The woman you married. The woman you love. She donates like half her salary to charity, for God's sake. She -"

"Wants to look like she cares," I said. "But she's a hypocrite. She doesn't care about people like me. She just wants everyone to think she does. It's sick."

"Look - just hang in there," he said. "In a few months, you'll be back to being Edgar. You'll fix your marriage, and everything will be back to normal. I promise. But you've got to keep it together."

I nodded. "I know," I said.

"Look - I've got to go," he stated. "I can't see you like this anymore, okay? If you need to talk, we can do it during one of our sessions. But outside of that, no contact."

"I understand," was my answer.



"Come on," Rosa said, perfectly balanced on her high heels. As was often the case when we were alone, we spoke Spanish. "It'll be fun. I promise."

"Is that my dress?" I asked.

She nodded sheepishly. "Maybe," my sometime-roommate said. She'd been spending more and more time at Tommy's house, which left me alone in our small apartment. To stave off loneliness, I found myself spending most of my days in the empty house with her. "But it looks good, right?"

"It looks better on me," I countered, smiling.

"Don't be a bitch," she said. "Just come out with me and my cousins. You like dancing."

"I do," I said. What I didn't like was being groped and hit on by a bunch of drunk guys. I also didn't like the constant fear of being roofied and raped. Or the fact that Rosa, for all her good intentions, wasn't the best wing-woman. She was easily distracted, and when we went out together, almost always abandoned me to my own devices. Usually, that meant that I'd soon be surrounded by the aforementioned horny, drunken idiots. "But no. I'm not in the mood."

"What are you going to do?" she asked.

I shrugged. "Watch Netflix?" I answered. "I don't know. You don't think Tommy will care if I use his entertainment system, do you?"

"Of course not," Rosa stated. "You're practically family now. And he's not really the type of guy to get upset over stuff like that. He's really generous."

"Seems that way," I said. It was strange. I kept looking for a chink in the man's armor, but it seemed like he was a genuinely nice guy. He was good for Rosa, even if I was a little jealous of their relationship. Or maybe a lot jealous. Either way, I couldn't really find any glaring character flaws. Rosa had gotten lucky.

"Are you sure I can't persuade you to come?" she asked. I shook my head, repeating that I wasn't in the mood for dancing. "Okay - your loss. But if you want my advice, you should get out more. Quit moping. It wouldn't be that hard to find you a nice girl."

"Yeah," I said. "I'll get right on that."

“So,” I said. “Today’s the day, huh?”

Rosa grinned. “Serenity Salon is opening today,” she said. “I never thought I’d be a business owner.”

“Me neither,” was my response as I reclined on the bed in my underwear. It was strange. I’d gotten so used to wearing bras and panties that it was hard to imagine going back to simple boxer shorts. Equally alien to me was the idea of having a dick swinging between my legs. Like most of being Edgar, it felt somehow wrong. I chalked it up to hormones and recency bias, but if I was honest, I felt more than comfortable as a woman. And it scared me. “I just hope I’m ready. I’d hate to screw something up on my first day as a stylist.”

“I’ll be right there,” she said. “And you might not have gone to school, but you’ve got talent. In a few months, you’ll be certified, just like me.”

“Right,” I said, wondering if that day would ever actually come to pass. My return to Edgar’s life wasn’t that far off. What would Rosa do when I left? Would she try to stop me? Would she miss me? I would certainly miss her. In fact, there was a lot about my life as Adriana I would miss. Even my oldest friend, Andrew, didn’t know me as well as Rosa did, and I’d known him for decades.

She sat on the bed. “Listen – you’re talented,” she said. “Really talented. And smart. You’ll be fine. Better than fine. Great.”

“I’m glad you’re more confident than me,” I said, smiling. “Thank you for doing this with me. I know I don’t bring much to the table right now, but I’ll make it up to you. I’ll prove I’m worth partnering with.”

“You already have,” she said. “You’re like a sister to me, Adriana. You know that, right? You’re family. And family sticks together.”

“Thanks,” I said. “I needed to hear that.”



I knelt on top of the chair in the back of the boutique. It was after closing hours, so it was only Rosa, her friend, Melanie, and me. I should've felt a little self-conscious, wearing only my panties, but there was no way anyone else could have seen me. And besides, we were trying on clothes. You had to be half-naked for that.

"Just get anything you want," Rosa said. "This is a celebration."

"Two weeks in the books," I said, referencing the amount of time we'd been in business. It felt amazing, running a functioning business. We'd had plenty of clientele and were well ahead of schedule in terms of growth. It was almost like our business had been blessed. "You should be proud."

"We both should be," said Rosa. "I think everything's going to work out perfectly."

Melanie, who was a blonde, curly haired girl, modeled a particularly pretty dress. "What do you think?" she asked. "Does it make me look fat?"

"You look great," I said truthfully. "And I don't think you could look fat if you tried."

She grinned, and I had to admit that she was quite pretty. "I'm going to get something from up front," she said. "I'll be right back."

When she left the back room, Rosa lapsed into Spanish, asking, "What do you think of her? She's nice, right?"

"Yeah," I agreed. "Really nice."

"What would you say if I wanted to...you know...set you two up?" she asked. "No pressure or anything, but she's definitely into girls. Not bi or anything. She's totally lesbian. And I think she likes you."

"W-what?" I asked. "You're trying to set me up on a date? Is that why we're here? I thought we were celebrating by getting some new outfits."

"Maybe both?" Rosa said. "Come on - you need to at least try to find somebody. And Melanie's super sweet and pretty. You'll get along perfectly."

"I'll think about it," I said, and Rosa gave me a critical look. "I will. I promise. But for now, can we just do what we came here for?"

"Fine," Rosa said. "But I'm going to quit trying if you don't stop being so hard to please."

"Heaven forbid," I muttered in English. Rosa had the good grace to ignore the comment.





"I can't believe you're actually going out with me," said Rosa. "Who are you, and what have you done with my best friend?"

I admit that I was a little taken aback by her statement. I was her best friend, and I had to admit that she was mine. However, it was akin to hearing "I love you" for the first time, and it briefly startled me.

"What's wrong?" she asked. "You are still going, right?"

I nodded. "Yeah," I said. "Sorry. Just a little distracted, I guess. Do you think I look okay?"

I'd chosen a simple, black dress in which to go dancing. It wasn't immodest, and I felt comfortable in it. But I was worried that it was a little conservative for the type of dance club Rosa would likely drag me into. No doubt, the other girls there would be dressed in the sorts of dresses that barely covered their asses.

"You look amazing," she said. "But then again, you look good in just about anything."

"Thanks," I said, her comments going a long way to alleviating my fears. I'd decided to finally give in to her constant requests for me to go dancing for one reason - because I'd chosen to ignore the constant negativity in my head. Just because something bad could happen didn't mean that it would. I wanted to believe that the world was a better place, and that meant not living in fear. Or rather, in my case, it meant ignoring it. "Just don't abandon me, okay?"

"I won't," she insisted. "I'll be right there with you the whole time."

"I'm serious," I said. "If you leave me alone for more than a couple of minutes, I'm calling a taxi and getting out of there as quickly as I can."

"Strength in numbers, huh?" she said. "I get it. And I won't let you down. I promise."

The night did not end as I expected it to. I suppose I had it coming. The curiosity of it all had been with me for quite a while, but I'd been unwilling to admit it. But looking back, it was only a matter of time before I gave in, before I decided that I only had a couple more months as a girl and chose to experience all that it had to offer. The alcohol only made that decision come sooner rather than later.

Still, I hadn't expected to end up having sex with a man – especially one I'd just met. It was stupid. And dangerous. And wrong. But from what I could remember in my inebriated state, it felt so damned right. Natural, even. And it felt right more than once that night. And the morning after.

It's so difficult to explain how it felt because, if you haven't experienced it, it defies description. On the surface, it shouldn't have been all that different from taking Natalie's or Skylar's strap-on. The mechanics were the same. But the result was so very different.

There's something about being with a man that simply can't be replicated with rubber and plastic, no matter how enthusiastic or dominant a woman might be. It's pleasant when they do it. But with a man? It's raw and real and warm. Nothing else can compare.

I know how that sounds. You can't just flip a switch and change someone's sexuality. It's not possible, right?

I thought so too. But I'd been living as a woman for so long that I think everything got confused. Women, after all, are biologically engineered to be with men. And vice versa. That doesn't invalidate homosexuality or anything. It's just a genetic fact. So, it wasn't so unreasonable that, given the genetic tampering masterminded by Dr. Russo, some of that might have slipped through the cracks. It may have expanded and expanded until I simply couldn't ignore my natural inclinations. I don't know.

Realistically, all I can really know is that I liked it. I really, really liked it. And that, after that initial encounter, I wanted to do it again.





I sat on the couch, naked as Rosa paced back and forth. My gentleman caller had just left. "You were worried about me leaving you all alone?" she demanded. "And then, after only an hour, you just disappear. You don't answer your phone. You don't return my texts. I was worried!"

"I was fine," I said.

"Obviously," Rosa said, looking in the direction my one-night-stand had just gone. He was probably all the way back to his car, but she wanted to direct her hateful gaze at something other than me. "And what the hell was that? You're a lesbian."

"Yeah," I said. "About that...I don't know what I am. Not anymore."

"What does that even mean?" she asked. "I mean, you act like you'd never even been with a man before." I quirked an eyebrow in her direction, and she gasped, understanding dawning on her face.

"Oh. Oh, wow. Really? That was your first?"

I nodded. "Maybe," I said.

"Dios mio," she said, sitting beside me. "I guess I just thought...you know...I thought that you'd at least tried it before."

I shook my head. "Nope," I said. "He was the first."

"But not the last?" she reasoned.

I shrugged. "I don't know," I lied. I wanted more. I knew that much. The only question was whether or not I could keep myself from seeking it out.

"Well, I hope you know that you just flipped my whole world upside down," she said. "I hope you're happy."

I guess the result of holding something back for so long is that, when it finally breaks through, it's like a dam shattering. In my case, I was flooded with a lust that could only be satisfied by men. I wish I could say that I was careful. Or that I was picky. Or that I was even thinking at all. But I wasn't. I didn't have the presence of mind to care about any of that. I was on a mission, and I wasn't going to let anything get in the way of getting what I wanted.

I couldn't get enough cock. The real thing, and not some plastic facsimile. It took over my life. Each night, I'd leave the salon, head to a bar, and pick up a man. And they were all more than willing. I was lucky in that respect; at least Russo and his building full of scientists had made me pretty.

Sometimes, I wondered how I'd ever been satisfied with women – either as Edgar or Adriana. Being on the receiving end was so much better. Cock was so much better. The taste of it, the smell of it, the way it filled me so perfectly – it was overwhelming.

Over the next two weeks, even as the end of my time as Adriana quickly approached, I tried to cram as many sexual encounters into that time frame as possible. I was making up for lost time. I wanted to have sex with as many of them as I could.

I knew Rosa was worried about me. To her, it must have seemed such a dramatic shift, but to me, it had been a long time coming. I'd barely acknowledged my feelings before. I'd tried to ignore them, in fact. But once I tasted it, I simply couldn't get enough. And there wasn't enough time.

I think I was running from the reality of my situation. Soon, I'd go back to being what suddenly seemed like an old man. I'd gotten used to my body doing what I wanted it to do, and without the aches and pains of age. I'd grown accustomed to the attention I got from men and women alike. And I had become comfortable with my womanhood. Being a man, by contrast, seemed so boring.

But it was coming. I knew it, and I couldn't stop it.





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I think I was running from the reality of my situation. Soon, I'd go back to being what suddenly seemed like an old man. I'd gotten used to my body doing what I wanted it to do, and without the aches and pains of age. I'd grown accustomed to the attention I got from men and women alike. And I had become comfortable with my womanhood. Being a man, by contrast, seemed so boring.

But it was coming. I knew it, and I couldn't stop it.



The countdown had begun. Two months, and I'd go back to my old life. Or perhaps a new, younger life, given what Andrew had told me. However, I couldn't help but worry about his seeming change in personality. The man had been a lot of things, but a man who'd spout off about "ruling the fucking world" was never one of them. Was that the sort of change I wanted for myself?

I should have been happy. I wanted to be. I'd challenged myself to do this, and I'd been through a lot. I had truly become Adriana, for better or worse.

I should have been proud of the accomplishment. Not many men could have done what I did. Or, according to Russo's estimates, almost no one could have gone through the sort of transformation I had experienced. That made me special.

So why did I feel so anxious? Why wasn't I looking forward to resuming my life? I could finally go back to being a man. I'd be a husband again. A father. A successful academic. There was a lot to like about being Edgar. But I didn't look forward to it. In fact, I dreaded the day when I'd have to say goodbye to Adriana.

I masked my trepidation with fake smiles. Jokes. Sex. Friendship. But it was still there, lurking beneath the surface, ready to erupt at any moment. I cried a fair few nights, frustrated about the fact that I didn't even know who I wanted to be.

My two identities seemed to be locked in constant battle. Every time I thought about things I might miss about being Adriana, my old self would point out the bad parts. Periods. Harassment. Racism. Relative poverty. I was one bad day away from finding myself deported to Mexico.

On the other hand, going back to being Edgar wasn't going to be a walk in the park, either. I would have to relearn my masculine ways, for one. For another, it wasn't like Natalie would welcome me back with open arms. And whatever relationship I had with Skylar would doubtless have eroded due to my lack of communication. I had abandoned her, and she wasn't the type of person to forget that sort of thing. And that wasn't even considering how awkward it would be to play the father when I knew her so intimately.

The idea sent shivers up my spine.

I was lost. Alone. And I had no idea what to do. So, I just smiled and trudged along like I was the happiest girl in the world.

Of all the things I thought I would one day experience, anal sex was definitely not high on my list. But as Adriana, it seemed almost natural. So, when one of my lovers asked if I wanted to try it, I did. And to my surprise, I liked it. God, I hated that I liked it. But it was one of those things that I couldn't deny.

I'm not sure what it was about it that made it so irresistible. Maybe it was the taboo nature of it. As a man, it had always seemed so wrong, and that feeling had obviously carried over to my attitude as Adriana. And nothing is ever so pleasurable as when you know you're not supposed to want it. Or perhaps it the simple, physical pleasure of it. I'm not ashamed to say that the physical sensation was quite good, if in a different way than vaginal sex. There was also the possibility that I'm just into weird stuff. I don't know. But the result was that I found something else I liked about being Adriana.

After that encounter, I asked Rosa about her thoughts on the subject.

"Have you ever done it?" I asked.

"Once," she said. "But I didn't like it. He was too big, and it hurt."

I nodded. I knew about the pain. But I almost relished it. It gave the act more bite. The pain was a good counter to the pleasure.

"I think I liked it," I said. "Kind of a lot."

She shrugged. "We all like what we like," she said. "Does this mean you're done with girls?"

"I don't know," I said. "Maybe. It's just so confusing. I still look at women and find them attractive. But men are different. When I'm with one, it just feels right in a way I've never felt with a woman."

"I know the feeling," she said. "Girls are fun. Men are more real."

"Does this mean I'm bisexual?" I asked.

"I think it does, sweetie," Rosa stated. "Welcome to the club."





"You're in a good mood," said Rosa. "What's up? Get laid last night?"

I smiled. "A lady never tells," I said.

"Which means that you did," she reasoned. "You're going a little overboard, aren't you? I mean, I like sex as much as the next girl, but -"

"Making up for lost time," I said. "I should've been doing this all along."

She shook her head. "Sometimes, I don't get you," she said. "Most girls don't discover that they're straight. It usually works the other way. Like, you act like your default option was to like girls, and you had to convince yourself that it was okay to be with guys."

I shrugged. "Maybe that's exactly what happened," I said. "Look - I don't know what to tell you. It just happened the way it did."

"Clearly," she said. "But moving on because I'm totally not going to quiz you about your sex life -"

"For once," I said.

"For once," she agreed. "Anyway - are you ready for your exam on Monday? If you pass it, you'll be completely certified. We'll really be partners then."

I nodded. "I think I am," I said. I might have been experiencing a sexual awakening, but I hadn't forgotten about getting my certification. I had worked extremely diligently to prepare myself for the test, and I'd come to regard it as my last major hurdle before going back to being Edgar. "I've been practicing."

"You don't have anything to worry about," she said. "You're going to pass it. I know you are."



"I am not a slut," I said, my tone full of indignation. Some of it might have even been genuine. "Why would you say that?"

Rosa laughed. "It wasn't an insult," she stated. "It was kind of a compliment, really. You know what you like, and you went and got it. If anything, I'm kind of jealous. I could never do what you do."

"That...doesn't sound like a compliment, Rosa," I said. "It sounds like you're judging me."

"More like I'm living vicariously through you," she countered. "You're my hero."

I didn't miss the sarcasm in her voice. "Funny," I said. "Really funny."

I was going to miss the easy camaraderie I shared with Rosa. We really got one another, and in a way I'd never experienced with anyone else. My only close friendship as Edgar was with Andrew, and even then, there was a sizable distance between us. But with Rosa, I felt more comfortable than I could have imagined I could be with another person. I wanted to tell her everything, and aside from my true past, I did. And she returned that favor. Our relationship was as intimate as it could be without getting romantic. And I was incredibly grateful for it.

But I knew I'd have to leave it soon. Only a month remained until my time was up. I'd go back to Russo, and he'd put me through whatever procedures were required to turn me back into Edgar. I didn't relish that goodbye.

"You okay?" she asked, noticing my vacant expression.

"Yeah," I said, shaking my head. "Just thinking about how lucky I am to have you for a friend."

"Aww," she said, wrapping her arms around me. "I feel lucky too."



"Business is booming," I said, setting my laptop aside. I'd just finished doing our books, and Serenity was far exceeding expectations. In fact, our profits had been steadily increasing each week, and didn't seem to be slowing down.

"But I guess we didn't need a computer program to tell us that."

Rosa grinned. "Yeah," she said. "We're going to have to hire another hairdresser soon. We're booked solid for weeks."

"I agree," I said. "You know anybody?"

"Maybe," she answered. "I'm sure we can get someone else who fits our corporate culture."

"Corporate culture? Where in the world did you hear that?" I asked, laughing. "We don't have a corporation. Or a culture."

"You know what I mean," she said. "I think we need to hire another Latina. A pretty one. That's kind of our thing."

"Aww - are you calling me pretty?" I asked. "Thanks!"

"Shut up," Rosa said. "Oh - I have a surprise for you."

"What's that?" I asked. She smiled and slid a sheaf of papers across the couch. "There. Read it."

I did. "Citizenship procedure? What's this about?" I asked.

"I think it's time for us to become legal," she said. "I've already submitted my paperwork. It's expensive, but it'll be worth it in the end. Then, we don't have to worry about getting sent away."

I nodded. "I'd love to, Rosa," I said. "But I can't afford this."

"You can," she said. "Because Tommy's agreed to loan us the money as part of his investment. We already paid back the first loan, so he knows we're good for it."

I stared at the papers. "I...I don't know what to say," I muttered, tears in my eyes. "Thank you. Really, Rosa. Thank you. You have no idea how much this means to me."



What if I didn't go back?

The question had been rolling through my mind, back and forth incessantly for the past few weeks. Maybe it had been going on longer than that. However, with my deadline approaching so quickly, I could focus on little else. I didn't want to be Edgar. I didn't want that life. I knew that as well as I had ever known anything before.

But I also knew it was wrong. I had been born a man. That's how God, if there was such a thing, made me. That was what nature intended. So why did femininity feel so natural? So right. I'd been building a life without even knowing it. I had a lot to lose and not much to gain by going back to being Edgar.

I didn't want to leave Rosa. She needed me. And I needed her. She believed in me. She helped me. And I helped her. We were partners. Friends. Sisters. I was closer to her than I'd ever been with anyone in my life - including my ex-wife who, once upon a time, I'd loved.

I didn't want to leave my sex life. It was difficult to admit, at first, but I loved men. Their smell. Their strength. The feel of their rough hands. The thrust of their cocks. Those rock-hard muscles contrasting with my soft curves. It was all so intoxicating. So addictive.

I loved the clothes, the makeup, the hair. I loved everything about being a girl. I loved everything about being Adriana, and I felt more in touch with her cultural identity than I'd ever felt for my own. Hell, I didn't even know where my ancestors came from. Call it appropriation if you want but being part of the Mexican-American community was more rewarding than just about anything I'd ever experienced.

But I was really a man. That thought kept coming in to dash against my concrete assertion that I wanted to be the woman I'd become. I felt guilty, thinking about eschewing my return to manhood. It was wrong.

Then why did being a woman feel so perfectly right?



"You're serious, aren't you?" Andrew said, looking even younger than the last time I saw him. If I'd had been forced to guess his age, I'd have put him in his mid-twenties. It was uncanny, but I was a little too distracted to truly appreciate the effect.

"I am," I said. "I've been thinking about this a lot, and I realized that I don't have any reason to go back. I'm going to talk to Natalie about it first, but I'm pretty sure I'm going to keep living this life."

"Jesus, man - did they brainwash you or something?" he asked. "I knew this would be a mind fuck, but this? I didn't even think you'd make it the full two years, but now you're telling me that you're going to spend the rest of your life like that? It's crazy!"

His eye twitched, and I pretended not to notice. Something was wrong with him, and he didn't even know it. But I wasn't his keeper. Besides, it wasn't like he'd listen to someone like me.

"Is it?" I asked. "I wasn't a good person before, Andrew. I've spent most of my life being bitter about one thing or another. When I was young, it was about not getting any scholarship offers for football. I was so convinced I'd be the next star NFL player. But I didn't have what it took. Then, I was angry about my chosen discipline not getting any respect. Do you know how many people care about Latin American politics? I do, and it's not many. Then, I was bitter about immigration. Social Security. Hillary fucking Clinton. I hated so many things and even more people. But now? Now, I feel so free. I don't have all that baggage holding me back."

"And your answer to all that is to give up your manhood?" he asked.

"My answer is to live my life however I'm comfortable," I stated. "And right here, right now, I'm comfortable being Adriana."

I knew he didn't understand. He couldn't. He just wasn't built that way.

"This is a mistake," he said bluntly. "And you're going to regret it."

I shrugged. "Maybe," I said. "Maybe not. But it's something I've got to do."



"What do you want?" Natalie demanded. She looked great, wearing a skintight, purple dress that showed off her body perfectly. However, I couldn't help but think that she was a bit old to be wearing such a thing. But it was her life. I wasn't going to judge how she wanted to live it.

"I needed to talk to you," I said. "Not as Adriana. I want to talk to you as Edgar."

"Edgar isn't here," she said. "And he's not going to be for another week. Even then, I'm not sure I want him around."

"That's just it," I said. I took a deep breath, steadying my nerves. "Edgar's not coming back."

"What?" she asked. "What happened? Are you stuck?"

"In a manner of speaking," I said, measuring my words. "I don't want to be Edgar. Not anymore. I know that's probably going to come as a shock to you, but –"

"It really doesn't," she said. "I wish it was. I probably should have expected this. I knew from the moment I saw you that you were hooked. You like being a girl, don't you?"

I nodded. "I do," I said. "And with everything that happened between us, I didn't think there was anything waiting for me back here. Was that a fair assumption?"

"I don't know," she said. "I tried not to think about it. I know you didn't set out to do the things you did. My daughter can be persuasive. I'm sure it wasn't your idea. But you still did it, and I don't know if I could ever forgive you for that. Even if you went back to being Edgar, I wouldn't be able to look at you without thinking about it."

"That's what I thought," I said. "I wish it was different."

"No you don't," she said.

"No," I agreed. "You're right. I don't."



"What are you doing here?" asked Skylar, wearing a simple purple tee-shirt and a matching pair of shorts. On her feet were a pair of flip-flops. "Does mom know you're here?"

"She does," I said. "I can't stay long, but I need to tell you some things. You might believe them at first, but you can ask your mother about it. She'll tell you it's the truth."

"I know," she said. "I know everything. I know who you are."

"Wait, what?" I asked. "Are you sure we're talking about the same thing?"

"You're Edgar," she said. "I've known since you left."

"What? How?" I asked.

"I overheard you and mom talking about it," she said. "It sounded crazy at first. And then when you came back, I mean, you looked different, but I knew it was you."

"A-and you still...did...stuff...with me?" I asked. "Why?"

She shrugged. "Because I could," she said. "And you're cute. It was easy not to think about who you are. Or were. But as far as I'm concerned, when you get back to being Edgar, nobody has to know that I knew. We can just pretend it didn't happen."

"Oh," I said. "Here's the thing, Sky. I'm not coming back."

"W-what?" she asked, for the first time distressed. "Is it because of what happened between you and mom? That stupid divorce? That wasn't real. She doesn't really want to -"

I sighed. "That's part of it," I said. "But there's a lot more to it than that. I've spent two years like this. And it's opened my eyes to a lot of things. Some good. Some bad. But I don't want to be Edgar anymore. It would be so much easier if I did. But this isn't about you, okay? I want you to know that. This is about me."

I could see the pain in her eyes. "Can...can we be friends, then?" she asked. "Not like before. Just, you know...friends?"

"I'd like that," I said. "I really would."



I don't know what the future holds. I wish I did. But for now, I think I'm happy enough. The salon's doing well, I'm well on my way to getting my citizenship, and I'm actually dating instead of just having a series of one-night-stands. The idea of getting a real boyfriend has truly begun to appeal to me. It's still strange, thinking that, one day, I might actually love a man, but it's a good kind of strange.

As for Rosa, she and Tommy are getting married, and I think they're just perfect together. If I had to guess, I would say that they both believe they're the luckiest people in the world. And that's just about the sweetest thing I can imagine.

I haven't spoken to Natalie in quite some time, but from what I hear, she's doing well. I know she's been dating too – mostly younger men. I might not have recognized it before, but her sudden interest in fitness, coupled with the cosmetic surgery and her shift in fashion sense should have keyed me in to the reality of her not-quite-midlife crisis. It's kind of sad, but I can understand it well enough. The idea of getting older and wrinkly isn't terribly appealing.

Speaking of aging, I don't think Russo's technology will be hitting the market anytime soon. As it turns out, there are quite a few hurdles to clear before it can be applied to any significant portion of the population. Andrew found that out firsthand. Last I checked, he was mostly confined to a wheelchair. The treatments that had given him his youth back had also played quite a number on his nervous system. I genuinely hope Russo and his team of scientists can help him regain some of his old life.

As a result of my friend's new disability, the study was never really finished. However, I can tell you right now that the results would have been impressive. I am a different person now. Edgar – and most of his core views – is in the past, buried under a mountain of Adriana's personality.

And then there's Skylar. She's getting along as well as can be expected. We talk most days, but I don't see her as much as I used to. We live two different lives, and if I'm honest, we don't have a lot in common. But when she needs me, I'm there for her. As a friend. Always as a friend.