

Prologue

Trapped! At first he was stunned, then incredulous, then angry. Lying on the king-sized bed at the Dolphin Motel, his arms crossed behind his head, he watched her dress. Then he sat up, facing her. From the beginning, he had known she was too young to think about consequences, even though they had discussed them at length. She had promised no strings, and now this? She had not taken the pill. What was she thinking? He watched her pull on her black silk pantyhose. He usually loved to watch her do this. Not now. She noticed him watching her and tried to read his expression. His annoyance had been unexpected. He had stared at her in disbelief.

He watched a tear trickle down the corner of her nose. Now she's crying, he thought, I hate tears. I get too much of them. She knew I was married. She had been careless and stupid.

Standing, he walked over to the small table by the window and poured himself a glass of water, his back to her, collecting his thoughts. Talk, talk, talk – he had stopped listening to what she was saying until – what was that she just said? She's not sure? What does that mean? How should I handle this? I must not let her get hysterical. When a woman loses control, who knows what she's capable of doing or whom she'll talk to. One of us has to make sense of this. She'll have to get rid of it. She's not going to spoil my life by her recklessness. He turned and smiled at her, giving her one of the comforting looks he used with his public. I mustn't let her see my disgust, or she might do something rash. She might insist on having the baby. How could I have been so stupid?

He had known she was too young. The others were more mature, more knowing, and as eager as he to avoid discovery. He never should have let her seduce him. It was the long blonde

hair, the soft brown eyes, the full lips, and her obvious attraction to him that had led him here. He was no longer attracted, but he couldn't let her know that. She could be trouble, but she was going home to Houston in a few days. He had celebrated an easy end to the affair when she told him she was leaving. Now she hinted that she would be back in two weeks so that "we can work this out together." Work it out together? There's nothing to work out.

He walked over to the bed, sat down beside her, and patted her hand, assuring her that everything would be all right. He was a master at handling women. She stopped crying. He asked her if anyone else knew about the situation. She hesitated a second too long before answering no. He questioned her further. "Who suspects? What about your friend Latrice?" She shook her head in denial. "And your mother? I know how close the two of you are."

She repeated "no" softly.

"What if?" he paused.

"What if what?" she said, searching his face.

He had intended to ask her if she would consider an abortion. Looking at her anxious expression, he changed his mind and said, "You're much too young to have a baby. You have your whole life in front of you." He stroked her long hair as if she were a child.

"But I know how you feel about abortions," she said.

"Right now I'm concerned about you." Then he added, "Don't worry. You won't have to go through this alone."

"You told me that you and Margaret lead separate lives. Why can't you get a divorce and marry me?" she asked.

He cringed at those words, but he knew better than to show her what he was thinking. "You know I can't get a divorce right now. Too many people would get hurt." He paused for a

minute as he saw the expression on her face change from hope to despair, and then he added, “It wouldn’t be fair to you either.”

“Why not?” she said.

“You have a family to consider. They would be hurt and disappointed if they knew about this. Your mother....”

“My mother has always understood me. She’s my best friend.” She stood up and walked over to the window, turning her back to him.

“Have you thought about how this will ruin me?”

She turned toward him accusingly. “That’s all you’re thinking about, isn’t it? What about me and the baby?”

He fought to disguise his growing frustration. “You’ve just sprung this on me. I need some time to think”

“I understand that. It’s a shock to me too, but if I *am* pregnant, we have to do what’s best for the baby.”

“It’s not that easy.” Overwhelmed by her stubborn refusal to face reality, he began to feel sick to his stomach. He took a deep breath and spoke more gently. “I wish we could be married too, and in a perfect world, it would happen, but we can’t always get everything we want. People have to sacrifice their personal desires for a higher good. You’ve heard me say that many times.”

She shook her head and said, “But you don’t understand; I couldn’t live with myself if I killed my own child.”

He nodded. “It will be hard for both of us to live with, but we talked many times about my being married and having obligations. Margaret is a sick woman, and she needs me. This would kill her.”

“I’ve never wanted to hurt Margaret, but now everything has changed.” She looked as though she might start crying again, so he decided to take a different tack. He put his hand under her chin, raised her head up, and looked into her eyes. “You said yourself that you’re not sure, so let’s not worry about it yet. Go home and enjoy being with your family. We’ll work this out, but remember, for now, no one must know.”

She stiffened and stepped back as a wave of realization came over her. She lowered her voice as if she were speaking to herself and said, “You don’t care about me at all, do you?” She spoke slowly and with determination. “I won’t get an abortion, and I’m not going through this by myself.”

Her words were chilling. “Of course not,” he said. “Let me think about this. When you return from Houston, I’ll have a plan.” He was doing his best to buy time, and she knew it. He had noticed the change come over her, so he measured his next words carefully. “Victoria, don’t you trust me?”

Avoiding his eyes, she answered, “I’m not sure anymore.” She picked up her purse and walked to the door. Then she turned, “I’ll call you before I leave,” and the door closed behind her.

He sank onto the bed, his head in his hands. What am I going to do? What if she calls Margaret? A wave of nausea swept over him. Suppose she tells her parents. It would ruin everything. She waited too long when I asked if anyone else knew. The sickness in his stomach was unbearable. He ran into the bathroom and vomited. He wet a towel, held it to his forehead, and lay down on the bed. Breathing deeply he tried to calm himself. It’s going to be all right. I just need time to think.

If there's a baby, I won't be able to deny paternity thanks to modern science. Then I'll join the long line of men betrayed by empty-headed, conniving women. No, that's not going to happen. I've got to bring her to her senses somehow. She doesn't care about money. Her rich father has spoiled her and gives her everything she wants even before she asks for it. He looked around at the iron bed with its rumpled sheets and the stained walls covered with peeling floral paper. Two hours ago it had seemed like a romantic hideaway; now it was just another shabby motel room. Walking to the bathroom, he dropped the wet towel on the tile floor. For a moment he felt dizzy and leaned against the bathroom doorway. One of his migraines was coming on. He had to go home to get his medicine. Suddenly, an idea came to him. There was someone he was sure could help him now, but what if he is still in South America? I'll leave a message on his answering service, saying it's urgent. He walked to the outside door and looked out cautiously. Seeing no one, he hurried to his car in the rear parking lot.

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"Wait here, Chiquita," said the short, stocky man slipping some money to the voluptuous half-clad woman who moments before had been sitting on his lap in the back seat of the limo. She nodded obediently pulling her blouse down and flashing an insolent look at the big man sitting next to the driver, who had been admiring her long legs and exposed breasts through the rear view mirror. Stepping out of the automobile, Carlos Flores-Vasquez spoke to the big man. "Ricardo, drive around the block with her a couple of times. The Shark may be watching us from there," he said, nodding toward the two-story stucco building across the street. "I'll be back in five minutes, as soon as I finish my business." He grinned. "Then you come in and take care of him, just like you did the other one." *The other one* was Jorge Mendoza, the Shark's partner, who had aroused Vasquez's suspicions and whose bullet-ridden body was yet to be found by the

police. Ricardo nodded, patting his jacket. The girl tried not to notice the outline of the gun. She was a country girl and had learned that it wasn't wise to witness anything—not here in Bogotá, Colombia. Vasquez picked up a briefcase and, after confirming the address by his handwritten note, hurried across the street.

The hall lights were off, and the building seemed deserted. The open door cast eerie shadows in the dimly lit entry as Vasquez stepped inside. He should have brought Ricardo with him, he thought, but he didn't want anyone getting nervous, not before the payoff. "Shark, are you there?" he called out. He had done business with the man they called the Shark on several occasions—an easy sell. The Shark brought the money as pre-arranged, and Vasquez supplied a high quality product. "Shark!" he repeated more insistently, "Where the hell are you?" The darkness was making him edgy. Reaching for his gun, he decided to call out one more time, and if there were no answer, he would assume something had gone wrong and get out. Suddenly he felt a whiff of air behind him as the door closed. He turned to open it and felt an arm around his neck suffocating him and dragging him back away from the door. His heels made marks on the floor as he struggled for breath and tried to get loose from his attacker. "Shark, why?" he gasped. The only answer was the sharpened blade moving swiftly across his throat.