

Carly could see Preston through the window of the jet as it taxied on the ramp of the Palm Beach County Airpark. He was leaning against a black stretch limousine. She waved to him. He smiled and waved back.

Disembarking from the jet and sauntering to Preston, she gave him a peck on the lips and said, "Hi."

Preston was casually dressed in jeans and a sleeveless pullover. He dressed down when he planned to take some time off from work, something he usually only did during the last two weeks of December. He'd mentioned that he had a big surprise planned for her fortieth birthday, and Carly assumed he'd do something like renting a nightclub and hiring her favorite singer to perform for just the two of them—like he'd done for her thirtieth birthday. If he was taking time off from work, he had something really special planned.

"You look sexy," Preston remarked about Carly's revealing little dress. He seemed more relaxed than she'd seen him in a long time. Working in Florida had given him some coloring, which looked good on his lined patrician face.

Preston was fifty-three but aging gracefully. His six-foot frame was still trim, and his light-brown hair held only traces of gray. "How was your flight?" he asked as he opened the car door.

"No problems."

He got in after her, closing the door and sitting next to her on the side-facing seat.

"How's Jill?"

Carly sighed. "You know Jill."

"Yeah."

They made pointless small talk as the car took them up Highway 9, as they usually did when they were together. They'd always had a civilized marriage, without drama, without turmoil—according to Carly's mother, the kind of marriage a rich woman should have. But there were times Carly would've liked a little drama. She knew Preston believed that one should always be in control of one's emotions, but Carly thought a little drama would've shown that her husband had passion.

Carly's mother, a Greek immigrant who'd been orphaned during World War II, and a servant since she was a little girl, had raised Carly to understand how special rich people were. Because she was a maid, who Carly's father married after his first wife died without giving him children, she was never truly a member of that rarified upper caste. But she made sure Carly was, by way of the right schools, the right social circles—and the right husband.

The family fortune came from Carly's grandfather, who smuggled liquor across the Canadian border during Prohibition and used the proceeds to buy hundreds of thousands of shares of stock for pennies on the dollar in the days after the stock market crash of 1929. When the stocks regained their true value, the family's occupation became simply being rich.

Preston's money was even older. His family fortune came from providing shoes to Union soldiers during the Civil War. Preston had used his inheritance to start his own private equity fund.

Carly had met Preston at a charity event for one disadvantaged group or another. He proposed a month after they started dating. She was twenty-one at the time, and he was thirteen years older. The wedding, a week after she graduated from college, was a

fairytale affair held at her parents' estate in Providence, Rhode Island. The guest list included many of the country's business and social elite.

Carly's wedding night was the first time she'd seen a hard dick up close and personal. She'd often fantasized about the night she'd be deflowered, but the life-changing starburst of carnal delight she'd been waiting for didn't happen. Eventually, she began to have modest orgasms with Preston. But the first time the Earth moved was the first time she cheated, with the racquetball pro in the women's shower room at the club—when she was doing it purely for herself rather than as a wifely chore. After that, the body-quaking, back-arching, breathtaking orgasms came easily, as if a wall that had imprisoned her libido had been knocked down. Preston noticed the difference and thought it was because she'd reached the age at which women most commonly start experiencing orgasms. Carly let him believe that.

The limousine parked near the dock of the Riviera Beach Marina. Carly glanced around, puzzled.

"Why are we here?" she asked.

Preston pointed out a pristine white sailboat with glistening aluminum fittings tied to a finger pier.

"See that beauty over there?" he said. "It's for you."

"You got me a boat?"

"Not exactly. We're sailing to the Bahamas. Just you and me. No PDAs. No computers."

"We're not going to the house? I don't have a change of clothes."

"You won't need a change of clothes."

She looked at him with disbelief. "I don't know what brought this on, but I approve!"

As they walked toward the pier, Preston described the features of the forty-foot sloop he'd bought. Carly listened with a smile, but didn't understand much of what he was saying. Preston loved boating. He'd been an avid sailor before they married. Now, on the rare occasion when he had a weekend off, he'd take a boat out in Sag Harbor Bay. Carly had gone out with him a couple of times, but she really didn't enjoy being out on the water that much. However, she'd make an effort to enjoy her birthday present.

With Preston at the helm, they motored away from the dock, pulling a dinghy that was tied to the transom railing. They rounded Peanut Island and passed through the Lake Worth Inlet into open water. Preston didn't raise the sails, but continued into the dark-blue expanse of the Gulf Stream on engine power. Carly, sitting on the lazarette on the starboard side of the cockpit, kicked off her sandals, brought her legs up, and let the warm ocean breeze sweep over her body.

Sunset over the Gulf Stream set the horizon ablaze with breathtaking hues of red and orange. The boat left the Gulf Stream and entered the clear, sparkling water of the Little Bahama Bank. The sandy bottom seemed close enough to touch, the white sand occasionally broken by a lonely rock, a wistfully waving clump of sea grass, or a colorful coral reef.

When darkness settled, Carly experienced for the first time a night sky unobscured by civilization. The stars were more brilliant and more numerous than she'd ever imagined. The moon was so bright its light made the water shimmer. This trip was by far the best birthday present Preston had ever given her.

Preston shut off the boat's engine and announced, "We're here."

"We're where?" Carly asked.

“The best place on Earth for two people who want to be alone.”

Preston dropped the anchor by activating the electric winch on the bow of the boat with a remote control at the helm. The boat drifted until it was steadied by the anchor line.

“Wait here,” he said, and disappeared below deck. Moments later, the boat’s deck lights came on, illuminating the cockpit where Carly was sitting. Preston came up from below carrying a basket of bread, cheese, and wine—the same thing they’d ordered from the hotel room service on their wedding night.

“How long have you been planning this?” Carly asked, astonished.

“A year,” Preston replied. He put the basket on the sole of the cockpit and sat next to Carly to open the wine with a corkscrew. He poured a glass for each of them and offered a toast. “Here’s to turning forty.”

They clinked glasses, and Carly giggled.

They took turns feeding each other as they drank wine. The gentle splash of the waves against the hull of the boat, the only sound other than their voices, enhanced the romantic mood.

“This is wonderful,” Carly said.

“Just trying to please you,” Preston replied.

“You’ve succeeded.”

Smiling softly, she put aside her glass. She stood up and unzipped the back of her dress. She peeled the dress down and off her body, and then slipped off her panties. Leisurely, she pulled Preston’s shirt off his still-muscular torso. She pulled off his sandals, and he then stood so she could open his jeans and draw them down his legs, along with his boxer shorts.

To Carly’s surprise, Preston’s dick got hard right away. That hadn’t happened in a while. During the past couple of years, she’d been the one who always initiated sex, and Preston needed hand, lip, and tongue action to get it up. They’d never discussed it, but she assumed his loss of vitality was a result of his age. Anyway, she’d liked being the dominant partner; it was the only aspect of their marriage in which she had power over him.

Preston’s dick curved like a saber when it was hard, and it was eight and a half inches long. Carly liked the way its head rubbed against the walls of her vagina. Before the racquetball pro, she’d thought all hard dicks looked alike and felt the same. But no. They were as distinct as the men attached to them, and each made a different kind of magic.

Carly lay on her back on the lazarette with her knees up and her thighs apart. Preston stood over her, buck naked with a hard dick. He’d never done that before; they’d always been in bed and under the covers when they had sex. Preston got between her thighs and pushed his dick into her wet pussy all the way to his balls.

Again Preston surprised her. He didn’t support himself with his arms like he’d done for the past nineteen years. Instead, he lay on her and clamped his arms around her. Casting aside his inhibitions and long-held sense of propriety, he fucked her with absolute abandon, taking her to a state of orgasmic bliss. As Preston ejaculated, he emitted loud, guttural grunts—the first time he’d vocalized during sex.

They sat resting on the lazarette. Carly leaned against Preston, stroking his pubic hair. She asked coyly, “Did you take something?”

“No,” he replied. “It was just me.”

“Twice!”

“I just wanted to show you I could be as good as the others.”

“Others?”

Preston glowered menacingly at her. Carly instinctively moved away from him.

“A marriage should end as gloriously as it began,” he said.

“I don’t—”

Preston gave her a backhand blow that knocked her off the lazarette.

She looked up at him in shocked disbelief. As she was getting up, he pushed her back down with his foot. Standing over her, he snarled, “How many were there?”

“What?”

“Men.”

“I don’t know what you—”

“Save it! I know about the gigolo you’ve been fucking on the Upper East Side, and I know he wasn’t the first.”

The realization that Preston knew about her infidelity left Carly flabbergasted.

“How many?” Preston screamed.

“S-six.”

“Six?” Preston echoed. “Was I so inadequate?”

“No,” Carly replied desperately. “I was inadequate. There was nothing in my life that wasn’t inherited from my family or didn’t come from my relationship with you. I needed something that would make me feel—empowered.”

“So you became a whore!”

He stomped on her stomach. She cried out and doubled up in pain.

“You want to know how I found out?” Preston asked. “A card from your family planning clinic, mixed in with my mail. It was a reminder for you to change your contraceptive implant. And we both know my sperm are immotile, so you don’t need it for me.”

“How—how long have you known?”

“Two years. I could barely bring myself to touch you. But I forced myself, while I waited for this moment.”

Preston opened the lazarette on which they’d had sex and took out lengths of rope from the storage compartment.

“What are you going to do?” Carly asked, frightened.

Preston forced Carly to lie face down on the cockpit sole and kept her down with a knee on her back as he tightly bound her wrists and ankles. He pulled off her gold wedding band and his own. He looked at the rings for a few seconds, and then hurled them into the sea with disgust.

“Preston,” Carly said, trying to stay calm, “what are you going to do?”

Preston grabbed her hair and, ignoring her cries of pain, dragged her to the top of the cabin house and slammed her against the boat’s mast. He lashed her to the mast with another length of rope.

“Preston, please!” Carly begged tearfully.

Preston went back to the cockpit and put on his clothes. He noticed the bank card that had been hidden in Carly’s panties. He picked it up. Carly could see from the expression on his face that a wicked idea had formed in his mind. He brought the card to Carly, and said to her, “You probably won’t need this where you’re going, but you never know.” He jammed the card into her pussy, and she winced.

In the cockpit, Preston lifted a can of gasoline from the compartment beneath the starboard lazarette. He splashed gasoline around the cabin house hatch and on the companionway steps that led down into the cabin. He took a propane torch from the storage compartment, and then went to the stern of the boat and opened the fuel-tank compartment. He lit the torch.

Trying not to panic, Carly said, "Preston, you don't have to kill me. You can divorce me. I won't ask for anything. You'll never see me or hear from me again."

Preston adjusted the torch flame to minimum intensity, and then put the flame in direct contact with the fuel tank. He pulled on the tow line of the dinghy to bring it closer.

"How will you explain coming back without me?" Carly asked him, still trying to get him to see reason.

"Easy," Preston answered. "I'll say you ran off with one of your lovers."

"Preston, you can't do this! You can't burn me alive!"

"Don't worry. I've put enough bottled propane below to blow you to bits long before you burn."

"You bastard!"

"Sticks and stones."

Preston climbed down into the dinghy and cast off the tow line. He started the dinghy's motor and pattered away from the boat. Carly cursed at Preston until he was beyond the illumination of the deck lights and she could no longer see him.

Smoke rose from the scorched exterior of the fuel tank. Carly could not control her quaking—or her bladder. She closed her eyes and waited. The fuel tank erupted into flames that raced forward along the lazarettes, and into the cabin house.

"Oh God! Oh God! Oh God!" Carly muttered. She could feel the heat against her feet as the interior of the boat burned.

*I'm actually going to die!* She would never see Lauren again, or her friends, or her lovers...

First came the thunderous noise, and then, for a split second, Carly felt searing heat. Before she lost consciousness, she felt herself hurtling through the air.