

**NAKED CAME
THE DETECTIVE**

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For CJ

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PREFACE

Poof, she was gone.

The night before, her Twitter account had still been active, as had her website. But when I checked the next morning, ready to arrange a date, there was nothing. Her Twitter account had vanished. And the URL for her website took me to an empty space on the web, a notice from Wix.com that the domain name no longer existed. My texts went unanswered and my emails were kicked back. Escorts sometimes do that when they quit the business. Many escorts have a tour to bid farewell to their clients, or at the very least, they keep one page of their escort website alive with a notice that says something like “off to my next adventure, thank you for the memories.” But she cut cord quickly, without any forewarning at

all.

To say I was hurt would be an understatement. She was my ATF. She had just helped me score the biggest scoop of my life. I still had many questions. To be honest, I had fallen in love with her, though I know she would have dismissed that sentiment. Our relationship was transactional: she had sex with me in exchange for money. Using an anonymous Twitter account I created to follow sex workers, I wrote a plaintive tweet asking if anyone knew where she had gone. There was no reply. I also tweeted an escort who once tagged her in a tweet as a “lovely DC lady,” asking if she knew what had happened to her friend. “Not for me to answer that,” she responded.

Time passed. The hurt lingered, then became numb. I stopped Googling her name in hopes of finding her again. One day I went down to the newsroom mailroom in the headquarters’ basement, something I do about every year or so. When I began working at the newspaper, news aides would deliver mail to reporters’ desks. New security procedures imposed after the Sept. 11 attacks and the anthrax scare meant the mail was isolated in a central location, away from the newsroom. It piled up until the mailroom sent you a note to rid of it. Few people use snail mail anymore, so the note came less and less frequently. I began the dreary task of examining the debris that had accumulated in a bin. I tossed out the pitch letters from flacks, the books from no-name authors on obscure topics, the angry

missives from pissed-off readers. Near the bottom of this pile I found a plain manila envelope from a far corner of Europe—Portugal or Moldova, one of those places. There was no return address, and I hadn't examined the stamps closely before discarding the envelope. Once I discovered what was inside, nothing else mattered.

It was a sort of memoir, her observations on neatly typed pages about her final weeks as an escort. Who knows how long it had been sitting there, its secrets waiting for me to discover in that dank and gloomy space? Scrawled in pencil on the first page was simply: “FYI.”

I've added some notes and a few explanations of sex-business lingo. Otherwise I haven't changed a word.

—Chris (*her pseudonym for me*)

AARON/BEN

“Sex in the afternoon can be a delight. Murder is another matter.”

That phrase popped in my head as I entertained a client. I never reveal names so I will call him Aaron. Those words wandered through my mind as Aaron kissed my breasts and then dawdled at my belly button, clearly headed downward. Maybe I had read it in a book. Somehow, the words were chillingly appropriate.

I was in my incall in the Virginia suburbs of DC — a basic single-bedroom rental unit but snug and convenient. I had lit some candles, and the shadows of the flames were gently flickering on the walls. The mood had been set. Aaron, like many men, was proud of his tongue technique and thought he knew what he was doing down there. Not really, but it was his choice. I settled back, preparing to let him think he was hitting the mark, and, damn, my mind was drifting again.

I couldn't stop thinking about a murder — the

murder of another client. I guess his name will be Ben. I had met Ben about half a dozen times in the past six months, roughly every four or five weeks. He had a busy job so he insisted we could only meet for long lunches near his office. Fortunately, I had a favorite app that allowed me to rent a high-end hotel room for a few hours at a steep discount. Perfect for my job. He would wander over to the hotel and meet me there.

Ben always brought a bottle of Pol Roger Champagne and a box of Belgian chocolates. He was patrician, with gently graying hair, piercing cerulean eyes and an attractive dent in his chin. Standing just under six feet tall, he displayed only a slight potbelly at the age of 55. He was a prominent person in the region — a leading businessman, big in property development but with his fingers in all sorts of things. After we had sex, he regaled me with complex stories about his business deals and bragged about the enemies he had made. He was clearly trying to impress me. Ben's stories of business derring-do amused me at times because I have a good mind for figures. I spent two years in the graduate econometrics program at Brown. My clients believed I had a PhD, because that's what I told them.

I learned of Ben's violent death through Twitter that morning, just before Aaron arrived. Someone has stabbed him several times in an alley near his office in the late afternoon. The time of death was uncertain, news reports said, but we'd had a date that same day. The sex was so

recent that the scent of his cologne lingered in my nose. Ben wasn't a favorite but the proximity of sex and death shook me. I needed to process my emotions. I'd always been a mystery buff — Nancy Drew was my childhood favorite — and a bit of a snoop. Ben had been such an important person in the DC region that many of my clients knew of him or may have even done business with him. A lot of my time with clients was spent in conversation, not sex. This had given me a unique perch from which to observe the political and business elite that ruled the region. I began jotting down fragments of conversations, which I later wove together into the chronicle that you are currently reading.

Dwelling on Ben's murder distracted me during my date with Aaron. He had been working long and hard down there and I wasn't paying attention. I knew he got pleasure from thinking that I enjoyed his handiwork and he was probably wondering if he had lost his touch. He had started to use his fingers — always irritating. So I quickly gave him the satisfaction of believing he had succeeded. He seemed happy when he came up for air.

Aaron was a bear of a man, over six feet tall, heavy-set but strong. His muscular forearms showed he worked out and he had a lot of stamina. He had a square-shaped face, thick neck, a smooth pate, and intense metallic-gray eyes; his nose was as large as his middle finger. Sometimes I sensed that he was a bit obsessive about trying to please me. He failed to understand that it was

my job to please him, not the other way around.

Like many clients, Aaron often showered me with gifts. Just recently he presented me with a tiger-striped Kit-Cat Klock — the retro timepiece created in the 1930s with swaying tail and moving eyes — which he insisted was perfect for the bedroom. I was not a clock watcher but I enjoyed observing the tail wag and eyes move in time with my lovers.

As I lay next to Aaron, I heard rain gently splattering against the windows. Rainy days were ideal for staying in bed with a naked body next to me. “Hey,” I asked as I stroked his neck — had he ever heard of Ben?

Aaron, an accountant, did not appear to pay much attention to Twitter or social media. “Sure, he’s one of the biggest players in DC real estate,” he replied. “My firm once bid for his business but we didn’t get it. In fact, it was one of the more depressing presentations we’d ever made. We really hustled but his staff was so obnoxious. We never really had a chance. It still pisses me off.”

“I saw on Twitter this morning he was killed.”

Aaron was silent for a moment. “Really? That’s shocking. Poor guy. There’s probably going to be an earthquake.”

“What do you mean?”

“When anyone powerful dies, it shakes everything up. No one knows where the pieces will land.”

Aaron’s voice had a soothing radio tone. The words flowed so easily, one after the other, like my own personal NPR station. One of my

attributes is that I am a great listener. You had to be in my business. In fact, many of my clients seemed to view me as therapist, despite the fact I had no professional certification in that field, or even a member of the clergy, even though I'm not religious. Virtually all of my clients were married, but had no desire to leave their wives. They had wonderful families and big houses — nice set-ups that would be difficult to disentangle with a divorce. They desired a compassionate listener, someone who could lend an ear and keep their highly personal confessions confidential.

[She offered what's called GFE — “girlfriend experience.” That's not wham-bang-thank-you-ma'am. She was supposed to be just like a girlfriend — kissing, sucking, fucking, cuddling.—Chris]

I met many fascinating men in this business— intelligent, artistic and charming. I had relationships with some that have lasted years. I also encountered quite a few duds. Some guys showed up just once and then never returned. But Ben's death was a twist I hadn't expected.

The news reports made Ben's death seem like a mugging gone awry. My intuition told me this was a crime of passion. *Who had killed him? And why?* There weren't many details in the news. When I tried to engage Aaron in speculation, he didn't seem interested. Instead, he began to nibble one of my nipples. Ouch.

CHRIS

As soon as I saw the tweets about Ben's death, I texted Chris, another regular and a top journalist at a local newspaper. Chris had a baby face, even as he neared mid-century, with just a hint of gray peeking through his chestnut hair near the ears. He was of medium height with periwinkle-blue eyes that sparkled when he got excited. We saw each other whenever he had saved up enough money to afford my rates. Between the sheets, he gave me the lowdown on the dirty politics in our city — intelligence that couldn't be printed yet, if ever.

[I explained to her that reporters trade information all the time. I suggested one day she might even become a source. She replied: "You mean I'll be your Deep Throat?" I laughed. Basically, I was trying to impress her. —Chris]

"Really busy, babe," Chris quickly texted. "I don't know anything more than what's on the wire."

I paused before I replied, but Chris had said he could be trusted to never reveal sources. *“He was someone I knew. Please let me know what you learn asap.”*

“Ah, got it,” Chris texted back. *“I will keep you posted.”*

Although I liked Chris, his insatiable curiosity sometimes made me feel uneasy. He’d always bombard me with questions and I knew he had a talent for digging up information. I had carefully crafted a persona to present to my clients, but he never seemed to accept it at face value.

[She was right to be concerned. I searched property records to discover her real name and birth year. I found she had created a company, AMZ Consulting LLC, for tax purposes. I knew she didn’t have a doctorate. I never mentioned any of this to her. But it was unforgivable to do that. —Chris]

I had been contemplating how much longer I should continue in this job. Ten years and counting. My escort ads still stated that I was 30, but now I am closer to 40. No one could tell, certainly not my clients. I maintained a youthful appearance, so I could get away with that fib. I stayed trim and fit by working out for at least an hour, five days a week, typically alternating between jogging and Pilates.

[She was such a spinner. Just 5’2” tall, barely over 100 pounds, with a flawless hourglass figure, tiny waist, amazingly soft skin, and alluring natural breasts. She had thick black hair that cascaded beyond her shoulders and hazel bedroom eyes so deep you could swim in them.—Chris]

I didn't tell my clients that I grew up in Cincinnati, a solidly Midwestern city with a tinge of the Old South. Instead, I lied about having a wealthy European family and regaled them with fabricated stories about adolescent adventures in Paris and Rome. The longer I stayed in the business, the more I realized that clients were willing to pay significantly more if they believed I had a highly educated and upper-crust upbringing. I tried out different fictional stories until I internalized a narrative that I could effortlessly recite, almost like lines from a play.

My actual life story was more prosaic. Growing up, I often would take the bus downtown, past the dilapidated buildings on Reading Road, from our single-story ranch house in the poorer tract housing. I'd gaze longingly at the elegant dresses in the shop windows my mother could never afford. I'd climb up the hill in Eden Park, with its majestic view over the Ohio River, and contemplate my future as I watched the river churn where it marked the border with Kentucky. As a child, I loved to scramble on the park's metal statue of the Capitoline Wolf suckling Romulus and Remus, the mythical founders of Rome. The nipples always looked so inviting. That was the closest I ever got to Rome before I earned serious money as an adult.

I idolized my brilliant and sensitive father, who passed away from a heart attack when I was 12. He used to take me for long walks in Mt. Airy Forest where, at a glance, he could easily identify plants, flowers, trees, and rock types. To this day, I