

Dan Frazier

Flash

She sucks in her sunburnt belly as acid burns her throat and bile oozes between her teeth. With gravel digging in her knees, she looks up from the gutter; yellow dribble hangs off her lower lip.

Our eyes lock and I want to tell her, “Don’t worry sweetheart, at least you’re sober enough to hold your own curls up. On my fateful night, my extensions were dried spaghetti and my camisole was a toddler’s bib.”

Her friends are standing close enough to hear her but not close enough to touch her. As her mascara smears, I want to bend over and say, “Darling, you have no reason to cry. You haven’t been ditched yet like I was.”

Tonight, I’m in another seasonless city, following another meandering mob down blocked-off streets with rows of bars. The sun is gone and the air is sticky. And for those who travel here, this is their vacation or break, an excuse to stay drunk and go wild:

Drink.

Wander.

Flirt.

Screw.

Repeat.

But for me, this is just another notch. Getting around, I’ve learned that tourists wear those flowered shirts because vomit blends in with the patterns. And now my nose is immune to the mix of alcohol, urine, and spew.

Every night this time of year, they all act the same. College kids. Trailer park couples. Biker gangs. Middle-aged divorcees. They all come together without any goals, obligations, or morals. Everything is put on hold: jobs, school, life. No time for second thoughts. Just sayin', that much I do remember.

A crowd gathers ahead and blocks the foot traffic.

"Oh, come on!" says a dude with a popped collar and chiseled jaw.

"Do it! Do it!" says another guy in a white visor and seersucker shorts. His companions, covered in Greek letters, support his plea by chanting, "Show us more! Show us more!"

"Sorry, I don't think so," snaps the brunette who doesn't look old enough to vote.

With arms held high, these dudes showcase the girl a collection of plastic trinkets. Pushing each other out of the way, they bid by shaking and twirling the currency for tonight's lewd barter system. This works because silly girls always want what they don't have, and will trade anything for it, just like I did.

These plastic beads that dangle from the bros' fingers, some are green and gold with charms. Some large as Christmas tree bulbs, others small as marbles or pearls. Some shaped as disco balls, others seashells or red hearts.

But unlike these douchebags here, the professional pervs go online and buy beads in bulk. And they know the more different, the better. A rare color or unique shape means higher stakes to obtain, make the girls go crazy, more outrageous acts performed—but only for the right treasure.

The super pervs, they know if you hold the only string of beads with a mermaid pendant or plastic shot glass, then you control the party streets. Ruler of Sluts. King of Deviants. All shall submit to your will or awe at your power.

The beads that aren't gifted tonight, leftovers of putrid propositions, the real pervs will box them up in attics, garages, and storage units. Buried away behind dusty comic books, sci-fi DVDs, and *Magic: The Gathering* cards. But unlike everything they're surrounded by, these beads are never forgotten. They're lying and waiting to be used again.

These plastic beads mean so much tonight, but tomorrow they'll be worthless, disposable. Hotel trash cans will overflow. Yet this is now and this girl gazes at them, needs them. Souvenirs for her grit, or tokens of her regret.

The circle of dudes stands before the girl in hopes of a flash. During her spotlight, for two whole seconds, she'll be the center of the world. Just sayin', that's how it was for me, before I became every daddy's worst nightmare.

And you really can't blame her, cause every girl wants to be famous. Every girl has dreamt about walking down a red carpet in a Gucci gown with perfect makeup and bleached teeth. Interviewed by E!, featured in *US Weekly*. But no one ever thinks about having fame for the wrong reason. Or at least, just sayin', I never did.

The beads swing back and forth, glistening in the streetlights. The poor thing reaches out but the hands with the prizes pull back. The barbarians start grunting, "Take it off! Take it off!"

They make a wall on every side of her, shoulder to shoulder. All escapes blocked.

Maybe I should warn this one. Protect this one. Stop her. But no, this girl is my bait tonight. Bless her heart.

Her own stupidity may prevent the humiliation of so many more just like her. She must learn from her mistakes, just like I did.

Hiding half a smile with her tongue, she lifts her tank top and lacey bra high above her shoulders. Digital snaps and bright strikes attack from all sides. These strobe lights of narcissism and debauchery make her spin, jump, and dance as a candy raver. Then her top comes back down and now there's a fresh collection of pride around her neck.

This sort of attention will give a rousing rush to the head. A flashing moment of fame. Just sayin', that's what I remember, before I was worldly renown.

Shouts and howls morph into sequel chants of "Show your bush! Show your bush!"

The girl unbuttons her jean shorts and pulls down the zipper, but her friends grab her arms and pull away. If only I'd had friends like her, I wouldn't be here.

The dudes groan and take their harassment further down the strip:

Approach.

Chant.

Gawk.

Cheer.

Repeat.

And as they move on, I see one trailing the pack.

Now we begin by removing my petite bowler and gauzy shawl. But my masquerade mask stays on, purple feathers and all.

They always carry a camcorder and a thirst for flesh. Various beads choke their necks and bend their backs. Their entire lives revolve around these so-called festivals, breaks, and holidays where revelry is mandatory. They countdown the days on a *Playboy* calendar and cross time zones to attend.

They chase the crowds, waiting for the opportunity to witness simultaneous sin: someone's vanity and everyone else's lechery. Never initiating but always lurking. Leering. An optical scavenger. A genuine voyeur.

Maybe at one time, binge-watching Netflix or gaming on Xbox consumed their lives. But broadband just made porn more accessible, and long nights of staring at a bright screen turned a bad habit into an addiction.

So now on the street, I approach him. Come on too strong and they'll cower in confusion.

Begin with eye contact, no blinking.

Follow up with a slow walk, one heel in front of the other.

Then tease with a little skin...

Tonight, this one twists his neck sideways, then right back at me. My polished fingertips grab the bottom of my cropped top and he freezes.

"You wanna see something?" I say and flick my navel chain. He hides behind his display screen. His beads shake.

"Well, you'll have to follow me," I say. "Somewhere private. Just for you."

They never question their ultimate wet dream coming true. And this one is lured into an unlit alley, empty except hunter and prey.

"You ready?" I smile. "Your eyes will soon be mine."

His beads sway as he rubs his fly. Spinning on my stilettos, I bend over and pull up my mini skirt. His camera beams a light over my thong, shining it up and down my crack. My spray tan and spin classes have paid off.

After I cover up, he pulls out a string of beads that blink with lights. Seeing him do this, offering his top prize, now we know he's hooked.

"You wanna see more?" I nod and cup my hands over my chest. "You will. But not here."

Their motel rooms are always within walking distance, even for high heels. Booked a year in advance, the rooms can see the action by overlooking the festivities, costing extra for party proximity and views of vulgarity.

After a few flights of stairs, his key card makes the door handle flash green. As it opens, I'm expecting a laptop, external hard drives, and a wastebasket overflowing with moist tissues. As I strut inside, the only light is from a computer screen. Hidden in the dark are dead bugs and scuffed furniture.

He stands still—they all do—until I tell him what to do.

"Turn the camera on night mode," I say while closing the door behind us. "And put it on that table facing the bed. I'm gonna need your fingers somewhere else real soon."

He drops it before setting it in place. And after the record button is pushed, there is no turning back. Through the lens, my skin turns green, my pupils go white—transformed.

His beads jingle.

"You know," I say while pulling off my top and letting my freckled breasts bounce. "You're gonna be part of this too."

Gasping, he squeaks, and tosses the string of blinking beads around my neck. After I slide open the balcony door, a cool breeze hardens my tits. The gust blows past the wastebasket and now the room reeks of dogwoods in bloom.

"Lie down on the bed," I hush. "Face up."

Outside, the party cheers roar from the streets.

These crazy creeps, they always smile when I pull out the handcuffs and rope from my satchel. They watch so much BDSM, they must expect it.

His wrists are now locked to the bedpost, legs tied to the railing. He lies there, beads still, as his heartbeat syncs with the blinks of my new necklace and the camera's red light.

Pulsing.

Flashing.

Recording.

See how easy that was? I say into the camera. They're always so fucking desperate.

Now we're halfway through as I'm saving the dreams of countless debutantes and pageant queens.

Beside the bed, I drop my skirt and slip off my heels. Standing on the rough carpet, I stretch the straps of my thong—pulling out and letting go, snapping as his breaths pollute the air.

I hope you know what you're in for, I always hush into their ears as I lean over, brush back their comb over, and kiss their forehead.

"You're never going to forget this night," I say.

His beads jangle.

In Coventry, England during the 11th century, I tell him. A bold noblewoman known as Lady Godiva once complained to her husband about his oppressive taxes over their people. He told her he would only revoke them if she rode a horse nude throughout the town at night.

Taking off my blonde wig, but keeping on the mask, I let my natural red hair fall past my shoulders. Leaving one hand covering the skin right above my crotch, I peel my panties down to my feet.

"I hope you like what you're gonna see," I wink.

My hand moves. His beads are still. He stares. But he's not checking if the trimmed carpet matches the long drapes. Instead, he's transfixed by my tattoo; a tiny green shamrock followed by a rainbow.

"I know what you might be thinking," I always say. "Pretty basic right?"

Just like all the others before him, his forehead scrunches. He's seen it before. Everyone's seen it before. He figures it out, they always do.

"You have to understand I was not very sober when I decided to get it," I say and laugh. "I was far from home or anyone who could tell me what to do."

Or help me.

Save me.

Prevent all of this.

"I thought I was having fun," I say as his eyes follow my hands into my satchel. "But to tell you the truth I really don't remember much of that night at all."

My hands now hold a pair of pruners and a few strips of duct tape. His beads clatter.

Don't forget this step, I say into the camera. No one likes to hear a squealing pig. Such a buzzkill.

He twists his wrists in the handcuffs. The sunken mattress squeaks. I tape his mouth.

No protesting.

No pleas.

No screams.

But his beads keep clanging.

My friends and I drove all night to get here. Then we hit the strip with fake IDs. At the first bar, we were doing body shots off each other when some hot guys offered us some beads—but only if we showed our boobs. Then some other fine fellas offered us more if we did it again. We loved showing off our graduation presents so much we turned it into a contest: Whoever collects the most beads before sunrise wins. And there was no way I was going to lose.

My hand pumps the pruners' handles in and out. The recoil spring squeaks with each slow squeeze.

The last thing I remember was my bestie screaming at me. I had so many beads, they covered my chest without a shirt. My friends were so jealous, they just left me. And after I puked on myself, it all went black. Wasted and abandoned, I must have kept trying to win, outdo myself. I was very naïve back then. This was before I learned how disgusting and cruel men can be.

Leaning forward, I part my lips and say, "Men like you."

After peeling off my mask, I stare at its facade.

Never forget, it says with hollow eyes. *What we're about to do is just.*

I slide it over his face. His pupils bulge behind the slits, gazing at me beneath the gold trim. He wiggles on the stained duvet. His beads jolt.

Now he knows for sure who I am, I say into the camera. Or *what* I am now. Our reputation is starting to precede us. He knows it's true. We're real.

He looks at me, to the camera, and back. His beads jump.

"I never thought I would really know what happened that night," I say and sigh. "But I was wrong. Someone was following me. Documenting every move."

A few weeks later my Dad asked his coworkers why they kept snickering behind his back. Soon after, my boyfriend dumped me saying he didn't want to catch some STD. My sorority sisters voted for my

expulsion. My college revoked my scholarship. My crown was stripped. Then my mom took down all my pictures: dance recitals, cheerleading camp, prom.

Life just isn't the same when every stranger gives you a long hard stare and asks why you look so familiar. Ironic how something that takes a few minutes to stream can scar an entire life. Call it mass viral disgrace. Call it a smear campaign against the girl next door. Could've been anyone, I try to tell myself.

Stepping onto the bed, I straddle his hump of a stomach. His shirt is stuck to his skin and it makes me wetter.

"Now tell me," I say and clench my teeth. "Who filmed me and put me on the Internet for everyone to see?" Leaning into his masked face, I say, "Do you know how many times my clit clip has been viewed and liked? Do you know how many times my viral vagina has been shared?"

Too many.

"Soon, you'll be just as famous as me," I always whisper in their ears.

He shakes his head. Drops of sweat sprinkle the room. His beads clink.

Don't ever hesitate, I tell the camera.

A jab with the pruners and a double-handed grip:

My elbows lock.

My shoulders pinch.

My knuckles turn white.

"Is this how you like it?" I ask. "No? Well, don't worry. It'll be a quickie."

His thumb drops to the floor. A fountain of warm liquid sprays. Housekeeping will never get rid of these stains.

Coming from outside on the streets, drowning out his pain, we hear collective chants of "Do it again! Do it again!"

TVs, laptops, smart phones, tablets. It doesn't matter. If it has a screen, I've been on it—can't wait for Apple to unveil what I'll be on next. And the worst part is, as they keep finding better ways for resolution, my cellulite becomes clearer. And as definition advances, the more my acne breaks out.

"I know how all you sick fucks work as a ring," I bark.

They're part of this network of shooting, trading, and selling reality-porn. But I'm part of this new counter group. We're in their deep web chat rooms. We've breached their private torrents, personal FTPs, and protected websites. We know how they operate. Making fake profiles to facejerk. Hacking tweens' webcams for bedroom strips. Phishing cloud storage for naked selfies. They were behind The Fapping. And they're the reason the amateur sites just keep growing.

"So tell me," I say. "How many micro cameras have you hidden in women's locker rooms, tanning salons, and toilet seats?"

His eyes widen with guilt.

We find them all the time. Soon, we'll find them all. And everyone who views them.

Film.

Upload.

Stream.

Jerk.

Repeat.

These mega pervs, they're overexposed to the usual studio porn. The type made with actors and sets. Boom mics and stage lights. They've seen every posed position, penetration, and scenario so much that now they're immune. Can't get a hard-on to get off.

These ultra pervs, now they only crave footage of real sultry situations and authentic assaults. Impromptu intercourse featuring natural nipples, public pussy, and candid clits.

"Do you think," I screech, "I can ever get back to having a normal life after what y'all did to me?"

Every person I know stares at me with disgust or lust. Any form of achievement will always be overshadowed. I was on track to graduate in the top of my class. Get a master's in Education. Become Miss Georgia. But now, my reputation will never be more than a silly girl tricked into being a whore.

His beads rustle.

"Thanks to pervs like you, at least I'm not alone," I say and smile. "And just like y'all found each other, we found each other." I say, "And as long as y'all keep doing what you do best, I'll keep getting new recruits. More to train. More to help avenge."

Mardi Gras, Fantasy Fest, St. Patrick's Day, Memorial Day. They're all the same. New Orleans, Key West, South Padre Island, Savannah, Lake Havasu. We're everywhere. Cancun: spring break. Rio de Janeiro: Carnival. We're going international.

With another prod of the pruners, another tight pinch, I demand. "What's your screen name? Your username? Your password? Which one are you? HungDaddy12? MeatBeater45?"

His lips fight to open, his voice is muffled, but all I hear is his beads clanking.

We'll figure it out by process of elimination, I tell the camera. See who doesn't log in anymore.

A snap as thick as celery breaking echoes off the faded walls. His other thumb drops. No longer a primate, his dexterity is gone. Masturbating, fapping, it'll never be quite the same.

Coming from outside on the streets, answering his agony, we hear "We want more! We want more!"

While wiping the pruners on the sheets, I take out two sterling silver letter openers and grind the stained blades against each other.

This is the last step, I tell the camera. And the most important.

Heavy breaths move his ribs up and down. Back on his belly, I ride him as a mechanical bull set on "low." My faint nipples align with his eyes. Tears are streaming down his cheeks. They collect and drip into a pool beneath the folds of skin around his chin.

His beads are static. In them, strange reflections stare back at me in all sorts of angles, sizes, and colors. The faces stretched, the bodies warped, all beyond recognition.

Never forget, they say. What we're about to do is just.

I poke the tips of the letter openers into his Adam's apple. Dragging the blades down, I leave red creases as the strings around his neck are cut. The beads fall off the bed and crash as hail, bounce as rubber, and roll in circles around my stripped clothes, both unstrung.

Before Lady Godiva rode naked that night, I continue to tell him. She asked all the townspeople to close their windows and doors out of respect. But this old creeper named Tom, he just couldn't resist. He bore a small hole through his shutters and sat there, waiting for her to come by. And when he finally saw her, her breasts bouncing with each step of the horse, he was struck blind.

After that, the townsfolk called him Peeping Tom. But the saddest part of this fable is that he would have gotten away with it, if he just had a camera. And by using technology, modern pervs have found a loophole in the curse. Which is why I'm here: to carry out Godiva's will, manually.

He bucks as if cranked to "high."

My thighs pinch his torso.

His eyelids clasp.

I point the blades down...

Imagine shucking an oyster from a shell made of skin. And don't even try, if you think cutting grapefruit is just too messy.

His hands and feet keep shaking, but the beads stop bouncing.

Sliding off the bed, I kick two beads the size of ping-pong balls. Rolling around on the floor, they're caked with blood and dust. I grab them, push them through the mask's holes and into his sockets.

Looking into the camera, I say, "Mission accomplished."

Coming from outside on the streets, breaking the silence, we hear "Whew! Yeah! Fuck yeah!"

Now we're almost done. I pull the memory card from the camera and put it in an envelope. Make sure to always label it with the tally number, location, and date. And just for fun, feel free to slip in that special string of beads you earned—like my flickering trophy here.

In the bathroom, I twist the shower handle on hot and place his computer, hardware, and video camera underneath—pornfolio drowned. Blinded by the mist, I step in. But no matter how much I wash, I'll never be clean.

After drying off, I re-dress and look at the giant mirror above the sink. Using my finger to cut through the fog, I write *Atonement was here*.

Never again can I be my parents' precious little girl. My stature will always be tainted, no matter how much I cry. Always unforgettable, no matter how much I hide. Never forgiven, no matter how much I pray. My celebrity cunt and me, we're infamous for infinity.

Before closing the outside door with a "Do Not Disturb" sign, I pause to tell him to make sure to warn all the others. That the message boards, the forums, they're all wrong. We're not some cyber urban legend.

The evidence will soon be posted and they better find a new hobby before a former victim finds them. Now a Frankenstein's monster. A disciple of Godiva.

Hunt.

Seduce.

Torture.

Warn.

Repeat.