

## **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.





