

Prologue

“Bring what you need,” they said.

How do I know what I’ll need? I’ve never been a Hooker before.

Behind the locked bathroom door of this stranger’s apartment, I’m lying on the floor not blinking so the tears don’t spill out and make me a mascara raccoon.

Just in case I go back out there.

My frantic fingers rummage through my bag, seeking any useful thing I might have thought to bring to help me get through this.

“Bring what you need.”

I have my vagina? What else would I need?

Chapter 1

Bring What You Need

It's New York City. Late 1980s. Madonna is still Like a Virgin. And after five years in undergrad, a further four years at The Juilliard School, then one year on the road with The Acting Company, I am an actress, who was acting.

I am also broke.

The Acting Company job finished less than two months ago and I've already lost two waitressing jobs.

One because I spilled 5 a.m. over-easy eggs on Jon Bon Jovi's lap.

The other because one of my boobs got in the mousse. Maybe also the soup.

Ok. I'm a terrible waitress.

For the past decade, I've been making up the short-fall between work, tuition, and expenses by living off my

student loans and credit cards. I'm into my second month behind on rent, with no solution. And I now have this humongous new debt called Student Loans: An entire week's salary, at least, to be paid every month. Possibly for my whole life. Probably even after I die.

Also, just to make sure I fall entirely apart, Mean People have been calling. I learn they are called Debt Collections.

I didn't know that.

I think they are just being mean. To me, specifically. Me and only me.

I don't understand why they are so mean. Why would a big company like Chemical Bank need to yell at someone who is obviously struggling, to hurry up and give them \$183 dollars? Are they going to go out of business if they don't get my \$183 by Monday? I mean, I understand I owe it. What I don't understand is the very, very, meanness, especially over something like money.

I offer up my guitar. It's the only thing of value I have.

Also, I don't play guitar.

I meant to learn, but besides it hurting my fingertips, I can't hear the difference in the notes.

They decline the guitar and inform me they'll call again.

And again. And again. Later.

Nothing will be different later. I don't understand why they are being so mean. I cannot function under 'mean.' It paralyzes me.

And don't they think the world needs artists? Don't they know that by crippling us with their meanness, they will hurt our creativity? Do they not understand the peril the world will feel if there is no art?

Sitting on my floor in a mess of overdue bills, hic-hic-hic crying, searching the Want Ads, I notice a large ad in bold letters on the back page of the *Village Voice* that reads:

"GIRLS! GIRLS! GIRLS! Earn \$1000.00 a week! Escorts Wanted. No sex involved."

I'd seen this ad a week before, and after the first barrage of threats from the Mean People, I called the number but hung up after the female voice on the other end asked for my measurements.

"Thirty-four C" was as far as I got.

Somewhere inside, I know there is sex involved.

Ok, so? I mean, I've had sex before. But sex with strangers?

No. Yes. Sort of. One-night stands.

I didn't *intend* them to be one-night stands. I would be thinking we were at the beginning of a beautiful romance, with more to come, no pun intended. The ending always took me by surprise.

But so, yes. Sex with strangers.

And so...so...

The thought of sex with strangers can actually be titillating. It is the aftermath that makes me feel bad. The

encounter has to *mean something*. Or it just feels empty. Even mechanical sex can be elevated to something sweet if it has meaning.

And it isn't just the emptiness that makes me feel bad. It's the dumping.

It's not that people can't leave, it's just that when I've had a nice time with a man, laughed, talked, connected enough to want to sleep with him, but then he doesn't call again even though it seemed like we were dating, I feel confused, foolish. Disposable.

So what is this then? Instead of having sex in exchange for some sort of relationship, men pay so there's no romance or relationship? Just the sex and the dumping? Why would they want that?

Is this (gasp) Prostitution?

Prostitution is bad.

Sex is a sacred thing.

How can a man treat a woman like someone to serve him, and use her in that way without concern for a mutual experience? Men and women have a special role in each other's well-being. We need each other. We are not to treat our relations as transactions.

Ok, as I said, I've had some men treat me like that. Deceit and dumping, but no money involved. Maybe I would have felt better if I got paid?

I mean, what are they paying for? The right to dehumanize you?

Is that what this job is – ‘Prostitute’? Does Escort mean Prostitute? Now I’m terrified. I know what prostitutes are. They are not well-educated girls from good families. They are not girls who have people who love them.

I know what prostitutes are. I’ve seen movies and TV shows and read books.

And I know what happens to them.

If I do this, in a year from now will I be diseased and dying, lying in a gutter with a needle poking out of my arm, beaten regularly by an enormous Pimp who owns my life?

But, even if I get a waitress job tomorrow, it won’t be enough to pay my debts. It won’t be enough to keep me from being homeless. Even if I work three jobs, eighty hours a week, I can’t catch up. I can’t even live.

I’m terrified of being homeless. Being broke, being poor, is so hard, but being without a safe shelter, without a place for your stuff, without a place to bathe and go to the bathroom? It’s almost impossible to climb out from homeless.

Oh my god! How is this happening?

Maybe sex isn’t involved. Maybe that’s why they call it “escort,” not “prostitute.” I have to think that or I can’t make the call.

The same female voice answers.

“I’m calling about the ad in the *Village Voice*.”

“What do you look like? How tall are you?”

“Five four.” I lie.

“And how much do you weigh?”

“Hundred and fifteen pounds.” I lie.

“And your measurements?”

“Thirty-four C, twenty-four, thirty-four.” I lie.

“Age?”

“Twenty-six.” That’s true.

“Can you come in for an interview? In an hour?”

I write the address in black marker on the back of an overdue bill. Tears hit the words, smearing the ink. I’m a mess, and I am forced to call back to clarify the location.

Now wait. What do you wear to an interview to be a hooker? How about ... a Victorian white lace button-down-the-back blouse ... with long sleeves and throat-high neck? Maybe ... a mid-calf-length black skirt with pink elephants on the trim, purple tights, and ... old lady lace-up shoes? ‘Cause that’s what I choose.

The look: “Spinster with a secret life.”

And of course ... my pink vinyl backpack! That gives it a contemporary feel. Yeah, that comes with me.

Hidden behind my dresser on my windowsill is a glass jelly jar with a handful of change—all the money I have until my next job. I’ll need one dollar for the subway to the interview and one dollar back. In pennies, nickels, and dimes, I have 96 cents total. Not enough for a token.