

Fairy tales hardly ever come true for quiet girls. Men pay for the screamers — the moaners and yelpers who could make a colonoscopy look like the most pleasurable thing in the world. Hell they'd actually done that one before, too.

But the quiet ones, no thank you. The quiet ones can't seem to rid their faces of that subtle twist of discomfort. They can't seem to get themselves bouncing, *bouncing*, for fear of drawing any more attention than already necessary. Even after hours of having so many sets of eyes hone in on the most intimate parts of their bodies, they can't shake that self-awareness. The quiet ones, they just can't let go.

Shayla had always been a quiet girl. At 22 she still felt nervous every time she walked into the coffee shop where she worked for another shift. She'd been there for five years and knew everything about her colleagues. She knew their eating habits, their dream jobs, how much money their parents gave them each month. But despite her ease with the people she worked with, she still got nervous to walk through those doors.

"Mornin'," Shayla said softly one early Saturday. The sun had yet to break the horizon, but a gray hue was quickly adding color to the world.

"Hey, Shayla," Josh said from behind the espresso machine.

Shayla walked into the break room to hang up her thick green overcoat that made even the coldest mornings manageable. Her heater in her car had died the week of Christmas, when her mother had given her the coat. Timing. Shayla would've starved for a week if she'd had to buy the expensive coat.

"Ready for another day?" Josh said to her as she came out of the break room.

Josh met Shayla's eyes. He had his cocksure smirk on his face, the kind that annoyed the hell out of her. He was a nice guy, but in his smirks she saw a cockiness that she could never pull

off. Maybe she was just jealous. After all, it had been Josh who'd swooped right past her for the assistant manager position. She tried to resent him for it but somehow couldn't. His confidence was too soothing when things got slammed. Josh never lost his sense of command, never panicked. Shayla often found herself wishing she could be more like him. Her fingers fumbled when there were more than a few people in her line—she became overly conscious of every movement she made, fearing she'd make a mistake.

“If you could get the fridge stocked, that'd be great,” Josh said. His tone was always less demanding with her than other coworkers because he found Shayla attractive.

Shayla's shift went by quickly once the store opened. A little before one, the afternoon staff started filtering in through the front door.

“You're off, sister,” Annie said, pointing to the clock on the opposite wall.

“Is it noon already?” Shayla said, trying to act surprised when really she'd been counting down the minutes for the past hour.

She went into the break room and put on her green overcoat, said a quiet goodbye to Josh and Annie, who replied in unison, and then she was out the door and into the brisk, bright afternoon.

Without her knowing, Josh followed her out the door.

“Shay,” he called from his car, one hand resting casually on the roof, “have a good one.”

“You too,” she said without enthusiasm. It was too cold for chatter. She jumped inside her car and raced back to her apartment, her teeth chattering the whole way home.

At her apartment complex, she looked for a parking spot close to the mailbox. She was expecting a paycheck that she needed badly. Her little stash of graduation money was nearly gone.

At the mailbox, her key jammed in the lock. A sinking feeling of panic overwhelmed her. What would she do without that check? When the lock turned, Shayla shut her eyes briefly in relief. Then she grabbed the lonely envelope smartly stamped with her company's logo.

Just then a bit of crisp paper crinkled nearby. She glanced around for the source of the noise. She saw a newspaper, and a flashy advertisement there caught her eye. By the time Shayla got to it, the wind had shuffled the pages. She picked it up and rifled through until she found the ad she was looking for.

MODELS WANTED!

EASY CASH!

She tore the page out and hastily shoved it in her purse next to her check.

When she walked into her apartment, she realized it was warmer outside than in. She had forced herself to keep the heater off until she found a second job. At the small circular table that her parents had given her, she pulled the newspaper page from her purse. Tomorrow was her day off, and she wanted to put another application out somewhere with her free time. She looked over the flashy ad. A voluptuous redheaded woman was staring seductively back at her. She wore flesh-colored lingerie that blended in with her pale skin, making her appear nude. Shayla admired the redhead's done-up hair, the way it rested perfectly about her shoulders. Her eyelashes looked full, and her lips had one too many coats of gloss. She looked like a stripper.

CALL US TODAY

SET UP YOUR AUDITION

With the flourish that precedes an impulsive decision, she pulled out her cell phone and punched in the number.

A woman's voice answered. "Paradise, this is Janelle, how can I help you?"

Shayla swallowed quickly. "Hi, um, I saw an ad in the paper. So I'm calling about auditioning?" Shayla's shyness turned her statement into a question.

"You're 18 and have proof of age?"

"I'm 22. And yeah, I have a driver's license." Shayla tried to say it with dignity, but something about the woman's perfunctory nature made her feel small.

"That'll work. We've got a spot tomorrow if ya wanna drop by. Auditions normally last about half an hour. You're comfortable with yourself, right? You'll have to take your top off. Just you're top though. But Rick does ask that first timers wear tight bottoms. Think yoga pants. No sweats."

"Oh, um, I guess I didn't know the ad was for something like this—"

"You saw the picture, right? Of Jess, the redhead? Who'd ya think you were callin'? But hey, I get it. First time's hard for anyone. If you're interested you can check us out tomorrow at noon. If not, no big deal. But we're just a cam agency. No physical stuff, just you and your webcam."

"Oh. So I'd be alone?"

“Yep. Can shoot from your bedroom if ya wanna. We got a couple rooms here at the office, but nobody really uses ’em. You put in a couple of hours from the comfort of your bed or bath, whatever, and make a quick fifty. No biggie. No one’s ever touching you.”

“O-kay. Can I think about it?”

“Sure, sure. You do your thinking, and I’ll put ya down for tomorrow. Noon. If ya decide to come, don’t be late. Rick’s busy with, ya know, work.”

“Right. Okay. Thanks.”

“Mmm-hmm. Take care.”

Shayla set her phone down on the table, covering the redhead’s—Jess’s—lower body. She looked at her phone for a couple seconds after her hand left it and then got up quickly.

She focused all her attention on cooking her dinner, trying to take her mind off money and work and the audition. She knew she would go. She told herself that if it the audition was more than she could handle, she could just leave. But deep down, in a place that she didn’t want to acknowledge, she knew that she’d stick it out no matter what happened. She knew she couldn’t walk away from that kind of money, not right now. Besides, she only needed to work until she’d saved a little, at least enough for a couple month’s rent and some damn heat. A few weeks would pass and that would be that. She could quit. How hard could it be, anyway? It wasn’t porn.

After a while, she walked back to the table with a bowl of noodles drowned in cheap alfredo sauce. She picked up her phone, uncovering Jess’s legs as she did so. As she slugged up the creamy noodles, she stared admiringly at the redhead’s legs.

The next morning she arrived early for the audition. Her stomach dropped as she pulled into the lot. The crumbling brick of the building scared her more than an old façade normally would. Mostly, she feared what went on behind the dingy walls. When she walked to the door, the harsh sunlight of a cold day reflected in the glass. It beamed across her face as she pulled it open, blinding her, making the interior of the lobby briefly appear pitch black.

“Hello, Shayla is it? I thought you’d make it in to us today,” said a cheery, overweight woman at the front desk, too cheery to be the woman she’d talked to on the phone. The overweight woman’s red-rimmed glasses protruded from her wavy blonde hair. At the roots, hints of brown gave her color away. Long silvery earrings bounced about when she spoke. She looked like someone who’d been beautiful in her youth and was trying too hard to cling to it after it was gone.

“Sorry I’m a little early,” Shayla said. “I can wait if, um, if it’s too early.”

“Let’s call up Rick. He’s usually pretty free in the mornings, so we’ll see if he can’t take ya right now. I’m Laura, by the way.”

“Oh, okay,” Shayla said. She felt overwhelmed by the woman’s friendliness. It didn’t fit with where she was.

Laura picked up her phone and hit a single button. “Your noon audition is here. Are you able to see her?” Laura’s voice became higher for Rick. She glanced up and gave Shayla a quick smile that was there and gone. “Okay, I’ll send her in.”

Laura set the phone gently back on its receiver. “He’s right down the hall, first door on your right.”

Shayla felt a sudden pang of anxiety, a mixture between gnawing anticipation and nausea.

“Thanks,” she mumbled.

“Good luck.” Laura beamed at her like she was a proud parent watching her only child on the first day of school.

When Shayla got to Rick’s door, she tapped her knuckles lightly on the glass.

“Come on in,” a man’s voice called softly from within.

She opened the door and was shocked by how handsome Rick was. She was expecting an unkempt and probably overweight middle-aged man who had to rely on porn instead of dating for sexual cravings. But Rick appeared to be none of those things. His smile was warm and welcoming, a smile that reveals an unfaltering attention to its audience. He strode evenly toward Shayla, who stood frozen at the door, made immobile by anxiety and now attraction.

“Glad you could make it. Please come in and have a seat.” Rick motioned to a chair in front of his desk, and the white sleeves of his cotton shirt stretched to contain his bulky upper arms. He was probably in his late twenties or early thirties, and Shayla found herself glancing at his ring finger for a wedding band. There wasn’t one.

“So Shayla, tell me a little bit about yourself.”

As she started talking, the more words she said the more comfortable she became. At one point Rick’s cellphone rang, repeating that singular chime that Shayla heard so often at the coffee shop. He took it out of his pocket and, without taking his eyes off of her, lowered the volume until it was silent.

Shayla didn’t speak long. She couldn’t. Though she felt slightly more at ease than when she’d arrived, she could not ignore a persistent cause of apprehension—that at the point when she stopped talking, that would be the point when he’d ask her to take off her shirt. That thought

alone, the fear of it, made her feel even more shy than normal, stifling her sentences so they came out almost breathlessly and blunt.

Finally, she conceded by allowing herself to stop talking. Fear gripped her neck like a vise.

Rick smiled at her warmly, too warmly for a man of his standing to smile at a potential employee. He held the smile, and a pause turned into a prolonged silence. Shayla shifted uncomfortably in her seat. For the first time since being there, she thought he was evaluating her, eyeing her in a way that asked what she would look without clothes, or so she thought.

“Okay, well there’s nothing to be ashamed of. Money trouble is the main reason our girls—and guys—come to us. No worries. But my next question is, and it’s a personal one . . . how comfortable are you with sex? Do you have any past experiences with abuse? Do you have a current partner?”

Shayla thought about the first time she tried to have sex. When she was a freshman in college she fell quickly for a guy who lived on the floor above her in the dorms. He was tall and gangly, and often dropped whatever he was holding.

Shayla had desired him that first night with him. She’d wanted the mystery of sex to finally be solved. But each time they fooled around, it was always initiating things, pushing them further. He always subtly resisted her. When she tried to slide his shorts down, he’d rotate a hip ever so slightly to pin her hand against the bed. Or when she pulled at the hem of her shirt to remove it, he’d vigorously kiss her so that she couldn’t.

Later she discovered the root of his inhibitions. When she finally managed to get his pants off, he couldn’t get an erection. He was mortified, and they broke up not long afterward.



“Um,” she said, avoiding Rick’s eyes, “I don’t currently have a boyfriend. And no, I’ve never been abused.”

“Okay, good. I like to ask just because we’ve found that people who’ve dealt with abuse tend to, well, have those bad memories come back if they work for us. We do our best to discourage them from joining.”

“But can’t I just do this from home, on a webcam?”

“Right, that’s exactly right,” Rick said. Shayla wondered if she heard discomfort in his tone. “Even on a webcam, it can still be . . . difficult for some. You are at home, but you’re not alone, not really. People are watching you and that can be hard.”

Shayla just nodded, not sure what to say in response.

He simpered before averting his eyes. He was the manager of an adult website and perhaps ashamed by his close association with the industry.

“Okay, great,” Rick smiled, and his awkwardness seemed to seep out of him, down into the floor and out of sight. This was not the face Shayla expected to see right before he asked her to take off her shirt.

“Well, if you have any questions, now’d be the time to ask them,” he said. “After this meeting, if you decide to join, I will email you login credentials and all employee documents, and then you can get started whenever you’d like.”

“Okay, I’ll look over everything at home,” she said.

“Sure. No questions then?”

Shayla shook her head and stood up quickly. She thought he’d forgotten about the part of the audition that she feared most, and she wanted to bolt out before he remembered.

Rick stood with her and reached a hand across the table. They shook hands for the second time.

The lobby felt much brighter than when she'd first come in. She noticed things she hadn't before. Roses in a plain vase stood on a table in the sitting area. Maroon couches reminded her of a celebrity talk show. Even the wallpaper was a bright shade of pink. Shayla thought it looked comical, this attempt at some kind of romantic sexuality. It looked more like a young girl's bedroom in a commercial for dolls.

"How'd it go?" Laura asked.

"Fine, it was fine." Shayla looked around nervously and then let the words pour out of her. "But I'm confused. Can I just do it from home if he forgot? Send in a picture? Cause I just don't really want to do it—"

"Slow down now. What is it you're worried about?" Laura asked.

"Over the phone the woman told me I'd have to take my shirt off."

And then Laura laughed, the rolls on her chin and neck jerking about along with her earrings. "Sorry, sorry. I shouldn't laugh. It's an honest question. We say that to girls just to test them. We figure if a girl can't bring herself to take her shirt off in front of one person, she won't be able to do it for the whole Internet. It's a way to weed out the faint of heart when it comes to this stuff, that's all. Nobody actually has to do it."

"Oh," Shayla said, relief a cool cloud expanding from her stomach until it filled her.

"So what did ya think?" Laura asked.

"I don't know." Shayla tucked her hair behind an ear.

“Couple words of advice.” Laura shifted toward Shayla confidentially. “You don’t have to do anything you don’t wanna do.” She flashed her quick smile and then the phone rang. She picked it up on the first ring. “Paradise, this is Laura.”

Shayla sat on the edge of her bed in nothing but her bra and panties. She stared at the screen. Her frigid apartment made gooseflesh stand on her bare arms and stomach.

Earlier, the nagging fear of shame had waged a war against the potential money she could make simply by taking her clothes off for the Internet. Fifty bucks was what she made during an entire shift at the coffee shop. And she could get that in just 90 minutes.

She shifted her laptop that clung to her bare thighs. She was wearing her favorite pair of panties, black and lacy and she thought sexy. The light from her screen shone on her gooseflesh and tossed a long shadow on the wall behind her. Her room was dim, lighted only by a weak lamp near her bed. She thought it’d be easier that way.

She dragged her cursor to a button on Paradise’s website. She thought about what it would mean if someone she knew saw her naked online. She thought about the money. She stared at the button.

GO LIVE!

(WARNING: CLICKING THIS WILL MAKE YOUR CAMERA PUBLIC TO ALL PARADISE® MEMBERS. CHECK BOX TO ACKNOWLEDGE.)

Shayla bit her lip and wondered how things had gotten so bad so quickly. She thought again about the money and told herself it would solve things for her.

When she resolved to click the “Go Live” button, she felt strangely detached from herself, like it wasn’t her making the decision in the first place so no harm could come from it.

Almost immediately messages popped up in her chat box.

“Where r ur tits?” wrote JimmyJack3000.

“Yummy that’s nice, not 2 skinny. I like something to grab. Can I touch you baby?” wrote Earl2122.

Shayla wanted to end it all right then, and she almost did. Then she noticed that she could hide her chat box. After it disappeared, she felt alone again, even though she knew she wasn’t.

For the next 20 minutes, Shayla moved around her bed, trying out different positions, first lying with her head on a pillow, then flipping around and moving to the foot of the bed, her head close to her computer that gazed imperiously from her desk. At one point she raised her hips in the air and let her butt sway from right to left. She felt ridiculous. She felt like a dog that sits and lies down and rolls over for a treat.

But she’d started the thing and she told herself she couldn’t quit now, not so close to fifty bucks.

After a while her laptop screen timed out and went dark. A small green dot next to the camera remained illuminated, reminding her that she was being watched. In her dark screen Shayla could see a faint reflection of herself. She saw her hair moving about her shoulders as she jiggled on her bed. She suddenly had the urge to cry, to throw her laptop off her desk and kick it until it sparked. She didn’t want this to be her, didn’t want the strangely seductive movements that she saw in the reflection of her screen to be hers

Still, she let the recording run. With 15 minutes to go she slipped off her bra and grazed her nipples until they became hard. She reached into her panties and rubbed herself, first slowly and then more quickly.

When her mind wouldn't let her have an orgasm, she faked one, quietly gasping, pointing her toes and arching her back off the bed in what she felt was a pitiful show of pleasure. She wondered how guys could actually get off to the mockery she was making of it all.

When the 90 minutes mercifully came to an end, she jumped off her bed and slammed her laptop shut, wondering if her screen had cracked from the force and not caring if it had. She went straight to the bathroom and turned on the shower, twisting the dial as hot as it would go. She let the water scald her skin. It felt painful and good, but it couldn't distract her from her vicious thoughts. She pushed her palms up into clenched eyelids, making the galaxies that appeared there burst.

The next morning she met Josh in the break room as he tightened the straps of his apron behind his back.

"Hey Shayla," he said. He cinched the apron straps and then concealed his mouth with a fist to release a huge yawn. Shayla thought he put an oddly forced amount of effort into it.

"Tired this mornin'. How're you?" he asked.

"Alright," she lied.

"I was thinking, um, it seems like I've known you so long but only just at the coffee shop. Would you ever want to, I don't know, get lunch or somethin'?"

Shayla jerked around to look at him. He was smiling at her sheepishly. His awkwardness amused her. It wasn't something she was used to seeing from him.

“Doesn’t have to be a date,” Josh added to fill the silence. “Ya know, just for fun or somethin’.”

“Um . . . sure,” she said. Her excitement disallowed her from saying more.

His awkward smile transformed into one of relief. “Great. Maybe tomorrow? We both work late and can go before.”

“Yeah—” she said.

“Great. I’m excited,” he smiled at her. “I can pick ya up if you want?”

She nodded.

Shayla felt a lightness in the pit of her stomach that she hadn’t felt in a while, and then the previous night crashed over her like a silent, deliberate wave. She wanted to crawl back into her bed and never leave it again. She felt filthy and wondered how Josh hadn’t noticed. She thought it was written in her empty eyes and pale, sold skin.

During her shift each step she took felt like it was through thick, suctioning mud. Every glance that flitted her way made her fear that those same eyes had been on her naked and exposed body the previous night.

When her shift mercifully ended, she mustered a goodbye to Josh and made for the door. He called from the register that he was excited for tomorrow. She just nodded in response, wondering how many times a person could say excited in the same day.

That night signed into Paradise’s website absently. She hit the “Go live!” button and sat down on her bed, staring at the camera intently, as if doing so could conquer it. She despised the men who were touching themselves while watching her. She despised the very society that rewarded a person for surrendering her privacy and peace of mind.

She wondered if Josh watched porn. A cold fear ran through her then. What if he stumbled on this very recording of her? Would he stroke himself as he watched her undress, and then afterward, satiated, no longer want anything to do with her?

She slid her panties down to her ankles and kept them there, flexing her legs outward against the elastic stretch of her panties.

She let out a husky moan as she felt herself, and a strange part of her applauded her acting. She propped her head up on two pillows so that her breasts were still visible to the camera. She worked her hand slowly down her body like she'd seen in a movie.

The next day Josh got to her apartment ten minutes early, which annoyed her. She wasn't ready and didn't know if she should yell out the door for him to wait. She didn't want him inside her apartment. It was messy and, more importantly, she feared he'd see some form from Paradise.

She watched him through her blinds and was grateful when he didn't get out of his car.

She brushed her teeth quickly and watched the blood swirl in the bottom of the sink. Holding her finger on the light switch, she paused, gazing at her reflection in the mirror. Her eyes were red, the skin around them puffy from restless sleep. She hoped Josh wouldn't notice or worse, ask her if something was wrong.

When she lowered herself into his passenger seat, she was impressed and surprised by how clean his car was. She wondered if he'd cleaned it just for her.

"Hi," he said.

"Hey," she said, trying to sound casual.

"Okay, buckle up."

Shayla forced a giggle. She wanted him to like her even if she wasn't sure she could like him.

"Where do ya wanna go?" he asked.

"That's your job. You asked me out."

"Right. Well, we got Mickey D's, or you know, something like that." Shayla laughed more throatily this time; she was forgetting. Her body sunk more comfortably into the seat as the car grumbled down the street. The muscles in her neck unclenched and instead conformed to the car's swaying motion.

"I like their fries," she offered.

So they went through the drive-thru, and Josh ordered two of the largest cartons of fries on the menu.

He handed a man his credit card, refusing Shayla's offerings to split it with a wave of his hand. Shayla, flustered by his needless generosity, shoved her card back in her wallet. He didn't seem to notice and, turning to her, said, "I hope you weren't lying about liking the fries. I'm on a budget and gotta jump at the chance of a cheap date."

"Cause you go on so many of them," Shayla said mockingly.

"Exactly." He smirked at her in the way that she envied.

After they'd wolfed down all the fries in the parking lot, he started driving away from the city. The streets got wider and the hills more sweeping and steep. Fields stretched for miles, yellowing and hard in the cold. In the distance she could make out patches of missing trees on a mountain. They looked like bald spots on the fur of a great, slumbering animal. Shayla loved the



country the way people love visiting relatives—at first it’s a feeling of intense admiration and gratefulness, and then it fades to monotony.

Shayla in that moment and for no particular reason felt an overwhelming sense of clarity. She gazed out the window and saw everyone’s intentions so clearly—the greed, the lust, the fear, the pain and passion—she accepted all of it for what it was. How can one resist the flow of a river?

She felt like crying, not from fear or even shame but submission. What control did she have? Her life felt like it belonged to the urges of people she’d never see or care to see. She pretended to be engrossed in the view out her window, but really she kept her head turned from Josh to hide, afraid that any attempt at conversation would reveal how swiftly she was crumbling.

Josh pulled into a gravel turnoff high up on a hill. The sun dipped. Its dying light thrust an array of warm reds and mysterious oranges into the cold sky. Below them, the fields looked like patches in a great quilt and the rounded hills like bodies beneath it.

As she stared at the stillness of the sky, Josh stopped rustling in his seat and exhaled, as if seeing the sunset for the first time.

“Beautiful, huh?” he said. “I want to touch it.”

“You can.” Shayla got out of the car and pointed mockingly up at the sky. “See?”

“You’re funny,” Josh said.

Shayla moved toward his car and without thinking, leaned back on the hood. “Hope it’s okay if I lie down here,” she said without looking at him.

“Of course.” Josh lowered himself next to her. The car ticked as it cooled, and the cold metal beneath her made Shayla shiver. But the view and Josh’s warm shoulder against hers filled

her with something she hadn't felt in days. A sensation. Perhaps it was desire, or companionship, or curiosity. All she could hear was their breathing. A breeze made her shiver. She watched the light fade as if it meant something.

Later it would come for her, like hunters after wounded prey. But in that moment, brief as it was, she forgot about all that plagued her.