

Betrayed

Terri

This is the last place I thought I'd ever find myself; in the front seat of a car with a man I'd never met before tonight. I can't believe Lisa would do this to me. We haven't known each other long; I met her at the church I'd started going to two months ago. She seemed nice enough, I guess. She sings in the choir. I came to find out that her mother does, too.

I'd confided in Lisa that I'd had a crush on someone I'd met at the church. To be honest, the church is the last place I would have expected to meet someone; I mean, finding an available man in the church is hard. But, to find an eligible woman who's not afraid to admit she's into women is almost impossible. It had happened, though. She and I had been on a couple of dates, but we stayed away from each other during service. We kept our budding relationship hidden to avoid judgement. I needed to confide in someone. I'm from a small-town family in another state, and Lisa is the closest thing to family I have out here. So, I'd treated us to a dinner out and brought up the subject. The conversation did not go as I'd expected. I really don't know what I'd thought would happen. But, being called every vulgar and offensive rendition of the term lesbian was not what I'd figured as a possibility.

If I hadn't ridden to the restaurant with her, I'd have left her sitting at the table. I was shocked at her reaction; shocked into inaction, really. What I should have realized by her actions was that she cared more about her viewpoint and her comfort than she valued me as a person. I mean, she didn't even have the common courtesy to be privately disgusted. Chalking it up to shock and surprise on her part, I ignored what I know now to have been a red flag that should have sent me running for the hills.

Lisa

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When I met Terri, I knew she'd make an okay person to hang around with. She was quiet; shy people do almost anything to fit in. She didn't have any family out here; lonely people will do just about anything to avoid being by themselves. Terri would need me in more ways than one, and that is the way I like things.

It wasn't long after she started coming to our church that my brother decided he liked her, and he wanted to get to know her. Well, he wanted to date her. The problem was, he was already seeing someone else. I say it was a problem, and it was. But, not for him. He always dated at least two women at once. The thing is, the women never knew about each other. Bro is good, but it's doubtful he'd successfully be able to juggle two women who attend the same church. Although, he'd probably welcome the challenge.

When I decided to take Terri out to eat that day, it was with the intention of getting her interested in my brother, Sean. Oh, my God! When she let it out that she was gay, I was speechless. I couldn't even see how she could like women. She's pretty, and she's smart. Lord knows, she is nice to a fault. And, she is trusting to the point of being gullible. I'll bet she got tricked into being gay. That's a thing? Right? All I know is that my Sean wants her for his girlfriend, so I've got to get her interested in men.

Terri & Lisa

Damn it! I'd answered the phone before turning it over to check the caller id. Lisa was on the line.

"Hey, Terri," she said.

"Hi," I replied, hoping not to sound as cold as I was feeling.

"Listen," she said, adjusting her tone to sound more friendly. Maybe she was going to apologize for the other day.

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“I said some things to you before that were,” silence fell as she wrestled with the words. “Well, you caught me off guard, and I guess I got a little reckless with my words.”

I stayed silent, waiting for my apology. She stayed silent, refusing to give it. It’s a good thing this is a voice call and not a video call because if looks could kill, she’d be dead twice. Just as I started to end the call with her, she said, “I want to make it up to you. Show you how sorry I am.”

Finally, we’re getting somewhere. She sounds sincere. I think she’s sincere. I mean, I’d feel bad if I had made someone feel the way she’d made me feel. So, I get it. She’s uncomfortable with my sexuality. But, the thing I don’t understand though, is why a hetero woman would immediately assume because I’m a lesbian, that I want her. As if being a lesbian means I have no self-control or preferences or common sense. I don’t spend my days looking for random women to bed. That would be dumb.

“I’m listening,” I said. “What’d you have in mind?”

“Well,” Lisa said, “I have this friend I just met, and he wants to go see that new scary movie that came out yesterday.”

I was confused. How in the world does her going on a date have anything to do with me? Seems like going to a movie isn’t a good place to get to know someone. You can’t have a conversation. You’re just in the same place sharing the same space and looking at a screen. And, if she’s on a date, how is she going to be making things up to me? Before I could say the words to end this phone call, she spoke again.

She asked, “Will you come with?”

I thought to myself how much I hate this idea. I don’t even like horror movies. And, I don’t want to sit through one for someone else’s benefit. Then again, Lisa’s making a gesture, an overture to a deepening friendship. So, I relented. I said, “If it will make you more comfortable, yes. I’ll come.”

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We spent the next ten minutes game-planning our night. She and her friend would get here in an hour to pick me up, and we'd head for the movie house. I'd asked her why she would go out with someone with whom she felt uncomfortable with to the point that she needed a third wheel. She'd explained she just met the guy on a dating app, and this was more like a meet up; which, to me, is weird. Isn't the purpose of a meet up to feel a person out? You just cannot do that effectively in a movie.

The more I thought about it, the more uneasy I became. I'd decided, I'm not doing this. I picked up my cell and dialed Lisa.

"Hello?" She answered. I could hear the baseline of the music playing in the background. And, I heard what sounded like two male voices.

"Yeah, listen. I'm not," I started, but she interrupted before I could finish.

"Girl, we're outside. C'mon, let's go," She said, shouted into the phone so she could be heard over the music that was playing.

"I thought I heard two guys," I said.

"Um, hmm. You did," she said.

I became even more unsettled by what she'd said. Why in the world were there two guys in the car with her? A double date this is not. I don't get down like that. I needed to see Lisa, feel her out as I asked her what the hell is going on.

"Can you come inside for a minute," I asked. Then, I continued, "I need help with my outfit."

I heard her saying something to the people she was with, and then I saw the light inside the car as she opened the door, got out, and headed toward my front door. She walked less in a straight line, more

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like a diagonal path across the lawn instead of heading up the paved porch. The girl was tipsy. Had they all been drinking? I wondered. I sure wasn't going anywhere with this bunch.

I held the screen door open for her as she swayed her hips inside, and I closed the wooden door behind her. We stood looking at each other. Outside, a car horn sounded one short honk. I folded my arms in front of me and shaking my head, stared at Lisa. I wanted to scold her about her risky behavior. In a car with two strangers, she just met online. Crazy. Crazier still the fact that Lisa had obviously been drinking.

"You look fine," Lisa said. She was hoping to hide her jealousy. Lisa hated how being near Terri made her feel. As hard as she'd tried, Lisa couldn't shake the feeling that Terri is much prettier than she herself is. And, that left her steeping in murderous thoughts about Terri. Lisa had shown her date a picture of Terri, and he'd gushed on and on about how fine she was. And, how if things didn't work out between him and Lisa, he hoped she wouldn't care if he and Terri hooked up. That was the impetus to her sipping from the bottle he had offered her. How could she compete with someone who commanded the affection of both men and women?

"I'm not getting into the car with two strangers. And, I don't think you should either," I said.

Outside, a car horn gave a long and impatient honk. Lisa turned and looked out through the window in the front door. She was visibly exasperated by my renegeing on my promise to accompany her on this date.

Lisa searched her mind for an angle. She needed to get Terri into that car. She needed to be taught a lesson. Terri offended Lisa's sensibilities. The fact that no matter how she fixed herself up, how she gave herself away to men, Lisa never was the preferred one. She was only ever the chosen one, the second choice, the one who would do. Terri represented what Lisa wanted to be and being around her only served to remind Lisa that she'd never measure up.

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“But,” Lisa said. To Terri, she sounded on the verge of tears. “That’s exactly why I need you.”

Lisa worked hard to keep a pleading expression on her face while hiding the guile at work within her. To tell the truth, the men in the car weren’t strangers to her. She’d known Ryan and his cousin Ricky for a while. Ricky’s girlfriend broke up with him last week. It turns out, her female bestie stole girlfriend right from under Ricky’s nose. Ryan’s constant picking had Ricky questioning himself, questioning his manhood. I’ve never seen someone so determined to prove his masculinity. So, when I was telling them about Terri, Ricky decided he was the man destined to redeem her from the clutches of lesbianism.

“Please, Terri,” she said.

Terri was torn. Everything inside her was screaming, no! Her safety concerned her. Loyalty to this faltering friendship demanded of her. In the end, her desire to be accepted for the genuine woman whom she is won over, and she acquiesced in her decision.

Terri said, “Let me get my coat.”

The interior of the SUV reeked of weed. Nobody was smoking now, but they had been. The bassline of the music pounded just enough not to be too loud, and Ricky and Ryan seemed cool enough. Lisa had gotten into the back seat with Ryan. Terri watched them, through the rearview mirror, chatting it up like they were the best of friends.

There was a movie house a couple of miles from Terri’s house, but apparently, that is not where they were going. Ricky had maneuvered through the streets Terri was familiar with and had driven the car down the highway into a neighboring town unknown to her. She wasn’t lost because she had payed

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attention to mile markers, landmarks, and street names. She could make her way home if she needed to.

Terri was glad when the car finally pulled up in front of the theatre; she was tired of Ricky trying to hold her hand; like they were on a date. If there was anything this was not, a date was it. He couldn't be convinced of that fact. At every turn in the conversation, he tried to make it grown and sexy. She'd been consciously creative in the ways she rebuffed his advances, so as not to offend. But, this act of polite kindness was wearing on her, and her irritation would soon show if this shit persisted.

Terri said to Ricky, "Why don't you just park the car? We can all walk in together."

Ricky looked into the rearview mirror at Ryan. Then he said, "Man, I forgot my wallet! You have any cash?"

"Just enough for Lisa and me," Ryan said. And, then, he jumped out of the car so fast no one could ask a follow up question.

Lisa followed him so quickly; I didn't have a chance to say a word to her. I visually begged her through the window on the rear car door to stay a second. She looked at me through the window, mouthed something, then took Ryan's hand. He was saying something to Ricky through the front driver's side window, but I couldn't focus on the conversation. The car door wouldn't unlock, and pulling the door handle wasn't working the way I expected it to. I tried to remain calm, to think of a way out of the car. But, before I was able, Ricky pulled the car forward away from the curb and into the night.

Lisa

I expected to hear from Terri last night. She hadn't called or sent me a text. I guess she had a good time with Ricky after all. Did I feel bad about manipulating the situation? The way I see it, there's nothing to feel badly about. I'd done Terri a service. I'd given her an opportunity to experience a sexual

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relationship the way it should be done, with a man. I and Ryan ended up at the bar instead of watching a movie. We drank. We danced. We threw darts. Then, we took it to the room. I had a great night.

Apparently, Terri had also.

When my cellphone finally did ring, I assumed it was Terri. I didn't check the caller ID before answering.

"Hey, girl," I said.

"Lisa," the voice on the other end asked. The voice did not belong to Terri.

"Yes," I said. "Who's speaking?"

It was Terri's cousin calling from some midwestern town. She spoke so slowly I could barely make out she was saying. I don't know if it was the southern drawl, or the agitation in her voice, making me need to focus too hard on her words. She was worried because Terri was supposed to check in with her last night when she got home from. But she'd never done that. Terri had given her cousin my phone number as an emergency contact, so the cousin was calling to find out what I knew.

Well, it's a good thing I didn't know anything. Isn't it? I'd told the cousin that I hadn't see Terri since she had left the movies with her date last night. When the cousin asked whether Terri had a new girlfriend, I corrected her. I told her that Terri was on a date with a man, which she found laughable and couldn't believe. She'd said that Terri had been with women since they were in high school. I told her not to worry because Terri was cured. But, before I could complete the thought, she'd hung up the phone.

Now, I became curious. I was curious about what Ryan's doing. My mind had wandered toward thoughts of him since I'd woken up this morning. I'd purposefully not called him because I didn't want to seem desperate after hooking up with him even after he'd said he preferred to be with Terri. I'd hoped that giving myself to him would make him forget about her. He'd see I'm just as good as she is. So, I called him, and the phone rang ten times before it went to voicemail. I didn't leave a message. I

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just called back. This time, it rang directly to voicemail. And, every time I called over the next couple of hours, the call did the same thing. This irritated me so until I turned on the television for a distraction.

The television was set on the local news station. The weather woman told me my part of town was in for a wild and stormy night. The news anchor discussed the deteriorating state of international affairs between our country and the restless county in the middle east. And, then, the anchor began talking about a story that grabbed my ear. The breaking news segment told the tale of an unidentified body that had been found behind a dumpster at the theater I'd been at last night.

Terri

I had no idea a person could enjoy being so evil until I was forced into space with Ricky. He'd said and done things to me that I won't repeat. It had been made clear to me, though, his twisted goal had been to "fix me" so that I'd prefer men again. And, that he'd gotten the idea that he could succeed at this from Lisa. Hearing those particular words had gotten me so pissed, that I'd flipped out. I can't tell you exactly what happened because I don't remember. What I do know is that I'd managed to overpower and disable him. I'd rolled him out of the car's front seat onto the ground near a dumpster behind the theater we had been at earlier that night; he'd driven us back to that spot after he'd done the things he'd done.

I hadn't been able to find what he'd done with my cellphone, so I couldn't call for help or use GPS to find my way home. As I began to drive, my memory kicked in, and I was able to retrace the route in reverse as I'd been careful on the way out here to make mental notes. My body hurt. My feelings were hurt. And, my ability to think straight came and went. But I'd made it to the emergency room near my home, and I had gotten treated. The ER staff called the police so that I could report what had taken place. I wish they hadn't. The male officer who came out listened in disbelief and seemed reluctant to make a report. Even with the female nurse present with me, the entire conversation felt awkward. And, as odd

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as it seems, I hadn't thought of myself as a victim until that officer began his interrogation. I handed the officer the keys to Ricky's car, and his entire tone changed. He believed me now, it seemed and became all business. He distanced himself from us, but the nurse and I could hear snatches of his conversation requesting someone to process the vehicle.

The nurse had called a car for me, and I'd waited downstairs until it had come. I'd ridden in silence until the car had driven up to the sidewalk leading up to Lisa's house. As I approached the front door, I could see the television through the bay window. On the screen, I could make out the dumpster behind the movie theater. An ambulance with flashing lights was parked beside it, and EMTs were wheeling a stretcher toward its rear doors; there was the form of a body covered partially with a blanket atop it.

I climbed the stairs slowly in the darkness; flickering flashes of light from inside lit my way. Lisa turned her attention from the television toward the stairs just as I landed on the final step. Our eyes met, and we regarded each other in stillness; an expression of disbelief owned Lisa's face. It was as if to her, I'd returned from the dead. I think the gravity of what would become her reality was settling on her. She did not move as the sirens, and flashing lights announced the approach of the officers toward her house.