

Skin deep II - Midgame

JANUARY 2025



SKIN DEEP



After the disastrous leak of information surrounding Karen's bodysuit transformation, which had become a viral sensation in the news, the organization knew it needed to quickly escalate its efforts. If their enemies deciphered the secret behind the bodysuits, the organization's competitive advantage would vanish. The experimental phase was over; it was time to take a decisive step closer to securing power.

Their next target was Eleanor Hagerty, the 19-year-old daughter of Senator Roger Hagerty. The senator, a staunch conservative from Appalachia, had a significant influence in Washington. Despite his career's demands, he remained deeply rooted in his Appalachian origins, spending every summer in a family residence nestled in a remote village. This summer retreat, with its relatively low security compared to the fortified mansions of most politicians, made him an ideal target. One day, a delivery guy approached Eleanor as she was watering the plants. He had a package wrapped in colorful paper, from Mateo, a young man Eleanor had been secretly dating. Her father would have exploded with rage had he known. Mateo was Hispanic and from a working-class family, everything Senator Hagerty despised. Eleanor bit her lip. Mateo was always romantic, but this was unexpected. How had he gotten her address? This was supposed to be a secret location, hidden from the public eye. *Kinda creepy...* She unwrapped it. It was a realistic skinsuit, like those in the news. Was he crazy? This stuff was illegal! What if her father found out about this? Inside the box was a small note: "Wear this for our next date. It'll be fun!". Eleanor blushed. The disguise had an olive skin tone and a black wig. The instruction manual mentioned it was the Latina model and was a removable version of the bodysuit. "This might actually be fun" - she thought.

SKIN DEEP



Eleanor repacked the present and hid it in her luggage. Back in Washington, anticipation and curiosity got the better of her. Inside the box, she discovered that the bodysuit came with an outfit, a maid's uniform. She raised an eyebrow. "Kinky" she thought with a smirk. From a senator's daughter to a humble maid. Apparently he wanted to reverse the power dynamics between them. She eagerly slipped into the bodysuit with a thrill, donning the wig, brown contact lenses, and the maid uniform. As she adjusted the final pieces, she checked herself in the mirror. The bodysuit's details were not visible before wearing it but by now it was obvious that she looked like no random Latina. She was looking at the spitting image of Liliana, the family maid.

"What the hell?" Eleanor whispered, in a Oakland 2nd generation Latina accent. *Did Mateo have a crush on Liliana? And how did he manage to get a perfect replica of our maid's face?* As she adjusted the earring that came with the outfit, she heard a buzz. A voice. "Hello, Eleanor. Don't panic. My name is Mary. This isn't a kinky present from Mateo" the voice continued, calm yet menacing. "It's us. And you're going to cooperate." Eleanor's heart sank as icy fear gripped her. "Us?" "That's all you need to know for now. You will help us to retrieve the information your father hides in his safe. Only you know the combination, Eleanor. But only Liliana has access to that room." "I... I can't," she stammered, her throat tightening with panic. "Don't even think about disobeying us". Eleanor watched as her brown hands grabbed a duster and began cleaning the drawer. Her body moved on his own, without any possibility to control it. "That should be enough to convince you of the power we have over you. Now, be a good girl and you won't have any trouble, ok?" Eleanor gasped as control over her body returned. She nodded, too terrified to even think about resisting. "Is this permanent? I don't want to be stuck as a Latina maid!" - she replied, almost in tears. "Hmm, it depends on how you'll behave." "But they'll notice my disappearance! You won't get away with this!"



"We've covered that. Turn around."

Eleanor obeyed, her movements shaky. When she turned, her breath caught in her throat. Standing across the room was a perfect replica of herself. The double had her hair styled elegantly, her makeup flawless, and she was dressed in one of Eleanor's favorite date-night outfits.

"Hello, bitch." - she replied in Eleanor's voice.

"Who... who are you?"

The double rolled her eyes. "Jeez, you're such a blonde! Well, I guess I'm technically the blonde now." She smirked, giving her hair a playful flip. "Anyway, I'm Liliana, of course. Welcome to my life."

Eleanor's knees nearly buckled. "Liliana? You work with them?"

"They paid me for my cooperation. To be honest, I'd have done it for free." She stepped closer. "You have *no idea* how delicious this is going to be, little spoiled brat. After everything you've done to me, bullying, treating me like dirt..."

Eleanor shook her head, tears forming in her eyes. "I didn't..."

"Save it." Liliana waved a hand dismissively. "You don't even realize half the crap you've done. But that's fine. Now, I get to live here in luxury, wear your clothes, date your boyfriend..." She leaned in, her voice dropping to a venomous whisper. "...while you scrub floors and serve me drinks. Oh, how the tables have turned."

SKIN DEEP



Eleanor's heart raced, her mind spinning as the gravity of her situation sank in. She had been replaced, and the person now living her life was the very one she had unknowingly wronged. Liliana stepped back, her grin never faltering. "Now, be a good little maid and follow orders. You wouldn't want to make this harder on yourself... would you?" Mary's voice buzzed sharply in Eleanor's ear. "Enough small talk. Now, listen carefully. Go to your father's office as soon as he leaves. Open the safe. You know exactly where it's hidden, behind the painting. Only take the documents. Leave the jewelry. Replace them with the envelope in your pocket. It's a near-perfect replica; he won't notice the difference." With a heavy heart, the maid headed to her father's office, unnoticed by the household staff. She found the painting. Her father had told her his most treasures possessions were hidden behind the painting of a lake close to his native village. She gently lifted the painting, revealing the safe embedded in the wall. Her fingers hesitated over the keypad, trembling as she punched in the code: her baptism date. He had confessed the combination to her years ago, swearing her to secrecy. "Because you're special," he had said. Inside lay stacks of papers, glittering jewelry, and a single envelope marked *CLASSIFIED*. Eleanor swallowed hard, her hands shaking as she reached for the envelope. She placed it in her maid's apron and slid the replica in its place, carefully aligning it so that nothing looked amiss. The jewelry remained untouched, just as instructed. "Done," she whispered into the earpiece, her voice barely steady. "Release me from this now!" Mary's chuckle crackled through the device. "Not so fast, my dear. You have *one more task*." Eleanor's blood ran cold. *One more task*? The nightmare wasn't over yet. "Tomorrow, it'll be your turn to clean the senator's master bedroom," Mary's voice buzzed coldly in Eleanor's ear. "Place the microphones you'll find in the box all over his bedroom. We know he sometimes takes work phone calls there."



"I... I've never made a bed before." Eleanor confessed hesitantly.

"Right. Of course. Give me a second."

Suddenly, Eleanor felt a strange sensation ripple through her body. Her muscles twitched involuntarily, her joints stiffened, then loosened. When the sensation subsided, she gasped, her body tingling with unfamiliarity. "What... what have you done to me?"

"You now have the muscle memory of Liliana," Mary replied. "Her body language, her skills. It'll help you." Eleanor glanced down, noticing the subtle but unmistakable change in how her body carried itself. "No..." she whispered, watching in dismay as she moved with a feminine humility that had been drilled into Liliana through years of subservience. She was a senator's daughter, for fuck's sake! Mary's voice came again, calm and unbothered. "Don't fight it. You'll find it much easier to perform your tasks this way." Eleanor tried to stomp her foot in defiance, but even the motion came out as dainty and restrained. Tears blurred her vision. "Please," she choked out, "I did what you asked me to do. Now let me free! I'm not a maid!" Mary's tone sharpened. "You are *who we need you to be*, Eleanor. And you'll do exactly as instructed." Eleanor's breath hitched. She had no choice. "Good girl," Mary cooed, as if sensing Eleanor's silent surrender. "Now, rest up. Tomorrow's going to be a busy day."

The following day, Eleanor completed all her tasks with unsettling precision and grace. Her hands moved swiftly, folding sheets, tucking corners, and fluffing pillows with a skill she hadn't possessed just 24 hours ago. Her body seemed to flow effortlessly through the motions, bending and moving in a way that felt foreign yet natural. "Done," she whispered into the earpiece, her voice hollow.



“Good girl, Eleanor. I knew you’d come around. Now, get back to your duties before anyone notices. We’ll be in touch with your next instructions.”

Eleanor left the room, her head down, her movements dictated by someone else’s memories. Eleanor resolved to break free from her nightmare. Surely, if she spoke to her father directly, he would see through the disguise. No matter how they forced her to act like Liliana, he was her father—he’d recognize her.

Summoning her courage, she requested to speak with him. Surprisingly, her request was granted, and she was allotted five minutes in the afternoon. Her heart pounded as she entered his office. The senator sat at his desk, reviewing papers. He barely glanced up as she entered. Eleanor hated the way she naturally lowered her head and folded her hands in front of her, like a maid seeking approval.

“Sen. Hagerty, I am...” she began, her voice trembling. She tried to force the words out: *I am Eleanor, your daughter.* But instead, what came out was: “I am... Liliana, your maid.” *No! That’s not what I wanted to say!*

The senator smiled, his tone dismissive. “I know, Lily! What is it you need?”

Eleanor fought for control, trying to wrestle the conversation back. “I want... I want a salary increase,” she blurted out, her voice meek and subservient. *No! Stop it! That’s not what I’m here for!* She screamed internally, but her lips obeyed the script, not her mind. The senator leaned back, considering her request. “I see,” he said thoughtfully. “Well, you know we have many expenses. The reelection campaign cost me a fortune.” He paused, then added with a smirk, “But I could grant you a 5% increase—if you agree to wear that new uniform I showed you for the reelection party with my colleagues.”

SKIN DEEP



Eleanor hesitated as she looked at the uniform laid out before her. It was shockingly revealing and sexualizing. The navy-blue dress clung tightly to the torso, its white crisscross lacing emphasizing the curve of her waist. The neckline dipped lower than anything she had ever worn before, bordered with delicate ruffles that framed her exposed cleavage. The skirt flared out just enough to give it a playful, classic maid look, but it was impossibly short, leaving most of her legs exposed. What had she agreed to? Were her father and his colleagues such creeps?

She slid on the thigh-high white stockings, their lace-trimmed tops brushing against her skin as she adjusted them nervously. The final touch was the pair of sheer, lace gloves.

As Eleanor stood in front of the mirror, her reflection stunned her. The updo hairstyle and flawlessly applied makeup only heightened the effect of the uniform.

She crossed her arms over her chest, trying to cover herself. "This is ridiculous... I can't wear this!" she muttered, her cheeks burning with embarrassment.

Mary's voice crackled in her ear, sharp and unapologetic. "Oh, but you will. The senator's colleagues and friends will love it. Did you really think you could escape us? We only allowed you to talk to your dad because we hoped something good came out of it, and it did! We might even find our next target thanks to your little idea!"

SKIN DEEP



The re-election celebration was in full swing, the room filled with the laughter and chatter of influential men congratulating themselves on another term in power. If parading around in her humiliating maid uniform wasn't cringe-worthy enough, Eleanor found herself forced to endure the suffocating hypocrisy of these politicians. She listened as they clinked glasses and boasted about their policies, making promises to crack down on immigration and "secure the borders." Some even spoke about the deportation of Hispanic Americans, all while openly admiring her, their sexy Latina maid.

Among the crowd, was a young, chubby man with a round, freckled face that Eleanor recognized instantly. Joshua, her aunt's stepson. Joshua was *ogling* her with an intensity that made her skin crawl. It didn't take long for him to approach. "Hey, Lily," he said, his voice low. He reached out, his fingers brushing the hem of her skirt. "You look... really nice tonight." Eleanor stiffened, her heart pounding. "Please" she whispered, stepping back, but her movements were tentative, restrained. Joshua chuckled, leaning closer. "Aw, don't be shy. You know, I've always thought Latinas were... exotic. You're a real gem, Lily." Eleanor's stomach twisted as he continued, making thinly veiled, racially charged comments in a misguided attempt to flirt. The man she had once considered family now saw her as nothing more than a fetishized object, a caricature of her stolen identity. "Don't go running off now," he said, his tone playful but laced with entitlement. "Come on, give me a smile." The laughter and chatter of the party seemed distant, muffled by the blood pounding in Eleanor's ears. Her humiliation was complete, her stolen identity forcing her to endure the advances of someone who had once been kin.



A few days later, the new Eleanor sat comfortably in the study room, scrolling through the new app she had been given to tweak and tune the bodysuit's advanced settings. She called in her maid and smirked as she motioned her closer. "Hey, Lily," the new Eleanor said casually, "Come here. They gave me this app to fine-tune the bodysuit. It's a new feature they added to the newest generation. Pretty cool, huh?" The maid hesitated, her heart sinking as she approached. "What are you doing with it?"

"Oh, nothing much. Here, take it." The new Eleanor showed her the phone, her grin widening. "I don't think I'll need it anymore." The blonde tapped the *Language* tab, dragging the *Spanish* slider all the way over to the maid's avatar.

"Perfect. Let's test this out. Read something in Spanish," she ordered, gesturing to a nearby book on the desk.

Lily's hands trembled as she picked it up, her lips moving automatically. She began to read fluently, her voice filled with the soft cadence of a native Spanish speaker.

The new Eleanor laughed, clapping her hands. "I have no idea what you just said, which means it works haha!"

The maid set the book down, her face burning with humiliation, but the new Eleanor wasn't finished. "Oh, there's more. Let's see... *Desires*. Ah, this is interesting," the new Eleanor mused, her finger hovering over it. "Let's see... hmm. It says here my preferences are for white men. Heh, true. Yours instead are for Latino men. Haha, of course, a racist bitch like you secretly likes Latinos. Kinda boring though now, right? Why don't we flip them?"



The Latina's face drained of color. "Don't. Don't touch that," she whispered, backing away.

But the new Eleanor's grin turned wicked. "Oh, come on. What's the harm? I'll find Mateo less dull and you'll get over him, distracted as you'll be by gringos!"

"Nooo!" Lily cried, lunging forward, but it was too late. Both women froze as a strange, electric sensation coursed through their bodies. The former Eleanor's heart raced, fear flooding her mind. *Did it work? Is something wrong?* For a moment, she thought the app had glitched. Relief washed over her when she saw Mateo walk into the room. But then she blinked—and felt nothing. Mateo's smile now stirred no emotion. All she saw was a fellow Latino. A friend. A brother. She still had memories of her love for Mateo, but the attraction was gone. Meanwhile, the new Eleanor's cheeks flushed a deep crimson. Her breath hitched as her eyes locked on Mateo. "Fuck," she whispered, her voice trembling with excitement. "I get it now. He's just your type!"

To the maid's horror, a different feeling began creeping into her mind. She suddenly craved the attention of white men, an unfamiliar longing she didn't recognize but couldn't suppress. She felt a deep insecurity about her Hispanic heritage and an overwhelming desire to have children with a white man, as if it would somehow validate her existence. Memories of her family talking about "Mejorar la raza" emerged out of nowhere. The former Eleanor stood frozen, her mind spiraling into despair. "Looks like the app works perfectly," the new Eleanor purred. She let her words hang in the air for a moment before adding with mock sweetness, "I bet resisting Joshua's flirts will be difficult for you now."

SKIN DEEP



Lily's eyes widened as the words struck her. Joshua, the young, chubby, freckled stepson of her aunt who had flirted shamelessly with her at the party. The thought of him once disgusted her, but now... *No. No, no, no!* She clutched her chest as the intrusive thoughts bubbled to the surface. She could feel it, this new, unwanted pull toward him. She shook her head desperately. "What have you done to me? I... I can't stop thinking about him now!" The new Eleanor laughed, a cruel, delighted sound. "Oh, Lily, you're going to have so much fun in your new life. Don't fight it. Just let it happen."

Given the success of the senator's re-election celebration, another event was quickly arranged, a casual work drinks evening attended by the same crowd of politicians and their close associates. Eleanor found herself back in the humiliating maid outfit, serving drinks to the powerful men. Even the older senators, with their silver hair and commanding presence, made her heart race. Their power and confidence sent an unfamiliar thrill through her body, a reaction that horrified her but felt impossible to resist. But it was Joshua who drew her attention the most. She couldn't stop herself from seeking him out, glancing his way as she served drinks. She approached him with a tray, her voice soft. "Anything else you need, Sir?" she asked. Joshua's eyes lit up, emboldened by her tone. "There's a number of things you could do for me," he replied with a nervous laugh. To her horror, Eleanor felt her cheeks heat up, a blush spreading across her face. The maid giggled softly, her voice barely above a whisper. "Oh really? Well... you could stay here a little longer," she murmured, her gaze lowering shyly as she adjusted her tray. Joshua chuckled, leaning closer. "So, do you want me to stick around?" "Yeah..." she replied breathlessly, her voice trailing off. The sexual tension between them was thick, almost tangible. She hated every second of it, yet she couldn't stop herself.



Eleanor found herself leading Joshua down the hallway, her outfit sensually brushing his trousers. "I knew you were up to it haha," he said. When they entered a small guest room, Eleanor turned to face Joshua, her cheeks flushed and her breaths shallow. She hesitated for a moment, her trembling hands reaching for the ties of her maid outfit. She craved this. She craved *to be hit on by Joshua*. The thought both horrified and excited her. As she slipped out of the uniform, the fabric pooling at her feet, she revealed a matching set of red lingerie, lacy and seductive. Joshua's jaw dropped, his wide-eyed stare drinking her in. "Lily... wow. You're incredible," he stammered, his voice filled with unrestrained desire mixed with inexperience and awkwardness.

Eleanor took things in her own hands "Touch me... here", took his hands and guided him where it aroused her. Eleanor's voice dripped with need, her breath hitching as she guided Joshua's trembling hands over her body. The sensation sent shivers down her spine, and her lips parted in a soft gasp as her artificial desires overpowered her lingering rationality.

Joshua's inexperience was evident in the way his hands moved—hesitant, fumbling, but desperate to please. His cheeks burned bright red, and his voice cracked as he stammered, "L-Lily, I've never—"

Eleanor cut him off, her patience fraying under the weight of her manufactured longing. "Joshua, please," she whispered, her tone urgent and commanding. "I can't wait any longer. *Fuck me raw* or I'll lose my mind."

Shaking with pleasure, Eleanor realized life could be worth living even like that.

SKIN DEEP



Meanwhile, the organization was nurturing a snake in its bosom. In order to escape detection, N8, or Karen as she had restarted to see herself, had learned to play the long game. To survive, she had to act the part, suppressing her rebellious spirit and obeying orders without question. Over time, her compliance paid off. She gained access to the organization's full database, a privilege they didn't grant lightly.

There were hundreds of active bodysuits by now. This was an operation on a massive scale, and if the organization succeeded, they could infiltrate governments, corporations, and power centers worldwide. Karen knew she had to act fast.

Eventually, something caught her attention: one of the earliest bodysuits had been deactivated. Reading the report, she discovered something even more interesting. The bodysuit had been worn by a scientist named Rolanda Goldhaber, who had been instrumental in the development of the technology, but when she became too knowledgeable about it, the organization turned on her. They forced her to fuse with a bodysuit in the early development stages and tried to rewrite her memories. But Rolanda had escaped before they could finish. Karen's heart raced as she read further. According to the reports, Rolanda had somehow managed to rid herself of the bodysuit, breaking free from the organization's control. It was unprecedented. Her location was listed as *unknown*, but the report mentioned a lab in the United States as her last known whereabouts. After that, her trail went cold. With a bit of digging, Karen discovered that the lab had recently been donated to a science foundation.

SKIN DEEP



She did some research and managed to find the name of the spokesperson: Dr. Ruth Goldstein. A good starting point.

Karen had casually planned a Tel Aviv trip as a getaway, presenting it as a chance to escape the stress of her double life. But of course, she had an ulterior motive. She had traced Dr. Ruth Goldstein's location and decided to approach her directly. An extensive search made possible by the organization's extensive database revealed that Dr. Goldstein was a woman in her 40s working for a pharmaceutical company based in Tel Aviv. She was married with two kids. Karen spotted her after having dropped her kids at school.

Ruth was a Sephardic Jewish woman in her forties, her brown skin weathered by the relentless Israeli sun. Karen didn't waste time. "Dr. Goldstein?" she called out, catching up to Ruth. Ruth paused, her eyes flickering with curiosity and guardedness. "Do you know someone named Rolanda Goldhaber?" Ruth's expression shifted for just a second, enough for Karen to notice. "An esteemed colleague," Ruth said carefully. "She disappeared too early." "So you knew her!" Karen pressed. Ruth studied Karen intently. "Why don't you come to my place for some tea?" she finally said, her tone neutral but her eyes sharp.

SKIN DEEP



A few hours later, Ruth opened the door to her apartment, inviting Karen inside. "Please, sit," Ruth said as she disappeared into the kitchen and returned pouring two cups of tea from a kettle. It was a large yet anonymous apartment, showing wealth but a distinctive lack of family photos, and cultural traditional items.

As Karen sipped her tea, she felt an unsettling itch spreading across her skin. "What's going on?" Karen panicked as she scratched at her arm. "You're wearing a bodysuit, aren't you?" Ruth said bluntly, her tone colder. "Who sent you? Are those bastards coming for me? I thought they gave up!". Ruth grabbed a revolver from a drawer. Karen shook her head frantically. "Hey, stop, let me explain! I work for them... but I want to fight them now! Please, just make this stop!" Ruth sighed, her suspicion still evident but softened slightly. She set the revolver on the table but kept her hand near it and handed Karen a pill. "Take this. It'll stop the reaction."

Karen swallowed it quickly, and within moments, the itching subsided. She looked at Ruth, her expression torn between gratitude and wariness. "What did you give me? How did you know?"

"I do the questions here," she said firmly. "Who the fuck are you?"

"My name is Karen, I was tricked into wearing a bodysuit and forced to work for them. My memory was almost completely erased too."



Ruth sighed again, sitting across from Karen. "Shit. I'm so sorry you had to go through that. I owe you an explanation," she began. "See, I'm partially responsible for all of this. I know how those bodysuits work because... I helped create them. I didn't always look like this, you see." She handed her a picture of a blonde girl at a graduation ceremony. Karen's eyes widened. "So you're Rolanda? Are you wearing a bodysuit right now?"

Ruth nodded slowly. "I am Rolanda, yes. But no, I'm not wearing a bodysuit. Not anymore."

Karen frowned in confusion. "Then how do you...?"

"When I escaped the organization, I underwent a procedure to remove the suit. It wasn't easy. It required years of research and help from someone I trusted. The process stripped me of the bodysuit, but it left me permanently changed. My body took on the ethnicity of the suit, Sephardic Jewish. But I don't mind. I see it as karma."

"Karma?".

Ruth nodded. "My grandparents were German scientists during World War II. They came to America through Operation Paperclip. I see this as a way of paying a debt for my whole family. Now we celebrate Hanukkah every year." - she added with a small, bittersweet smile. Karen sat back, stunned. "Wow, so you're really this... Jewish woman now."



"I am," Ruth said firmly.

Karen shook her head, still struggling to piece everything together. "Still, I don't get it. How did you manage to do all this research in freedom while still wearing a bodysuit? Why didn't they stop you?"

"Early bodysuits were more rudimentary... Not in terms of how realistic they were. But the range of their control over them was limited. Memory erasure was luckily not an option back then. And *their* network was also not as developed as it is now." - she added with a scoff. "To be honest, I had almost given up any hope of fighting them. I was content with my quiet, mediocre life here. But maybe, if we work together..."

Karen's jaw tightened. "Those bastards stole my life and had another woman impersonate me. I want to fight them. I need to."

Ruth nodded, her eyes glinting with determination. "We need to be careful. If you're still wearing a bodysuit, they're probably tracking your position. But maybe... just maybe, there's a way to free you too."

Karen looked at Ruth, hope flickering in her chest. For the first time in a long while, she didn't feel entirely alone.



“So you’re saying I could undergo this procedure to escape from their control too?” - Karen asked, shocked by how quickly her perspectives had changes.

“Yes,” Ruth said firmly. “I’ll need time to prepare the machines—they’ve been sitting untouched for years—but it should be possible. Based on your reaction earlier, your bodysuit behaves just like mine did. But...” She hesitated for a moment before continuing, her tone turning somber. “It comes at a price. Once the procedure is done, your body will no longer be compatible with *any* bodysuits. They won’t be able to seal onto you because the process will cause your body to produce an autoimmune response that rejects the suit completely.”

Karen’s head spun as the implications hit her. She looked down at her brown arms, running her fingers over the unfamiliar skin. “Trapped as this... brown woman forever?” she murmured, her voice trembling. Her thoughts swirled. She had just begun to recover fragments of her original identity—her name, her ethnicity, the faint outlines of who she used to be. Was she ready to give that up entirely? The organization had dangled promises in front of her like a carrot on a stick, assuring her that if she remained loyal, she’d earn a bodysuit that looked much closer to her original self. And now Ruth was offering her freedom, but at the cost of closing that door forever.

“Yes,” Ruth confirmed. “But first, you need to go. We can’t risk them getting suspicious by your behavior. I’ll get in touch with you. But first, there’s something you could do for me.”

SKIN DEEP



Rolanda had asked Karen to track down one of her closest former collaborators, Dr. Aleksandra Symanski, who could help her reactivate the machines and free Karen from her bodysuit. Rolanda had lost contact with her long before, but she hoped Aleksandra had also managed to escape.

Karen returned to the US and worked as usual, finding new victims for the organization. In her free time, however, she managed to trace Aleksandra down to a small apartment in Atlanta.

She rang the bell, and a young woman opened the door. Something was wrong. The woman who opened the door looked nothing like the Polish scientist Karen had seen in photos. Standing before her was a young Black woman, no older than twenty-one, wearing a frilly maid outfit that was clearly picked by a kinky owner. Karen felt a sudden wave of arousal when she saw her. She was just her type. She hesitated, trying to hide her feelings. "Is Dr. Symanski at home?" - she asked.

The woman blinked in surprise before letting out a dry laugh. "Oh, lawd. Ain't nobody called me *that* in a while" she said, her voice carrying a Georgia twang. "I... go by Alex now. Who are you?" Karen was shocked. Clearly Aleksandra was wearing a bodysuit, but why did she sound like an airhead? Something was off. In any case, she quickly explained her everything, how she had met Rolanda and the role expected from her in freeing Karen from her bodysuit. But Alex only stared at her, a half-smirk on her lips, before letting out a sigh.

SKIN DEEP



"I'm real glad to hear Rolanda doin' fine. Years ago we worked on a device that could free folks from them bodysuits, but the organization caught up with me. They tried makin' me talk, wanted me to tell 'em where Rolanda was hidin'. But when they got I wouldn't talk, they decided to make an example outta me. See, I wrote this paper once, 'bout differences in intelligence between races. It was real controversial. They called me racist for it, but I ain't never believed science oughta stop just 'cause society don't like what it say. And truth is, I never liked Black folks much. We don't have many of 'em back in Poland. Anyway, they told me if I ain't cooperate, they was gon' put me in a bodysuit, turn me into a Black girl. But it weren't just 'bout changin' my body. They said they'd strip away all my technical knowledge, dumb me down 'til I ain't smarter than your average ghetto girl. They wanted to humiliate me, show what happens when you think you're too smart. I won't lie, it was terrifyin'. For a second, I almost broke. But I knew if I gave 'em Rolanda, there'd be no hope left for *nobody*. And let's be real... even if I had talked, they woulda wiped my mind anyway. I knew too much." Karen's chest tightened. She could see the pain flickering behind Alex's eyes.

"I told 'em I wasn't scared. Told 'em they couldn't break me. But they just laughed. Called in all my colleagues, made 'em watch. Strapped me down in this... this mechanical chair. Then they forced me into that suit, and I ain't make it easy for 'em. I kicked, I screamed, I *knew* once it was on, there weren't no takin' it off. But they had me strapped down tight in some kinda mechanical chair, couldn't do nothin' but holler. I watched as they rolled that brown skin up over my legs, then my torso, then my arms.

SKIN DEEP



Then came the worst part” - Alex’s voice fractured as she touched her face, her fingers tracing the edges of her jawline as if searching for something lost - “They stretched that mask over my face, smoothed it down ‘til I looked like this.”

Karen noticed how Alex’s posture stiffened—a woman who’d learned to wear her new skin like armor, but now, reliving the memory, the cracks showed.

“Then they put me in this suit and showed me my reflection. Lawd, I damn near fainted. It was too painful seein’ myself turned into one of *them Black folks*. The words dripped with old, venomous prejudice. And flipped the switch on my mind. I felt like my brain was being fried. My IQ dropped from 143 to 78, bit by bit, and there wasn’t nothin’ I could do to stop it. It was horrifyin’. All my science, all my learnin’, just... gone. They filled my head with rap songs, Afrobeats, dumb nonsense—just to mess with me. Like they wanted to rub it in, make sure I knew I wasn’t me no more. Then they said they had a lil’ test for me. Told me if I could answer some simple high school questions, they’d bring my IQ back. I was *hyped*. I *had* to remember somethin’, right? One of my old colleagues asked me what size a human cell was. My mind went blank. I scratched my head, gigglin’ like a damn fool. ‘I dunno ‘bout that, but a prison cell ‘bout a few feet,’ I said. ‘Oh man, I’m so dumb now!’ I heard my own voice, high and girly, and it was humiliatin’. I was suddenly the dumbest person in the room

Alex paused, her eyes distant, as if reliving the moment. “They laughed. I *laughed*. But deep down, I wanted to scream.”

SKIN DEEP



"Then came some logic questions. Somethin' about black and white balls, guessin' the color from some hints. I stared at 'em, my brain strugglin' to keep up. 'Black balls should be bigger, right? More cum.' That's all I said. Some of 'em looked horrified. Some of 'em was tryin' not to laugh."

She let out a shaky breath, her shoulders slumping. "I failed the test. They told me my results would've been subpar even in the worst high schools in Atlanta. I had always been an excellent student, top of my class, and now... now I was the worst of the worst. They took everythin' from me, my mind, my body, my dignity."

Karen hesitated, then pulled Alex into a hug. The maid stiffened at first, her body rigid with pride or shame—Karen couldn't tell—but after a heartbeat, Alex sagged against her, trembling.

"They unlocked my cuffs and let me wander 'round. I looked down at the chemical formulae I'd scribbled just hours before, lines and symbols that might as well've been chicken scratch. I wasn't a threat to 'em no more.

"Listen, you might have failed the test but you still recall the whereabouts of Rolanda, right?" - one of them asked me.

"Yeah, yeah, but I ain't tellin' y'all nothin'. She's comin' for me. She's gonna fix this—gonna put my brains and body right again!"

"I'm afraid she won't be able to, darling. Even if she were to take off the bodysuit, you would stay Black and dumb as a rock as you are now."



"You're lyin'!" I shouted, my voice cracking.

"Nope. Once the neurons we shut off start dying, there is no cure. And once your DNA's changed? Well... that's permanent, sugar. The only way to stop it is if you talk now."

They set a mirror right in front of me, makin' sure I saw *what* I'd become. A big-breasted Black girl stared back at me, her eyes wide and lost, her mind sluggish and thick like molasses. It was too much. Too *damn* much. They made me beg. And I did. And I told 'em everything. I sobbed, my shoulders shakin' as I begged 'em to fix me, to make me Aleksandra again. But they just laughed. Said it was too late. I cried myself to sleep for days. The shame of betrayin' Rolanda for nothing felt like a stone. But time kept movin', and as the days turned to weeks and the weeks to months, I knew one thing for sure—Rolanda was still out there. And she had gotten away.

"She did," Karen whispered, her hand lingering on Alex's arm. "And she's fighting. You survived. That's not nothing. I'm just so sorry you had to go through all of this."

"Survived? Look at me." She gestured to her maid uniform, the frills suddenly grotesque. "I'm a punchline. A genius turned *this*."

"You're alive," Karen insisted, her voice firm. "And alive means there's a chance." Alex studied her, then let out a tired chuckle. "Hope's your thing, huh? Fine. But don't expect no miracles."

SKIN DEEP



"I'm afraid I can't help ya no more" she added. "I got me a PhD in genetics, but I'm dumb as a rock, all the biology I remember now is that mitochondria's the powerhouse of the cell." Her smirk faded. Karen's stomach twisted.

Karen couldn't help but stare at Alex in disbelief. She could hardly believe the Black girl in front of her was the brilliant geneticist she was looking for. She now had flawless, deep brown skin that seemed to glow in the soft light of the apartment. Her full lips were painted a glossy pink, and her almond-shaped eyes sparkled under long, curled lashes. Her thick black hair fell in voluminous waves, framing her youthful, heart-shaped face. Her hourglass figure was accentuated by the frilly maid outfit she wore, a cruel reminder of what the organization had reduced her to.

She laughed bitterly. "The organization gave me a new job, ya know? A real nice offer to thank me for my *collaboration*. A maid job."

Karen felt sick.

"Yeah, a maid," Alex said, rolling her eyes. "Gotta eat, don't I? Ain't like I got many other options no more."

Alex adjusted her frilly apron, letting out a heavy sigh. "Now, if you'll excuse me... I got floors to scrub." she said. "You tell Rolanda I miss her, but... I can't do nothin' no more to help her." She paused, her gaze dropping to the polished floor before looking back at Karen, a sad, bitter smile.



"Wait, I want to stay in touch with you..." Karen blurted out.

Alex gave her a long, meaningful look, her lips curling into a slight smirk. "I'm sorry, sugar, but... I'm straight! I like *dikk!*".

Karen's face flushed with embarrassment. "I didn't mean that!" - she replied, her voice rising an octave. *God, was I that obvious?* she thought. "I meant, I could maybe work from our Atlanta offices for a while... so we'd stay in touch, in case I hear anything from Rolanda."

Alex's smirk softened, and she gave a small nod. "Ohh, okay. Sure," she said simply, her tone casual, though her eyes lingered on Karen with a hint of amusement.

The following day, Karen was in the middle of a meeting, going over the next steps in her plan. As the meeting wrapped up and the others began to filter out, she spotted a familiar figure entering the room. Alex, dressed in her maid uniform, was quietly cleaning the meeting table. Their eyes met briefly, and Alex gave her a knowing look before returning to her work, her expression unreadable.

Then, an idea sparked in Karen's mind. She couldn't return to Rolanda completely empty-handed.

She started flirting with Alex. At first, it was just little remarks, playful smiles. She realized she didn't even have to *try*, it came naturally to her. "Since when had women become so alluring? Damn!" - she told herself.

SKIN DEEP



Alex, stuck in her youthful African body, her once-brilliant mind dulled and replaced with naive, carefree energy, had become a natural tease. She giggled easily, swayed her hips without thinking, and played up her charm without realizing it worked on *everyone*, especially on Karen.

Karen realized there was an opportunity. If she could convince the organization to grant her some more private time with Alex, maybe she could find a way to reach whatever was left of the real Dr. Symanski. And if that meant playing along, well... Karen had played worse roles before.

"Alex, sweet cheeks," the Indian-looking woman purred one evening, leaning against the doorway as Alex wiped down the conference table. "Why don't you stay a lil' longer after work today? I got some dirt you could work on..." She paused, then smirked. "In my dirty mind." She let out a playful laugh, her gaze lingering.

Alex blinked, then giggled, swaying her hips slightly as she stacked the chairs. "Oh, you somethin' else," she replied, shaking her head.

Karen had gained enough status within the organization that her behavior went unquestioned. Flirting with a lower-level employee like Alex wasn't just tolerated, it reassured the higher-ups that she was fully *invested* in her new role. If anything, it made them trust her more. And that was exactly what Karen needed.

Karen's colleagues exchanged amused looks as they noticed the interest Karen had taken in the young Black maid. They all knew she had a weak spot for Black ladies so it didn't surprise them.

SKIN DEEP



After everyone else had left, Karen led Alex to a small, local lab she had access to. The goal was simple—get Alex to feel something, to see if any fragments of her past self could resurface.

At first, Alex just wandered, looking out of place in the lab, but then something shifted. Her fingers traced along the edges of a countertop, and she instinctively reached for a set of containers, turning them over in her hands. A flicker of intelligence sparked in her dull brown eyes.

Karen watched closely. “What are those?” she asked.

Alex frowned, staring at the labels like they were just out of reach. “Dunno,” she muttered. “Just... muscle memory, I guess.” She turned to Karen, an odd mix of confusion and excitement flickering in her eyes. “But I think this was a good idea. Somethin’ ‘bout bein’ here feels right.”

Karen leaned in. “Do you remember anything? Anything about your work?”

Alex bit her lip, tapping her fingers on the container. “I recall some procedure we was workin’ on with Rolanda... It’s fuzzy, but it’s there. Maybe if she was here, I could still be of some help.” She let out a dry laugh, shaking her head. “Even though I don’t understand nothin’ no more. Ohh, shit... this givin’ me a headache.”

It wasn’t much, but it was a start. “Good girl” - Karen added, smacking her butt. She couldn’t resist it. Not all of her flirting was merely instrumental to her goal. The Black maid, used to all sorts of humiliations, didn’t react but Karen seemed to notice a spark in her eyes.



In the meanwhile, the organization was making their own moves, too.

Evelyn Leblanc was a brilliant Canadian “white hat” hacker. Her work involved breaking into systems to identify vulnerabilities, a job that kept her on the ethical side of the tech world. She was one of the very best in her field, respected and admired, yet her job bored her to death.

On what seemed like another routine day at the office, Evelyn opened her inbox to find a job offer that immediately grabbed her attention. The email wasn’t the first “black hat” proposition she had received, but this one was different. The description was vague but tantalizing, and the offered salary was astronomical, far beyond anything she had ever imagined. Whoever they were, they weren’t amateurs. Attached to the email was a snippet of code, and it was some of the most sophisticated work she’d ever seen. Curiosity overwhelmed her. Against her better judgment, she replied to the email. They provided more details, they wanted to target big tech companies, political entities, central banks... Evelyn smiled. Her company provided services for most of them. One thing led to another, and soon, she found herself agreeing to meet the mysterious recruiters in person.

Evelyn arrived at the upscale, anonymous office building. As she stood there, a part of her screamed: “What the heck are you doing, Evelyn?” She thought of her peaceful town in Nova Scotia, her down-to-earth parents, her bubbly friends. What, if they knew, would they think of her? She scrolled her head and entered the building. She wanted more from life than a boring office job.



She was led into a sleek conference room where an Asian woman named Mary greeted her. Evelyn couldn't shake the unpleasant feeling that she was sitting across from someone who already knew everything about her. Mary wasted no time. "Evelyn, your skills would be essential in your new job. But they alone are not enough. Plus, your face is a liability. You're too well-known. If you were to join us, you'd need a new identity."

"A new identity? Like, online aliases?"

Mary chuckled. "Not quite. Have you heard of bodysuits?"

Evelyn's heart skipped a beat. she had heard rumors about them. Creepy stuff. People disappearing, coming back looking like someone else. "Yeah" - she replied, trying to sound chill.

"Imagine this: you could be a beautiful, confident woman with access to places and people you could only dream of. Combine that with your skills, and you'd be unstoppable. You could seduce powerful men, gain access to their secrets. With your hacking abilities, you'd be the ultimate spy. Think of it as becoming a female James Bond." Evelyn hesitated, her eyes dropping to the table. She couldn't deny the temptation. A part of her had always felt invisible, trapped in a life that never quite fit. The idea of becoming someone entirely new was intoxicating. "But... what would I even look like?"

Mary slid a tablet across the table, the screen lighting up with an image. Evelyn froze.



The avatar was... *Asian*. Exotic. Unapologetically sensual. "Not what I was expecting, not gonna lie" she said dryly, arching an eyebrow.

"It's not that I'm against Asian women, but couldn't I be a charming blonde?"

"We like to make people look as different as they can be from their old bodies. This minimizes the risk of being identified. Plus, a lot of your targets have... an Asian fetish."

"Ugh. Ok. I thought for a second you guys worked for China." Mary shrugged, unfazed. "You're free to think whatever you like."

Evelyn studied the image again, conflicted. Becoming a sort of spy, an Asian bombshell was exciting yet scary. "What's the catch?" Mary's smile cut. "The suit becomes you. Permanently." "Wait... are we talking about a *permanent* change?"

"Yes. You'd be stuck looking like that for the rest of your life. It's a lifetime commitment." Evelyn inhaled sharply, her mind racing. "I... I need air." No going back. No way to undo it. She thought of her old life—her face, her ethnicity, her identity—all of it erased in an instant. Was she really ready to leave it all behind? Then she thought about her boring life, hating her job, being unnoticed by men, and she knew she had enough of it. This was a once-in a lifetime chance to live an exciting life and she knew she had to take it.



"I might curse myself tomorrow" she said, meeting Mary's gaze. "But let's do this."

"Good choice" Mary said with a satisfied smile. "We'll reserve the lab for tomorrow." Outside, Evelyn gripped her phone, Evelyn's trembling thumb hovered over *Message Sofia*. Would her sister mourn the woman vanishing tonight? She wrote something, then she deleted the draft and called an uber. Regret, she decided, was a problem for tomorrow.

The following day, they met again in the basement of the same building. Mary lead Evelyn to an automated closet with sleek, futuristic lighting. Evelyn shivered as she undressed, the previous day's bravado crumbling. Mary helped the shy girl out of her lingerie. "Cold feet? Relax, darling. It's normal to feel a little nervous. Soon, you'll have a brand new body." From a box neatly placed on one of the shelves, Mary pulled out a golden brown bodysuit. Then she began slipping the suit on her.

The tight rubber stretched over her pale skin, first over her legs, up her torso, and finally her face. Her skin tingled where the suit touched. Daphne choked as her pelvis compacted, ribs fracturing and reforming into a wasp waist. "It's *hurting*" she rasped through reforming vocal cords. "Focus on your breath, beauty is pain." Mary ordered. *Femurs* shortened, centimeters redistributed to her chest. Her breast merged with the ample orbs of the bodysuit, their weight feeling alien.



The face-mold struck hardest. A gasp escaped her lips as her *cartilage liquefied, her nasal bridge collapsed and* her cheekbones lifted, sculpting angles no European ancestor had ever carried. "What was that?" - she asked, frightened. "Your face is changing, sweetie! It'll be over soon. These new models are fast but might hurt a little." Her lips swelled into a perfect, pouty curve, and her jaw softened. "M-My eyes-!" she cried, as the blepharoplasty nanobots stitched epicanthic folds. "Everything is ok. Almost there." - Mary tried to comfort her, leaving her more confused than ever. Then, with methodical precision, Mary massaged a special lotion into her skin and, after a minute, gave her some lingerie to cover up. Daphne stumbled toward the floor-length mirror. Her hands—*were those her hands?*—fluttered over the alien body shapes.

Mary stepped closer, a black wig in hand, and carefully positioned it atop Evelyn's head. It slithered onto her scalp, each synthetic strand grafting to her follicles. Next came opaque contacts that burned, dissolving Evelyn's green irises into deep brown. Finally, she handed her a tacky black latex outfit. Evelyn slipped it on, and as she adjusted it, she couldn't help but notice how her new body filled it perfectly. "Christ, I look like a.. I look like a stripper!" Mary smirked. "Well, *Miss Daphne Wong*, that's exactly what you'll be known as. A stripper job will be your cover. You're a second-generation Chinese-Canadian woman with a well-paid gig at *The Black Cat* in Toronto."

"Daphne Wawng?" The name felt foreign on her tongue. She frowned. "That's *my* surname? I can't even pronounce it."



Mary's smirk deepened. "Good point. Let me fix that."

She picked up a small tablet, tapping a few commands before looking up. "Alright," she said, switching to Mandarin. "跟我重复一遍：'我的名字是 Daphne 黄'—Repeat after me, 'My name is Daphne Wong.'" Daphne's mouth betrayed her, reciting the phrase with flawless tonal inflection. She gaped, fingers pressed to her lips. "What the hell?" Mary gave a satisfied nod. "Better, no?" Mary quipped. Daphne's eyes widened. "Oh my God, I speak Chinese! And—" she paused—"I have a little accent in English too!" Her vowels softened; her *R*'s rounded like teacups. Mary chuckled. "Mmh, yeah. Now the backstory: second-gen immigrant, daddy issues, orphaned at nine, moved to Canada and raised by a tiger aunt in Markham, trauma sealed behind that pretty smile." Daphne clawed at her throat. "But my *real* family—" "Believe you never existed. Oh, and we've purged every trace of 'Evelyn Leblanc'—school records, family photos, cloud backups. Poof. You've always been Ximeng Wong. Check any archive—grade school transcripts, dental records, even a positive COVID test from 2020. You've always been this." Daphne swallowed hard. "By the way, Daphne is just your Western name. Your real name is Ximeng Wong."

Daphne blinked. "Wow... Okay, I guess. I always wanted to learn a foreign language. Although, it feels weird to have an accent in *my own* native tongue." Daphne took a deep breath, staring at her reflection in the mirror. "Alright, alright." She paused, a thought striking her. "Wait... if I took a DNA test, what would it show?" "DNA tests, dental records have changed, your *blood* sings Han Chinese. These suits don't disguise, they *replace*." Daphne exhaled sharply. "So I'm just... a Chinese woman now? No big deal?" "But look on the bright side—" Mary's smile didn't reach her eyes. "—you're finally *interesting*."

SKIN DEEP



Daphne stepped into her penthouse that would be her new home, courtesy of the organization, the city lights of Toronto glittering through the windows. Daphne's stilettos *click-clacked* across cold marble. She took a shower, scrubbing until her skin blushed raw, but her new exotic scent clung: jasmine perfume over the alkaline tang of the bodysuit, and changed into something more comfortable than the black PVC stripper outfit she wore. The delicate lace lingerie hugged her curves, the sheer fabric clinging to her impossibly perfect hourglass figure.

She ran her hands over her smooth, golden-brown skin, result of South Chinese ancestry combined with with California beach tan, feeling the way her foreign body responded to even the slightest touch. She wondered if they'd tweaked her amygdala too, rewired her to *enjoy* this captivity. She inspected her body further. She was hairless. Everywhere. Her nipples had darkened to a brown tone. Her full lips curled into a slow smirk as she traced a hand over her cinched waist, down to her hips, marveling at how effortlessly sensual she looked. "Men will lose their minds over this" she murmured, tracing the surgical precision of her waist.

Stepping toward the mirror, she took in her reflection. the sleek black bob grazing sharp cheekbones, almond eyes widened by artful brows and lashes that cast shadows. Her lips, full and inviting, looked made to be kissed. And her body—*this* body—was something men would *crave*.

Her old self flickered through her mind—pale skin, boring European features, a life as forgettable as a smudged fingerprint. "*Men will finally notice me now,*" she thought, tilting her head as she admired herself. "*Finally, I will be lusted after. Even if it meant becoming a Chinese cunt, it'll be worth it.*"



The following night was Daphne's first shift at *The Black Cat*. Her mission had already begun—learning her role, slipping seamlessly into this new life. For now, they were still watching, still deciding whether she was truly one of them. What she didn't know was that she was the first to do this willingly. Others had been forced—rewritten, reshaped against their will. But she had *chosen* this.

Her outfit was nearly identical to the first one she had ever worn in this body, tight, black PVC, only one difference. *No panties*. The directive had been delivered with clinical detachment by the handler who'd zipped her into this second skin. Just smooth, bare skin. They had handed her a drink before sending her out, telling her it would help her *relax*. She took a slow sip, letting the warmth settle in her stomach.

She settled into a private booth, crossing her legs in a way that showed just enough, and let her gaze drift around the club. But what caught her attention most was the way the men stared at her. She felt them like infrared lasers—pinpricks mapping the topography of her hips, the engineered swell of her breasts. A man in a suit licked his lips as she passed, his wedding band glinting. *I could ruin you*, she thought.

She had never been looked at like this before. Not as Evelyn. But *Daphne*—Daphne was a fantasy, a prize, something men *desired*. A slow smirk played on her lips as she leaned back, running a hand through her sleek, jet-black hair. "I could get used to this."

SKIN DEEP



Another wealthy man in a sharp business suit sauntered over, his smile polished, his confidence effortless. With a charming ease, he offered her a drink. No rings. She hesitated, the warmth from her earlier cocktail still buzzing in her veins, making her head light, her body thrumming with a strange, lingering heat. She declined, already feeling tipsy—already feeling *something* from whatever they had slipped into her first glass.

But when he spoke, when he looked at her like that... she melted. She wasn't used to this kind of attention, wasn't used to a man like *him* being within reach. Before, someone like him would have never given her a second glance.

Now, he wanted her.

Without thinking twice, she let herself fall into his offer, into his world. And when he invited her to his hotel room, she didn't even hesitate.

She woke up alone. The spot beside her was empty, the only trace of him a neatly stacked pile of hundred-dollar bills on the bed. Her stomach tightened as she stared at them, the weight of what had just happened settling in. She swallowed hard and reached for the cash.

She had passed the test. She was convincing—seamlessly slipping into the role of a high-class escort.



And now, her next target was lined up: the CEO of a second-tier IT firm where she briefly used to work. He was a pathetic little man with a predictable Asian fetish.

"We need to amp up your *Asian-ness*," her boss Mary informed her, her tone matter-of-fact.

Daphne scoffed. "You already gave me slit eyes and a black bob!" Then she paused, fingers running through her hair. "Wait... this isn't a wig. It's *growing*."

Her boss barely glanced at her. "Obviously. You've got black hair now. Everywhere."

"Of course. Silly me." Daphne replied, still not used to her new body.

She tossed an outfit at her. "Anyway, this is what you'll wear tonight." Her outfit was a striking blend of elegance and seduction. A form-fitting black leather cheongsam-inspired dress, with a dramatic cut-out neckline, revealing ample cleavage.

Daphne held it up, rolling her eyes before smirking. "Well, at least now I can't be accused of cultural appropriation, huh?" Her smirk faltered slightly. "God, look at me. I'm a walking stereotype. The hair, the dress..." She exhaled, shaking her head. "I thought this was going to be enjoyable but being sexualized like this... is demeaning as hell."



As she adjusted the fabric, she caught her reflection and tilted her head. The transformation was undeniable. She ran a hand down her curves, lips curving into a slow smile. "On the other hand you know... I have to admit," she murmured, almost to herself, "I'm starting to see why men are so obsessed with Asian women."

They met at *The Black Cat*, in Daphne's usual spot. He had been told a new Asian *hottie* was in town, and he had practically rushed to see her.

From the moment he sat down, the clumsy compliments began. She had seen him before, countless times in professional settings, corporate meetings where he confidently broke down quarterly earnings, even in one-on-one discussions where she had once admired his composure around women. He had always seemed *respectful*. Now he was horny, overeager, blurting out awkward, borderline offensive remarks about Asian women. And that's when it hit her. He hadn't been *respectful* before. He just hadn't been *interested*.

Then they talked about tech—his favorite subject. She played dumb, nodding along, feigning curiosity. That was the hardest part. Back when she was Evelyn, she would have dominated the conversation, maybe even impressed him. Now, people—especially men—just assumed she was dumb, just because she was gorgeous. It was one of the more annoying drawbacks of her new persona.



Still, it made things easier in other ways. Seducing him took no effort. He fell for her in record time. A few drinks, a few teasing touches, and they were tangled in his bedsheets. Not that he lasted long. A couple of minutes, and he was out cold. Which was fine. That was all she needed. As he snored beside her, Daphne slipped out of bed and reached for his personal laptop, the real prize of the night. She already knew her way around the system, but this time, she had unrestricted access. Within minutes, she had extracted everything she needed—sensitive details on countless clients, their transactions, their secrets. She never would have gotten this far as the geeky girl she used to be.

She slipped into the cheongsam dress before heading for the door. As she stepped out into the night, a flicker of doubt settled in her chest. Had she really traded a respectable life as a geek for this—a glorified escort, wrapped up in the affairs of a shadowy criminal organization? *This is what you chose*, she reminded herself.

When Daphne was assigned a new, longer mission, she felt a strong sense of relief. This time, she wouldn't be posing as an escort, she would be hired as a secretary for a powerful tycoon. Her job was to spy on him, gathering inside information that only a trusted employee could access. Even if it was just a cover, having a respectable job felt better than playing a full-time escort. But Daphne wasn't naive. She knew why they'd picked her. Her forged credentials were flawless: Trinity College, fluent in Mandarin and corporate doublespeak. But she knew the unspoken criteria. Harding's HR memos might tout "diversity initiatives," but his hiring practices screamed another agenda: *Asian. Voluptuous.*



Day one, she armored herself in pressed linen—a high-collared qipao blouse, pencil skirt strangling her thighs—only to have Harding’s lip curl. “Miss Wong,” he’d purred, circling her like a curator assessing flawed porcelain, “let’s refine your... aesthetic.” The “shopping trip” was a coronation of humiliation. Harding selected her latex qipao himself, black-gloved attendants draping her in gleaming mahogany rubber. “Tradition with *vision*,” he declared, thumb brushing the gold clasp at her throat. Daphne quickly realized that “business attire” in this office had a very *specific* interpretation. The outfit he picked for her was outrageous, an over sexualized take on a qipao. The form-fitting dress was made of deep brown latex, glossy and skin-tight. The short sleeves and high collar retained a nod to tradition, fastened with delicate gold clasps and a soft pink bow, but the design was anything but conservative. A bold cutout across the chest left little to the imagination. Gold satin gloves stretched up past her elbows, adding an air of elegance. She had hoped, just *once*, to be taken seriously. Even if she was just playing a role. But instead, she was treated like a *dress-up doll*.

Sitting behind the grand mahogany desk, she folded her gloved hands neatly in front of her, channeling as much poise as she could manage, but she felt like a caricature of Chinese beauty, tailored to the tastes of men who didn’t see past the surface. She had hoped to be a brilliant, covert spy, but now she was just ornamental, a piece of exotic décor meant to be admired, not taken seriously.



With a perfectly measured smile—and a Chinese accent that her boss *encouraged*—she greeted the visitors. She was just eye candy, with no real other task than looking pretty.

One day, she caught her reflection in a glass door at the office. No one overlooked her anymore. Men wanted her, craved her—but was that really better? Before, they saw her as a person. Now, they saw a fantasy, a plaything. A trophy.

And the racism—God, the racism. She had rolled her eyes at talk of white privilege, called it exaggeration. She had dismissed colleagues' rage about microaggressions, once sneering "*Stop playing the victim*" in a boardroom. But now, in this skin, she felt it: the condescending whispers, the fetishizing stares, every leering "*Ni hao*" hissed in nightclubs. It was real. It had always been real. She just hadn't been the one suffering for it, until now. And even if she *wasn't* really Asian, she was starting to feel *bothered* by it. Daphne was deeply unhappy with the trade she had made. After the end of the mission, she called Mary and demanded a meeting, hoping that something could be done. "I want out of these stereotypical Chinese roles," she said firmly. "I'm sick of them. I refuse to be reduced to a bait for horny men with yellow fever." "Fine," Mary said, as if she had been expecting this. "No more stereotypical Chinese roles. But if you want something different... I have another project for you, a long undercover mission. But you'll need to undergo a makeover for your new role."



That was how Daphne found herself sitting in a sleek room that looked more like a high-end salon than a meeting space. She sat in a chair, flinching as the stylist began woving jet-black extension into her scalp, each strand heavier than the last. “*Nanocarbon keratin*” she murmured, as if that excused the scalp-sting of each threaded strand. Daphne winced but said nothing. She *wasn’t* thrilled about having longer hair, but at least she wouldn’t be stuck with that a black bob that screamed *Asian doll*. Mary’s stiletto heels clicked into the room. The chair was turned away from the mirror. “Regretting your choices already?”

“I miss my old life,” Daphne admitted, her voice raw with frustration. “I was a cybersecurity analyst. Men listened when I spoke. Now they just... *leer*.” The memory of last week’s mark—his fingers “accidentally” brushing her thigh under the meeting room table—twisted her stomach. Mary scoffed. “Contracts don’t care about your nostalgia, darling. *Adapt or perish*. This is what attractive women have to go through everyday. And as for your assignments you’ll get what’s *useful* to us, not what you *like*.”

Daphne clenched her fists. A sudden yank at her scalp made her gasp. The stylist was coiling her hair into rolls. “What is this?” she asked, uneasy. Her fingers scrambled to trace rigid coils on her nape. “What *is* this?!” - she asked.

Mary’s smirk deepened. “A lesson.” She gestured to the stylist. “Turn her.”



Her sleek bob was gone, replaced by an elaborate *shimada* updo, her hair sculpted into flawless, rigid rolls in a mockery of Edo-period geishas. Her heart pounded as she took in the reflection staring back at her. Her Han Chinese features clashing violently with the Shimada updo's sculpted loops. *Not only had they turned her into a walking stereotype... they picked the wrong one!* "Holy shit! I'm... a geisha?" she hissed. "This isn't even my culture!". Pre-transformation, she'd have seen only "Asian" –now she notices the dissonance: *Japanese costume, Chinese features.*

Mary's reflection barely moved, her expression cool, unbothered. "Your next target, Mr. Saito, is a Japanese businessman with a particular taste—Chinese women dressed in Japanese attire. We'll be sending you to Japan *like this*. He'll savor the... *tension*."

Daphne's stomach clenched. "Wait—I'll keep the qípáo! The bob! Please." she said quickly, desperation slipping into her voice. Mary didn't even blink. Instead, she nodded to the stylist, and Daphne felt the weight of long, golden hairpins slid into the sculpted rolls, dangling beside her face, swaying like chains. Ornamental sticks pierced through the bun, their intricate engravings catching the light. "This is what happens to girls who forget they're *replaceable*" Daphne sat frozen, as the finishing touch was draped over her shoulders—a red kimono.

SKIN DEEP



“To perfect your role, we’ll upload the mannerisms and body language of a well-trained high class geisha and update your background story. Consider this an upgrade.”

“But... I’m Chinese now! This is *outrageous*.” she replied, with a last spark of pride. “This is so wrong on so many levels.”

But it was too late. Daphne’s pupils dilated as the maiko training flooded her synapses—how to pour sake without spilling a drop, how to laugh behind a trembling fan. She became submissive. Quiet. New memories forced their way in, overwriting the old. Bitter ones. She remembered growing up in China, then relocating to Japan. A flash of herself as a young girl came to her mind: children’s voices sharp as blades: “*Chankoro! Baka gaijin!*” Hands yank her *qipáo* collar until the silk split. That night, she burned her Mandarin workbook in a convenience store bin.

She remembered doing whatever it took to feel accepted, to belong, to be more Japanese. Out of desperation, she had thrown herself into geisha training at fifteen, determined to make it her life’s purpose. The *okiya* mistress measured her skull with calipers. “*Han features... problematic.*” She recalled herself enduring the ritual: Pine resin rubbed into eye sockets to “enhance” monolids, bleaching cream to hide her sun-kissed complexion...



Then, the final severance. A letter from her mother, with a single sentence: “Nǐ bùshì wǒ de nǚ’ér.” *You are no daughter of mine.*

Xinmeng tried to scream, reacting to the humiliating memories that had shaped her new persona, but the sound twisted into a fractured tongue that made the AI monitors glitch. “Kǒngbù de róngnéng!” she wailed.

Mary’s voice was cold. “Your English hippocampus is deteriorating. Stop resisting. You only learned it in school, after all.” Her Mandarin thoughts now carried Kyoto’s refined lilt. “Wǒ bùshì rìběn rén,” she whispered to her reflection. *I am not Japanese.* The confession warped midair, emerging servile and high pitched voice, in a Chinese-inflected Japanese: “Dōzo o-makase kudasai.” *Please let me serve you.*

Mary smirked. “Saito will adore how your accent *breaks* during climax.”

And so, she was sent on a mission to Japan. The flights were long and exhausting and the worst part were the looks she got from people, especially when she had to show her passport. The immigration officer squinted at her documents. “Xinmeng Wong? Chinese... *dressed like this?*” His chuckle curdled. “Kimiyō desu ne.” *How peculiar.* Xinmeng felt a wave of shame.



Osaka's cherry blossoms fell like congealed blood on snow. Her client smelled of entitlement. "Xinmeng Wong, a Han flower trying to bloom on Yamato soil?" His thumb smeared her rouge. "Delicious contradiction. But a filthy Chinese prostitute like you shouldn't be seen dressed like this."

Xinmeng's geisha-programmed body curtsied while her inner voice screamed. "This unworthy one aspires to... cultural harmony." - she replied in Japanese, with a faint Chinese accent. He laughed. "Harmony? Your Weibo activists would stone you. Imagine the hashtags: #RaceTraitorWhore. #DragonLadyDefiled. Your people would skin you alive for this performance... if they knew." The neural programming forced her to giggle while taking a selfie for TikTok, her body moving on *autopilot*. "I'll probably get banned for this" she murmured, her voice light, flirty. "Such delicate treason" he murmured into her ears. Above them, cherry petals swirled like disintegrating apology letters, never quite landing where they ought to.

A chill ran down Daphne's spine. She wasn't a Canadian citizen anymore. She was Chinese, with a temporary residence permit for Japan. If she angered the Chinese government enough—if her ID credentials were ever scrutinized and found to be fake—she could end up in real trouble.



Her grip tightened around the man's arm. "I'm cold," she murmured, tilting her head up at him, her voice taking on a breathy softness.

"Can we go to your place?" she purred.

He liked that.

In bed, she was a tiger one moment, a kitten the next.

She teased. Gave just enough, then pulled away, leaving him wanting. It was an *artform*—one her body now knew instinctively. And, to her shock, she had become very skilled at pleasing men orally. By the time it was over, he lay sprawled beside her, chest rising and falling in contentment.

"*I'm surprised your rate is so low,*" he mused, running a lazy hand along her bare thigh.

"You're one of the prettiest call girls I've ever met, and you're exactly my fetish—Chinese enough to degrade, Japanese enough to adore."

Xinmeng was checking her TikTok account, which was exploding with angered comments. "I'm just a pervert, I guess."



The mission was long and degrading. She was forced to play the part of a modern geisha long enough to convince the man to trust her more and more to lower his defenses. He was wary, guarded—a titan of Japanese industry whose disdain for her Han Chinese heritage outweighed even his contempt for the profession he had forced her into. And yet, he his forbidden fetish was only being reinforced being with Ximeng. He was way more diffident than western men, but eventually, he opened her the doors of one of his mansions. He said she had been elevated to the role of his *official* concubine, complete with salary and status. Ximeng bowed and thanked him.

The secluded estate in Hokkaido's forests was a relic of Edo-era opulence, sliding paper doors, tatami mats, and the kind of privacy that hid shame.

No more waxing, he ordered one day. *Grow your pubic hair out*. A symbol, he claimed, of natural beauty. Ximeng obeyed. Days blurred into a scripted rhythm of tea ceremonies and scripted intimacy, her mind numbing under the monotony. Then, one evening, she glimpsed Saito's laptop left carelessly open in his office room. She gracefully took it, her manicured fingertips hovered for a heartbeat before diving into the keys. She sent all the required information to her organization and received an encrypted message.



She sent the encrypted data her handlers had been waiting for. Within minutes, a reply came.

“Mission accomplished.”

Her breath hitched. She typed her own message in broken English:

“When do you rescue me? Me tired of being geisha but I cannot go. My mind too broken. Plz help.”

“Stay there a little longer. We can’t risk suspicion. He will grow tired of you, eventually. Give it a few more months.”

A few more months. Ximeng stared at the screen, the weight of those words pressing down on her.

Each day, she sank deeper into the persona forced upon her, her voice softer, her movements rehearsed to perfection. She was made to study Japanese literature and calligraphy, her brushstrokes expected to flow with the same grace as her steps in the tea room. As a reward for her progress, they stripped her of her real name, replacing it with a Japanese one, Sayuri. At least, she felt secure in his mansion. After her social media accounts had been blocked, flooded by negative comments, she felt increasingly worried of retaliation from China.



By the time she had fulfilled her mission, she no longer knew where Ximeng ended and the geisha began.

But then, one evening, Saito arrived with an expression far colder than usual. He poured himself a drink, swirling the liquid in his glass before finally speaking.

"Sayuri," he said, his voice measured. "You've been lying to me."

A chill ran down Ximeng's spine. She forced a practiced smile. "Saito-sama, what do you mean? I've been faithful to you,, and you alone. No other man has touched or seen me."

He set his glass down with deliberate care. "It's not that. I did some research. I don't know exactly what happened, but you are not who you claim to be. The woman who kneels before me has no childhood. No school records. No ancestral tablets in Qingdao. Nothing about your existence before a few months ago can be verified. Very fishy." He leaned in, his voice dropping lower. "And my sources led me to a Canadian family, your real origins."

Her breath hitched. "No, Saito, that's impossible! Check my DNA, I'm really Ximeng!" Saito nodded. "Oh, I already did. Your DNA confirms you're ethnically Chinese somehow." He smirked. "But let's conduct one last test."



A screen flickered to life behind him. Xinmeng's stomach twisted as an image appeared—a young woman, handcuffed, fear mixed with defiance evident in her eyes.

Her sister.

"Look who we've taken to... encourage you."

"No! Leave Sofia out of this!" she gasped, the words escaping before she could stop them.

Saito's smile widened. "Ah, there you are. You told me you had no family, yet every trace of your past led back to her. I don't know how this is possible but you're a dirty gaijin." His voice darkened. "You will pay for this deception." Xinmeng's mind raced. Her cover was blown. She needed a way out. Fast.

"Saito, please... You don't understand." She took a shuddering breath. "I always wanted to be Asian. It... it was an obsession. A fetish so strong it took over my life. I had surgery, genetic modifications to become Chinese. But even that wasn't enough." She swallowed hard. "I wanted to take it further, to create a past that would justify my desires. So I crafted the story of a Chinese girl desperate to be Japanese. It was all I had left. I spent everything. I went into debt. Becoming a geisha was my only way out."



Saito tilted his head, studying her like an insect pinned to glass.

Then he let out a slow, humorless chuckle.

"You went a long way to satisfy your fetish," he mused. "Tell me, did it hurt when they widened your epicanthic folds? Or were you already numb to it?" He let the question hang, his amusement twisted. "It's so perverse, I almost respect it."

Xinmeng's lashes fluttered. Was that mercy in his voice?

But then he leaned back, tapping his fingers against his glass. "You can remain my concubine. But your sister stays." he said simply.

Xinmeng's breath came in shallow gasps. She had no choice.

She needed the organization's help.

For the first time, she would beg them, to save her sister.

She contacted them and explained them the situation. Saito was a powerful man, but she was confident they would be able to rescue her. She begged them and finally received a positive reply. They would rescue her, but only at their own conditions. Xinmeng knew what they meant and tears rolled down her porcelain cheeks.

SKIN DEEP



It only took them a couple of days to arrange a rescue mission. Their agents were present in any country by then.

Sofia was half-asleep, her wrists sore from the handcuffs, trapped in a dimly lit storage room somewhere in Japan. The air was thick with dust, the silence pressing against her ears.

Then, suddenly, a noise.

The door burst open, and a group of four, maybe five young women stormed in, moving with practiced efficiency. They were all Asian and in their early 20s. They wasted no time. One of them crouched beside her, unlocking the cuffs in a matter of seconds. Another pulled a box from under his arm and set it down with a dull thud.

"Disrobe," one of them ordered. Sofia's breath hitched. What the hell is going on? - she thought, massaging her wrists. "Who the hell are you?" Then she saw what they were holding—a folded, skin-toned bodysuit, its surface smooth and eerily lifelike.

"We have not time to explain it to you now. It's a disguise, to break out of here. Hurry up, we don't have much time!" one of them clarified. The tension in her chest loosened, just a little. They seemed sketchy but at least she would get out of there.



Still wary, she nodded and let them guide her through the process. The material clung tightly as they helped her slip it on, fusing seamlessly against her skin. Cold lenses pressed against her eyes—brown contacts that erased her irises' true hue, followed by the weight of a jet-black wig, its strands brushing her shoulders. When she was done, she turned to the mirror.

Her heart skipped. The disguise was incredibly convincing.

The woman staring back at her had porcelain-smooth skin, delicate features, and striking, almond-shaped eyes. Her reflection blinked in sync with her, lips parted in silent shock.

She looked...*Korean*. Not just disguised, but genuinely so. She got lost staring into her pretty brown eyes. They looked so natural... Like they had been like that all along.

As she studied her new face, she glanced at the others around her. She noticed how well she matched them. The same youthful features, the same sleek style. It was mesmerizing. But they had no time to waste.

When they left the building, they looked like a group of party goers, probably Korean students. Nothing too eye-catching. Weirdly enough, she felt a sense of belonging to that group.



They jumped into a car, a 2010 Kia sedan. Engine vibrations hummed through her synthetic flesh, syncing with *Gangnam Style* pulsing through the speakers.

"Where—" Her voice surprised her, honeyed and high-pitched as she asked: "Where are we going?"

The driver, a young woman who hadn't spoken much, glanced at her. "To see your eonni, your big sister. She's the one who ordered your rescue, after all. We need to rescue her too, by the way."

She slumped back into her seat, staring out at the streets as they blurred past. "I'm finally going to see sis again! I hope she's doing ok!"

A strand of wig hair snagged in the seatbelt, yanking her scalp with needle-sharp betrayal. How was that possible?

"Shouldn't I... remove this? Now that we're out?" - she asked one of the others. The girl's laugh was a short, dry snap.

"Don't be in such a hurry baby girl! You'll be less noticeable looking like an Asian girl where we're heading to."



"But my sister, she will never believe this is me..." . They laughed.

"Oh trust us, she will definitely believe it, haha! - one of the pretty Korean girls answered. "Anyway little one, why don't you relax a bit?" - she insisted. "Let's stop to refill the tank and to stretch our legs here."

At the rest stop, they refilled the tank and stretched their naturally hairless legs. Sofia caught herself staring at them for some reason. She blushed when they noticed that. The girls surrounded her like beautiful sharks. "Come on in!" - one of them said. They made her sit in the back seats this time. "Sit close to me" - said one of them. She was pretty. Like real pretty. She leaned in and went for a kiss.

Her lips were soft. The kiss tasted of spearmint gum. Sofia's neural lace misfired, translating revulsion into dopamine. It felt wrong yet exciting. She melted against the stranger's lithe torso, her body betraying her. "Feeling more relaxed now baby?" She nodded. She felt much better indeed. "What was that?" - she asked herself - "I've never wanted to kiss a girl before. Must be the stress, I guess."

As they merged back onto the highway, Sofia took a nap. Various pictures floated in her mind. She pictured her sister, trapped in a BDSM-style cage. Weird though, why her? Soon, she would be rescued.



When she woke up, they had arrived at a mansion hidden deep within the forest. They told her about how her sister had been kidnapped by a powerful man, and that she would be the one to rescue her.

Her task was simple, they said: enter a specific room, find a woman, and tell her to follow. No questions. No distractions.

“But how am I supposed to get in?”

“You’ll wear this.” - they draped her in a maid’s uniform—starched linen choking her throat. “Mr. Seiko has... particular tastes,” one of them said. “He only allows Korean servants. And he prefers Chinese lovers.”

She frowned. “That makes no sense. My sister’s neither Asian nor... attractive enough to catch the eye of someone like that. Why would he kidnap her?”

No one answered. The pieces didn’t fit, but the plan moved forward anyway. She entered from the back door with a employee id card that was scanned and worked, and she followed the instructions given to her through a hidden microphone.

She walked through empty rooms and corridors, until she opened a door.



The mansion was still as she slipped inside, with lacquered walls and tatami mats. Her heels clicked too loud on teak floors, as she listened to the hidden microphone: Left. Third door. Don't linger.

When she finally turned the last knob, her pulse a drumbeat in her skull, the woman she found inside was nothing like her sister: a living Japanese doll with kimono cascading in blood-red silk, hair pinned with lacquered kanzashi. Not her sister. Not even close. Unless...

"Sis?" The word crumpled in the air.

The stranger tilted her head.

"Sofia? They make you Asian doll too?" - she said, in broken English.

"It's just a disguise, but... Are you wearing one too? And why do you sound so different? Why are you dressed like this? Are you supposed to be a geisha or something?" - Sofia was interrupted by a voice in the microphone. "Stop stalling, leave with her now."

She followed the instructions and her sister followed her, struggling with her traditional lacquered okobo sandals. Without another word, they stepped back into the hush of the mansion, its walls watching.



They took both sisters to a small apartment nearby. After being stripped and scrubbed down in silence, Xinmeng sat motionless, wearing the striking black latex bodysuit that was the organization's unofficial uniform, clinging to every curve. Her elaborate geisha-style hair remained untouched, lacquered pins still clicking softly with each breath. Untangling it now would ruin her real hair. Sofia felt her breath catch. "Enough with these disguises," she said. "Let's take these things off. We're safe now."

"Li'l spallow," Xinmeng said, her geisha hair clicking with hairpins. Her gloved hand rose, index finger tracing Sofia's new jawline. "Dey no tell you?" Something flickered in her dark eyes—pity, perhaps. Or resignation. She rose with dancer's precision, the latex whispering as she moved. "Dey play wit' you. Bodysuit not disguise. It... pelmanent. I... solly, jie jie." she said, her English corrupted but urgent.

"What?" Sofia clawed at her arms, nails digging until pain flared. No seams.

"No escape," Xinmeng murmured, her English fraying as Mandarin bled through. "Dey... change brain, too. I... Xinmeng now. Speak Zhongwen. Nihongo. Engrish... fading."

"What? Why did they do this to us, to you?" Xinmeng looked away in shame. "Actually..." she said, "I a glead."



"You agreed to this?"

She nodded, slowly. "I sign contact. I wan' be... more pletty." A bitter laugh slipped out, jagged and small. "Tired of... ugly Evelyn." She gestured to her sculpted cheekbones, her frozen beauty. "But dey change inside too. I not Evelyn now. Xinmeng!"

She looked at Sofia again, and her accent thickened, vowels curling into foreign shapes. "You still pletty, Sofia. Still you. Mos'ly."

"Enough talking," said one of their Korean masters, her gaze sweeping over the sisters. "Sofia, you work for us now." Sofia blinked. "What? No, I didn't agree to anything. This is madness. Remove this bodysuit now!"

A second woman stepped forward. "You want food? ID? Access to the outside world?" Her smile was thin. "Then you obey."

"You'll get a new name," the first woman added, tapping something into her wrist device. "New language skills. You'll be given Korean fluency, hand-to-hand combat training."

"No," Sofia said, her voice barely a whisper. "No, no, I'm not doing this. I'm still me. I'm *Sofia*." The woman cocked her head. "Not for long. Your name is Ha-eun now. Pretty name, right? 하은." She gave a tablet to Xinmeng.



"Ha-eun..." Sofia whispered, then shook her head violently. Xinmeng rose beside her, silent until now. "Don't fight it, jie jie." she said quietly. "Dey already... inside your mind. Like dey did wit' me." She glanced at the Korean women, then lowered her eyes. "Bettel to bend, not bleak."

"No," Sofia whispered again. "No—you can't just—"

But Xinmeng was already working on the tablet. Her gloved fingers moved swiftly across the glass, typing in command sequences. Behind her, one of the Korean women nodded in approval. Sofia gasped, clutching her head as a wave of heat bloomed inside her skull. "Wh-what are you doing?!"

"Help you adapt," Xinmeng said. Her voice trembled, but her hands were steady. Sofia writhed, vision splintering. "Issneun il-eul meomchuseyo—" The plea spilled out, raw and desperate. She felt like she was having a stroke.

One of the Koreans crouched beside her, tilting Sofia's chin up with a manicured finger. "Ha-eun-ah," she cooed. "Deo isang yeong-eoneun eobs-seubnida. ije hangug-eoman issseubnida." "No more English. Only Korean now." Xinmeng watched, tears glistening but unshed. "I sorry, Sofia," she whispered. "I not want lose you." But Ha-eun understood nothing of that already.