

FOUL

“You cheap bastard!” I screamed.

“Fuck you, Jen! I’m doing this for your own good!” retorted my husband of thirteen months.

Mister First Base, his adoring fans called him. I knew the real him as stingy and mean-spirited. A spouse who keeps score. The honeymoon, it seems, was over.

“It’s just some Saturday courses down in Chicago at the Art Institute! Not some shopping spree to one of my favorite boutiques in Scottsdale. Not a membership at Spa Bella Femina, like the other players’ wives!”

“You’re just like your mother, Jennifer! Blowing the old man’s hard-earned money on ... what ... crap like Beanie Babies?”

“I hate you Tom!” was the last thing I said before I left the house for a long drive in the Lexus, my mind made up to just do it. *To hell with him!*

In the morning, Mr. First Base skipped breakfast. No note, no apology, no tender touch on my cheek as I lay silently in our marriage bed. He couldn’t wait to get to Miller Park to work out with his beloved Brewers brothers.

The die was cast, as they say.

One of my girlfriends from college down in Chicago had mentioned it in passing when we had met months earlier for lunch. At first, I thought she was nuts. And yet, it somehow made perfect sense. I don’t know. I just fell into it.

Seems that she had heard some of the other girls talking. Maybe they were a little too drunk at the time. But it all made sense somehow. Perfect sense.

Players. How ironic!

Players was a *very* discreet high-end Internet call girl service. The pay, if you were young, beautiful, and willing to please rich and famous clients, was outstanding.

My own money! Just the thought of it made me smile. How sweet, this revenge!

I met for an interview on a Saturday in September. I had taken the train down to Chicago from our home in the toney north shore Milwaukee suburbs.

“So,” said my female interviewer as we sat on a bench in Lincoln Park, “why do you want to be a *Players* girl?”

I lied. “I’m putting myself through art school. The money sounds good.”

She had me fill out an application and promised to put in a good word for me with her boss, a person called *M*.

Less than a week later, I received a cell phone call while I was returning from grocery shopping.

“Hello, is this Jennifer?” inquired a lady with a syrupy-sweet British accent.

“Yes, who’s calling?”

“Jennifer, this is *M* with *Players* down in Chicago. How are you?”

“Fine, thank you.”

“We have a mid-level slot for you in our little family. How does that sound?”

I almost dropped my groceries as I twisted the front door key to our home in the gated community where Tom had always wanted to live.

“Uh ... fine! Great! Yes, that’s great news! When do I start?”

M laid it all out. How she would FedEx me a special cell phone to be used only for work. How I was to be on standby on weekends, ready to go to work in as short as six hours notice from the call. How my service area would be within the Chicago Loop hotel district. How I should always register under a rotating pseudo name. The split? 50-50.

“We want you to have a unique identity in our *Players* entertainment catalog. Something sexy. Any ideas?”

I paused, trying hard to wrap my brain around what I was about to do. Just then a butterfly touched down in the flowerbox outside my kitchen window.

“Sorry ... it’s just that this is all so new to me. How about *Papillon*? Yes, that’s it, and I want to wear a butterfly costume mask when I meet and entertain my clients. Like in high-society party circles in old France. How does that sound?”

“Sounds delightful, Jen ... er ... *Papillon*! Can you send me a body shot, complete with the butterfly mask on, by, say, Thursday, so we can get it up on our Web site by Friday?”

“Yes, I have a digital camera here at the house. I’ll get the butterfly mask today at a nearby costume supply. You won’t be disappointed in me, *M*. I promise!”

With that agreement in place, things started to happen very quickly.

I, of course, had gone ahead and registered as a Saturday student at the Art Institute, just in case my husband followed through with his threat to check my credit card bills for outlandish spending patterns. We had already fought about it. What could he say?

Tom was off with the team on an away game when my work cell phone rang.

“Hello? Yes. Yes. The Palmer House hotel tomorrow at one-thirty. Graying gentleman in the bar. Forest green blazer. Twenty-five-hundred once we are up in the room. Basic car wash, no extras. Fine. Thanks. Bye.”

My heart was beating so fast I could hear it in my chest. No time to waste. Girl, are you ready for this? Tom, do you even give a shit?

As I packed an overnight bag for the two hour train ride tomorrow, my personal cell phone rang.

“Hello?”

“Hi, it’s me! Do you love me? Yeah, Pittsburg and then home on Sunday night. Can you take my suits to the cleaners today? Oh, and can you wear that thing I bought you from Victoria’s Secret? Great, baby! I love you too. Bye.”

Yeah right! I’ll drop everything and run over to the drycleaners just so you can look good, Mr. First Base. Gotta keep all those groupies happy! If you only knew

My first sex-for-money tryst with Mr. Forest Green went quite well, actually, considering he had probably downed a bowlful of Viagra just before we met. Nice guy. Family man. He loved my butterfly mask and asked if we could meet again some time. I said sure.

All the way home on the train, I couldn’t help but bask in the naughtiness of it all. But, hey, I’m a grown woman. I have needs. And Mr. First Base is striking out on the home field, you might say. My cut? Twelve hundred and fifty bucks for an hour’s work! Those were pro baseball wages! And no one would ever have to know, except me and *M*. Oh, and all those satisfied clients, adding cash to my growing war chest. And the bling!

Word about the exotic masked *Papillon* spread like wildfire in the hallowed halls of Chicago power broker-dom. Judges. Diplomats. Self-made millionaires. Rock stars. My dance card was filling up fast. All, nicely dovetailed to coincide with Tom’s out-of-town trips or Spring Training in the southwest. I was close to netting six figures by this time, all safely tucked away in an offshore account that *Players* had set up for me.

The sad part of all this was that I still had a ray of hope that Tom would change. That he would lighten up on me and be like when we first met. The perfect gentleman. On his best behavior. Promising me the moon if I accepted his marriage proposal.

Yet, my wedding and engagement rings always stayed behind, as I once again took the train to Saturday “art classes.” This time the client was supposed to be some big sports figure. A baseball player. A pitcher named Rick.

Rick was a handsome, suntanned ball player with a delightful southern twang. We really hit it off upon our first encounter, this one at Watertower Place on Michigan Avenue.

Of course he never saw my eyes, whether behind dark glasses at first or later as the masked mistress *Papillon*. I liked the anonymity and yet, with Rick, I felt very much at home, as he regaled me with tales about baseball and the World Series they almost won. Rick had pitched a perfect game tonight and promised to ask for me again when he was in town.

Tom returned from a road trip and we once again fell into the same old pattern. Too much alcohol, too much yelling, threats, and then that stony silence that the dutiful wives of famous men often face. Yet, on the outside, all was happy faces and kisses for the sports press.

Tom was off to Mitchell International almost as soon as he had gotten home. A team charter to the west coast for a double-header. I tried not to look happy.

My work cell phone rang as I was having a delightful bath, getting all the kinks out for what I hoped would be another rewarding Saturday in Chicago.

It was to be a back-to-back at the Hyatt, starting at seven. Then another at nine. I was to bring my toolkit.

Oh boy, big money this time! Tom and I would both be attending double-headers, in a manner of speaking. And the take? Five grand gross for the whole evening! Maybe *Papillon* could even afford to buy Mr. First Base a little truce gift. Victoria’s Secret again?

The two gentlemen I served rewarded me handsomely, both in terms of their prowess and with cash tips in the hundreds. One was a high-powered prosecutor and the other, a young alternative rocker who had more money than good sense. His thing with the Yakuza tattoos and chrome studs in his ears was a bit off-putting, but I soldiered on for Uncle Sam. I slept all the way home on the train to Milwaukee, almost missing the conductor’s call. I might have ended up in Minneapolis, who knows!

Tom and his Brewers had been playing home games at Miller Park and doing pretty well in the league standings. This weekend, the team was driving down to Chicago for a big match-up with the Cubs. I gave Tom a stilted kiss and looked forward to some down time with the girls.

As luck would have it, my work cell phone jarred me awake at 2:15 in the morning.

“Uh ... ah ... yes? *M*? Yes, yes I’m awake. No problem. Special VIP at the Nikko. Room 860. 11 PM til the bars close on Sunday morning. Got it. Bye!”

Papillon readied for her trip to meet the nameless VIP who requested anonymity and great discretion. A Japanese business executive, maybe?

The Saturday train ride was uneventful and the weather equally so. Maybe it was a hint of battle fatigue. Maybe it was just becoming boring. But tonight’s mystery client intrigued me like none other. I nervously fingered my butterfly mask in my overnight bag as the Metra pulled into nighttime Chicago. Then, a short taxi hop to the Nikko.

I looked at my watch through my dark glasses 10:55. Five minutes til zero hour. Why not be early? I knocked.

“Just a minute!” I heard a voice say from within. “What’s the password?” he asked with a knowing laugh, having given it to *M* to heighten the mystery.

“Beer,” I said, somewhat embarrassed, to the peep hole in front of me.

The door snapped open, revealing a dimly-lit suite spread with flickering votive candles. I made my way inside, my butterfly mask in place, my body ready for whatever.

From behind the seemingly self-opening door sprang a tall, athletic-looking naked man.

“Hi, I’m Tom! You can call me Mr. First Base if you like!”