

THE FACE OF A FAT GIRL

MY PATH INTO SEX WORK

BY LORI S



When I was a girl, I dreamed of growing up to be a sex worker.

I could not make up my mind about being a hooker, a dancer, or a porn star. I had a hard time differentiating between them. I had an especially hard time figuring out why porn acting was legal and prostitution was not. In both cases women are being paid to have sex, right? When I was nine and ten, at the gate of puberty but not yet across the threshold, I would pore over my father's Frederick's of Hollywood catalogs to choose my working outfits. I dreamt of the penthouse apartments financed by my lifestyle. I read every account of prostitution I could find. I accepted dares from other children to stand on the side of the road and wink at passing cars.

I don't know what led me to my obsession. Maybe just loving sex, or at least the idea of sex. I did not learn to masturbate until I was an adult. I was just fooling around with my friends, playing truth or dare, tease and touch, nothing more than that. But I loved the seduction, the hot flush in my thighs, the tingle in my young pussy. I wanted to be good at sex. I wanted to do what I enjoyed for a living. I enjoyed those sexual games, more than I was willing to admit. It was supposed to be humiliating, forced by losing a sleepover dare into parading around the bed in my cotton panties, so the other girls could look at my body. Those girls especially wanted to touch my breasts, which budded early and didn't stop growing until my twenties.

As a teenager I never lost my "baby fat." I remained chubby and stopped feeling particularly desirable. My friends would all say, "Oh, no. You're just a big girl." I knew that comment to mean: "We still think you're cute." Cute, not sexy. My stomach was never flat. I never had much of a waist to speak of. I was thick. Broad-shouldered with big hands, big feet. A model-quality escort I ain't. Who would want to fuck me for money, or pay to watch me touch myself? They would be repulsed, disgusted.

I didn't like dressing in feminine clothes -- skirts that showed off my hammy thighs, binding and restricting me in uncomfortable ways. I was not supposed to anyway; I was supposed to hide my body. Drape it. Conceal it.

For years it was not such a big loss to me. I did not like wearing shoes that

pinched my toes, with heels impossible to balance on. I didn't like the way make-up felt on my face, clogging my pores, making me itch. These things were fine for make believe, theater play, or special occasions. I didn't date. I didn't get cast in the school drama productions. Suddenly, I had no excuses for dress-up and play, so I gave it up.

I still had a dirty mind and a dirty mouth. I started writing down those naughty thoughts. I wrote smut, dirty stories, finding my niche in the world of commercial sex. Although I met and befriended many women who were sex workers for real, dancers and porn stars and whores who came in all shapes and sizes, I kept apart. My desire to participate was dead.

Until I discovered specialty porn.

A friend of mine invited me to work with her on a series of tapes for men who liked big-breasted women. That was the only requirement. And boy, did I qualify. I can manage eight inches of cleavage without breaking a sweat.

The rest of my body -- its shape, color, abilities -- did not matter.

I've always had a difficult relationship with my breasts. They were too unwieldy and too attention-getting. It was too hard for most people to look past them and to the rest of me. I concealed them like I concealed the rest of my body, experimenting with binding, loose clothing, tight sports bras. I thought about having them reduced (and still may, someday); I have a lot to spare.

It's not that I don't like my body now. It wasn't an easy road to self-acceptance, but I'm very comfortable in my skin. Never tried a diet. It is hard for me to cope with the fact that I don't fit into the usual ideas of what a desirable body looks like. The inner furnace of my lust doesn't fit my outer appearance. Nobody, I thought, would ever look at a picture of my naked body and feel that tingle between their legs. Once they got to know me and my naughty little soul, of course, they'd be hooked, but until then? It would make no difference how I appeared, only how I acted. I was fit only for private consumption, not public display. Or so I thought. Here was my chance to change all that. It was just a masturbation video "for men who fantasize about their mother's underwear," as my friend put it. I would dress up in a lace bra and girdle, put my hair in braids, wear garish, ridiculous make-up

(it washes out videotape), step under hot lights and touch myself for the camera. Nobody else would lay a hand on me. It was safe, easy, and required only an afternoon's worth of time. In exchange, I'd get paid as much money as I usually make in two weeks. Of course I said yes.

And, of course, I adored it. I was nervous, but, unlike stripping for my lover or other erotic performance, there was no audience present to cheer or jeer, only the videographer-director and my friend, who sat quietly reading the newspaper for the four hours we shot. It didn't take me long to start having fun. I hope whoever bought the tapes could see the delight I was experiencing at realizing that, yes, there were people who would pay to see my hands upon my clit, touching my breasts, lifting my nipple into my own mouth. I would flirt with them from the videotape, tease them to frustration and then release. I had found my place in the sexual economy.

And that gave me a feeling of triumph, because this time nobody was looking past my flesh to my dirty mind and wicked tongue. They were staring right at my chest. And this time they were paying for the privilege. Not like on the street where I wasn't sure if the catcalls were taunts or compliments.

It's not about being reduced to a body part. My tits are a keyhole, and I've unlocked a place inside me that was sealed for too long. This space they've led me to, this place of erotic power and commerce combined, I may never leave.



In the January 2000 issue of the literary journal *The Sun*, Sharon Skelton writes to the editor:

"I would like to see these [sex] workers as proud women with a gift for sensuality, as sacred women: This is their path, their craft. They do it well. But let's also see these women as hungry. Let's see them as neglected. Let's say they have children and not enough money, and are trapped in a poverty mentality. Let's say that no matter how much someone looks at them, touches them, tells them they are beautiful, it will not be enough to make them feel loved, to make them realize their true worth. Let's say they are all addicted to something, just like the rest of us. Let's say their work is not spiritual all the time, but often just a way to get money.

And let's also say that they were six-year-old-girls once. Let's say they ate cinnamon toast. Let's say they lost their front teeth when they were seven. Let's say, when they were eight, they took their friends to the skating rink for a birthday party, and each of them got a package of M&M's, which melted in their pockets by the end of the day. Let's say those women have mothers, and their mothers have shoe boxes filled with crayon drawings of trees and smiling sons. Let's say these women were not always naked, but once were twelve-year-olds who read C. S. Lewis stories on their back porches, who got A's and B's on their geometry finals.

Let's say all of this is true. Let's widen our view of these women beyond their bodies, beyond the 15-inch screen, beyond even 'the red thread of passion.' Because for all of us humans there are many threads."

This is a compelling recitation of an old story: sex worker as lost innocent. Every whore was a child once, a child with crayons in her shoebox, M&M's in her pocket, cinnamon sugar smeared around her mouth. Something must have happened to that little girl to lead her astray. Something presumably terrible and wrong. Every time a sex worker proclaims in response, "But I feel empowered by what I do, and I like it!" she is shadowed by the question, "But at what price? What have you lost?"

What have I lost by learning to talk dirty, and getting paid for it? Nothing. Less than nothing. What I have gained is immeasurable. I have gained both a profound understanding of pleasure, and a certain amount of money.

If the Mammon that sex workers are chained to, and thus condemned by, is not sex, it is money. When we aren't to be condemned for getting paid for providing sexual services, we are to be pitied. If it's not that we're sinful, dirty sluts, it's that we live in a 'poverty mentality.' (What does that really mean, anyway? Our economic

woes are all in our minds? That women can think themselves free of wage inequalities?)

Or does it mean that in utopia we would not need whores, because whores (and their clients) are driven by need? Economic need, or course, and no other. We are hungry, and not just for love; we are starved for attention and affection.

"Let's say these women were not always naked." In this statement Ms. Skelton, after vividly imagining these women's pasts, reduces their present to an image on the screen. Their present and their futures are canceled out.

Let's say these women are not always naked. Let's say these women have boy-friends and girlfriends, a small apartment filled with books, a closet full of shoes (and not all of them 'fuck-me' pumps.) A bike on the rack in the hallway that she's just getting used to riding again. A favorite sweatshirt, cats on the couch. She eats sushi with chopsticks that she fumbles with, laughing.

Ms. Skelton wants to widen our view of these women, but her gaze focuses almost exclusively on their past. To her, these women have no off-screen present; they have been reduced to their erotic image, and no more. But it is not the screen that silences these women. It is Ms. Skelton's failure of imagination; she simply cannot conceive of a present for these women that's not delimited by hunger, by neglect, by addiction and want. Her vision of sex workers is of women thin of spirit. Yet she doesn't see herself living within those same restrictions? Living a complex life both of pain and joy?

I would like Ms. Skelton to hear the story of my past, my childhood, which is filled with neither horrific abuse nor innocence lost. My spirit, like my body, has always been fat. I did not chance onto this path by accident. I went to it clear-eyed and from an early age. Ms. Skelton, can you hear me? I am living my childhood dream.



I don't know the title or even the label of the first video I performed in. I don't even know the name I was given by the director. Since then I have done a few photo shoots, a few more videos, mostly masturbation and sometimes S/M scenes without sex. (No touching her or me between the legs.) I've never seen my work on video. People don't believe that movie stars never watch their own films, but I think I understand -- the process is more important than the result. I don't need the document to know what I've done.

I do own some of my photographic work. And I've even put some of my photos up on the Web. It's there that I got my first bad review. In Pif Magazine, reviewer Tom Hartman wrote, "[Co-reviewer] Ingrid liked the fact that the staff (self) portraits in Scarlet Letter's Gallery show 'real' women with flabby hips and pimples on their bottoms, and she 'loved the magnificent ivory layers of flesh' on Features Editor Lori Selke. Frankly (and I'll apologize first for my callousness here), I would have preferred not knowing what Selke looked like as I read her [prose]."

As bad reviews go, that one's pretty mild. But at the same time, it was a realization of my ultimate fear, one that used to be paralyzing. I was repulsive, Mr. Hartman is trying to say. It was gross to think about the sexual me when he read my words. Better that I remain anonymous, invisible. Or at least clothed. Certainly not crushed or devastated, I was a little angry, but mostly just annoyed. Tastes differ. Guess I was too much for you, Tom, in more than one sense of the phrase. Too bad...

But I've encountered even worse than that. I've had my face photo-shopped, inches shaved off my jaw, before my picture appeared in an erotic events calendar (and without asking my permission first.) I do not have the face of an erotic writer. I have the face of a fat girl.

This left me angry, but speaking out is the best revenge. I am a fat girl and an erotic writer. A fat girl and a sometime porn actor. My desires are big, and messy, and if you can't handle that, then stay away. Your words and your software tools can't reduce me to respectability, and they can't shut me up. 