

THE ISLAND



At first, Daniil kept his distance from that side of the clinic. But weeks slipped into months, the bills kept mounting, yet leaving was frightened him now. What would people say? What would they see when they looked at him?

So he stayed. His hair kept growing, so he got it styled. He liked the way it softened his face. By the time the clinic staff suggested hormone therapy, the idea no longer shocked him. This time, he agreed. Over the following months, the changes deepened. His shape softened. Curves slowly formed, helped by push-up bras. He felt relieved. And with that relief came something even more dangerous: happiness. She began, little by little, to stop thinking of herself as Daniil at all. What had once felt like humiliation or loss now felt like release.

Eventually, Danica was granted access to the rest of the island and, not long after, allowed to meet Adrian in person.

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She was by the pool when Adrian finally chose to meet her properly. "I didn't come here for this," she told him. "At first, I only wanted to find Yelena and get her out. That was the whole point." Adrian said nothing.

"But that's not what I want anymore," she went on, more quietly now. "I don't even know what I'd do if I went back to Russia like this. What would I tell people? How would I explain any of it? And I can't leave anyway," she said. "I'm drowning in bills already. Every extra treatment keeps adding up." Adrian's expression barely changed. "And yet you are still here." "Yes," she admitted. "Because I still want more." That made him smile. "I want more procedures," she said, forcing herself to say it plainly. "I want to be a natural blonde! Facial feminization surgery, breast implants... Without push-up bras these are just mosquito bites!". Adrian smiled then, calm and pleased. "These are expensive procedures!" "I know, I don't want money, I want to stay. I need a job here. I'm asking you not to send me away."

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"A job can be arranged." She let out a breath she had not realized she was holding.

"And Yelena?" he asked. "Would you like to see her?"

Danica hesitated. "I thought that was all I wanted," she said at last. "But now... I'm not sure. I'm not sure I want her to see me like this."

"You should," Adrian said. She looked away, out across the sunlit paths and white buildings. "It would be good for both of you," he replied. There was something in the way he said it that made it clear this was not really an invitation. Danica looked back at him. "So I don't actually have a choice?"

He rose smoothly. "She's in the west salon." Danica walked slowly. She almost turned back. But the door to the west salon was already open.

Yelena stood near the window, back half-turned.

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Yelena stood near the window, back half-turned. Her skin held a golden warmth now. Her hair was no longer the pale blonde Daniil remembered, but a deep, glossy black that fell in loose waves. For a second, Danica thought she had the wrong room.

Then Yelena turned. Their eyes met. Danica lifted her hand almost by instinct, a small, awkward wave. Her eyes flickered over Yelena again and something tightened in her chest. *Oh god... what did they do to her? She looks Latina now*, she thought. She seemed confused.

"...Daniil? Oh my God!"

Danica looked down, then back up. "Not anymore."

Yelena's gaze moved over her. "I see," she said. "Shit, you're... different! What did you do to yourself?"

Silence stretched between them. Danica shifted her weight slightly.



"I didn't come here like this," she said. "I didn't want this at all... I thought I could find you and leave."

Yelena let out a quiet breath, almost a sigh. "No one leaves like they arrived." Danica nodded.

"You changed too, and you stayed too" Danica said. Yelena glanced toward the window, then back at her. "At first, I didn't have much of a choice." A small pause. "Then it stopped feeling like that."

Danica frowned slightly. "You don't regret it?"

Yelena tilted her head, considering. The gesture was new, but the thinking behind it was familiar. "I regret how it happened," she said.

Yelena held her gaze and spoke more simply this time. A week after arriving, they split her from her twin sister. "I was brought to the main house, dressed as a maid, positioned, introduced differently. Katya was sent the other way—into the villas."



"The rest came gradually. The changes. At first it was small: tone, features, details you could almost ignore. Then one day they took me to another facility. When I woke up, I looked in the mirror and there was no mistaking it. Darker skin, darker hair... a different woman entirely. A Hispanic woman. We used to be identical. That's what struck me the most. Then I underwent a more complete procedure that changed my facial features, my body shape, even my DNA. I have no idea how they did it." She looked down to her brown arms.

"Now I'm okay to look like this. I go by Catalina now. And I'm fine. Thank you for looking for me."

"And you?" she asked. It wasn't sharp. Just... curious. "You didn't come here planning this," Catalina said quietly. "So what happened to you?"



"I found myself," she said. A small smile followed, not shy this time. Practiced. Catalina's eyebrow lifted slightly.

Danica shrugged. She brushed a strand of hair back. "I don't care about women anymore," she added, casually, like it wasn't something that would have once defined her. Catalina watched her carefully now.

"And honestly?" Danica continued, a faint smirk forming, "I don't feel like going back to anything I was before. I'd rather lean into this properly." She glanced down at herself, then back up.

"I want to go blonde permanently," she said. "A real blonde this time." Her smile sharpened slightly. "And I'm thinking of... upgrading a few things."

Neither of the two sisters ever returned. Now, three people had gone missing.