You know I keep it real (I live for the appeal)

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by cremecheesebagel

Summary

Freelance writer Meredith Grey is desperately trying to keep her head above water, unwilling to use her mother's connections in the publishing industry. Enter mysterious, Oscar-winning actress Addison Forbes Montgomery, who hires Meredith to ghostwrite her autobiography.

Chapter 1: Tell me who I am

She's drumming her fingers against the steering wheel listlessly, waiting impatiently for the traffic light in front of her to turn green. Meredith bites her lip, mentally trying to calculate how long she's been stopped at this intersection and how much the lost time is going to screw her over. She flicks her eyes over to the paper bag in her passenger seat, cheeseburger smell filling her car. A loud, obnoxious honk from the car behind her fills her ears and Meredith startles, turning her head back to the front to see the light has changed. She drives through, humming listlessly to the Duran Duran song playing from her phone as she turns the wheel.

She stops in front of a two-story beach house in Malibu that looks like it cost more than her car. A wry chuckle escapes Meredith's lips, turning the keys and shutting off the engine. She lets her seatbelt fly loose, cringing as the tongue bangs against the car's wall, lodging itself between it and the driver's seat before opening the door and hopping out. She pulls the aux chord out of her phone as she grabs the bag, double-checking the delivery instructions.

Hand it to me.
Please use the back door (beach side).

Meredith grimaces, scanning her surroundings for the entrance to the beach - she sees it fifty yards away, in contrast to the door a few steps away from her.
Meredith sighs, "Just think about the big, fat tip you're gonna get. Just think about the big, fat tip you're gonna get." She mutters, pacing towards the beach entrance, paper bag firmly clutched in her hand. The glare of the Los Angeles sun shines in her face, causing Meredith to squint, using her free hand to shield her eyes. She trudges down the beach, trying not to think too hard about how much sand she's going to need to get out of her shoes later before reaching her destination. Wooden stairs come out of the beach, leading to a spacious deck decorated with furniture; it's nice, for a moment she can almost picture herself sitting there, drink in hand, hearing the waves crash into each other - the moment is gone as quickly as it arrives.

She walks over to the glass door, a living room that looks like it came from Architectural Digest on the other side of the glass; Meredith raises her hand, rapping carefully on the door three times. A beat. She pouts, shifting her weight from foot to foot nervously before pulling out her phone, opening the text conversation with... *Addison*, the app tells her. Meredith grimaces, contemplating whether or not she should also try and ask (beg) for a rating before the sound of the lock clicking pulls her attention away.

In front of her stands a woman - redheaded and drop-dead gorgeous. *She looks like a movie star*, Meredith thinks. Piercing green eyes like sunlight through leaves that Meredith would spend entire summers trying to describe meet hers, a perfectly groomed, arched eyebrow raising slightly in amusement.
"Uh... Meredith?" She asks, a nervous smile colouring her features.
"I - yeah, um - hi! That's me! Meredith - um - is my gay - my name! My name is Meredith!"
The woman - presumably Addison, Meredith thinks - chuckles, "Are you okay? You seem nervous. You didn't spit in my food or anything, did you?"

"Oh, God no - I wouldn't - I don't do that kind of thing, no I just - um..." Meredith squints, cocking her head slightly, trying to place where she'd seen this woman before. "You look *really* familiar."
Addison's throat bobs, eyes flashing wide for a moment before she quickly composes herself again, batting her eyelashes. "I guess I just have one of those faces."
Meredith nods, "Right. Right... Um-" she chuckles, handing the bag over to Addison, fingers brushing at the exchange and sending Meredith's heart up into her throat.
Addison smiles, "Thanks."
"Just - uh - just doing my job." Meredith stutters, screaming internally at how much of a fool she's making herself.
God, what am I - Postman Pat? She thinks to herself. *Wait, stop. I really shouldn't be thinking about her right now.*

Addison laughs, eyes wandering to behind Meredith. Her face falls momentarily - smile nowhere to be seen, dread in her eyes - before she turns back to look at Meredith.
"Do you have any other deliveries you need to fulfil right now?"
Two trains of thought in Meredith's head begin battling for supremacy: the logical part of herself - the rational actor concerned with her personal safety - wanting to say "Yes.", and the emotional part of herself - the horny fifteen year old who wants to fall to her knees and do anything this woman in front of her asks - wanting to say "No.".
"I - um - I may... uh - that depends?"
Addison smirks, "On?"
"Well - um..." She clears her throat, desperately trying to redeem herself and maintain what little shred of her dignity remains. "What you're... about to suggest."
Addison nods, lips splitting into a Cheshire-like grin. "Well... I happen to be in need of someone to... sneak me out of here and escort me to Ventura - I've been having something of a... let's just call it a stalker problem."
Meredith furrows her brows. "Ventura? That's like, an hour drive. I'm sorry but-"
"How much?"
"...What?"
"I'm serious. Money's no object, I understand that - you need to be fairly compensated for your services. So, how much? Two-hundred? Three?"
She can't help but think of a cartoon animal whose eyes flash with dollar signs. Meredith swallows, "Um... three-fifty?"

Addison nods, "Is one-twenty-five up front and the rest later alright with you?"
"Sounds great to me."
"Cool..." Addison presses her lips together into a thin line, eyes wandering along the coastline. "Would you like to come in? It's probably faster that way, going through the house rather than around - assuming you parked your car out front, of course."
Meredith swallows, "I... I did, yeah."
Addison nods, before leading her through the house (the coffee table alone is probably worth more than the current sum total of her bank account) and escorting her to the front door.
"I'll be out in a second - just need to grab my purse."
Meredith nods, "Cool... What's gonna happen to the food you ordered, though?"
Addison's eyes widen slightly, a stilted laugh escaping her. "I... hadn't thought about it, actually."
An impulse creeps into the edges of Meredith's mind. She acts on it.

"You're not a messy eater, are you?"
Addison blinks, "Um - no, I - I'm not."
Meredith shrugs, "You can eat in the car if you want?"
"Are you sure?"
"Yeah. Just try not to drop a pickle on my seats."
Addison laughs, "I will be very careful."

Meredith nods, Addison closes the door. She fishes her phone out of her pocket, clicking through her call list.
Izzie picks up on the second ring. "Mer, hey. What's up?"
"Just wanted to let you know I'm gonna be home late - can you walk Doc for me?"
"Yeah, it's no problem. What's keeping you out, though?"
"I'm driving up to Ventura - it's a long story, I'll tell you when I get home but if I randomly fall off the face of the Earth..."
"Cristina and I will check the 101 for you, don't worry. Be safe, okay Mer?"
"When am I not?"
"Do you want that list alphabetised?"
Meredith rolls her eyes. "Talk to you later, Iz."

Addison sashays over to the car five minutes after Meredith leaves the house, sunglasses covering the top half of her face, brown paper bag in one hand and purse hanging over the opposite shoulder. She opens the back door opposite of Meredith, Meredith turns to look at her, raising an eyebrow.
"What are you doing?"
Addison pushes her sunglasses down the bridge of her nose, eyeing Meredith confusedly.
"Getting in the car?"
"No, I mean..." She sighs, "Just get in the front, will you? Please? I know I'm giving you a ride and all but I'm not *actually* your cab driver."
Addison's eyebrows rise, lips parting slightly in shock. "Right. Um... yeah, okay. Sorry."
"It's fine."

Addison climbs up into the Jeep shortly after handing Meredith the money (who has one hundred and twenty five dollars *in cash* on hand?), gently depositing her purse at her feet and holding her food carefully in her lap, playing with the edges of the paper.
Meredith's hand works the gearshift. "You can eat it, you know. It's fine, really."
Addison stiffens under her seatbelt. "You're right, yeah. Um... I'll hold off for a second - don't want to make a mess if you stop suddenly."
"This car is older than I am, don't worry about it. Seriously."
A beat. Meredith pulls out of the driveway onto the road. Addison sighs, gingerly parting the opening of the paper bag with her fingertips. Duran Duran fills the silence as the rustling of the bag can be quietly heard. Meredith flicks her gaze to the side, seeing Addison sheepishly take small bites of the cheeseburger, paper bag encasing the bottom half she holds. Meredith smiles, eyes returning to the road.

Addison clears her throat when they pass Agoura Hills, running her hands over the now carefully folded brown paper bag. "So..."
"So?"
"Is this - um - your *job* job? Wait, I'm sorry that sounds condescending - I mean, are you an

actor and this is a side thing or- you know what? Forget it. I'm being-"
"No, you're fine. This is, uh - kind of an 'in-between job'? I'm a writer."
"Oh, really?"
"Yeah, I work freelance."
"Anything I might know?"
"Nothing recent. I've been doing a lot of ghostwriting. It pays okay, but I've also signed so many NDAs because of it."
Addison laughs, "I know the feeling."
"You do?"
"Yeah, I - um - I work in.. *entertainment*."
Is that a euphemism? Is she a pornstar or something?
Meredith clicks her tongue. "Cool."

A beat. Addison clears her throat harshly.
"You okay?" Meredith asks.
"Yeah, I just - my throat's a little dry."
Meredith's eyes flick over to the scratched, metal bottle in the cupholder next to her. "You don't have - uh - herpes or anything like that, right?"
Addison snorts, "Excuse me?"
Meredith cringes, "I'm sorry, I meant... you can drink some of my water-" Meredith mutters, taking her right hand off the wheel and fumbling around for the bottle as she stares straight ahead; she grabs it, offering it to Addison, "If you want."
After a few seconds, she feels Addison's fingers brush against hers again - gently prying the water bottle out of Meredith's hand. She hears it open and close.
"Thanks." Addison breathes.
"No worries."

They're close to Thousand Oaks before Meredith speaks again.
"Well, actually, I *used* to work for a newspaper a few years ago."
"Really?"
"The Stranger? Over in Seattle - I worked on columns for the socio-political section. Probably some of my best work, to be honest."
A pause, Addison clicks her tongue. "...Wait, are you Meredith *Grey*?"
Her grip stiffens against the wheel at the usage of her surname - the name of her mother's publishing company. "Uh - yeah."
"*You* wrote that article on the Elena Bailey Memorial Clinic? And the impact those protests were having on reproductive healthcare?"
She swallows. Maybe she should have told Izzie the full truth. "Uh... yes?"
Addison beams, "I read that article - it was beautiful work, really. The way you communicated it was... it was stunning, really. It was art."
Meredith laughs, "I - I wouldn't go that far-"
"No, I'm serious, Meredith - that piece was *incredible*... Why aren't you at The Stranger anymore?"

Meredith swallows. Her mind plagues her with memory: long, blonde hair falling over the pillows, tangled together, the flash of a camera, laughter filling her ears, and smooth, gentle whispers against her skin in a soft English accent.
"I made the... *mistake* of dating a co-worker... whose father was a buddy of the editor-in-

chief..."
"*Oh, hon*-"
Meredith raises an accusatory finger. "*No.* Not that. Anything but that. We're not doing the 'Oh, look at Meredith! Isn't she sad and pathetic? Writing smut that makes her eyes bleed for five cents a word and worrying about dumb teenagers giving her a one star rating! Maybe she's gone mental!' Maybe I have! But save your pity. *Please*."

The silence is deafening.
"Okay. I'm sorry."
"You don't need to apologise, I just - I don't like talking about it."
Addison nods, "So are you writing any... five cents a word smut right now?"
Meredith chuckles, "No, thank God... I'm kinda between jobs right now. Still have bills to pay, though."
She just traded rent for nursing home fees.
"Okay... So, do you have a website or something for business-related inquiries or-"
Meredith beams, "Oh! Yeah, I have business cards, actually. Open the glovebox."
She sees Addison shuffling in her peripheral vision before hearing a small click.
"You have *a lot* of business cards."
"Yeah, I made them ages ago. Never really got to use them."
Thank you, Alzheimer's diagnosis.
Addison laughs, "Well, I think they're very nice."
"Thanks."
"All the information here is up to date?"
"Yeah."
"Great."
"Cool."

The rest of the drive is done in comfortable silence. Meredith stops the car in front of a blindingly white hotel building - The Marriott, according to the large, black and red text near the roof. Addison gets out of the car with a small nod, handing Meredith the second set of bills with a smile.
"Thanks again for this."
"Hey, no problem. Best tip I've ever gotten."
Addison laughs, waving at her, white business card tucked between her fingers. "Goodbye, Meredith."
"Bye, Addison."
Addison walks away, the rhythmic clicking of her heels growing fainter and fainter. Meredith smiles, unlocking her phone to send a text to Izzie:

Omw back home

drive safe! im about to walk doc :)

A small yawn escapes Meredith's lips. She pouts, exiting her messages and opening the delivery app (she logged out, right?). The main menu stares at her mockingly.

Total made today: $109

She presses her lips together, pinching the bridge of her nose before shaking her head and shrugging. By muscle memory, she taps her way over to her profile, noticing a new rating:

☆☆☆☆☆ - Great
Please check all that apply:
Good communication ☑
Followed instructions ☑
Friendly ☑
Handled with care ☑
Went above and beyond ☑
15s ago

Meredith chuckles, "Thanks, Addison."

She opens the door just a sliver and sees Doc's snout slot itself into the small space, sniffing enthusiastically. Meredith laughs, pushing the door open further, the snout backing away. She enters the threshold, Doc enthusiastically wagging his tail as Meredith closes the door behind her. He lets out a small bark.
Meredith winces, smiling faintly. "Hi, boy."
Doc pokes her leg with his nose; Meredith chuckles, shoving her keys pack into her pocket to scratch behind his ears, mussing up the mop of white fur around his neck.
"Did you miss me, buddy?"
Doc turns his head, licking her palm.
"You did, didn't you? There's mommy's good boy."
"Mommy's good boy' tried to fight an electric scooter." Izzie says, walking over and leaning against the nearest wall.
Meredith shrugs, "I mean, can you really blame him? Those things are horrid."
Izzie laughs, "Like mother, like son."
Meredith gasps, covering Doc's ears with her hands. "Hey! We're *co-parenting* this fur baby!"
Izzie rolls her eyes.

Cristina is sitting on the couch when they enter the living room. Doc runs over to her, sitting in front of her with a whine.
Cristina rolls her eyes. "I can see Meredith is here, I have eyes."
Meredith waves, walking past the living room into the kitchen, opening the fridge.
Izzie leans against the counter. "So, what took you to Ventura today?"
Meredith grabs the bottle of cranberry juice, shutting the fridge door with her hip before grabbing a glass and slowly filling it. "A customer paid me three-fifty to drive her up there."
Cristina scoffs, walking in and sitting herself down on the stool next to Izzie. "And you just took her up on that? What if she was a serial killer or something?"
"Don't be ridiculous, she definitely wasn't a serial killer. She was really nice, actually. She'd read some of my work from The Stranger, she was kind of a fan."
"So what? She was some kind of bored rich lady?" Izzie asks.
Meredith shrugs, "I don't know. She seemed pretty well-educated. She was pretty too. Could've been a model."
Or a pornstar...
Izzie raises an eyebrow. "Mer, it's LA - everybody looks like a model. Hell, *I* used to model."

"Yeah, but... she was *really* pretty. Like, Paris Fashion Week pretty. Don't get me wrong, Iz - you're a total catch, but she blew Bethany Whisper out of the water."
Izzie rolls her eyes.

"Maybe she *is* a model. You get her name?" Cristina asks.
"Uh - Addison?"
"Just Addison? No last name?"
"It didn't exactly come up."
Izzie pouts, "What'd she look like? Other than being 'Paris Fashion Week pretty', of course."
"Red hair. Really green eyes. She was in her thirties, maybe?"
Izzie's eyes narrow before slowly widening again. Cristina cackles.
"No way." Cristina laughs.
"What?"
Izzie pulls out her phone, quickly typing before showing a list of Pinterest results ("The Pinterest photos are more flattering, Cristina!") to Meredith. "This wasn't her, was it?"
It was. It absolutely was. All over Izzie's phone, Meredith sees a series of photos of Addison: In one, she wears a frilly yellow dress on a red carpet, a handsome man in a suit smiling behind her. In another, Addison sits up in a bed, chest covered by a sheet pulled over her. In one photo she wears pastels with a painfully fake smile. Another has her in scrubs, mascara streaking down her face.
"Oh my God, that *is* her." Meredith breathes.
"Mer, that's *Addison Forbes Montgomery*! She just won *an Oscar*!"
Oh, that's what she meant by entertainment.

"Shit." Meredith laughs.
"Didn't we watch a movie with her in it like, literally last week?" Cristina asks.
Izzie nods, "Yeah, Lavender Haze - Mer, how did you not recognise her? You *cried*!"
Meredith raises her hands in the air. "I was on my period! That doesn't count!"
Cristina furrows her eyebrows. "You seriously didn't recognise her? Wasn't Lot of Hart like, the only thing your mom let you watch as a kid?"
"The reruns, yeah. The show ended when I was like, two. Wait, what does Lot of Hart have to do with this?"
Izzie and Cristina exchange a look of bewilderment.
"What?"
"Mer, she played Erin Hart." Izzie informs.
"That's insane, no she didn't!"
Cristina scoffs, "Uh, yeah she did."
Izzie looks back down at her phone, typing something in before turning the screen back at Meredith. "See?"
In front of her are two images side by side: the first, a young girl at about the age of ten with fiery red hair - Erin Hart, the main character of Meredith's favourite childhood show; the second, that same girl over twenty years later - *Addison*.
"Oh, *shit*."
Cristina stifles a laugh. "You delivered takeout to your childhood hero and you didn't even notice - holy shit, this is priceless."
"Cristina!" Izzie scolds.
"What? It's funny!"

Meredith sighs, rubbing her face with her hands. Doc trots over to the kitchen, sitting himself atop Meredith's foot. Meredith chuckles, petting him.

She ends up in her bed, back against the wall and laptop on her legs. Doc lays on his back next to her on the floor, tongue hanging out the side of his mouth. Her fingers hover over the keyboard, pursing her lips before finally sighing and typing 'Addison Forbes Montgomery' into the search bar. She clicks on the top result - a Wikipedia page.

Addison Adrianne Forbes Montgomery (born October 13, 1988) is an American actress. She is best known for her role as Erin Hart in the television sitcom Lot of Hart (1998-2000) and her collaborations with her then-husband Derek Shepherd.

She skim reads the rest of the page. It feels wrong - almost voyeuristic, even - to be reading about details of Addison's life like this: her early child acting endeavours - usually in her older brother's shadow - her big break with *Lot of Hart*, her sudden disappearance from the acting world in favour of a French boarding school, her undergraduate education at Julliard, her marriage, her awards, her affair, her divorce. Meredith reads about her brother's rehab and her vocal support of pro-choice and LGBT charities; she reads about Addison's famous, almost equally successful parents - she reads about the affair she had on the set of *Cruel Summer* - her latest film, directed by her ex-husband - with her co-star. Meredith's stomach churns.

She continues regardless. She watches Addison try to stay composed despite turning pink in the face on *Hot Ones*, she watches Addison & her ex-husband get asked for their top four favourite films by Letterboxd, she even watches Addison's Oscars acceptance speech for Best Actress in a Leading Role, tears streaming down her cheeks and a wide smile on her face.

Then, a soft chirp, a notification box popping up in the corner of the screen - an email. Meredith clicks on it.

To: meredith.grey@hotmail,com
From: a.forbesmontgomery@gmail,com
Subject: Writing Services

Meredith,

It was very nice to meet you today; thank you again for your help and professionalism! I'm interested in using your services. Would you be free to meet tomorrow to discuss details? Over lunch, perhaps?

Sincerely,
Addison Forbes Montgomery

"Oh, *fuck*."

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