

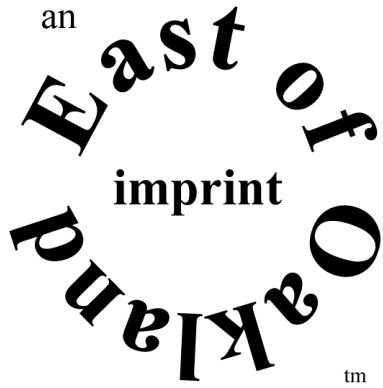
# HIKING THE RIDGE



J. Manque

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fiction

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*Where they burn books, ultimately they burn bodies- Heinrich Heine*

## **Hiking the Ridge**

### *Chapter 1*

It's close to Nine O'clock on a summer night, and warm in California's Contra Costa County. The western sky is still fairly bright, though its red and orange hues are gone, replaced by rapidly deepening blues that soon won't cast even a hint of shadow. A few streetlights along Buskirk Avenue are still flickering to life, but most are already on solid, and will burn as they do every night, until dawn, sentries that can witness

nothing of import. The parking lots in the area are ideal for what I'm doing, and dusk near dark is the perfect time to do it. And despite the somewhat lofty title of 'Avenue,' Buskirk itself isn't a tree lined promenade. It's a busy little connector drivers use to get between Treat and Monument Boulevards, or to get to the Coggins Drive overpass and across 680's twelve lanes and into Pleasant Hill, and they're always in a hurry. That's the key. Nobody looks at the parking lots no matter how well lit, and when people refuse to look things become invisible.

But not just any parking lot will do. First, it needs to have the right mix of stores. Medium sized down-market malls with off name department stores, movie theaters, and garden centers are perfect. People take their time in those. If it has fast food eateries, dry-cleaners, and a gas station across the street it won't do. The turnover's too fast. You're too likely to be surprised. And once you get the right place you have to choose the right time for shopping. It needs to be busy enough to offer a good selection, but not so busy that you'll be observed loading the merchandise.

So you see, I have thought about this, and the lot I've chosen meets all my criteria. There are a fair number of cars, most congregated near the front, but there's a good deal of empty space at the edges and to

the sides, which aren't easily seen from the main entrance- another plus. People walk by at the rate of one every two or three minutes. That's just what I want. And, naturally, whenever they do I check my watch as if I'm waiting for someone- and I am.

I just don't know who yet, or should I say whom? The difference is subject and object. I'm looking for the latter, definitely the latter.

I've only been there about five minutes when I see her, and I can't believe my luck. She's far better than I would have hoped, nearly made to order, and dressed for the warm weather in incredibly short green shorts that show off shapely legs with a hint of summer tan. Her little white cotton ribbed tank top is snug, admirably displaying C-cup breasts beneath- at least they would be C-cups if she had a bra on, but without one I can be certain there's no padding or underwire trickery going on. And she's fairly compact, which is the polite way of saying not too fat, another consideration if you're going to need to carry or drag her at the end of the evening.

Honestly, though, she isn't perfect. On the down side her shorts are faded from years of wear and washing, and clothes worn out by detergent might be a good choice to wear to the laundry room on wash day, but she's chosen to go out in public in them. She's also

wearing dollar store flip-flops that were overpriced when she bought them, and spent a small fortune getting her hair over-frosted by a bad hair dresser whose work has left her head nearly striped. And while it's true that the absence of a bra makes it easy to judge her body, and her breasts' freedom combined with her rolling gait imparts natural undulations that are almost mesmerizing, the whole package hints of a certain lack of sophistication. It's not that I need a Rhodes Scholar for the evening I have planned -we're certainly not going to debate the President's latest war, energy, or economic recovery policies- I think I'd prefer a woman with a bit more self-respect. But as any good hunter will tell you, there are no ideal specimens, and he knows instinctively which animal he's going to take when he sees it- and this girl is going in my bag.

She walks by my car without giving me a second glance, heading for the back corner of the parking lot and the only car there. I'm sure she knows better than her father, who doubtless warned her never to park in an empty area at the edge of a large parking lot, especially an area not easily seen from the entrance because you never know who might be lurking there, but I quite understand her desire not to have parking lot dings in her shiny new car, and silently forgive her willfulness as I move my jacket from the seat next to

me to uncover my trump card, the thing I know will impress her more than any bunch of flowers or box of chocolates. I take a deep breath and start up, drive around her and back into the space next to hers. I've timed it perfectly. She's not even ten seconds away, and still hasn't noticed anything wrong. Five... four... three... two... one. I open my door and pop the trunk with the remote as I exit, gift in hand. 'This is it. Big smile,' I think to myself, 'Lots of energy. Impress her.'

"Excuse me," I say cheerfully before she can open her little purse, "I wonder if you can help me?"

She cocks her head and looks down her nose at me, giving me the same dirty look she's given a hundred others. I'm certain with her body and dress sense men approach her every day, that she enjoys teasing them, then enjoys pretending she just wants to be left alone even more.

I pull my smile wider. I don't say, 'Not this time, bitch,' but I think it as I hold the stun gun a foot from her face so she can get a good look, though if anyone is watching from the corner of the mall all they see is her back- either her round little ass or hundred dollar dye job depending upon their proclivity. Her little purse falls from her hands as I press the trigger and artificial blue lightning arcs between the gun's electrodes, bright enough to illuminate her face, which changes instantly

in that beautiful flickering light. The forced disgust, the arrogance, the feigned superiority- all that ugliness is washed from her pretty face in an instant. It's an amazing transformation. I feel like a boy scout doing my good deed for the day as I release the button.

“Do what I say or I turn you into a human lightning rod. Back of the car, now.” I order, motioning.

It's all over. She's too scared to fight and too weak to run. I place the electrodes against her warm back and follow close behind, kicking the purse under her car as we move. For a second or two I'm not sure she'll make it. Her pretty waxed legs have developed an endearing jelly-like quality. It takes a number of small steps, but soon we're between the open trunk lid and the freeway's sound wall, the two providing us a near perfect privacy screen, and since the sound wall doesn't work, for its designed purpose anyway, the constant road noise makes certain our voices don't carry.

It's time to get the girl properly attired for our date, and I'm going to spend a lot less time doing that than she's ever done. The duct tape is already pre-torn into appropriate lengths that hang down from inside the trunk. She almost collapses when she sees them, but I steady her, trapping her legs against the bumper while I tape her wrists behind her back with several turns of the silver magic. The next piece, less than six inches long,

goes over her mouth.

“Oh, yeah, this is really happening,” I tell her. The instant I say it, it sounds trite and forced. It would have been nice to come up with something more original, but I’m under some pressure here, too. The girl doesn’t seem to notice the gaffe. Her wide eyes are on the pillowcase which inflates with a snap as I whip it through the air. I quickly twist the excess cloth snug around her neck when it’s over her head. She begins to tremble in earnest, but offers no resistance as I secure it snug against her neck with several loops of tape. We’ve been behind the car less than 20 seconds, and though I’ve never done anything like this before I can’t help thinking I’ve discovered a new talent.

Now it’s time to handle her attire. While she may be a bit under dressed for my taste for a girl about town, she’s considerably overdressed for the activity I’ve chosen for our first, and last, date.

“Kick off your sandals,” I order, and she does, quickly, doing her best to impress me with her obedience so as not to draw my electric wrath. The instant she’s barefoot I slide her shorts down to her ankles, revealing a pair of panties that surprise me. They’re really quite delicate, quite pretty- and expensive. They’re made from a good material, easy to tell because the delicate flower pattern printed on it is

razor sharp, and they're trimmed with a hint of lace, nothing vulgar. The little garment isn't ridiculously small, or tight, yet clings to every one of her curves like it's painted on. I certainly wasn't expecting anything that nice after those appalling shorts. Before the discovery, the girl had a distinctly white trash feel, not uncommon in Concord so close to a mobile home park and the cheap apartments, but the princess panties give her a dignity that makes her much more interesting. She's out slumming- maybe a rich girl; that would be perfect. No, her car is new, but it's a Toyota, not a rich girl, a professional woman- still, not a bad catch for a first cast. I think about letting her retain her little undies for the ride, but it's a passing fancy. What good is dignity if you can't strip it away? So they join her shorts around her ankles with one quick motion.

"Step out," I order, and a moment later her pretty underwear and old shorts are on the same cracked and dirty pavement, and she finds herself unencumbered from the waist down. "Good girl," I tell her, cupping a smooth ass cheek, giving it a little squeeze. I know it can't be easy for her and maybe I am breaking the rules. It's not really fair to ask a kidnap victim to help prepare herself for her own rape, but she has to know that's coming, and it is the fastest way. I grab the last piece of tape and wrap it rapidly around her legs just below her

knees, then dump her unceremoniously into the waiting trunk.

She can't see the knife. That's a mistake. I should have bagged her head last. I wanted to make this as dramatic as possible. It irks me a little because it's a ceremonial knife purchased just for the occasion, and I think it would have impressed her- stag-horn handle with gold trim and a mottled Damascus steel blade, the kind of thing an impressionable woman might imagine being used for human sacrifice. Well, if she can't see it she can at least feel it. I run it up her belly, sharp edge away from her skin, letting her experience the sensation of the cold steel, but I don't dally. I give her just enough time to shiver once before I slash upward into her top. The thin white cotton stretches a good two feet before it cuts with a taught ripping sound that's to die for. Three more small cuts, one to sever the neck seam, and one each to cut the shoulder straps, and it pulls free, a rag as useless to her as the rest of her clothing is now, and so it joins the little pile on the asphalt.

I don't take time to admire my prize. I grab the nearest nipple and pinch hard enough to get a reaction. "If I hear one sound from back here I'm going to pull over and fry you like a slab of bacon," I tell the girl, putting the stun gun three inches from her bagged head and depressing the trigger, letting her listen to the

electricity arcing between its contacts. The temptation to zap her right there is nearly overwhelming- having that power begs its use, and I like the idea of transporting her like a sack of potatoes. But I promised myself I wouldn't use it until the end unless she panicked, and she's been good, though I doubt she appreciates the reprieve as she hears the trunk lid latch above her.

I take a deep breath. I scan the lot quickly. I'm alone, and a moment later I'm in the car and driving. It's been less than a minute and a half since I laid eyes on the girl in the green shorts and she's safe in my trunk and ready to go. I bet she never imagined she could vanish so quickly- luckily I did. At the edge of the parking lot I take one more glance in the rear view to see if anyone's looking or following and get nothing but a cheap thrill from the small pile of discarded clothing next to her car.

The traffic clears and I pull onto Buskirk and accelerate, smiling. I take Oak to Civic to Ygnacio Valley Road and sample the new LED streetlights that cost half as much to run as the old yellow sodium vapor lights. They only run for a mile or so, but it's enough to see the future. For those of us who have one it's very much like the past, though a little softer, a little bluer. But I'm not on Ygnacio Valley for the light. It leads somewhere, several miles away, a romantic cheap date

spot perfect for when you've got a girl who can't say no.

## *Chapter 2*

The open space on Lime Ridge that looks out over half the county is closed at night. It's ridiculous, of course, to have to leave a place when the sun goes down like pagans, denying half our lives in deference to other people's fears, but it is nice our benighted benefactors have provided a private place for the kind of activity I have in mind, since they have, be edict alone, made certain that all decent people are at home watching television, or are gathered in some well lighted and easily managed place engaging in commerce when darkness gathers. Even so, going there is by far the riskiest part of my plan. It's a place where delinquent high school kids throw the occasional kegger- not much of a threat; I'd know about them long before they knew about me, but it's also a place where silent and unseen libertines have been known to look at the stars and city lights, listen to the coyotes, owls, and insects, and enjoy the solitude. If I wanted safety I could have taken the girl back to my house, fucked her all night in the comfort and privacy of my own bed,

then dumped her wherever I wanted before dawn, but the spot I chose would make for some wild sex theater. Shell Ridge or Morgan Territory would be more likely to be completely deserted, but the views from Lime Ridge make the additional risk worth it in my book, and that's the only one that counts for a change.

The full moon is well over the horizon as I pull onto the dirt road, access to the high open space's system of fire roads. I'd been there just after noon to cut the chain and open the gate. And it's not that I approve of vandalism, especially of public property because I pay taxes too, but I do intend to come back and put a split link on it tomorrow, which will allow the gate to seem chained and locked to officials, but also allow anyone with an interest and a pair of pliers to remove it and gain access; that should please everyone.

Since the gate's still open I know my actions haven't attracted attention. I kill the headlights and creep forward up the road. If I'm found here now it'll lead to some awkward questions, but in the three times I reconnoitered the route at night, hiking the whole length point to point slowly, I hadn't seen another soul. It only takes a few moments before I'm around a hill and out of sight of the main road. I roll down the windows and let the car crawl up the steep slope, the

dry soil crunching softly underneath the weight of the wheels. Hours later, but only a few minutes by the clock, I park in a small copse of scrub oak at the intersection of two fire roads. It's only a third of the way to our destination, but this part of the ridge is mostly grassland. If I go much further I'll be clear of the shielding hill, and a flash of the brake lights in that darkness would be seen for miles. I'm not about to risk that even if it means having to walk a fair distance.

I help my date from the trunk, leaving its lid and my door ajar, closed over so the lights are out, but not latched to prevent anyone nearby from hearing those distinctive sounds where they shouldn't be. The last thing I want now is somebody else who shouldn't be in the open space, but there on a far more innocent mission, finding the car and bumbling up the road five minutes behind us to investigate. My senses are heightened because there is no escape route. There is no plan B. From here on out it's success or failure. I untape the girl's legs, and holding one of her soft upper arms to guide and give her some security in her blackened world we begin our trek.

It's an amazing feeling not to have to be a mind reader, not to have to compliment and coax and cajole, things necessary even with a receptive woman, and even when you do everything in your power to win that

magic whispered, ‘Yes,’ you can still be rejected for a hundred unfathomable reasons, each more trivial than the last. And I hope it’s been a refreshing change for my date, too. Most men will say anything -literally anything- to get a woman into bed, and I haven’t told her a single lie. She seems to appreciate that, striding bravely, almost enthusiastically up the dusty rock hard road for me, not seeming to mind stepping on the occasional stone or twig, in as much of a hurry to get fucked as I am to fuck her. Either that or she’s taken to heart the little warning I whispered before starting that if she slowed me down by even a second, or dropped either of the two things I’d given her to carry, one for each hand, that I’d drop her like a sack of bricks with the stun gun.

The night is alive with sound. Hundreds of unseen crickets chirp from all sides and the dry grass is filled with the rising and falling waves of buzzing insects fighting the constant whirl of tires on Ygnacio Valley Road still no more than 200 yards away, but considerably beneath us, threading the pass between Lime Ridge North and Lime Ridge South. With the moon high enough to wash the hills in its cool light, the landscape becomes a magical, nearly enchanted place. The colors are gone, but the varying tones of the different soils, grasses, and plants, makes it feel like

we've somehow managed to stroll into an Ansel Adams print.

A dark gray shape glides silently overhead, probably a great horned owl listening for a mouse, and as it disappears into the darkness we round a bend and the busy main road becomes visible, covered with the white and red lights of a near ceaseless stream of traffic carrying people East or West to and from homes, jobs, and friends. I know the girl can't see through the pillowcase. It's king sized and doubled up, but I think she can hear the traffic more clearly, and fearing public embarrassment more than what I have planned, she hesitates, but only momentarily. A little push is all it takes to keep her moving, and she doesn't have to worry about discovery. Up so high and at such a distance we'd be hard to spot by a driver craning his neck and looking for us in broad daylight. At night with drivers' eyes adjusted to oncoming headlight we're ghosts.

One of us is a naked ghost, and she's breathing pretty hard now. I guess she's a little out of shape, but the hard climb is over. From here out the fire road is nearly flat, and as much as I'm enjoying the walk, the beauty of the outdoors, and the occasional small puffs of breeze coming off the Delta, my lust is growing. Even if my partner is blind I'm not. Her curves are

intoxicating. Her skin nearly glows in the moonlight, and almost every inch of her flesh seems to jiggle and move in some amazing way that fuels my desire. I release her arm and put my hand around her waist, increasing her speed with a squeeze, but we're almost there.

A few minutes later we come around another little bend and there it is- the spot. We're there, but the girl's winded. The fabric in front of her nose billows and retreats in perfect synchronization with her rising and falling chest. I give her a moment to catch her breath, then tear the tape from around her neck and pull the pillowcase from her head.

She blinks, then her eyes open wide like a child's as she beholds one of the reasons I've chosen this place. From our moonlit vantage we can see right out onto Suisun Bay and the busy bridge over the Carquinez Straight connecting Contra Costa and Solano counties. More impressively, we can see the massive oil refineries on both shores that are lit up like world class Christmas displays blazing into the night, with a few equally bright little tankers that feed them day and night gliding over the dark glassy water between. The girl doesn't need to know the other reason I've chosen this place- that there's a good hiding place close-by. When it's over I won't have to drag her more than 20 feet and

she'll be invisible to anyone who might be shocked to find a naked woman lying motionless on the fire road or hillside. I guess I wouldn't expect most people to understand what I have to do because I'm not sure if I do, but I'll do it as quickly and humanely as possible. She's been good and I owe her that much.

The girl stares at the vista and I stare at her, and for the first time notice the walk has had the same effect on her as it has on me. Her nipples, not small to begin with, are harder than any stone she's stepped on on her trip up here. I slip my arm around her waist again and this time let my fingers find her sex. To my surprise it's wet, quite wet, and her lower lips are parted. One of the reasons I brought the lube was in case she couldn't find romance in the moment, but maybe it's been a while since she's been touched by a man, any man. Sometimes women like her get in such a habit of rejecting men that they forget their nature; they forget how to say, 'Yes.' And I don't mean that as a sexist comment; men and women live to hear and say that word equally. Without it we revert to our animal nature. Without it we die. But sometimes in a world that creates and services impressive things like oil refineries we forget what's natural.

I begin to rub her slowly, gently. Her breathing deepens again, and she begins to squirm just a bit as

orgasm approaches from that distant and never seen place. Then, as it bears down on her, for the first time there's real resistance. She tries to pull away but I wrap my other arm around her and pull her to me tightly. As soon as I have her secure she melts into a squirmy, whining, orgasmic cataclysm, punctuated with a few unladylike snorts through her little pug nose. I'm sure it's embarrassing to come like that in a stranger's arms so quickly. As it subsides I chastise her softly, "You greedy, greedy, greedy... greedy little whore. What would your mother say?"

The girl is blushing so furiously that it's obvious even in the moonlight. But her body relaxes now. She won't try to pull away again because she can't pretend she doesn't like it, that she's not a slut. This leaves my other hand free to fondle her firm breasts and engorged nipples. She fixes her gaze at the twinkling toy oil refineries in the distance and, a minute later, releases herself in a series of more or less continuous rolling little orgasms.

"Good girl," I tell her with a little chuckle, "you just let them all out." And now that I've proven myself a gentleman by letting her come first, something I'm sure so many of her boyfriends with tanning bed bronze skin and the right haircut never bothered to do, and believe me it's taken an iron will because her body is so

rocking hot and I'm so unbelievably horny, it's my turn. It's time to unleash the beast. My erection's been pressing against my pants since I taped her wrists together, and threatening to break a seam since I pulled her out of the trunk. I push the girl to her knees, wipe my hands in her hair, and take the condom from her left hand where she's held it dutifully all this time. Then I lower my pants and roll the little rubber sheath onto my hungry erection, dropping the discarded wrapper in the dirt next to her.

You need a condom for women like this for a number of reasons. First because you need protection. I've seen the guys they screw, male whores who fuck anything with a hole while swearing she's the only one or he. Second, it lets her know who's boss and what her place is; casually using a condom is a way to tell a girl she's suitable for fucking, not childbearing. Lastly, and most importantly in circumstances like this, it allows me to use my magic lubricant, which can kindle the passions of the coldest of women.

That's what the girl's holding in her right hand. It's in a little plastic screw lid jar with my proprietary mix of KY jelly, cinnamon oil, and peppermint oil, a little concoction I perfected over the years because so many suburban girls I end up have pretty much given up on passion. It's not hard to get them into bed, because

they've normally given up on themselves as well, but then they'll just lie back and take it like a blow up love doll if they have a choice. My lube ensures they don't. It turns them into, at least from my perspective, and without exception, enthusiastic lovers.

I slather the magic potion on my rubber clad erection liberally. I roll the girl onto her back and mount her balls deep in one thrust forcing the cutest little gasp from her nose. At first she thinks she's going to give me the dead fish response, but in seconds she starts rocking her hips in time with mine just a little. The warmth of the cinnamon kicks in right a way, partially offset by the initial cooling sensation of the peppermint, but with a little time and friction they both become steadily hotter, and the girl does Darwin proud, evolving from cold fish to devoted lover to porn star to bucking bronco in just a minute or two as she tries to free herself from our engine's friction- she the cylinder, me the piston. Her gasps become genuine pleas reverberating through her sinuses, but I won't show mercy- not because I'm cruel, not because it's an amazing fuck for me, but because I know what's coming. Now, you may think I'm a bastard, and maybe I am, but I know my special lube can be an enlightening experience for girls who've given up. In order for that to happen, though, she has to take the ride all the way to the end, and we

all know the road to heaven leads through hell's outskirts.

You see, even if the burning is fairly unpleasant, it is stimulation, and stimulation leads to arousal, and arousal to orgasm, and that's what the girl beneath me is discovering. At first her splayed legs are merely loose appendages, their conjunction forming an arrow pointed to paradise. Soon, however, she's moaning and gasping desperately, squeezing her thighs against my pelvis in a futile attempt to stop my thrusts. As the arousal overwhelms the pain she hooks her calves around my ass and matches my rhythm, trying to drive me into her deeper with every stab, and finally they lock in a death grip as she melts. Her eyes widen. She holds perfectly still for a moment before sweeping her head back and forth on the dusty road as her moans become a series of rapid chirps in perfect synchronization with my thrusts, and loud enough to make any self respecting cricket jealous.

That's my cue. I grit my teeth and start slamming her as hard and fast as I can until I can't stand it anymore. In a perfect world there would be flares from the refineries- huge fireballs atop 300 foot chimneys lighting the hills miles away as they burn off waste gasses, making for a truly operatic crescendo- but there's no need. Nothing can make it more intense for

me. I explode in a familiar finale that's too overwhelming to be mere pleasure, so tortured that it can't be anguish alone.

I collapse on her, panting, shrinking, and utterly disgusted by the girl under me. And because she had no choice I can, for the first time in my life, be honest with myself about that feeling, a feeling all men have after orgasm, a feeling we lie about even to the innermost reaches of our souls if a woman has consented, even if it's a drunken and sloppy consent, because it's too confusing, too hurtful, even if it only lasts for seconds, minutes at most. But now I bask in it. Now I embrace it as I pull my penis from her body and recognize it as a disgusting and strange organic thing, like an unusual mushroom or a tide pool tube worm. And I feel wonderful because I'm no longer attached to it, attracted to it, controlled by it. I'm free and the world is a wonderful place.

I pull the condom from my penis and throw it aside, satisfied by the sound of the soft latex on the hard packed soil, by the little cloud of dust it raises that's barely visible in the moonlight. I pull my pants up. I smile. I'm tempted to just walk away, but there's something else I have to do.

The girl closes her legs and rolls a bit to her side when I bend towards her. It doesn't take much effort to

pull her to her knees again facing the bay, and I drop to mine behind her. A few seconds ago I wouldn't have been able to touch her, but feelings change rapidly post-coitus and now she's just a thing- a warm, soft, thing, no longer repellent, no longer irresistible.

But there's no way I can divine what she's feeling now. I'm sure for every rape victim there comes a time when it's over when they wonder what will happen to them, whether they will be released to run naked and vulnerable into the hands of a stranger and hope for better luck than they just had, or, their life's single purpose served, will find themselves geocached in a shallow grave. My new little friend will only have a few seconds to think about whether she'll regain consciousness or not, though they won't be comfortable. I place the stun gun's electrodes against her belly firmly. She knows what's about to happen and shakes her head; she begins begging quite earnestly through her nose. When I chuckle she begins squirming, and I let her enjoy the anticipation for a few seconds, secure in the knowledge that I can hold her easily, that there's nothing she can do to change her fate.

"Three, two, one," I count down as her struggles and pleas go from desperate to panicked. Then I press the trigger.

The girl tenses and yelps through her nose, but falls silent almost instantly. I keep the electricity flowing and start counting upward, this time silently. This isn't a warning. I'm not trying to scare her or make her jump. I'm turning her off. I can barely feel a vibration in my victim as the circuitry tenses and releases her skeletal muscles hundreds of times per second. When I reach ten I release the trigger and she falls limp in my arms, quite stunned.

The effect will be temporary, but it is complete. Her brain has been fried, every nerve leading to it, and within it, having been overloaded and short circuited simultaneously, causing extreme confusion then unconsciousness. When she starts to come around she won't remember what she is, let alone who, for several minutes. And even then she'll find herself virtually paralyzed, her voluntary muscles unable to comply with orders to move, their supply of ATP fuel exhausted by the tens of thousands of involuntary contractions the stunning initiated. All in all I'm quite impressed with the little device.

I check the girl's heartbeat and breathing, and with all well I stare out at the twinkling lights of the refineries, and the black water between them, and breathe deeply, holding her warm limp body against me, feeling her heart slow to a steady even rhythm

neither of us has set.

After a minute I pull the tape from her mouth, put the pillowcase back over her head, re-tape it, then drag her, rather reluctantly, up the embankment and into the small depression I'd seen on my recon trips. With the dry grass around it she'll be completely invisible from the fire road. I don't really want to leave her like this, but it's part of the plan, and who am I to say it's wrong? I put her on her side, and can't help thinking that large breasted women look a bit ridiculous on their side, but I wouldn't want her suffocating if she regurgitated while unconscious. I sneer at her, the same sneer she gave me when she thought she had a choice. I don't know why. I don't feel any animosity towards her, then leave, kicking the used condom to the dead center of the road as I go.

As I walk back to the car I send a pre-written email from my phone, in which, frankly, I bragged about my conquest, because even if it's against all the rules, there is someone who knows about my plan, someone who doubtless thinks I wouldn't go through with it, and fifteen minutes later I'm on Ygnacio Valley Road like it was all a dream, but with the satisfaction of reality, the perfect date. For the first time in my life something had gone almost entirely to plan. My mind races. I don't know where I'm going to find another girl like that, but

I'm going to look. OK- she was, clearly, whitefish. The suburbs are filled with it, and it makes for some interesting encounters, but I've never had anything like that before.

### *Chapter 3*

Whitefish is my name for lonely women seeking anonymous or semi-anonymous sex. It's not flattering and it's not meant to be, but I've seen too much of it to batter coat. It's the result of infinite choice and no community, no responsibility, strip mall after strip mall, coffee shop after coffee shop, and big screen TVs in church. It's unattached women in their 20s and 30s sick of the games- if they're going to be fucked by someone who doesn't care they want to know that in advance. It's semi-attached women in their 30s and 40s tired of being strung along who want to convince themselves the reason they don't have a husband and a baby isn't their fading looks. It's married women in their 40s and 50s who know it's too late to start over, but want to be wanted for something other than cooking, cleaning, and a paycheck, who want to feel a warm body against them that doesn't expect anything else.

These women already feel debased when I find them

on Craigslist, MySpace, or one of a dozen dating sites that prey on these disenfranchised souls tired of hope, or cater to them, depending on how you look at it. I've had half a dozen one time partners who had a no name or no kissing rule, something I'm more than happy to oblige, giving them beautiful, meaningless, nihilist sex—the kind that leaves you wonderfully empty a day later, ready to cope with a world filled with indifferent, self-serving bastards who see you as a tool at best, an obstacle at worst.

So you may read this and ask if I've abandoned hope. Who cares? Certainly not you, and not me, and not them, not anymore. Equality is a wonderful thing, isn't it? Aren't you glad we traded freedom to get it? It's to the point now that if I saw my old grammar school principal (I know the spelling because of the old mnemonic, 'The principal is you pal,' a phrase with no other purpose or meaning, maybe the only thing useful I ever learned in school) crossing the street I wouldn't bother to throw him under the fastest approaching car as I'd so often dreamed in the past. I'd punch him in the face without a word and leave him collapsed and bleeding in the crosswalk, and that's progress, believe me.

And while tonight's entertainment was unusual, for

me anyway, her screen name, 'RapeVictim729,' told me the fantasy wasn't. And this particular victim wanted in 'real' or she wasn't interested. That's not unusual. Whitefish want it their way or no way at all. RV729's rules were simple- no photo exchange, no meeting for coffee, no talking it through. I guess she never learned that when you live without compromise you end up making quite a few, but she got it her way this time, maybe for the first time in her life, so I hope she's happy when she wakes up with a coyote sniffing her crotch, I really do.

We arranged it all in a few emails, and even though we exchanged cell phone numbers in case of emergency, she promised that any use of it beforehand would cause her to call it all off. I'd know her by the green shorts walking towards the freeway side of the arranged parking lot between 9:00 and 9:30. She'd know me because I'd be the one kidnapping and raping her. And she was quite specific about how it had to happen. I had to have a stun gun, a modern type with pulse frequency technology that really knocks a victim out. I had to stun her at the end and leave her bound in an out-of-the-way public place. When it was done I had to send her an email, which she'd have a friend monitoring, with her location and her friend would go pick her up. I guess if she woke up and I was there in

the distance making sure she was OK it would utterly ruin the experience. It's amazing how specific fantasies get, how exactly they have to be carried out, but we're a spoiled and greedy generation, and I don't exempt myself from that judgment because I got exactly what I wanted, too, an easy fuck with no awkward phone call the day after pretending to like her.

And while I did send the email from my phone, I'm not taking one fucking chance. I'm going to send it again from my PC just to be sure. Like I said, I didn't really want to leave her alone, but appearances aside, I never was the one with the power in this relationship, which I'm sure is over. Who wants to be raped by the same man twice? The only thing I was allowed to do was pick the spot, and it's marked with an 'x' on an attached map, and an explanation that I'd leave the white condom on the road to make it easier to find in the dark. The rest is a little boastful and crude, something I'm no longer proud of. I think I started it with, 'I fucked your friend until she passed out,' but that was my lust writing.

As soon as I get through the door I go directly to my computer. Before I can open the saved message in my drafts folder I see a new one from RV. She'd been hemming and hawing about whether or not she wanted to be stunned at the end. That's what most of our emails

had been about. She changed her mind two or three times before telling me to go through with it, and I'm sure the new message, too late, is telling me not to. Now I know why her struggles and pleas had been so earnest. I don't know why that's funny to me, but it is.

"Too late now," I say. No longer able to contain it I laugh out loud. Maybe her next fantasy will involve a bottle of champagne and a heart shaped box of chocolates. I click it open. It reads, 'I'm sorry about missing our date. I hope you didn't wait too long. I just couldn't go through with it.'

My blood runs cold.

It's time stamped 9:18. She was bound and naked in my trunk at 9:18, on her way up Ygnacio Valley Road to be raped at 9:18. I run over the details in my mind- 9:00 to 9:30, green shorts- that was our agreement. So she was a little early, a few minutes, that's all, nothing to concern me. What the hell was another girl doing there dressed like that, going to the deserted, noisy corner of the parking lot like she wanted to get raped?

Even if I just want to get away with it -and I do because it's not my fault, not really; it was just play rape, like it was real, but play- my DNA filled condom is at the scene of the crime; my pillowcase is there; my fingerprints are all over the duct tape, and the condom wrapper. The parking lot's security cameras have

doubtless photographed me and my car's license plate. My car's tire tracks are on the fire roads. I bought a stun gun and bolt cutters and duct tape with my credit card last week- and a knife. It's not as easy to actually get away with rape as it is to play a game. I was such a fucking amateur they'd have to believe me. They can't put me in jail for an accident, right?

But none of that matters now. I have to go back. Nobody knows the girl is there. She won't freeze to death, and no coyote is going to eat her, or even sniff the only cinnamon-peppermint flavored vagina in all of Contra Costa County, but she'll have a horrible night, and then be found naked and bound by a hiker in the morning when she stumbles out of that little depression. No, that won't do. Even if she was asking for it, and any girl dressed like that and parked like that is kind of asking for it, isn't she? I wonder what the odds of drawing an all misogynist jury are. Unless I can get a time machine and get back to 1927, or get a change of venue to Orange County, that's unlikely.

But anybody would have to see it's not my fault; I'm not saying it's her fault. That would be blaming the victim and we can't do that anymore, but she's not much of a victim. She even came- multiple times. That should go down well with any women on the jury, especially if they're frigid. Maybe it was just an

involuntary biological reaction and against her will, but she can't complain about it. Besides, she has to have had rough sex before- sleep with three guys and two of them will like it rough. And the magic lube repeatedly rammed into her private area? I've had much more conventional lumps of whitefish confess to me, after complaining emphatically about the surprise while it was happening, that in hindsight they loved it as much as hated it. That's just the way it is. And the stunning may have hurt like hell and... even if she were in fear for her life I didn't actually kill her, so no harm, no foul, right? She's just a little late getting home.

I feel like I'm going to puke.

And what do I say after I release her, while I collect the evidence, tell her, "You're going to laugh when you hear this, but it was all a big mistake. You see..." and then I can explain it all to her calmly and she'll believe me and forgive me. Or maybe that parking lot doesn't have good camera coverage. If they don't have a license plate number they'll still have the tire tracks on the dirt road -there's no way to rid of every inch of them- but no car to match them to, and of course my shoe prints are there, too. And if I get the tape, and the condom, and the wrapper, and the pillowcase maybe I'll get away with it... Yeah, I'm thinking of myself, too. I'm not going to spend the rest of my life in prison over a

piece of whitefish with big fantasies and cold feet because you can be damn sure RV729 won't be charged as an accessory. And if the girl runs when I un-tape her, when I try to explain? Do I chase her down? Do I grab her and stun her again to make my getaway? And if she doesn't, do I take her home, or back to her car- naked? She can't very well put her top back on. If I give her a towel or anything like that it'll give the cops something else to go all CSI on and if I don't she looks like a rape victim coming home.

I'll cross that bridge if I come to it. Maybe she wanted it as much as RV729. With that little scowl she gave me right before she saw the stun gun, if she didn't, maybe she should have. That's all it really wants, that great mound of warm watery whitefish- to be pulled from the serving tray by a man who can make it come and does.

Yeah, right.

I drive slowly. My hands shake on the steering wheel. I'm covered with cold sweat. I don't realize my teeth are clenched until I see a cop's head pivot when we pass head-on on Bancroft. It's the most ridiculously over-lit street in the county and I'm sure he could have counted the perspiration beads on my forehead if he wanted. I fully expect to see him make a fast U-turn and start following, but he just drives on.

By the time I get back to the fire road my shirt is soaked through. I'm freezing, but strangely calm. I was half expecting it to be awash in flashing red and blue lights, to see the girl wrapped in a blanket point an accusing finger at me, but bound and blindfold the way she is, she isn't going anywhere until she's released. It had to be real, remember? It had to be fucking real. So the road's still deserted, and this time eerily quiet. The insect hum is gone. Only a few lonely crickets are still chirping, most having already found partners for the night- without a list of demands or set of expectations, requiring nothing beyond reality in a mate. Even the traffic on Ygnacio Valley Road is limited to an occasional rush of wheels.

I slam the door as I get out. I don't care who hears this time, and hurry up the road towards the girl. I walk as fast as my feet will carry me, passing rocks, stunted trees, even the occasional tumbleweed, skeletal, and ghostly pale in the moonlight, but I don't seem to make any progress. It's like I'm on a treadmill. I want to run but I'm so light headed now I'll pass out if I try.

I'm panting when I see my condom shining on the road, its dark wrapper nearby. I put my hands behind my head, close my eyes, and breathe deeply. I'm sure she can hear me. I'm sure she knows it's me. I'm sure

she'd terrified, convinced I've come back to rape her again or finish her off, but I'm too winded to speak, too tired to climb the last six vertical feet to where she's concealed above me and out of sight. The refineries in the distance are moving, drifting slowly towards one another; that's when I realize my eyes are crossing and force them to focus, force myself to take the twelve steps to wear she is.

The little depression is empty.

If this were a B-movie she'd jump up behind me and crush my skull with a rock. But this is the real world. You don't have to be an owl to hear something as small as a mouse moving in that dry grass. My clouded mind just can't make sense of it. She's nowhere.

If she'd come to, and been able to get to her feet and walk, she probably would have moved towards the sound of Ygnacio Valley Road, but the hill drops off suddenly right at the edge of the fire road. She would have stumbled four feet forward and ended up on the barbed wire of the old cattle fence, which has slanted where the hill's moved and is nearly perpendicular to the slope. With her hands bound behind her she probably wouldn't have been able to get off it. And she'd still be there because she'd be too high and too far away for anyone driving the road to see, and she could have screamed her head off and nobody would

have heard. Besides, if she had been found where were the cops? If she'd come down the road the way she came up, which is the only other thing I'd expect her to do, I would have met her. It's not like there are so many naked, bound, head bagged women on Lime Ridge that I might not have noticed her. And she didn't get the pillowcase off her head, not around here anyway. If she had she might have taken it with her for modesty, but would she have taken all the tape, too? There isn't a scrap of it anywhere.

The only other possibility is that she's still bound and walking blindly deeper into the hills. I have to search for her, and even though Lime Ridge isn't huge, there are miles and miles of trails and fire roads. I have no idea where to begin. I take a few tentative steps down the road further than I've been. It's hopeless, utterly hopeless.

I put my hands to my head and stare at the refineries. There are still no flares. They sit utterly undisturbed. I don't know how long I stand there. I hear something and turn. There's a gray shape on the hillside moving. I take a step towards it then see another- coyotes heading for the hilltop. They crest it and stop, then disappear over the other side without looking back. I turn again and proceed even further down the road. I go nearly a hundred yards when the night is shattered by sound. I

jump about a foot thinking it's a siren. Then I realize it's my phone. I grab the damn thing as quickly as I can and answer to silence it, "Hello."

"Hi," a woman's voice replies, one I've never heard before. "I wanted to thank you."

"What?" I ask.

"It's me."

"Who?"

"Your date, remember? I know rapists fuck and forget, but this is kind of insulting."

"Rape Victim 729?"

"Did you rape anyone else tonight? I'm not surprised you don't recognize my voice. It was pretty harsh the way you gagged me right at the beginning. You didn't even let me beg. I wanted to beg."

"I'm sorry," I say.

"I'm not complaining."

"But wait... you sent the email backing out when you were in my trunk."

"No, that was Cheryl, my friend who came and got me. She sent the email 15 minutes after she saw you take me."

"She was there? In the parking lot?" I ask.

"Of course, in case you were seen and we needed someone to run interference."

"But... why? Why did you have her send that

email?" I ask. "It scared the shit out of me."

"I figured I owed it to you to make it as real as you were making it for me. What could be more real than finding out you really raped somebody?"

"Oh, fuck." I'm light headed again. I sit down. No, I drop to the ground. "I've been up here looking for you... for... I don't know how long."

"You went back?" she asks.

"Of course I came back."

"That's so sweet." There's a long pause. "So what do you think?" she asks.

"About what?"

"About the mind fuck? Did it make your heart beat? Do you feel alive?"

I hate to admit it, but I'm reborn, and I know I should be furious, but all I can feel is a kind of dull and buoyant relief. "You know, I'm sorry," I say. "I really am."

"About what?"

"About using the stun gun. I know you said you wanted it, but... how was it?"

"Painful, horrible in a way I can't even begin to explain, not the least bit erotic, and humiliating-kneeling there after you had everything you wanted, still burning below, and waiting to be turned off like a used sex toy. But I would have felt cheated if you

backed out, and in a weird way, after everything I just said, it was satisfying.”

“Really?”

“Not that I want it again any time soon,” she tells me quickly. “I think I want a lover who will use it on me if I disobey, but I’m going to want to obey now that I know what it’s like.”

“I understand that,” I tell her. “Would you ever want to...”

“Do it again?” she asks, reading my mind.

“Yes.”

“No,” she says, shooting me down quickly. “It wouldn’t be the same. But there is something else we could do.”

“Dinner and show?” I ask, being a bit of smart-ass.

“No, no, not at all. I was thinking, now that you know what it’s like to be powerless, how would you like it to be more like earlier?”

“I don’t understand,” I tell her.

“Let me abduct you, drive you away, use you as my sex toy. Would you like that?”

“I don’t know.”

“Well if you decide you want to, leave the stun gun where you left me. I won’t tell you the date or the time. It’ll be a surprise.”

“And at the end? When you’re done with me?”

“That really won’t be your choice, now will it?” she says, and hangs up.

I sit down and think for the longest time. I put the stun gun against my leg, determined to give myself the shortest zap possible, to feel a fraction of what she felt. I can’t do it. I don’t even want the thing anymore, and to my surprise I leave it in the little depression above the fire road, then walk back to my car and go home, feeling amazingly aware, yet slightly light headed, like I haven’t slept in weeks. It’s not until I walk through the door and see the familiar walls that I realize that maybe the problem is the opposite. Maybe I haven’t been awake, not for years.

*The end*

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Author's note: To those who aren't local and may be curious- yes, Lime Ridge is a real place. To those who are local- no, you won't be able to retrace the footsteps of the characters. Though described as one continuous walk above Ygnacio Valley Road, the location is actually an amalgam of fire roads and views from Lime Ridge North and Lime Ridge South.

Also, as of this writing, it is, like most open space in the San Francisco Bay Area, closed at night, the result of a nanny state terrified of litigation, which justifies its actions by convincing itself that the only people who could want to use open space at night must be up to no good- hence the story.

Naturally I don't feel obliged to say this -anyone who feels obliged to imitate fiction is either an idiot or insane- but I don't recommend doing anything described in this story, especially those things that violate laws, even ludicrous ones. And to anyone even thinking about taking a car up onto Lime Ridge, I

should point out that even if you managed to transition between the main and fire roads without being noticed, the local police often back onto the fire road entrances to hide while pointing their radar up or down Ygnacio Valley Road.

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### **About the author**

J. Manque is a writer based near San Francisco, California. He's currently working on a million word magnum opus about life and politics in the 1990s. It will likely be released as three or four novels. The first, tentatively entitled *Love on Concrete*, is scheduled for release in print and eBook form shortly. Here's a

brief synopsis-

*In the late summer of 1994 an act of civil disobedience triggers a chance meeting between an amateur dominatrix and an IT specialist, resulting in an intense psychological wrestling match that mirrors the politics of change of the mid 1990s. It ends with a torrid confrontation in a rundown motel in Reno's dirty heat hours before the 'Republican Revolution' changes America in ways that are still echoing through the world today. In between the two explore the dark shadows of the human psyche reflected in aspects of sexuality never discussed among friends, but always lurking just out of sight in a dark world of sodium vapor lights and diesel choked streets- in short, our world.*

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