

The Urinal

by Bingo

Note: This is a story for adult readers.

Part One

Chapter One

It was just Val's luck to win his first real poker game. Val and his friends were playing at Rudy's BB. The BB originally stood for Band Box when the bar was a club in the 40s and 50s. The swank side of town moved and Rudy's was now surrounded by a few junk stores calling themselves antique stores, a Christian mission for the homeless and a shoe repair shop. BB was short for Bar and Barbecue now though the barbecue was only on Saturday night and was hamburgers.

Sunday nights Rudy's was closed. The man who owned Rudy's, Tommy D., was behind the bar cleaning. Saturday nights, with a loud band, got a little rowdy.

Val didn't usually go to Rudy's but his friend, Jerry, brought him over. The others at the table, Frank, Bob, Sammy and Dave were also Val's friends. Not close friends but they'd all grown up together, shared the same music likes, high school rivalries, Southside against Central, and even had some of the same girls for lovers. That was twelve years ago. Bob was divorced, Sammy and Dave each had kids and a mortgage, Frank was looking and Jerry had a live-in girlfriend. Bob always talked about women as if they were slabs of meat which was why Val never expected the marriage to last. Bob's ex was a good friend of Nancy's, Val's girlfriend's, and Nancy didn't really like it much when Val spent much time with Jerry, Bob and the others. Nancy taught women's studies at the university, was at a conference for the weekend, and Val figured she'd never find out.

Everyone was looking at him, Bob looked like he was going to say something but didn't, no doubt because of Jerry's elbow.

"Two pair," Jerry said. "You take the pot and we have tradition that the winner of the last game gets to keep the urinal for a week."

Jerry was starting to bald early, wore gold wire rim glasses and looked like an old time bookie. Of course he had to be a CPA.

Val looked at the mound of pennies in the center of the table. "I don't need a urinal."

Bob laughed, "This one . . ."

"It's a tradition," Frank said. Frank was angular and dark; always looked like he needed a shave. He leaned forward. "Just for a week. It's no big deal." Bob shook his head grinning. Sammy and Jerry were nodding. "Jerry didn't tell you?"

"No."

"He should of." Frank turned to Jerry. "You should have."

Jerry shrugged.

Frank rose and left the table. He talked to Tommy D. for a minute and came back with six beers. "Last call."

Val took a sip of the new beer and watched their faces as they watched his.

"It's in the men's room," Bob said. "Need any help?"

"You're kidding, aren't you?"

"You haven't been in the men's room?"

Val shook his head.

"Check it out, man. This is a special urinal. Fancy." Bob chugged his beer. "Come on." Bob could stand to lose some weight. For some reason he always wore red plaid shirts.

"Maybe he'd better see it for himself," Sammy said. Sammy was the shortest person in the room. He was always careful in his choice of what he wore unlike the rest of them -- he was a dapper man.

Frank grinned as he drank from the bottle.

Val put his bottle on the table, rose and left them. He came back a few minutes later, sat down and finished his beer. He opened his mouth, shook his head. Frank came back with another beer for Val.

"It's like fucking a bowling ball. Frank shaved her head two weeks ago and you can't hold on to nothing." Bob grinned at Val. "Better than a bowling ball, but you know."

Frank said to Bob, "It's strange you would know what fucking a bowling ball is like. My dick is too big for those finger holes."

Dave took a drink, put his bottle on the table. "God gave her ears, Bob." Dave was a cop, a burly guy who knew how to use his voice.

Bob glared at Frank, then laughed. "I need to take a piss." He stood.

"Sit down," Dave said. Bob sat.

"Well?" Frank said.

Val had done a lot of crazy things, especially when he was younger. But what he'd seen in the men's room was craziest by far.

"Well?" Frank said.

"Give him a moment," Jerry said.

Val had opened the door and expected a prank, a urinal off the wall or decorated for him. Everyone would have their laugh seeing how far they could go with the joke. Eventually they'd all go home. They'd have something to smile about at work on Monday, the whole week maybe.

The men's room was large, tiled in white with black banding. The floor was a black and white checkerboard of smaller square tiles. In the center of the room was a painted cement basin, about three feet by three feet, lowered into the floor with a chrome drain cover in the center. The cement looked newly painted, shiny brick red, the chromed eyebolts at the corner of the basin were bright, unlike the chrome on the sink fixtures which was beginning to show brass in spots. Chains went up from the eyebolts to a steel collar where they were locked to the loops on the collar. The collar looked homemade, of gray iron with weld spatter where the loops were fastened and already getting rusty. No one had bothered to paint the collar.

The collar was around a woman's neck. The first thing Val had seen when he walked in the room was her smile, she shorn head, and tattoos.

Val was still seeing in his mind what he'd taken in with a glance. She was kneeling, naked, slender, not skinny, small breasts, the smile, red lips, green eyes, bald but with a blondish fuzz. No jewelry. Her pubic area wasn't shaved and the hair was dark like her eyebrows.

She opened her mouth, stuck out her tongue which was covered with white goo. Her body glistened with moisture and she smelled strongly of urine. She popped her tongue back in her mouth and swallowed. She showed her clean tongue and settled back on her heels.

The girl gave an unearthly moan and that's when Val shut the door.

"Well, will you?" Frank asked.

"Look guys. I really, really need to take a piss." Bob left them.

"It's just for a week," Jerry said. "You can bring her back here in the evenings."

"For her . . ." Sammy began.

"Shut up, Sammy. Look, why don't you guys go join Bob and I'll talk to Val."

Val watched Tommy D. join them in the rush to the restroom. He turned to Jerry. "What's . . ."

"Look, Val. We have this girl who," Jerry paused. "She's someone Bob knows. She wants this, but don't ask her, she won't say a word. Not a word. Frank and Bob have been taking care of her, they're not married or have girlfriends, and it's the only way she'll do this. She made a commitment; we have to match that commitment. You know how it is? We couldn't just let anyone, you know, just pass her along. Shirk our responsibilities. That wouldn't be right. None of the rest of us can. Take care of her during the week, you know, except for Bob and Frank and they're going out of town for three weeks. They're going to miss her."

"What's her name?" Of all the questions Val could ask, he asked this one.

"No name. I'm not even sure Bob knows her real name. You see her tattoos? Bob takes her to a parlor and trades, her for, you know? He wants to get her done all over. She likes it, Val. You gotta believe that. Otherwise none of us would be doing, you know?"

"And if I say no?"

Jerry leaned forward. "You're kidding. You wouldn't say no, would you? We need your help, Val."

Val could hear muffled shouting from the restroom. "Why not Tommy D."

"Married."

"Why not leave her here?"

"She can't be left alone. She gets lonely." Jerry was ready to go on but Val stopped him.

"This is crazy."

"We've been lucky sons of bitches the last few weeks. It'd be a shame to have it end. Besides, what's going to happen to her? What if someone, who didn't care for her like we do, got their hands on her? She'll do anything, as long as she's, well, you know." Jerry waved his hand to the restroom. "You know?" He smiled.

Val shook his head. "Nancy is coming back to town tomorrow."

"But you two don't live together."

"Just about."

"Tell her you're sick. Something communicable." Jerry smiled.
"It's easy."

"You're crazy, they're crazy, this whole thing is crazy. She's . . ."

"Val if you don't take her, it's not like it's 24/7, you can drop her off here in the evenings, someone can even bring her back to your apartment at two. If you won't, we'll have to discard her. Give her to whoever we meet. Some pimp or a group of homeless men. You know what happens then. Six months from now you open the paper and read about some woman's body being found and you'll know it's her and you'll feel like a shit."

"No."

"Look, Val. Try her out, at least. And she's cheap to take care of. No clothes, nothing. You don't have to do anything. She lives on cum and piss. Literally. If you don't want to, there are plenty that will feed her. What do you say?"

"No." Val was thinking about the girl and cum and piss and what Nancy would say. There was no way he'd take her.

Chapter Two

Val was surprised at how easy it was to walk the naked girl, her hands bound, out of the bar and to his car. She sat in the front next to him, never saying a word, stinking only a little. Tommy D. had hosed her down.

Bob squeezed the girl's shoulder, said to Val, "You won't starve the bitch, will you?" laughed and shut the door.

Sunday night, after eleven, the streets were quiet. Val watched his friends walk away, the lights at Rudy's go out. He was stuck with her which was a little exciting and a little frightening at the same time. He started the car and pulled out onto the street.

Val had known sure things when he was younger, girls who always said yes. But none of them had affected him so strongly. It wasn't the girl's looks, which were okay but she wasn't near as pretty as Nancy. It wasn't the girl's nakedness or the smell she gave off. It wasn't watching his friends and the girl earlier. Val thought it might be the collar on her throat, crude, heavy and beginning to rust, riveted shut. The collar and the key to the locks that bound her in the restroom and in the car seat. The key was in his pocket.

She never said no, never said yes. At most she gave that weird nasal moan or used her hands to point at what she wanted or where she wanted it. Bob could be crude and she didn't care, leaned into him after he slapped her and called her every name possible, all of them watching.

"What's your name?" Val asked. He heard nothing and looked over at her. She shrugged.

"No name?"

She shrugged.

"You don't mind? What Bob and them did to you?"

She smiled, shrugged.

"You like it?"

She nodded, said, "Ummmm."

"Are you happy?" Val wasn't sure he wanted to know. If she wasn't he'd have to do something. "I can get clothes for you tomorrow. You can go. We'd get that silly thing off of your neck first." He looked over at her while stopped at the light. "Tomorrow. Okay?"

She touched her collar, hung her fingers from the welded loops.
“Ummmm.”

Val looked away. “Are you hungry?”

She made that moan. He looked over at her and the car behind him honked. The light was green. He drove through the intersection as she moaned next to him. The sound sent shivers up his spine.

He felt her hands in his lap, glanced quickly over, saw her face, and turned back to the road. He heard her seatbelt click.

She fumbled at his pants, head under his hands on the steering wheel, bare ass in the air where anyone could see it.

“Stop that.” He tried to push her away. “Stop that.” He drove into an empty, too well lit parking lot and lifted her away. She didn’t resist. She knelt in the seat next to him, moaning and poking her finger into her mouth.

“No,” he said. She looked crazy to him. No one could want it that much. “No.”

She slumped against the seat, said, “Ummmm.”

“I’m not going to, with you, understand? I’m just keeping you for a week. I have a girlfriend, understand?”

She nodded, twisted slowly back down into her seat and looked to her right out the window.

Val realized he was going to have a crazy woman in his apartment. He’d be at work during the day, he’d drop her off at the bar in the evenings. Maybe he wouldn’t. Nancy would be back in the morning and he could talk to her and she’d know what to do. A shelter or something.

Val started the car and drove to his apartment. He parked in front and realized he could go up, find something to cover her, or brazen it out. He wasn’t sure he should leave her alone.

The apartments were built in the late fifties, single story, and meandered across a well kept yard. His was near the front, down a walk, past the Anderson’s and Chin’s whose lights were out. He chanced it.

He pulled her into the apartment and shut the door behind them. He felt her stumble, turned on the light and saw her down on a knee.

It was entirely different seeing her here in his own apartment, kneeling, head bowed, quiet, her bound hands on the floor in front of her. He saw the tattoo on her upper ass for the first time. All of the tattoos were crude, most were incomplete, several were just words. On

her ass was a dick and balls, drawn like he'd seen on lavatory walls, drops arced from the penis head across the cleft of her ass onto the other cheek.

No swimsuit would ever cover what had been done to her. She might pass with a long sleeved blouse and jeans.

He couldn't talk to her, turned on the TV and walked to the kitchen, turning on lights. She could sleep on the couch. He filled two glasses with water, carried them back to the living room. "Here," he said, handing her one.

She lifted her eyes, smiled and shrugged. She lowered her eyes and said, "Ummm."

"Here," he said. He gave up, left the glass on the table by her and sat on the couch. He sipped his water, set the glass on the table, changed the channel to something with movies and left her.

He came back with sheets, a pillow and a blanket and she was gone. For a moment he thought she'd left, then he heard her weird moan coming from the bathroom.

She knelt in the bathtub, hands outstretched, the chain and locks between them, taut. The girl's mouth was open. She smiled and stuck her tongue out, waiting.

He'd seen her do this earlier and what happened. Each of the guys. His mind stopped. There was no sequence. Bob's fingers held her ears as he shoved his cock as far as it would go into her mouth. Tommy D. painted her with piss, finishing in her mouth. Jerry barely less rough than Bob and Frank.

He left her, came back into the bathroom and splashed the glass of water in her face. She wiggled her tongue at him.

"You're sleeping in here?" She nodded. "Good." He turned out the light and shut the door. He'd use a coffee can in the kitchen.

The coffee can in the kitchen made so much noise she heard him and he had only just enough time to cover himself with his robe. She fell to her knees, lifted the can, moaning open mouthed. She bent her head back but he took the can from her before she poured. He dumped it in the sink.

She struggled to get past him and he struggled not to feel her body against his. He grabbed the chain between her wrists and tugged her.

"Come on," Val said. "Back to the bathtub. Time for nighty night."

As he wrapped the chain around the tub's cold faucet and locked it he had the strange feeling that he was watching himself do something

evil. He tried to ignore the feeling, touched her shoulder to say goodnight and felt her shiver. That shiver jolted his hand away. He said nothing and left her.

In bed he tried to imagine what she was feeling or thinking. His imagination ran wild but he wasn't sure her dumb articulateness meant a little or a lot. He needed to call her something and the names that popped in his head ranged from Anne, his older sister's name, to Fuckslut or something similarly stupid. In the morning he'd ask her her age, saying numbers until he saw a meaningful smile or nod. That could be her name. He was sure, mostly sure, she was over eighteen, and younger than him. He was also sure calling her something like twenty-three wasn't going to be satisfactory.

He woke in the morning hearing the apartment door close and Nancy saying, "Hello? Val?"

He sat up in bed. "You're early. I needed to call you."

"I need to pee. Be there in a . . ."

Val said, wait, wait, wait, but no sound came out. He heard the girl's moan.

"Valentine Demitrios Stanos. You have an explanation, don't you?" By the sound of her voice, Nancy was walking away.

"Wait." He stood in the doorway to the bedroom, saw Nancy at the apartment door, opening it.

"You don't, do you?" Nancy closed the door.

Val was incredibly angry with himself, his friends, at Nancy for not listening. He slapped the girl in the tub, backed away, shut the bathroom door.

He sat on his bed, the alarm rang too loudly and his hand still stung. He slapped the alarm off. He was someone he didn't know.

Chapter Three

Val left messages at Nancy's home and office telephones, dressed and readied himself for confronting the girl. He started a pot of coffee for him and her and tried to put his mind in order. He needed to apologize to her, needed to call Frank or Bob or someone and have them take her. And he needed for her to get dressed; it was awkward for him being around her nakedness.

He poured two cups of coffee and carried them into the bathroom. She looked up at him, kneeling in the tub, her hands holding the cold faucet. Her head had been supported by her arm; he could see a red mark on her forehead. She smiled, tried to turn sideways.

She'd peed in the tub and the whole room smelled of urine. Val smiled back at her, set the cups on the edge of the sink and unlocked her wrists. "I'm sorry I hit you," he said. "I shouldn't have, for any reason. It's not your fault. It's not . . ."

She looked up at him, rose on her knees as she held out her hands and moaned through her open mouth. For the first time with her Val became erect which made everything even more embarrassing.

"No," he said. "I brought you coffee."

She quieted immediately, dropped her hands and settled back on her heels. "Ummmm?" she said. The rising inflection made it seem a question.

He sat on the toilet and crossed his legs, ignoring her smile. He could see her better at daytime. She wasn't as pretty as Nancy but no one would ever call her plain or ugly. He saw for the first time the network of fine scars across her forehead and bridge of her nose. They weren't obvious, but once he'd seen them they caught his eye. She had a tattoo on her right shoulder, something like a fish caught in a spider web, done in blue and black ink with shading, but like most of the tattoos unfinished. An outline, without shading, dropped down almost to her breast. Her nipples were small and pink. He raised his eyes to her face. "You can't stay here. We'll . . ." There was a knock on his door. Whoever it was, was impatient. "I'll be back in a minute."

He opened the door and three large men faced him. The one in front spoke.

"Bob said you might need help feeding the whore."

The two behind him grinned.

"We're having coffee, I don't know you, and . . ." He froze when she moaned behind him.

"Coffee's not what she wants. Is your name Val? Val." The big man looked over Val's shoulder. "Hi, sweetheart. Remember us?" He spoke differently to the girl, almost as if she were a child.

Val felt her try to pass him. The last thing he wanted his neighbors to see was her out on his porch, doing god knows what. "You'd better come in." He backed away from the door; she went around him and jumped in the arms of the big man.

"Just like a bitch in heat," the man said. "You hungry, sweetie?"

The girl wiggled in his arms and said, "Ummm." Val couldn't see the faces she was making over the man's shoulder at the others but both were grinning. One gave her a little wave.

"I need to talk to Bob," Val said.

The man's hands opened, "Down girl," and she dropped gracefully to the floor. The door closed behind them. As she opened his pants he said, "Bob and Frank left early this morning. They won't be back for three months."

"I was told three weeks."

"Three months at the least. That's a good girl." The man looked up at Val, "Look at the bitch go at it."

Val sat on his couch as three strange men got blowjobs from the crazy girl in his living room. He felt embarrassed and left out as the four went about doing something they'd obviously done before. She was finishing off the third when the first asked him, "Will you need us to give her a ride tonight?" He looked hopeful.

Val shook his head. "No. We're okay." He was going to call Jerry, someone as soon as they left.

"Still hungry, sweetheart?"

She stopped, gave a nod, and returned to bobbing her head over the third man's crotch.

"Can we use your bathroom, Val?" The man rose to his feet.

Val heard her choke and swallow. He looked back at the big man.

"That's a mighty fine ass but I wouldn't touch it without two condoms on at least," the big man said. "Probably not safe then either. The mouth, that's different. I read somewhere spit kills germs." The second man sitting on the couch nodded. "Ready bitch?" He hooked a finger through a loop on her collar and pulled her over to him. "The bathroom is where?"

Val sat back. "She knows."

"Good girl." The man followed her, turned briefly to Val, "Isn't she a good girl?"

"You're a good girl," Val said to their backs.

He called in sick at work while they were in the bathroom, got another cup of coffee and sat on the couch. The first thing he'd do was get her dressed, after cleaning her up, and they'd go out and get her some clothes. By then he should have reached Jerry or someone and they could take her off his hands. Which left Nancy and he had no idea what he'd tell Nancy. The truth? Even if he did, would she believe him?

The girl remained in the bathroom, quiet, when the men came out. They sat on the couch across from him, grins on their faces. "If you need anything, call us." The first man put an envelope on the coffee table. "My name's Bert, this here's Jeff and that's Juan. We'll be by tomorrow. Number's on here, Val. You need anything call me. You can leave a message and I'll get right back with you."

"Thanks," Val said, he stood.

"Time to get to work, boys." Bert stood. "See you, sweetie," he shouted. He walked up to Val and said in a low voice, "You take good care of the whore, hear?"

Val nodded.

"Good boy, Val. You're a lucky man. What'd I do to be in your shoes."

"You could be in my shoes, Bert. I find I'm . . ."

"Too busy, Val. The whore needs a man who appreciates her many fine qualities."

"Bert's married," Juan said.

"And my wife wouldn't appreciate my keeping a fine bitch like that chained to the bed."

"Pussy whipped," Juan said and hit Bert on the arm.

"Pussy whipped but as long as that bitch," Bert pointed to the bathroom, "sucks my cock I'm a happy man."

Val shut the door after them, carried his coffee cup into the bathroom and sat heavily on the toilet. The girl was licking the bathtub clean. Her skin glistened and the room stank of urine. Val crossed his legs and held the cup on his knee. "You don't need to do that."

She turned to him, smiled and returned to licking, this time slowly, her eyes on him.

"We're going out shortly to get you clothes."

She shrugged, wiped her chin with her wrist and licked her wrist. The girl raised her eyes. "Ummm." She dropped back to her hands and knees and resumed licking the tub.

"Please stop."

She held her tongue against the tub and looked sideways at him.

"You know what I mean. How old are you?"

She shrugged, licked the tub by the drain, making slurping noises.

"Eighteen?" She ignored him. "Nineteen?" He continued up to thirty-seven and she never responded. "Sixteen? Seventeen? Ten?" He stood. "I give up. Bathe and when you're clean we'll go out." He left her, went to his computer and wrote emails. The email to Bob was short and sweet: "You fucker." The email to Nancy, to her personal and university addresses was also simple: "Please call. I can explain. It's not what you think. It was one of Bob's pranks."

He heard the shower run, made them breakfast. She came out, sat across from him in the dining area and gave a grin. She hadn't bothered to dry off.

"Here's toast. If you want eggs or cereal let me know. Another cup of coffee?"

She pushed the juice and toast away from her, rested her elbows on the table, her chin in her hands. "Ummm," she said.

"Ummm to you. No name, right?"

She nodded, licked her lips suggestively.

Val looked away. His cellphone rang. He picked it up from the table, saw it was Nancy at work. "Nancy."

"Val, don't you ever call me." She hung up.

He set the cellphone on the table. The girl was humming, no tune, just a random lulling sound. "Damn you," he said.

She grinned, said, "Ummm?" with the rising inflection.

"You know what I mean," he wanted to add bitch and hit her. He wanted to hurt the girl. He shut the door to his bedroom and sat on his bed. He was pissed at Nancy too for not even giving him a chance to explain. He couldn't explain a thing, not so it made sense, but still he wanted a chance to try.

He felt empty.

Eventually he got up, went into the dining area and took her collar. "Em, we're going to get you dressed."

He'd considered just shoving her out his front door and locking it behind her. He didn't because he thought she'd stay on his doorstep all day and moan and the neighbors would see her and call the police. He wanted to do this right. The girl was crazy. It wasn't her fault; she needed help. He'd help her.

Chapter Four

At the mall, Val took the girl into a store that looked like it might have clothes that were appropriate. He barely knew the difference between Talbots, The Gap and Victoria's Secret except Victoria's Secret didn't look like the style he had in mind for her. Jeans and blouse, shoes of some sort, and feminine stuff. Right now she wore a pair of his jeans (too big), shirt (too big) and flip-flops. Except for the shorn head she looked kind of cute. With her grinning at every man she saw, shaved head, and steel collar (all too obvious – he didn't have a hacksaw so it remained for the moment) they attracted too much attention.

She wasn't any help at all and the clerks stayed away from them. The girl hummed and watched the mall concourse, making small oh sounds every time she saw a male.

Val selected several jeans and blouses and handed them to her. "Try these on." He turned back to the rack to look some more. He was absorbed in the difference between petites, misses and juniors when he heard a giggle. He turned around and saw the girl standing naked, her back to him, front to the large window onto the concourse, clothes lying in a scatter on the floor. Val saw the clerks talking, obviously he and the girl were more excitement than they'd had for a while.

"Em, get your clothes on." She turned to him slowly, rotating at the waist. She pointed to her mouth.

"We'll eat in a bit. Get dressed. You can't act like that here. Em." He raised his voice, glanced over to the clerks. "Get dressed now."

The girl shrugged. She bent to pick up a blouse. "Ummm."

"That one fit?"

She tried it on and it was too small.

"We can't do that here like this." He picked up all her clothes, pulled her past the clerks, "Sorry," he said to them, pushed her into a dressing room.

When he shut the half door, the door didn't go to the sill or the header, the girl's face became radiant. She fell onto her knees before him and fumbled with his pants, moaning softly.

Val pushed her hands away. "No, Em." He shoved the clothes at her. "Try these on."

Nothing fit. Nothing was even close to fitting.

"Wait here," he said and left her. The clerks pretended they were busy when he walked up to the counter.

"I need to buy clothes for the woman over there. Could you help me? Do you have something her size?"

The blonde asked, "What's her size?"

"I haven't the slightest idea." He tried to look as helpless as he felt.

The blonde turned to the brunette and arched her eyebrows. The brunette studied him for a second, said, "I'll help you."

"Thank you. Thank you." He was starting to sound as crazy as the girl acted. He followed the brunette to a rack of juniors and held the items she selected.

"Try these."

"Thank you."

"Is she your girlfriend?"

He shook his head. She smiled, pushed her hair over her ear. "Is she on something?"

"No." He didn't think so but that would explain a lot. He didn't think there was a drug that could do this to a person and last for so long.

"So you're her pimp, right?" The clerk's tongue briefly passed over her lower lip.

"No. Of course not." The clerk didn't believe him and followed him to the dressing room. When they got close they heard the girl's moaning.

"Need any help?" The clerk quickly looked over her shoulder to the counter and back at him. She smiled.

"I don't think so. I, maybe I do. Thank you." He handed her the clothes and held the door open for her. The girl leaned against the wall, legs spread, facing them, eyes shut, hips slowly rotating. The clerk looked at him, paused and went in. He joined them.

With the clerk's help, the girl left the dressing room wearing hip huggers, a pink blouse that was too cute, a cheap pair of shoes and carried her underpants in a bag. Everything was more expensive than he expected. He used his credit card, looking over his shoulder at the girl who stood in the doorway to the concourse.

The brunette clerk followed him to the door. "I get off at seven."

"That's good. I mean, thank you. I think we'll be busy tonight. Thank you."

"Tomorrow at seven. The parking lot, blue zone, twenty-three, red Civic." She licked her lips, looked back at the counter, leaned closer to him. "Please."

The girl's moaning was louder. Her ohs were perceptible to passerby.

"Thank you. If I'm able, but I might not be."

"You know where I work." The clerk looked at the girl, raised her eyes to him. "Please."

Her eyes held his for a minute then she walked away. His eyes followed her as she went back to the counter and bent to say something to the blonde. He turned, took the girl's hand and led her to a restaurant. He let her carry her small bag; he carried a larger bag with his clothes she'd worn earlier.

Seated in the restaurant, Val said to the girl, "Point to what you want on the menu and I'll order it for you." He felt good thinking of that. The girl closed the menu and turned away from him, staring at a table full of men. Her fingers played with the buttons on her top, opening them, closing them.

Val ordered burgers and cokes for both of them, ate his and watched her ignore hers. The girl said, "Ummm," long and drawn out when the men left, turned to him. She pointed to her mouth.

"Your burger is getting cold." She pushed it away, turned from him.

"Look, Em. We need to talk. I'm going to offer two choices. Number one and number two. When I'm done explaining them, you hold up your fingers. One finger for choice number one. Two for choice number two. Understand? Look at me."

She faced him, nodded, put her hands on the table. Her blouse was half unbuttoned.

"Choice number one is that I take you somewhere where you'll be safe. My girlfriend knows people and I'm sure we can find a place for you. Where you'll be respected. You won't have to do things you don't want to do. You'll be with friends, people who like you. Who won't, well, you know. They'll respect you. We'll get rid of that silly collar," her fingers touched her collar, "maybe something can be done about the tattoos and you won't have to do things with people like Bert," or Bob or Frank, he thought, "and you can be happy." She was frowning at him.

"Choice number two is that we go to Rudy's tonight and I guess everything will be like it has been. I'll try to keep things safe but you

know what it'll be like." She nodded and smiled. "You decide." Val thought number one was the obvious choice but he wasn't sure watching her reactions to his words that she thought the same.

The girl took a moment, raised two fingers and smiled.

Val wasn't happy with her choice. How could anyone . . . She was tapping his wrist. He looked at her. She pointed to herself, then at him. She raised three fingers. She did it again, pointed at herself, at him, smiled and raised three fingers. She nodded, watching him.

"No." Val shook his head. "No, I told you . . ."

She left the table, left the restaurant.

He grabbed the two bags, left a tip and paid the cashier. He looked right and left on the concourse, saw her take the escalator down. She was far ahead of him, moving with a steady pace, not running, she didn't need to run.

Val was clumsy, holding two bags, dodged people, trying to keep her in sight.

She turned to the right; when he reached the spot he saw it was a passageway leading to the restrooms. He wanted to follow her, hoped she went to the ladies, didn't want to see her in the men's. He backed up, found a wrought iron bench close by, next to a potted palm. He sat there and waited. After ten minutes he knew.

Val knew where she was by the look on men's faces as they came out of the passageway back onto the concourse. He expected to see a security team at any moment. He expected to see her hauled out, but maybe not. There must be a back way, a service passage. The girl would be naked, filthy; they wouldn't take her onto the concourse.

No security appeared. Val checked his watch. In an hour he'd look and see. If she was still there, he'd see if he could get her to go home with him. Which was crazy. He didn't want her back home with him but he couldn't just leave her. He wanted to be sure nothing happened to her. Not so much though so he'd go to the men's room now.

The brunette clerk came out of the passageway, saw him and came over. She sat next to him, didn't look at him.

Val was sweating and uncomfortable. He faced the passageway.

"How much will she make for you in there?"

Val shrugged. It was all too involved to explain.

"My name is Megan. I forgot to tell you. Tomorrow?" She stood. "I need to get back to work. Tomorrow?"

Val said, "Maybe," wishing he could say never. He didn't want to hurt her feelings. She passed by him and he didn't watch her walk away. He remembered the nice sway to her hips.

Chapter Five

Val had a miserable afternoon and the evening wasn't much better. Because she wanted it, oh so obviously wanted it, he brought the girl to Rudy's at eight.

He knew he was doing something terribly wrong but he wasn't sure which was more wrong. Thwarting her and making her angry, perhaps to the point of losing all control of her, as if he had any control over her in the first place. Or abetting her and therefore taking advantage of her, somehow gaining prestige because of how and who she was. Which he didn't understand or know at all -- he couldn't fathom her desires or needs.

When they got to the bar -- the girl dressed, barely, from the apartment to the car, naked in the car from the apartment to Rudy's cross-town in the waning daylight, the girl oblivious to who could see her, and of course naked from the parked car to Rudy's, a half block walk on the sidewalk, she leading him, to the enjoyment of several honking cars -- she got what she wanted.

In Rudy's, he'd asked Tommy D. for a stool. Tommy, looking as if he was going to say something, pointed to one at the end of the bar. Val carried the wood stool into the restroom where the girl was in place and busy -- her appearance in the bar was met by a cheer -- but unchained.

They'd worked this out in advance, using Val's number system. She wanted to be in the bar, she wanted to be in the restroom, she wanted to be chained to the floor, she didn't want him there if all he was going to do was make her "safe."

He went in the restroom anyway, locked the chains to her collar, and watched from the stool until the frown on her face made it plain she didn't wish him there. He carried the stool back to the end of the bar, got his free beer. Tommy D. told him not to worry about paying, which was awfully fine of him.

And since he was the one who brought the slut, one man's words, he didn't want for company at his table. The things guys told or asked him.

Currently it was Club, a dark man in his forties, long beard and hair each in a braid. The hair braid reached his wide black leather belt. Club had a suntan, black hair, dressed in black, a faded t-shirt with a local cycle club name on the back and jeans, with tall black boots.

Club was a tattoo artist, self-proclaimed, the one who'd done much of the girl's decoration. Val wasn't impressed which didn't bother Club one bit.

"Bob brings her around Friday to get inked. I'm always busy Friday but do what I can for a friend."

"I'm sure," Val said.

"You'll be bringing her by, won't you? Look at this." Club rolled up his sleeve to show his shoulder. Both arms were covered with flame tattoos and naked women. On the shoulder was a medallion, bordered with vines, black ground, white letters: "Ginger." "That's her name, but you know that."

Val nodded. Ginger fit. She was the pretty one on Gilligan's Island. "I'm not sure about Friday. We'll see."

"I'll ink you too, if you want. Free of course. No charge. That girl's special."

"I know that."

"Incredible. I've never known anyone drink so much piss and not cramp or get the shits. Gallons. Of course she pees a lot herself, but you know that."

"It hasn't been a problem."

"Rubber sheets." Club nodded.

"Bathtub. She licks it clean afterward."

Club gave him a look, burst out laughing and slapped Val's arm. "Shit," Club said. "Some of us were just born lucky, the rest of us all have to work."

Val raised his beer bottle as a salute and took a drink.

"The slut likes to party. But of course you know that. You want to make some money, give me a call." Club fished for his wallet; it was attached with a long chain to his belt. He took out a card. "Leave a message."

Val put the card in his wallet.

"Five hundred for all night. No lasting damage. I could make sure for a hundred of it. Some of the guys don't know limits."

"I'll keep it in mind."

"How'd you get her off Bob?"

"Won her in a poker game." Val looked away, around the room. The bar had a mixed clientele, women and men, mostly over thirty, nobody looked overly affluent. He turned back to Club.

"That must have been some game."

"It was. It was. Look Club, the beer is running through me and I need to take a leak."

Club rose with him. "I'm ready for another go. This place could use pretzels but I'm not complaining." He laughed and slapped Val's back.

Val used the urinal, Club along with several others was using the girl. Club was getting obvious pleasure and for the first time Val heard her squeal with laughter.

He went back to his beer and there was a woman at the table.

"You should be ashamed," the woman said. She drew wet circles on the table with her glass. "Doing a young good-looking girl like that. You are a bunch of animals." She looked up at him.

"My limits for shame are continually being tested," Val said. He was thinking of going home from the mall, the sullen girl in the back seat. She hadn't wanted to leave and several of the men looked like they could easily pick a fight. They were bantam cocks who looked astonishingly like Baptist ministers: short hair, polyester shirts, and florid faces. One of the men, a tall heavyset black man, helped Val clean her up and get her dressed. He held the girl while Val splashed her with water from a sink to wash as much of the cum off as he could. His shirt she'd worn to the mall was used as a towel.

At home, the girl in the bathtub moaning, the TV louder than usual to help cover the sound, Val sat on the couch and picked up the envelope Bert had left. He found three five-dollar bills inside.

He'd had two choices – tear up the money or keep it. He was so fed up with the whole situation he put the fifteen dollars in his wallet. Doing that, in a subtle way, changed their relationship, his and the girl's. He wasn't sure how, but it was changed now.

"What makes you think you're the lord of creation?" the woman said.

"I'm not the lord of anything, lady," Val said. "I don't know or understand most of what happens around me, my relationship to the girl back there is my business, not yours, just as what she wants to do is her business and not ours." He finished his beer. "I'll be back in a minute to continue our discussion."

"Smart ass," she said to his back.

He returned with a second free beer, no pretzels as Club said, and he was hungry not having had dinner. "Yes?" he said.

"You're going to pretend she likes it? That's disgusting. Doing what they're doing in there."

"Pretending she doesn't like it hasn't been successful so far, lady."

"My name's Lisa." She took a drink.

"Lisa. Could I get you another?"

She pushed the glass at him.

Her drink was free too. "When we're done we can, one, go to the men's room and you can see what they're doing if you want. Two, you can join in, if you want. Or three, I'm famished. Do you know a good place to eat nearby? I'll buy you a meal."

Lisa studied her glass for a minute. "Three. There's a White Castle a couple blocks away."

"Not one or two?" He took a sip of beer.

"You're an instigator. You know that? No, I'm not going in the men's room."

"It's just a meal, okay?"

"Sure. What makes you think any different?"

"You took your wedding ring off."

"So you noticed?"

"I'm getting better at it."

"Lisa's my name. What's yours?"

"Val."

"You look ethnic."

"My father was Greek. My mother was from Lebanon."

"Not one of those guys with hairy backs?"

"No hair on the back except lower down."

"Val. That's a nice name. Why do you treat your girlfriend like that?"

"Like her? She's not my girlfriend, Lisa. I won her at a poker game last night." He watched her face for her reaction.

Lisa drew circles on the table with the glass, looked up at him. "I don't think I'm going to go out to eat with you tonight, Val."

"Because I won a girl at a poker game?"

"Because I think you're telling the truth and either you have amazing luck or you're a dumbass."

"Thank you, Lisa. I'm a dumbass."

"A handsome dumbass with his hands full. Don't fall in love with her, Val. She won't be yours for long."

"I know that, Lisa. A couple of blocks away, you said."

"Down the street, turn right. Corner of 20th and 1st Avenue." She took her glass and left him.

Chapter Six

Val brought the girl home from the bar at eleven. He wasn't going to work in the morning and he could have stayed out all night but he was bored to tears nursing beers at Rudy's and talking. He didn't feel like talking.

He did feel like talking to Nancy but she'd drawn her line and he wasn't sure it made sense to cross it if he hoped to save the relationship. He'd give her time to calm down and him time to deal with the girl.

Dealing with the girl was the big one. If there weren't some emotional tie, she wouldn't be a burden. Part of the burden was that there was enough of a relationship where he couldn't just leave her somewhere.

He unlocked the door and pulled her into his apartment. "Sit on the couch," he said. "After you clean up." She trod off to the bathroom.

Val started coffee and hunted through his cupboards for a snack. He carried a tray in and set it onto his coffee table.

The girl came out, dripping wet, and sat on the couch. She gave Val a nervous smile.

"We need to talk. You won't talk though, will you?"

She shrugged.

"So we'll do the one finger, two finger, three trick. Okay?"

She nodded, pulled her feet up onto the couch under her and leaned back.

"One. Do you want to stay here or, two, do you want to leave? Three, you can just walk out or, four, I can take you back to Rudy's and leave you there?" He picked up his coffee. "A coffee for you and snacks. Please eat and drink."

She held up a single finger.

Val smiled. "Thank you. I think." He paused, set his cup down. "I need to know what you want." She pointed to him, pointed to her mouth. "That easy, hunh?" The girl smiled, gave a quick nod. She opened her mouth to moan. "Stop that."

The girl shut her mouth.

"Thank you." He grabbed a handful of crackers. "Would you be willing to write out what you want?" She pointed to her mouth.

"Would you please write out what you want?" She shrugged. "You don't say no, do you?"

She smiled, "Ummm."

"Okay." He tossed her a cracker. If you don't eat that, you can't stay here. My rule. Okay?"

She threw the cracker down on the table and stood.

"Club wanted to know if I was going to bring you by his tattoo parlor Friday."

She sat.

"There are things you want to do. There are things I want you to do. If we are going to live together for a while we need to work this out. If you leave I may get my girlfriend back. You need to make it worthwhile for me."

She pointed to her mouth.

"Honey, I need to be able to talk to a girl before we do the fun stuff."

She sat angrily against the couch's back cushion.

"You have things you want and need. I have things I want and need."

She thought for a moment, nodded.

"I need you to eat and drink something now and again besides piss and cum. Besides. Not instead. We meet halfway. Okay?"

She shrugged.

"Seriously. Okay?"

She picked up the cracker, looked at it, put it back down. She leaned back against the cushion, crossed her arms.

"Eat something. Go into the kitchen and find something to eat." He picked up his coffee cup and turned on the TV.

She came back with two hot dogs. She sat on the couch across from him, legs spread and shoved the hot dogs into her cunt.

"Interesting." He turned on the TV. "Do you want me to be hard or soft on you? We already know when I'm angry I'll hit you. How about that?"

The girl moaned. He looked at her. She pulled a hot dog out and nibbled its end. She made a face.

"Good girl. Both of them." He turned off the TV and watched her. When she was done, he said, "So we need to think about a new tattoo."

She smiled, pointed to her forehead.

"Maybe a piercing. Does Club do piercings?"

She shrugged.

"Okay. Some basic rules. You don't like to wear clothes. Okay. In here you don't have to. At Rudy's," she smiled, "you don't have to. But in between you have to. If you'd prefer a skirt and top, easy to shed, we can get them for you. Understand?"

She crossed her arms and stamped her foot.

"It won't kill you. Another rule is your name is Em, for empty, or whatever you like. Just between you and me. Unless you want to tattoo it somewhere. Not your forehead. Okay, Em?"

She nodded.

"I work which means you'll be alone during the day. Unless I say otherwise, you'll stay here and there will be no visitors. I find you've been roaming or having a party, you're out. No second chances. Understand?"

She nodded, looked away from him.

"We can go to Rudy's. Club said he can fix you up for parties. All night. Interested?"

She pointed to him.

"I'll go to Rudy's with you. I may or may not go to the parties. Okay?"

She shrugged.

"Not sure or don't care?"

She shrugged, smiled.

"What you did at the mall pissed me off. If you need something you need to figure out a way to tell me, otherwise don't think about doing it without my say so."

She pointed to her mouth, held up three fingers.

"I need to know what's going on in that head of yours first."

She shrugged, pointed to him, pointed to her mouth.

"Would you be able to give up Rudy's and the rest for me? Honestly?"

She lowered her eyes, shrugged.

"Have you thought about what you want me to give up for you? My girlfriend. My self respect. Who I am. Just so you can go in a bar and give blowjobs and get your ass fucked by strange men. And a

chance to fuck your face makes it all worthwhile? What if I did what you want and when I was done I threw you out onto the street? Will you be happy then?"

She shrugged.

"Look at me, Em."

She turned to him, gave a tentative smile.

"Again. One, you want to stay. Two, you want to leave." He watched her.

She raised one finger.

"How long was your hair before they cut it?"

She held her hand even with her breasts.

"It must have been pretty. Do you want me, one, hard, or two, soft?"

She held up one finger, put it in her mouth.

"Not that kind of hard. You know what I mean." He smiled to show her he wasn't angry.

She shrugged.

"Another rule. You sleep out here, not in the bathtub. I expect you to keep the place clean and neat. Perhaps I can let you run errands – do the grocery shopping. Not right away. We go to Rudy's two nights a week, Club's parlor another, maybe a party one or two nights. Bert and his friends can visit in the morning. Those are huge concessions on my part. Immense. If that's not enough, you should leave. I want you to drink something." She pointed to him, put her finger in her mouth. "If not coffee then something from the kitchen."

She sat still and stared at him.

"Leave or drink something. Your choice. Each minute you waste we take one of my concessions off the list, starting with the parties." He raised his wrist. "Starting now." He watched the second hand. "Forty-five seconds left. Thirty."

She picked the coffee cup up off the table and began drinking.

"Good girl." He lowered his wrist. "Any preference in movies?"

She shrugged, wiped her chin.

He turned the station to HBO. "Okay?"

She shrugged, wiped her mouth and grimaced.

"How many gallons of piss did you drink tonight? A cup of coffee isn't going to kill you. If you'll share a bowl of popcorn I'll share the couch with you. No funny stuff."

She pointed to her mouth.

"Not tonight, Em. But not an impossibility some time in the future."

She nodded.

"Would you make the popcorn? I'll get your bedding together."

She studied him for a minute and smiled.

"See? Give and take."

She went to the kitchen. He watched the movie for a minute, shrugged his shoulders. He was stuck with the girl and Nancy was going to be pissed as hell.

Chapter Seven

Val sat a little longer in his car in the university parking lot near Nancy's office. Dropping in cold on her like this was idiotic but he desperately needed her help or to know he had to do this alone, his project with the girl.

This morning at breakfast ("Pretend the milk is cum" had gotten a lopsided grin) he'd asked her if she liked porn. She'd shrugged. Would she like to make porn? That got a nod.

So she was the star, he the photographer, when Bert and his pals dropped by. He promised Bert a copy of the photos to show around; the girl was positively glowing at that idea. Before Val left he showed her how to use the computer, created a Yahoo account for her and let her loose in Yahoo groups with a horde of photos to share with her new friends.

Leaving the apartment and seeing her there, at the desk, engrossed and unselfconscious, she looked adorable. Knowing that she'd forced down a half a bowl of cereal because he wanted her to eat was nice too.

He had to quit dawdling and bite the bullet. He left the car, walked across the parking lot and entered Nancy's building. Classes didn't start for two weeks but the campus wasn't uninhabited. In early September a mass of confused freshmen would rush about, most of them a little lost, some more than a little.

Several of the staff in Nancy's department shared one secretary, Dot, who was retirement age but not throwing in the towel. Dot, in spite of her age, added an aura of immaturity to the hallowed, and way too quiet, academic halls.

"Nancy in?" Val asked.

"You, young man, are on the persona non grata list." Dot leaned forward. "What did you do?"

"It's all a big misunderstanding. I need to talk to her."

Dot picked up her coffee cup and left the desk. "I wasn't here. Good luck."

Val knocked on the open door's frame. "Five minutes? Could I ask that?"

Nancy pushed the papers to the sides of the desk. "Must we?"

"I wouldn't be here if I didn't think so. Honestly."

"Five minutes." Nancy leaned back in her chair, crossed her arms.

Val sat in one of the hot seats. Nancy was loved by her students, but not for being easy. She expected them to work hard, very hard. No excuses.

"Okay, I . . ."

"I'm timing you," Nancy said.

"I need your help. The young woman you saw was dumped on me by Bob and his friends." Nancy smiled; it wasn't a friendly smile. Val could imagine an Aztec priest smiling like that as he prepared to flay the skin from a writhing victim. "She, I don't know how to put this."

"Try." Again that smile.

"If I didn't take her in, she would have been cast off. Left in a park or bus station. Naked as you saw her, she had no clothes, probably chained, and . . ." Val shrugged.

Nancy tapped her watch.

"For the past several weeks all she's had for nourishment has been piss or semen. A lot of piss and semen. She's a strange woman. She wants, or thinks she wants, this. She doesn't talk. Never says no, no one knows her name, and is voracious sexually.

"Yesterday we got clothes for her at the mall. Later she took exception to something I said, left me and I found her, very, very busy in one of the mall's men's restrooms. At first I thought she's crazy but she isn't. There's a system, an order, to her behavior." He paused.

"Remember that film we saw? Y Tu Tambien Mama? Where the young woman discovers she has cancer and is dying and goes on that crazy trip with the two dimwitted teenaged guys. Sex for her was an attempt to taste everything life has to offer before her end. For the guys it was scoring, a competition without meaning or purpose. Except to score higher than the other males in their group.

"I think she's like that. Something happened to her and she's dived into life in the only way she can. Surrounded by dimwits.

"She had a bowl of cereal this morning. A concession on her part. She's willing, for the moment, to stay at my house. I haven't touched her. She knows about you, doesn't like it but accepts the fact.

"She was in the tub Monday morning because I put her there. I chained her to the faucet because I didn't want the responsibility of caring for her. I was hoping you could help when you got back. You know people and places where she could go. Where she'd be respected as a human being instead of as a willing orifice. I was hoping . . ."

"Two minutes left."

"I can't do this by myself, Nancy. I'm not good enough." She gave that smile.

Val stopped talking and looked around the room. "I hate for the three years we had together, my feelings for you, everything to end this way. All because of a screwed up attempt to not seriously screw up. I don't think I could have done it differently, the finer points, yes. But . . ." Val stopped. He could tell it was over by the look on her face. "I'm done."

Nancy clapped her hands in a very slow, prissy way. Clap. Clap. Clap. Clap. "You still get an F, Mr. Stanos."

"Is the F for failure, or is for fuckhead? Nancy, I wouldn't have done what I did any differently. There are parts where I have done things that have made me terribly ashamed. She's forgiven me. I thought you would too."

"Your five minutes are up, Mr. Stanos."

"This is the condemned man's last speech, Ms Dexter. I'm allowed that, aren't I? I'll put your things in a box and drop it by here sometime this week. I'll leave it with Dot. I . . ."

"Put them in a box and mail it. Don't come here. Don't call me. Don't email me, don't stalk me. I'll slap you with an injunction so fast you'll be knocked silly." She gave that smile.

Val stood. "Could you give me something about battered women centers nearby? Anything that might help her?"

"Try the phone book. I'm busy, Mr. Stanos. Good day." Nancy brought papers back to the center of her desk and ignored him.

Val stood in the doorway, studied her for a moment, said goodbye silently, to himself, not to her, she wasn't listening.

Dot was back at her desk, looked up at him, her face became serious.

Val drew his thumb across his neck. "Like that. I'm history. It's been nice knowing you, Dot."

She nodded, watched him leave.

He sat in his car for a few minutes. Worked the kinks out of his hands and jaw. He felt like he'd been in a fight – bruised all over. The adrenaline was all gone. He was in that flat space that is all past, no future.

The last few minutes with Nancy had altered the three years they'd been together, all the memories were touched by something

sour. He'd never seen her like this, would have held back more if he'd known.

He started his car and began the drive home. Part of his mind was occupied with Nancy, their past, and the scene in the office. Part of his mind was occupied with the girl. She'd never told him whether she wanted it hard or soft. She'd get it hard. Not like when he slapped her. That was lack of control. Hard was control with force, but force wasn't the right word. Impetus? Something like that. Soft was ballet, hard was a slam dance.

Options he'd considered fell away, new ones appeared.

He stopped at Burger King to pick up a lunch. Probably not organic like piss and cum, probably laden with chemicals and fat. She'd get used to it. Just like he was getting used to seeing her wallowing so joyfully in her degradation. Piss and cum. He smiled.

Actually this was the easiest way. Perdition. The destruction of everything in himself he'd thought good.

He parked the car in front of the apartment, carried the bags in one hand, his key in the other. For a moment he was afraid she'd be gone. Then everything would have been for naught. He opened the door; she was still at the computer. She turned, he said, "Is that drool I see?"

She touched her chin, smiled and shrugged. She pointed to him, pointed to her mouth. "Ummm."

"You're supposed to leap in my arms. I'm supposed to yell, honey, I'm home. I have burgers. We can eat there, by the computer."

Val pulled up a chair; she moved hers a little to the side. For the first time he noticed her smell, saw her ear had been pierced. He sorted out their meal.

The girl opened her sandwich and frowned. She pointed to him, to her sandwich and gave a hopeful grin.

Not right now, Em. You'll have to pretend. I've been thoroughly emasculated, cut loose, no more girlfriend."

She pointed to her breast.

"Because of you? No. We saw things in each other we didn't like. You were the catalyst, not the cause. I think they were always there." He changed the pitch of his voice. "Ready for excitement this afternoon? Shopping. A surprise. And a question. Would it bother you if I made a little money off your . . . hunger?" He raised an eyebrow.

She flung her arm around him and jiggled and squealed.

Chapter Eight

Val had explained his plans for this afternoon along with incentives to make the girl's shopping ordeal palatable. They were in Goodwill and both were looking for a variety of presentable slutty costumes.

Her heart really wasn't in it until she found a skimpy black miniskirt. After that she began to search in earnest. They each had an armful of clothes for her to try on and carried them into one of the changing rooms. Val leaned against the wall and watched her try one item after another. The cotton summer dress fit, a print top fit but didn't go with anything else so it was put on the discard pile. The miniskirt looked great, she was trying on more tops when Val's cellphone rang.

"Hello," Val said.

"Val, that's you, isn't it? This is Bert."

"Hi, Bert. Thanks for calling."

"Everything okay?"

"Fantastic. We're at the thrift store and she's trying on clothes now. Want to say hi to Bert?" He held the cellphone to her.

"Ummm," she said with a smile.

"Hi, sweetie. Put me back with Val."

"Bert, I need to go out this evening and I wondered if you wanted to borrow her for a few hours. Say from six to eleven. You can do whatever you want, but it's fifty bucks an hour." He gave the girl a wink. She flipped up her skirt showing him her pussy. She pointed to him and then touched her slit. "Not now, Em."

"She's a cutie pie, isn't she? I don't know, Val."

"Anything you want, as long as she's back by eleven and in one piece."

"That would be . . ."

"Two fifty. I know it's a lot and it's short notice and if you can't, that's okay."

"Anything?"

"Put her on the street at Central by Kinko's if you want."

The girl pointed to her mouth. "Ummm."

Val nodded to her. "Anything. As long as she comes back in one piece."

"I don't know. Anything?"

"Anything. Listen, can you operate a video camera? I'll loan you mine. Bring it back with great video and I won't charge you a dime. The batteries need to be charged, but if you set up where there's an outlet you can film for hours. It's digital. Brand new." He was buying it later this afternoon.

"Anything?"

"What are you thinking of?"

"I don't know."

"Need an idea? Call up all your friends and have a party somewhere. Even a motel. Hell, invite guys off the street. Don't get busted, shoot great video, bring her and the camera back at eleven, no later, and if I like the preview, it doesn't cost you a dime. You should be able to find twenty-five guys willing to pay ten dollars for a good time. Charge twenty and you'll make money no matter what. Get a keg of beer. Have a party."

"I could do that."

"Do you want to think about it? Call me back. I need to know by five."

"Let me see what I can come up with. I need to say goodbye to the little bitch."

Val held the cellphone for the girl.

"Hey, sweetie. I'd sure like to see you tonight. Those photos turn out okay?"

The girl said, "Ummmm."

Val said, "She's pointing to her mouth, Bert. The photos turned out great. If we get back early enough, I'll burn you a CD. You'll get a copy of the video too."

"Bye, sweetie. Okay, Val. I'll call."

Val put his cellphone away. "That sound okay to you, Em?"

The girl pointed to him, pointed to herself and pointed to her mouth.

"We have stuff to do first. But, yes. That's why I want you back by eleven. Is that okay? I can call Bert back and he can keep you all night."

She shrugged, with a smile, flashed five fingers at him five times.

"Maybe more," Val said. "You like that skirt, don't you?"

She nodded, did a slow spin, holding the hem up.

"Find everything you want?"

She nodded.

"I'll take back the clothes you don't want. Stay here, just like that. I'll see if I can't find someone or another. Just one thing. Condoms. And you have to tie the condom off to save the good stuff for later. Got it?"

She made a thumb up sign.

Val left her and now the hard part for him had come. It was okay talking to Bert about renting her -- handing her to a stranger -- but actually doing it himself was different. Besides, Bert was an acquaintance. He put up the blouse and other items, found several tank tops, a pair of boots and another miniskirt. He also spotted a lanky youth, maybe early twenties, black haired, alternative styling but not extreme. Val carried his finds over to the youth and made his pitch.

"My girlfriend liked you earlier. She's in a dressing room and if you want to, you can. You have to use a condom but otherwise what you do is entirely up to you."

The youth smiled at first and then his expression became puzzled. "I . . ."

"Do you remember seeing us together? She's had her head shaved; it's just starting to grow back. Want to see her?" Val walked toward the dressing room, not bothering to look to see if the youth followed him.

He opened the door wide. The girl stared at him, then broke into a smile. Val looked over his shoulder. "Interested?" Val handed him the clothes he'd found for her, took a condom out of his pocket. "Here. She's to try these on after you're done."

Val stepped aside; the girl was falling to her knees. The miniskirt was off and she was naked. He shut the door and went back to look for clothes.

He watched the dressing room from across the store. Once the youth left, Val found another man for her. When that one was finished, Val went in the dressing room. Two used condoms, their open ends tied, lay on the chair. The girl was humming, looking at herself in the mirror wearing a tank top and the black miniskirt.

"Happy?" Val asked.

She nodded, turned to him and pointed to her mouth.

"Both of them?"

She shrugged. She pointed to her mouth and to her pussy, lifting the skirt.

"Good."

She nodded.

"Time to go. I think you can wear those. Carry the condoms but don't be obvious about it."

Val paid for everything at the counter, the girl humming by his side.

Their next stop was a metal shop. Before getting out he told her, "From now on you won't get much choice. You can still say no," he smiled, "but you'll have to say it. Okay?"

She nodded not paying much attention.

The metal shop was a large open room in an older building that had once been an automobile dealership. This was the former repair area, with large doors open at each end because it was summer. Benches filled the space along with stacks and piles of steel bar and pipes and equipment. There looked to be seven men working, most at their own benches fitting or welding. A man in his late twenties or early thirties with long blonde hair tied back came to them.

"Can I help you?"

"I called earlier," Val said. "I have a rush job and another not so rush. The rush job isn't so complicated, consisting of two separate components but with hinges and latches."

"Drawings?"

"No drawings. I thought it would be easier if I brought the model. This is Em."

The girl smiled.

"Strip, Em."

The girl looked at him, pulled off the miniskirt and her tank top. Val took the clothing from her hands. "Legs spread. More. Like that. Hands by your sides."

"What the . . ." The man started to speak. They had the attention of everyone in the shop.

"I need a steel ring, hinged to fit around her waist. Two hinged bands attached to the ring for her forearms. For her feet I need a bar, hinged loops for her ankles at either end. I want to be able to lock the ring and loops with padlocks which I'll furnish. Good girl, Em. Stay like that. I need to run errands but I can leave her here for fitting."

"We don't . . ."

"Is this something you want, Em?"

The girl nodded. "Ummm," she said.

"She doesn't speak. She's available for use, aren't you, Em?" The girl nodded quickly. "If it would interfere with your schedule today, I can leave her tomorrow for as long as you'd like." The girl nodded with a smile. Val could see her fingers twitch.

"We . . ."

"And of course I'll pay. Her use is as an incentive, not instead of paying for the rush job." Val saw that three of the men came closer.

"Can you do it for us?"

"Two hundred?"

"Fine."

"Look we . . ."

"Entirely up to you. I have condoms in the car. Please tie the ends off after using them." Val watched the girl's face. "Em likes her cereal fortified."

The girl gave a squeal and began to bounce.

Val turned back to the man and watched his face as the man finally got it. The girl began making that weird moan; the man flushed deeply.

"She loves to drink piss," Val said and left them to get the condoms.

Chapter Nine

Val and the girl stopped at Burger King on the way home so she'd have something to eat. A new video camera, digital with a huge hard drive, was in the trunk along with software for editing, a web cam (a treat for the girl to keep her occupied while he was at work), and the appliances from the metal shop. He had her select one of the condoms from the bag on the seat beside her to take in the restaurant.

While waiting to order, he asked her, "You don't mind going back tomorrow, do you?"

She gave a big smile, shrugged, and began to pull up her tank top.

"Not here."

She nodded.

"Happy?"

She began to put her finger in her mouth.

"Not here."

She stamped her foot.

"Do you want to stay home tonight?"

She made a face and shrugged.

Val ordered dinner just for her, a coffee for him and they sat in the dining area. It was before five so it wasn't very crowded yet.

"I got you a web cam to play with tomorrow. Plus you can learn how to edit video. That okay?"

She nodded, laid the condom on the table.

"You do much with computers?"

She ignored him. She opened her sandwich and picked up the condom.

"You catch on quick."

She flashed him a smile, struggled with the knot. "Umph," she said, looking across the table at him.

Val took his leatherman out of his pocket and set it by her tray.

She grinned at him, held the condom up and clipped off the tip. She squeezed out the cum, laid the shriveled condom on her tray and closed her sandwich. She wiped the leatherman on her tank top and handed it back.

"Thanks," Val said. "I want to see you eat the whole thing."

The girl opened her mouth to moan.

"Not here. I know, I'm no fun at all. Looking forward to this evening?"

She nodded, her mouth full.

"Like Bert?"

She swallowed, "Ummmm." She pointed to him, pointed to her chin, held up three fingers.

"You, me, three, too. I want you to begin doing something for me. I want you to keep track, the best you can, which hole, how many. I was thinking of making a web site. We can give the daily tally. Update with new pictures."

The girl got up from her bench seat and slid next to Val. She pulled her tray over, placed a hand on Val's crotch. He moved it to his leg.

"Can you eat one handed?"

She nodded.

"Maybe once or twice a month give everybody a chance to be with the star. We could get a motel room or find a cheap apartment. You could hand out cards with the date and address." She squeezed his leg. "But we're getting ahead of ourselves. Keep track of the numbers, organize your pictures. You'll be famous."

She tried to pull her hand from his leg. "Ummmm."

"You don't like that. What? Being on the web. Famous?"

She used two hands to eat.

"You don't have to be famous. Afraid someone will see you? Don't want to talk about it? Listen. I may want you to do this. It may become important to me. Understand?"

She ignored him.

"You don't want someone to see your picture. That can be fixed. We can disguise you. We can . . . You're not listening. Okay. Bert will be filming you tonight. He'll have a copy, I'll have a copy, people are going to see it. Understand? Like the pictures. Probably not a lot of people. I have no idea how many. You have a husband, maybe a kid somewhere?"

Val watched her eat. She swallowed each bit, moved on to the next like she was in a race.

"How's the sauce?"

She nodded.

"Having second thoughts?"

She shrugged.

"That tells me a lot."

She smiled at him, went back to her sandwich.

"When you're in bed with me tonight, you'll be bound by iron, the things that were made today."

She nodded, finished her sandwich.

"That doesn't scare you? What if I hit you again?"

She shrugged, cleaned her hands with the napkin.

"Do you want some of my coffee?"

She shrugged, put her hand back in his lap.

"When you get in the car, take off your skirt."

She nodded, gave his crotch a squeeze.

"I bet you didn't think it was going to take two days, did you?"

She smiled, shrugged. "Ummm," she said.

"Ready to go? We need to make a CD for Bert."

She stood bouncing on her heels, fingers playing with the hem of her skirt.

"I'll take that." Val dumped her tray in the bin; the condom stuck to the tray. What the hell, he thought. He put the tray on the stack. It'll be something for people to talk about.

In the car, her skirt stuffed in the bag with the condoms, Val asked her, "Aren't you afraid of HIV? Other things?"

She shrugged.

"Don't care?"

She shrugged, said, "Ummm."

"I have to think about it. Whether or not I'll use condoms with you. I should, I know that."

She made a tying motion with her hands.

"We could. I don't know. We'll find out tonight. Ever been tested?"

She shrugged.

"Want to get tested?"

She waited a moment, shrugged.

"I wish I didn't have to keep taking my eyes off the road to talk with you. Maybe one grunt for a nod, two for a shrug."

She shrugged.

"I'm supposed to be the boss here. Remember?"

She smiled.

"Me, you, three. I remember."

"Ummm."

"You need to put your skirt back on."

"Umph."

"I think I'd like you to shave your pussy."

She nodded, pulled the skirt out of the bag.

"Hamburger good?"

She shrugged.

"The cum made it taste better?"

She nodded.

"You need to write Burger King."

She grinned. "Ummmm."

"Put it on first. Remember?"

She shrugged, got out of the car, pulled on her skirt.

They walked together to the apartment and Val opened the door.

"You get everything started, I'll get the stuff from the car."

When he brought in the last load, she was sitting at the computer. The new cameras, tripod and software boxes were on the table beside her.

"Bert's going to be here any minute. You need to get ready."

She turned to him. "Ummm?"

"You need to get dressed."

She touched her tank top.

"It's going to get dirty, remember. Maybe not your favorite for tonight. It's up to you."

She left him.

He started burning the CD for Bert when she came back. "Your mall clothes. Figures. The most expensive stuff you have." She made a face. "Wear it. I don't care. You ever use one of these?" He held up the video camera.

She paused, shrugged.

"Not this one, but maybe one like it. Good. You can show Bert how to set it up. I don't care about zoom shots and stuff. Put it on a tripod,

turn it on and forget about it. There'll be enough good stuff to make it worthwhile."

Val held up the web cam. "Ever use one of these?"

She shrugged, gave a smile, looked to the door.

"You can set it up tomorrow. Use it. You'll have all afternoon to play. Think you can stand it?"

She pointed to him.

"I have to work. No visitors. No roaming. I'll be home by five-thirty. Maybe a little later if I do some shopping."

There was a knock at the door. "I'll get it. Open that drawer and find a magic marker."

Bert came in a little shy. "I don't have the money up front."

"Don't worry about it." The girl brought him the magic marker. "What do you think we should name her?"

Bert grinned at her, "Hi, sweetie. No, we'll take care of that later." Bert looked to Val. "Isn't she a good girl?"

"The best. She'll show you how to use the camera. It's brand new, don't let it drive you crazy. Come here, Em. What shall we call you?"

The girl pointed to her mouth.

Val wrote on her forehead, "Use me."

Chapter Ten

After ordering Val and Megan sat quietly in the Chi Chi's just outside of the mall where she worked. Val let her lead the conversation; so far she hadn't said much.

Their beers came; Val had assumed she was of drinking age and so had the waitress.

"Where's your friend?" Megan asked.

"She's busy tonight. I rented her out to Bert until eleven." He watched her lips tighten and relax. "He's subcontracting her."

"How much?"

"Fifty an hour."

She gave a nod. "So while we're eating you're making money."

"Not exactly. I gave him a brand new digital video camera. He's to bring that and the girl back at eleven or there will be hell to pay. If the video is even mediocre I'll not charge him a dime. If he's halfway smart, he'll make some money off her tonight. Me? I'm not so smart." He gave her a grin.

"What's her name?"

"I don't know. I call her Em."

"For Mary?"

"For Empty."

Her lips compressed and relaxed. "I need to go to the ladies' room." She slid to the edge of her seat.

"Take off your panties and leave them there. You don't need them."

"What?"

"You want me to tell you what to do. Am I right? If not, speak up." She left him and he took a drink of beer. There was nothing riding on this and he shouldn't be nervous but he was. Not as nervous as she was. She couldn't keep her hands still. They fidgeted together or with the silverware and her drink. Then she dropped her hands from sight where he thought she was shredding her napkin. A few minutes later they were back in sight doing their dance. Her skin was very pale.

He watched her return to the table. "That's better," he said. "You move differently, looser."

She blushed, put her hands flat on the table.

"How old are you?"

"Twenty-two."

"In college still?"

"At the university."

"Who's your favorite person there?"

"Dr. Dexter."

"If you want to pass, don't mention my name to her." He watched her drink her beer, still shaking but not so much. "When was the last time you had sex?"

She blushed. "Saturday. A week ago."

"No boyfriend?"

"Not really. A friend."

"Children?"

She shook her head.

"Been tested?"

"What?"

"For STDs?"

She shook her head. "I use condoms."

"Always?"

She blushed.

"Ever had your picture taken? Naked?"

She opened her purse, took out an envelope. "Photos on a CD. My resume. I want to finish and get my degree, otherwise," she shrugged. "I have to work. There's no money."

Val didn't say anything about her being prepared. Maybe he wasn't supposed to have noticed.

Their meal came. "Relax," Val said. "I just want to get to know you." He put the envelope by his placemat. "Pretty noisy, isn't it?"

"I don't usually eat here."

"Stay at home with your parents?"

She nodded.

"What do they think about you being away all night?"

"I'm twenty-two. They know how things are."

"You're pretty but you already know that. Are you sitting on your skirt or the seat?"

She blushed. "The seat."

"Do they appreciate you at work?"

She shrugged. "The clothes sell themselves."

"What did you think of Em?"

"I wish I could do that. Just take off my clothes. Stand there. Do whatever happens next."

"Or whomever?"

She blushed, looked away. "Can we eat?"

"Certainly. Megan." He said it as two distinct sentences, with a smile. He leaned forward and whispered, "There'll be no casting couch session after dinner. Just talk."

"I don't . . ."

"Not tonight, Megan. Relax." He ate, watching her. After several minutes he asked, "How are you at oral sex?"

She set her fork down, looked at him. "You're baiting me."

"You're doing good so far. Do you give good blowjobs? Swallow? Did you look in yesterday and watch Em?"

"I'm told so, sometimes, yes." She resumed eating.

"But if it's whomever you'd want them to use a condom." He smiled. "Condoms are a novelty for Em. She uses them to store cum for later. Tomorrow she'll empty a bag full over her cereal." Megan's lips compressed. "And I am having the time of my life baiting you. The thought makes me queasy too."

She relaxed.

"The most you've done in a twenty-four hour period."

"Two."

"Total?"

She shrugged. "Depends on how you count. Intercourse?"

"Intercourse," he said smiling.

"I think fifteen."

"That's a good number."

"I'm glad you think so."

"Would it frighten you to have to do fifteen a day? Fifteen an hour?"

She froze. She became even paler, then flushed. "I . . ."

"You've considered it?"

She nodded. "Have you ever read the Story of O?"

"Years ago."

"What do you remember?"

"This place where O is used by men. Her naked at a party with a bird mask on, led by another."

"The other is Natalie, a young girl. Jacqueline's sister."

"You've read it more than once, I take it."

She gave a nod. "O in the chateau. Roissy's cellar, chained to the wall, in the dark. They come in singly and in groups. They fuck," she looked right and left, "her." Megan's voice lowered. "She has to let them. She can't stop them. Her lover wishes this."

"The lover?"

"There are two. René at first who takes her to the chateau. Then Sir Stephen, an older man."

"Like me."

"Not at all." She flushed. "René gives her to Sir Stephen. Sir Stephen makes her agree to let them do whatever they want to her."

"Whatever." He smiled. "Now who's baiting whom? I'm not Sir Stephen. Am I René? Maybe I'm one of the faceless ones."

She looked away.

"Could I borrow your copy? I need to reread it. I don't remember the story this way at all. You could bring the book by my apartment or I could pick it up from you at work." He waited. "This is important, isn't it?"

"Your apartment."

"I'll need your schedule. What you saw yesterday. Did it frighten you?"

"A little. She was alone. They were . . ."

"They weren't gentle."

"But." She opened her mouth to speak, paused. "I don't know what I want."

"You know what you should want isn't enough."

She shrugged.

"If you're looking for a single, intense experience, I can hook you up with Bert. You'll get to double or triple your numbers and he'll

make some money off you." He grinned at her. "I think the money part is very important myself. If you want something more prolonged, intense but as a minor, not primary, participant, you could be what's her name, the girl with O at the party. I don't remember her being . . ."

"She isn't. Not in the Story of O. In the sequel, The Return to the Chateau, she is. By Sir Stephen. That's Natalie."

"Some guys have all the luck. You could be Em's Natalie, until or unless you decide to be O. Once you agree, you can't turn back, can you?"

She shook her head. "I want to finish school first."

Val didn't say anything.

"I . . ." She looked away.

"I need to talk to Em before you visit. She may not want you. When you visit, realize that Em and I aren't your normal swinging couple. That I may ask you to do something you haven't thought about. Something I want and need you to do. If you spend the night, you'll spend it in the bathtub, chained to the faucets. And if you decide to be O, anyone who walks into the apartment can use you however, I repeat however, they wish. I do think we can enforce a condom rule. And you can leave anytime, but you already know that. I try to be good, but I'm human. You have failings which I'll try to take in consideration and not be too harsh. You did well tonight."

She wrote out her schedule, passed it to him.

"You work Saturday and Sunday, but are free Friday. Do you have any tattoos or piercings?"

She blushed. "My nipples."

"Excellent." Val smiled. "If you want to be Natalie, you get to create your own costumes. I hope the nipples will show in at least one. Friday is tattoo night." He wrote his telephone number and address. "Call me tomorrow and I'll tell you when and if you can come by. Em is very accepting. Perhaps tomorrow night." He arched an eyebrow.

She licked her lower lip. "I don't mind if you . . ."

"Not tonight, dear. We need to process. And I need to get Em's web cam sorted out and set up if I can. What are you majoring in?"

"Literature."

"Broad subject."

"My thesis is on pre-modern women writers."

"So you'll have something to fall back on?"

"If I get a degree."

"Call me tomorrow anytime. I'll be at work, at home or in transit. Em won't answer. She'll be busy in the morning anyway."

Megan leaned forward. "What?"

"What do you think? When she left with Bert tonight, before I drove out here and met you in the mall, I used a magic marker to write on her forehead, 'Use me' in bold capital letters. She wants that or something similar tattooed there. She can be Use Me, you can be Cunt. Imagine?" He watched her eyes.

"But that would be permanent."

"If you agree, that will be permanent, even if you end up walking away one day. More than skin deep, Megan. Natalie doesn't have to agree, she can walk away, get her degree, teach, raise a family and have daughters who she'll be afraid are like her, the person she really is. It's the same for me, dear."

Chapter Eleven

The cellphone rang just as there was a knock on the door. Val rose, said, "Hello; can you hold for a minute?" into the phone and went to the door. Bert and the girl were on the porch. "Come in you two. Just on time."

The girl followed Bert. She wore a black plastic garbage bag, was grinning at Val as she passed and pointed to her mouth. She smelled strongly of beer, piss and sex.

Val said in the cellphone, "Can I call you back?"

"Val, this is Megan. I need to see you tonight."

"Just a minute." Val asked Bert, "Where's the camera and her clothes?"

"Her clothes? Don't you have them, sweetie?"

The girl shrugged.

"The camera is in the car. I'll go get it." Bert left.

Val asked the girl, "Where are your clothes?"

She shrugged, grinned and lifted the front of the garbage bag to show her swollen pussy.

Val said into the cellphone, "Megan, I'll call you tomorrow."

"I really need to see you. If I think too much about this I'll chicken out."

"Maybe you should think about it." Val said to the girl, "Go sit in the bathtub." She left the room humming. "Megan, I'll call you tomorrow."

"Can't I come over? I need to talk."

Val thought for a second. "Come before midnight. If the porch light is on, you can ring the bell. If it's out, sorry. I'll talk to you tomorrow. If you rush, you'll get to meet Bert, the man of your nightmares." Val hung up.

Bert came in with the camera and tripod. "I didn't see her clothes. I thought she had them."

"You owe me two fifty. If you can't find her clothes that's another seventy-five more. They're brand new."

"I thought she had them."

Val waited; Bert dug in his pocket and pulled out a wad of bills. He counted out Val's money.

"If I like the video, you get this back." Val took the camera to his desk, tried to preview. "Do you know how to work this thing?"

"The bitch does." Bert shifted from one foot to another.

"Em," Val shouted. "Come here."

The girl, naked, walked into the living room. She pointed to her mouth.

"Not right now. I want to see what the video looks like."

The girl took the camera, pushed buttons, and handed it to Val. "Ummm."

"Thank you."

"Isn't the bitch amazing?" Bert said. "I need a piss."

"Wait a minute."

"Okay," Bert said. "I think."

Val watched the tiny screen. He could see several men, all shapes and sizes, some large like Bert, most were normal builds tending toward a belly. The girl was there, not very visible, but that was all right. "Where is this?"

"A friend has a tire shop. It's where they put them on and balance them."

"Those are huge tires."

"For those trucks with lift kits. You won't believe what those tires cost. You need a fucking ladder to get into the seat. Should she be doing that?"

Val looked up. "Em, close the door. You stay inside." He grinned at Bert. "Try to find her clothes, will you?"

"I'll look tomorrow, but gosh I don't know. We were all over the place. I thought she had them."

"Had a good time?"

"Yeah, but I gotta piss right now."

"Em, show Bert the bathroom." Val watched the screen. This was better than he thought they'd do. He turned off the camera, put it aside. He brought up a couple of Megan's photos on the computer, shut their windows. The girl was giggling in the bathroom.

He was going to have to learn to say no like he really meant it, though he had to admit if he had total control of his life it'd be a mess.

No girl. No Megan who was more a whim than a possibility. He'd still have Nancy but right now he wasn't feeling that loss too sharply.

"Feeling better now?" he asked Bert.

"Yeah, but I couldn't you know what and I think I let the bitch down. I can only do it so many times, twice as many when she's involved. I told her to lick the tub clean and by god she's doing it. That camera have any film left, you should shoot a movie."

"I think it's full and that's okay. We'll film that another time. The whole thing, maybe when you and your friends stop by. Take the two fifty. I'm more than happy." Val handed Bert the money. "Want to do it again next week?"

"We can? I mean, sure."

"I'll talk to Em tomorrow. If she has no problems with it, we'll make a date. You'll make a film again, but this time you'll pay me. With a little more notice you can make up the difference."

"I think so."

Val could see Bert working out the math.

"I'll give you a DVD of this but it'll take a couple of days."

"That's okay. I don't have a way to watch them."

"You have a TV?"

"Sure."

"We'll get what you need, even set it up for you, and you can reimburse us. Maybe have a small party with a couple of your friends when your wife isn't home."

"You would?"

"Sure. The girl likes you."

"I know. If she weren't a whore . . . Oh well."

The doorbell rang.

"Just a second." Val rose. "Someone for you to meet."

Val opened the door. Megan said, "Sorry, I . . ."

"Come on in. The rule here is women have to be naked. Meet Bert." Val watched her face as her eyes left him and went to the man standing by the computer. She took in Bert's size. She held a bag in her hand; it fell to her side.

Val touched her arm. "You were in a rush. Strip."

She looked at Val, "I . . ."

"Yes or no?"

She stepped across the threshold. Val shut the door behind her.

"Just drop your things on the floor."

"I . . ."

"She's shy, Bert. Let me get you a beer." He steered Bert into the kitchen.

"You going to shave her too?"

"Right now I could do just about anything."

"Look, Val, right now I don't think I . . ."

"Don't worry, Bert. She's just to look at, not touch."

"That's good. If I'd had known maybe I could have. You know?"

"Deprive Em? I'm shocked, Bert." Val smiled. "I think she's ready for us." Val led Bert into the living room.

Megan stood by the door, clothes folded on the floor by her feet which were in heels. She held the bag in front of her crotch.

"Sit down, Bert. You too, Megan." Val watched her cross in front of him, sit on the chair opposite the couch. Her nipples were pierced, she had perky breasts, slender waist, and hips that swelled nicely.

Val sat next to Bert. "What do you think?"

"She's okay."

Val smiled. "Just okay?"

"What if the bitch hears me?"

"We'll start with okay. How many were there tonight?"

"Twenty-seven plus me and two joined in later."

"Thirty. Plus today, three plus two plus eight."

"That's a lot," Bert said. "I need to go, Val. I have to work tomorrow. Sorry I didn't finish my beer."

"Megan will for you. See you in the morning. And remember finding her clothes." Val said to Megan, "They lost her clothes. She came home wearing a garbage bag."

Bert left, Val sat back on the couch. "Finish Bert's beer. You're spending the night in the tub. We'll talk in the morning."

"Val, I . . ."

"What's in the bag?"

"My costume." She opened the bag.

"I'll see it in the morning, Megan."

She closed the bag and put it on her lap. Val smiled, pointed to the beer. She looked at it, her lips compressed.

"If you don't drink the beer right now I'll ask you excruciatingly personal questions, expect answers. If I don't get them, you'll be tossed out as you are. The drive home won't be nearly as interesting as. Good."

Val drank from his beer bottle, set it on the table. "You're here, you've crossed your Rubicon, are getting a chance to see what permanent means. I have to be at work at nine but Em and I have an errand to run first. Between now and then structure what you have to say so as to be as concise as possible.

"Yes." She leaned forward.

"Impertinent or eager?" Val stood. "Come with me. Leave the bag on the couch." Val led her to the bathroom.

The girl looked up at them from the tub. "Ummm?"

"Em, if you'll have her, she wants to join our adventure. Not as your equal. She'll hold your leash at events, pass out condoms, and such. Then and in this apartment we'll call her Cunt. Otherwise she's Megan. It's up to you."

The girl stood. "Ummm?" She looked at Val and pointed to her mouth. "Ummm?"

"Nothing will change for you. She's not to be touched right now, by me or any others. Unless she agrees and then, Em, you'll have competition."

Em grinned. She pointed to him, to her mouth, held up three fingers.

"You, me, three. You're joining me in my room; she's sleeping in the tub. Aren't you, Cunt?"

"Yes." Megan dropped her eyes.

"Get in the tub then. No, Em, don't get out. I need you." Val unzipped his pants. "In your mouth, Em, but don't try to swallow." The girl fell to her knees and opened her mouth wide. She moaned, grabbed Megan's wrist.

Val pissed. The urine splashed on the girl's face, in her mouth and down her chest. Megan made a sound and peed a harder, faster flow around her feet. The girl held Megan's wrist and tugged. Megan fell to her knees beside the girl, eyes wide, nostrils flaring, mouth open.

Val zipped up. "I'll get the chains and locks."

Chapter Twelve

Val wrapped the chain around both faucets and used locks to hold it. The two free ends of chain he locked to Megan's nipple rings. He stood, grasped her hair and scrunched it. He left the light on, not looking at her as he left. She'd have plenty of time to think, enough free chain to shift from her knees.

The girl stood in his bedroom, the towel on the floor. She grinned at him.

"I'd hoped to have a chance to talk to you first. It really is your choice. Thumbs down any time and she goes."

The girl opened her mouth and moaned.

"Tired of waiting, hunh? Just a few preliminaries to take care of first. On your knees, arms out." Val left the room. He came back with a length of rope, a chain dog leash and a length of black plastic pipe.

He tied her wrists together. He left the room and came back with the metal implements from the fabrication shop, leaning them against the wall by the bed.

The girl watched what he did, moaning, stopping her moan momentarily to lick her lips.

Val undressed, left his clothes on the floor, went to her. "Your forehead says, 'Use me.' I will." He pulled her to her feet, put her hands on the bed and explored her cunt from behind.

"Ummm," the girl said. "Oh."

He fucked her slowly, just three strokes and pulled out. He pushed her onto the bed. "Roll over."

She rolled onto her back, tied hands over her head between his legs. He probed her mouth with his cock.

He chose to cum quickly, squatting over her, his cock hitting the back of her throat. He couldn't see her face; she was under him. He could see her body twist, feel her hands on his back twist. She choked; he pulled up an inch and came in her mouth.

He could hear her swallow as he spurted. She was noisy and her back arched. "Did you keep count, Em? In your mouth?"

Her hands slapped his back.

"Five."

She slapped him.

"Ten. Fifteen. Twenty. Twenty-five. Thirty. Thirty-five. I'm losing count." She kept slapping him.

"No wonder your lips are so red."

She slapped him. "Ummm."

"On the bed. Hands and knees." He backed away.

She rolled over and worked herself into the center of the bed. She rose.

Val clicked the leash's clasp to her collar after pulling the leash through the hand loop around a ring he'd attached to the wall earlier. After dinner with Megan Val had had fun at Lowes in various departments finding useful things. The landlord was going to throw a fit about the ring in the wall. Too bad.

The girl hummed, swaying on her hands and knees.

He hit her with the plastic pipe, on her rear thigh just below her ass. She screeched.

"A little quieter, please."

She looked at him. He couldn't read this look. It wasn't anger, wasn't pleasure.

"Do you need a gag?"

She did nothing except face the headboard.

Val counted fifteen. The strokes landed on her legs and lower ass. The welts were more sharply defined than he expected. When he'd slapped his wrist with the flexible plastic pipe in the store it was stingy and his skin turned red. If he could leave marks, it was something he thought men would like. Maybe the girl would like that too.

Val laid the bar on the bed by her feet and locked the loops around her ankles. He pulled her legs off the bed, onto the floor. The leash was long enough with a bit to spare. Her knees were on the floor, ankles spread, body upright, braced by her tied hands.

Val left her and came back with a strip of cloth which he tied over her eyes. He shoved another strip into her mouth. "Can you breathe?"

The girl nodded.

"I'm going to beat you again. The first time was because I wanted to. Now is because I am punishing you for losing your clothes."

A muffled sound came from her. She turned to the sound of his voice.

He knelt beside her, held her close to him as he gave short, quick blows to her ass cheeks. He felt her flinch but she made no sound through the gag.

When he was ready he pushed her against the bed, entered her cunt to get his cock slippery. He left her, pressed against her asshole and pushed.

He entered easily. The girl gave a sharp moan.

"That hurt. How many here?"

She struck the bed with her hands. He lost count. "Does it hurt too much?"

She shrugged.

"Do you want me to stop?" He pulled back, thrust.

She shrugged, stiffened.

"Nod your head and I'll stop."

She moaned.

He fucked her slowly.

At first she bucked under him. She quieted and tensed her body. Her arms and hands were outstretched, gripping the steel leash between her neck and the wall.

While he fucked her Val used his hands to explore her body, feel her breasts which had a surprising fullness compared to their size. Her flanks were muscular and hard, her cunt wet, open and soft.

He rubbed her clit hard, felt her stiffen, rubbed more gently. He wasn't concerned with her pleasure. Tomorrow he'd watch her masturbate and learn what she liked.

Before cumming he pulled the wad from her mouth and gripped her teeth with his thumbs. Her jaw tensed and he felt her upper teeth against his skin. Her tongue probed. He came and held her tightly.

He removed his fingers from her mouth and held her nipples, leaned against her. She bent and collapsed onto the bed, he over her.

There wasn't the emotional depth between him and the girl that he and Nancy had, even at the beginning, but the sex was less tame. He felt he knew the girl better. His cock fell out of her ass and he held her tightly.

He fell asleep, woke up a few minutes later. He left her, turned out the lights in the apartment except for the ones in the bathroom and bedroom.

The girl still lay half on, half off the bed. She turned her head when he came in, her blindfolded face making her appear vulnerable. He pulled her onto the bed, untied her hands, and unclipped the leash. "Sit up, Em."

Val closed the large metal loop around her waist, positioned her arms and locked them into place. He clipped the leash onto her collar, laid her flat on the bed on her back.

"One more beating, Em. This one is because I need to."

He struck her thighs, fifteen blows, not as hard at first as the last two times. The girl didn't cry out, kept her mouth tightly closed, writhed under the heavier blows. She was sweating.

Val climbed onto her and fucked her cunt. The correlation between her pain and his pleasure was something he tried to ignore. How whipping her made him hard, made him want to bury his cock into her soft flesh.

"How many here, Em?"

She moaned. She reached up with her tongue to touch his face.

"No condoms, Em. I'm up to the hilt in you, up to the hilt with you."

She bucked under him, twisted wildly.

"Do you want to drink it?"

She arched her back, thrust her chin in the air and moaned. He could feel her fingers on his legs, the steel band around her middle.

He climbed over her, holding the cum in his cock with his fingers squeezing tightly, pushed his cock in her mouth and let go. He shut his eyes, leaned back onto his heels as she swallowed, used her lips and tongue to stroke him.

Val stretched alongside her, held her cunt as they kissed. He squeezed her between fingers and thumb. "I own you," he said.

She licked his face.

She smelled of piss and cum, some of it his. He couldn't get away from the smell or what she was. He owned her in so many senses of the word. It was almost three in the morning. They fell asleep with the light on. The alarm rang at seven. His grip on her cunt was still firm. Her fingers held his hard cock.

Part Two

Chapter Thirteen

Val's fingers played with Em's hair, two inches long now, which covered them. The tattoos on her head were totally obscured – only those who knew her then were aware they existed.

Em's lips caressed him as his cock slipped out of her mouth. She raised her eyes to his for a moment before Cunt jerked her leash and directed her to the next waiting cock.

The tattoo parlor was crowded Friday nights. Em worked for her ink and Cunt's piercings. Club worked on one or the other each week. Em's back was almost complete and with practice Club's work was improving.

Em's back was decorated with a grid, like iron bars or a plain grille, horizontal and vertical, spaced a few inches apart. Behind the grid, sometimes appearing over it on the foreground, were fish and naked women (Club did both well) intertwined.

The design was so complex it camouflaged the body it covered. The crack of her ass was left uninked, creating focus. The primitive penis and balls tattoo was covered though because Val knew it was there he could still see it.

Cum on the colored surface of her back could shimmer and glisten or disappear depending on where it fell.

Almost all the men wore condoms when she used her mouth. Her ass was Val's, doled out on special occasions only.

Club sat next to Val. "Your whores put on a good show."

"You're only jealous Cunt isn't performing too."

"She's just going to waste, man."

"I don't think so." Cunt's costume was economical tonight. A wide black leather belt, black tall boots and a cascade of tiny red chains from her collar that covered her shoulders, back and front, to just above her breasts. She wore a single bar joining her two nipples and her cunt rings had a cluster of links that hung below. Her lip and nose rings were dull black, matching the rings in her ears. Her head was shaved except for a strip that ran along the peak, front to back which was dyed a brilliant red.

Giving up her job was a major step for her. Being able to make money, not much, she wasn't surgically enhanced, as a fetish model, compensated in a small part for the economic loss of the mall job.

Cunt's bed in his apartment, a thick rug on the floor by theirs, her clothes and school things were all she had now. She saw her family but visits didn't last long. She had few friends at the university. Even an institution with over twenty thousand students, the majority commuting, had very few rebels, and those tended to form cliques.

Cunt's inner life flowered. She wrote a journal, stories sometimes, and had long conversations with Em who didn't talk. She wasn't celibate, but her desires at the moment weren't Em's.

"Both of them are lazy." Club watched Em intently.

"Because they don't participate in those elaborate plans of yours?"

"You know what I mean."

"No more parties and you know why. Em likes this and that's okay."

"Things just got a little out of hand." Club took a drink from the tallneck. "She needs her cunt flaps pierced. They're just begging for it."

"They beg for other things." Val watched Em crawl to the next man.

"What does the other feel like?"

Val smiled. "Why don't you ask her?"

"You know what I mean. She's a hot looking piece of ass."

"Have you ever read Lady Mary Wroth's Urania?"

"Somebody wrote a book called Your Anus?"

"Urania, in the early 1600s."

"Why'd she, this lady what's her name, call it Your Anus?"

"So people could get degrees, write books, get jobs where they can't fire you. You should read it."

"What are you talking about?"

Val tapped his forehead with his finger. "I call her Cunt because she has brains. You call her Cunt because that's where you want to stick your dick."

"She's a cunt, Val. You know that. I don't know what you're talking about. She's a cunt and cunts get fucked. If they're not getting fucked it's a waste, especially a cunt that looks like that."

"A difference of opinion." Em was on her knees, hands limp by her sides as the man using her thrust deeply into her throat. "Do you

ever think about the reason for all this?" Val pointed to Em and the man. "What both of them get out of it. Why Em and not millions of other women?"

"You haven't made any sense all night. First books, and then fuck knows what and now what a cunt thinks while she's getting fucked. She's thinking she's damn lucky to have a chunk of manhood in her. That's what's she's for. This is all part of God's plan."

"I don't entirely disagree."

"That's good because I've seen you and your whore and the things you do to her and the other one."

Val sat back in his seat, put his hand behind his head and smiled.

"So don't pretend . . ."

"Are we having an argument?"

"If we are, you started it."

"I didn't mean to, Club. What I'm suggesting is that Cunt is a fine woman even if she isn't fucking."

"And I'm saying don't advertise like that if you don't want to get fucked. If she wants to be a nun, dress like one."

"I like the way she looks."

"So do I, but she's a tease, and if she doesn't put out, it will get taken one of these days and more power to the one who does it."

"Cunt," Val said loud enough for her to hear. She dropped her leash and walked over to him. "Have you decided to agree?"

She shook her head, looked back at Em.

"That's all."

She returned to Em, picked up the leash. She gave him a look, turned a quarter turn away from them.

"A little silicone, that's all she needs."

"Club, she's pretty definite about not doing it. I hope you can respect that. Em is different and if someone doesn't use her cunt tonight she'll feel unappreciated. Why don't you be the first?"

"Adam wouldn't be the first in that whore's cunt." Club put his beer down. "Look. I'll give you two hundred for an hour with Cunt. No one needs to know. Just you and me."

Val shook his head. "She's not for sale."

"Both of them are for sale, it's just her price is higher. Three hundred."

"She's not for sale. You want to borrow Em for an afternoon, we can see what we can work out."

"She's getting old, Val. Can't you tell? It was fun at first, but she's boring."

"If she's boring everyone, it's time to go then." Val stood. "Girls, we're leaving."

Club stood. "Just what the hell do you think you're doing?"

"Relieving you of boredom and her sister temptation. Finish up, Em." Val took the leash.

"Val, what the fuck do you think you're doing?"

"We're leaving. Em's back is a beautiful piece of work, Club. Thank you."

Em stood, Cunt took her hand.

"You can't leave."

"We're boring you."

"That was just a figure of speech. A metaphor. You knew what I meant."

"Everyone, good night." Val led the girls to the door.

Club grabbed his arm.

Val stared at him as the girls left. He wanted to give Club the chance to let go on his own.

"Fuck," Club said. He released Val, left him. "Fuck you too, Mr. Hot Shot."

Val shut the door, met the girls at the car. "Let's leave."

Cunt sat in back; Em was quiet in the front. Usually she hummed during the drive home from the tattoo parlor.

Val drove quietly for a few minutes. "Are your clothes still back there?"

Em shrugged, Cunt said, "Yes."

"When we get to the apartment, stay in the car. I'll bring you two something."

"What happened?" Em looked back to Cunt and nodded.

"Club was discussing your finer attributes and how they were made for a man like him to use. I was fooling with him and he couldn't be distracted. I found myself just about ready to burn my bra, become a feminist, and pop the bastard. We left instead. We'll not go back."

Club is trouble. I should have realized after that last party of his and cut him then."

"You said I could wear this."

"I know. It's Club, not what you were wearing or your name. Those were red flags, that's all. He had to charge. I've been thinking we should move from here."

"Right away?"

"Not right away. We need to be ready. We're outcasts, two whores and their whoremaster. The social order finds us an irritant, wants to expunge us. You kept track, didn't you, Em?"

She began grunting.

Val let them keep count; Cunt added the numbers to the spreadsheets. It was their "business" and business meetings, held weekly on Tuesday, involved deep analysis of the numbers and what they meant aided by all manner of charts and graphs. Em and Cunt spent hours trying to outdo the previous report in terms of graphic display. Em loved all the numbers; how many over all, doing what, when.

"Shit. The bag," Cunt said. "I'm sorry, Em."

Em moaned. Her bag of used condoms filled with cum had been left behind too. She could have cared less about her clothes, the bag was food.

Chapter Fourteen

Val left Em and Cunt in the parked car with strict orders to stay until he returned with something for them to wear. He was in his apartment, searching in the bedroom closet when he heard the door open and close and their giggles. So much for strict orders.

They were waiting for him on the couch, trying not to grin.

“What if someone saw you?”

Cunt arched her eyebrow. Em began humming.

“I need a beer, you two will have to be satisfied with milk. Val went over to the TV and set up one of the early DVDs of Em to play, the sound down low. The film was shot at one of Bert’s parties, calmer affairs generally than Club’s. He could hear the girls in the kitchen. It was hard to keep a straight face around them; they were a couple of clowns, a kinky version of Laurel and Hardy.

The apartment had undergone changes over the months. Cunt’s presence was visible if one looked: her books on the shelves, mess on the table by the computer where she worked on her school papers and thesis. Her costumes consumed a growing portion of the closet. Em’s presence was more obvious. Locks and chains could be found lying where they’d been last used, her apparatus in the bedroom consisting of steel restraints stood against the wall by the bed, and the large wood A-frame rack in the living room.

Val had traded with Bert who made the A-frame. Bert had Em’s company for a fishing trip he and a friend took one weekend. Val suspected they spent the whole time in a motel room on the edge of town.

The frame panels were seven feet tall, four feet wide, made of lumber assembled with sides, top and cross pieces. The two panels were hinged at the top and opened at the bottom. Their angle was adjustable. A floored panel had slots that the bottom bars of the upright panels fit into. It took two people to adjust the frame – one to lift an end of the floor, the other to move the vertical panels closer together or wider apart at the bottom. When lowered, the floor locked everything in place.

Val wondered if another panel couldn’t be added to make two sides, a top and a floor. Rudimentary suspension could be done with the A-frame; more complex activities would be possible with the U-frame. Add two more sides to the U-frame and they’d have a pen.

There wasn't enough room as it was now and that was one reason for thinking of moving. Val suspected that they'd find it easier to live together, and meet Em's needs, if they were on the West Coast or somewhere in the urban northeast.

Cunt brought his beer and Em set their bowls full of milk on the floor. The telephone rang and Val answered. "Hello?"

"Val? This is Jerry."

"Hi, Jerry. How's Amy?"

"We're doing fine. Not ready for Christmas yet. It's hard to believe it's that time already. Listen. Bob and Frank will be back next week and we were wondering if you'd be interested in another game for old time's sake?"

"Rudy's on Sunday night?"

"That's right. Not this Sunday, next Sunday at six."

"I can't make it, Jerry. Besides, I'm not ready to give her up."

"I'd heard some things. I haven't been to Rudy's since forever."

"Since the last game. I haven't seen any of you since you dumped her on me. I'm not angry anymore. We've worked out things. Nancy and I broke up, which was to be expected considering. We're happy and my gain is you guys' loss. Sorry."

"You aren't supposed to keep her forever."

"I was only supposed to keep her for a week. Then there's be another game and someone would take their turn. No, we're happy, Jerry."

"Can we, like, borrow her?"

"You can rent her, Jerry. By the hour or day. It's not cheap because of her," he paused, "qualifications. She comes with a companion, Cunt, who is not, at this time, available for use. Perhaps you've seen Cunt on the web at Gord's and other sites. Cunt is willing to show off her various piercings and is, like Em, quite attractive."

Jerry didn't speak. Val thought he might be talking with someone else.

"Jerry," he said. "I'm busy right now. Why don't you call back?"

"Val, sorry. You were saying?"

"I'm busy right now. Why don't I call you back?"

"How much, Val?"

"How much what, Jerry?"

"The rent."

He held up one finger, Cunt shook her head. He held up two and she nodded. "Two hundred an hour, a discount for over five hours. Daily and weekends are available but we're busy, Jerry. I'll call you back."

"So much?"

"Look, Jerry. I'll call you back. There are lots of options. We have a website, everything." Val hung up, turned off the cellphone. "Bob and Frank will be back in town next week, Em. Interested in going back?"

She thought for a moment, gave a shrug.

"There are times, Em, when I wish you could say no. Should I call Jerry back?"

Em shrugged.

"Question time again. One, you want to stay. Two, you'd like to go back. Three, you'll stay but you want some time with Frank and Bob, say a day or two a week."

Em held up four fingers. She pointed to Cunt, to him, to herself, showed the four fingers.

"You're happy then?"

Em nodded.

"In spite of what I'm going to do to you when I'm finished with the beer."

Em grinned and pointed to her mouth.

"That depends on who wins the toss for the bottle. You know that."

She hummed.

"Go ahead and finish your milk."

Em grasped the bowl, brought it up quickly and splashed it on her face. She gave a squeal and laughed.

"One's bad enough," Val said to Cunt. "You drink yours."

Cunt hunkered over her bowl and began to nosily suck up the milk.

"Go on and position yourself, Em." Val watched Cunt as she drank. The first few weeks he was driven crazy trying to photograph or videotape everything. Now they set aside special times for using the camera.

The girl crawled to the frame and through the two panels over the crosspieces. In position, her arms were on one side, her legs on the

other. She was on her hands and knees, her body supported by cross pieces.

Val set his empty bottle on the coffee table and went to the A-frame. He tied Em's wrists and knees in place and waited for Cunt to finish.

Cunt took her time drinking.

Val went over and turned up the sound on the DVD. A group of men were taking turns on Em, a line formed at each end, fucking her front and back. Not watching the screen it was possible to form an image of what was happening from the sounds. Bodies hitting bodies and liquid sounds. Grunts and the sound moving bodies made. Several of the men were vocal, one of the men using Em spat out words as he thrust, telling what she was and what he was doing to her. Others talked, giving a running commentary on what was happening, what they'd personally or collectively done and what they personally or collectively hoped to do to her, along with a commentary on who she was, how she felt, how she did things, her skills and lacks. All of these layers were happening at the same time, each moment one layer would be more prominent than the others.

"I'm done," Cunt said.

Val turned to her, found a coin in the pocket of his jeans on the floor by the desk. "Call it."

"Heads," Cunt said.

Val tossed. "It's tails. Sorry." He carried the bottle to Em and slowly pushed it partway in her vagina, bottom first. He walked around the frame and stood in front of Em.

Em watched him as he dropped to his knees in front of her, his erection waiting. Em lowered her head as much as she could. Val took a handful of hair and thrust.

Cunt undressed and waited, the crop in her hand.

Val held Em's head as he came and she gagged. Most positions she could do; for some reason, the angle of his cock maybe, she couldn't take him fully this way.

Cunt laid the riding crop at his side and crawled into the frame next to Em. Val just tied her wrists. He went behind them and standing swung the crop against Em's ass.

"Hold it," he said. He swung four more times, each time saying, "Hold it." After the last swing he said, "Good girl, Em."

He moved to Cunt. "Fifty," he said. "Keep count."

After each blow she gave the count. The blows were light at first. After ten they were heavier. After twenty heavier still and Cunt found it difficult to keep up.

"Thirty-five," Cunt said.

"Fifteen more," Val said and swung.

"Thirty-six."

"Fourteen more."

"Thirty-seven."

"Thirteen more, Cunt." Val swung. "Shall we rest?"

"Get it over with, you bastard."

"What's the count?"

Cunt's mind went blank. "Thirty-seven?"

"Wrong. Twelve, plus fifty more."

"That's not fair."

Val swung.

"One."

Val swung and said, "It's been a week since I asked you the question. Do you want to be like Em, my possession to use as I see fit? No more college. No more costumes. All the cum and piss you can eat."

"Two," Cunt said.

Val swung and hit her hard.

"You fucker. Three."

"I'm going to take a break. Think about the question while I get a beer."

"No."

"No isn't a word used in this house."

"You use it all the time."

"My name isn't Empty or Cunt." He tugged the links hanging from her cunt lips. "Is it?"

"No, sir."

"Fifty more."

"Yes, sir."

Em hummed next to Cunt.

Chapter Fifteen

Val traded Cunt, strokes for fucks, a hundred strokes for two fucks. He always bought or exchanged for her use; it was never freely given. There were rules. He wore a condom. Em positioned him in the hole of Em's choice, and Cunt's use by him wasn't ever made into an elaborate ritual or event. She was never fucked on the bed.

He watched the DVD while Em and Cunt got ready. Sex with Cunt was necessary but required an act of disassociation. That was one reason he always thought of her as Cunt rather than Megan. Their relationship had grown but she was closer to Em than him. The relationship they did have was a working relationship, she assuming a lot of the responsibility for Em during the daytime and helping to manage their financial affairs.

Her education wasn't inexpensive in spite of grants and loans; what she made modeling didn't cover half of it. The weekly events Bert arranged, the web site and sales Val had made of raw video to studios on the West Coast were the major sources of income other than Val's Salary, which was more than adequate for one but not enough for three plus college.

Right now on the TV screen five men were soaking Em with their piss with the pretense of cleaning her. They were making her chase their streams with her mouth.

Cunt had pointed out to him the predictable groupings according to hierarchy. The hierarchy wasn't based as much on class or economic status as on the level of dominance and aggression individuals were willing to use. Most of it was for show, and often the least loud or continually visible individuals were actually those in control of the situation. Everything rotated around Em who as the star but watching the video Val could see individuals using devices, such as movement or voice, to attract attention to themselves. These persons weren't always the most effective in the project at hand.

Em didn't care. She moved gleefully in the matrix that was offered getting what she wanted.

Val still didn't understand her, no more than Cunt did; though Cunt dreamed of being able to let go like Em.

The weirdest thing he'd seen with groups of men fucking Em was there'd sometimes be, like now on the screen, a guy standing by the side, intent on the action around Em but talking of a cell phone.

This guy had a shriveled dick, paunch, and graying body hair -- otherwise he was almost bald. He talked on the phone and Val wondered what he was saying. Was he presenting a narrative of what was happening, with commentary, for a buddy, or was he telling his wife something had come up and he'd be a little later than he expected. Usually the conversation was long.

Em stood by his side, took his hand. He rose and followed her to the bedroom where Cunt lay bound on her rug. Cunt's eyes watched him as he moved to stand over her. Cunt lay open for him, ankles in a steel restraint, stretched wide. Ropes held her wrists to her sides, forcing her back to arch, and crisscrossed her body, around her breasts making them prominent, over and under her, crossing on both sides of her slit.

"I'll ask you again, Cunt. Are you willing to give up everything -- self-respect, rights, the ability to say no -- in order to live up to your name?"

She smiled at him and said nothing.

Em placed her palm over Cunt's crotch.

"I'm sure I could get five hundred from Club for the honors."

"You have a sick mind, Mr. Stanos."

"Thank you, Megan Cunt."

She grinned at him. "You get close enough to me I'll bite it off."

"Then I really should call Club. I get five hundred dollars, you get a keepsake."

"You wish."

Val dragged the rug with Cunt on it into the living room. "We're going to film this and send a copy to Club."

"You like playing with fire, don't you?"

"I wasn't going to show your face."

"Fine, you fucker."

Val set up the video camera on its tripod. He started the filming. "Smile, princess."

She grinned, snapped her teeth.

Em got him hard using her mouth and hands. She put on the condom, held him until he was over Cunt. She directed his cock and let go.

Em hummed as Val fucked Cunt. There was no finesse. He simply fucked her.

Cunt below him writhed as much as her bounds would allow. She moaned in short bursts of sound which grew longer as he fucked. Her eyes never shut until near the end. He kept his face above her snapping teeth.

Val came as her body relaxed from a staccato convulsion. He ground himself in her, held her face with hands on each side and kissed her, stifling her scream.

When Val withdrew, she said, "Yes. Yes."

"Too late, Cunt. I'll ask again next week."

She tried to wriggle. "More."

Em took the condom off him, tied the end and wiggled the shriveled thing over Cunt's face.

Val rested on his knees for a moment, got up and returned with a metal link and pliers. "One for you, Cunt." He added the link to those that hung from her cunt rings and closed it. He flipped the string of links off her belly so they fell against her cunt and onto the rug. He got up, turned off the camera. "I'll get this ready while you two prepare."

Em kissed Cunt, moved to her feet to unlock the restraint.

Val loaded the video from the camera's hard drive and made a DVD of the raw footage. He cleared the camera's hard drive and relaxed in his chair. It was only a minute or two when Em came for him.

Cunt lay on her stomach over a large cushion from the couch, her ass in the air. "Are you sure?" Val asked. Cunt nodded her head, not saying a word.

Em worked her finger laden with KY in and out of Cunt's asshole. She let Val put on the condom himself; she positioned his cock, and stroked his sides as he slowly lowered himself.

Em was wide open – mouth, cunt and ass. She was loose, relaxed, and eager. Cunt was tight, tense and tried so hard to be eager.

"No," she said. "Stop. I can't take any more."

Val halted, withdrew slowly.

"Thank you. No. Don't. That hurts too much. Stop."

Val went in further. "Too many words, Cunt."

"No, I said. Stop."

"Em can take thirty, you can't even take one."

"I'm not Em. Stop. Get off."

"Pretend I'm a pirate."

"You're an asshole. I said no."

"You're the asshole. I'm the cock. And you're getting fucked."

"It hurts."

"I'm a pirate. You're up shit's creek, lady. There are twenty-nine others waiting in line."

"That's not funny."

"Neither of us is laughing, lady. Hold still. It'll be over in a minute."

"You're too big."

"We'll see what you say to the last one."

"You can't, Val. You said you'd stop."

"I didn't, Cunt. You have a nice tight asshole. Shame to ruin it. I'm taking you like this down at the VFW tomorrow. We'll see if the codgers can get it up for you. I'll write on your ass, 'Fuck me, I'm patriotic.' "

"Please stop."

"Gag her," Val said.

Em pulled Cunt's head back by the hair, put on the ball gag.

Val thrust saying, "You're a good girl. Bert's going to love this. Nearly virgin ass that grips a dick tightly. Two parties a week, maybe three. Once you say yes. You know how many they are, what they look like, what they'll do, don't you? They're going to love this."

Cunt shook her head slowly back and forth. She tried to kick him with her heels.

"Finish me," Val said, pulling out.

Em pulled off the condom and sucked his cock. When he came, she held his cum, not swallowing.

Val sat on the floor and watched Em spit his cum on Cunt's back. Cunt immediately stilled.

"Your turn," Val said.

Em came back from the bedroom wearing a strap on. She knelt, slapped Cunt's ass several times, and motioned to him to help roll Cunt over.

On her back, off the cushion, Cunt arched her back, feet and shoulders on the floor, ass shaking in the air. Em pulled off the ball gag.

"Oh God," Cunt said. "I'm. I'm. Oh God."

Em shoved the fake penis in Cunt's mouth. Cunt sucked it avidly. Em withdrew, crawled over Cunt and entered her.

"Oh God," Cunt said.

Val grabbed a fistful of Cunt's hair. "You are going to get whipped after this. I'm going to piss on you and leave you chained to the bathtub."

Cunt's eyes stared at him, she convulsed sharply, head rolled back, eyes shut.

"One," Val said. He got up, returned with clips for Cunt's nipples. He put them on, tightening them quickly. She shuddered.

"I. I. I," she said. Her tongue reached out, touched Em's as Em fucked her. "I."

Val tugged the links attached to one of Cunt's labial piercings and draped them over her leg. He crawled around Em and Cunt and did the same to her other set of links.

Cunt abruptly stopped moving, shook.

Val returned with the blindfold and put it over Cunt's eyes. "I'm going to whip you, Cunt. I need to whip you because we've just started."

She shook her head.

"Twenty-eight more, Cunt." He spit on her face and she screamed.

Chapter Sixteen

Val and Em drove around on Saturday, leaving Cunt to work on a paper and readings for her thesis. Before they left, Cunt checked her emails and discovered she had a shoot next weekend in Columbus. She'd fly out Friday, fly back Sunday. That meant more money for their coffers.

Val had a loose schedule of errands to run on Saturday. The post office to send off films, Goodwill for Em, and Cunt in absentia, an adult store for paraphernalia, etcetera. The etcetera included lunch and dinner, possibly Rudy's or a sex club, maybe even a movie. Em liked going to movies.

After the post office they drove to Goodwill. Em wore her favorite miniskirt, tube top and a hoodie (Cunt's influence). Her choice of shoes was idiosyncratic. Today she wore a pair of pumps. She was just as likely to wear combat or vintage white Go Go boots.

Val sent men to the dressing room for her at Goodwill. When Val and she left the store, Em had a coat, more skirts, some T-shirts, a dress with spaghetti straps, and a bag with three used condoms. She'd managed to misplace her tube top.

At Burger King they relaxed over lunch. Val covered the empty condom on her tray with a napkin since there were kids about and had her zip up her hoodie.

"I know I ask you this every day. Are you still enjoying this?"

Em nodded, wiped her chin and set the burger down. She held up four fingers.

"Good."

She grinned, pointed to her mouth.

"Not here. Maybe later." He watched her chew and look around the restaurant.

Val drank coffee and ate his burger. Every now and again when he was out he'd spot a good-looking woman. When he was with Em and Cunt he watched them appraise men. Em was indiscriminate; Cunt's tastes were more toward the tall, slender arty types. He didn't know what his tastes in women were. Face was more important than body, certain types of dress more than others. He enjoyed a loose sophistication, somewhere between refined and slovenly. Tall, imposing, strong features, long hair. Everything Em wasn't.

When he was with Em and Cunt in public, he couldn't help but be aware of them, their bodies and how they felt. Cunt was the more traditionally pretty of the two; Em was rawer, more open. Any man with a cock could have her, anywhere, anytime. Her hunger was a constant source of stimulation for him. Her odors, the looks she gave, the sounds she made, the knowledge of what had been done to her, what he had done to her and wanted to do. She wasn't just a one act play, he had a constant awareness of her skin and the imagery layered on it, crude, sophisticated, the elaborately complexly ornate letters spelling "whore" on her chest, not obvious at first glance, visible now.

Em could be demure or she could be provocative. It was possible she sat with her skirt pulled down over her thighs, legs closed. It was just as possible she sat legs open, skirt tugged up around her waist.

She was very naked under the few clothes she wore. That nakedness was obvious in spite of the bits of fabric and ink covering her.

"We need to go to Dirty Danny's and then the choice is yours. One, the sex club north of here. Two, Rudy's. I think they have a band you like playing there tonight." Em smiled, wiped her fingers with her napkin, left the condom exposed. She pointed to her mouth and hummed. "Third, a movie, have an early night and go home."

Em shrugged.

"You know what you want more than me."

She shrugged, playing with the zipper on her hoodie.

"I don't care." Which wasn't true. In order of work he had to do, they were movie as least, the sex club, and then Rudy's. Saturday night had a crowd, was loud and people wanted to talk to him. Besides that he might run into Club which he didn't want to do. "We could try to find a new tattoo place."

Em made a C shape with one hand and jabbed it with her finger.

"Cunt needs to work. She's going to school."

She put her elbow on the table, leaned on her hand and tapped her head.

"You want to do something different?"

She nodded.

"Bored?"

She shrugged, pointed to her mouth.

Business meetings held Tuesday nights, with their charts and graphs, devolved, if that was the proper word, into consideration of

the goal of keeping numbers up. Their first week was the benchmark. Em desired a 25% increase each week, an impossible overall goal but one that was sometimes met for several weeks in a row. "Something new. Something good. You'll have to tell me, Em."

She shrugged.

"Let's not do Rudy's, okay? I don't want to run into Club."

She nodded, got up, took their things and dumped them. She came back, sat next to him. "Ummm."

"The sex club's pretty good." It was one of the few opportunities for him to have access to other women. The problem with sex clubs, unless they let in single men, was that there wasn't enough for Em.

She shrugged.

"Why don't we go to Dirty Danny's, drop off some videos, maybe they have a decent pair of handcuffs finally?"

She shrugged.

"You can drive, can't you?"

She nodded.

"But no license."

She nodded, smiled at him.

"Both hands on the table, please."

She hummed, placed both hands on the table. He tugged her skirt down.

"Dirty Danny's, dinner, the club and maybe I have an idea. Okay?"

She hummed, stood and waited for him.

"Zip your sweat shirt, Em."

She shrugged, waited patiently while he zipped it for her.

"I think we need to shave your head again."

She drew a line with her finger across the top of her head.

"A cut like Cunt's? Sure. We'll stop at the hardware store, too."

She rubbed against him.

At Dirty Danny's Val took a box of DVDs out of the trunk and followed Em in. Her hoodie was unzipped but at least the skirt was still on.

Dirty Danny's was really named Dan's Adult Bookstore. Dan was somebody in another state who owned a chain. The man Val talked to was Jeremy.

Em left her clothes on the counter, as Jeremy and he talked, and wandered through the shop. There were never many here, especially during the day, but enough so Em didn't get bored.

Dirty Danny's had been carrying Em's amateur films for two months now, for rental and to sell. It wasn't much money but she had a loyal following of several perverts. If she'd ever bother to answer emails and promote herself she could create a devoted following.

The decent handcuffs still weren't in; Val took the check from Jeremy and went back out to the car. He could stay and watch or join in but the novelty had quickly worn off for him. He enjoyed Em most when they were at home and he was free of constraint. She was able to take care of herself so didn't need him there to observe.

Em never felt constraint; he did. When they were at a place like this he didn't feel like he could bind and whip her or use her the way he was used to. As it was he'd found he needed to dress a certain way or the men didn't take him seriously.

Val had a muscular build; genetics, not because he worked out. If he wore a t-shirt and jeans that showed his build, men would take him seriously. Aroused men were aggressive and were thinking of only one thing. He had to project an image of power and control otherwise they'd react as if he were an impediment to reaching their goal. At most he wanted them to calm down, take their time, and enjoy themselves. Casual dress like he wore to work -- slacks, dress shirt and tie -- didn't achieve that.

The only time there'd been a problem was at one of Club's affairs and he hadn't been there. Club was being paid to keep the rowdiness down and hadn't. It had been a mistake to do anything with Club afterwards.

There were three cars parked next to his. They'd stay for a while and a new car would arrive every fifteen minutes or so. Not a high volume of sales but the prices were ridiculous and the location meant the rent wasn't high. There'd be a spurt of DVD sales after Em's visit. The men had had their few minutes of glory, actually lived their fantasy, and had been able to touch Em any way they wanted. They'd have memories that would last years.

Val had Em, would have memories that would last years, but his were more complex. He almost knew her, still didn't understand her, loved her which surprised him when he finally admitted it. He knew her body, its moods, its savors. He slept with her, almost always bound, owning her in all the meanings of the word.

The men inside were touching the embodiment of the type of woman they dreamed of, open, sexy, and frankly promiscuous. He held her at night and wondered about those who knew her before she'd become what she was -- family and friends, perhaps husband and child.

She'd never say no to him or anyone else. The ones before thought they'd known her and look at what had happened.

Chapter Seventeen

Val called Cunt and told her, "We won't be back until the morning. Can you manage by yourself?"

Cunt paused for a minute. "What are you doing?"

"A secret. I have a present for you."

"A better offer than Club's?"

"A little present. Something to wear."

"I have a present for you. My ass still hurts."

"Captain Pissgums is a rough fellow."

"Captain Pissgums?"

"Before your time. From the old Zap comics."

"It's not funny, Val."

"It is if your ass isn't sore. You should have said something."

"I did."

"Everything was happening so quickly I must have missed it. Do you think Em's ass ever hurts?"

"Of course it does."

"Why doesn't she say anything? Would O complain to René or Sir Stephen? Say like, 'You know the man who used me all night, both ends, that really hurt.' "

"She's a literary character, she's not real, Val."

"But you think of her a lot."

"Less and less."

"Ah, sweet disillusionment. Cunt. Your ass is supposed to hurt every now and again. If you want to go through with this you need to realize it's not all orgasms."

"Not when you're concerned."

"I'm hurt."

"I don't think you care, not really."

"All this is because we're not coming home tonight?"

"Because she's not coming home. Em, not you."

"If you're not too busy you could join us."

"I'm too busy and you know it. I have to sit on my sore ass and work while you two are having fun."

"We'll think of you."

"Why don't you stop by Club's parlor and see if he'd be willing to lop off three inches or so."

"Em wouldn't like that."

"Ask her."

"Should I get three inches lopped off, Em? Yes or maybe."

"See if she nods."

"You are allowed two beers tonight, Cunt. You may finger yourself. You may even sleep in our bed."

"How about a friend?"

"No friends, Cunt. Sorry."

"O-kay."

"Don't hold up breakfast for our sakes."

"Have a good time."

"You have a good time, Cunt."

She made a kissing sound; he hung up the phone.

"Ready?" he said to Em.

Em nodded. She wore her new dress with spaghetti straps that she'd found a Goodwill. He'd taken it for her when he went in to get her at Dirty Danny's.

Val took her hand, led her into the restaurant, a Mexican place they'd not been to yet.

After dinner and a quick stop at Kinko's, he drove them to a hotel on the edge of town, by the highway, favored by truckers and transients. The rooms were clean and no one paid much attention if a bunch of cars pulled in, the parking lot was large. Val got two rooms, next to each other.

"I think we need to check out tattoo parlors, don't you?"

The girl shrugged. She pointed to her mouth, began to lift her dress hem.

"Soon," Val said. "Tattoo parlors first."

She shrugged.

He held her hand at stoplights and they drove to places he'd noticed. One was in a small strip mall, a neat and tidy shop. The other was in a former gas station. Someone had painted the walls with an

exuberant mural, part graffiti, part manga. The third was out of business, a residence with a sign out front in a commercial district.

Em liked both; Val thought either would fit their needs.

"Let's have an ice cream," Val said.

Em looked at him, said, "Ummm?" She lifted her dress higher.

"When you first did that, it drove me crazy. You know that? You and I are going to drive around first and then we are going to the hotel and we'll spend the night. Like a normal couple."

"Ummm." She thrust her finger in her mouth.

"Well, it is Saturday night, isn't it? But not here, not now."

"Umph."

"Have I ever let you down?"

She nodded.

"Other than right now?"

She nodded. She slapped her bare leg.

"Other than then. Okay. I've let you down a few times. Your choice. We have ice cream, drive around, go back to our hotel room, and you know what. Or, two, I can drop you off wherever you desire. You can do whatever you want. I'll go back to the hotel room, give you the key to the other. One or two?"

She shrugged. She held up a finger, jabbed it in her mouth.

"Ummm?"

"Will you get it if you hang out with me? I promise you. You might do better with two."

She thought. After a couple of minutes she held up a single finger.

"Good. We can still do two if you're disappointed."

"Ummm." She pointed to her mouth.

"I've fallen in love with you. You know that, don't you?"

She shrugged, looked away from him.

He didn't say any more until they were in the ice cream shop. He took a pen from his pocket, slid it across the table to her. "You're going to have to do the rest of this." He opened a Kinko's bag. "You need to add a time, nine or ten p.m. I think ten is better. And a room number, thirty-two."

She looked at the slips of paper, raised her eyes to his and smiled. She put the pen in her mouth and arched her eyebrows.

"I certainly hope so."

She filled in the slips which said: "I'm very attractive, very female and very horny. Use me. Tonight. Room ____ at the Walker Lodge on the highway, from ____ to three a.m. Bring your friends." At the bottom in smaller print: "I don't use condoms -- you should."

She fanned the stack of slips of paper.

"There are more than enough. Give them to whoever strikes your fancy."

She took the pen out of her mouth, filled in the time and room number and handed him one."

"Why, thank you, miss. I believe I will."

She grinned and wiggled in her seat.

"The sooner you fill them out, the sooner you can pass them out."

She nodded and went to work.

The area around the hotel was the rougher side of town. It was outside of city limits so there were strip clubs and rundown bars.

Val parked the car in front of The Rocking Horse. "I can stay here or go in with you."

She left the car without looking at him.

There was an even chance she'd stay here. It depended on how demure she acted and how goal-oriented she could be.

The moment she wanted was one that he barely understood enough to facilitate. Cunt was too intellectual. She desired the same thing as Em but had to have it within a framework she could analyze to death, which destroyed the moment.

Em came out, got in the car and grinned.

"Next stop?"

She nodded, pointed to her mouth. "Ummm."

He parked in the next strip club's parking lot. "I want to watch you." Em was already out of the car; he followed her in.

He paid his cover charge, found a seat. The noise and lights were frenetic. He saw Em move through the tables quickly passing out slips. Now and again someone would question her. She ignored one man, for another she lifted her dress in a revealing flash. She came to his table and sat down.

"Ready?" He knew she couldn't hear him.

She nodded, rose to her feet. He led her to the car.

"Any left?"

She had a handful.

He drove to a truck stop next to the hotel. "I need a coffee. Hold still a minute." Val took the pen out of his pocket and wrote "Use Me" on her forehead. "Give me your dress."

She pulled it over her head, handed it to him. He tossed it into the back seat. "Lock the doors, okay?" He kissed her hard, left the car.

He sat in the restaurant with his coffee, watching her thorough the big window. She moved in the car, over the seats, against the windows like she was a snake in an aquarium. She knew he was watching, pressed herself against the windshield showing him breasts and then her butt. She pulled the cheeks apart, pressed them against the glass which was more funny than erotic to watch.

She disappeared from view in the back seat. He could only imagine what she was doing there.

He finished his coffee, left a tip and went to the restroom. He set the remaining slips by the edge of the sink, washed his hands and left.

The car was unlocked; he sat behind the wheel. "Ready, sweetheart?"

She gave a long moan from the back seat.

"Only a half hour before nine. Can you wait?" That was an unfair question. She licked his ear while he drove and parked in front of their rooms.

Chapter Eighteen

The past two hours had been a nightmare. Val woke and he was alone in bed. He thought Em had fallen asleep in the room next to this one and hadn't worried. She'd been happily in her element last night; doing exactly what she wanted to be doing.

He dressed, went next door and the room was empty, showing disorder. The box they'd set on the dresser for help with the room had money in it. But Em was gone.

He was sure there was an explanation but after hours of searching, talking to the staff at the restaurant next door, thinking of something -- like he should check the car, doing it and still nothing. Dark thoughts were beginning to take over.

He called the apartment. "Megan?"

"She's not here. This is Cunt speaking. I can give her a message."

"Have you heard from Em?"

It was quiet on the other end of the line.

"She's missing."

"You've lost your slut, Val? How gauche."

"It's not a joke, Megan."

"Cunt. Remember?"

"It's not a joke. Megan. Have you heard anything?"

"Have you checked the lost and found?"

"I'm not in the mood, Megan."

"Cunt."

"You'll call me if you hear something?"

"Where are you?"

"You know the number."

"Maybe I don't. What is it?"

"You know the number. I'm staying here and searching. I'll stop by tonight."

"You'd better. I want to be tucked in."

"Eat, get clothes for tomorrow and stay out here. I'm sure I'll find her, but."

"I want to be tucked in."

"Megan, I'm worried, upset, and don't want to deal with this. You're not helping."

"Oh goody. I get spanked before you tuck me in."

"Megan."

"Cunt. Remember? I'm Cunt. You're the boss who lost your slut, whatshername."

"Cunt, then. You'll call me?"

"Maybe."

"What are you doing?"

"Talking to you. What are you doing?"

"Getting angry."

"Ooooh." She paused. "You know, my ass still hurts."

"Good." He hung up. Megan was sometimes a pain.

He thought he'd go back over where they'd been yesterday. He wanted to walk the neighborhood, such as it was. He needed to do something other than begin thinking out all his worst fears. She was taken by someone. That one could range from borrowed for a few hours to raped and murdered. She could have left on her own. He didn't think she had but it was a possibility. She seemed happy last night but maybe she had a reason or had found someone else.

She hadn't taken her clothes. Her dress was still in the car, the Goodwill clothes in a bag in the trunk, her miniskirt and hoodie in a bag with a complimentary issue of Barely Legal from Dirty Danny's in the room he'd slept in. Her high heel pumps were in the car.

Being naked on main street was nothing to Em. It was entirely possible she went somewhere, out for a walk without a stitch on though he thought it was too chilly for that. She'd certainly leave the hotel with someone naked; she had gone that way with him the first time from Rudy's.

If someone had taken her, he thought they would have wrapped her in a sheet or towel and there was nothing missing from her room. No blood, no signs of struggle other than the gangbang last night. No broken furniture.

The thing that made him believe she'd gone on her own was her bag of used condoms was missing too.

Last night had exceeded his expectations and if he'd known what the morning would bring he would have called the whole thing off in spite of how upset she'd be. Em on the bed, on the floor, in the bath tub, taking on as many as possible. He'd stayed with her until three

thirty when he could take or do no more. He wasn't the watching type and although Em's performance was never boring, he became quickly bored. There were seven others in the room, three on the bed with her, the rest cheering them on.

She'd smiled at him throughout the night; showed him mouthfuls of cum before swallowing, or grinned while those using her changed positions.

Those using her. Em had, he was already thinking in the past tense, a spirit and will which they never saw. She was intelligent; they liked the fact that she didn't talk. She was beautiful in a dynamic, always dramatic, way, using her body to express herself. They saw a white trash whore moving mechanically.

Val knew he himself was equally at fault for not seeing her. There were so many times that first week when he wanted nothing more than that she'd leave or someone would take her off his hands.

If he didn't come up with anything, he'd print out photos of her tonight. Make flyers with a telephone number and description.

Flyers. He'd tried to get her to carry a card, what he called the get out of jail free card. He'd made a business card sized ID for her: "Hi. My name is Em. I don't talk. If I give this to you or you find it, please call my friend Valentine Stanos at 388-9746. Thank you."

She'd leave it places. In the apartment, the car, or when they were out.

She came to him with nothing except that steel collar. She was gone with the steel collar and a bag or two of used condoms. What people must think.

He was stupid. He'd known all along, but he'd never thought it would happen like this. Gone. Not a word from her. No message. Nothing. And that's if she was okay. If the worst happened, she was taken from him.

He'd started out wanting to help her. He believed eventually that the best way to help her was to provide a safety net for her. A home. A person who liked her. Friends.

It was a skewed sort of safety, within a framework she'd accept. It had to be or she would have left. And if she'd left last night then it meant he'd done it wrong and he couldn't imagine how.

Last night was what she wanted. The men in the dressing room at Goodwill, the men at Danny's, and later the men at the hotel. The fact that the bag of condoms was gone meant he'd done something right.

And then a spooky thought came. Unless someone was afraid of DNA evidence.

He needed to do something other than sit on the bed and think. He'd reserved the rooms for two nights more on the off chance, left the other room unlocked for her. He stood, looked around the hotel room and left.

He walked up the busy street toward town. There were residences in the blocks on either side of the businesses on this street. The businesses were mostly in concrete block structures, converted. Some of the strip clubs looked like they had been stores or restaurants previously. Sheets of plywood covered what must have been large windows. There was a second hand tire store, a convenience store, the only thing open on Sunday, and a small motel on the opposite side of the street that looked like it had been built in the 40s or 50s. The people who lived around here had to go miles to shop for groceries. Cigarettes they could get at the convenience store or at one of the gas stations on the highway.

He walked a long distance; at least it felt that way. It was probably less than a half mile. There was such a huge area to cover. He'd walk the streets until he became tired and then he'd drive up and down the highway checking rest stops and interchanges.

If she wasn't there, or in the neighborhood of the hotel. If she wasn't on the street, naked waiting for him, and he realized she probably wasn't. He'd do it again and more. Searching was all he could do.

Calling hospitals and the police was pretty much out. At this stage at least. Then he thought maybe it wasn't. He'd use the phone book in the hotel room when he got back. She had no ID but she was heavily tattooed. That would help.

He remembered Club tattooing her legs, her inner thighs. More fish, swirling upward in the churning waves. The bright colors and black shading from a distance looked like colored stockings. A fish disappeared at the crease of her thigh, where it met her vulva, in a dramatic splash. That was the part usually covered by her clothes. Her pussy itself was undecorated. On her stomach below her navel was one of Club's earlier unfinished designs, swirling geometric figures in black ink over another almost indistinguishable tattoo, just the words, "Fuck Me."

This neighborhood was desolated. The houses, even those in good repair, looked run down. The children playing in the street looked like they were, he didn't know the correct word. Retarded. They didn't

look right. The cars were older, adorned with bondo and rust. No girl. He couldn't imagine her here and then he could. In the bushes somewhere, not to be furtive, but because that's where she'd been left. She was still alive. She needed him if he could only find her.

Chapter Nineteen

Val used his key to enter his apartment. He dreaded this. Returning home without Em was a sign of failure and a monumental catastrophe. He had hoped, for some obscure reason, Megan wouldn't be home. She was, she came out of the kitchen.

"I have dinner started. I wasn't sure when you'd come home so it's something simple."

"No word?"

She shook her head. "Look. I'm sorry about how I acted on the phone this morning. Okay?"

He sat on the couch, gave an absent minded nod and looked through the magazines on the table.

"Want a beer?"

"Coffee."

As soon as she was back in the kitchen, he went to the computer. He had an idea of which picture he wanted to use for a flyer. Finding the high resolution original took some searching. He cropped out the unnecessary portions, resized it and made a new JPG. This he inserted in a word processor document. Writing the text was hard.

"That looks good," she said behind him.

He printed a copy and handed it to her. "Think it'll work?"

She nodded, touched his shoulder. "Back to the kitchen for me."

"Why don't you put some clothes on?"

She stopped. She didn't turn to him. "Val, Cunt is my name and I'm like this when I'm at home here. Nothing's changed."

"Everything has changed. Put some clothes on."

"No."

He shrugged. "I'm too tired to fight you, Megan."

"Cunt. It's Cunt. You named me Cunt. You can't take that from me."

"I've made a lot of mistakes."

"We all make mistakes, Val."

He shook his head. The magnitude of his follies pressed on him.

She went to the kitchen.

To lose someone, so completely, so quickly, was unimaginable. Our lives were based on the premise that everything would continue as it had. No death, no disruption, no disappearance. No no knowing.

Val printed a hundred flyers, setting them in stacks as the printer spit them out so they'd dry unsmudged. Half way through he realized a hundred wouldn't be enough. He printed copies until he ran out of paper.

"Your dinner is getting cold."

He looked up.

"I said something but you were so absorbed." She shrugged.

"Sorry." He went to the dining area.

Dinner was macaroni and cheese with sliced hot-dogs on top. Bag salad in a bowl with vinaigrette.

"I can go out with you."

"Stay here." He finished chewing. "Someone needs to stay here. Go to the university when you need to but stay here."

"What happened?"

"We had two rooms in Walker Lodge, know it? Down by the highway. We'd been to Goodwill, Dirty Danny's and a few other places. Then Em invited men from a couple of strip clubs and a truck stop restaurant to the room. I left her at three thirty or so and went to the other room. When I woke up she wasn't with me. I assumed she'd be asleep next door. That room was empty. The bag of condoms was gone," she smiled, "but that doesn't mean anything. That's all I can eat." He laid the fork down. "I've been on my feet, on the phone or in the car since then."

"Strip clubs?"

"The police and hospitals don't know anything. Nobody knows anything. Do you realize how big everything is? It's like looking for a needle in a haystack."

"Val, which clubs?"

"What?"

"Which strip clubs?"

"The Rocking Horse, Godiva's. The restaurant restroom next to the hotel. That's where I left the slips."

"Slips?"

He took out his wallet, handed her the one Em had given him. "She passed these out, I left the rest in the men's room."

She handed it back. "I need her numbers for Tuesday."

"What are you talking about?"

"Our business meeting. I need to do the books."

"I have no idea. That's not important."

"It is to me, it was to Em."

"She's coming back."

"Then she'll want it done right. You must have some idea. Write them down."

"I have to work tomorrow."

"Go to bed early. I'll wake you in the morning."

"I have to go back. What if she's waiting? I don't want her to think we've left her."

"I can go with you."

"You need to stay here, Megan."

"Cunt."

"Please. Let's not argue."

"It's Cunt."

He stood. "I'm going to get a few things. I'll be out of your hair in a minute."

"You're not in my hair. Relax for a minute. We can strategize."

He went into the bedroom, took a shirt and slacks out of the closet. He laid them on the bed, began to grab things out of drawers.

"You're leaving me here alone. Is that it?" she said from the doorway.

"I'm leaving you for the next few nights. I'm not good company anyway. Small loss."

"Did you love her?"

"That's a stupid question." He tossed socks onto the bed and turned to her. "I don't have time for this."

"Do you love me?"

He stared at her for a moment, turned back to the dresser.

"Answer me."

He shrugged.

"Fuck you, too." She left the room.

He sat on the bed, stared at the appliances he used to bind Em at night. There were too many memories here. He went into the

bathroom, got his shaving gear and toothbrush and dumped them on the bed. There wasn't enough stuff to use a suitcase. He went into the kitchen, grabbed a couple of plastic grocery bags and carried them back into the bedroom. Megan sat on the couch watching him.

He stuffed his clothes into one bag, his other stuff into a second bag. Anything he forgot he'd buy. He set the bags on the table by the computer next to her books. He wanted to just leave but couldn't. He sat across from Megan.

"I've already called Bert. He's keeping an eye out, too."

"So I'm to be celibate." She turned to face him.

"Do whatever you want."

"I don't care if you love me or not."

"I know. I'm sorry."

She started to speak, stopped. After a moment she said, "I need the numbers before you leave. Will you call me?"

"I'll be by tomorrow after work."

"I want you to call me. I'm lonely, okay?" She gave a tentative smile.

"I'll call you."

"It's not like I don't put out for you. You make it sound like an ordeal."

"I'll call you." He moved to stand.

"Don't rush off. I need you to hold me."

"Sorry." He stood.

She stood. "I know a girl who works at The Rocking Horse."

He sat. "Why didn't you tell me?"

She knelt by his chair. "I tried to. Her name is Angelique. I don't know if she has a stage name. Angelique Curtis. She's blonde, kind of cute, not exceptionally smart, but wears tight clothes, looks like she had a boob job, and aces her classes with male profs."

"You don't like her?"

"Okay. She's really smart, is pretty, had a boob job, passes all her classes, works in a strip club and is known for doing stupid things like giving a bunch of guys blowjobs at a party."

He smiled at her. "Jealous?"

"Of what? My reputation, now, is trashier than hers."

"Sorry." He stood.

"Please fuck me. Do whatever you want." She looked up at him from his feet.

"Not tonight." He went to the table, picked up the bags and the stack of flyers.

"You'll call me?"

"Why?"

"Because I need to hear your voice."

"No more rules. You get bored you can watch TV, have friends over. Whatever. Get drunk, get laid."

"Get lost like Em."

He stood at the door looking at her.

"I'm sorry. Val, the rules remain. Valiant and brave Cunt will watch the homefires tonight."

"You'll call me if you hear anything?"

"You'll hear my screams of joy before the phone rings. She's okay, Val. I know she is."

"I wish I could feel that way."

"She was happy here, Val. She told me so."

"I hope so." He stood on the porch, held the door. "Keep the front door locked, Megan."

"That's been rule number seventy-two since forever. And it's Cunt. C-U-N-T."

He shut the door, listened to hear the lock engage and went to his car.

Chapter Twenty

"The meeting will now come to order."

"This is stupid," Val said. "I don't know why we're doing this."

She looked up from the papers in front of her. "Val, this is important. You had no idea how hard Em and I worked to create impressive reports. You thought they were cute."

"Go on with it then, Megan."

"Cunt." She pointed to her forehead where she'd written it in block letters.

"That won't wash out before you go to school tomorrow."

"I don't care. You don't care. No one frigging cares."

"Let's get it over with. I need to go back."

"So you can cram in a dozen more lap dances. In memory of dear Em." She raised her eyes and crossed her hands over her breasts.

"We're at a business meeting."

"Cunt's report is short and sweet. A sore ass, two new links and that looks like that will be about it for this week. Stay tuned for next week." She leaned toward him, arms on the table. "I'm bored stiff. After the meeting I have a proposition."

"No."

"At least listen."

"Megan, I've asked you."

"Cunt."

"You a thousand times. Put some clothes on."

"And I've told you, not in the house. You want to hold this meeting elsewhere; I'll dress appropriately. At Dirty Danny's I'll wear a belt. It'll give the guys something to hold on to. In your hotel room like this, hopefully doggy style, you chose the hole. I won't complain ever again. Better a sore ass than nothing. At your strip clubs I'll wear a thong, unless you ask me nicely. I can even lap dance. Want to try me?"

"No. Not really."

She pushed a sheet of paper aside. "Em's report is much, much more impressive." She handed him a copy.

He saw the cover, Em's face on it, flipped through the pages.
"Fine."

"On page fourteen is a summary of the week's totals, Saturday's figures are conjectured but believed to be reasonably accurate." She held up page fourteen.

There were several columns, each with a visual cue as to its contents. The imagery was derived from Em's photos or movie stills, stuff off the web and clip art that she and Em had accumulated. The first column was men, distinct numbers, totaled for each day, not counting repeats. The following columns were devoted to particular acts and the number of condoms in Em's condom bag.

"Are you examining page fourteen?"

"No."

"Please do. It's impressive." She lowered her voice. "Come on, Val. This was important to her. She got a kick out of creating these reports, entering her daily totals, creating graphs and charts of the most obscure minutiae of her daily life."

Val opened the report. "Cute."

"Why thank you. It's a start. Most men tell me I'm beautiful so they can get in my pants. Here I am, bare ass naked, you've been there, done that, and I've had exactly two compliments from you. That dinner at Chi Chi's where you told me I'm pretty and now this, months later, after I've given you everything, you say cute."

"I meant this," he tapped the report.

"I know you meant that, Val."

"Megan."

"Cunt." She pointed to her forehead.

"Everything doesn't revolve around you. There are other people, you know."

"Val. Val. Val. Val. A thousand Val's. The whole universe and poor little lonely Cunt is put to the wayside. On page fifteen," she picked up the report, "we can see how outstanding in performance the past week has been." She held up the report. "Page fifteen, Val."

He turned to page fifteen. A long graph showed ups and downs plotted over the past months, with a spike ending the series.

"It's pretty amazing. I don't know how she did it. Page twenty shows the grand total for all the categories. Since the accounting method wasn't the same for every item during the period considered, there are irregularities. Page twenty-five presents suggestions to create

a truer picture of activity, assuming Em is still with us." She held up page twenty-five. "This is important, Val."

Val wanted to leave. Seeing how many men Em fucked in a day was obscene. A week ago it was a big joke.

"Are you paying attention?"

He looked up.

"A bar code scanner. We'd need to give everyone a bar code, their very own. They could keep it on their key ring. The overall numbers would go down in category one, but we could track each individual's activities using bar-codes attached to the usee, in a waterproof manner, to be scanned before each act. So we would know user and uses they chose."

Val pointed to his watch.

"I think it's a very good idea especially considering its minimal onetime upfront cost. The data collected could be attached to promotional materials, such as DVD covers, presenting the numbers involved, and awe-inspiring determination of the actress. Fellatio, eighty-nine times; fornication, twenty-three times; sodomy, ten times; and piss drinking, gallons and gallons. Yummy. That reminds me, Val."

"No."

She set the report on the table. "I move that the report be accepted."

"I second that."

"Thank you, Val. Votes for." She counted. "Unanimous." She rose and carried her copy of the report to the bookcase. "A fitting tribute."

Val stood, "I'm going. Do you need anything? Money? I'll be spending the night at the hotel through Saturday."

She faced him. "Val, I want nothing more than for her to come back. She's not here, though, and I have the feeling that everything is falling apart."

"I don't have time."

"Just a minute or two. Can we sit?"

He followed her into the living room, sat across from her. The trouble was she was good looking and he had memories. The last thing he wanted was to fall into the old pattern but had nothing she wanted to replace it with. She sat with her legs open, her links arranged carefully, spread on the couch cushion between her thighs.

"I need to get something." She jumped up, left him, came back and sat down. She fanned the links between her legs, took the book from her side. "O is taken by René and Sir Stephen to Sir Stephen's apartment the first time where they propose to her. The proposal is simple. They ask her to agree to let them use her, however they wish. She asks if they'll whip her. Remember? I can read the passage."

"I remember. Megan, I . . ."

"They tell her, yes, she will be whipped. She's not sure she'll be able to --"

The telephone rang. Val spoke into the receiver. "Yes."

"Val? This is Jerry."

"Jerry. I called about the poker game Sunday. I'd like to play."

"The word is the girl is gone. Is that right? You have nothing to play with."

"That's why I."

"There's no game Sunday, Val. I'm sorry."

"None of you has seen her?"

"What did you do to her?"

"Nothing. I."

"There is no game Sunday, Val. I have to go." Jerry hung up.

Val hung up the phone. "I need to leave, Megan."

"Val, for the fucking last time. My name is Cunt. That's the name you gave to me." She tossed the book to the table. "Em's gone and it's terrible without her. I miss her more than you can imagine. We talked about so much stuff; it's empty here without her. I don't want to lose everything. I keep my name. Cunt. I dress as I used to, like this," she slapped her breast. "And I hope you and I can find a way to continue. It won't be the same as with her here, but it wouldn't be anything she wouldn't like if she came back. I'm ready to say yes to you. Val, you can use me in any way you like. I have hopes and desires but you'll chose the way I'll be used and by whom. I'd like to get my degree. If you have other plans, I'll abide. I want to be sold; you don't want to sell me, that's fine. I want to be used as Em was used; by whom and how is entirely up to you. If just by you, I'm happy. If by no one, I'll abide. I'm giving myself to you to use as you see fit."

"I'm sorry."

"You didn't hurt my ass that much, Val. I'm histrionic, I need attention. I'll dramatize. I." She stopped, looked down.

Val stood. "You said something about knowing a stripper."

She spoke not looking up. "Angelique Curtis at The Rocking Horse. Did you hear a word I said?"

"I may not be in tomorrow after work." Val took his wallet out, set some bills on the coffee table. Her fingers were closed, thumbs pressing hard, hands on her knees. He wanted to touch the band of hair on her head.

"Did you?"

"I'm sorry, Megan."

"Cunt," she screamed. "Cunt. Cunt. Cunt." She stood. "You're sorry what?"

"I'm sorry I didn't do anything right."

"You did nothing wrong. Nothing. I wanted this. I want this. I want you to tie my hands together, gag me, drag me to your car, drive me somewhere, and dump me in the laps of the most disgusting men you can find. Sell me, loan me, get rid of me. Do something. I'm not a fucking little schoolgirl. I'm your Cunt. I'm this." She slapped her forehead. "Don't leave me. Don't turn your back on me. Don't you dare. Val."

He locked the door behind him. All he could remember was Angelique something.

Chapter Twenty-one

Val left his car and walked toward The Rocking Horse. Angelique wasn't here Wednesday night; he'd try again and again until he talked to her.

There were no clues, no leads, nothing that anyone admitted knowing, even the ones who he knew had been in the room with them Saturday night. The more he asked, the tighter lips became. His cellphone rang.

"Yes?"

"Val, where are you? You didn't come by tonight."

"I'm busy, Megan. I'll call you back."

"It's Cunt, Val. Remember? Right at this moment, useless Cunt. I need to talk to you."

"I'm busy."

"I'm going to Columbus tomorrow. I won't see you."

"Have a nice trip."

"Can you come by tonight? I'm having a crisis of conscience."

"I'm busy, Megan."

"You want to take everything away from me, don't you? If I'm Megan, not Cunt, to you, then I'm leaving." She waited.

Val leaned against the building. It was after dark. The lights on the building made it look special, not like the dump it was. He could hear music, just the beat, not the tune. "I'm sorry," he said.

"I'll get my stuff out tomorrow. You can pretend that nothing happened. Ever. Tabula rasa. Then you will be happy. Won't you? No Cunt to remind you of no Em, to remind you of Em and Cunt and what we three had together."

He heard her move, knock something, a piece of furniture. "Do you need money?"

"What I need, money can't buy, Val. No. I don't need, want or require your money. I don't need anything but a good fuck. Any suggestions?"

"Will you be at your parents?"

"I may not come back from Columbus. I don't know yet. Val?"

"I'm sorry." He turned away from the headlights of the car entering the parking lot.

"I have a confession to make and I'll preface it by saying that because of you my thesis committee has fallen apart. Dr. Dexter quit as the literature person in the committee. Now I have to find someone to replace her. It changes everything."

"You didn't tell me Nancy was on your committee."

"You didn't tell me she was a former lover but everyone knew. She was going on about how you this and how you that, not naming you but it was obvious. I got fed up and told her, 'You have to admit he's a good lay.' The cat was out of the bag, secrets revealed, oaths sworn, and the bitch threw a hissy fit."

"I'm sorry, Megan, but I'm busy."

"I kind of lied when I said my thesis was on pre-Modern women writers. Lady Mary Wroth et al. I'm a sociology major. Surprise!" She said the word with glee.

"Congratulations. You'll get a job."

"If I get a degree. My thesis was, this is the working title, 'Modern Sexual Slavery: Literary and historical antecedents.' The Story of O, comfort girls in World War II, ad nauseam. Say something so I'll know you're bored."

Val turned back to the parking lot. "The night here is bright with meaningless light. What am I supposed to say, Megan?"

She didn't speak for a minute. "Finding you was a dream come true for me. I understand so much now. I meant it, Val, about yes, you can do what you want with me. Lousy experimental protocol, but what the hell. I meant every word. I still mean it. If you think you might want me next week, I'll come back from Columbus. We can see what happens. If you decide not to, that's okay. Take as long as you want. A year, two years. You can even decide what I'm to do with myself while you think about it. Anything. I'll do anything, or try, Val, if you want me."

Val shut his eyes. He didn't want her to go but there was no reason for her to stay. "I'll stay at the hotel through Saturday night. I've come up with nothing. It's up to you if you want to go or stay." He ended the call. The cellphone rang and he turned it off.

Inside The Rocking Horse he gave the man at the door the ten dollar cover charge and asked him, "Is Angelique here tonight?" He had to shout it twice.

The man nodded. "Know her?"

"I need to talk to her."

"The girls aren't here to talk to. Do you know her?"

Val shook his head.

"She's the tall blonde over there. She's popular."

"Thanks."

The man shrugged, half turned to reach for his beer.

Angelique was beautiful, had a face and body that few others he'd seen the past week could match.

Angelique told him if he wanted to talk he'd have to get a room. Getting a room meant giving sixty dollars to the bartender who gave him a key. Val showed her the key and she led the way.

The room was eight by eight feet, no windows, dimly lit inside with dark walls. A chair was in the center.

"Sit down," she said, shutting the door. The club's sound diminished slightly. She turned to him, smiled and hooked her thumbs into her thong, pushing it down. She stepped out of it.

To Val, Angelique's body had a sexual density, as if her skin could barely contain the lust thrown at it. Her breasts were unnaturally round and perfect and didn't move right. Her pubic area was shaved and had a small tattoo that looked like a numeral 23 above and to the right of her slit. She moved with an easy grace.

"Lap dances are twenty. Blowjob are fifty, half and half one fifty. Straight fuck for one hundred, anal is three hundred. Double for bareback." She smiled at him, slid her hands down over her hips. Her fingernails were extremely long. "A dance to warm you up?"

"I just wanted to talk for a minute."

"I don't just talk." She smiled. "Let's do a dance. You can put the twenty right here." She pressed her breasts together with both hands as she straddled him, swayed, lowered herself.

Val felt her ass brush his crotch; her breasts offered up to him. He took out his wallet, put a twenty in her cleavage.

"Think you can last three minutes?"

"I'm looking for a girl." He took a flyer from his wallet, unfolded it.

She stopped moving, studied the flyer, and shook her head. "Never seen her." She settled on his lap, moved slowly, grinding his crotch. "You can touch them," said with a lift of her hands, an expectant look in her eyes.

Val put another twenty in her cleavage. "Look again."

She studied the flyer. "Never seen her. Why ask me?"

"She was here last Saturday."

"I was here but I don't remember her. I'll give you a blowjob for thirty-five."

"There was a party afterwards."

"That's the tattooed slut?" Angelique backed away from him. "Are you a cop?"

He shook his head. "She's a friend. I'm trying to find her."

"So are a lot of guys. I heard Saturday night she pulled a train from here to . . . Ruined it for me."

"Sorry. She just likes to have a little fun."

"Thirty for the blowjob. I need to make money tonight."

"Megan said you went to the university."

"You know Megan?" She folded the twenties, picked up the thong with her toes. "Is this all you're good for? I need to go back to the floor. They don't like us to dawdle."

"Megan's a friend, too." He stood.

"You gay or something?" She pointed to his crotch.

"My mind is on other things right now."

"Megan can go take a flying fuck, the stuck up bitch. Breezing about campus, dressed like a tart, and not giving me the time of day. We used to be friends." She pushed the bills into the front of her thong. "I know you're gay." She gave a crooked smile.

"What happened between you and Megan?"

She rubbed her fingers together; he handed her a twenty.

"You could have had a blowjob for this, probably more if you'd dickered. That's how I know you're gay. Beats me what you're doing in a place like this. Megan and I were friends since we were freshmen. But she took exception to the things I like to do. Last summer she changed one eighty, from straight and narrow to I don't know what. I heard she was living with this guy and another woman, dressed screwy like she wanted it but never carried through. I need to get back to work. You see Megan tell her Angelique said hi."

"I'll tell her."

She raised an eyebrow. "What's going on?"

"What?"

"You must be some freak or something. You know how much I make a night here?"

He shrugged.

"One, two thousand. I don't need what you're offering."

"I haven't offered anything."

"Tell Megan hi for me. We'll leave it at that."

"If you see her," Val pointed to the flyer, "call me. There's a reward." He held out the flyer.

"I already told you I haven't seen her. I'm not sure you should come back here any more. Some of us were pretty upset." She raised her middle finger and shoved it in his face. "As for Megan, up her ass."

"I'll tell her you said hi."

Angelique left him, not bothering to walk sexily.

Val left the key with the bartender, tried to give him a flyer but was ignored like the last time, and left.

He sat in his car, tried to call Megan but there wasn't an answer.

Chapter Twenty-two

The lights were on when Val went in his apartment Friday after work. He knew Megan would be gone. The table by the computer was clear of her stuff and he knew she was gone forever.

In the living room, two pizza boxes lay closed on the coffee table, beer bottles and filled ashtrays showed the remains of a party. He sat on the couch, opened one of the boxes and saw several used condoms. He closed the cover. The pizza was from the other side of town by the name on the cover. They always called a place close by, family run, not part of a chain. Real New Jersey style pizza.

He'd tried to call her last night and today but the number was either busy or she didn't answer. He could see why. He couldn't blame her a bit and wished her the best of luck.

The unsaid things were the kickers. The things he'd never said to Em and the things he'd never said to Megan. With Em it was too easy to enter her nonverbal universe or to talk to her as if she were a child. These are your options: one, two or three. With Megan, the hyperv verbal universe hid everything.

He picked up a pizza box, folded it in half and carried it with as many bottles as he could manage and threw them into the trash. More bottles sat on the kitchen counter. A used condom was draped carefully on the edge of the kitchen sink; another was smack dab in the center of the floor.

Val was more sad than angry. Sad that Megan was gone and how she went, leaving such evidence as a slap in the face. Sad that this was what she had wanted and he hadn't been able to give it to her like he'd tried to give it to Em.

Which opened up all those doors which lead to more doors in the maze he was trapped in. Em was happy was a door to a long corridor of doors. A door in that corridor led to Em living close by but not entirely happy, with its own corridor of doors. Or in a different part of the maze: another door, she was taken. Another door, by force and he didn't hear her. Another door, why didn't she cry out?

All these open doors, a maze he had followed for days to discover the maze was without end, each door led to new corridors and new doors; he was separated from Em, the tether cut. She existed, or not. He was in the maze, no matter what actually happened to her, if he ever found out or not. The moments between his last seeing her and

finding her gone; he never could recapture those. They were lost forever to him, even if they were rich and fulfilling, his greatest hope, for her.

Mechanically he cleaned the kitchen, picked up the living room, and those chores done went through the apartment finding new evidence of Megan's leaving. All her books were missing from the bookshelves, including the Story of O. He'd grown used to her marked up copy. Her things were gone from the bathroom. There were signs someone had attempted to clean this room. Condoms in the wastebasket, a towel faintly smelling of urine hanging from the shower curtain rod.

He checked the bedroom last. Beer bottles were in clusters on the dresser and floor. The covers were torn off the bed and tossed in a ball in the corner of the room. Several boxes of condoms were on the dresser; one box still had two unused.

Val sat on the bed which smelled of sex. They must not have always used condoms; the bottom sheet was stained. In the center of the bed, forming a miniature outline of her body, was her jewelry. Earrings, three on one side, five on the other. Lip and nose rings in the center of the imaginary face. Below those were two barbells for her nipples, navel ring, and cunt rings with their links precisely fanned out.

He touched the links, didn't disturb them, got up and righted the steel bar he had used at nights for Em's feet. His clothes alone filled the closet.

In the kitchen he made two cheese sandwiches, opened a cold beer. Whoever had joined her last night or today had brought their own beer; his was untouched. He sat on the couch, turned the TV on to a movie and ate, not watching or trying to make sense of what was happening on the screen. Actors and actresses did nonsensical things. It was a different world, not his.

He'd been offered an opportunity to take a position in his company's Chicago office. That was far from here, cold in the winter, not like here at all. He was tempted except Em would never find him there. At some point he'd have to accept she was gone. For him, now, that wasn't a possibility. If there was nothing by Sunday he'd have to believe he'd done everything possible, with what grace he could muster. If he could imagine her happy, that would be all he'd need. The maze of corridors wouldn't be quite so large; the darker, more sinister, corners would be gone.

He turned on his computer, waited for it to boot. He needed to print more flyers, find a change of clothes for tomorrow and he could leave. He wouldn't be back until Sunday. He'd finish cleaning then, take the trash out, recreate a new life for himself.

In a way he'd be relieved to be done with the search. The strip clubs were unrelenting in their money grasping ways and he couldn't help but feel sorry for the women who in unguarded moments, by their faces, showed how they felt. Mostly tonight he hoped to walk the neighborhood.

Em's face never showed anything but pleasure when she was being used. Never boredom, fear, anger or disgust. Those emotions existed outside her frenetic activity -- when she felt he was keeping her from others or himself.

Being able to do the things he'd done to and with Em and Megan had been liberating, had made him into a new person. He wasn't sure he liked himself anymore.

He went online and checked his emails. There was one from Megan; he left that unopened and went to her account. It had been purged, everything deleted, address book, sent items, drafts and inbox. No folders remained.

Her email to him was simple.

"Dearest Val,

"Isn't it funny? I can say that now that I'm about to leave you. Thank you for bringing me to the edge of the precipice of my desires even if you weren't able to join me in that leap I need so much. I never knew I needed it so much until I knew Em and you. You remain the model for the one I hope will bind me to his desires. Em remains a model of how much I can give up and how much I can gain; though her path isn't mine.

"Paths? I hope you find yours, in time understand Em's and mine. I hope whoever you settle with loves you wholeheartedly and is a much, much better person than Dr. Dexter. How could you?

"Em and I had worked on your birthday card. It's not complete, but has a message from Em, in her words, typed herself.

"I've started something with a phone call. I don't know what will happen, where I'll be taken or what will be done to me. No more than Em and, if you're able to admit it, you.

"If I say I love you it's because it is true, not because I want to lay a burden on your shoulders. Where I'm going I don't think that word exists. Think of me as I was, not as what I'm about to become.

"The doorbell is ringing. Goodbye.

"Love, Megan, who was your Cunt

"PS The card is on the desktop: birthday.psd."

He printed the email, folded the copy and put it in his wallet. He didn't think he'd reread it anytime soon. He didn't want it to slip away like so much else had if he tried to hold it too close.

He opened the birthday file. The card was huge with densely layered photographic imagery of Megan's and Em's naked bodies and body parts. He reduced the image to 12% and was impressed. The artwork was coherent, filled the screen, and created a different impact with a riot of forms not individually apparent in its larger size.

On the top half were the words: "Thnks Vl. M." Of course Em wouldn't use vowels. The bottom half was without a message, perhaps Megan deleted that layer, perhaps she'd never gotten to it.

Val checked the partitioned drives and folders that held Megan's thesis and other projects and they were empty. Nothing else was touched. The only sign of vandalism was the remnants of the last party.

Val printed more flyers, shut down the computer. He left the stack of flyers on the table by the desk, got the clothes he needed, and a suitcase from the bedroom. He saw nothing of Megan's remaining in his apartment except the jewelry on the bed.

He stood by the bed, decided to add one last link. He got his pliers, an open link and sat on the bed. He remembered their last night together, Em's, Megan's and his, and pressed the link closed.

He left the pliers on the bed, turned out the light in the bedroom, turned out the lights in the apartment. He left with his suitcase, locked the door. Free. Totally free.

As a free man he had very little any more. Chicago was too cold. If he went anywhere it would be to a different country. Costa Rica maybe.

The nearly empty suitcase rode in the back seat.

Chapter Twenty-three

It was useless for Val to try to sleep. His mind was running wildly like a chainsaw, barely in control.

He'd done everything he could and he had absolutely nothing to show for it. Saturday night, a week after Em disappeared, all he had were his darkest imaginings -- the chainsaw -- and a monumental sense of failure. He'd failed Em and Megan. The person he thought he was consisted solely of a two dimensional facade covering the person he didn't want to see.

He could do nothing. He'd tried to be angry. He'd driven by Club's tattoo parlor a thousand times, sure that Club had taken Em. Last night the parlor was open as usual but only one car was parked out front. Tonight it was closed, not inexplicably. Studying Club's, Val realized how little business Club did. He must be just hanging on. Club for all his bluster and bravado was a failure.

It was humbling for Val to accept Club into the fraternity of failures. It was doubly humbling to realize Club was a mirror; Val was like Club in more ways than he wanted to admit.

Club probably didn't have Em. His suspicion now centered on Bob for the insane reason that Jerry had called at five while Val was sitting in his car at a rest stop forty miles north on the highway.

"Val?" Jerry had said.

"Yes. Jerry?"

"This is Jerry. The game is on for tomorrow night. Seven at Rudy's. Bring your pennies."

"What made you change your minds?"

"Sammy wanted to get out of the house. We're all bored. No other reason."

"None of you have seen the girl?"

"Nothing. Bob's not upset. Easy come easy go was what he said."

"It's a bit more than easy come easy go for me, Jerry."

"Is there anything I can do?"

Val thought for a moment. "Just keep your eyes and ears open."

"We're already doing that. Are you coming tomorrow?"

"I'll be there."

"Good."

"Jerry?"

"What?"

"No surprises, okay? If you have the girl, I'd rather you told me now."

"No surprises. Just a simple poker game. Val, if we had the girl, we'd tell you. Believe me."

"I believe you, Jerry. I'm not so sure about Bob and Frank."

"They're your friends, Val."

"I know."

"We'll see you tomorrow."

"Thanks."

Jerry hung up and Val started the car and drove back to town. Town was a place with a half a million souls, too large for one person to search. Then there was the state, region and country. Em could literally be almost anywhere. Val knew where she wasn't.

Val sat up, turned on the room light and checked the clock. Almost four. He'd been stewing in his juices four hours. A fifth of cheap scotch sat on the dresser. He poured an inch into a plastic cup and carried it back to bed. Last weekend he'd collapsed and been asleep by this time and Em might already have been gone.

Val wished he could pray. He said prayers but he didn't think anyone listened. He prayed he would become a better person. He prayed he wouldn't be burned when he played with fire. He prayed Megan would understand and not force him with ultimatums. His prayers did as much as if he prayed for the characters in a movie. The script was already written, the film shot and in the can. His prayers could change nothing.

He prayed Em and Megan were happy. Safe was a relative term. Neither had been safe with him by most standards. He wanted Em to laugh and laugh. He wanted to watch her face light up but that was probably never going to happen. He had seen it, knowing Em had changed him. Not made him better, that wasn't possible.

The scotch was awful and left a sour aftertaste. He finished the cup, set it on the table and reached for the light switch.

There was a knock on the door. Urgent. Again, louder.

He froze for a second, jumped up and wrapped a towel around himself. It was a cheap tiny bath towel and the ends didn't even meet.

A woman stood in the doorway. "I'm cold. Could I stay here for a while."

She was short, had a square face with a broad nose, brushed her hair from her face in a jerky movement with the hand holding a cigarette. He let her in.

She sat on the corner of the bed. "I saw your light on. It's too cold out there, you know?" She smiled, was missing a tooth in front.

Val got his clothes and dressed in the bathroom. When he came out she was dropping ashes into the ashtray by the TV.

"Is it okay if I stay for a while? We can do it if you want."

"What's the matter?"

She carried the ashtray back to the bed. "Roger has a whore from The Rocking Horse with him so I have to wait out there until they're done. It wouldn't be so bad but it's cold tonight." She glanced at Val. "Roger and me go back a ways, understand each other. He wants a piece of ass that looks better than me, that's okay." She shrugged. "We live in a room across the," she couldn't find the word. "Over there. Okay if I look out your curtains? I can go back when she leaves."

"Sure." Val saw her lift the curtain, drop it, light another cigarette. "He opens the window when I can go back. I'd do anything to get high." She turned to him and smiled. "You're not bad looking."

"Thanks." He poured her an inch of scotch and handed her the plastic cup.

"Let me warm up for a moment and I'll give you a great blowjob." She drank the scotch, handed him the cup and went back by the window.

"You don't need to do anything." He gave her the cup with another inch of scotch.

"Aren't you joining me?"

"I had mine just before you knocked."

"It's not friendly to let someone drink alone." She smiled when he poured scotch into his cup.

"Cheers," he said.

"Cheers to you too. I'm warm now."

"Good. But really I'm happy. I've been holding a wake tonight. A blowjob wouldn't be proper."

"A wake? What's that?"

"When someone passes people stay up, talk and drink. In their memory."

"Someone you know die?"

"Not die. Two friends have left to go on to do other things. You know how it is."

"Roger's the only one who's stood by me. I don't know what I'd do if he left me."

"You love him?"

"I'm not sure it's that. It's just that we were made for each other. That may be love. I wouldn't know. Could I have another?"

Val poured an inch in her cup.

"You see me sometime, remind me I owe you." She grinned, her tongue pushing through the gap in her teeth. "I mean it. No one else would have opened their door here and I didn't feel like standing out on the street, you know?" She checked the curtain. "I think the whore is leaving." She turned to him. "You've been here a few days."

"A week. I was looking for a girl."

"For fifteen fun minutes, you found her." Again the grin. She lit a cigarette. "I would have died without these."

"A woman was here with me last weekend. She disappeared."

"The window's open. I can go back. Thanks." She dropped the curtain.

Val dug a flyer out of his bag. "Maybe you've seen her?" She looked, shook her head.

"Sorry. I hope you find her. Is she the one we're holding the wake for?"

He nodded, tossed the flyer on the bed. "Did you see anything last Saturday night?"

"Here?" She stood by the door.

"Late Saturday night. Say around six, earlier or maybe later in the morning."

"I did see someone. Roger was mad at me, nearly gave me a black eye. I couldn't help it. Sometimes I do okay, sometimes I don't, you know?" She stared at him. "So I was under the staircase over there, waiting for him to cool off. He'll be in a good mood after the whore."

"Doesn't it make you jealous?"

She shook her head. "Why should it? If I were prettier we wouldn't be staying here. It's not his fault."

"What did you see?"

"I saw someone walk away to the street, carrying a bag. They looked funny, like their skin was blotchy. I don't think it was clothes."

"Was she alone?"

"She was alone. She got a ride I think. I didn't think it was important."

"It may not have been. What time?"

"The sun was coming up. I think it was Saturday night. I better go."

"Take the bottle. You and Roger have a good time. Thanks for joining me in my wake."

She held the bottle, stood in the open door. "I didn't want to make you cry, mister."

He smiled. "I have terrible allergies."

She stared at him for a moment. "Thanks for the bottle. You'll remember?"

"I'll remember."

"Good." She shut the door.

Chapter Twenty-four

Val won the last game because they cheated. He knew enough about poker now to see that they were cheating. That didn't make any difference. The bit about the men's room having plumbing problems -- he needed to use the little heifers as Bob put it with his grin -- let him know they were setting him up again.

He didn't think they had Em, he was sure she was gone. But he couldn't be absolutely sure about anything anymore. Dave's right hand was bandaged and there was an in joke, they were all making asides to one another like a bunch of little kids.

Everyone deferred to Sammy who was the runt of the group. That was different. Usually Bob and Frank pretty much ran everything.

"You won again," Dave said. "You're a lucky guy."

Val looked at their grinning faces. "I don't think luck has anything to do with it."

"Three of a kind. Highest hand of the game," Jerry said. His bald head was shiny in the dim light.

Val let that pass. "Do you think Tommy D. will let us have another?"

"He'd better." Bob went to the bar, came back with several beers. Tommy D. brought the rest, pulled up a chair and joined them.

Val took a drink. "Okay. What's going on?"

"You know our tradition? About the urinal?" Sammy said. "You won it again."

"Don't lose it this time," Bob said.

"It wasn't his fault," Jerry said.

"Besides, he knows better." Frank stood.

"Sit down," Sammy said. Bob grinned at Dave. "We need to talk a little first."

"I really, really need to take a piss, sir," Bob said.

"So do I," Frank said.

Sammy looked around the table, said, "Oh, go ahead. Jerry, you stay here."

Bob led the rush.

"I can't do this," Val said.

"You have to," Jerry said.

"Shut up, Jerry." Sammy turned to Val. "We're in a little predicament due to Jerry here doing someone a favor. Dave and I can't take her home with us. Bob and Frank will be going overseas in two weeks and while they'd like to help, they can't. Jerry has his girlfriend. That leaves you."

"You have another." Val said it as a statement, not a question. "Couldn't you keep her in the garage? Pretend you're tinkering on the car."

"The thought passed my mind," Sammy said. "But, no."

"This one's a little more complicated." Jerry finished his beer.

"Complicated is a pretty good word for it."

"No."

"She needs a place to stay. She had problems with her boyfriend."

"Pimp," Jerry said.

"And needs a place to stay. She's willing to clean house, cook."

"Fuck your socks off."

"Multi-talented."

"She's pretty," Jerry said. "I'm going to get another, you two want a beer?"

"We're okay," Sammy said. "Jerry couldn't say no. If not you then this guy is willing to take her but he's a bit rough. Dave had to slap him down. At least take a look at her."

"I can't, Sammy." Val rose to his feet. "Please don't do me any favors." He walked toward the door.

Jerry took his arm. "Wait a minute. Sammy is checking with them. We need to work something out."

"Let go," Val said.

"Don't talk that way to me, Val."

"Let go."

Jerry released his arm.

Val started his car, heard a thump, and turned it off. Three of them leaned on the hood. The rest stood behind the car. Bob winked at him. Val got out.

"Sammy said you can't leave yet." Frank looked to Jerry.

"This is sorta a life and death situation," Jerry said. "You don't get a choice."

"You get a choice," Bob said grinning. "We're just helping you make it, Val."

They escorted him back to Rudy's. Everyone got a beer but him and they all went to the men's room.

She wore a collar like Em's, no tattoos, knelt in the basin, chains from the floor locked to the collar. She gave him a tentative smile, wiped a strand of dark hair from her face showing a bruised cheek. Sammy pushed her hand down. "Going to talk?" Sammy asked.

Val nodded.

Sammy shook her head. "Don't say anything stupid." He let go of her hair. "Everyone out."

"Can't I just one more time?" Bob said in a plaintive voice.

"Out." Sammy followed them not looking back.

She opened her mouth, stuck out her tongue at him.

"I thought it was to be condoms only," Val said.

"It is. Except for you if you want."

"I went in Friday to get tested. I won't know for sure for a while."

"That's okay, Val."

"What do I call you?"

"I've been known by two names. Megan and Cunt. Anything you want."

"You know I don't want to do this."

"I don't know anything else to do." She gave a quick, nervous smile.

"You didn't have to leave. I tried calling you."

"I know."

"And still?"

"It had to be this way."

"No it doesn't."

"I think it did and does." She relaxed, settled back on her heels, hands open on her legs. "Any luck?"

He shrugged. "She's gone."

"I'm here."

"Congratulations."

"I got my numbers up. Aren't you proud?"

"Tremendously. With my friends even."

"They're good friends, Val. I called Jerry. I told him what I wanted. They've given me that. They sold me to Club, for use of my ass and cunt." She touched her cheek.

"Nice bruise."

"Isn't it? It'll go wonderfully with your decor. I'll fit right in -- used, only slightly bruised."

"Club hit you?"

"After paying them five hundred dollars."

"Was it worth it?"

"For me, yes, it was worth it. For him, I'm not so sure. Your friends didn't like me getting hit. Sammy broke just about every finger in Club's hand. He won't be doing tattoos for a while."

"And if I say no."

"I go to the highest bidder. Bob knows some people near Boston who accept such merchandise."

"Trust Bob to know."

"I trust Bob. I trust all of them. I trust you."

"What about your thesis?"

"You care?"

"Not really, Megan."

"Not Cunt?"

He shook his head. He was assaulted by intense emotions which clouded his thinking. He wanted to leave, he wanted to stay and talk with her. He wanted to install her in his apartment; he wanted nothing to do with her.

"Too bad, Val. I think I would have been good for you, as you were good for me."

"I wasn't good for you."

"Say Cunt. Just once. For old times sake."

He shook his head.

"We could have great sex, great arguments. I'll let you win now and again." She grinned.

"I can't help but remember our dinner at Chi Chi's. How young you are."

"Not that much younger than you, Val. I remember you telling me to take my underwear off. I hadn't worn panties for years. Like O."

"I'm not René or Sir Stephen."

"Better."

He shook his head.

"That night in your bathtub, my nipples chained to the faucets. You were the first to know what I wanted."

He shook his head.

"You won't take me?"

He shrugged.

"What do I have to do to make that a nod, Val? Anything. Just tell me or make me. I'll do anything."

"Em is gone. I can't go back."

"Neither of us can. She's gone and we have to figure out a way to do this without her. Not in spite of her. In her absence we have to survive."

"You need to finish your thesis."

"Okay."

"No more chains, this stuff." He waved his hand at her.

She shook her head.

He turned and walked to the row of sinks. He ran cold water, splashed his face. In the mirror he could see her looking at him.

"Say Cunt, Val. Call me by the name you gave me. Please."

He shook his head.

"I won't go away, Val. Em was tied to an act, not to people. Not to any one person. She was tied to being a particular person. I'm not like her. I'm tied to you, willing to be tied by you. You can do what you want with me or to me. You can keep me or you can abandon me. I think you love me. I love you. I won't be easy to lose unless you want me gone. Say Cunt."

He shook his head, turned to her. He opened his mouth to speak, couldn't. He'd loved Em and lost her. He knew he'd lose Megan, he'd already lost her. She was so beautiful, there, on her knees, waiting for him to say something. He knew her body, was beginning to know the convolutions to her thinking. She smiled at

him. It hurt to love. It must be killing her not to talk right now. He smiled back. It hurt.

“Cunt has been good. It’s time to go home.”

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