

Chapter 11

Joan and I dated steadily over the next several weeks. During that time she only permitted the physical aspects of our relationship to advance slowly—*too* slowly—and as a result, I became more frustrated and anxious as the weeks went by. I had become quite involved with the girl, and I guess I expected we would get a little more intimate as we got to know each other better. Joan was a fascinating, obviously intelligent individual, as well as being rather uncommonly pretty (as far as I was concerned), and I though really wanted to bide my time and relax, my natural teenage horniness and lustful desires were becoming more and more insistent as time went by.

It was very unusual for Joan to want to go out in public with me, anywhere, but as we headed into homecoming, with the big dance and general celebration, she actually talked of going to the dance with me. We may have ‘dated,’ but we rarely went out. Our dates consisted typically of watching TV or listening to her stereo up in her loft. But, for some reason I never quite understood, she seemed very interested in homecoming. When I asked her about it, she simply informed me that she did ‘occasionally want to dress up nice and see how the rest of the world did it’. I naturally viewed that attitude as a kind of softening of her usual standoffish nature, so as a result, I wanted our evening out at the homecoming dance to be something special. Also, I hoped with the right mood and circumstances, she would relax and let things become a bit more heated.

Joan intimidated me. I have to admit it. No other girl had ever affected me that way, and though I was never in any real pain, Joan’s ability to control me in most situations grated roughly against my perceived role as a man, and my expectations of always being the dominant partner in relationships with the opposite sex. The old Huffman heritage, you know. I was determined to overcome her position of control.

I didn't want to hurt her feelings, but my pride was at risk if I continued to allow her to dictate most of the things we did—or did *not* do. I had become hooked on her quiet, but intensely loyal affections, and kept hanging on in hopeful anticipation, because, despite the fact we hadn't done anything, she never denied me the opportunity to kiss, pet and touch her—*clothed*—whenever I wished. But the fact that she invariably limited our contact to just those things—that fact was becoming elevated in my mind into just another type of failure. Huffmans, of course, *did not fail*. But the whole situation was confusing and complicated, and I wrestled with it continuously. Joan needed to be in control *all* the time. It was like she didn't trust me, for which I suppose she may have had some reason, but I wanted to be trusted, very much, and I wanted to have a certain amount of control, as well. To admit that Joan had control, was for me an admission that I lacked it. I had always been taught that the man was supposed to be the one in charge. I was a man, and the man ran things—*the man* was supposed to run things. But Joan wanted to be the boss, and when I was with her (which was as often as possible), she was simply determined to dictate every situation.

I was a little early arriving at Joan's house the night of the homecoming dance. In fact, I was a half hour early, and I caught Joan still undressed. There was no one else at home, since her parents were out to dinner, themselves, so I had to ring the doorbell several times. When she finally answered, she was in her bathrobe.

Joan didn't seem too surprised to see me. "You're early," was all she said. But she did smile, slightly.

"I know," I shrugged, "I was wondering if you might like to drive around a little, before the dance."

"I doubt I'll be ready quickly enough." She indicated her partially wet hair, "I haven't been out of the shower very long."

But, I smiled anyway, my disappointment barely showing, "I can tell."

She was oblivious to my bruised sensibilities, and calmly motioned to me to follow her upstairs to her bedroom. I had been there a few times, though I'd never visited when she wasn't fully dressed. I couldn't help but be mildly excited by the prospect.

Joan smiled, and seemed to blush, "You will have to excuse me while I get ready. You can sit on the bed, if you like." She pointed me there. "I'll try to hurry."

"No hurry at all." I found a smooth spot on the edge of her bed. It was unmade, and I found myself further excited by proximity to the

actual place where she slept. The very look of the pillows and the ruffled sheets, the quietly feminine delicateness of everything, spoke of her personality and presence in the room, and I found myself running my hand almost reverently over the indentation where she had last lain. Joan was in the bathroom adjoining the bedroom, ignoring me and working on her hair and makeup. I reveled in the clinking sounds and flowery, sensuous odors of a woman getting dressed, and watched her quietly for some minutes.

She combed her hair, her back to me, but I could see most of her face in the bathroom mirror. "You're very beautiful, tonight," I called to her. She was.

"Thank you. You're very sweet to say that." Joan often responded in ways that for some other girls might have seemed corny or naive. But I knew her well enough to know she was not being corny, nor was she especially naive about anything. It was just her particular way of speaking, a result of an upbringing in a small, Southern town, and her family's long cultural experience with gentility and habitual politeness. The issue of sex, though, which was rarely (if ever) off my mind, made me wonder if she wasn't indeed more naive than I was being led to believe. And I continued to think about sex as I continued to watch her apply eye shadow and then comb out her hair again. She *was* very beautiful to me.

"I've been thinking," she said finally, turning to address me. "If it's all right with you, I'd like to eat some seafood later this evening. I've been tasting lobster all week, and I'm afraid if I don't satisfy my craving, I may go plum crazy."

"Don't go crazy, yet," I joked. She smiled, but that was all. I went on, "Where would you like to dine on lobster, tonight?"

"I've heard the Crab Shack is a very good place for steamed lobster tails, served with drawn butter." She turned back to her mirror, "Is that acceptable?"

"Sure." My reply, though, was not very enthusiastic. Acceptable, indeed. She had just scored another control decision. Damn! She beats me to the punch every time. I don't think she liked the tone of my voice, since she then paused the barest of moments, but she didn't say anything. Instead, she simply went on with her application of makeup.

Eventually Joan finished in the bathroom, and moved quickly to the bedroom, where she stood, hands on the belt of her bathrobe, and seemed to engage in some internal debate with herself. I was quick, however, to seize the moment.

"You can dress in front of me," I assured her. "I promise I won't do anything we'll regret." I grinned, reflexively, "I've seen girls dress before."

"I'm quite certain you have," she drawled, smiling ruefully, but continued to debate with herself over whether or not she should dress in front of me. Then she decided: "I don't want you to see the incomplete product. If you were to, it might spoil the effect." She nodded, and came over to the bed to pull me standing by my hands. "I'm sorry to have to ask you to go downstairs and let me finish getting ready. I may have already broken etiquette, as it is, by allowing you to see me in only my bathrobe."

I protested, and resisted her request, but I was eventually forced to relent. As I then walked down the stairs, I remember thinking that the evening was going to be just like all the others. I was already becoming disappointed over it, and we hadn't even left the house yet.

I wasn't displeased though, when Joan finally did come down the stairs. She was dressed very nicely, at least as well as any of the other girls would be. I found, that for all my frustrations and unrest, I was proud of my Joanie, and I felt warm affection for her as she walked proudly toward me, where I sat in the living room.

"I like it," I smiled and nodded. I was very pleased that she looked so nice.

"Thank you," she posed, and smiled, almost becoming a little embarrassed, "I do, too." I stood up and she took my arm, and most of my worries seemed abated. "Let's go," she said.

We stayed a couple hours at the homecoming dance. We danced a little, munched on peanuts, and drank the sherbet punch. The band they'd hired was pretty good—for a high school dance. It was a magical-feeling night, and Joan was much more open and talkative than I'd ever seen her. She seemed to be having a wonderful time, as was I. And after we left the dance, we went to the Crab Shack (as suggested) and had a couple of fairly good lobster tails.

During dinner, while we wrestled with slippery claws and hard, red shells, her mood seemed to elevate even more. I was trying very hard to be especially witty and charming, and Joan's grins, and even outright laughter in response, were helping me. She was outgoing and friendly, almost so totally out of character I began to wonder who might have taken over her mind and body, and who it was inside her was smiling and moving in ways that were pure, unsullied *femme* at her very sexy best. Joan really *was* feeling more relaxed, confident, and therefore more invitingly provocative than she ever had, before. I know she did not think of herself as the sensuous, seductive type, though she knew she was considered more than a little above average looking, but that night she

seemed to have found her groove ...

I found it becoming more and more effortless to be gallant and charming, witty, attentive, and appreciative. By desert, my less than satisfied mood of earlier was completely gone, and I found myself treating her as a true lady in the most grand and classical style. I was the perfect gentleman, and as the dinner progressed to the coffee, Joan seemed to have warmed completely to my genteel manner and ultimately winning style. By the time we returned to her house, she was all but purring audibly, emitting a warm, infectious glow of contentment. As we walked and talked, and poked each other in the ribs as we joked and laughed, it was truly as if I were out with a completely different person. And I hoped sincerely that this new person would not resist me if I made a pass at her. And by the way she was gazing at me as we walked up her front steps, I felt pretty sure she would not.

Joan's parents were home by then, and were in the living room watching TV. I had, of course, been introduced to them long ago, and as we sat in the living room making small, polite conversation, Joan rushed upstairs to change her clothes. It only took her a few minutes to change. When she glided down the stairs, grinning so broadly I thought she would make her parents suspicious, she only took me by the hand and silently led me through the kitchen, out the back door, and up the stairs to her loft. Once in private, Joan remained quiet, but certainly not less friendly.

She didn't even wait for us to hit the love seat. The instant the door was closed she wrapped her arms tightly around my neck and planted a very affectionate—if indeed that word is accurate—kiss on my mouth. I felt compelled to return the kiss in kind, and I lifted her off her feet with the strength and passionate need of my embrace.

Joanie looked and smelled wonderful. She was warm and alive in my arms, and I desired her more than anyone I had ever desired before. The question on my mind, though, and one that *still* remained as I squeezed her to me, was her attitude on intimacy, and ultimately sex. I considered, briefly, breaking down and asking her about it pointblank, but she didn't seem to be in the mood to talk. In fact, all she seemed inclined to do was kiss me, and kiss me, and kiss me. And with each successive kiss she became more intense and passionate. She rubbed the back of my neck, and squirmed in my arms—not to get away—but to get more tactile response from my touch. As we kissed she seemed ready for anything, and I was both excited and fearful of what the night might have in store for us.

I managed to move us over to the love seat. It wasn't my favorite spot

to make out, the fabric being a little too rough—not much more than oddly fuzzy canvas—but it was by far the most comfortable and convenient place to sit. The only other furniture in the room was her desk and chair. Joan seemed not to mind retiring to the love seat, because once we were seated more or less satisfactorily, she put her legs across my lap, and snuggled warmly with me as we resumed our smooching.

I had to think rapidly to keep up with the situation. We couldn't lay down on the love seat. That was absolutely impossible. I cast about rapidly in my mind for a better spot to become reclined with Joan, who, as we enveloped ourselves with tight embraces and wet, sloppy kisses, seemed about as ready for such action as she was ever going to become. The floor would do, I thought, but it wasn't nearly as soft as it looked. But ... oh, well ... it would have to do, I guess. I put my arms under her, and slid us both carefully off the love seat and onto the floor.

When we bumped down, our lips were forced to part. Wondering, she gave me a quizzical look. "Where are we going?" It was the first thing she had said since closing the door to the loft.

"Well," I explained, "the love seat isn't very comfortable."

"I was comfortable," she frowned, disapproving of my decision.

"But I wasn't."

She hesitated, as if to complain further, but it only lasted a moment. "OK," she relented, "but please, let me up a minute." Curious, but not sensing imminent disappointment, I released her from my cradling hold. She quickly scrambled to her feet, and narrowly missed hitting her head on a ceiling beam. She had a cedar chest next to the desk, and she opened the lid and removed a large, soft blanket and two pillows. The pillows were tossed to me, and Joan then proceeded to open up the blanket in order to spread it on the floor.

"Do you always keep this stuff up here?" I asked as I watched her work, carefully laying out the blanket and folding it over on itself.

"Actually, yes." She seemed matter-of-fact. "I've slept here many times. I keep this old blanket and these pillows here in my cedar chest in the event it becomes very late, and I'm either too tired, or too lazy to go back out into the cold, just to go to bed."

"Don't your parents mind?" And I knew immediately, as soon as I'd asked it, that they did not.

"No." Joan smiled, and knelt in the center of the blanket, dropping her behind down onto her ankles. In so doing, she seemed to discover her shoes unwanted, so flipped them off and tossed them in the corner. Then she just sat there, rear end on ankles, hands on knees, hair in wild tangles about her face, and blankly turned her gaze on me. Undaunted, I knee-

walked across the blanket to join her, and we regarded each other from about an arm's length away.

I looked into her eyes, but I couldn't read the expression there. I really wished I could, but she was a closed book to me. She was the kind of person who was always like a duck. Calm on the exterior, but always paddling like hell underneath. Her mind was perpetually moving at a hundred and ten miles per hour, but to look at her face you wouldn't ever know it. I watched that calm face, and waited with as much patience as I possessed, and wondered what, beyond my imagination, was going to happen next. I'm not sure what I expected, but so far the mood of the evening suggested that she would surprise me.

And she did.

Her hands, poised on her knees, moved up to the tops of her thighs and then to the bottom of her pink cotton sweater. Then with a quick, fluid motion, she pulled the sweater up and over her head, inside out. She followed through by pulling her arms through its arms, and the sweater was tossed to join her shoes in the corner. Except for a lacy, and barely adequate bra, it was all she had on above the waist.

Encouraged, and not wanting to waste any time, I started to edge closer, to put my arms around her, but she stopped me.

"Now *you*." She touched me lightly in the center of the chest to make her point.

Hmmm, I thought, this is interesting, and immediately began to work on the knot in my tie. Joan wanted to help me, but I refused. I felt pretty sure I could take my own damn tie off. It didn't take long to remove the tie and my dress shirt, and that left me with only my undershirt on above the waist. It wasn't quite the same thing, but she seemed to consider it a fair exchange. Then we stopped to sit and look at each other, again, she in her jeans and bra, me in my T-shirt. And my pants, of course.

So, I got an idea, then. I pulled my T-shirt off, suddenly, and said, "Now *you*, again." I wanted to see what she would do. And I found out.

Joan hesitated only the shortest moment, and then reached behind her back and found the single hook in her bra, and snip! undid it. With painfully slow (for me), measured movements, she brought her arms back to the front, and held the bra tightly to her breasts, hands on the shoulder straps. This was much more undressed than she had ever been with me, previously, and she took her time and all due deliberation before continuing. Joan smiled, a little embarrassed, maybe, but apparently determined, and brought her arms down, taking the bra with them.

The sudden cool air against her nipples brought them quickly erect,

and I found myself staring, most unabashedly, at her bare and very nicely shaped breasts. She *was* embarrassed, and seemed to want to cover herself from my sight, but somehow she restrained her natural inclination, and endured her embarrassing nudity with surprising resolve. It seemed that once she made the decision to remove her bra and become topless, she was determined to go through with it, and not back down. All I could do was look at her, and her acorn-sized, dark brown nipples.

"I'm getting cold." She held her hands on her knees, with resolve, and seemed to shiver, slightly, in the cool air. I felt the fervor of the moment slipping away, and threatening to become deadly embarrassing.

In response, I placed my hands gently on her shoulders, and brought her slim frame close to me. I felt the soft, warm mounds of her breasts flatten very nicely against my chest, and I pulled us down to lay on the blanket, together. Then nervous myself, I held her against me, and tentatively kissed her forehead, to help allay her fears and trepidation. I also soon discovered I had my own fears to deal with, and also my own uncertainty and trepidation, but as our light touching of lips continued, they just seemed to evaporate. I hugged her to me, squeezing her tightly. My hands were on her bare back, and I caressed and massaged her, running my fingertips under the waist of her jeans, very daringly, and then up to her neck.

Warmed and relaxing, she whispered, "It's your turn, again."

"Let's do it together," I suggested, and without comment she accepted the idea.

Joan pulled away from me to lay on her back, and started to undo her belt. I took the cue and rolled onto my back to do the same thing. Belts were undone; snaps, buttons, zippers, etc., undone and pulled down. I hesitated at that point, but she ignored me, and purposefully pushed her jeans down off her hips and past her knees. I, of course, had to then do the same. When she saw I was following suit, and was removing my pants, she pulled her panties off without any hesitation at all. So, this was going to be everything, then. I felt compelled to follow her lead, once again, or risk seeming juvenile, so I whipped my shorts down past my ankles and over my feet. She tossed her underpants to lie with the rest of her clothes, and I discarded mine to the same forgotten pile.

We lay there a few moments together, both on our backs, and both of us completely naked together for the first time. Actually, it was the first time we had ever removed any parts of our clothing, at all. Of course I had an erection, and it stuck straight up in the cool air, goose bumps forming on my tightening scrotum. I was embarrassed to be so conspicuous, and almost put my hands over it, but at the last instant I rationalized that

covering up would draw even more attention to me—to that part of my anatomy—that already was becoming the center, so to speak, of Joan's attention.

Joan turned on her side to face me, and I turned to face her, as well. I was afraid to pull her to me, due mainly to my protruding erection, but she was, for the moment, more interested in studying me than having me poke her. She seemed very curious about my obviously male physiology, and tentatively put her hand out, presumably to touch me there. I think she was looking for a cue from me—a go-ahead, or something—so I took her hand, which was small but very warm to the touch, and carefully placed it on my penis. This was a moment of truth, and I almost expected her to pull away in disgust, but she didn't, so I dared to position her fingers, and squeeze them encouragingly around its circumference. I looked to her, very shyly, but found her looking right back at me, very unshyly. To answer her unspoken question, then, my expression was quietly urging, agonizingly hopeful, and once she was certain what I wanted, she began to explore me. I relaxed, expecting to enjoy it immensely.

Joan was obviously inexperienced with the handling of boys' hard members, as her unsure hand movements and intent facial expressions indicated. But she was patient, and willing, and studied me for clues to my pleasure—in my face and in the reactions of my body, and began to work on me. Though slow at first, she quickly gained confidence as it became apparent I was responding satisfactorily to her strokes and squeezes. With her ministrations my arousal was increasing, by veritable leaps and bounds, and I soon reached that state where there is no turning back. At least not easily. I'm sure if she had been just a little more skillful, I would have come all over her by then, but fortunately or unfortunately, I hadn't reached that point, yet.

I wanted to touch her, too. I desperately, fervently needed to touch her, so I put out my hand, and made the same show of timid hesitation and unsure looking for approval as she had. As I expected, I saw no indecision or denial in her face, so I placed my hand confidently, purposefully, on her mound of curly, soft, dark brown pubic hair. She moved to help me, and parted her knees, just a little, and I slid my hand quickly down between her thighs, where I felt plainly that she was wet.

I had been with only a couple of other girls before, in any kind of situation even remotely similar to this. But I was the more experienced between us, even if only marginally, and I was determined to take charge and really show her what boys were all about. I rubbed my fingers up and down the length of her slightly parted labia, spreading her slippery

wetness around, and eliciting the most highly satisfactory and erotically excited responses from her. This was very encouraging to me, but I really only knew the barest bit about how girls were turned on sexually, and perhaps even less about how they could achieve orgasm. I knew it had something to do with their clitoris, but I wasn't *at all* certain what or where it was, so I couldn't be too sure if I was doing it right. But Joan's reaction to my (clumsily inept) massaging told me that I obviously wasn't doing it completely wrong, either. Emboldened, I intensified my rubbing and massaging, keeping it in time with the gentle rocking of her hips against my hand.

It seemed she had completely forgotten about me. Her hand was still tightly gripped around the middle of my raging hard-on, which was painfully throbbing against the constriction of her fingers, but she had totally ceased masturbating me as she turned her attention inward, becoming much more involved in what I was doing for her, than what she was doing for me. I noticed I was no longer being stroked, but I was getting more and more intensity and insistency of movement out of Joan's hips, as I rubbed, massaged and kneaded the nearly gushing folds of her vagina, so I, too, soon forgot my impending pleasure in order to more fully satisfy hers.

In fact I was becoming quite fascinated by her responses to me. Suffice it to say, no other girl had ever reacted as she was reacting, and I was, as she, exploring delicious, heady, new territory. Her eyes were closed, head thrown back and mouth open as she panted and sighed, and made small grunting, mewling sounds as I intensified my efforts in time with her rhythms. Her concentration was totally and absolutely on what was happening to her, and what was just about to happen.

Her thrusts against my hand quickened. She seemed to be nearing some summit, some climactic peak of sexual excitement, and in her urgency and need to achieve that sybaritic plateau more quickly, she grabbed my wrist and pressed it harder to her vagina, changing the stroke to become more of a stiff, hard thrust, then a gentle pullback, then another hard thrust downward, and another gentle pullback, my palm pressing against and flattening that nodule of extreme sensitivity against the hard edge of her pubic bone. It didn't take more than four or five of these impassioned thrusts before she suddenly stiffened with a gasp, clenched my hand even harder against her vagina, grinding it in, and orgasmed.

I recognized what was happening, and relaxed my arm and my hand, to hold perfectly still while she twitched and spasmed under me. She rode the intense, nearly overwhelming feeling of pleasure like a wave, riding up one side and down the other, each pulse falling in intensity as her

ecstasy continued. Her hand was clenched almost into a fist, fingernails dug deeply and excruciatingly into the burning, sensitive skin of my penis, and as her tide of mindless gratification then flowed out, I couldn't help but have my attention returned to the razor-sharp clamp she had cinched around my most sensitive organ. I suppressed the pain, though, and prayed in silent agony that she should soon finish and relax her iron, vise-like grip on me. I also prayed, beyond hope, that she would then return her attention to me.

In a couple minutes her orgasmic 'seizure' did seem to fade, and as she relaxed she opened her eyes wide, and looked at me. "**Wow!!**" she grinned, white teeth all shining—*most* uncharacteristically—"I've *never* done *that* before! Wow!"

"You've never had an orgasm before?" I thought it pretty unlikely she hadn't, but I simply wondered. She seemed to blush with some embarrassment, though here we were, my hand still smashed against the soaked opening of her vagina, and hers still noosed around my rock-hard, and ready-to-explode penis.

"Yes, I *have* had an orgasm, Marc Huffman. But not like this! It's much different when someone else is touching you, instead of just you—touching yourself." She was very obviously embarrassed to be telling me this, but she seemed to be rising above her shyness, quite nicely. "That was very, very, *very* nice, Marc!"

"Hmmm, three 'verys'," I commented. "Is that good?"

She whispered, "It's wonderful!" and leaned forward to kiss me.

I was glad it had been so wonderful for her, but I was also about to burst. As we kissed, the hot, sweaty pressure of her breasts against my chest reminded me of the too-tense state of my own arousal, and I was beginning to understand—and fear—that if something didn't happen soon, I was going to be most unhappily saddled with a truly monstrous case of 'blue balls'. *Truly monstrous*. And then, as I carefully sensed the state of my poor, forgotten testicles, I realized it may be far too late, already.

But Joan returned to the present to realize I was very hard, and very neglected, right there in her hand. She smiled, and gave me a slight squeeze (painful!) as if to remind me she was aware of the wholly unsatisfied state of my raging cock. "Don't think me too naive," she looked down, "but I've never seen a boy have an orgasm, before." Her complexion seemed to darken.

"Haven't you ever seen a porno movie?" I asked, almost panting with the impending joy of release. Be patient, now, Marc.

"No," she shook her head, "I guess not. I don't think so."

"You aren't sure?"

"Do porno movies have orgasm scenes in them?"

"Do minks fuck?" Despite my state, I couldn't resist the joke, and I grinned as charmingly as I could.

"Well," she closed her eyes, slightly embarrassed by my obscenity, "whatever movies I have seen, never included an actual orgasm. I mean, I *have* seen boys before—I have a brother, you know—but I've never, ever, seen him hard like you are. It's very interesting."

"Interesting?" Hold on, now. "In what way?"

"Maybe interesting isn't the right word ... try 'curious,' or 'exciting'. Both of those are good words to describe what I'm feeling. You gave me such a good orgasm, just now. I'd like to help you have one, if you'll help me out, a little."

Eureka! But I said, "You were doing pretty good all by yourself."

"Maybe I was just lucky." She finally looked at me, and smiled, "If you'll show me what to do, I'd like to please you, if I can."

"Well-ll," I drawled, feeling great relief, already, but becoming mildly embarrassed, myself, "I *could* use a little more lubrication."

"What kind of 'lubrication'?"

I cleared my throat. "Uh ... a little spit will do." I meant she should lick her hand.

She smiled, but didn't seem very embarrassed. "Do I have to put you in my mouth to 'lubricate' you?"

I was more than surprised at that, but recovered quickly. "Um ... not unless you want to." But not very smoothly. It sounded lame in my ears, and then those ears were red, for sure. Practically no one I knew had ever been given oral sex before (except for Tom, that is). Well, at least *I'd* never had it happen to me. It was supposed to be better than 'real' sex (so Tom said), and I found that instantly, and despite the apparent odds against it, I was readying myself with the anticipation that she would, indeed, 'put me in her mouth'.

Joan studied my face coolly, and carefully. She was thinking, and looking for something—I had no idea what—and was taking her dear sweet time about it. Be patient, and make yourself wait. After some moments, though, she gave me a most mischievous grin and said, "I think I might like that."

"Like what?" No sense jumping the gun. Be sure.

"I think I might like to suck your dick! OK?" She seemed irreverent, rebellious, and damned proud of herself. "How's *that* for getting to the point?"

Yes, I *was* blown away by her ability to change and show a different face. But I was young, and brash, and just inexperienced enough to call her bluff, since I was still completely certain she was bluffing, and would never go through with it. Ah, but if she did ...

“OK,” I said.

Joan pushed me onto my back. She came up to her knees, and while still keeping her steely hard grip on my penis, began to work her way down my chest, kissing me as she went. She kissed me on both sides of my groin, and on my thighs clear down to my knees, looking in my direction from time to time, judging my reactions and learning from me as she went.

Finally, she settled her mouth above the swollen, red tip. She licked her lips and placed a small, light, tender kiss on it. The sensation went straight to the base of my brain, and blocked out everything except the nerves centered just under the circle of her lips. She parted those lips, and her tongue licked lightly around the head. I tensed, holding back. She was testing, and tasting, and working up to it, but I was no longer skeptical at all that she was going to do it. And sure enough, in a few seconds she plunged her mouth down over my burning, aching shaft, and let go with her hand.

I came instantly. The force of my orgasm easily matched or even superseded the power of hers, but the huge volume of my semen then issuing forth quite shocked and surprised her. I’m not too sure she was even expecting something to *come out* of me, since on the second contraction, she flew up off me in a flash and rocked back, putting her hand to her mouth, coughing and hacking. And I was left open to the air to spew cum all over the blanket; Joan; myself—everywhere. It was a monstrous orgasm, more than even I had expected, and I was *positive* Joan had not expected such an effusive, prodigious production from me. Her choking and coughing told me more than I wanted to know. I became worried, then, how she would react when she could finally breathe, again.

I lay there, silent and unmoving, and tried desperately to sink into the carpet. Joan coughed and coughed, and took a long time clearing the overwhelmed passages in her throat, the ones that had been so rudely and quickly filled with my cum. So few boys ever experienced oral sex, I believed, and if this occasion were any indication, it was probably going to be my last—with Joan, anyway. In fact, I wasn’t too sure if this episode would completely change her outlook on the whole matter of sex and such, period. I had heard of it happening before, and I was both disappointed and resigned to its happening, again. But this time, alas, to me.

In time, her coughs subsided, and it seemed she could breathe once more. My semen was everywhere, and I even noticed some of the milky white fluid slowly making its way down Joan's breasts and onto her stomach. Disgustedly, I thought, she wiped at herself and tried to clean her face and breasts off with a corner of the blanket. She said nothing, and the longer she was silent, the more fearful and worried I became. Needless to say, my erection had faded, almost completely, and I lay there forlorn and forgotten, becoming cold and limp as I watched Joan try to clean herself up. When she finished, finally, or at least reached a point of diminishing returns, she turned toward me. Joan looked at me, but I could not read her eyes. She wasn't frowning, or smiling, just looking. But I was terrified.

She cleared her throat loudly. "*That was something.*" I was taken aback at her statement. It wasn't condemnation, as I expected, or hatred, or anger, or anything like that. She was commenting, and most calmly and amiably, on the violent abundance of my orgasm. Then she smiled. "Are all your orgasms like that?"

I was flushed with welcome relief, but still in complete shock at her reaction. "Uh ... no," I replied, meekly. "That one was about a nine on the 'Richter Scale'."

She coughed again, but it seemed to be more for effect. "You should have warned me! I nearly choked to death!"

"Sorry. I didn't know it would be so much."

"Oh, don't worry about it," she grinned, and took a clean corner of the blanket to wipe me off. "Next time, I'll be prepared."

• • •

Danny Golden only beat me with his belt that one time. I didn't think I'd done anything *then* to deserve what I'd gotten, and afterward I *sure* didn't plan on doing anything—ever—that could possibly provoke that kind of brutal attack again. Of course, I'm assuming there was anything even resembling logic or rational thought guiding his actions. Now, I know there *wasn't*.

I was in terrible shape as I laid there on the floor. I couldn't even move. I tried to get up, to stand up—to lift my fucking head!—but it was impossible. The pain, which had been most mercifully absent while he beat me, had decided to reveal itself in the fullest measure, and I was

agonized beyond the point of tears. All I could do was lay on the floor, completely immobile, icy-cold and shivering, and wracked with the worst, most blinding, searing pain of my life.

I don't know how long I had lain there when someone appeared.

Danny must have realized how badly he had hurt me, because the person he sent over to check on me was Kristie, one of the dancers at Danny's club, but one who also had once studied to be a nurse. It was obvious to me that Danny was the one who'd sent her, since only Danny knew what had happened to me, and I barely knew her. Under the circumstances, she was by far the best person he could have possibly sent.

When Kristie saw me laid out, bleeding on the floor, she immediately wanted to call the police. Damn near insisted on it, in fact. Maybe I should have let her—but **no!**—I begged her, sobbing and pleading, not to involve anyone else. I was thoroughly immersed in shame for myself, and the last thing I wanted was a lot of attention. I can't believe how stupid I was! But that was then.

She helped me get to the bed, practically carrying me there, and while I whimpered, and even occasionally bawled, she removed what was left of my robe so she could inspect the extent of my injuries. My entire back, the backs of my arms and hands, and the sides of legs were nothing more than a swollen mass of red, bleeding, ugly welts. There must have been close to a hundred lacerations on my shoulders, alone. Fortunately, almost all were pretty small and did not leave obviously visible scars. A few, however, were not so small, and though I really can't see them, from time to time I *am* reminded of them. Marc has seen them, and I really wish he couldn't.

Kristie got the hydrogen peroxide and a box of gauze pads from the medicine chest to attend to my cuts. She had me laid out on the bed on my face, legs spread-eagled and arms akimbo, and she began to wipe me down with the peroxide. Yes, friends, *that* hurt even more, but I only cried a little since I knew I was going to get better if I withstood it. Apparently there wasn't too much bleeding, which was good, but there were too few band-aids and bandages to cover all my wounds adequately. She did the best she could with what I had on hand, then had to go out for more gauze and first-aid tape. When she was done bandaging me, my entire back was almost completely covered with tape and band-aids. At least then she could cover me up so I wouldn't freeze.

It was odd. I was unusually cold, though it was not cold outside, at all. Kristie explained that all the blood rushing to my wounds got extra-cooled (like what also happens when you get sunburned) and was making me cold. It made sense, I guess. What she didn't say, though, was that I

was also in a state of shock. If she hadn't bandaged me and then covered me with a warm blanket, I could have died from the effects of the shock, alone.

Kristie didn't leave me. Since I was in such bad shape she decided she had to stay and watch me. I did nothing for the remainder of the day and all the next night but sleep, and the whole time Kristie sat next to the bed and patiently watched over me. When I would awaken, she would give me Seven-Up along with some prescription painkillers she had, but the painkillers (whatever they were) weren't all that powerful, and the agony pushed through, anyway. She took my temperature occasionally, looking for signs of infection, I guess, but otherwise she was just *there* for me. You know, I think she really should have been a nurse, after all.

I had to stay on my stomach. I couldn't roll onto my side to save my life, and of course there was *no way* I could lay on my back. I was able to sleep reasonably well, despite the occasional attempt to shift into a more comfortable position, but it was while I was awake that being 'in traction' got in the way the most. All I could do was lay there on my stomach and either look out the window, sideways, or lay facing the other way and look at the wall. Not much of a view in either direction. Of course, after an hour or two looking at *any* one thing, all the attraction goes out of it, anyway.

The next morning Kristie brought the TV into the bedroom and placed it near the head of the bed so I could watch. That helped a lot, and made the remainder of my long convalescence almost bearable. Almost. I still slept most of the time, but when I complained about it and apologized to Kristie, she told me it was my body's way of healing me, and not to worry.

I cried a lot, all the time, and when I did Kristie would lay on the edge of the bed next to me and stroke my hair and kiss me on the cheek and on the forehead. She would tell me I was all right; that I was doing better; that I would be fine—all good and necessary things for a sick person to hear—but for this particular sick person to come around to believing them would be an entirely different matter. Except for Kristie's presence, I felt as totally alone as I have ever felt. I was in emotional shock, too, that my erstwhile 'boyfriend' had beaten me to within an inch of my life, and I wasn't at all sure if I should forgive him and go back to him, or pack my stuff and catch the next bus outta Dodge. It's stupid, I know, to have been even *thinking* of staying, but sick and foolish as I was—I was. I don't know if I was afraid of Danny, especially, or if I was mainly afraid of just doing something (apparently) wrong again and getting another beating for it. At the time I thought I had done only what he wanted me to do, though I

was not at all happy or proud of it.

He had set me up in an untenable situation, and when I balked at it he slugged me in the stomach to obtain my compliance. I had then done what he wanted me to do (I have to keep on saying it, because it wasn't what I wanted. **It wasn't what I wanted!**) and I had tried to do it *well*. And all it did was provoke him to attempt to kill me. I was humiliated, and ashamed, and afraid, and lonely. But mostly, I felt so very much *alone*. Becoming Danny's prostitute meant I would never be having any friends, and no one would be coming around to see me, and ultimately, no one would be caring enough for me to be checking, now and then, to see if I was even *alive*. I was alone, and felt as isolated from the world as any person had ever been.

Danny tried to come by a couple of times the second day, but Kristie chased him away, refusing even to let him in the door. I was surprised he listened to her—as if he listened to anyone!—especially one of his 'girls,' but I guess that's an indication of how much he respected her. And he must have respected her *a lot* to concede to her wishes. Maybe he was afraid she'd call the cops, or something, if he didn't cooperate with her. I don't know. Kristie thought he was afraid I would die on him, but I don't know if he thought that, either. I didn't know then, and I don't know now. She never let him in the door, so I was simply glad I didn't have to deal with him.

By the fourth day I was able to eat solid food for a change. It was difficult, what with me being permanently locked in a facedown position, but I was starved and Kristie was very patient, and also very persistent at seeing that I got *something* to eat. And she still hadn't left me. We talked a lot, too. I don't remember now what we talked about, but I guess the subject matter isn't all that important. What *was* important was that someone was there with me, and I wasn't left all alone.

If I had been left to fend for myself, and if I hadn't also then managed to call an ambulance, I'm sure I would have died. I can't say for certain, but I don't think I would have called anyone. I think I would have been content just to lay there and die, rather than do something to save myself.

There have been a few times in my life when I've completely lost the will to live, where I've wanted to just end it all and finally die. This was one of them. I can't really say I wanted to *kill* myself—I just wanted the chance to *die* and not have to endure life, anymore. I'm a coward, at heart, when it comes to that kind of thing. I've hated my life, and I've often wanted out of it, but I've never had the guts to do anything about it. There are times, even, when I've envied those who can commit suicide—kill themselves. They, at least are successful at *something*, even if they can't be

around to see their success. I, on the other hand, am not even a success at the just giving up and dying part.

Kristie was very, very pretty. She also had very large breasts and that kind of blond hair and cute figure that might have marked her as a 'bimbo'. But she didn't sound like a 'bimbo' when she talked. She was bright, very obviously intelligent, compassionate and caring, and as far as I was concerned, a living, loving angel of mercy to me.

I think she really should have been a nurse. I guess she figured she could make more money dancing, considering how well built and pretty she was. And she was one of the best dancers, as much as I can remember.

I wish I remembered her last name, but I don't. There have been many times I've wanted to call her or write her a letter to thank her for what she did for me, but I don't know her last name, and she doesn't dance in clubs anymore. That's all I know. Things have changed, and I don't get around to meet the 'strip club' crowd anymore. And besides, except for those few rare (very rare) friends one makes, the lifestyle is pretty much a revolving door. Faces and bodies come and go, and after a few years there's no one left who even remembers anyone you might have known. It's terribly sad, but there are times I wish I could just tell her 'thanks'. Like now.

My recovery, at least to the point where I could get out of bed, took over ten days in all. And yes, Kristie stayed with me the whole time. When I was finally able to get up, I still couldn't lay on my back or even lean against the back of a chair. But being able to move around helped a lot. But I know what you're thinking. Of course I had to get up to go to the bathroom. I couldn't hold it for ten days, or anything like that. During my recovery, if I needed to go, Kristie would have to help me up and walk with me very carefully, and help me sit on the john. It was hard to even bend over, and there were times I wished I could just pee the bed, and not have to get up at all. What I was talking about, was the time when I could finally get up on my own and stay up long enough to maybe fix breakfast, or wash my hair. That was what took ten days, and believe me, when it came, I was ready.

Of course I can't say I knew what it was, truly, that I had to look forward to, but I was, regardless, happy to be up and around. And after ten days it was time for Kristie to be getting back to her life. To think that for me she had forfeited almost two weeks of her 'salary' as a dancer made me feel pretty bad. I told her of my concern, but she passed it off as if it were nothing. She said Danny was still paying her, anyway, and that she also had plenty of money saved up. And besides, she said, she had wanted a vacation away from the place, for a while. I wouldn't have

necessarily called what she'd done for me a 'vacation,' but I was very grateful that she'd been there. Very grateful.

When it finally looked as though I would survive, and I was able to do things for myself somewhat adequately, Kristie gave me a kiss on the cheek, told me to take care, and left. I saw her only once afterward, and that was while she was up on stage, earning her keep. I wish I'd thought enough to thank her for everything she'd done for me.

So, Kristie, if you ever read this, thank you. Thank you. Thank you. And I love you.



Kerry and I had a talk about things after we got back to the apartment, the Sunday afternoon after our little 'three-some'. Despite Kerry's alleged 'hunger,' and her subsequent halfhearted protests, we did not stop on the way home to get anything to eat. Personally, I had more than enough of a hangover to make the subject of food quite undesirable, and I sincerely wondered how Kerry could have gotten as drunk as she had, and still have a stomach left, let alone an appetite.

The conversation in the van on the trip back into town was light and polite. Tom was pretty quiet—for Tom. I was quiet (though I usually am), and the tenor of the whole quiet atmosphere eventually served to quiet Kerry, as well. I'm sure she sensed something wrong, though I was not unkind or short with her. Maybe my cool 'politeness,' in light of the strangeness of the night before, was confusing her. I don't know. I wasn't trying to make things more difficult, but I was unquestionably in need of some heavy-duty reflection. Tom dropped us at the studio, where I retrieved my car, but even when Kerry and I were finally alone I kept silent, and by example, forced her to do the same. The trip home from the studio, then, was quite short, and once inside the apartment door, Kerry bolted immediately for the bathroom. I simply walked over to the TV and turned it on. I flipped through the channels until I found a halfway suitable program, and kicking my shoes off, sprawled out on the couch to watch.

Kerry wasn't gone long. I first heard banging and thumping from the vicinity of the bedroom, faint sounds of water running, probably from the bathroom, and then she reappeared, having changed into her robe. As she padded by, barefoot and silent, she eyed me briefly and narrowly, then turned briskly toward the refrigerator. I thought she was going for a beer,

and though I really didn't want her drinking anything, considering her drunken antics of the night before, I didn't have the energy or the interest, especially, to stop her. But I was wrong about the beer. Kerry retrieved a Coke, and while I laid on the couch and tried to look like I was actually watching the program, she stood in the middle of the kitchen, well away from me, and sipped it. Fine, let her act any way she pleases.

We let several minutes go by, like that. I thought she was acting strangely, of course not thinking my silence and patent charade of ignoring her was in any way unusual, but *I* had a lot to think about. That she was allowing me to think, reasonably unobstructed, I considered a benefit. What she was thinking of the present circumstances, I couldn't have guessed, and probably wouldn't have admitted to caring about, either. Let her stand there all by herself and drink her Coke. She was leaving me alone, and for the moment, that was good.

Then, out of the relatively noisy silence, Kerry spoke. "Are you mad at me?" She sounded almost concerned. That was good, too. Maybe it meant she cared what I thought about her. Maybe she actually cared, at least enough to ask.

But I didn't answer very quickly. I had to think about the import of her question, and weigh any number of possible responses along with the attendant universe her possible replies—and in my hung over state, it wasn't a quick process. I wanted to be certain my answer accurately reflected how I was feeling, but I *didn't know* how I was feeling.

She moved, slightly, and I reacted by looking briefly in her direction. She clearly expected me to say something, but I only looked, prompting her to make another attempt to draw me out. "Are you not gonna even talk to me, now?"

That was a much easier question to answer, though. "I can talk to you." I looked toward her, again, this time holding my stare longer. "I'm talking to you, now."

I thought she shook her head, slightly. "I know," she folded her arms, the Coke cradled in her elbow, "but you haven't answered my question, yet."

I sighed, "I don't know that I can answer you. I'm not sure *how* I feel, right now."

She frowned deeply, and suddenly reached a rather drastic conclusion. "Should I just pack up and leave? Do you want me out of here?"

It took me a few seconds to decide. I hoped she wouldn't draw any premature, unfavorable conclusions from my hesitation. "No," I said, but I know I didn't sound very enthusiastic, "I don't want you to leave. I still

want us to stay together, I guess.”

She was several seconds, then, before she followed with, “So do I—I guess.”

I sensed some amount of anger in her, which I thought ironic, but it may have only been frustration with me. So I asked, “Are you angry with *me*, for some reason?”

No direct answer, just, “I wish you’d talk to me.”

“OK.” I could play this game, too. “Why?”

“Why—what? Why do I want you to talk to me, or ...” she figured it out “... why did I suck Tom’s dick?”

“How about that second thing.” I looked away.

She thought some moments before answering, “I’m not sure I can tell you why. It’s kinda complicated.”

“I’m sure it is.”

She sensed the irony in my voice, and complained, “*It is!* It’s very complicated!”

Complicated, indeed. “Maybe you were just drunk, Kerry.” I thought booze was a likely culprit. A very likely culprit.

She sounded very defensive, and more than a little angry, too, “*So what?* So what if I was drunk? I get drunk a lot.”

“Yes,” I thought it very ironic, “you do.” I had to bite the inside of my cheek to keep from smiling. It was so ironic it was almost funny.

She continued in a very defensive tone of voice, “*I like to drink.*” She made it sound like the most reasonable thing in the world.

Well, maybe it was, sometimes. “I do, too, but I still don’t fuck your best friend, and then wonder why you might be upset about it. *Come on, Kerry!* Wouldn’t you be at least *a little* upset if I fucked your best friend?”

She snorted, “I didn’t *fuck* Tom.” Just splitting hairs, she was.

“Right.” More irony. “You only sucked his dick. It’s a completely different thing, isn’t it? It’s not like sex, at all. It’s something like ... fixing him breakfast ... or washing his clothes, maybe.” I had to grin at the pun I had coming, “Instead, you just washed his dick.” Wholly ironic.

She flinched at the words, but then recovered enough to straighten her posture, lips pressed into a tight, thin line and jaw set firmly. She was obviously very angry, but held it back almost totally. I fully expected her to blast back at me, but as I laid there and waited, expecting the worst, she didn’t. I didn’t understand why she chose not to retaliate, but maybe, just maybe, she realized my words, and the disappointment and condemnation they implied, might be justified. After about a count of thirty, she relaxed her stiff expression and unfolded her arms, slowly, which helped how I felt about her. It made her seem less combative. And

when she spoke, then, she was. "I'm sorry, Marc." She sighed, looking me in the eye, and then looking away, "I really didn't mean to cause all this trouble."

She *sounded* sincere. Was she? "How do I know you mean it?"

She looked back. "Because I'm telling you." She refolded her arms. So much for sincerity.

"Right." I turned away.

"*You don't believe me?!?*" Now, she was incredulous. "Marc Huffman! I've *never* lied to you, ever! I can't believe you think I'd lie to you. I mean—shit!—if I was gonna go and fuck some other guy, do ya think I'da done it in fucking *front of you?*" She spun and threw the Coke can at the sink. Fortunately she made the shot, because the can was still half full. Even so, it sloshed Coke on the counter, clanking and rattling around, and almost bounced out onto the floor. Then she charged me, covering the distance in a few rushed strides. "No way! If I'da thought what I was doing had anything to do with how I felt about you, then I'da *never* done something where you could see it."

"I see. You would have simply gone behind my back to do it. Right?"

"**No!!**" She raged up in front of the couch, blocking my view of the TV. "*I love you!!* I love you!" she panted, "I love you, very, very much!"

"I thought I loved you, too." I had to look at her, to make sure she understood me.

But she suddenly backed down, apparently, seeing at least part of my dilemma, "I know this is hard to understand."

My eyes went wide. "It's damn near fucking *impossible* to understand, is what it is."

Surprisingly, she accepted that. "So tell me." She folded her arms, again, "Why did you let me do it?"

"Kerry, it wasn't my responsibility to watch you." I felt myself in an inferior position, laying as I was, with her towering over me. So I sat up. "I don't ever 'let' you do *anything*. You're not some child I should have to watch every minute. Kerry, you're an adult. You do what you want." I paused, checking her face for a reaction. None, yet. "It's not my job to tell you what to do." Then I thought, "Would you even have listened if I *had* said something last night?"

"Yes. Of course."

Oh, right. Sure. "Bullshit. Originally, you wanted to get so drunk you passed out. If I hadn't stopped you, you'd have drunk yourself to the point that we'd probably *still* be there, trying just to get you to stop puking."

"When have I ever done that?"

I shook my head, smiling, "You can't fool me, girl. I've heard you in the morning, sometimes, puking your guts out. Plenty of times, in fact. You get sick a lot."

But, she didn't contradict me. Instead, "Last night you stopped me from drinking. Why didn't you stop me from blowing Tom?"

The way she said it struck me oddly. "That's a nice word. You make it sound just like a business."

Whoa! Did *that* ever spark a reaction. She screamed down at me, "**This is not a fucking business for me!**" Her face went red as her hair, the veins popping out on her temple, "**Don't you ever fucking accuse me of treating you like 'business'! Don't you EVER!!**"

It was an extreme reaction, to say the least, but not unusual, considering who was doing the yelling. But, rather than engaging her in a shouting match, I kept my voice low, and replied, very calmly, "Kerry, it was the word you used, and your tone of voice that made it sound that way. I mean, you should hear how you sound, sometimes. 'Oh, I was just out blowing so-and-so. No big deal. Just another blowjob'." I shook my head, "I didn't make it sound like a fucking business—you did. Just another fucking blowjob."

Then she was crying, but still seething, "**But it's not a business!!**" Tears began to stream down her cheeks, and with much show of disgust, she wiped them away, and then forced herself to stop crying. I was amazed. She stopped her tears almost as soon as they started. "This is not a fucking business for me," she whispered, sniffing. She exhaled, and cleared her throat, "Why the hell didn't you stop me, if it was gonna upset you so much?"

I raised an eyebrow, "I don't think I'm the one who's upset, at the moment. I may be pretty damned disappointed, but I'm not upset."

"*Whatever!* Why did you let me ..." she fished for a word that wouldn't spark some unwanted reaction, gesturing with her hands, but then frustrated, gave up "... do *that* ... to Tom?"

"I already told you. It wasn't my job to stop you." I had to stand up. I couldn't adequately continue to deal with her from a sitting position. "My God, girl. Just how many girlfriends do you think I've had in my life that I've had to actually *stop* from giving blowjobs to my friends? Kerry, this is so far removed from reality that there isn't even something I can compare it to. How do I react to you? How am I supposed to react—how am I supposed to *feel*—when I see you on your knees, sucking him off, like that?" I finished, "How would *you* feel?"

She stood stock-still, without speaking, for a very long time. Her eyes, red and leaking at the edges, went from looking down at the floor, to

looking at the clock on the kitchen wall, to the windows, and lastly, to me. I hoped she would decide correctly, but I sensed it a chancy moment for us. For my part, I couldn't possibly say I was ready to throw her out, but our future did depend upon her answer.

She began, "Whether or not you can understand it, making love to Tom had nothing at all to do with how I feel about you. You have absolutely nothing to worry about, from *anybody*. I don't want Tom."

Maybe not Tom, but ... "Even if you say you love me, and want only me, seeing you 'make love' to someone else makes me feel very inferior. Very much second best. Kerry, I've tried to keep an open mind about it, but this is something that's going to be very hard to shake. This just isn't something I'm going to get over, quickly."

"You're not second-best in my mind, you know."

I looked away. "You've told me that."

She thought she knew what came next. "But you don't believe me."

I turned, "I *want* to."

Her voice became a plea. "You can! Marc, I promise I'll never do anything like this, again. You have my word. From now on it'll be just you and me."

I thought about what she was offering, and though I wanted to believe her and put an end to the uncertainty, something still bothered me about the whole situation. What if I did believe her? What if she was telling the truth? What I *really* wished was that she hadn't done it, at all. That way I wouldn't have something to always remember, and always overlook, and despite my better instincts, always have to forgive her for.

"Kerry, I don't want you making promises that you won't keep. It would almost be better if you told me that this was the way it was going to be, because that way I could decide either to get over it and get used to it, or call it quits with you. If I forgive you, now, and believe what you're telling me, then it's going to be just that much harder to forgive you the next time it happens."

She was aghast—shocked. "I can't believe you think I'm lying to you. I can't believe you think I would *ever* do something like this, again."

"I don't think you're lying. I think you believe you're telling me the whole, complete, honest, truth. I just don't think you'll *remember* what you've promised me the next time you get drunk—and horny—at the same time."

"So, what does this mean?" She started tears, anew. "Are we through?"

"Oh, God, Kerry." I had to pace, then. "I don't know *what* to do." She followed me as I walked around her toward the bedroom. "Last night I

sort of let things get out of hand, since I could have stopped you, and didn't. Hell, even Tom could have stopped you." I paused in the doorway, and turned, "Tom could have stayed sitting on the fucking couch, if he didn't want to have anything to do with you. But that didn't happen."

"No," she was right behind me, "it didn't." Then she immediately followed with, "I'm sorry, Marc. I'm very, very sorry, because it was wrong, and I was wrong, and no matter how I felt last night, I should not have taken advantage of the situation."

"I can almost believe you, but I still wish you hadn't done it."

"I do, too," she shrugged, "but it's too late, now. We can't change it."

I agreed, "No, we can't."

I went to the bathroom to pee, while she stood in the bathroom doorway and watched me. She waited until I flushed, then asked, "What are we gonna do, buddy?"

"I don't know, Kerry." I wanted out of the bathroom, and she was in the way. Should I walk by her, or remain trapped? I chose the latter, for the moment. "I need more time to think about it."

"Fair enough." She moved out of the doorway, and let me pass. I walked into the bedroom, and again she followed. "I am sorry, though."

"Well, it would still be a whole lot easier if you just didn't do those things that you will only just have to apologize for, later." I continued on out to the living room, *the girl* in tow.

She sighed, "I thought we already covered that." She followed me to the couch, but didn't sit when I did. Instead, she stood in front of me, arms folded again, and blocked my view of the TV. "Besides, I already told you. It's not that simple. I mean, are you gonna tell me you never make mistakes?"

"No. I've made lots of mistakes." I thought about it. "Some of them serious."

"And when you apologized," she looked down at me, hands folded in front of her, very contrite, "did they believe you?"

"Sometimes you don't get the chance to say you're sorry."

She rubbed her arms. "Will you give me the chance?"

In response I just shrugged, and regarded her while she moved to sit next to me. She sat close, but not too close, and we watched TV together, in silence, for about the next hour. Occasionally I would glance at her, and she at me, but mostly we just sat and watched, and thought, and mainly tried to decide where we stood.

Eventually I must have come around to a decision, because in time Kerry seemed to sense the atmosphere had changed, and though I still hadn't moved or made any attempt to approach her, she inched closer,

little by little, until her hip touched mine. I made eye contact with her, then, and she threaded her arm behind my back, forcing her shoulder up under my arm. Giving up, I put my arm around her, and very gently held her against me. In a few moments, she sighed, very heavily.

"You know," I spoke, as if cued, "I've been thinking."

"Yeah?" She wrapped her other arm around me, so that she was then hugging me about the chest.

"I've been thinking that I don't own you. Really, I may never 'own' you, so I can't say you've given anything away that was meant only for me." I paused, thinking. "But you know, from time to time I kind of wish it *was* like that. It might be nice to know that someone is there only for you, and can be trusted to be there, as well."

She seemed to nod as I talked about each being there only for the other, but at the word 'trust' she turned to look at me, and her eyes got very large. "But you *can* trust me!" She was very concerned, "I *want* to be trusted."

"And I want to trust you, too." I thought some more, and she waited. "I don't think I'm handling this very well. Last night I was drunk enough to get something out of it, maybe, but now it makes me feel very shaky and unsure. I just wish everything was back to the way it was, before."

"I'm sorry, Marc," was all she said, finally.

"Me, too," I said, and believed it.

"You know, I was thinking, too," she began.

"About what?"

"About this whole 'thing'. During the first break, last night, Mel said some ... things ... to me."

"Like what? What did she say?"

"Well ..." Kerry didn't seem to want to repeat it "... You remember when Tom hugged me as we were coming off stage for the first break?" I wasn't sure, but said I did, anyway. "Well, she seemed to think he was trying to come on to me, or something."

"She said that?"

"Yeah." Kerry sat up, turning to face me, "And she also said that she 'reassured him that if he was interested—she was available'. Something about keeping him away from me. I don't know. I think she figured if *they* got caught, maybe, then it would only be Tom that got axed—and not me. That is, if Tom and I did anything."

"Huh!" I was surprised, but not all that much. After all, it *was* Mel Howe she was talking about. "She wanted to put herself between you and Tom, is that it? Do everyone a favor? Sacrifice herself?"

"I guess so," she shrugged, and hung her head. But I think she sensed

the sheer, strange irony of it, the same as I did.

"Maybe," I posed, "she just wants Tom for herself, and was afraid of a little competition from you. Is that possible?"

Kerry shook her head, sharply. "No! I would *not* be competition for Mel Howe." Her eyes bored into me, with intent. "I don't want Tom." Then she stood up suddenly.

I stood up, too, wondering where we were going, "And she probably knows that, too." We went toward the kitchen. "That's just Mel Howe. The chick is truly a piece of work."

"So what can we do?" she asked as she made an abrupt about-face and returned to flop down on the couch, right where she had been.

"About what?" I wasn't sure to what she was referring. Either it was about Mel and Tom, or about she and me. If it was about us, I wanted to hear it.

"About *Mel*," she shook her head, seeming to think me dense. Oh, well ...

"Let her give it her best shot." I thought about it, and smirked, "Besides, dear Kerry, *you already beat her to it.*"

"*Oh!* That's not funny!" She seemed angered by the barb, and looked away frostily, then back. She fairly scowled, "It wasn't my intention to 'beat' *anyone* to *anything!* I don't know ..." she stumbled in her train of thought, expression softening "... I don't know *what* I was thinking. But I was *so* horny. I just had to do *something*. It just happened to be the wrong thing, is all."

"Kerry, sweetheart, that was sure one fucking *huge* wrong thing." She, of course, was not amused in the least, and I wasn't trying to be funny, either. "Well," I said, reluctantly rejoining her on the couch, "you weren't the only one at fault, maybe. But it *was* your idea."

She sighed, not looking at me, "I guess you're right. It *was* my idea." Then she was silent for quite a while.

When she finally spoke again, she had begun to cry. I had said nothing, but had sat quietly and patiently next to her while she thought about things.

"**Oh, Marc!**" she bawled, very upset with herself. "I can't believe I hurt Sheree this way. I don't know what I was thinking. **I don't!**"

"I can believe that," I said.

"You won't tell her, will you?"

"Not me." I shook my head. "Will you?"

She seemed appalled I would suggest it. Her tears continued for several minutes, and I did nothing to stop them. "Can ... you ... forgive me?" she spoke, finally, between sobs she tried very hard to suppress. I

guess I must have nodded. She buried her face on my shoulder.

Tom called from the studio some time later. Our conversation was brief, consisting mainly of him asking me to come over and help him unload the equipment. Earlier, it seemed as though he couldn't wait to be rid of us, and I didn't blame him for it—at all. I had offered to help him with the equipment, but he'd refused. Friends are friends, and if he wanted to be alone, who was I to disagree? But apparently his resolve to 'de-van' the equipment solo must have *dissolved*, and in time he was on the phone asking me to come over. I told Kerry where I was going, and she seemed to know better than to ask if she could come, too.

I simply left her in front of the TV and made the short trip over to the studio. When I got there the side door was unlocked, with Tom's silver Dodge van backed up to it. I didn't see him immediately, so I went inside to find him.

He was sitting in our rehearsal studio looking at the walls.

"Hey," I said. He turned at my voice, but said nothing. I went on, "You want to unload the stuff, now?"

He spoke, then, "Sure." He stood up and we walked outside in silence. "I was gonna do this all by myself," he grabbed a heavy trunk off the back of the van, "but I figured I didn't need the punishment."

"It's OK," I assured him.

"Are you pissed at me?"

I had to look at him a moment before answering, "I'm pissed more at myself, than anyone."

He shook his head, "I can't believe she did it."

I almost choked on the words, "I can." I gave no further elaboration.

"Are you two still together?" He, quite reasonably, thought it possible things were over between Kerry and me.

"She's still at the apartment, if that's what you're asking."

"I'm sorry, Marc, but I was pretty drunk."

As good an excuse as any, I suppose. "It's OK." He made me most uncomfortable. "Can we not talk about this anymore, right now?"

"Sure."

So we unloaded the rest of the equipment in silence.

• • •

Hello. My name is Kerry MacDonald, I think. (I'm not trying to be

funny, I know who I am, I just don't know if I want anyone else to know.) I'm sitting here in the apartment by myself, and I just got the urge to write some things down. I've done this before, but I never liked what I wrote, nor did I ever save anything. When I was back in Alabama I used to write all the time—I sort of kept a diary—but when I left there, I left all that stuff there, too. If I'd taken my things with me, I might have continued my writing, but I didn't take anything, so I just got out of the habit.

Now, I've run out of places to go to avoid it. I've been a really bad girl, and I'm sorry, and I have to write this down so I can apologize.

I don't know why I hurt people sometimes. Especially my friends—the people I love. It's taken me a long time, but I think I now understand what love is, and I can say I love someone when I feel a certain way toward them. But, still I can hurt them. I don't *want* to hurt them, though. I want to be trusted, and loved in return, and I know the only way this is possible is if you both love and trust them. And I do. I want to.

Before I met Marc Huffman and felt his love, and felt the love and friendship of Sheree and Tom Germaine, I don't think I ever gave any other person a thought. Sure, I may have thought about Grandma, and at one time I may have even thought some about Danny Golden, but other than those two people, I've kept my feelings and my true self strictly to myself. In some respects, it's almost amazing that I've permitted Marc Huffman inside to see even part of the real me. I could just as easily have kept him out and gone on with my life essentially unchanged. This hasn't happened, of course, and since I've seen what it means to let another person see you and know you—even a little—I've begun to see that the risks aren't quite as great. Still painful much of the time, but almost worth it.

But then I do things to totally fuck up. Give me a drink and it seems I'll do anything to anybody. When I'm drunk, I can't trust myself. I go into automatic 'drunk mode' and I go off doing things and saying things I wouldn't dream of if I were sober. So *you'll* say, and I've been told, 'just don't get drunk'. **Hah.** If it were that easy, don't you think I'd have already done it? Truth is, it's *not* easy, and even when I don't *want* to drink, I still do. If I take that first drink, I always take the second, and maybe the third and fourth, and so on ...

Why am I bothering to look at myself? Why do I even bother? Things have changed, that's why. I can't explain it, but I know I'm in love, true love, and the whole world has changed. When I see Marc, he just warms me *so* much. I can't help it, I just melt inside the moment he touches me. He'll never read this, so I think I'm safe writing this down.

I've also started doing something I think could be the biggest opportunity I've ever had. I'm singing in a band, and I love that, too. I'm really good, they tell me, and I have almost unlimited possibilities if I work hard and don't fuck it up or quit. Well, I've decided, right here and now, not to ever quit. Whatever happens, I *won't* quit. This is something new for me. Always before I told myself that if I didn't like something I could just get out. If I didn't like it I could just quit. Well, I like this singing thing. And I'm not going to quit it.

But that isn't the reason I'm writing this. (Get back to it, Kerry.) I want to apologize. I need to say I'm sorry for something I've done, and this is the *only way* I know to do it.

Last night I did something I really didn't want to do. Pretty soon I'm going to get very drunk, again, since I'm getting real tired of crying about it all the time, but before I take a sip of that glass of scotch I've got sitting here, I've promised myself I *will* write down this apology. Then I *am* going to get drunk.

Sheree, please, please, *please* forgive me for what I've done. I won't let myself forget what you mean to me as a friend. I won't just ignore you. I want to be loved. I *will* be loved. *I will*. **I will!** That's why I'm asking for your forgiveness. You don't know how bad I've been, and what I've done, but if you knew you might not want to know me, and you might not want to forgive me, but I'm begging you.

You and I have talked about things. You told me what happened to you and I know I didn't say anything about it, or cry for you, either. It's been very hard to tell you about my life, but I know you'll understand when you hear it. I'm crying now, and for the first time I understand why. It's not just for me, it's for you as well.

I love you all, and I love *you*, especially. You've been the best friends I've ever had, and I love you. I never wanted to hurt you, any of you, but I did. That's why I'm saying I'm sorry.

I wish I could tell you what I'm sorry about, but Tom has told me not to say anything. I don't know what the right thing is to do—I probably won't ever know the right thing—but until I do, I guess I'll have to go along with Tom's judgment. He may be right to keep this secret from you, but it doesn't seem to me like the right thing. I don't want to keep this a secret since it'll be worse when you find out (and I fully expect you *will find out*). But regardless, it's Sunday, December 18, 1983, and I'm sorry.

That's all I wanted to say.

Chapter 12

When I got home around eight-fifteen that unusual and uncomfortable Sunday evening, Kerry was passed out drunk on the couch. I had already eaten some dinner out with Tom, so I just got a beer and flopped next to her quietly sleeping form and watched TV. She never stirred (much) the whole time I sat there, so she must have been completely plastered. Around eleven o'clock I turned the TV off and went to bed, leaving Kerry on the couch, still asleep. I did consider waking her to tell her to come to bed, but under the circumstances my heart wasn't in it, so I left her there. I did cover her up so she wouldn't get too cold, and put the near-empty bottle of scotch away. I wasn't completely sure, but I thought it had been full before I left. No, I didn't hate her, nor did I want her (exactly) to be gone, but I was doing some serious thinking about her, and it was just as well I left her there on the couch.

I can't say with certainty why Tom and I have survived as friends. So much has happened between us over the years (and it was not nothing that happened that night, after the gig), that sometimes I am quite amazed he and I have managed to keep our friendship together. But we have kept it together. In another life I might have blamed him for Kerry's actions. In another life he might have blamed me for setting him up with such a wanton and uncontrollable woman. In this life neither happened. Kerry was held responsible for her own actions, and I felt no jealousy or competition from Tom. Tom did what Tom wanted to do, I did what I wanted to do, and Kerry *obviously* did what Kerry wanted to do. Tom went back to Sheree, and to some degree, I went back to Kerry.

It was awhile before I fully realized Tom had cheated on Sheree. I don't know what I'd thought before, but while we were putting amplifiers and keyboards and stuff away, it occurred to me Tom had done something he'd never (as far as I knew) done before. It was something *I'd* never done before. True—I'd not had that much experience with

women—certainly (and apparently) not enough to have had the opportunity to commit adultery, but in reality I'd also never even *thought about it* before. Of course, I'm not sure Tom thought about it ahead of time, either. While we worked, I pondered the meaning of one-man, one-woman (and one-woman, one-man) relationships and the meanings of fidelity and trust, and the possible reasons for those ideas to be so important. Although I'd never considered them before, it didn't invalidate them. There had to be reasons why these things were important, or otherwise, *why were they so important?*

I had to think what fidelity might mean to me, in terms of Kerry. Was Kerry's fidelity important to me? Did I care if she had sex with other men (or women, for that matter)? Should she (or would she) care if I had sex with other women? For her part, I reasoned that while she might not outwardly profess to care about any hypothetical relationship I might have with another woman, she in fact *did* care and would care, and would be both hurt and upset if I became involved with someone else. I wasn't sure why, exactly, but it seemed right. OK, then, did I care if she had a relationship with someone else? That was harder to admit. At the time, I *couldn't* admit it, either. I then got sidetracked trying to figure out why I seemed to be indifferent (or unfathomable) over the idea of Kerry's relationships with other men, and it took some time to sort out.

But then, besides the debate over fidelity, there was that trust thing, again. I assumed Kerry trusted me completely. I realize how foolish (and wrong) this idea was, but at the time, I thought of myself as totally trustworthy, and couldn't have conceived she felt otherwise. Well, I knew she'd had some problems with a guy before we met. I knew he'd beaten her, as well. What was I thinking? I guess I never connected trust, or the lack of it, to the idea of being in a relationship where you got hit. That she would not trust me because some other guy had beat her never occurred to me. That there could be other reasons—older, more painful, unresolved reasons—why she wouldn't trust me, someone, *anyone!* also never occurred to me.

Did I trust Kerry? In the time I'd known her, she'd not given me any reason to doubt her. She drank a lot, but she never stole anything nor ever did anything to raise my suspicions. I had pangs of doubt and mistrust the first night she stayed with me in the apartment, but after that night those doubts just disappeared. I gave her money all the time. She bought food and stuff—and a lot of booze. I never tried to withhold or ration her spending money, and though I never carried that much cash around, to my knowledge she never, ever took a cent from me that I didn't know about. It wasn't quite 'what's mine is yours,' but she made life very

pleasant, and I felt it was definitely worth something.

But questions of money aside, did I really trust Kerry? What was she going to do that would make me not want to trust her? Leave me for someone else? I know I didn't want to think about that possibility, but I also tried to convince myself that if it ever did happen (and as we headed into that first Christmas I couldn't be sure of anything) I would know about it and probably would be in agreement. It didn't seem reasonable she'd leave if I didn't want her to.

That idea was also pretty foolish. Kerry could not be held closely forever. Like a cat I once had, there was a time limit, and once it was up, you had to put her down. Kerry, like my old cat, needed a leash so long that sometimes you'd almost feel like there was nothing there at all ...

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Tuesday night's rehearsal was our first payday, and the first thing we did was hand out the cash money. It was a very big deal to me, since it marked the first time I ever received money for performing music. After Tom handed me my share, which was \$120, I was literally floating on air. I felt like my head almost touched the ceiling, and it made the rest of the rehearsal go very nicely. And quickly, too. Finally, I was a professional. Finally legit. Yep. There was *no* going back (to anything else) now.

Tom told us the club owner had said some very nice things about the band when he handed over our check. In fact, he said the owner wanted us back the following Thursday, Friday, and Saturday nights. Marc pointed out that these nights were the last three days before Christmas, but Tom said the guy wanted us, anyway. He'd offered us \$2,000 total for the three nights, if we were interested.

"Did you talk to Bozeman?" Dancer asked, referring to his 'manager,' Maury Bozeman.

"Not yet," Tom replied. "If y'all are interested in doing the gig, I was planning to call him tomorrow to get everything arranged."

"Fine," Dancer said. Concerning the upcoming gig, that was all he said. Some of the rest of us had questions, though.

"He's offering us *more* money?" I asked.

"Not really," Tom told me, "Bozeman's cut comes out of the two grand."

"Oh," I said, feeling stupid, "So, how much does that leave us?" Out of the corner of my eye I saw Dancer roll his eyes. Mel, who saw him do it,

gave him a dirty look. Despite that, I *did* feel stupid.

"Let's see ..." Tom did some rapid mental calculations "... \$2,000 less thirty percent ... that leaves \$1,400 to split five ways ..." he paused, having an obviously difficult time figuring everything out in his head.

It was Mel who supplied the answer, "\$280 per person."

"That's right," Tom agreed. "But probably more like \$260 after we subtract expenses. I only kept about \$30 out of Saturday's gig since I wanted everyone to get a nice round number."

"How thoughtful," Troy Dancer commented sarcastically, smirking, but it was *just* a comment. Tom gave him a level look. Dancer apparently had no real argument. Considering it was the first money he'd earned in about six months, I couldn't see how he *could* have any complaint.

But I was curious, and concerned. "Why is the next gig so much less per night?"

"That's not unusual, Kerry," Mel told me. "One-nighter's always pay better than longer gigs. It has to do with moving the equipment, and stuff like that."

"Right," Tom nodded. And then again, I had to agree that \$260 was better than nothing. Certainly much, much better than nothing. Especially with Christmas coming up.

Then I thought a moment. We wouldn't get paid until after Christmas, so the money wouldn't be there in time to buy Christmas presents. Then I was pretty depressed. I really wanted that money to buy Christmas presents for Marc (and some others), but when I realized I wouldn't have it in time, I was very unhappy. Marc and Mel noticed my frown and asked what was wrong.

"What's the problem, Kerry?" Marc asked.

"We won't get paid in time for Christmas."

"So, what difference does that make?" he asked me.

I just sulked, and refused to air my business in front of the others. When he was satisfied I wasn't going to answer, he just shrugged and let it drop.

"I know what it is," Mel chimed in, then. "She wants to buy Christmas presents with the money." She looked at me and smiled. "Am I right?"

Barely perceptibly, I nodded. Of course, she was right.

"Oh," Marc understood, now, and smiled, too. "Don't sweat it, Kerry. If that's all you're worried about, I'll lend you the money until we get paid." He grinned, apparently coming to consider for the first time that he might be getting presents for Christmas—from me. "Hell," he went on, "if I'd known *that*, I'd given you anything you wanted." He was definitely

feeling self-conscious. And his embarrassment tickled me. But the subject of my Christmas money was dropped, after that.

Tom returned us all to the subject at hand—whether we were going to do the gig the coming weekend, or not. “OK, people,” he said, “do we want to play this weekend, or not? He wants a decision by tomorrow afternoon.” He looked around at all of us.

We all looked around at each other, and it was readily apparent that we were all in agreement. Yes, we would all like to play the gig. As far as I was concerned, there never was any doubt. Give me money!

“OK, then,” Tom concluded, “I’ll call Bozeman in the morning.” He picked up his bass guitar and saddling it over his shoulder, turned up the volume control and plucked a few notes. “Let’s play some music.”

I think most people take for granted the opportunity to earn money. Even in my case, I have usually been able to work and earn rent and food money, and in some cases even earn a good deal more than that. When I waited tables in Alabama money was a lot scarcer, but still, it was there and not too difficult to come by if you were willing to work hard for it. Since I was saving up money for college and living at home, I spent very little, in general. But during that whole time I don’t think I ever gained any appreciation for the true *value* of money. Nearly every dime went into my savings account, and while Grandma was alive I just simply didn’t touch it. Of course, after she died I just blew it all on nothing. Well, it seemed like that, anyway.

Danny Golden gave me more money than I’d ever had in my hand at one time, up to that point. In fact, he doled out more in a single week than I’d ever made in an entire month. But that still doesn’t help you understand the value of money. In fact, quite the opposite. When you just get it, and don’t have to work to earn it, you find yourself spending it without any regard to the level of effort required to obtain it. I know I’m not making myself very clear, but I’ll try harder.

With over \$3,000 per month flowing my way, I tried my best to spend it all. Why save it if you were just going to get more? Yeah, I know, I was *so-oo-oo stupid!!* I’d go and drop \$300 on a dress, or \$600 on a neat leather jacket without even batting an eyelash. And speaking of eyelashes, I’d get my hair done every other week, and a complete makeover almost any time I wanted. If we were going out on a ‘hot date’ (and we went out on ‘hot dates’ a lot) I’d have someone apply my makeup for me. It was *only* about \$25 a pop. I could almost have had it done every day, if I’d wanted. But of course, Danny and I were going out all the time, and when we were out, he always paid for everything. The food we ate was always

expensive, and the booze we drank frequently resulted in bar bills over \$300 a night. He thought little, if not nothing of it, and I thought about the same. Maybe less.

After being poor in Alabama for so long, I was having an orgy on money. Spend money for this; spend money for that. 'You wanna do something? Here, I'll give ya more money so you can go do it.' So I bought tons of clothes. I lived in a very nice, expensive apartment. I ate steak and lobster. (I gained weight, but that's not related to money, specifically.) I drove a brand-new car, and Danny even leased it for me so I didn't have to pay anything for it.

I never really understood what having money *really* meant. Of course, that all changed.

Against my will, I was forced to start working for my keep. It wasn't the fact I had to work, it was the type of work I had to start doing. The 'free money' was completely cut off. If I didn't work, I didn't eat or have clothes. The rent was still paid, but then again, I *owed* that to Danny. If I didn't work, or didn't work enough, I didn't get any food money until the rent was paid, and I was paying at least double what it was worth. I never got beat up for not earning enough money, but the threat was *always* there. And I can tell you, the threat was enough. The threat has *always* been enough for me.

I was forced by Danny Golden to become a prostitute. I have to say it outright. I worked for him—he was my 'pimp,' if you will—and he took about half of everything I got paid, for 'services rendered'. I'm not going to get into the details of the whole sordid affair here and now. I don't want to. But my point is that I suddenly started to become quite aware of the value of a few dollars. If I had to let some guy into my arms and between my legs for \$100—believe me!—I understood how much that hundred was worth. If I sucked off some other guy for \$50, mentally I was figuring out how much each goddamned sperm I swallowed was worth. Not worth enough, either. The only time it was worthwhile was if I got \$200 for just going out with a guy. No sex—just a date. But those times were so few and far between, I almost don't count them.

Oh, and don't mention the risks and danger of working in that particular illegal profession. I was constantly aware if I so much as smiled at the wrong guy, I could be busted. Fortunately, Danny made nearly all my arrangements, but there were still times I 'freelanced' for some extra spending money. You see, if he didn't know about it, I didn't have to pay him his cut. It's only good business. I always had proof positive of every john he sent my way, so he couldn't cheat me, except maybe to raise my rates now and again and not tell me. And even then he had to collect in

order to do that. You see, Danny, too, was at risk for accepting money for prostitution. I think he much preferred having me do it, but then he had to trust me. It would never have gotten him off the hook. If I'd ever been taken in on any serious beef, I'd have implicated him. I'd have had to disappear, after that, and I don't think I ever thought it through, but I always told myself I had a way out if I ever got seriously busted. I only ever got busted once, and Danny took care of it. Now, of course, the whole thing's moot.

I worked hard at my new profession. I wanted to be good at it, I guess. I wanted to have some pride—some 'dignity,' I suppose. When you're lowered to a new low, you tend to raise that low to an acceptable level. If you're poor, you tend to have pride in being poor. When you're a whore, you likewise tend to have some pride in being a whore. You want to be the best whore you can be. I mean, if it's what you're going to do, then you might as well do it right. Do it well. It's certainly true that after awhile you start viewing your gains as something other than 'ill-gotten'. They start to be 'good-gotten,' if you know what I mean. I changed my mind about hooking, and started (perversely) to like it. It makes it easier to live with yourself, that way. Of course, there are other things that can make life more bearable, too. Alcohol, for one.

I may be a bad person, but I never wanted to be. I always wanted to be a good girl, and do the good and right things, but I never got the chance. Hey, I don't want you to think I'm blaming anyone for my problems, but I tried and tried to be good and do the right things, and even though I tried, it seemed the closer I got, the further away I'd end up being. There are just no breaks for a poor country girl with two strikes against her.

And no, I *never* thought hooking was the best I could do. I think I'm pretty smart, sometimes, and I can write, and I can sing, and I'm learning how to love. I don't know everything that this particular combination will do for me, but *so far* I haven't been a total failure. There was a point when prostitution was the only option I was given, and considering that, I did the very best I could with what I had. That's it. I'm sorry for what I've been, and what I am, but being sorry is almost beside the point. I had to do what I did (I thought), and in so doing I learned a whole lot about the value of money. I had it, and at times even a lot of it from turning tricks, but I knew then, and I sure know *now* just how hard I really did work for that money. The opportunity to earn money by doing something legal; something fun; something people really want—that's where it's at.

My \$120 felt like a thousand.

The gig that Thursday night was basically a fiasco. Not only did Tom, Marc, and I have to be at the club by four PM to set up the equipment, the owner informed us he wanted us to play five hours each of the three nights. We'd only been rehearsing since October, and though the others might have known enough songs to put together five sets, there was no way in hell I knew that many songs yet. When I heard what he was asking, I got so nervous and worried I was actually physically sick. I had to excuse myself to go barf in the ladies' rest room.

Tom and Marc argued with the guy, pointing out the contract we had, but the owner claimed Bozeman had made a mistake, insisting he'd told him five sets specifically. I didn't know what we would do. I knew about three sets worth of songs, and we'd rehearsed another ten or so songs in addition to our set repertoire. Ten songs is maybe another set, but not another two sets. I asked Marc, what are we gonna do? Twiddle our thumbs for the final set? Repeat the first set over? Yes, he said, probably repeat the first set, or most of it. But, of course, he informed me, we haven't exactly agreed to play five sets, yet. But for me, the key word was 'yet'. It meant that eventually we would be doing all five sets, whether I was ready or not.

How about the money? I asked. What about it? Marc asked me. I told him, this means the gig is for a whole lot less money per night, since we have to play two more sets each night. Welcome to the real world, he informed me. I was starting to see that the glamorous world of professional music wasn't all the glitz and glitter it was made out to be. Like anything else, it had its crummy side, as well.

Of course, I was extremely nervous at nine o'clock when it came time to start. And my nervousness was made even more pronounced because I *knew* we were playing all those extra sets, and I still hadn't figured out how we were going to do it. Mel, once again, helped calm me down and reassured me we were going to be OK. It seems she had actually expected to play five hours instead of the three we'd played the previous Saturday. It seems the three-hour gig the other night was a *short* one by comparison. Dancer didn't seem to care, much, either. He had little to say when told of the extra sets, and seemed about as worried as Mel (that is, not very) when it came time to dream up the extra songs. Why was it only me that was scared? What was I going to do during all those songs—the ones I didn't know? I didn't know.

Well, it turns out I knew, or could at least fake, almost all the 'new' songs. Of course, I did know the songs we'd been rehearsing, but Dancer, Mel and Tom pulled out some 'oldies and goodies' that *everyone* knows, including yours truly, and I was able to sing some backup harmony and

play a little tambourine, or something. What helped, too, was that we mixed them in with all the regular songs, so there was something familiar in every set, not just the first three.

Why I didn't think of all this? Well, I was new to the music biz. Faking it is SOP—standard operating procedure. And in time I even learned to enjoy the chance to fake something. I never knew it before, but at any given moment from ten to twenty percent of the songs being played by any given band are faked. By that I mean they play them essentially unrehearsed. Where you learn them? Must be osmosis or something, or maybe you just hear them so often you figure out how to play them on your own time, and when it's called for, you pull them out of thin air and play them. And in the final analysis, most of your audience is so drunk they can't tell the ones you've practiced from the ones you haven't. It all sounds good to them. There may be those listening who can tell what's going on, other professionals, maybe, but they're more likely to respect you for being able to fake stuff so well. And I never knew any of this before that night.

Friday and Saturday nights became successively more fun for me. Surviving Thursday intact helped a lot when Friday rolled around. And our resounding success with the crowd that Friday made Saturday go even better. When the owner gave Tom the check at around three AM Saturday night (Sunday morning, Christmas, that is) he told us we were the best band he'd had in the place in over a year. And then he invited us back for another full two weeks—six nights each week—starting after the first of the year. Tom said we'd think about it, but I know he was figuring out how we could get more money. Gosh, the very idea of regular work was almost more than I could fathom! (And I'm joking, of course.)

Marc and I didn't get to bed until about five-thirty. And it was Christmas morning. Christmas morning!