

# FAMILY PRACTICE



EDWARD DROBINSKI



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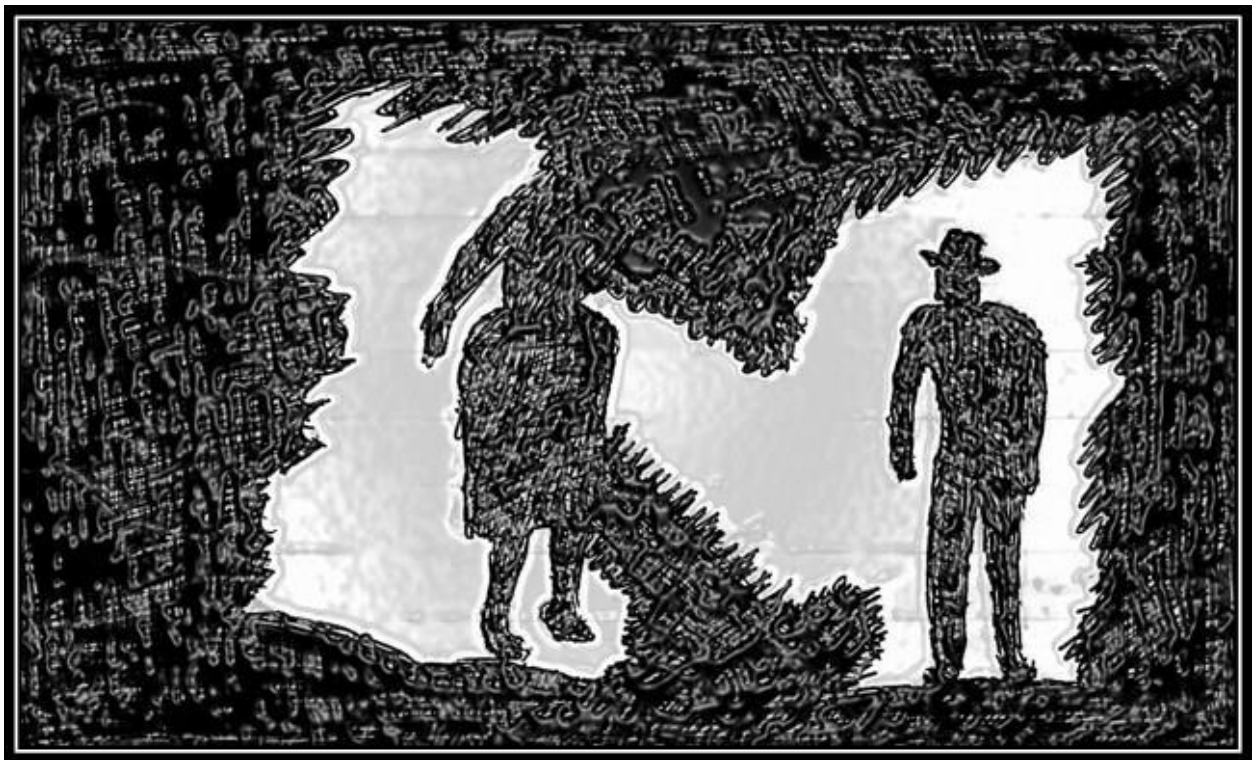
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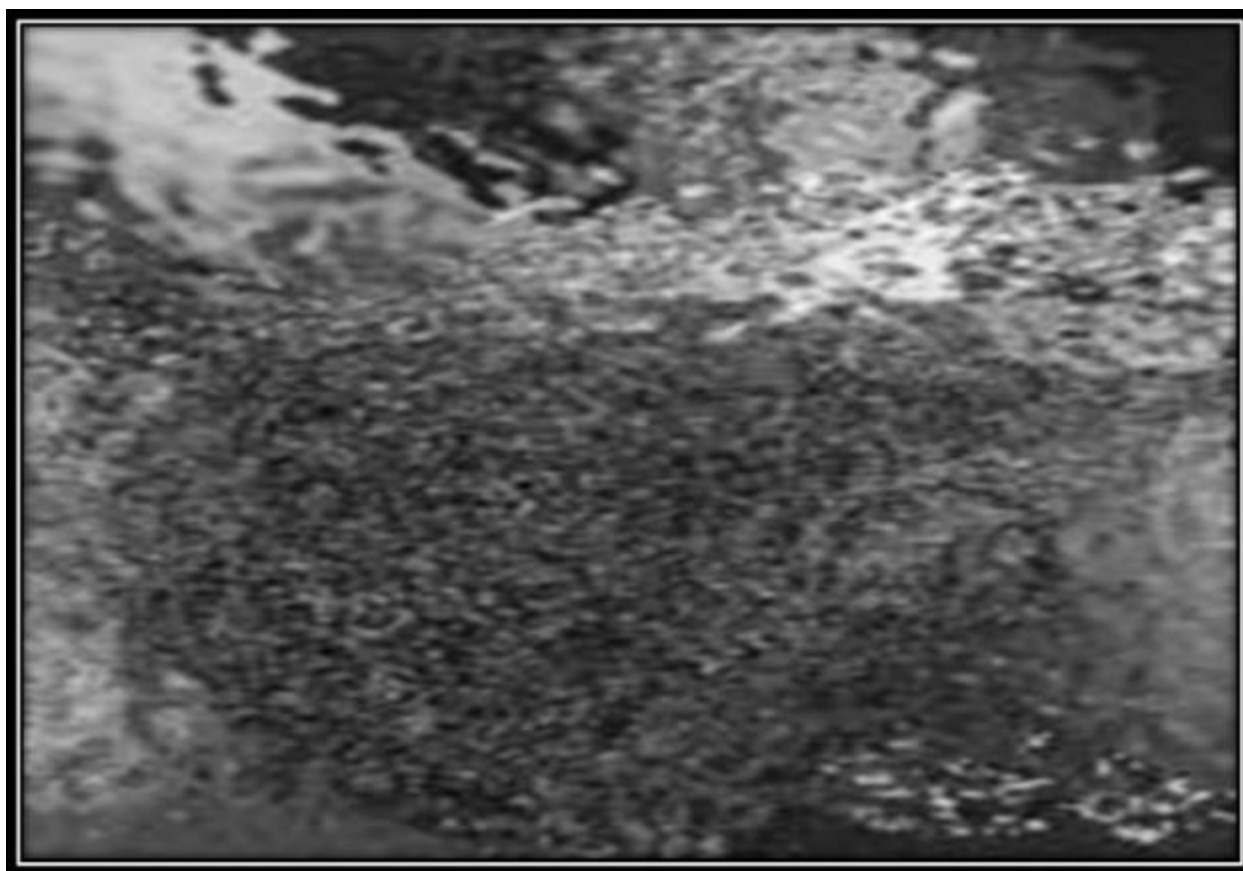
# Family Practice



*"The Approximate Significance of a Sneeze"*

**By Edward Drobinski**

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## **Preface**

History consistently depicts the story of mankind as being one group's enslavement to another, sometimes the result of force, sometimes due to supposed free will and sometimes somewhere in between.

Claims have been made of all types of materials, non-materials and obsessions, the latter manifestation defined as a persistent preoccupation with an often unreasonable idea or feeling; broadly, compelling motivation.

This is a story of obsession and its resultant chains; some of iron, some of leather, some of gold, some non-material and some in-between.

## CHAPTER 1

She was sitting on the desk as he entered his office, leaning back on her left hand, her right removing the cigarette from her bright red lips. Her uncrossed legs were covered with gray opaque seamed nylons held up by black garter belts. He fumbled attempting to put the keys back in his pocket and dropped them. As he stooped in a retrieval attempt, his right hand felt the ground while his eyes remained elevated enough to see that it was too hot a day for underwear. She calmly laughed, exhaling smoke and said; "Like the air down there?"

Temporarily oblivious to the peeling light green or yellow paint on the wall and brown carpeted floor, Mark Cinchapport said; "Air's fine. View is even better." She got off the desk and walked a few steps to a framed lithograph of a yellow sailboat sinking near port, her short loose red skirt brushing the face of the crouching man as she passed. Her back to him she said; "I'm Constance Roe and I think you provide the type of service I want."

He stood up, walked to the desk and pushed a button and said; "Do you like art?"

"Certain types. Boating scenes don't do a thing for me."

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He looked at the long blond hair parted in the middle of her head and knew it was a bleach job and said; "Call me Mark. What kind of thing can I do for you?"

"Surveillance," she said, laughing.

He laughed, too, surveying her almond shaped green eyes, saying; "Of what?"

"My fifteen year old daughter, Candice. I think she's carrying on with a forty year old married man." She took note of the rumpled pants and sports jacket on the 28 year old, oval faced man with his mouth slightly open, adding, "Call me Connie."

Trying not to look disappointed at another low paying job, at the same time appreciating having one at all, he took an obvious look at the Jell-O cleavage protruding from the lacy lavender blouse, that she didn't bother to button very much. "Busy girl," he thought, not fully realizing the immense accuracy of his vision. Trying not to appear ungratified, he simply said; "Who?"

"Callie Majors."

"Sounds familiar."

"He's one of the owners of Majors' Chevrolet."

"Do you have any photos?"

She went back to the desk and opened her black fringed purse, produced two and handed them to him. In one he saw two

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young girls, sitting on backyard swings and in the other was a sturdy looking man of about forty with a blonde crew cut, reclining against a door of a new black Cadillac parked on a city street, appearing to be waiting or looking for someone. Small American flags on thin wooden sticks protruded from plastic holders on both edges of the windshield.

Mark said; "He probably won't be that hard to find. But tell me which of the girls is Candice?"

"Candy's on the left. The other is her nineteen year old sister, Shari. They do look somewhat similar at first, but Candy's got an innocence that just explodes out of her."

"When were these pictures taken?"

"Last month, May, 1972."

"Do both girls live with you?"

"Yes."

"Are there any other members of the household?"

"My husband, Warren."

"Is he also suspicious?"

"No, he pays little attention to them. He's not their father."

Mark looked at Connie, not wanting to ask a rude question, but wanting more information.

She surmised, laughed and said; "Oh, I see. Warren's my second husband of five years. We met during the 'Summer of



Love,'" rolling her eyes and making a facial expression of neither delight nor sarcasm, perhaps suggesting some sort of captivation and continued; "My first husband is their biological father."

"I'll need your phone number and address."

"Calling me is a problem. I don't want anyone else in the house to know about this. The address is 694 Liberty Lane, Jersey City."

"How can I contact you in an emergency?"

She laughed; "What kind of emergency can possibly happen?" She again took a seat on the desk, hoping to distract him.

It worked, but he felt obliged to say something businesslike; "Isn't there something else you can tell me about Candy?"

She was still grinning, as she crossed her legs, exposing a stocking top and a bit of a garter strap. "Candy is sweet..... She's about 5'4", two inches shorter than her sister and about 110 pounds, ten lighter. She's got a small pink mole on her left cheek."

Mark's preoccupation continued, compelling him to absurdly grin and he said; "I suppose you're referring to her face."

Connie thought the answer was too obvious to warrant words. She blankly stared at him and the air was still a few seconds.

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She then excitedly said; "Oh, yeah. Candy tends to wear bright colors and Shari is the opposite."

Feeling that he had done his job as well as he could, he reached over to the desk and pushed the button, shutting off the tape recorder, pretending to be looking for a pen. Connie wasn't fooled and pushed another button, popping open the deck and took out the tape. As she hid it in her ample cleavage, she said; "Bad boy. I suggested that I want no record of our relationship."

"Fine with me. Now, about the money; I get \$20 an hour."

"You'll take ten." She retrieved a wallet from her fringed purse, counted out \$240 and dropped it near her red skirt. "This should cover about three days." She got off the desk, started to leave and said; "I'll be in touch."

Mark smiled widely and licked his dry lips. He said; "I was counting on that tape for information. I'm afraid we'll now have to go through the whole process again, with me taking notes." This time he really reached for his pen and searched for a piece of paper. After they ran through the routine a second time, Connie took a few of his business cards, glad to see both his home and business addresses and phone numbers. She wanted him when she wanted him.

As she exited, she closed the door behind her and saw Victoria Clyborne, Mark's "secretary" sitting lazily in the

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chair behind her wide desk. She had mounds of papers to file, but contented herself rubbing a file against her nails, her grinning, dreamy eyed black face looking down. The vestibule was too small and cluttered for Connie to pass through unobtrusively, so, though she didn't really want to communicate, she was compelled to say; "Good day" as she passed.

Without looking up Victoria's grinning lips said; "Bet it was. See ya' soon, honey."

"I beg your pardon?"

"New client?"

"Yes, as a matter of fact."

Victoria's head finally elevated as she said; "Good day."

Connie again echoed the thought and opened the next door just as a short, round, sweating and swarthy man tried to enter. They brushed by each other, both mumbling something that sounded like "'Scuse me." When he was triumphantly inside she shut the door.

As she saw Santo enter, Victoria sarcastically said; "My, my, what brings you here today?"

"Same old, baby. What brings you?"

"Paycheck, honey, you know how it is."

"Good luck," he said as he briskly walked by and passed through the open door. Mark saw him too late and moved quickly in an attempt to get the cash still sitting on the desk, but

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Santo beat him to it, picked it up and put it in his pants pocket.

Mark shrugged his shoulders and looked at the floor saying; "God damn it, Santo, you can smell it, can't ya?"

"Obviously, better than you." He took the money from his pocket and counted it, with his back to Mark. He shook his head disapprovingly, said; "Almost covers April," and put it back.

"Use that bald head of yours for once. If I don't have any money, I can't do my job and you don't get your rent."

Santo pulled out a twenty and flipped it on the desk.

Mark said; "That won't even cover my gas."

"Walk," said Santo and he turned to leave.

Mark said; "Hey, you know you're charging a lot of money for this little dump."

"I didn't force you to take it. I got plenty of customers."

"Yeah, maybe if you painted the fucking place. The rats are dying of lead poisoning."

"Prime location, my man. Keep giving me shit and I'll have you thrown out and not by the nice guys."

Mark thought, "Santo always likes to infer that he's connected with the mob and so he's not, but if I piss him off he can evict me." So, he said; "Sorry, man. I understand. It's

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just that things have been slow, you know what I mean and I'm getting frustrated. Thanks for putting up with me."

Santo said; "All right. But, things might be slow because you're paying too much attention to things other than work; you know what I'm saying." He smiled at Mark, gesturing underhanded with his right fist, then added; "You know, I was just like you when I was young, but I straightened out and started taking care of business."

Mark sheepishly nodded with a half-smile and Santo left. When Santo got to Victoria, she had her back to him and was bending over her desk arranging the unfiled papers, her short, tight, orange knit dress exposing most of her meaty black legs, supported by bare feet. She was about 45 years old, 5'6" tall and carried a well-proportioned 170 pounds. Santo gave her a playful slap and when she looked up, he said; "Don't get him started. He's got work to do," and continued out the door.

Victoria slurred; "I think he already has," and entered the dingy windowless office, put on the overhead fluorescents and seeing Mark solemnly holding the \$20 bill in two hands made a grab for it. Afraid that it would be torn, Mark let it go and she smiled, placing it between her 40DDs. He thought; "Twice already and the day has just begun." He reached his right hand out and felt soft chocolate, saying; "You know that's not going

to stop me," mock chasing her as she screeched and ran around the desk.

"Come on, Victoria," he said, unable to get close to her, "I've got a job and I need gas."

"Payday, baby," she giggled as she made sure the bill was still in place.

"I'll get more. Give that back and I'll get you a hundred by the end of the week."

In a falsetto voice, she said; "That's what you're supposed to be doing anyway." She shook her head "no" and continued in a mock incredulous tone; "You white boys must still think you got some dumb black slaves around here. Well, I got some news for you." Knowing that it would end the money discussion, Victoria put one leg up on the chair and lifted her light blue dress, pretending a need to scratch her upper thigh. "It must be a hot day for everyone," he thought, as he admired her long Afro.

Connie's car was now on her home street, Liberty Lane, which was single-laned and lined with parked cars on both sides. The houses sat on 100 by 100 foot lots and sloped upward from the concrete sidewalk. Some were quite substantial, in the 4,000-5,000 sq. ft. range, often with three levels, mostly built in the 1880s and 1890s, hence evincing a Victorian feel. When she got to her driveway near the middle of the block, she was

happy to see that a parked car wasn't blocking her entrance. She drove down the decline to the two car garage, the door open. She said; "I wonder what he's up to," when she saw her husband's car sitting there idly in the cavity.

She had one of the grandest abodes in Jersey City; three living levels approximating 6,000 sq. ft. and a garage constructed underneath through the gouging of truckloads of dirt many years prior to Connie's residing there. Externally, the three floors were covered in yellow painted clapboard, with irregularly placed fretwork trim stained a bright red, giving it the appearance of a "painted lady," but this was mere cosmetics. The first floor, the only level made in a regular square pattern, was surrounded by a covered porch supported by purple and white painted posts. The second and third level celebrated irregularity in that it was devoid of straight lines, each room containing one or two jutting areas. The severely sloped roof covering most of the third floor was proud of its unique design with seven gables covered with black slate. Above the third floor master bedroom was a small observation tower, suitable for only a bench or two, above the trees affording the grandest view in the vicinity, with its own slate turreted cap, topped by an iron modified cross finial. Similar finials were placed atop four of the lower gables. The grounds were enclosed in a three foot, black, rusting iron decorative fence, once expensively

more for show than security. The overall feel was tall, heady, eccentric, declining and generous with easy access. The structure suited Connie very well, the purchase of which was demanded of Warren five years prior, as a "condition" of marriage. She could get anything she wanted from the older man and was proud to show that to her friends. Its maintenance was a constant act of love, relegated to Warren in its entirety. The house's age, detail, colors and irregularity proved an excellent source of income for local craftsmen, not always supervised by, but at least somewhat watched by her husband. His early retirement as Senior Vice President of a Wall Street stock brokerage firm gave him the time and opportunity to do something "real," and he enjoyed his new work.

After she parked her 1972 light blue Camaro, she walked up the simple wooden stairs to a utility room and then entered the high ceillinged kitchen, where Warren was seated at the ten chaired, lavishly carved, rococo revival table made of rosewood, its red mahogany stain, further developing the natural hue. When the silver haired gentleman saw her, his gaze fixed on her loose, short red skirt, as he implored; "I'm famished. What did you bring me for lunch?"

She said; "Oh, poor baby didn't have anything to eat yet? Let's see what I can find in the breadbox. Are the girls out?"



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"Yes. Candy's at her drumming lesson and Shari went to the pool. They should be gone all afternoon."

She smiled, put some lunchmeat, lettuce, tomatoes and some sauce between a sliced bun, brought it to the table and watched as famished Warren closed his eyes and gorged himself.

Mark located his local map, courtesy of his favorite gas station and found Liberty Lane to be only ten blocks away from his Journal Square office. He planned on commencing his surveillance this evening, but wanted to first view it in the daylight. He opened his closet door and pulled out a well-used pair of blue jeans with holes in the knees, a white Bob Marley T-shirt, sunglasses, kerchief and bad sneakers. He stripped from his current attire, looking in a cheval mirror, slowly tying the blue kerchief around his head, hoping Victoria might have some reason to enter the room. Dejectedly, he donned the rest of his new apparel and decided to take Santo's advice. As he walked out he saw the chocolate one still playing with papers on her desk. He wondered if they had anything to do with her job here, as he didn't think that the amount of business he was doing could have resulted in the volumes displayed. He decided not to be contentious and planned to peruse them sometime when she was not around. He said; "I'll be gone the rest of the afternoon. You might as well take the rest of the day off."

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Victoria said; "Ah, ah. I need the bread, honey and you can see I've got a lot of work here. By the way, I can show you how to tie up that blue kerchief a lot faster than you know how."

She and he both laughed. He said; "Next time," and went through the door.

The first floor location was a convenience to coming and going. He at least had to think that way, as Santo was collecting a "prime" rent presumably because the first floor of the fifteen story plain white stucco over something office building was supposed to generate traffic with its restaurant and "gift shops." Even if it did, how many people do you think just happen to be taking a stroll and suddenly say to themselves; "Oh, yeah. I forgot. I have to get a private detective, too."

He watched his feet descending the ten step path to the street. The stairs were rather ostentatious for the plain building, as they aped an important government building in their wide, gently circling pattern. It also precluded anyone above the age of seventy from climbing them. One of his supposed markets when he first decided to be a private eye was the geriatric set. People are always trying to scam them out of money. Usually relatives. However, this expectation was to be one of his worst miscalculations as not one of the clients in

his four year history had been of the doddering set. It was a real disappointment as he expected to easily collect his top rate, pad the hours, pay Victoria and Santo and still have plenty left over.

Instead he was staring at another sporadic \$10/hour job. "Dammit," he said to himself, "I left the gun in the drawer again." As usual, he didn't feel like going back. He walked on, trying to focus on the positive things going on; he didn't have to wear a suit the majority of the time; and he got the opportunity to uncover fascinations, like Connie Roe.

The sun had already made the shadeless sidewalk suitable for burning discarded newspapers and he noticed that his rubber soles were announcing his presence with a mild squish, squish sound, capable of attracting attention on his silent side of the road. "Prime, Santo's fucking ass," he thought as he crossed the street to get to the middle of Journal Square, where the constant arrivals and departures of buses would drown out his squids.

He got lost in the smorgasbord of people milling about. Old Eastern European women with shopping bags, wearing babushkas, were busily entering and exiting the retail stores and crossing the square in a myriad of directions on their way to the next place that might have something useful "for sale." Their ankle length coats defied the now overhead sunshine, in a

probable overheated attempt to hide what sixty years of experience had taught them to conceal. Frequently, they would stop for an almost stationary moment, to point and tell one of their confidants where they knew of bargains, arms gesturing quickly in haste to move onto their next site. Many of them were residents of the city's northwest section, home to abandoned docks, piers and warehouses, but resided in currently very desirable three story attached limestones and as a result had half a million dollars, at least on paper. The last decade's fancy for similar Manhattan brownstones, had driven prices high enough for yuppies to consider living in a part of New Jersey, five minutes from the "Big Apple" by PATH trains, whose path took them under the jelly textured Hudson River.

Black men and women in their twenties and thirties combed the same area at a leisurely pace; the men's threads an attempt to mirror Sly Stone, with the women's idol apparently Tina Turner. Mark tried not to make direct eye contact with them, not wanting to hear a defiant mouth utter; "What chew lookin' at, white mother fucker."

People were on four lines in the middle of the square, craning around heads and gazing at their watches, anxiously awaiting the arrival of the always-behind-schedule buses to take them somewhere else. Young couples, satchels in hand, were going "down the shore," the part of New Jersey which bordered

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the Atlantic Ocean, far enough south to avoid being in the paint factory and chemical plant towns closer in. People of all ages, shapes, sizes and dress were making their way to Manhattan, where they hoped to "be cool" among the people who had seen and done everything they wished, the "everything" available twenty-four hours a day in the city with no stars on the horizon. Some were off on a few days journey to New Jersey's furthest western reaches to see farmland and vintage villages in the hilly locale still possessing relatively clean air and those with more time to spare desiring the mountains of upstate New York, the trip replete with ground hogs, up on their hind legs, watching the excitement of the loud bus, from two feet away. They continue to play this "sport" despite their flattened relatives nearby. They must have concluded that it's the only game in town.

As he got to the sidewalk of the street opposite his prime location Mark heard; "Hey, man. Where the fuck you been?" He located the sound and saw that it was his old friend, Sonny. Mark returned the upbeat greeting with; "Sonny, great to see ya'. I've kind of been nowhere. Where you been?"

"Here, there and everywhere, you know." Sonny's right hand took Mark's right and attempted to do some kind of underhanded twisting handshake that was currently the rage among the brothers, but Mark botched it as usual, laughing and saying; "By the time I get it right, you guys change the rules."

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They knew each other from the neighborhood where Mark grew up and Sonny still lived, basketball, school and weird adventures only describable in their time and place. Sonny and his partner Mike were the co-founders of the biggest black gang in Jersey City, the Cheyennes, which started as mostly a fighting gang with an open invitation to all comers, which had now evolved, with the times, to a community support, government funded group, the middle man in the dispensation of federal largesse to the neighborhood poor. People seemed pleased with them, but it would take foolish souls to say otherwise, as the Cheyennes could still kick ass.

"You white guys can't do anything except copy us, so we got to stay ahead. It looks like we're going in the same direction, so I'll risk embarrassing myself and let you walk with me. Where you going, anyway?"

"Liberty Lane. I got a surveillance job there."

"What are you surveilling?"

"Some fifteen year old girl. Her mother thinks she's fucking somebody."

Sonny laughed and said; "No doubt she is. This is 1972, ain't it?"

"Yeah. Where you heading?"

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"To the college. There are a number of kids there fairly new to town, who need the services of a good herbsman and they pay well."

"I wish I could meet somebody who paid well."

"You picked a bad profession, my dumb white friend. Nobody needs a private eye anymore because everybody knows that everybody is doing everything and don't need you to confirm it."

Mark didn't know what to say and was silent, making a small nod and grimace. Sonny could just be right about his chosen profession. At least, it was a plausible reason for his perpetual lack of money. He considered saying something about Connie Roe, but Sonny started talking before he did.

He looked at Mark's T-shirt and in a high pitched voice said; "Since when are you a Bob Marley fan?"

"Since I heard of him a year or so ago. He's got my beat, unlike that Temptations' shit you like."

Sonny shook his head yes and said; "He's the man for me too, now."

Mark, more secure in his thoughts added; "He makes David Ruffing sound and look like a waiter."

"That's Ruffin."

"Whatever, you know who I mean."

Both did their best imitations of a stoned slow Jamaican moving on stage, double beating, moving shoulders, waving arms

around, with their heads slightly back, looking down at something beneath their dignity. The adaptations of Jamaican patois came by way of the Jersey Turnpike.

Sonny had the youthful looks of Muhammad Ali: a short Afro, good looking face and the thin, muscular build of an athlete. He also had the biggest cock Mark had ever seen, as he would enjoy swinging it around at the public pool they both frequented as teenagers. Girls would giggle and feign hiding their eyes on a friend's shoulder, but the pupil in the corner of one of them always seemed to maintain the light of day. As they walked down the Boulevard, lined with three story office buildings and few people, Mark tried to keep the subject an upbeat one saying; "Do you remember the time? I think we were about fifteen, when the team I was playing for only had four guys show up. You were hanging around the gym for some reason and I asked you to play for us."

"Yeah, I remember. I didn't have any sneakers with me, so I had to play in my socks. And whenever I'd dribble and try to stop, I'd slide and the referee would call a walk."

"The ref should really have cut you a little slack, but we won anyway. We always did back then."

Silence persisted for a minute as they passed more offices and small apartment buildings with their shades drawn to the street scene as if by being blind to reality the up and comers



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could keep their belief in the gentrification they'd heard so much about.

Sonny said; "Hey, do you remember Lydia Camacho?"

"Oh, yeah. That pretty little Spanish girl with the black skin and wavy fine black hair. Whatever happened to her anyway?"

"Five or six years ago she took off to California with some white guy. She never could make up her mind whether she liked the brothers or the white boys. She left me for some pimply white dude and man, I got ridden about that for months. That's out and out embarrassing, you know."

"Some girls know that the white guys are better lovers. I got with her a short while."

"Oh, yeah?"

"Yeah, I was fucking around, play fighting with somebody. She was there, gave me a look and said in that funny way she had of talking; 'You look good. Don't act like fag.' And I said; 'Not anywhere near as good as you,' and one thing led to another."

Sonny said; "She stay with you long?"

Mark laughed and said; "No, like a month. I was embarrassed 'cause she took up with some black guy from the other side of town with an old yellow sports car."

"Then she probably left him for another taste of white meat."

"Probably."

Sonny made a mock circumspect face and said; "See, she probably liked the simple macho of the black man, but kept switching off 'cause niggers don't give up no head. That's a white disease." He lowered his shoulder and gave Mark a nudge.

"Yeah, right." They both laughed.

Sonny looked up at the sky, his expression softening and slowly said; "Yeah, those were some glorious times." We got near the college and he had to turn down a side street next to it, where most of the dorms were located. As we parted paths, he looked back, shrugged his shoulders and said; "Business..... Stay in touch, man."

"I will." As Mark continued down the Boulevard alone he thought back to those days when everything was amusing and nobody seemed to worry about anything, except if they were hooked up and that the girl wasn't going to get pregnant.

He saw the overhead sign for Liberty Lane and turned onto the street he had never previously visited. He wondered why his curiosity never compelled him to look into the 1890s museum. From what he had read and heard it was supposed to have been a grand time.

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He didn't know one kind of Victorian house from another and also realized that even if he did, so many repairs, additions and improvements had been made over the years, he might wind up describing one with the absurdity of "modified Italianette, by way of 1920s arts and crafts with a penchant for mission, mitigated by 1980s functionality and tempered by ten years of neglect." It was much easier and more to the point to say a big hodge podge. He did his best to put his aesthetic musings aside and focus on the job at hand.

The one way traffic imposed an insurmountable limitation on his ability to follow anyone leaving their house on foot going in the other direction. The parked cars baking on both sides of the street would probably render him invisible doing the same. However, the proximity of many houses and their abundance of windows would leave him unprotected from curious eyes. The wide spacing of the street lamps must have been accomplished one of the years that the city had a budget crisis, as there would be spots in complete blackness. There were only a few kids on the street now, sitting on cars fortunate enough to have been placed in a shady spot, the heat loving boys throwing around twenty-five cent "spaldeens," which would often "accidentally" come the way of the girls, falsely pretending to act cool within the

shade of indifference. Though there were enough open parking spaces now, people were still at work.

All in all this should be an easy job. Being spotted by neighbors was of minimal concern; he just needed to remain invisible to one person; Candy. The one way nature of the street, coupled with the possibility of her leaving on foot in the opposite direction, would probably be alleviated by the fact that he could drive around the block and again find her at the corner. When he got to Number 694 he was pleased with its approximate middle of the block location and his artsy senses were re-aroused by its glorious, consistent, non-uniformity. The people who lived here knew exactly what they wanted and had no qualms about showing it. The sun reflected off the uncovered windows which prevented him from seeing inside and he also surmised that a person could be looking out, invisible to him, so he didn't linger. Two lots away, on the opposite side of the street he noticed an old, one level building, which appeared to be an abandoned, dilapidated garage in a night-time dark spot. He considered that this could be a party spot for local teenagers, but even if it was, it would be a perfect place to park, as they would probably want to remain hidden more than he did.

He walked back to his office parking lot and drove his black 1968 Mercury sedan to Liberty Lane and parked it in front

of the garage, planning to come back just before dark and hopefully get an opportunity to use the loaded flash camera he left in the front seat. He again used his pedestrian skills to get back to his apartment at 990 Headwaters Road, just behind Journal Square, hoping to get some rest.

His first floor studio apartment sat in the back corner of what was once, a single family, square, two story, flat roofed structure, as was the entire block. Most were now covered with aluminum siding of various colors or fades and were also broken up into apartments. Mark's stood out as the only one inventive enough to make facial use of speckled black and white roofing shingles. As all the buildings were attached Mark's only window looked out at a small unmaintained backyard, strewn with discarded items, some he remembered from three years prior. He had a certain affinity for the place as its \$80 per month rent was about the best one could do; it was a short walk to his office; the people on the block varied from Indian immigrants, to Haitian black, to Puerto Ricans and older eastern European whites, most without the full use of the English language, ensuring limited conversations not advancing beyond "Hi," and because he didn't have to go through the trouble of moving to get there.

He climbed the soggy gray carpeted steps to the landing, went in and saw that his door had already been opened for him.

He approached carefully, reaching for the gun that he had again left at the office, fearing that one of the people he had shadowed might now be trying to pay him back; though it would have to be one of the extremely stupid ones to advertise his presence. He couldn't exclude anyone, or maybe they were gone. He heard no sounds and went in slowly, very prepared to duck and run. He saw Margie sitting on the toilet, not choosing to close the door, with her 30 by 38 blue jeans hugging her ankles. He relaxed. She saw him, jumped up pulling at her Levi's, tripping as she tried to approach him and agitatedly said; "Where the fuck are they?" through full beige painted lips. He had known her a few years now and could always count on her severe manic depression to immediately tell if she was hot or cold. Her bra-less 36 inch chest was almost covered today by a torn pink t-shirt that simply said, "Led Zeppelin."

With a faint smile he calmly said; "Where the fuck are what?"

She charged right at him and made a half-hearted attempt to scratch his face, which he easily deflected, keeping hold of both her hands. He took one more chance at a little smile, trying to lean against her, but she jerked her hands down and pulled away. He concluded that this was going to be a hot day, but not the kind he liked. He watched her hands and feet, anticipating further assault and was consequently prepared when

her right foot went for his shins, able to overstep her foot with his own causing another entanglement.

"Stop grabbing me, asshole," she disgustedly said.

"Then stop kicking me."

"I ought to....." She put her right hand in punching position to which he did a Joe Frazier cover up and she relented.

She said; "I don't want to see you anymore," for easily the fifth time that he could recall, "And I want to take my records out of here."

Mark considered saying; "If you don't want to see me, I guess my apartment is the best place to accomplish that," but rather he said; "I'm sorry," not certain for what. He had learned from some weird movie that this tactic disarms people. In a conciliatory tone he added; "Don't make a big deal out of nothing. What do you want from me?"

The tactic didn't phase Margie one iota as she angrily responded; "My records, stupid. Shove that bullshit somewhere."

He went to three yellow boxes on the floor near the turntable and said; "They should be here. Which ones are yours?"

"I don't know. Probably the ones you sold to pay the rent."

"I didn't sell any records. I sold some of **MY** books. They couldn't be yours because you can't read."

"I can read you, easily enough."

"Margie, please. Take whichever ones you want. I've got a job tonight and I really need to eat and sleep a bit."

She looked through all the records, while sitting on the floor tossing them to one side or another, consequently getting everything out of order, settling on about ten that probably really were hers, as they were much louder groups than he generally appreciated. She started to stalk out with them balanced somewhat between her right arm and the hole in her T-shirt. Feeling relaxed again, Mark made one more attempt at amusement saying; "Margie, did you remember to flush?"

"No, I left it for you," as she closed the old white painted wooden door behind her. When she got to street level she saw Mark's dented red 1967 Corvair parked in front and gave it a kick, hoping to make another one, but her soft sneakers were not up to the task.

Now, Mark was too keyed up to sleep, so he lit a joint he had in the mini-refrigerator, at the same time taking out the remains of a hamburger he had purchased at "The Griddle" sometime within the last five days and put it in the oven. One good thing about old meat, lettuce and tomatoes is that if you don't get food poisoning, you don't have to worry about constipation.



He sat on the yellow two cushion "contemporary" couch that hugged the wall and turned on the portable television set, rolling the chrome cart closer to himself. The channel he was set to was playing some 1940s film noir in supposed black and white that looked more like shades of gray. The movie was somewhat near the middle and he didn't know what was going on, but liked the atmosphere down there.

At Liberty Lane, Connie, having finished feeding a voracious husband, was in the Art Nouveau first floor living room taking some notice of the ebony pieces inlaid with silver. She dialed her memorized number, not knowing or caring that Warren was standing on the other side of the open door in the adjoining room. He listened to her end of the conversation.

"Benito, hi." Pause.

"I'm ready for you too, baby." Pause.

"I'll be there unadorned and weak in the knees." Pause.

"Hey, before you float away." She had one bare leg on the couch and one on the floor. She reached down with her right hand to wipe away some moisture left recently on the boxed inlay of the low coffee table. "I got that young private detective tailing Candy and Callie." Pause.

"No, he has no idea." Pause.

## Family Practice

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"If he gets smart, I'll straighten him out with the purple mountain's majesty. He'll forget whatever he thinks he knows." Pause.

"He's very hungry." Pause.

"See you in the elevations." She hung up and turned around to see Warren standing ten feet away.

Exhilarated and with his eyes glued to the still moist coffee table he said; "That small morsel you gave me didn't fill me up. I'm still hungry. And when are you going to get me more photos?"

Her eyes slightly squinted and a knowing smile came to the corners of her lips. She put one leg back up on the couch and said; "Clean up this boxed inlay. The wetness seems to keep coming. I think some got on my pretty foot."

He assumed his favorite church position, proud to satisfy both his thirst and hunger at the same time. She looked down at him doing the eager attentive job he so relished and said; "You're such a good little slave. You have my permission to play the second fiddle." She sat on the couch and closed her eyes, dreaming of things to come.

Mark woke up refreshed at 5:00PM and switched the channel to the evening news. The overly serious, forty-ish, male model was talking over a film clip of Richard Nixon waving to his fans

as he exited Air Force One. He was showing everyone the peace sign, a victory sign, or the bird, it was hard to tell, as he returned from Europe, ostensibly gathering support for his "Peace with Honor" withdrawal from Viet Nam plan. Nixon was no doubt anxious to talk about that, though reporters were more interested in "who knew what and when?" regarding the Watergate scandal, new "facts" and allegations coming to the forefront in his absence. Why they bothered to ask him anything was the unsolved mystery, as no one believed anything he said. There was no good answer possible as he was already confronted with the Catch-22 logic that even if he was innocent he should resign, as answering questions about Watergate took too much time from his other duties. Mark was especially nonplussed about the whole thing since he was in the business of spying on people for relatively trivial things; it seemed painfully obvious that the same thing would go on in higher arenas.

He freshened up, only mildly cognizant of the buzz from the joint he had smoked two hours prior, retied his blue kerchief and left. He eyeballed his dented red Corvair and couldn't detect any new gouges Margie might have left and as he strolled down the street he hoped that she hadn't learned how to do anything more insidious to it, as he felt he needed two usable, non-descript vehicles for his on again, off again, surreptitious endeavors. As he walked north he watched the sun to his left,

in its last stages of struggling to win its inevitable losing battle with the horizon.

Liberty Lane was awash with activity as people were returning from work and teenagers were on their way somewhere for an evening lacking parental supervision. As he had hoped, nobody seemed to take any particular interest in him as the adults moved quickly, so they could park their butts in front of the television as quickly as possible, after a long, boring and sometimes contentious day and the kids were too busy trying to get a word in with their group of eager companions, each putting their own commentary on the expected adventure of the evening. Either that or everyone considered Mark to be an undesirable they didn't want to know.

He sat in the Mercury's driver seat and adjusted the outside mirror to where he could see number 694. He turned on the ignition to make sure that the car was still working and to see the gas supply; a smidgeon under one-eighth of a tank. He hoped Candy wasn't into marathon trips. He never knew what to do with himself while he was patiently waiting, so he let his mind wander as he stared at the house that as yet had not shown any signs of life. It didn't seem very long ago that he was one of the teenagers, who would now be off on some type of exploit, rather than the floundering blockhead watching the merriment. He knew that his was an old, well-worn story shown in the

popularity of Peter Pan, but he would have to modify that tale somewhat as he desired eternal youth, but only sometime after reaching puberty.

As the sun went down for the ten-count, house lights spread their cheery artificiality over the area; including those emanating from gigantic 694. At least now he knew that someone was home. He realized that he might have already missed Candy as she could have been among one of the groups he had seen when he first entered Liberty. There were certainly a number of girls with straight black hair present. He might have unconsciously made the judgment that she wouldn't be going off to meet her forty year old boyfriend in a group, but how could he have been so sure. It's 1972. Anything goes. "Well, no matter," he thought, as if he had missed her he would be able to sit all night, catch a few winks and get paid for it.

It was now 9PM and the street was quiet and empty. The night air had lowered the temperature enough that he felt cold in his Bob Marley T-shirt, so he opened the trunk, got out and retrieved the dark blue sweatshirt kept there, pulling it over his head, doing his best not to disturb the kerchief. When he sat back down he folded his arms across his chest and enjoying the warmth, closed his eyes and started to doze off.

He heard a door slam and he saw the blonde hair of Connie. She left the house, went to its garage and drove away alone in

her Camaro. He picked up his left hand and put it outside the window, trying to show her that he was on the job, but she was more intent to get somewhere, driving quickly as if she were late, angry, or both. The street was again silent and Mark was tired from all the days walking, so he returned to a slumbering position, his head against the now closed window.

At 9:15 he again heard the door slam, jarring him back to the moment and he saw the black haired girl leave the house, walking quickly the other way down Liberty Lane. "Oh, shit," he said to himself, not wanting to move. When she had covered about 100 feet, he turned on the engine and drove in the only direction he could, consequently having to go around the block. When he again located her she was standing at the corner of Liberty and the Boulevard, looking at the cars going by and her wristwatch. She was wearing blue bellbottoms and a pink-red blouse, covered by a blue denim jacket. He momentarily thought; "Light colors or dark? Seems either/or. Let's see if she meets up with an old fart."

Mark parked in the middle of the Boulevard block and hoped she didn't notice. In only a few seconds a new black Cadillac stopped in front of her and she hurriedly got in the passenger's seat. Mark again started his car, let a few others get between them and followed North on the Boulevard. It's a good road for

surveillance as it is two lanes in each direction with an almost constant flow of traffic.

After only a few blocks the Caddy put on the directional and made a left onto Stuyvesant Avenue and Mark got behind it. Through the rear window he could see the couple was constantly turning toward each other, placing hands on the other's body, not paying much attention to the road and consequently weren't prone to noticing him. The street was lined with active commercial structures on both sides; places to get tires, small warehouses with open metal doors, truck parking lots, all night indigestion diners and auto repair shops, which he wished he knew less well. The properly placed aluminum street lamps provided adequate brightness to the small, broken, concrete sidewalk, whose cracks were currently home for two foot weeds and was now being traversed by five grim, bare-boned German shepherds in search of opportunity. Each business was enclosed by a chain link fence. The ones who thought they had something worth stealing topped it with angled barbed wire. What they had in common was that each appeared to have been rammed by a car, or two, or three, the bent metal always pointing in.

Mark hung back 100 feet from his prey and was somewhat relieved when two cars pulled out of driveways, getting between them. The pace was very slow as the crumbling road, improved

with twelve inch deep wading pools precluded speed, unless the driver enjoyed smacking his head on the roof.

Three long blocks of commerciality ended at the stop light at the intersection with Columbia Way. Mark looked at his gas gauge, hoping it would hold up, as he didn't want to again utilize the pavement to get back home, this time having to share the road with canine companions. When the signal flipped to green he was surprised that the Caddy didn't make a turn, like the two cars between them, but continued straight through, onto little used and aptly named Hook Harbor Road, known for its long term abandonment and teenage fornication. Its Hudson riverfront perimeter was now decorated with telephone pole sized round logs protruding from the water at all angles, some seeming to be supporting each other, as the docks they were once part of, moved to the opposite, New York City side of the river decades prior when Mayor Frank "I am the Law" Sully demanded a cut of three times the going rate to "do business" in Jersey City.

Mark followed, now very wary that the lack of other traffic would highlight his Mercury, hoping that, if noticed, his targets would assume that it belonged to another couple out to float an additional life raft at the piers. He wondered if the forty year old businessman was intent on saving the hotel charges, or if he was still trying to seduce the fifteen-year-



old girl into his teenage fantasy. Or was it hers that he was acclimating himself to?

Both or neither came to mind, when one-half mile into the unlit Hook, Mark saw lights in the windows of an erect, large, wooden industrial building with five loading docks and more lights from the 100-200 cars sitting or looking for an available space in the parking area. He instinctively knew that they would join the gang and had no idea what kind of a clique that might be, as his teenage forays into the land of blind desolation, left him with the impression that every single thing was abandoned.

The ten acre property was encased by an eight foot chain link fence topped with a barbed wire hat cocked to one side. As he had just guessed, the black status car stopped at the open gate and was waved on by two formidable looking men in dark suits and ties. They looked as if they stood 6'0" to 6'3", weighed between 250 and 300, had slicked back black hair topping their fleshy olive faces and worst of all, the bulges in their chests looked like they were packing. Mark slowed down trying to follow the Caddy's progress, but lost sight of it in the crowd. He too pulled up to the open gate and one of the huge greeters stood in the middle of the opening blocking him and the other walked around to the driver's side, bent down to the open window and said; "I think you made a mistake, pal." Mark looked

at the cars already in the lot and noted the domination of Mercedes, Caddys, BMWs and Lincolns, so he thought it possible that they might not think he measured up. He said; "My goddam Mazzerati is in the shop again. You know how it is with Italian sports cars. They gave me this piece of shit for a loaner." He took his foot off the brake and the car moved slightly forward.

"Hey, hey, Mr. Mazzerati. I don't give a shit if you come here in a Rolls Royce. This is 'members only,' capish?"

"All right, all right. How do I become a member?"

"You don't become one. You're invited if you know the right people." He gave a strong facial indication that he was quickly tiring of the conversation and added; "What are you looking for anyway?"

Not having a good answer and sensing that the wrong one might put him in an uncomfortable situation, Mark said; "Good question. How many of us really know what we're looking for?"

Both big guys started kicking the car and the spokesman said; "Get the fuck out of here. Get the fuck out of here right now." He put his hand inside his jacket, near the bulge and Mark quickly discovered reverse gear and backed out. When he was back on Hook Harbor Road, he put it in drive and slowly crept by the two greeters. He heard; "Don't come back here, asshole," and "Stupid fuckin' scumbag." He couldn't make out the rest, but had the idea.

Mark peered into the rearview mirror and saw them watching him, until another car approached the gate, requiring their attention. He made a right into the pitch black side street, turned the lights off and resumed his passive watching and waiting.

Connie entered the closed, but lit up Toyota dealership at 9:30PM. She found Benito Vespucci in his yellow carpeted back office, sitting in his swivel chair staring into space. He said; "You're late. You've been a very bad girl, Connie."

She unbuttoned and stepped out of her knee length tight purple dress. Her 40 year old body had the patina one gets from decades of loving use, which Benito immediately started visualizing in all its forms. She did a slow, middle wiggling dance as she approached the chief in the interior room. She had ample room as her only competitors for floor space were a small bookcase containing car manuals and a light green metal filing cabinet of three stacked attached drawers. She said; "I'm sorry. I see the picnic is over."

He said; "I've saved some things for you. Have a seat." She sat on the floor near him and must have thought she was in church. As his hard gaze transferred from the black to the golden hair, he took something out of his desk drawer, changed his mind and put it back.

"Please," she said, "I'm hungry."

He again displayed the olive lunchmeat, holding it in his right hand. She started to reach for it, her eyes showing the fascination that went through her when she saw that it still was fresh. She was afraid it might have dried out sitting in the drawer so long.

He looked at her closed eyes and extended cheeks, thinking about how much practice must have been necessary to finish the meal using no hands and not getting a drop on the carpet.

She was delirious and didn't notice the other two men enter the room through a back door. Once had a camera and started snapping. Benito sat back on the chair with his hands behind his head and said; "Don't worry. There's more than enough for all of us."

Connie didn't notice them until they were next to her using their hands to investigate if she was hiding anything from them. She put one hand on each of the turkey lunchmeats, now in her reach: one white and one dark.

Benito facetiously said; "Sorry, I don't have any forks."

When they were through with her and ready to sleep, she gave each one last loving kiss, got up and picked up her skirt. She said; "Benito, when you take over the show you have to let me be in it." He smiled, nodded and again closed his eyes. She decided that it would be fun to walk home in full view.

Carrying the dress in her right hand she walked out of the car dealership, but the myriad of pleasurable possibilities were dashed by the cold night air, so she drove with the heater on, dreaming about the possible treats at her next picnic, her dress occupying the passenger seat.

She thought about Benito and his two friends. While she enjoyed their company, their limited one dimensional act only produced monotony in the long run. She couldn't wait to see Warren. Though he had to be careful of being typecast, he learned to do and more importantly, loved every role.

Connie parked in the garage and walked triumphantly into the house to find Warren in the kitchen wearing a bathrobe, which he immediately slipped off when he saw her enter. He had recently had a very close shave, no stubble in evidence anywhere. His shoulder length gray hair flipped around when he eyeballed the long black hair that she had not trimmed in years. Her light makeup was smeared giving the appearance that she had been playing and his mind pictured her in a few games. Her greatly proportioned meaty body swayed as she walked toward him. He said; "Do you have any photos?"

"No, I forgot. You're going to have to be satisfied with the old ones for a while. I brought you some delicacies though. Follow me."

She entered the adjoining living room, Warren mesmerized by the threadlike protrusions, so long they could be seen from behind. She sat on their favorite pink, plushy, rococo revival wing chair and he dined on the digital drumsticks and polecat pasta she brought him. She slid forward on the chair and leaned her shoulders back watching him with cold burning eyes. He had placed his three favorite pictures of her picnicking on the floor near the chair and she saw him glancing at them and got mildly annoyed. She picked up the faux antique French phone and dialed a number.

"Hello."

"Wanda, it's Connie."

"Watcha doin', girl?"

"You should see. C'mon over."

"Be right there," and she hung up. Wanda removed her nightgown, looked in a mirror and took a glance at her 180 pound full figured ebony body admiring the untrimmed wild Afro hair the 45 year old had. She slipped on a simple loose black dress, went to the car and commenced her fifteen minute drive.

Warren had already spread the four by four plastic drop cloth on the wooden floor in one corner and Connie pointed at it, looked at him derisively and said; "Go lay down, piggy." The humidity went up as clouds rolled in and they heard the pitter-patter against an open window.

She slowly strutted back to the chair, his eyes riveted on the Jell-O globes. She put her knees on the seat, her back to him, with her arms over the chair back. He took one last look at his favorite pictures and did what had become customary. After a few minutes of his sampling Connie asked; "Do you prefer the lighter or darker meat?" She didn't expect an answer and appreciated his eclecticism.

The door slowly opened and Wanda stepped right into the room. He looked up and Connie sternly said; "Don't stop what you're doing, slave." When he resumed she asked the broad grinned black friend if she needed anything. Wanda made herself comfortable and also took off her shoes, saying, "My feet need a massage."

"One of Warren's trades. Get to it."

After a while Connie said; "Back on the drop cloth, slave." He again got on his back and the open window let in a torrent of rain which seemed to come from two directions.

Wanda wiggled over to the chair and duplicated Connie's last position and this time Warren got to taste two black pieces of meat, switching up and down to see if a preference would make itself known. Connie neared the window and her right hand got soaked.

## CHAPTER 3

Mark sat in the car, not having any idea of what he was looking at. The traffic stopped and everyone was now inside the warehouse which displayed light in every shaded window, precluding outsiders from a viewing of the internal goings on. He saw the two greeters still at the open gate, now sitting on chairs, smoking cigarettes and sharing a flask, not seeming to be interested in him, or at least not looking in his direction.

He started to lose concentration after half an hour of staring at zero motion, put his hand on his crotch, closed his eyes and dozed off, without the cognizance that he was an object of interest. Two sports coated men stood at the rear of the facility, having come outside to have a private discussion and smoke cigarettes. The rear, being devoid of light, enabled their eyes to adjust to the dark and they saw Mark's car and that someone was in the driver's seat. They broke away from their intended "business" talk when Jerry said; "What the hell is that car doing over there?"

Broadenly stared in Mark's direction, blew out cigarette smoke, shook his head and said; "Beats me. Independent operator?"

Jerry did the same act and said; "I hope the hell not. Maybe it's just some guy getting a blow job."



"Where's the girl?"

"Maybe she's on the floor of the car."

Broadenly furrowed his brow and said; "There's no room down there in a car like that." He paused and corrected himself. "Unless she's about three years old." He made a laugh which came out more of a snort.

"Who the fuck knows? It's 1972, anything goes, right?"

"Obviously, but we better perform our due diligence here. We can't have anyone rocking the boat, even a two pound rat."

"So, you want to check out Sleeping Beauty? It doesn't even look like he's awake."

"We ought to do something, but shit, we don't want to miss any more of the show."

"Or the after-show." They both nodded and smiled.

"Okay, tell you what. I'll get some photos, including the plates. If he shows up again, we'll come up with a plan at that point." He took a small Japanese plastic camera from his pocket, pushed the night vision button and snapped away.

Private eye Cinchapport woke as the sun attempted to fry the low dark rain clouds, which had dropped a half inch of moisture in the area overnight and were now struggling to maintain their supremacy by doing their best imitation of a lion roaring. Mark's opportunity for surveillance was over, as he

had slept through the departure of all cars, except three still parked near the entrance. He started his car up and drove to the now closed gate. He considered going in, but it would merely be an exercise in futility as the 1972 Cadillac was not one of the lingering three. He went to his Headwaters Road apartment and hoped that he didn't have any guests.

He had to park a few hundred feet away, as people were just starting to leave for work, not yet vacating their spaces. He had to dance around a few groups of Orientals and Spanish people, who seemed to not notice him, as they argued about something in their native languages. He got into the studio and after checking the bathroom, decided that he had the place to himself for a while, so he made coffee and heated up a ham and eggs TV dinner. While he waited he turned on the television just in time to have the male model mannequin newscaster give him the day's body count scorecard. "42,367 Viet Cong dead, 78 Americans and no French or English troops killed in skirmishes centering around the Ho Chi Minh trail." He said this with a straight serious expression, as if he believed it or was just reading pre-printed words, not bothering to attempt taking any meaning from them. The US flags disappeared from the screen as the next newsworthy story was recounted. It seems that recently Charlie Manson had carved an "x" or a cross into his forehead. It depends on your angle, Mark supposed. Charlie had shaved off

his long hair, though the stock background stills showed him with all his locks, without any forehead ornamentation, unless it was covered by his unruly bangs.

He brought over the breakfast and coffee, instinctively changing the channel. He found a station playing a subtitled foreign movie and rested there content that if he ignored the words, he wouldn't have to ingest any stupidity. He was rewarded in black and white by a scene depicting a forty-ish, heavysset, long haired, garishly made up woman exiting her solitary shack on the beach. Ten little boys were waiting for her and ran after her trying to touch various body parts. She danced away laughing hysterically, her wild wide eyes advertising excitement, insanity or both. When she tired the boys surrounded her, putting their hands where they wished, as she raised her arms and head to the clouded sky and laughed.

Mark shut the television, showered and changed into a white dress shirt, light brown corduroy pants, a blue blazer and no kerchief. He walked to his office hoping that someone was there; someone with money.

At 8AM Shari's tired eyes got their first glimpse of a new day, insofar as the drawn blinds and the gray sky allowed. She stayed in bed, naked under her summer blanket of pink sheets. As she lazily gazed around the room, she caressed her body,

primarily trying to determine if she needed a shower, as she didn't feel like taking one.

She did like the feel of the overly grand room she was assigned to and knew very well. The art nouveau motif made maximum use of walls and ceilings; the former made up of wood paneling, which covered the original plaster, faux antique stained a light red, the seams hidden by thin strips stained a much deeper shade. The extremely high ceiling dictated a variation at the last three feet of wall, which was accomplished by repainting the original plaster a dull white, but covering it with gold leafed designs of either crabs or Christmas trees with a halo around their neck. The light yellow ceiling was broken into sections by thin overlapping pieces of wood stained dark brown, forming countless separate squares.

The room had no feeling for eclecticism, as all the furniture matched perfectly. The curving walnut borders of everything was stained darkly and covered again by a very shiny lacquer, which seemed to magnify the detailed carvings. They ran the gamut from simple deviated lines to detailed depictions of symmetrically shaped roses. The couch, loveseat and two chairs were upholstered with an embroidered eggshell background, which hosted a band of small multi-colored flowers all identically shaped and separated into rows by golden lines.

Zealously manicured nature might be the title of this still life.

Two small tables near the center and two cheval mirrors in corners were of the same ilk. The recessed grand double entry doors with wide heavily carved sides and rounded top was the dominant focal feature of the room. The designs carved into all available space were somewhat highlighted by the shining dark stain and the flowered draperies which covered the two windows, hanging from the top. The door's size and well thought design enabled it to be alone enough, to induce many to classify the room as well-provided and lavish. The floor was entirely covered by a thin light blue rug with a simple white border design, custom made for the room, but also easily removable. A simple black iron piece surrounded the fireplace, capable of amplifying the heat.

Shari was still tired, though pleased with herself and her surroundings. She closed her eyes to spend some more time in dreamland, thinking about the type of paintings she might like on her currently empty walls, keeping in mind the room's pronounced predilection for even numbers.

Candice had already been up for two hours, had showered and ate breakfast in her bedroom. She wanted to have some kind of talk with her mother and was trying to determine a good time and

precisely what to say. She fidgeted in the triple topped Windsor chair occupying one corner as she looked for inspiration in her room of choice, which, a good case could be made, was the polar opposite of her sister's. Candy's walls remained the original plaster, somewhat freshly painted white, with plain unstained wooden cornices and similar support poles at each corner. Spaced beams emanating from the cornice divided the white plaster ceiling into somewhat irregular strips.

The tightly packed furniture in the smaller of the sister's room was considered "country" and the two chests were made of maple painted to simulate red mahogany with gold inlays. Their simple regular shapes didn't suggest any one style, though the hardware on the larger suggested Heppelwhite, while its counterparts on the smaller was mass produced Victorian rococo. The larger served as a perch to a maroon and white tin rooster and the smaller held a tin black jewelry box and two unpainted wooden ducks.

There were two other simple Windsor chairs, one a natural light wood and the larger painted black. The floors were tongue-in-groove strips of wood with slightly differing hues approximating tan with darker streaks. It was partially covered by two overlapping rugs; a very detailed Persian brown and reddish one was mostly covered by one bearing similarities to an American quilt; a white background, covered in bright red,

yellow and brown designs, home to green and orange bushes and many blue and red peacocks, each of a different size and position.

The simple queen sized bed was topped with a large unstained wooden headboard that contained shelving, currently home to many books, a hurricane lamp and small porcelain figures of animals, each with large liquid eyes.

She had two paintings squeezed into the crowded space; one a simple country scene with a large red barn sitting in fall's light brown undergrowth, surrounded by red and yellow leafed trees, under a pale blue sky, only interrupted by one small white friendly cloud. The other painting seemed to be of the very room in which it was hung excepting an ill-defined blue background. The painting on the painting's wall was too small to decipher well, but a quick look resulted in another mirror image.

Candy would often get as close to it as she could to try to see where and if the smaller mirror imaging ended, to always be quickly interrupted by something of more pressing need; like her sister not being able to find a certain dress, or her mother, anxiously needing to know if she received any phone calls when out. Candy decided that when she saw her mother today she would try to keep things as clear and simple as possible.

Candice knocked on the ornate dark brown door of her mother and Warren's bedroom. Without waiting to hear any "come in," she turned the gold plated latch, went in and saw the couple still under the covers, just rousing now because of her entrance. The dark, heavy, maple, square canopied bed seemed appropriate to her, as all it needed was a few poles on each side to complete the cage effect. She didn't care much for either of them and missed her biological father, immensely. She remembered how she cried for days when his job required him to transfer to California and her mother refused to go, this event becoming the final curtain on an already horrible show. Candy wanted to be part of the new land and disdained her mother for wanting to wallow in the old dirt. Connie sat up, not making any effort to hide her toplessness, while Candy eyed a painting on another side of the room titled "The Slaughter of the Innocents," which showed seven voluptuous nude women laying on the ground, dying from wounds inflicted by swords of the three dark bearded men standing above them, attired in the flamboyant battle gear of the sixteenth century. Not relishing either view, she looked at the ceiling and said; "Mom, I just want to remind you that I'll be out late tonight."

Connie said; "Is he that good?" and smiled.

Candy dismissed any vague notions she had of serious conversation, looked at the soft, dirty, yellow, thickly



carpeted floor, put her hands in the pocket of her light blue jeans and frustratedly said; "I just wanted to tell you that I'm going out with some friends and we're driving to Seaside, to enjoy some ocean breezes."

Connie said; "Okay, okay. I was just trying to make a joke. Forgive me for a poor one. I just woke up."

Candy shook her head and left the room. Connie was amused at the back of her daughter's pink t-shirt, which in black letters said; "PEACE NOW."

Warren got his head out from under the covers and said; "What was that?"

Connie snickered and said; "Oh, she really thinks that I give a shit that she's fucking Callie Majors." She continued laughing, shaking her head side to side and added; "She doesn't think that I know." She looked at Warren's tousled hair and doe-like eyes, put her left hand on top of his head and pushed it back down under the covers saying; "A tangy breakfast is served."

Mark didn't get his biggest wish, not finding anyone with money when he entered his office, but was happy with a close second when he saw Vicky sitting back on her chair with her voluptuous black legs, protruding from a short white skirt, ignoring the piles of unfiled papers sitting calmly on the desk.

She had a smile on her face and a twinkle in her eye. He said;  
"C'mon Vicky, that's no way for me to start a work day."

"Well, somethin's got to wake you up, white boy. You think I'm gonna get paid this week?"

As he walked by he grabbed her bare foot with his left hand saying; "One way or another, black girl." He continued into his office, closing the door behind him. He sat behind his desk, opened the middle drawer and saw the handgun that he always forgot to bring with him. "Just as well," he thought, "I never get any jobs where it would be necessary anyway." He spun through the cards in his Rolodex, hoping to remember someone who might be a source of repeat business, but no ideas came to mind. "Dammit, wasn't there anyone in this town doing something nefarious that someone wanted to know about?" Sonny's commentary came to mind. Maybe everybody is doing everything and no one gave a shit any more. He didn't feel comfortable with the next logical thought that maybe he was attempting to be an operative of the old time moralists, who have now changed their postures and was desired as much as a priest in Gomorrah. He didn't want to put a crimp in anyone's fun; he just wanted to get paid in the coin of the realm, whatever that was today. He stared at the peeling wall, noticing new strips of bare dirty white undercoating, which seemed to be trying to form a pattern of a face. He lit a joint and dreamed about how pleasant it

would be to spend the day playing with Vicky, oblivious to all the "important" concerns, but decided that if he did that, tomorrow would soon come and he'd be back to thinking about money; or more precisely the lack thereof. He changed from his spiffy outfit to a funky one: Blue jeans torn at the knees; a black Rolling Stones T-shirt with gold lettering and a red tongue; slip on sneakers; topped by a deep purple kerchief he tied around his growing, messy, curly black locks.

As he passed Vicky in the vestibule, she was sitting in her chair, bending forward to pick up some papers on the floor, the top half of her full soft headlights peeking out from her low cut, frilly, pink blouse. Mark said; "Doesn't your husband ever want to spend the day with you?"

Her eyes looked up; her head retained its weird position and replied; "That old man ain't good for nothing anymore. He can't even walk the dog. I like 'em young." She brushed her tongue slowly against her full red lips and Mark said; "I'm going to do some useless surveillance, at least I can charge for it." Vicky put the papers on her desk and adjusted her skirt and blouse saying; "You gotta quit being a wallflower and participate." Mark kept moving, entered his black Mercury and drove to liberty Lane.

The street's mid-morning quiet was overwhelming; everyone at work, still recovering from last night, or watching TV talk

shows discuss their outrage at Marjorie's being written out of "The Guiding Light." He took his now practiced spot in front of the old garage, set his side mirror to monitor number 694 and looked at the sky. A mass of light gray clouds had surreptitiously congregated, victorious in their battle with the struggling sun and were so densely packed, that it appeared as if the heavens were covered in one wide brush stroke devoid of any individuality, increasing the discomfort of the humid air. His expectation of a quiet, paying, morning sky gazing was rudely challenged by Candy's emergence. She hurriedly walked to the composite Victorian, non-descript and contemporary white house two doors away, where another young girl was waiting at the door. At a distance they appeared to be similar, excepting that where candy's pink T-shirt said "PEACE NOW," her friend's said; "War is good business. Invest your son."

Mark thought that they were too engrossed in their conversation to notice him, so he followed on foot, fifty feet behind, able to hear most of what was said.

Candy said; "And I'm seeing him again tonight."

"This is getting to be a regular thing."

"He loves me..... And I love him."

"He's married!"

"He's going to divorce her soon. He can't stand her. They're so different."

"You know how many times guys have said that?"

Candy really didn't have any idea, so rather than making a direct reply she said; "He's gonna take me to California. I'll be three thousand miles away from the "Constance Warren Perv Show" and I'll be near my real father.

"Then you can put on your own perv show, I suppose."

Candy playfully pushed her friend and seriously said; "It's different with us." As they jostled around, Candy noticed the kerchief man behind them, but pretended not to and kept walking toward Eastside Avenue.

Candy's companion said; "So, I'm going to be stuck in this decaying old shit, without my best friend."

"After we get settled in we can send for you."

"Oh sure, he's gonna want to do that."

"He'll do anything I ask. I move him."

Her friend looked at her, drew a deep breath, but said nothing.

Candy said; "Oh, come on. We can be at the beach in the sun every day."

Her friend looked at her, put her hand behind Candy's neck, looked into her eyes and said; "You're the biggest dreamer I know ..... And also the sweetest one."

As they approached the pizza parlor, Candy again noticed Mr. Purple Kerchief's reflection in the store's angled front

window. She said; "C'mon let's have a slice," and led her friend inside.

Mark kept walking to the next corner where he stopped in front of a dry cleaning store, pondering his next move.

Inside the pizza place, Candy went to the pay phone and dialed 911. She was afraid that she had either attracted a nut or that her mother had a tail on her. In five minutes a police car parked at the corner. Its occupant got out and said; "Well, well. Mark Cinchapport. Aren't you getting a little old to be hanging out with the teenagers?"

Mark immediately recognized an old nemesis from his teenage years, simultaneously realizing that there was some parts of his youth he wasn't interested in re-living and here it was. He said; "Hi, Hennesy, still chasing kids?"

"No, I've been promoted. Now I chase assholes who still think they're kids. What the hell are you doing here, Cinch?"

"I'm on a job; confidential; you know."

"Your conspicuous presence is upsetting some locals."

"Trite, but this is a free country, they tell me."

"Statutory rape negates the privilege for ten years or so?"

"Whoa, whoa, Ace, I didn't think the mind police took over yet. And if they did, you're doing an understandably lousy job at it. You know I like experience."

Hennesy put his arm around Mark's shoulder and said; "Let's take a walk," leading him back toward Liberty Lane. "Why the hell aren't you in Viet Nam, or something?"

"Flat feet. I guess I don't march very well."

"Well, we're marching back to your heap and you're getting the hell out of here pronto." As they passed the pizza parlor Candy and Mark got a good look at each other, neither having any particular thoughts about the matter and Candy was relieved at the quick police service. As they reached the corner, Hennesy said; "I'm gonna trust that you'll continue on to your car and leave. If I have to come back again we're going to be talking about 'Failure to give a good account of yourself,' 'Loitering,' 'No visible means of support,' and a whole lot of other unpleasant things I can't think of now. Let me give you a little bit of friendly advice. If you want to be a competent private eye, learn how to be less conspicuous."

"Thanks, Hennesy. And let me return the favor. If you want to be a Captain, or a Chief, or something, don't waste your time with the small crap. Find a big bullshit issue."

As Mark continued on doing as he was told, he thought that he should make use of the advice he just dispensed freely. He drove back to the office through East Side Avenue, again making a small degree of eye contact with Candy, who was now in front

of the pizza parlor with her friend. As she watched the car pass she muttered; "Purple kerchief."

Her friend said; "What?"

"Nothing, just talking to myself."

Shari entered her parent's bedroom without knocking to find Warren under the covers and Connie sitting up with her knees bent, her feet flat on the bed, the top half of her naked body in the soft light of the room.

Shari laughed and said; "Interrupting anything?"

Connie said; "Nothing that I wouldn't mind starting over. What can I help you with, baby?"

"Nothing really. I just came in to say 'Hi.' We've both been pretty busy lately, especially you."

"You've got to get yourself one or two regulars. It makes life easier."

I've been working at it, but lately I've been running into a load of one timers."

"Bummer."

"Yeah, really. I've been with one old fart a couple of times, but he's got a wife, another girlfriend and a business to run."

"Any good?"

"He has his hang ups."



"Doesn't sound like it's worth the effort."

"Well, until something better comes along." Shari shrugged and smiled. "I've got an itch."

Connie said; "I might have something for you," thinking of Mark. "Give me a few days."

"A diver?"

"What else would I want for my little girl?"

Shari said; "Cool," and left, shutting the door behind her. Warren didn't come up for air, relishing the prolonged engagement.

Mark parked in front of the office lot and went back inside to find Vicky sitting behind her now clear desk, apparently having put all the papers in their appropriate places. Her bare black legs were splayed, visible through the desk's front to back keyhole and she was scratching her armpit. "Bring back any money for me?"

Mark shook his head staring at the chair's furry cushion.

She said; "Stupid question. I did a lot of work this morning and at the very least I'm entitled to some fringe benefits." Mark saw her point.

## CHAPTER 4

At 3PM he left the office, stretching out his legs, as he negotiated the steps of grandeur, got into his 1968 black Mercury and drove back to Liberty Lane, his open, now regular space patiently waiting. As he watched the mini-maneuverings people made on the street, he hoped that Hennesy was not anywhere near and that the people had more to do than watch him. The glove compartment contained an old copy of "Playboy Magazine," and he skimmed it, unimpressed with the air-brushed photos supposedly showing someone's idea of perfection, which he found as interesting as a blow up doll. He toyed with the idea of writing and submitting an article, but could get no further than the title of; "The Pimples on her Well Used Ass." Some artistic notions lend themselves better to photography or painting. He thought that the era would put an end to or force a radical change upon the publication, as it was currently produced by someone unaware that God spits out the tepid.

He put it back for historical reference and substituted it with his camera. Not seeing any pimply asses he held it in his lap and dozed.

At 5PM, as the street started to fill with the usual day end activities, he saw Candy exit 694, walking quickly, paying no attention to anything other than what must have been in her

mind. Her bouncing "PEACE NOW" pink T-shirt presided over her skin tight light blue jeans and sandals. This time, as last night, her path was toward the Boulevard, so Mark drove quickly around the block hoping to relocate her there. The dismal light of the morning still persisted, providing some camouflage and to further make himself less noticeable he removed his purple kerchief. As he approached the corner of Liberty Lane and the Boulevard, he saw her get into a waiting Cadillac. The gas gauge showed that he had enough left to make it to Hook Harbor Road again and he boldly got right behind them. When they stopped at a light Candy and the 40 year old blonde crew cut guy looked lovingly at each other, each with one hand somewhere in the other's lap, the final destinations hidden by the backs of the bucket seats. He snapped off two shots through the windshield, knowing that they would be far from top quality, but probably good enough for Connie to use as "evidence."

When the Caddy didn't turn onto Stuyvesant Avenue, Mark said; "Oh, shit," and again examined his derelict gas situation. Making a hasty decision, he continued behind them in anticipation of getting a good shot or two when they exited the car.

No such luck. After another three miles his car started to sputter and he pulled into a Boulevard parking space at Amsterdam Avenue, watching as the couple faded from sight.

Nighttime darkness was quickly approaching and he didn't hesitate to make the only decision open to him. He took the camera, locked the car and legged it, thinking about the good possibility of satisfying Connie with the two adequate photos. He re-installed his purple kerchief as he walked the garbage strewn path, once host to substantial private dwellings, now displaying "For Sale - Commercially Zoned" signs. Low income projects had been built down the side streets, back in the day of heady optimism, which were now standing as defiant, crumbling, graffiti decorated, square, brick ten story tombs, where the residents huddled in least cost apartments protected only by triple locked and bolted doors, the front yards and basketball courts a magnet for criminals, derelicts and crazies, who the Hennesy's of the Police Department, could never seem to find or do anything about.

Mark mentally kicked himself for having a gun that resided in his desk drawer and added a few miles per hour to his casual nonchalant gait. In a minute, he heard a car honk three times, causing a bit of a chill, but when he turned to the source he saw Sonny waving at him with his right hand, his left holding the wheel of a slowed down 1972 black Chrysler. He called out; "Hey, man, don't you know it's dangerous to be walking around here?" to the mild amusement of the two girls in the car.

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Mark said; "Fuckin' car ran out of gas." He paused a second, then added; "Excuse my French, ladies."

The girl in the front seat said; "Don't worry. We've heard that word once or twice before."

Sonny said; "C'mon, get in the back with Dorette, before you get yourself into some serious trouble." Mark took his advice, saying a shy "Hi" to his 25 year old, 250 pound ebony seatmate. She slid over to give him some more room, adjusting her short loose light brown dress, put a silver flask to her lips and then offered it to him saying; "Here, have a swig." He was glad to do what he was told, put it to his lips and tasted straight whiskey.

Dorette said; "Don't you wipe it off first?"

Mark was starting to feel relaxed and much better than a few minutes ago, smiled at her, then glanced at her legs and said; "No, your juice tastes just fine to me."

Sonny said; "See, I told you," and everyone had a laugh. He continued; "Mark, this is Corinne up here with me. She's Dorette's older sister." Mark could see the resemblance, though Corinne was probably about fifty pounds lighter and had a closely cropped Afro as opposed to Dorette's long wild one.

Corrine said; "Hey, don't hog that flask."

Mark handed it to her and she massaged its opening with the palm of her hand saying; "No telling where that mouth has been,"

took a quick swig and handed it to Sonny, who unhesitatingly poured a good amount down his throat and said; "Aaah."

People smirked and Corinne said; "I don't get it. You guys just love to taste those lips. God bless ya!"

Mark said; "Sonny, is this a new car?"

Sonny replied, "It's hot," and everyone understood the meaning.

Sometime later when the flask needed a refill, Sonny said; "What have you been doing with yourself?"

Mark said; "Tailing a little girl."

The three laughed and Mark then laughed himself and added, "No, no, not that way. Her mother is paying me to. I trailed her and some guy down the Hook Road last night. There's something weird going on there."

Sonny caught Mark's eyes in the rearview mirror and took on a serious tone, saying; "That's some evil shit. You don't want to be anywhere near it."

Mark said, "What?"

Sonny said; "I don't know, but the word is that there are some very bad heavy dudes there with lots of fire power."

Dorette laughed and said; "I think my friend Mark here," and she put her finger on his lips, "is more interested in some very bad heavy chicks with lots of fire power." No laughter was

appropriate for the completely true statement, just knowing head bobs.

It was a hot humid night all over Jersey City and at 694 Liberty Lane Warren was passionately kissing Connie at 7PM as she put on her party clothes. "Please remember the photos this time, please," he said. She shook her head "yes" at him, while she smeared her makeup and lipstick, trying to attain the sluttiest look possible and considered whether she was wearing enough clothes for the evening. She looked in the mirror and saw eyes that were ready for anything and Warren with eyes aflame, not wanting to say goodbye and decided that she was very appropriately attired for her drive to Benito's.

At 7:15PM she drove the new light blue Camaro out of the garage on her way to Englewood Cliffs. Benito and his Spanish wife Carmela lived at the end of a dead end road, in a 4,000 sq. ft., red Mediterranean, by way of American mass production styled house with a tile roof. Connie had never seen much of the house and wasn't interested in so doing, as she felt quite at home in its basement playroom. There were seven or eight cars already in the driveway when she arrived and she thought, "The more the merrier." She had to park near the curb and it enhanced her excitement having to walk the hundred feet to the basement colonial styled, blue metal door. She walked slowly,

as she pictured herself on display to whoever was at a neighboring window.

She gently knocked and was greeted by the disdainful motionless face of Carmela, dressed in clear stockings held in place by black garter belts, high heeled black leather boots and a push up brassiere. Her olive skin was topped by short black curly hair, which Connie eyed as she heard, "Kiss me."

After allowing three smackers Carmela said; "I only gave you permission for one kiss. You're going to learn to be a more obedient slave." As Connie stopped, looking up at Carmela's hard amused eyes, Carmela put her best foot forward and cameras snapped away.

When Carmela was through with her, Connie saw that the room contained ten grinning men. She shook her body at them and said; "Don't the boys want anything?" her lipstick and makeup now completely smeared over her face.

Benito rose from his chair, exhibiting his now customary lunch meat and said; "I see that you're not carrying any photos, unless you've hidden them." He frisked her and, finding nothing, he said; "Connie, you are the baddest little pig and you'll have to work very hard tonight to atone. He led her across the room as eighteen mesmerized eyes stared. Benito instructed; "Say hello to the club members," and she silently made five second opening gambits to each piece of lunchmeat the



group saved for the guest of honor. After gorging herself, Connie said; "Hate to eat and run," and left. She drove back twenty miles over the speed limit, wanting to get to Warren's membership club quickly.

Sonny's Chrysler backed out of the space it had been occupying in otherwise empty Van Coppermate Park for the last two hours, the black night pierced by its headlights. Sonny said; "I hope everyone's ready. I got to get you all home and then ditch this somewhere."

He heard a general groan and Mark whispered; "I could sleep right here," as he picked his head up from Dorette's lap, gave her one last kiss and said; "You've got a great pillow." She made a lazy smile and rubbed his curly black hair saying; "Someday we'll find our own spot."

Sonny watched the pair in the rear view mirror, as Corinne adjusted her frock and slipped on the safety belt. The other three followed suit with a small contented smile. Corinne said; "Nothing wrong with being safe."

Sonny reached back, touching Dorette's leg and asked; "What do you think of my pale faced buddy."

Dorette smirked; and said; "He'll do."

Corinne turned to her sister and said; "Let's swap next time. I haven't had the white experience in some time."

Sonny said; "Hey, hey. You got something against brothers? Damn."

Corinne touched Sonny, smiled at him and said as if it should have gone without saying; "Oh baby, don't get silly. You know I love you. Can't you tell?"

Sonny grinned and said; "Just playing, girl. Hey, Mark. Where should I drop you?"

"990 Headwaters Road; it's right behind Journal Square."

"Oh, yeah, yeah," Sonny replied; "Where all the foreigners moved in."

They drove there silently; three watching for stars in the still clouded sky, getting a few glimpses while one watched the road. When they got there, Mark leaned over, kissed Dorette and said; "Beautiful, baby." He then leaned his head over the front seat and said; "Next time." As he attempted to kiss Corinne's neck, she pulled away, but playfully laughed, as they all did.

Connie was on fire, jerking the car to a stop in the garage and bolting inside. Warren was waiting for his late snack and insisted that he get it as it was her duty to feed him. She smiled and obliged, but then sheepishly said; "Wrong position, baby."

She led him out of the kitchen to their third floor bedroom, animatedly recounting the adventures of the earlier

evening. He wanted the photos more than ever before and was angry at their lack, so he kept slapping her butt watching the globes shake, which made her hotter.

Candy was in her bedroom alone dreaming about Callie and California, when she heard them come upstairs. She softly opened a crack in her door to watch them enter and heard the door lock behind them. She went to their door and got a view through the keyhole.

Connie climbed into the bed and Warren entered behind her. She pretended to be overwhelmed and in a short of breath manner related more of the evening's festivities, drawing fine distinctions between the varying samples. Candy's eyes were riveted and her mind flip-flopped between fascination and disgust, sometimes picturing herself in the same position as her mother, only with Callie, sometimes thinking that the whole thing turned her off and sometimes picturing herself in Warren's position with anyone other than her mother. When round one was finished and she moaned with her smeared face buried in the bedding, Warren wondered if she was coming, feeling good, or acting. He decided that it was of no concern to him and finished, watching her ripe body ripple. He got up and sat on a chair, thinking; "This is the greatest woman I have ever known."

Shari entered the house quietly after having spent the evening with two local boys at one of their houses, his parents on a trip to the shore for a few days. She liked that there was no pretense of love, but didn't like being treated as a one-time experience to tell their friends about. They had smoked some pot, started sloppily dancing to Led Zeppelin's first album and she pretended to slip to the floor laughing. It took quite some time to finish the album, as the trio kept repeating songs that they had a special affinity for.

She climbed the carpeted stairs and saw her sister kneeling at the keyhole. She cooed and said; "Still just a watcher? That's some kind of perversion."

Candy, embarrassed, jumped up and said; "I'm not watching. I wanted to talk to Mom."

Shari laughed; "Through the keyhole?"

Candy wanted no more of this conversation, went to her room and locked the door. She laid face down, cuddling her pillow, pretending it was Callie and that they were in California, with the windows open, listening to the waves break on shore.

Shari took a look through the keyhole and thought; "All right, mom!" and went to her room.

## CHAPTER 5

After a very long evening, Connie was mildly vexed that she would have to take time away from the fun things she wanted to do and have to pay another business visit to Mark. As she prepared to leave she passed Warren in the first floor hallway and she took note of something that she previously considered too minor to mention. The air conditioning worked through three switches. The first was not a problem as it stood away from its smaller counterparts and served to regulate air speed or wind. The other two were smaller switches, side by side, one to turn on the pump and the other to turn on the fan. The aesthetic problem she had was that for the unit to be operating as desired, one switch would have to be in the up position and the other down, or vice-versa when the unit was off.

Connie tersely said; "Those damn switches annoy me whenever I walk through here."

Warren was surprised and happily said; "I feel exactly the same way."

Connie smiled at him knowingly and said; "Great. Why don't you take a shot at fixing it while I'm out?"

He said; "Okay" and she left.

Over the course of the following weeks, the minor annoyance evolved to quite an undertaking. Warren went to the fuse box,

located the appropriate one and unscrewed it. He could hear the air conditioner cease its hum. He went back and put the two offending switches in the same position, before re-installing the fuse. When he went back, the pump wasn't on and the air conditioner was blowing in hot air from outside and when he changed the position of the pump switch, it was again reversed from its twin. He went through this process a few times, only succeeding in changing each one's functionality. The left switch for the pump now had to be up for it to be on, while it used to have to be down and the reverse results were true for the fan. He gave up and called an electrician, having some difficulty explaining the problem to the lady who answered the phone. He finally told her; "The air conditioner doesn't work right," which she seemed to understand and wrote it down on one of her forms. She arranged an appointment for the following day.

Aware of the scheduled meeting, Connie stayed home to supervise the project. The electrician understood her explanation of what she wanted, but apparently thought that it was so inconsequential, he wondered why she cared. After a few borderline testy exchanges, she said; "You know what I want. You're getting paid for it. So do it!"

The electrician said; "Yes," and trudged on virtually duplicating Warren's steps. He told a bothered Connie that he

kind of did what she wanted but it didn't come out exactly the way she desired, but it's really okay and it's not my fault anyway because the previous electrician had attached the whatsis to the whosis, crimping the wire in the wheresis. Connie had heard the routine numerous times and decided that the easiest thing to do was smile and say; "Yes, yes," give him his \$10 and get the idiot out of her sight.

The degree of concern about the mixed switch positions now heightened between Connie and Warren and got to be a constant topic of commentary whenever they spoke. After a few days of this, Connie got the idea of replacing the switches with buttons and had the electrician perform the task for another "\$10 plus parts."

Despite a minute disparity in height, the buttons satisfied the relative size difference lack of aesthetics. However with use, or the couple's constant focus, the disparity magnified.

As he had been having the same thoughts that he knew Connie was having, he whispered gently to her lips that he had the solution. "Replace one of the buttons with another switch. This way no comparison will be possible and our delicate senses will not be offended."

When the \$10 electrician deprecatingly joked about his new task, he at least didn't charge for parts as he still had the original switches in his truck. As Warren and Connie watched

him leave, they each wondered what might be the next cause of concern. Warren visualized the eight inch disparity in the level of one set of blinds and Connie thought of the infinitesimal wall height advantage that the copy of the "Portrait of Bartelemeo Punciaticchi" had over the copy of the "Portrait of Lucrezia Pucci Punciaticchi", his wife.

Warren said; "Damn. While he was here we should have had the electrician check the air speed switch."

Connie said; "No need, it works."

Warren was puzzled and said; "We have it on high. Let's see if we can set it in other positions." He moved toward the big switch and Connie said; "Wait. When it's on it's always high and when it's off, it's off. There's nothing worthwhile in between."

Warren turned back to her, seeing that her bathrobe had loosened as she was sitting and said; "I see something very worthwhile in between," and made a very thorough inspection.

Back at day one of the switch-button affair, Connie arrived at Mark's office to see Vicky, in a mid-thigh tan tight skirt and a knitted yellow blouse, standing near her desk perusing "Playgirl" magazine. Connie was a bit disheveled and tired in her cute yellow springy dress.

She said; "See anything good?"



Vicky said; "Oh, yeah, yeah. Let me show you this one." She took a few steps, until she was right next to Connie and showed her the page she was interested in.

"Connie sounded "Ummhuhm." She did like the looks of the guy and the fact that he was displaying his heterosexual oral orientation.

They silently looked for a few seconds, until Mark disturbed the silence by opening the door. Both women looked up a bit nervously, Vicky closing the magazine. When they saw it was Mark, they simultaneously sighed; "Oooo." Mark sighed and said; "That's a hell of a greeting. A gracious good morning to you, Vicky; and a gracious good morning to you, Connie. My pleasant surprise."

Neither replied and Vicky carried the magazine back to her desk and put it in the top drawer. Mark saw the name of the periodical and said; "Is that one of your favorite reading materials, girls?"

Connie said; "Not reading, viewing."

Mark said; "I stand corrected..... as usual, come to think of it." He swept his right arm, saying; "Please, Connie, come right in my office."

Vicky said; "I think he's had some of that wacky weed already."

Connie followed him in and sat on the desk. Mark said "I've got something great. I think you'll be pleased." He took the package out of his back pocket and put the two developed pictures on her lap. She looked at them, made a grimace, looked at him and said; "No, that's not what I want."

"I know. The quality could be a little better."

"No, I need something more..... explicit, is the right word."

Mark still didn't understand exactly what Connie was saying, but felt he was obliged to guess a bit and said; "Do you mean pornographic?"

"Exactly. You see, Candy is a strong willed little girl with her own views on things. If I confront her with these pictures, she'll just say that she got a ride, big deal." She parted her legs, her face in a grimace as she scratched and watched Mark's eyes change their viewpoint. "I need penetration."

Mark moved right in front of her and said; "I'll do my honest best."

After a few minutes, Connie reached for her purse, saying; "I know this is a difficult task, so let me up your pay rate to the \$20/hour you originally requested and a bonus for incentive is in order." She handed him \$980. She said that represented 24 hours plus a \$500 bonus.

Mark couldn't believe his eyes and ears, took the money and stuffed it into his back pocket, hoping he would beat Santo to the spot. "Thank you. Thank you, so much." He reached for his keys, purposely dropping them, so that he could be in the proper position to give Connie kisses. She said; "There can be many bonuses in your job. My nineteen year old daughter Shari needs some friendly company. Maybe I'll send her around."

The pleasant reverie was ended by a knock at the door and the entrance of Santo, seemingly unable to stand still, when he got a whiff of greenbacks. Santo said; "Am I interrupting something?" as he continued to fidget.

Connie got off the desk, lowering her yellow dress and said; "No, we were through." As she went out the door, she turned back to Mark and said; "I'll be in touch soon, bonus baby." Passing through the vestibule, Connie smiled as she saw a seated Vicky head down, looking at the magazine in her middle drawer. Not wanting to disturb her, Connie silently waved her right hand and saw Vicky return the favor without raising her head. Knowing smiles were the order of the day.

Mark took some of the money from his back pocket and said; "Stay calm, Santo. Here's \$500. Now, we're square with the rent gouging. You know, you ought to have somebody paint these goddamn walls. What are my clients going to think when they see this mess?"

Santo salivated as he pocketed his treasure and said;  
"Soon, soon. You can't imagine how many problems I'm dealing with. I've had a carpenter in number 208 for weeks now and....."

Mark cut him off; "Yeah, yeah. Just get a little bit on the ball," and walked into the vestibule where he gave Vicky \$210, saying; "For next week, too. Come on with me. We've got to go get my car back. I ran out of gas near Amsterdam."

Vicky's head bobbed up and down a few times, saying nothing. Mark stopped and added; "Take it with you. Believe it or not, I know what you're looking at. Show me your favorite."

She stood up, "*Playgirl*," in hand and showed Mark her current momentary fascination. She smiled and took a deep breath sigh and said; "Pretty interesting, huh?"

She looked at his face, anxious for a quick gut reaction. Mark said; "Looks great to me, but don't you just hate it when they airbrush out all the imperfections?"

She said; "I don't see any imperfections here, honey," and followed him outside, artwork in hand."

On the steps Mark said; "We have to walk a few blocks to my apartment....."

Vicky cut him off, by giving him a wicked look and saying;  
"Your apartment, I don't think I've ever seen it."

Mark continued his interrupted sentence; "where I have my other car. We'll get it filled and bring a can of gas to the other one and then we can each drive one back here."

"To your apartment?"

"Yeah, we won't get disturbed there." He smiled at her wide eyed face and said; "Keep looking at your dirty, evil-minded works of art."

Chores accomplished, Mark parked the red Corvair right in front of his building and Vicky put the black Mercury in the empty space in front of it. When he exited the car, he looked at the sky to notice for the first time that yesterday's overcast condition had given way to a blue gray haze, the sun visible through it, pale enough to be scrutinized by the naked eye.

Mark went to Vicky, who was standing by the Mercury trunk and said; "Bring your fine wickedness up the stairs," taking her free hand and leading her to the first floor refuge.

He inserted the key and the door opened, revealing no visitors. Vicky rambled to the couch and took a seat, with her magazine in front of her face, while Mark slowly fixed something to eat, noticing that the sun and sky condition increased the humidity by multiples, as the dampness enveloped him through the one open window.

At 5:00PM, Mark drove the red Corvair to Liberty Lane and didn't think he was noticed in the end of the day bustle and with a different car. He absently perused his glove compartment periodicals until 6:30 when a black 1972 Cadillac stopped in front of number 694 and immediately the long, black-haired girl, tonight wearing a light gray pleated short skirt and a midriff baring red button up blouse, ran to it and let herself in the front passenger's seat, kissing the crew-cut blond driver, cursorily.

As Mark followed them, she seemed to be upset about something, waving her arms around and looking at him, while he dispassionately watched the road, periodically picking her waving arm out of the air and gently placing it back in her lap. In time this had its intended effect as her movements became more pacific and composed.

The Caddy turned onto Stuyvesant Avenue and Mark slowed down, establishing some space between the two cars, as he now thought that he knew the ultimate destination.

As the lead car entered the busy Hook Harbor Road warehouse parking lot, Mark merely drove by, perhaps un-noticed and parked on the nameless side street or alley and hoped something useful would jump out at him. Nothing did and instead of watching the well-guarded, busy front, he took a walk to the property's rear, desiring to find something unprotected where the weak sun's

decline prevented illumination. In the shadows he found that he had to be careful on his path, because it was strewn with broken glass; old beer and soda bottles, crushed cans and parts of electronic devices. When he got behind the warehouse, still separated from it by a tall chain link fence, he saw that someone had left a first floor window open. The lights inside enabled him to see two very thin girls with long straight black hair paying homage to a man standing in front of them. Their bare feet were enclosed in shackles; its metal hooks not currently attached anywhere. As he watched the scene from his vantage point of garbage, more characters made themselves visible. Other men holding drinks observed the performance and were saying things indecipherable to him, but seemed to be cheering the duo on. After a few minutes of observation, they must have become aware of the roles they wanted to play in the scene and walked over to the girls and used their free hands to touch them roughly. The girls softly returned the many awards given and switched around sampling each. Considering the possibility that one of the girls might be Candy, Mark took the camera from his front pants pocket, snapped and snapped. If the people were indistinguishable on first development, maybe a blow-up would make something more clear.

At another window, Broadenly parted a blind and looked out saying; "Jerry, come here. Look at this." Jerry performed the

same operation at the adjoining window and said: "Is that the same asshole?"

"I'm not sure, but I think so."

"This is getting to be a pain in the ass."

Broadenly looked back inside, seeing the show that he enjoyed was near starting. He sighed and said; "We're going to have to take care of this tonight."

They both checked their holsters and Jerry said; "Get the truth serum."

Broadenly patted the pocket of his white dress shirt and said; "Yeah, got it."

The two left the warehouse through the front and got into their newish black Lincoln. When they passed through the gate, one of the attendants said; "Lousy show tonight?" and Jerry replied; "Business."

They made a right, then another into the dark side street and parked right behind the red Corvair. They walked cautiously through the difficult terrain and located Mark, still fixed on the open window.

Mark saw them when one stumbled on a beer bottle fifty feet away and put the camera back in his pocket. His first thought was merely "Oh, shit," but quickly got practical. He thought that while this was definitely not going to be something pleasant, it was preferable to stand there and deal with it.



The only other option necessitated negotiating difficult, highly weeded ground and even if he was successful, the two men in black suits would probably catch him anyway. He decided to act stupid, not realizing that he'd probably be naturally good at it, having had so much unconscious practice and said; "Great show in there," pointing at the open window where the two girls were now kissing each other, the men again reverting to spectator status.

Jerry and Broadenly looked at the open window and both thought that more than one idiot was at work tonight. They pulled their guns and Broadenly said: "On the ground, asshole."

Mark raised his voice and said; "There's broken glass down there."

He grabbed Mark by his arms, patted him down, took the camera, pushed him face first to the rubble and cuffed his hands behind his back.

Mark now knew this was more serious than he had expected, but decided not to change plans and said; "Are you going to put me in the show? The actresses look interesting."

Broadenly said; "We've seen you before. What do you want over here?"

Mark laughed and replied; "Probably the same thing those guys do," pointing at the window. His captors' stern faces

prompted him to try adding; "Probably the same things you guys do."

Broadenly tersely said; "I doubt that," and the two pulled Mark up and pushed him back to their car, putting him in the back seat and drove away.

They went over the decaying metal Pulaski Skyway. Mark knew he was going out of town and was headed for Newark. He hadn't been there in some time, but in the dark it looked the way he remembered; abandoned factories and warehouses, interspersed with square two story houses, ten feet apart, originally built for the workers, but now home to sullen non-workers, who eyed the car as it passed. Jerry said; "We ought to drop you right here and let the natives have some fun."

Mark wasn't particularly scared by the thought, as he thought he might have a better chance with the "natives" than with his two captors. He said; "Okay," to dead silence. He chose to try to take the initiative and said; "Who the hell are you and where are you taking me?"

Jerry said; "We're your best friends and you're going to your very own private room."

The car made a left onto Inaugural Road, now home to deserted paint factories. They parked in the cracked asphalt driveway of one and led him inside, where the huge empty vats were ensconced fifty feet above the concrete floor, not quite

wanting to reach the hundred foot ceiling, but appeared more inclined to fall to the floor. Mark prayed that it wouldn't happen to be this instant.

He was pushed through a door in the rear, probably once the station of the manager and they turned on the overhead fluorescent lights. He was, less than cordially, offered a seat on a couch against the furthest wall, shoving him on his back and attaching cuffs to both legs which they fixed to one couch arm. They re-arranged his handcuff situation to approximate his leg predicament.

As Mark nervously watched from his splayed prone position, Broadenly took a small plastic capped bottle from his white shirt pocket, poured five white pills into his hand and said; "Open wide."

Mark resisted the order instinctively, so Jerry held his nose with one hand and shoved two fingers from the other into Mark's mouth and Broadenly fed him the tablets, forcing him to swallow as one would medicate a dog, with hands over its nose and mouth. The two left the room, saying; "Don't go anywhere, we'll be right back."

Mark looked around the room as much as he could, not taking note of anything in particular, but feeling the squalor, as it seemed to permeate his bones. As the feeling increased, Mark remembered its source from a few years back -- acid, LSD to some

and he also recalled advice he had gotten on its ingestion; "Be somewhere you feel comfortable." He seemed to enjoy breaking rules, but the ones of his own choice. He started to freak out, thinking what could he do if they just left him here; die of dehydration or hunger? Who would ever find him in time -- nobody, until the dogs smelled death. Who were these people anyway? What did they want from him? Was it possible to supply it, even if he wanted to? Very deep life-threatening shit.

The two suited men re-entered the room and Mark's mood immediately changed when he saw them. Their faces appeared to him as those of children; children who were reviled nerds, now dressed in snappy business suits, convinced they were now conveying status and power, but still very shaky at their presumed hidden core. He thought that their childhood demise would certainly lead them to seek the highest possible power as adults. They probably worked for the federal government and consistent with all his other merged perceptions, they were quite amusing.

Broadenly said; "Asshole is smiling."

Mark said; "No, the assholes aren't smiling," and laughed. "You're feds, right?" He could tell by the lifeless looks on their faces that he was right. The thought occurred to him; "Two lifeless children. Reminds me of the year everyone was into black humor and told truckloads of dead babies jokes,

unloading them with pitchforks." He started laughing again as he watched the hurt children's faces, now intent on hurting everyone else. His merriment became contained when Broadenly slapped his face twice with the back of his hand, reminding him that as ridiculous as they were, they still had the power and that it was wise to at least appear co-operative.

Jerry said; "What were you doing at the warehouse?"

Mark replied; "Taking pictures."

Jerry said; "We know that. We have the camera, if you've forgotten."

Mark said nothing, so Broadenly angrily slapped him again and said; "Well?"

Mark said; "Well, what? I didn't hear a question."

Broadenly said; "Why were you taking pictures?"

Mark couldn't help himself and said; "I was interested in the subject matter." But before anyone could smack him again, added; "I shouldn't be telling you this, but I'm a private eye and I've been engaged to trail a couple who go to the warehouse."

"By who and why?" said Jerry.

Mark said; "I'd really be violating a confidence to say who, but I can say that it's a mother who thinks her daughter is screwing around with the blond guy who cuts his hair with a lawnmower." He couldn't help but again laugh at his own

commentary, but he noticed the looks of consternation on the face of his oppressors.

Jerry finally said; "Where's your ID?"

Mark said; "In my wallet. Which I always manage to leave in my office." He almost added; "with my gun," but thought that volunteering uncalled-for information served no purpose.

Jerry said; "Give us your name."

Mark said; "Mark Cinchapport," and they again left the room.

Broadenly said; "He's talking about Callie Majors and Shari Roe."

Jerry said; "Yeah. Fucking Callie can't keep his dick in his pants. And with all the fucking girls he has around the place, he has to go get popular elsewhere."

Broadenly said; "The damn thing is that everybody has faults. Callie is good at everything else."

Jerry said; "Now he's good at drawing unwanted attention."

Broadenly took a deep sigh and said; "So what do you think we should do?"

Jerry said; "I don't know. I'm gonna go to the car and check out this Cinchapport."

Broadenly stood in place, looking for some idea.

Jerry returned and said; "Checks out. Been in business about four years. No police record. Never involved in anything important."

Mark was feeling somewhat better, but the cuffs still bothered him. He thought, "What if bats flew out of one of the closets and decided to feast on me! What if hungry stray dogs found me! Where are my federal protectors?"

His last question was answered as the duo again entered the room. Jerry took over and said; "Okay, you're a private eye with a clean record. I'm going to give you the benefit of the doubt. But, if I find you around the Hook Road warehouse again, I'll kill ya. Just like we did today, we'll take you somewhere and next time, you won't come back."

Mark heard that as a reprieve and said; "I've only got a tiny, tiny problem with that."

Broadenly said; "Do you understand kill. It's like dead, deceased, gone, you're a corpse."

Mark said; "I'm not going to go there. I'm just looking for some help with my problem. I've been struggling along for years and I finally don't have to worry about money for a month, or so. It's because of this one freak lady who wants a picture of her daughter and the blond guy."

Jerry said; "I'll get them for you. I know where your office is and I'll find you. Okay?"

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Mark said; "Yeah, great," at the same time realizing that it was an easy thing not to do, but preferred to appear cooperative, at the very least, as maybe a miracle would happen and they'd deliver. He added; "She wants to see penetration, you know what I mean."

Jerry sarcastically said; "Any particular part?"

Mark said; "No, she didn't specify. Maybe I should check with her?"

Jerry said; "You do that. In the meantime, I'll get what I can."

Broadenly took Jerry by the arm and led him out of the room, saying; "Conference time."

After he closed the door behind them Broadenly told his partner; "What the fuck is wrong with you? We're the Feds; we don't do anything for anybody, especially while a Republican is in the White House."

Jerry said; "Relax. We've only got two options; one is to kill him. He doesn't seem too bright and that might get us unwanted attention. I'm not going to go the least bit out of my way to get any goddamn pictures. I'll ask a couple of the photo freaks if they've got anything. No big shit."

Broadenly didn't feel comfortable with appearing helpful and reasonable, but didn't want to say that and didn't know what to substitute, so he appeared quiet and deferential. They went



back inside and Jerry unlocked Mark's cuffs. When he tried to stand up, Mark noticed that it was far from easy, finding a steady balance after three small steps. He said; "Good shit, man."

Jerry said; "All right, good man. We're going to take you back to your car. Be careful driving. If they catch you under the influence of LSD, it's classified a class 1 narcotic and carries a stiff penalty."

They got back to Mark's red Corvair, let him out and Jerry said; "Hey, Mark; I'm very serious; don't get near the warehouse again."

Mark said; "Okay," intending to keep his promise. He would have to pursue the photos elsewhere. There must be other places they go. He drove to his apartment without any problem. He knew the drug wouldn't wear off for another few hours, so he wanted to be amused and turned on the television. He got a news show. The pert lady card-reader with beauty parlor hair informed him, with only two minor stumbles, that the Senate is still considering the formation of a panel to investigate reports that the U.S. Army is paying \$10,000 apiece for toilet bowls shipped to Viet Nam by a number of private contractors. The matter remains unresolved as Senators debate who would be most qualified for the five seat commission and that it seems that they all say that they are. Ms. Beauty Parlor was amused,

hopefully at the Senate's area of expertise. She added that the Pentagon announced that we were still making progress in the war today with 28,343 enemy dead and only 742 Americans.

At 694 Liberty Lane, Connie was deciding if she wanted to wear a dress or not, as she sat on the sofa comfortably letting Warren do his thing. She considered it exciting to drive and arrive wearing very informal attire. This evening she would be meeting three men she didn't know. They were associates of Benito's who knew her only as "his slave," and he would not be present. She decided that a simple dress was in order, started breathing heavily and faked. Warren could tell, but Connie reached down with her left hand and said; "Let me take care of you, baby." They reversed positions and Warren was soon pleased. Connie got up and said; "Got to go, now."

"What are you up to tonight?"

"Three strangers." She slipped a simple red and white summer dress over her head, took her bag and left.

Arriving at the "Thunderbird Motel", she saw three guys standing in front of open door number 111 and parked in front of them. She got out of the car and looked straight at the three now quiet gentlemen. They really resembled each other in that they were all middle-aged business types, wearing suits and

displaying deep wrinkles around the mouth, from a lifetime of forced smiles and laughs. One said; "Connie?"

She growled; "Yeah."

"Slave Connie?"

"Double yeah." She scooted past them and went into the bathroom, saying; "One minute." She pulled the dress over her head, went into her pocketbook, retrieved some toys and put them in their most useful places. She exited to find the door shut, blinds open and three guys sitting on chairs very red. She slithered and danced over to one with her eyes on the prize. She did that a short time and then engaged the other two, not wanting them to feel ignored. She proceeded to spend the next hour pleasantly, to periodic calls of encouragement and questions about her degree of enjoyment, finally being rewarded with a six pack. She thought; "The sacred meets the profane."

When the men left, one took her dress with him, saying; "Benito told me that you really love being natural." The trio smiled and left. She wasn't entirely satisfied with the brief, perfunctory performance and looked at herself in the bathroom mirror, thinking of all the possibilities, knowing that the three were having the same thoughts, but were probably incapable of putting them into action. She went out the door, but felt that cool night breeze under the artificial lights and decided to drive, letting the room door shut behind her.

She turned the key, but the damn thing only replied with "Ummgh," then silence. She tried a few times and got the same response with a slightly shorter version of "Ummgh" each attempt. She thought; "What am I gonna do now?" and sat there a few minutes. After experiencing a few giggles from couples coming and going from other rooms, she decided to walk to the office and get a "jump." She walked slowly and confidently, imagining herself under surveillance and entered the quiet office to see a young black man standing behind the desk. He smiled when he saw her get pantingly excited at the new possible flavor of the evening. Pure merriment on both parts. She cleared her throat, swallowed and told him her predicament.

He told her that he was getting off duty soon and that his friend was coming by to give him a ride home and that they could jump her battery.

She thanked him and showed her appreciation. In a few minutes a red four door souped-up Dodge parked in front of the office. The occupants were Sonny, Dorette and Corrine, who all entered the office. When she heard the door, Connie looked up as Sonny said; "Beautiful, Russ. I guess you're not quite ready to leave." He turned back toward the door and Connie said; "Please stay. I need lots of company tonight."

Sonny stopped and smiled. Dorette said; "You into big chocolate?"

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Connie smiled and Dorette removed her shoes, saying; "Show me, slave." The group had just stopped at a fast food place and Connie enjoyed countless flavor nuances from their package. She thought; "The sacred and the profane are the same thing."

Russ saw his replacement park near the office and said; "Number 111 is paid for all night. Let's all go over there." Connie stood up and two men took her by the hand, slowly out the door and the five mosied over there, in view of a number of curious eyes. When they entered, Sonny said; "You girls have some fun first. Russ and I are going to jump her car. Sonny and Russ watched through the window as they took care of Connie's problem.

They re-entered, Sonny resuming his front door predilection. Connie kept getting orders from each of the four and happily did her best to do what was demanded of her, as it was their package she was enjoying. She wished Warren was at the window leering.

After everyone was tired, Sonny, Russ, Dorette and Corrine left. Russ grabbed his drumstick and said; "Whenever you want any more, you know where I am." Connie played solitaire on the floor. After ten minutes, she went to the car and drove home, very, very anxious to see Warren.

He was wearing a robe and was famished, waiting in the kitchen. She coyly said; "Don't tell me you're hungry. You're

not even properly dressed for dinner." As he got the proper attire, she heated up some eggs and bacon. When ready, she pulled him upstairs as he sniffed at the aromatic meal. She sat in a plushy chair while he slowly savored the full plate, listening to her recent adventures.

The two girls were near their slightly cracked doors and watched the hallway parade; Shari thinking; "You go, girl." and Candy opining; "My God." Both wanted to further investigate their quick judgments at the keyhole, but they exited their rooms simultaneously and, seeing each other, they made bizarre faces and went back inside.

## CHAPTER 6

Mark woke up feeling very well, an hour after sunrise as the television blared further Viet Nam news, authored by the Pentagon and portentously read by one of the award winning newsmen. Mark thought that he well deserved his honors for his abilities to seem so concerned, but mostly for his way of coming up with a questioning departure from his printed cards, that to many would seem hard hitting journalism, but actually were questions supplied him by the powers that be, which they could very easily answer.

He gazed out his one window at a perfectly clear blue sky, nothing obstructing the sun from radiating its warmth. Perhaps due to last night's acid trip, he felt vital, young, aggressive and hip, so he decided to put on his light green denim bellbottoms, white Santana T-shirt, red kerchief and walk the few blocks to his office and enjoy the warm spring morning.

Vicky was already there when he arrived, bent over her desk, apparently trying to reach something that was on the other side. Mark used the opportunity to plant a big kiss. She flinched and Mark continued through his open door, motioning her to come with him and saying; "Bring those buns in here. I'm dying for a big breakfast."

Before he could finish, there was a gentle single knock on the door and Warren let himself in, saying; "A man after my own heart." Mark got up and looked at the intruder, mildly annoyed that the great morning was cut short, but glad to see a man with similar taste, hopefully with money. Vicky got up from the chair, adjusted her skirt, walked out and said; "How would you like it if I walked in on you and your wife?"

Warren looked her up and down, blew her a little kiss and said; "Promise?"

Vicky shook her head, looked at the ceiling and replied, "All you white people freaks?" She didn't wait for a reply and quickly added; "To be continued when Mr. Rude leaves."

Warren said; "Not Rude. I'm Warren Roe. I got your name out of the phone book and I think I can use your services."

Mark thought; "Roe, it couldn't be. I hope he's not mad about me and Connie." He proceeded cautiously, saying; "What service is that?"

Surveillance. My wife Connie is screwing around and I want to get photos."

Mark wondered if this was a coincidence, or if some other game was being played on him. So he decided to look for as much money as he could get and ask a lot of questions. If Roe didn't like it, his departure wouldn't result in tears. Mark said; "I'm really pretty busy right now."



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"Yes, I saw. I'll pay your top posted \$20 an hour rate and provide a meaningful bonus."

"Meaningful?"

"Five hundred dollars, half up front. Let's say three eight hour days; that's \$480 plus \$250. That's \$730." He reached for the wallet in his back pocket and Mark said; "Whoa, whoa, wait a minute." He was having a mini-moral crisis. He couldn't pinpoint where, but the whole thing seemed as if there was a conflict of interest hidden somewhere. He sat down at his desk, picked up a pen and said; "You say your name is.....?"

"Warren Roe. My address is 694 Liberty Lane, Jersey City."

"Phone?"

"No phone. I'll contact you."

Mark thought; "Oh, another one," but said; "Great. Next time wait until somebody says 'Come in.'"

"Sorry."

"Do you have any photos of your wife?"

Warren laughed; "Not enough," and pulled one from his wallet and flipped it onto Mark's desk. It was a smiling fully clothed Connie, standing next to her light blue Camaro.

Mark asked; "Is this recent?"

"Five or six months."

"And this is her car?"

"Yes."

"Do you have any idea who's the guy and where she meets him?"

Warren pondered and decided to be up front, saying; "There are many and she meets them in different locations."

"You say that as if you're sure of it."

"I am."

"How's that?"

"She tells me."

Mark didn't know what to say next and looked at Warren's sincere eyes and finally said; "Well, if you already know, why do you want the photos?"

"I get off on them." Silence. Warren then added; "The whole thing is quite alright with me, but Connie keeps telling me that she's going to bring back pictures and never does." Silence. "I've already seen that you're a man of the world. So am I. Are you going to have the audacity to be some kind of judge?"

Mark considered his point and the \$730 two feet away, smiled and said; "Sorry. I forgot that it's 1972 and that anything goes..... And it's about time."

Warren said; "My sentiments, precisely." He took \$730 from his wallet, dropped it on the desk, shook Mark's hand and left, saying; "I'll contact you in a few days."

Mark quickly put the money in his pocket, hoping it was out too briefly for Santo to get a whiff and sat there very contentedly, finally a financial success.

He went to the vestibule and saw Vicky with her arms folded against her chest, with a scowl on her face, looking straight ahead and not at him. He tip-toed over to her and touched her ear. She flinched and turned to him.

Mark said; "I'm sorry. You know it wasn't my fault. Come on, I'm ready whenever you are."

Vicky said; "I'm not into any five minute deals, you know."

"Oh, please, baby. You know I'm extremely slow."

Vicky pointed at the chair she occupied and said; "Right here. I'm not moving." Mark got under the desk to investigate, realizing that the door was not locked, but didn't want to break the mood and thought it would be amusing if they were seen twice in one day.

Near noon, Mark walked back to his apartment, enjoying the sunny warm day and watching people, guessing at who they were and what they were doing. No interesting thoughts came to mind, as everyone seemed to be hurrying somewhere and didn't make any eye contact with him, strongly suggesting that their current lives were about business and being late for a very important date.

He entered his apartment, made a sandwich, sat, looked out the window and thought about how he should proceed with his two jobs. It was obvious that he should again scout Liberty Lane, but looking for who? Various thoughts rolled around his head, none conclusive, so he settled in on following whichever of the two women left the house first.

Still too early to occupy Liberty Lane, he walked slowly back to his office. Who knows? He'd been lucky lately and maybe someone would be there with more money.

Vicky had gone somewhere, so he went into his office to find a young girl with her black hair pulled back into a bun, sitting on his desk, her dark blue mini-dress hiding none of her attributes. Mark's eyes riveted on the talented black patch. She picked up one leg and said; "I'm Shari Roe. My mother told me all about you."

He was in a silly mood and had recently discovered that a roe was a fish egg, so he said; "Are you a little fishy?"

She said; "I don't know. I can't get my nose down there. You're going to have to tell me."

His mind raced. He didn't want to again be interrupted and certainly not by Warren, no matter how open minded he seemed to be, so he locked the door, pulled the shade and proceeded to do his work of choice; prolonged, painstaking investigation.

Shari said; "I need a regular."

He said; "So let's do it," envisioning some off the beaten path relationship, maybe like Warren and Connie's though he didn't know exactly what that was.

Shari said, "What's your home address?"

"990 Headwaters Road, Apartment 3."

After fifteen minutes he heard the door rattle and Vicky said; "Let me in." Mark looked up at Shari and she nodded. He said; "You're beautiful," and opened the door.

Vicky walked in, smiled, put her hands on her hips and said; "It's such a great day. Can I join the merriment?"

Mark looked at Shari, who said; "Yeah, I think this sucker never gets enough."

Vicky sat in Mark's chair and adjusted her skirt while Mark again locked the door and spent the afternoon split between the front of his desk and the rolling chair. After a while, he recalled the possibility of Warren coming back and he didn't want to tell Shari about his business with her father, but told her; "If someone else also comes to that door, get under the desk."

Shari said; "No way. That's your job."

After a pleasant undisturbed afternoon, Mark again walked back to his apartment where his two cars were parked. Needing a trip to the bathroom, he climbed the stairs, opened the studio door and saw Allison sitting on the couch crying. He was

surprised, not having seen her in months and somewhat relieved, as at least she was one of the more orderly people in his life.

He said; "Allison, what's wrong?"

She said; "I got fired from my fucking job."

He sat next to her on the couch and took her hand.

She pulled it away, saying; "Don't touch me, you fuck."

Her long blond hair, parted in the middle, flew in her face and she brushed it back, at the same time somewhat stifling her tears. Her light blue button up blouse almost matched the color of her faded jeans.

Mark remembered this as being her typical casual outfit and always wondered if it was a reflection of her eyes. He missed her terribly, but had given up hope of seeing his 26 year old long-term, on again off again, girlfriend after the fourth major breakup.

He pulled back and softly said; "Okay..... Need a place to stay?"

She angrily said; "Yeah."

They sat silently in the dimly lit sanctuary, both remembering prior times spent there, temporarily forgetting the turbulent ones. When she seemed composed, he said; "Are you with anyone now?"

She said; "Sort of, not really. How about you?"

"Sort of, not really." Another lull ensued, both looking at the floor. He recalled that they had already been through all the words, so he blurted out; "Not really is the better answer. I can't get serious about anyone after you."

She didn't want this conversation and angrily looked at him and tersely said; "But, you still get serious about every fuppelt you can get your nasty eyes on."

He wasn't sure if it was better to shut up at the moment, but decided to push things, saying; "I'd rather it was yours."

"Yeah, mine and everyone else's."

"I'm ready to stop all that."

She shook her head and said; "How many times have I heard that? Besides, who said I was interested?"

His feelings were hurt, but he also thought that there must be some reason she came to his apartment in a time of crisis. He felt tired of everything, now that he saw her again. He didn't want to pursue any "logical" argument as experience had shown him that they only produce circles, soon back where they started. Instead, he got up and walked to the refrigerator, saying; "Watch me. As long as you're here, I'm a member of the clergy everywhere else. Can I get you something to eat or drink?"

When he saw the look she gave him, he added; "I've got TV dinners, sandwiches, ice tea..... and not much more." He laughed and she made a little smile.

"Not right now." She got up and turned on the television. It coldly said; "27,156 Viet Cong dead, 3,526 captured. 1,525 Americans dead, most because of the new offensive....." She turned the channels, saying; "How many years are we going to be listening to this bullshit?" Mark just shook his head, as she found a station playing old movies. She caught the beginning of *"To Have and Have Not,"* with Bogart and Bacall. She re-seated herself in the center of the couch. He took his place close to her right and they stared at the screen as the one window showed the day's brilliant sun prepare for a rest.

After fifteen minutes he put his left hand on top of the right she had on her thigh. When she didn't offer any resistance, keeping her eyes on the screen, he decided that he would stay here and pursue someone else's sordid pictures tomorrow.

On the other side of town, the Hook Harbor Road warehouse show was about to start. About 200 cars jammed the parking area and about six hundred eager patrons sat on folding metal chairs, 90% male. Among the female contingent was Connie with Benito and Shari with Callie. The curtain remained down on the



improvised stage, when "Jimmy" Park, the Viet Nameese host, climbed up and said; "Good evening, ladies and gentlemen. We have something a little different and special for you tonight and we hope you enjoy it....." When he saw some looks of consternation, perhaps those preferring the same old thing, he wanted to assuage them and added; "As usual, no one is permitted on stage and after the show, the girls will be available as slaves at the usual rates." He departed and the curtain slowly rose. A white American woman of about forty was sitting in a grand red 1880 Turkish Frame winged armchair. Her curly black hair matched the chair's thick fringe. Her 5'5", 160 pound body was covered only with a black push up brassiere and a tight black waist corset attached to and holding up fishnet stockings. She reached behind her and clasped a red, white and blue leather whip and caressed her body with the handle.

Thirty slim Viet Nameese girls writhed onto the stage wearing only hand and foot shackles, each supporting three small US Flags on seven inch stems. They clustered around the great one in the chair, anxious to please. The woman stood and used her whip on them as she walked, followed by the crawling thirty to X-frames nailed to the wall, where she attached each one with four chains, leaving them with a last loving crack of the whip.

She sat back on her throne, while thirty nude dark Viet Nameese boys all desirous of showing homage, marched out and

bowed to her. They pushed each other, attempting to get a better location, as she laughed and made use of her whip. As Connie watched them swaying, she grabbed Benito's arm and said; "You've got to get me in that show."

Benito pulled his arm away and said; "Well, then get the fucking statutory rape pictures."

Connie said; "I'm trying," as she put her hand on his lap and said; 'Can I, right here?"

The men seated nearby looked her way and smiled a "Yes," holding onto their horses. She became the center of attention as people re-arranged their chairs to give her room. The Feds got to know all of Connie's aspects, though she would never be able to identify their faces. On the other side of the auditorium Shari saw the commotion and said to Callie; "My mom taught me well and I think I can do better than that."

Callie motioned to his adjoining compatriots, who moved their chairs, making room. She did her best to show that she was number one. A number of other women in the room got a desire to be sociable and followed suit.

On stage, the white woman gave a command to her groveling black slaves. Remaining seated, she said; "Enough. Go over to the girls."

Half of the flags were protruding from heavy, well watered grass and half were in fields lacking vegetation. The men

looked briefly for their favorite and did as they were told, as the girls bumped and grinded to the much desired attention, heads lowered with their lustful eyes fixed on the prize.

The commandant called out "Switch," and the men scurried around to find their second favorite choice. Later she would again say; "Switch" a few more times, prolonging the action.

The White Queen got up from her chair and said; "Stop." She walked slowly over to the girls and one by one removed them from their frames, allowing each to pay homage to her. She then re-chained each of the girls' legs, this time to the floor; their arms pulled over their heads and attached to the bolts in the wall, leaving them on eye level with their prizes.

She then said; "Remove the top flag and replace it." The men roughly did as they were told as the ladies struggled to get the firmest grip possible. The men were content to watch them in their endeavors, while Whitey again called out "Switch."

Various configurations and permutations were demanded by Miss, Mrs., or Ms. America. When she was out of ideas, she said; "There are prizes for the first three." The men universally seemed to comply, but each wanted to finish last. Each knew that the queen wouldn't be able to tell and did their best to prolong the ordeal. The girls liked this game and were trying to do the same thing.

The audience had broken down into groups, each with a favorite woman interested in exercising her specialty and the men's eyes diverted between local excitement and foreign affairs.

The curtain came down and "Jimmy" Park came back out and announced; "Show's over. The girls will be waiting for visitors, as always." He laughed, prior to adding; "Group rates are available."

Mark and Allison watched a series of movies, their conversation centering around judgmental commentaries concerning what they saw on the screen. They had seen them before, some while together and their stated predilections often carried secondary and tertiary meanings that communicated something to the other, without carrying the argument potential of a direct statement. They both claimed as their favorite line one near the end of "*King Kong*," when the promoter, in view of Kong's inert body on the concrete below the Empire State Building, says; "Oh no, it wasn't the airplanes. It was the beauty that killed the beast."

**Family Practice**

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When they tired, Mark shut the television and gave Allison some covers and tucked her in on the couch. He piled up some blankets and slept on the floor, more contented than he remembered being for some time.

## CHAPTER 7

Connie woke up late the next morning, still feeling tremors from the previous evening's experience. She looked out the open window and saw that the haze had returned, increasing the humidity and graying the sky. The filtered sun would take a few hours to burn its way through its distractions.

She was initially surprised to be in bed alone and felt unfortunate that she didn't have Warren available in her current state of arousal. Then she remembered that this was his big day and that he had probably gotten up early, too excited to drowse with her. Warren entered the room, still a bit wet from his shower, carrying a tray holding coffee, juice and scrambled eggs. He extended its legs and place the tray over her stomach and said; "Breakfast for my queen." She caressed his face and said; "Thanks, honey." He watched her eat, only interrupting once to say; "Any pictures?"

She mumbled a full mouthed "Sorry" and waved the fork she held in her left hand.

He showed mild disappointment, but that was getting to be the expected answer and he was too excited about today to throw any damper on it. He said; "Maybe you can tell me all about it sometime."

She said; "Maybe," still mumbling, swallowed and added; "It was really interesting and different. There were a few shows going on at the same time and I wouldn't do it justice to breeze through it now."

She put another fork-load of scrambled eggs into her mouth and tongued them. She liked mashing her meal this way as opposed to chewing, as it seemed to enhance the flavor. Warren stood still and watched. She mumbled; "Picture me at a barbecue in the middle of three hundred people."

His visualization was obviously a very pleasant one and he continued to stand there motionlessly, as he patiently watched her finish breakfast. He took the tray away and returned quickly, seeing that his bride was out of bed, naked, luscious and hair wild. He walked to her with his eyes beaming at his favorite seat.

Connie perceived Warren's eagerness for his monthly dalliance, as he stood anxiously before her. His medium length gray hair was messy, he was freshly shaved and his purple-heart tattoo was very noticeable. She said; "Thank me properly, slave." He started at the floor and worked his way skyward.

She pulled him across the room to a walk in closet and said; "Wait here," and closed him inside. He shared the floor with some of Connie's personal things.

The doorbell rang and rang, as Connie greeted each guest and got them a glass of champagne from the adjoining kitchen. They each took one of the plushy chairs, arranged in a circle for the day's festivities. They were a bit stiff and proper until the second glass, then started joking and getting comfortable.

Millie and Leticia were two middle aged black sisters, Millie very sizable and dark, but nicely proportioned and Leticia was thin and light skinned. Kathy was an Italian, olive skinned, twenty five year old beauty with long black hair. Sadie was a plain, somewhat portly white woman of about fifty, with short dark curly hair and very white skin. Goldie was a thirty year old, pert and chatty, recently divorced and average sized white woman. And new to the group was Muriel, a tanned thin white woman of about fifty, also recently divorced and angry about it.

Connie detected that the group was now comfortable, as the jocularity and impatience increased, the ladies freely scratching body parts not showered for two days, under Connie's instruction, as an inducement to Warren.

She asked; "Ready for the slave?" Connie walked to the closet and opened the door. Warren crawled out and the women quietly stared as he was led into the circle and Connie said; "Greet everyone, properly." He first went to Millie. The



process was repeated with each of the regulars and finally, Muriel, who quickly picked up the routine, but couldn't help giggling and said; "It tickles." She put her hands between her legs, looked at smiling Connie and said; "I can't hold the champagne any longer."

Connie said; "Warren. You heard the lady."

When Muriel was through, Warren looked at the window and saw that a few raindrops remained. He said; "Please let me clean it," and she obliged him. The six other ladies were in the identical situation as Muriel and Warren temporarily became a specialist.

As the circle got back in order, Connie said; "Dance." Warren was embarrassed, but also very excited, as he did the boogaloo. Connie said; "Stop." She held forward her glass and said; "Get me another, slave." Warren took the glass, went to the kitchen, refilled it, returned, handed it to her and said; "Thank you for the honor of allowing me to serve you." He looked at the seat of the chair and said; "May I have a treat?" Connie allowed the privilege. She announced to the group; "This is his favorite thing. Make him work for it."

For three hours Warren happily serviced anyone any way they desired. When the party was over, Connie saw that Warren was actually trembling, took mercy on him and gave him a hand.

As the prize for the new club member, Muriel, she took him to her car and brought him to her apartment, where she ordered him around the rest of the day and early evening. He spent extended time at the foot of her bed. Muriel appreciated the prolonged effort and told him; "You can handle yourself, but don't stop what you're doing." She finally fell asleep and allowed him to use her pillow. He liked the texture and aroma so much, he hardly slept. Connie found him there the next morning, took him home and provided the ecstatic slave with another pillow.

She listened to soft music as Warren had his favorite breakfast, when a news flash interrupted a song with; "US news service reports of a South Viet Nameese village burned to the ground by U.S. forces. Thirteen hundred charred bodies that seem to have been bound have been located. The Pentagon denies any knowledge....."

She moved her leg and gently pushed his head away, saying; "Sorry, baby. Some things just kill the mood."

Mark woke up on the floor, the sounds of him and the floor creaking caused Allison to start moving around with her eyes still half shut. She pulled one of the covers over her head and put her head back on the pillow.

Mark smiled visibly as he watched her. He saw that the morning wasn't as bright as the prior day, but in his mind, he thought that today the sun merely got a slow start and would soon equal yesterday's brilliance. He slowly came around, got up, went to the kitchen and made coffee and breakfast for the two of them.

He put it on the floor next to the couch, rubbed Allison's belly and pulled her hands. She resisted, turned on her back and mumbled; "Rrrrrr." He massaged her neck and upper back, saying; "Come on. It's a great day passing you by and your breakfast is getting cold."

She squirmed and her bleary-eyed head popped up and he handed her the coffee, drinking some from his own cup. She looked at it and aid; "It's black. You know I like milk and sugar."

He took the cup back and said; "Sorry, I forgot." He went back to the kitchen and mixed in the desired ingredients and brought it back to her. She already had a plate in her lap and was sampling the bacon, sausage and eggs. She still had a bit of a mouthful when she slurred; "This is good." He put her coffee on the floor and joined in, munching and drinking his own, while he watched her slowly rouse.

The momentarily, victorious sun, streamed in the open window, highlighting their area like a spotlight. She said; "Let's just play games today and forget about everything else."

With a mouthful of eggs he murmured; "Sure, you got any ideas?"

"Yeah. Do you still have those old outfits I bought when you first started being a private eye?"

"Sure, but I haven't touched them in years."

"Go get 'em."

He went to the closet and in the far left corner, he saw the rumpled outfits, took them out and carried them to her. She was very happy to see them again and said; "Great. Go put yours on."

He went to the bathroom and followed instructions. He watched himself in the mirror, as he donned the bulky 1940's dark pinstriped suit, white shirt and sloppy black tie. He particularly liked the dark brown wide-brimmed hat and spent quite some time adjusting it, trying different angle and brim positions, finally settling on a slight cock to the left, with the front brim in a downward position. He noticed a lump in his pants pocket, reached in and retrieved the black plastic luger pistol he had forgotten, filled it with water and returned it to its place. He started to leave, but got an idea that he thought might be funny. He turned the brim entirely down and put it

back on his head. The mirror said that it was indeed funny, but in a stupid way. Mark thought that it was much too early in their re-kindling for him to try anything retarded yet, so he switched back to the previous setting.

She smiled when she saw him and feeling a bit silly himself, he sheepishly smiled back. She carried her outfit to the bathroom. The deep pink vamp dress with a light yellow furry fringe covered her otherwise naked body. She eyed herself in the mirror and decided to open the top three and bottom three large red buttons. She put on the dark opaque stockings, held up by black garters and slipped on the stiletto high heels. She again consulted the mirror, looking at herself from every angle the two by three frame would allow and combed her long blond hair back and tied it in a pony-tail with a rubber band. She slowly exited seeing Mark sitting on the couch facing the other direction.

She said; "I need a private dick. Are you up to the job?"

Mark turned, grinned at her and while fixing on the bottom three open buttons answered; "I'd definitely like to try. I don't have anything better to do."

Allison walked over and sat on the couch arm facing him, slightly off balance, her white thighs a foot from his face. He was transfixed and perused the area for blemishes. Finding

none, he said, mock questioningly; "What on earth would you like me to do?"

She slurred her speech to sound street-wise, replying; "I've got a long term problem. Some man is following me around and I think he wants to kill me."

Mark adopted the same cadence and said; "Look, doll, how do I know that it's not you trying to kill him and getting a chump to do it for you?"

She adjusted her legs, giving him a different view and said; "Don't you trust me, honey lover?"

He controlled himself and replied; "I need some proof."

Not thinking of any verbal reply, she decided that the time for talking was over and retrieved a red plastic derringer water pistol from her unbuttoned top and squirted him in the face a few times. He pulled out his luger and squirted her back. The jumped around the room, at times standing, at times ducking and at times crawling, keeping the liquid barrage going as long as the water lasted. Apparently neither was wounded from the battle, but both were soaking wet. She knocked off his hat and he gently tackled her.

They didn't put on the television or radio and spent the rest of the sun filled day playing roles from 1940's noir detective movies, sometimes improvising a role they didn't fully

recall or didn't originally like and at times inventing ones they had never seen.

Warren spent the rest of the morning trying to get Connie back in the mood, a role he didn't play often, consequently resulting in a stiff performance. As she went about her housekeeping grind, he helped and tried to get her laughing, with minimal success. They both had slipped on white robes, while they did the neglected chores, both noticing that they must have looked like a couple of pure believers, ready to present themselves to their maker. They consciously wanted to forget the horrendous thought of burned corpses and by lunch time managed to take turns sitting, while the other satisfied their appetite.

By early evening she felt so well; that she unexpectedly drove to Benito's Toyota dealership and found him in his small office alone. When he looked up she pulled her light blue dress over her head, revealing a message. It got his interest and she did whatever she knew how to make the evening last, resulting in her being parched before she claimed her drink.

Candy remained in her room looking forward to her next date with Callie, thinking happy thoughts about sunny California, while Shari roamed the neighborhood looking for new friends.



## CHAPTER 8

After a good night's sleep, Mark and Allison woke up on blankets piled on the floor, him leaning against her with his right arm around her waist. They stayed like that for fifteen minutes enjoying the warmth provided by the other. Their outfits were in piles on the floor, as they both silently chose that the role they most wanted to play today was their true selves.

She said; "You know I love you, don't you?"

He replied; "I know I love you, but I'm not so sure about you."

She playfully rolled back toward him and half-heartedly tried to smack his face with the back of her hand. They laughed and wrestled for a few minutes in the strong sun rays, beaming through the window, like a big laser. Mark broke from the match, got up and said; "You're getting me tired already. I'm going to get us some breakfast. I'm famished."

"So am I." While Mark bumped his way around the kitchen, Allison looked at the clear sky and had a melancholy thought; "Why weren't things like this before?" She thought of many possible answers, all probably wrong or half-truths at best and decided that it didn't matter anyway. What they had was "now," and all they could do was make the best of that.

This morning her "breakfast on the floor" consisted of coffee, with milk and sugar and piles of French toast. He joined her face to face on the cushioned ground and they slowly fed each other.

When they finished Mark said; "I really should go to work tonight."

"Why? Let's pretend that it's Sunday."

He paused, not wanting to offend her, but desirous of spending some time at work. He said; "Let's pretend that it is Sunday, but while you doze I'll go out about two hours. I've been paid well for the first time lately and I'd really like to keep the clients somewhat happy."

She didn't want to sound the least big argumentative and also recalled that one of the problems she had with Mark in the past was his lack of a regular income. Often her job paid the rent, both at the apartment and his office. Though he kept saying that things would change if he kept working hard, she found it wearing to continually see the fruit of her labors used to complement the barrenness of his and unbearable when she thought that he might be with someone else. She said; "I'll miss you, but that's a good responsible boy," and she kissed his cheek. They played and consumed half the contents of the refrigerator, telling each other stories that usually began with; "Do you remember when you....."

At dusk, Allison tried to make herself doze and prevailed at making Mark think so. She listened as he put on blue jeans and a simple deep green button up long sleeved shirt and left. As she watched him, she became wistful, as she knew he had to do his job, but he had such a knack for getting into trouble. She wished everything else would go away and that they could just stay there together.

Mark took the Corvair to Liberty Lane, but didn't have time to park as he spotted Candy walking alone in a form fitting red blouse and tight white knee length skirt, toward the Boulevard. Still having the benefit of some natural light and without any other cars driving on the street, she looked his way and remembered the nuisance, turning around to watch the car continue down the street.

Mark saw the glance, but his desire to finish the job and get back to Allison clouded his better judgment and he circled the block seeing Candy again look his way, as she let herself in the black Cadillac, before it drove away. Mark pursued from a distance, feeling comfortable that he knew the two possible destinations.

Inside the Cadillac, Candy turned to look out the back window and said; "It's that creep again."

Callie said; "What creep?" looking into the rearview mirror, seeing many cars on the busy road.

"This guy has been following me around. A few days ago I called the cops and they chased him."

Callie's first thought was that she had managed to attract an unwanted admirer and was probably making more of an issue of it that it deserved.

She looked back again and said; "That's him in that old red car."

He smiled and said; "Okay, let's see if we can lose him." He pushed down on the gas pedal and got the car up to sixty, weaving between others doing the thirty speed limit. When he lost sight of the red car, he made a right onto Monticello Road and pulled into a parking space 200 feet from the corner. He said; "Let's just sit here a while. If he comes anywhere near I'll take care of it," flexing the veiny biceps of his right arm, intending a non-humorous display of his capabilities, at the same time not really expecting to be required to do anything more.

Candy kept watch to the rear and felt both frightened and anxious to be alone with Callie. After a silent minute, she felt somewhat better and turned her eyes back to him to see that the patriotic geezer had hoisted the flag. Her eyes went to the waving welcome and she put her left hand over it, saying; "For Christ sake, we're right in front of houses."

"So?"

"So, people could be looking out their windows." She tried to push it back and clumsily toyed with the zipper. Fearing a painful disaster, Callie took over the operation himself. When completed he put his hand on her and said; "Candy, I've been waiting days for this. Come on."

"Me, too, but not here. We're liable to get arrested."

Callie looked softly in her eyes and said; "Little girl, this is 1972. You can do whatever you want now."

"I've been getting that idea for years from my mother and I think that's great, but I'm not into being watched by creeps."

Mark had lost sight of his prey and made an easy decision. Since he didn't want to go back to Hook Harbor Road, he drove to another famous local rendezvous spot; the notorious Thunderbird Motel. Since he was in the vicinity, anyway, he thought it wouldn't take much effort and that he might get lucky at the scene of a few of his former "surveillance" jobs. When he got there he didn't see any new Cadillac's in the lot, but rather cars more like his own. He decided to drive around the block a few times, to see if anything would turn up. The motel was an unusual structure for Jersey City, looking like it would be more at home in the low rent district of some shore town, far enough away from the Boardwalk that it would be necessary to drive and park to get there and with a view of some construction site or an improvised weedy garbage dump. The Jersey City Thunderbird

had a flat fifteen foot sign; a purple plastic replica of its shore predecessor revolving on a thirty foot pole at the entrance with circling lights saying "THUNDERBIRD", with a plain sign below that showed three black spaces and the word "VACANCY". If the situation ever arose, the currently empty spaces could be filled by flipping the blank card to the side that said "NO". It was a one story, flat roofed structure, approximately fifteen rooms, with the fronts dominated by brown metal doors and "picture" windows, the lit ones with the blinds drawn. The neon orange "OFFICE" sign hung above the first room of the "L" shaped structure which was comprised of 90% glass on both visible sides sitting on a small white stuccoes base. The attendant was currently occupied with a muscular black man a white armless T-shirt who seemed to be somewhat involved and angered with a mini-skirted white girl with long messy blond hair, her arms folded against her chest, one foot in front of the other, her tired eyes looking out at the street.

After his third excursion around the block, making note of the abundance of girls sitting on stoops or standing, bearing some resemblance to the blond in the office and cars full of guys honking and calling out things, he saw a 1972 black Cadillac parked in front of the Thunderbird office. Callie got out alone and took care of business with the young black male clerk and then drove the car to number 111. They both got out,

the lights went on and the blinds got pulled. Mark parked in the second row of cars facing away from the rooms, across from 111 and watched nothing in the rearview mirror.

Inside the room, as Callie embraced her from behind, Candy peered through a blind slat she pushed up with one finger. Even in the dimly lit lot she was sure and said; "It's that fucking creep again."

Callie took a look and saw the red Corvair with a curly haired man in the driver's seat and got annoyed, this time not at Candy. He took a pad left on the room's mirrored night table and the two inch dull pencil alongside and wrote down the license plate number. Pocketing the slip of paper, he moved toward Candy and put an arm around her waist. She recoiled, took a few steps back and said; "You've got to be kidding. All I can think about is that some pervert is out there watching me."

Callie again went in her direction, this time putting two arms around her waist and said; "He can't see us in here."

She again moved away and said; "I'm sorry. I just can't."

Callie tried to joke, saying; "All right then, let's really give him something worth watching."

She was incredulous at the "joke" and just looked at him with strongly questioning eyes.

He sensed that he had stepped over a line, sat down on the bed and said; "I was just kidding," though he was really excited at the idea of being watched with a young chick.

Candy turned on the television set and sat in a chair, seemingly entranced by the screen, but her mind still visualized the unwanted tail. Callie watched the tube, assuming that she was doing the same and looked for another entrée, but was greeted with the silly intensity of "*The Monkees*." He got up and said; "Do you mind if I change the channel?"

She put her hand nervously to her brow and said; "No."

He flipped through the channels, able to find the blustering optimism of "*The Jeffersons*," a "Mama" segment on "*The Carol Burnette Show*," an author discussing his recent release involving left wing politics, the happy family fantasy of "*The Brady Bunch*," a news show he quickly dismissed as a downer and a channel playing the Marx Brothers in "*A Day at the Races*." He went back to "*The Monkees*." He looked at Candy, who was fidgeting in her chair, looking at the door, the ceiling, the television and the harbor scene lithograph on the wall. He quickly concluded that things weren't likely to get anywhere tonight. To cut his losses, the best thing he could do was bring Candy back home and get his entertainment on Hook Harbor Road. He said; "No sense sitting here nervous. Let me get you back home."



She quickly nodded "Yes" twice and he put her in the passenger's seat and then walked over to the red Corvair.

Mark was watching the door and when he saw them exit, he closed his eyes and pretended to sleep. Callie, frustrated as hell, slapped Mark's face through the open window, pointed a finger at him and calmly said; "You're going to be one sorry motherfucker," and walked away as Mark mumbled; "What? What did I do?"

Callie turned back to him, pointed the same finger and said; "Mark my words," then got in his Caddy and drove away. He and Candy did not speak, each currently uncomfortable with the other and cognizant of the mutuality. He dropped her at the corner of Liberty Lane and the Boulevard and sped to Hook Harbor Road, hoping not to have missed much of the show. She quickly walked the dark street home, looking over her shoulder, hoping not to see any creeps following and thinking about Callie's behavior, for the first time not seeing him as Sir Galahad.

Mark didn't dare follow the Caddy, still thinking he'd have a chance of playing stupid and instead decided to try to find Sonny. There were a number of things he'd like to talk to him about and the night was still young. He waited five minutes to let the Caddy get very cleared out and drove away. The side street was ablaze with activity as the girls, in mini-skirts and high heels, were arranging in groups of three to five and guys

were now carousing the streets, looking at the merchandise, also in groups. The girls watched Mark's car and called out; "Wanna date?" sometimes doing something provocative. Mark just smiled at them and kept slowly moving, first thinking how sad the whole situation was and then catching himself for playing judge, recalling that the scene was far from anything new. He overheard some of the "romantic" interchanges. A group of three young white guys focused on one older "girl" who looked as though she was on the game for decades, one saying;

"I'll give you a buck," his companions hysterical at the wit.

She said; "I need ten, baby."

He said; "There's only three of us."

She laughed, though she probably shouldn't have and answered; "\$25 for all three."

"What are you going to do?"

She slowly licked her smeared red lipstick and said; "I can do anything you want."

"Ten bucks for all three of us."

"Twenty."

"Ten, you've got a lot of young competition."

"Fifteen, I've got a lot of practice and I truly lo-oove my job."

"Ten and that's only if you're very good."

She put one hand on him and extended the other, palm up and said; "Gimme."

He smiled wickedly and put a ten dollar bill to her face, which she took in her mouth, beckoned with one finger and led him down a few stairs to a basement apartment of a three story building, his two friends following behind.

Mark continued his drive past the projects and onto Washington Street, Sonny's home turf. It was much like the other area's streets, with three story houses, now apartments and no evidence of any recent maintenance or repair. Black people were sitting on parked cars, or the ground animatedly telling funny stories and some just standing, sullenly staring, casually smoking cigarettes.

He came across the old school yard, where he used to play ball as a kid. The school was now boarded up, but the basketball courts were still in place, though some of the rims were bent. Kids were out there showing off their "unstoppable" one on one moves and dribbling between their legs and behind their backs. Others were sitting and standing on the steps of the fire escape doing other less obvious things, like sniffing glue out of a small brown bag.

Mark circled the block a few times, not seeing Sonny and was beginning to draw attention, so he parked the car across the street from five guys, who didn't seem to be doing anything

except "shooting shit." Ten eyes looked warily at him as he crossed the street. When he got close, he said; "Do any of you guys know where I can find Sonny?"

A short guy with closely cropped hair, a goatee and a Walt Frazier basketball jersey top derisively said; "Sonny who?" There's a lot of Sonny's around here." The others snickered.

"Sonny Middleton."

A tall skinny guy with half closed eyes said; "You a cop?"

"No, he's an old friend of mine."

The group looked at each other with raised eyebrows and small grimaces. The tall skinny guy again spoke; "You looking for some black girls?"

"No." Mark then thought that he might have said something offensive and was compelled to nervously add; "Not that I got anything against black girls. But not tonight. I just want to talk to Sonny."

A medium sized guy with a huge Afro and a snarl said; "You ever had any black girls, white boy?" as the others started at Mark's face, with feint smiles, anxious to hear what he'd say.

Mark got the feeling that there was no good answer to the question and he didn't feel like discussing his sexual preferences anyway, so he turned back toward his car and said; "Thanks for nothing," at which point the tall skinny guy grabbed him by the arm and said; "Wait, wait, wait, wait, wait. My old

lady's been bitchin' me and times are kinda tough, you know what I mean. Can you lend me ten bucks?"

Mark was at a loss for words. He knew the game, but when he was previously caught in it, he could always say, "I don't have it," but tonight he had a few hundred in his wallet. So, he tried to keep moving, but the guy who wanted a "loan" put his arm around Mark's shoulder and said; "You know, you can't just come down here and act like that, motherfucker." Mark remained silent and tried to move as the grip got tighter and tall skinny continued, after a few second lapse; "Sheeit, you're an out and out unfriendly cocksucker." The other four laughed, enjoying the show, even though this was probably the fifteenth re-run.

Now with some assistance tall skinny slammed Mark up against the building wall and said; "Now, for being so nasty, I'm not only going to take your fuckin' money, but my man Manny, over here is gonna break your motherfuckin' nose."

Mark eyed Manny and saw a grinning, light skinned heavy guy with greased relatively straight black hair, rubbing his clenched left fist with is right hand. Tall skinny laughed and put his face six inches from Mark's saying; "Manny got the last five in one shot." He paused, laughed again and added; "See what happens when you don't act neighborly."

A new black Cadillac came to a stop in the street and Mark thought; "Oh Christ, now Callie found me too." Activity stopped

as the five looked toward the car. The windows rolled down and from the back seat Dorette called out; "Hey, what chew trying to do to my favorite white boy?"

Sonny got out of the driver's seat and said; "Hey, hold it. That's my friend. Ain't you niggers got no manners?"

The group of five looked at Mark and slowly released their grips, tall skinny mumbling; "You one lucky motherfucka." At that moment Mark felt the same way.

Dorette opened her door and draped one big beautiful black leg to the ground, the other remaining in the car, her short skirt riding up and revealing that this was another night too hot for lots of clothes and a hairy, glistening center of attention she rubbed with one hand, knowing Mark's specialty and said; "Come here, baby. I got a better use for that nose of yours."

Now unrestrained, mark couldn't think of a better way to get out of his situation, walked to Dorette, bent down low and gave his benefactress a true tongue kiss. Tall skinny said; "Got damn," and shook his head from side to side, as he and his four companions watched in amusement and disbelief.

Sonny said; "Come on. Get in. We'll go someplace where there ain't no riff raff." Mark got in the back seat from the other side and Sonny pointed at tall skinny and said; "Chink, if anything happens to my man's car, it's your ass." He got back

in and drove slowly away. Dorette leaned her back against the door and put her bare legs up on the seat, her feet in Mark's lap. Corinne turned slightly and watched from the front seat, rubbed Mark's head and said; "This time I'm getting me some of that." Mark peered up at her, without breaking the delicious contact and mumbled; "All you can stand."

The group again wound up parked by themselves near the bay in Van Coppermate Park. Dorette and Corinne switched seats a few times and delirious time flew by with only peaceful sounds of wet kisses and groans. When Corinne got her second turn with Mark, she carefully watched his closed eyed methodology for a while and then sternly said; "Slave. Whose tastes better?"

Mark didn't know what to say, not wanting to offend anyone, as he loved both, though the tastes were a little different, so he just kept on his merry activity.

Corinne got insistent; "I asked you a question, slave."

Mark looked up at her demanding eyes and said; "I love both."

Corinne slid a little further forward and said; "Okay, munch on the other one," and laughed. Mark got a new flavor treat as the full moon made its presence known. Dorette peered back at him and said; "You're going to try mine, too," as she watched him. Corrine said; "Sonny, I've got to go. Is it okay if I do it right here?"

Sonny said; "Ain't my car. I don't give a shit."

Corrine opened a bottle containing lemonade and Mark swallowed all he could, the rest running down his chest and on the seat. Corrine got extremely interested watching the activity and roughly started rubbing her dripping Afro all over his face, as he aimed at a moving target. She made a ten second groan and then switched places with Dorette.

First Mark ate all of the chocolate candy he could reach and then buried his face and nose in the center. Dorette said; "I got something for you to wash it down with. Drink up, slave boy." She grinned at him devilishly as he enjoyed his second bottle of lemonade.

He kissed the fountain and whispered; "Thank you. I'm thirsty all the time."

Dorette said; "You're lucky tonight. Six different flavors." Mark groaned agreement and put his head back in his favorite place.

Sonny finally said; "We better get going. I got some business tonight and I know Mark came to talk with me about something."

Dorette said; "Hold your horses. Five minutes ain't gonna make any difference," and she switched positions with Mark. She said; "You sweet."



Mark said; "I think there's more where that came from," and Dorette tried to again bring out the best in him as Sonny drove back to Washington Street."

He dropped off the girls at their house and Mark switched to the front seat, slowly coming back to earth and said; "When you drove up in this car, I was scared shitless, because there's a guy with the identical car who says he's going to kill me, or something like it."

"Man, you can't keep out of trouble, can you? What did you get into this time?"

"I got seen watching some old guy with a fifteen year old girl." They both laughed. Mark continued; "Seriously, though, I'm making good money for the first time in my life and my freaked out mama client wants me to get 'penetration' pictures of the two. I don't know how. They go to the Thunderbird Motel and shut the blinds. Other times they go down Hook Harbor Road. Both you and the Feds told me to stay the hell out of there."

Sonny answered; "You know, you could just string her out, keep collecting money and not get her anything."

"Yeah, I thought of that, too, but that'll only last a short time. I'd rather take a shot at keeping her happy and hope for repeat business. I didn't tell you, but the husband is also paying me to get 'penetration' photos of the wife with

other guys. It turns him on, I guess. Real freaks, maybe I can get a long term gig as a family photographer."

"Real freaks, huh. Look who's talking."

"Hey, this is 1972. Anything goes, right?"

"Why does she want the photos?"

"She says that her daughter keeps denying the thing and that with the pictures there'll be no argument possible."

"You say the mother's a freak herself."

"She is. I don't know. Maybe she thinks that it's okay after she's eighteen, or maybe she doesn't like the guy." He paused and laughed; "Or, maybe she wants the guy herself."

Sonny laughed; "I don't know what to say about pictures of the wife, but one of my boys, Russ, clerks at the Thunderbird. Maybe he can help you out. Tell him I sent you."

"Great, I'll give it a shot. This one ain't prejudiced against white people, I hope."

"Probably is, but he'll be cool after you use my name. He knows Connie and Dorette very well; too, you know what I'm saying. You dig the heavy sisters, don't you?" He looked at Mark and made a big smile.

"Yeah, obviously. I could get addicted to that shit easy. Are they married, or anything?"

"No, they got their own jobs and just like to play."

They drove silently for a few minutes and then Sonny said; "Look, man, I've got to go see somebody about some bullshit. I'll drop you back at your car. I want to ditch this thing anyway. Take good care of yourself."

Mark wasn't sure if he had been dissed, but didn't care, especially coming from a friend. When they got back to the red Corvair Mark got out and said; "Thanks, man."

Sonny just nodded, his hands still on the steering wheel and then said; "Oh, yeah, Mark. Remember, you are what you eat." They both smiled and Mark nodded.

Big skinny and the crew were still across the street and were looking in Mark's direction. Mark circled the car, looking it over and as he opened the door, he called out to big skinny; "Thanks, man, you did an excellent job." He nodded "Okay" to waiting Sonny and they both drove off.

## CHAPTER 9

Mark took the car directly to the Thunderbird, parked in front of the office and walked in. The black guy behind the counter impassively said; "Yes?"

"Russ?"

"Yeah?"

"Sonny sent me."

Russ looked warily at him for a few seconds, then said; "Sonny who?"

"Sonny Middleton."

"Where you know him from?"

"I was just with him. We're pals since our school and basketball days."

Russ still looked a bit curious, so Mark added; "Actually, I was just with him, Corinne and Dorette. I understand you know them pretty well, too."

"You like the big ones, huh?"

"Yeah."

Russ laughed; "Me, too." He paused, then said; "So, what you want with me?"

Mark tried to be as brief as possible. "I'm a private eye and I've been trailing a couple who comes here regularly. My

client wants pictures of them 'in the act,' and I can't get them."

"Who are they, anyway?"

"The man is Callie Majors. He's a big guy, about forty, blond crew cut. I really shouldn't say the name of the girl, she's fifteen."

"I know who you mean. Who want the pictures?"

"Her mother."

Russ thought a few seconds and said; "I might be able to help you out." He put a "BE RIGHT BACK" sign on the desk, waved his finger and led Mark out the back door. They climbed the metal fire escape like stairs to the roof. Russ removed a manhole type circular covering and said; "This is for access to the heating ducts. It's right over 111. If you shimmy about three feet you can get to the grating on the ceiling. Try it."

Mark had to go head first into the dirty hole and made his way to the grating, looked down and saw the experienced older prostitute he remembered from the side street on her hands and knees, moaning low as she used both ends to service two young black dudes.

Mark must have lost track of time as he heard Russ say; "Come on, man. I got to get back to the desk. You get a good view there, right?"

Mark said; "Yeah," as he dawdled a few moments to watch more.

Russ again said; "Come on already."

Mark backed out of the hole and joined Russ on the roof, saying; "That works great."

Russ led him back down the metal stairs, retaking his position at the desk and said; "Look, give me your name and phone number. When that couple comes, I'll put them in 111 and call you."

Mark did that, giving him both his office and home numbers, reached for his wallet and said; "What can I give you?"

"That twenty looks nice."

Mark gave it to him and started to leave when Russ said; "Hey, are you that white guy Corinne and Dorette told me about, who likes to dine in the park?"

Mark shook his head and said; "Girls are getting to be worse than guys with the stories they make up." They both smiled and he drove back to the apartment and Allison.

As he entered he saw that she was sitting on the couch looking at television, wearing one of his bathrobes; a light blue, which hung down to her bare feet, tied tightly in the center. She looked his way, smiled and said; "Did you get anything good?"

For a second her words made him think of the meaty sisters and he felt guilty, now looking at Allison's sweetness. He quickly did his best to clear those thoughts from his mind and answered; "I think so." He took many quick tiny steps playfully to her, sat down and kissed her cheek, adding; "Maybe I'm finally learning how to do my job right."

She said; "I'm glad somebody is. Listen to this garbage, now, pointing at the PBS discussion show on television. The subject was "Zippo squads." The moderator was a forty year old, intellectual sounding man, with very moderately long hair, a half inch below the collar of his suit, named Simon Grassley. He introduced his uniformed military guest as Colonel Tyson Puck, who was about thirty, clean shaven, with one-eighth of an inch of black hair on his skull, visible only from the side not covered by his Green Beret cap.

Grassley said; "We're here to discuss the reports recently unearthed about the so-called and self-appointed 'Zippo squads' running amok in South Viet Nam, supposedly our "friends." For those not seeing a newspaper over the last week, this is the name proudly taken by the U.S. units who have admitted to be casually setting fire to villages. Perhaps, you'd like to shed some light..... Let me rephrase that. Perhaps you can discuss that topic, generally."

Puck didn't look Grassley's way, but shuffled around in his fully exposed chair, appearing to be thirty percent larger than the moderator and his feet looked three times the size in his combat boots. He said; "The matter is still under investigation, so I'll discuss what I can, as official spokesman," showing only the slightest of smirks. "Our reports indicate that some of the Southern villages are supporters of and willing host to the enemy, the Viet Cong."

Grassley paused, seemingly somewhat surprised at the response and then said; "Are you then confirming the reported stories of entire villages burned to the ground by U.S. forces?"

"I'm neither confirming nor denying. As I said, the matter is still under investigation."

Slightly annoyed that his show might be an hour of "under investigation," he took his own gambit and said; "Well, I guess you're saying that to burn our friends from their homes, is a real possible tactic, within the philosophy of the military."

"Our 'friends' don't harbor enemies."

"And if they do, the price is destruction, that judgment being made on the field?"

Puck seemed a bit uncomfortable, as he knew that this would be the inevitable conclusion and said; "I'm really not sure if I should be prematurely saying this, but in the interest of the public's right to know, I can say that this approach is



consistent with our game plan. Keep in mind that the villagers know the possible price when they allow enemy combatants to have refuge." He didn't realize what he had said, but Grassley jumped on one point and said; "How do the villagers know the price, unless they are aware of it being extracted on many occasions?"

Allison said; "Got 'em."

Mark replied; "Shhh. I want to hear how he wiggles out of this one."

Puck feigned a quizzical look, smiled at Grassley and said; "I don't get your point. Can you rephrase the question?"

Grassley pondered a few seconds and opted for simplicity, saying; "How do the villagers know that they will be burned out?"

"I don't know."

"You said that they did."

"No, I didn't."

Grassley asked for a transcript and when provided, he said; "I'll take your exact quote. 'The villagers know the possible price when they allow enemy combatants to have refuge.'"

"I spoke too quickly. I ought to have said that they **SHOULD** know. And I'm not going to discuss this further as I've already overstepped my bounds."

"Okay, let me go in another direction. It seems very likely to me that it's distinctly possible that the villagers are forced to give the Viet Cong shelter under threat of death. So, they're dead either way and the U.S. forces are just doing the same thing as the people we call rebels and enemies. Aren't we supposed to be better than that; we're the good guys?

Puck did slow burn and replied; "That's speculation on your part. Have you been there?"

"No."

"Well, I have and I can tell you there are things that go on that you don't understand and that which is considered confidential. Why weren't you drafted?"

"I'm too old."

"You could have volunteered."

"Now, that's speculation on your part."

Puck stared at his knee high boots.

Grassley, now irked, said; "Are you aware that a recent government report estimates that 50 percent of the money spent on the war effort goes directly into the black market?"

Puck continued to survey his feet and slowly said; "No, I'm not aware of that and that's not what we're supposed to be discussing."

"Are you aware that the military supplied daily death count now adds up to three times the entire population of Viet Nam?

If they're going to lie, aren't they bright enough to make up a good one?"

Puck remained controlled and said; "Now you're just shooting in the dark. Get back to what we're supposed to be talking about."

"Okay, tell us what you came to say about the 'Zippo squads' and please say something other than it's under investigation and that you don't know."

"We're very concerned with those reports, intend to find out the facts and take appropriate action."

"Have any new orders been given to field commanders yet?"

"Field commanders get new orders daily."

"Concerning the burn and kill policy."

"I've already said that it is being investigated. At this point we don't know the truth."

Grassley said; "That's obvious." After a pause he added; "What do you say to the reports that the villagers have been tortured and raped before burned?"

Puck got up from his seat and said; "This is getting ridiculous and I'm leaving." As he walked off, he added; "It sounds like you're pro-VC. You should be more careful about what you say. Somebody might think that it's treason."

Grassley, flustered, called out; "When will the investigation be complete?"

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Puck said; "I don't know," without turning his head.

Grassley remained in his seat, looking down at his papers, a few moments, then saying; "Well, there you have it. 'I don't know and attempting to find out might be treasonous.' How the hell are we going to fill up the rest of the program?" He tapped his pencil a few times and then looked offstage and said; "Hey, anybody back there got Jimi Hendrix doing '*The Star Spangled Banner*'?"

Some rumblings were heard; Grassley looked in that direction, waved one hand, nodded "yes" a few times and Jimi's guitar wailed.

The duo sat motionless, blankly staring at the television. As cynical as some, including them, had become about the United States war effort (actually a "police action" never approved by Congress) they didn't expect to be hearing anything like this. This was just over the top too much. What could possibly be worse? After torturing them, eating live babies as their parents were forced to watch?

In an attempt to change the dismal subject, Mark squeezed Allison's leg and said; "Song's the best part of the show. Do you remember that this was a great one to get stoned to?"

"Yeah, you got any?"

"No, dammit."

In a silly voice she said; "Mark what are you good for?" as she untied the bathrobe and showed him her soft, curly blond hair.

After she groaned and pulled him by the hair, he remained there and gave her light kisses every few seconds. He waited contentedly and patiently until he sensed that she had reached a calm state, then got up, repositioned her on the couch and said; "I love you, Allison."

She wickedly replied; "Prove it to me one more time."

## CHAPTER 10

The next morning Mark and Allison woke up cheek to cheek in each other's arms. Dawn had not yet arrived and the television was providing the only light in the room. The PBS international morning news show indicated that a number of Western European nations had issued an official condemnation of the U.S. procedures in Viet Nam and were planning to petition the United Nations to do an independent study. When they turned to the news on the commercial channels, they merely heard that the prior day's death count was 17,654 Viet Cong and "only" 227 Americans. In another story the Pentagon has requested the tapes of last night's "Simon Grassley Show" to determine if any treasonous activity took place. PBS is putting future "Grassley" shows on hold until the matter is cleared up.

Allison extricated herself from Mark's arms, got up and shut the television, as the day's first glimmer of light streamed through the open window allowing Mark a full view of his love. As he remained on the couch, she looked right at him, hands on hips and coyly said; "What do you want for breakfast, baby?"

He eyed her blond hair and replied; "You know."

She walked to him and lovingly ran her fingers through his hair as he took his sweet time. When he was finally through and

covered with the morning dew, she took him by the hand and said; "You still are a morning man, aren't you? Can't let you walk around like that," and sweetly returned the favor.

Across the river, in Manhattan, two men on the make were having their second meeting. This one was taking place in an upscale bar, the participants taking advantage of the fact that most drunkards hold out at least until noon, before showing their propensities to the public. Consequently, the two, the bartender and the floor sweeper had the place to themselves.

Benito Vespucci was an early riser. After a quiet restful night, the 40 year old 6'0", 200 pound, olive skinned Italian was very ready for business. His well-oiled, black, wavy hair was combed straight back from his tiny forehead and did not intrude on his well-cut black pinstriped Brooks Brothers suit. He appeared sharp and formidable, as he wanted to appear. He sat at the bar nursing drinks with "Jimmy" Park. The Viet Nameese born, US citizen, now residing in downtown Manhattan couldn't be any more different. His 5'4", 120 pound frame was encased in an ill-fitting red and white short sleeved shirt and starched black chino pants. His medium length, overly straight, dry, black hair looked as if it had barely survived the wind tunnel, some hanging on his broad yellow-brown forehead. His dark eyes topped an impassive face, as they blankly stared,

showing no emotion. What the few who knew him had in common was the belief that Jimmy wasn't someone to be fucked around with. The first 21 years of his life were spent in a desperately poor part of northern Viet Nam, replete with people who swallow rocks to alleviate the hunger pangs, women producing babies for sale to the highest bidder, the governance of whatever armed troops happened to be there at the moment, the worship of ANYTHING that produces money, a derided religion that emphasizes tolerance and the inconsequential nature of material things and perhaps, most likely, because, rumor had it, that he was very well connected. He took the name "Jimmy" over his birth's Nguyen, partially because it was easier to pronounce and partially because of his respect for the American attitude toward material life, evidenced by the two largest religions being the largest landholders in the country.

After they went through the customary greetings handled smilingly and effervescently by Benito and quietly and seemingly shyly by Jimmy, the latter got right to the point and said; "Tell me why you requested another meeting so quickly." He looked up at the bar clock and added; "I have other places to be."

Benito said; "I appreciate your time and I'd like to start on a more pleasant note, before I tell you how we can both line our pockets." He put a hand on Jimmy's shoulder, which



initially was responded to by backing away with glaring eyes and then acquiesced to as Benito said; "Let's take a table, away from big ears."

Jimmy followed Benito to one with a window on Fifth Avenue, the farthest from the bar and the two sat. Jimmy said; "You don't have to worry about my pockets."

"I'm not worried about your pockets. But, everyone wants more, don't they?"

Jimmy shrugged, aware of the truth of that statement, but said; "If you understood finance, you'd know that there's a risk reward trade off. Right now I've got almost no risk."

"How's that?"

Jimmy again showed some discomfort before replying, but chose to get to the point, saying; "Callie's got protection from the feds, the local police and the mob. What do you got?"

This time Benito pondered the reply. He could lie, but Jimmy probably had ways of finding out and that would kill any chance of doing business. So he said; "Assuming that the girls are compliant and no problem, I'll give you 20% more per head and a bigger cut on the show. You're probably getting 10% now. I'll make it twenty."

Jimmy got a bit defensive and said; "The girls are more than compliant. They're raised to do this. They consider it an

honorable profession. But, I still like things just the way they are."

"You wouldn't be here talking to me if that was 100% true. What if Callie was put out of the picture?"

Jimmy looked askance and said; "You're going to kill him?"

"No, but what if he was put away for a long time?"

"You got something on him?"

"Maybe."

Jimmy wondered if Benito was just talking, but decided to pursue the "what if's" a while more. If they didn't prove true, five minutes wasted and if they did, he could start preparing for a plan B. He thought it very probable that the Feds liked their cut immensely and most likely would transfer their protection to a new operator and could override the locals if anything went wrong. Probably! He said; "Remember we're just talking about possibilities, but you have to consider my position. If Callie is out of the picture, my risk goes up and I deserve to be compensated for it. I'd want 35% more per girl and 35% of the show."

Benito did some quick math in his head and wasn't thrilled with the result. He said; "How about 40% more per girl, but the show is my business?"

"I'm not giving up the show. I like that steady cash flow."

"Your numbers don't leave a lot of leeway for me. Maybe, if...."

Jimmy cut him off; "'Maybe if' is the right phase. The first 'maybe if' is if Callie is out of the picture. He's not yet and may never be." He stood up from the chair and said; "There's no point in discussing this any further now. You have my word that if something happens to Callie, you'll be the first person I talk to. In the meantime, the best thing you could do is get friendly with the Feds." He extended his right hand and Benito shook it. Jimmy walked out the door and soon disappeared in a Fifth Avenue now crowded by people on their way to work. Benito sat there a few minutes, nursing his early morning scotch and water and thought about his options. If the plan already set in place didn't work, no money lost. If it did, no money lost, again. Callie was making it easy for him, by allowing his desire for underage girls to put himself in jeopardy. If Connie was successful in getting the photos he could reward her for being a good slave and if she didn't, he could punish her for being a bad one. Same action, either way. It was a bonanza to know sexually obsessed people. So, perversely, the only way he could lose was if Connie accomplished her task and then he made a bad deal with Jimmy. He realized that he already had some practice at doing that when the bartender presented him with the tab.

Mark and Allison had a soft un-businesslike morning playing records and listening to new songs on the radio. They were both big fans of Van Morrison and today were in the mood to play his "Moondance" album over and over.

There wasn't much need for conversation, as they knew each other so well that everything essential was already out in the open and could not compete with what they heard on the stereo system, anyway. The most memorable sounds they made in the morning were their giggles, when they accidentally bumped into each other, dancing in the small kitchen.

At 11AM Mark said; "I'm sorry to say this, but I really should check in at my office for a while today."

She knew that was true, but wistfully said; "Why do we have to work?"

"Silly girl. Of course it's so that the government can collect taxes and distribute it to their friends and call it the war effort."

"I know that part. But, I mean us in particular. We should be a prince and a princess."

"You are a princess." He kissed her forehead and went into the bathroom to dress, returning quickly in his faded blue jeans, yellow Donovan T-shirt and a pale blue kerchief tied around his head. She smiled and waved two fingers at him and he

returned the gesture as he went for the door. He stopped to say; "What are you going to do all day?"

"I don't know. I might just stay here or maybe I'll walk to the book store." As he left she thought how nice it would be to stay here forever, as all the bad things happen out there. She didn't know he was having the same thoughts.

Mark walked through the early summer morning streets seeing the beginning of the day's activities. Some people were on their way to work, some out to get their shopping done before the heat set in and some stood on lines, waiting for buses to New York City, the shore and points unknown. He was doing little other than watching out for possible unsavory things on the sidewalk, as his mind was with Allison. He wondered what things would be like now if he hadn't been such a jerk in the past, particularly his seeming inability to keep his appetite under control. He knew this was the "Anything goes," "If it feels good, do it" time of ultimate liberation, but, at least for the moment, he wished it was still the 50's, thinking that the probable minimum of temptations would have allowed the two of them to have already settled into a calm, happy life. He never felt quite as well as he did with her and only her. He probably hurt himself more, when he made her unhappy. They were inseparable in the sense that he couldn't do anything for her without simultaneously doing something for himself. He also

couldn't hurt her without hurting himself. Maybe they were two parts of the same thing blown apart and destined to again become one. Someday.

His office door was open and Vicky must have heard him coming, as when he entered, she was leaning against her desk wearing tight short shorts and a tube top, when two tubes were necessary. When he saw her he smiled and said a simple, "Hi."

Her voice went up a few octaves from its usual level and she said; "'Hi'? Don't you like what you see?" as she pretended to be adjusting her top.

Mark felt the old feeling, but also thought of Allison and said; "You look absolutely delectable, but an old girlfriend of mine moved back in."

She laughed; "So, you worn out already?"

He said; "No, it's not that," putting his hand where it proved his attraction to her and then adding; "This one does something to me."

Vicky fixed her top and sat in her chair, softly saying; "This the special one?"

Mark made a little smile and simply said; "Yeah." He moved toward his office, but was compelled to add; "No offense, you're fantastic."

She said; "None taken. I'll see you again after you fuck it up."

He knew how true that was and sat at his desk, eyeballing the ceiling, with nothing to do."

Candy was also an early riser today, having made a date to meet her girlfriend, Nancy, at the pizzeria. She needed to talk to someone she considered sane and hoped that the early hour minimized the possibility of being followed by the creep.

When she got there, Nancy was already sitting in a booth holding a cup of coffee. Candy ordered one and joined her.

"Nancy, thanks for coming on such short notice."

"No problem," responded the short fifteen year-old, who wore a simple light pink blouse and a light brown "poodle skirt." They were quite the odd-couple, Candy ensconced in her uniform tight pink "PEACE" T-shirt and faded blue jeans. Her long straight blond hair set off Nancy's much shorter and stiffer red.

The counterwoman brought over Candy's cup. She said "Thanks" and turned to her friend, intending to start off lightly. She said; "So, what have you been doing with yourself?"

Nancy said; "Not much. I've been down the shore with my folks a few times..... Been doing some reading and watching my baby brother."

"How old is he now?"

"Six. Old enough to get into everything and young enough not to clean up after himself..... Boys can be difficult. I always had to put back things where I got them."

Candy thought she heard an entrée into her favorite topic and excitedly said; "Tell me about it. That's why I wanted to talk to you. You know this guy I've told you about...."

"Mr. California?"

"Yeah, you know what he wanted me to do?"

"No, but I bet you're going to tell me."

Unfazed, Candy said; "He wanted me to have sex with him while some creep was watching us."

"Get out of here."

"Yeah."

"Did you?"

"Of course not. The whole thing freaked me out and then he got the nerve to get mad about it."

"Nancy's eyebrows rose; "I don't want to do an I told you so, but....."

"But, sometimes he's so sweet."

"When your clothes are off?"

Candy didn't have a response, so Nancy added; "And he's still married?"

Candy dejectedly said; "Yeah."

"Divorce proceeding started?"



"No, there are business complications."

"You know, I hate to say this, but it sounds like the old story my mother warned me about. These guys will say anything before they get what they want and then the promises are forgotten."

"I'm starting to agree with you. But, I never got these warnings from my mother. She just wants everybody to be what they feel like being. My damn sister, too. Are we the ones out of step?"

"That's a good question. It seems like now, yes."

"You believe all the stories you hear?"

"No, but I suppose some of them are true."

Candy said; "How about the one about Donna Ferguson? Five guys took her to some ranch in Hunterdon County and after they all played, they watched her get equestrian training with two stallions. Then they played again."

"She does have a gigantic mouth."

"Seriously."

Nancy said; "Seriously you know I'm not interested in that sort of thing. I'd like to be with someone, but it's got to be someone I care about and who cares about me. I'm old fashioned; sex isn't the only thing."

"With me either, at least it didn't start that way. I'd like to kick Callie right in his big ass. He doesn't call me very often anymore and when he does, it's for.... you know."

"Maybe it's for the best. Maybe you'll find someone closer to your age."

"Are they any different?"

"There must be some."

"Know any?"

Nancy laughed and said; "No."

"Maybe I'll become a nun."

"Well, I tell you one thing. If Callie shows up with some friends and wants to take you to a horse farm, run like hell."

Candy laughingly said; "Or become Catherine the Great."

Nancy deadpanned; "Yeah, just double check the ropes."

Candy said; "Hey, Nancy. Do you mind if I spend the day with you. Maybe the two of us can control your baby brother. I really don't want to go home and see the freak show."

Connie and Warren were having a leisurely late morning as she sat on a chair reading a magazine and he was in his favorite place. She said; "I've got a surprise for you today, baby."

He didn't look up from his low perch and she added; "I've made a contact with two swinging couples and they're coming over here in about half an hour."

Sensing that the session might end quickly, Warren focused his attention on the prime location and mumbled; "What are they like?"

She put down the magazine and watched him do his thing, saying; "They're supposed to be very nice. A black couple and a white couple. Tend to be dominant. You can be with the two women and you can watch me with the two guys."

They massaged each other until the doorbell rang. They both were there to open it and two grinning couples looked down at them and stepped in.

Connie did as she was told by the two men and Warren did likewise with the two women. They were ecstatic, seeming to have a slight preference for the dark morsels. They watched each other savoring the goodies presented. The sight was enough to prompt each other on to new lows.

Shari took a brief look through the keyhole and was aroused when she saw her parents begging for more. She took a walk outside, looking for some guys, while Connie and Warren spent the rest of the day paying passionate homage. When the dominant foursome had their fill, they commanded Connie and Warren to service the other's body, while they watched and verbally urged them on with derisive observations.

Before they left Connie and Warren begged for more and arrangements were made for future meetings. When they were

again alone, Connie asked Warren; "Why makes you get off on this stuff?"

He shrugged his leg heavy shoulders, looked up, smiled and said; "I don't know. I can't explain it. Maybe my mother didn't cuddle me enough, if you believe in that kind of shit." He went back to work. She said; "Stupid question. Why? Why anything? Do your own thing, baby. I love it.

Mark walked back home wanting to see Allison. When he got there, the apartment was empty and he panicked. He hadn't been gone all that long, but there was no sign of her. He looked around for some evidence that she intended to come back and then she walked through the door.

With wide desperate eyes he said; "Where have you been?"

She smiled, seeing his state of mind and answered; "I went to the bookstore, as I said I might. Look what I got." She put her bag down on the kitchen counter and pulled out a soft covered book titled; "*Funkytowns, USA.*" She said, "Let's take a look at this. Maybe it's time to get out of this decaying hell hole.

Mark put his arms around her waist and held her closely, cheek to cheek, his mind having gone from desperation to exhilaration in the space of ten seconds.

## CHAPTER 11

They spent the day casually perusing the book and each other, coming to two major conclusions; they want to be together and there are a lot of nicer, more interesting places to live than Jersey City.

Shari came to a few conclusions of her own, having met three nice guys at the pizzeria and spending the afternoon in the back seat of one of their cars, making each of them come to some sort of conclusion of their own, as the other two pondered the situation from the front seat.

Connie sat reading "*The Story of O*," and watched a delirious Warren. The phone rang. She chose to pick it up and Warren chose not to hear it, his ears muffled, his likely excuse.

"Hello," she offered.

She recognized Benito's voice, which said; "What's new in the picture business?"

She was having such a good day, she had forgotten all about them and said; "Oh, shit. Nothing. I'm sorry. I got busy."

"I'll bet. Well, get right over here. I've got some things for you to keep busy with."

"Sounds good. Where are you?"

"At the shop, slave." He hung up.

A ripple went through her body when he heard that word and Warren's face got another bit of washing. She gently moved his head away and stood up, saying; "I'm sorry. I gotta go, baby."

Warren said; "Command performance?"

Connie laughed, shook her head and retorted; "Sounds like." She quickly threw on a simple white dress with stenciled red flowers, took her bag and scurried to her car.

At 3:00PM, Mark said he had to go, kissed Allison on the lips and drove his red Corvair to Liberty Lane. This was his lucky day, as before he even had time to park, he saw Connie take her blue Camaro out of the driveway. She drove quickly and made no note of anything, fantasizing about the delectable degradations Benito might have in store for her. Mark followed, watching her drive with one hand on the wheel.

Connie got to the dealership, arriving in broad daylight, with customers and salesmen milling about. Mark parked near her and watched as she put on her accoutrements. She walked through the showroom to Benito's back office, too excited to notice Mark's pursuit. She was concentrating on her object of desire and saw him through the large indoor window, sitting at his desk alone. Her excitement increased, seeing that the blinds were rolled up. She walked right in and pulled the dress over her

head, kicked off her shoes and did a slow swaying dance over to him. She got near him and saw that he was ready. Not caring that she was in full view of anyone walking the hallway, she said; "You're too good to your useless little slave," moved slowly and fancied herself being watched. When his time approached, Benito said; "Facial."

She liked feeling so pretty, looked up at the window and got excited to see a bunch of guys laughing and smiling. One of them was Mark, snapping away with his instamatic, but Connie had discontinued looking at faces. Benito said; "You're the bonus I promised them." He beckoned and eight employees of the repair shop walked in.

"She needs attention all the time. Can you help her out?"

Connie turned her made up face to one bold guy who obviously liked her and liked him back as the others watched and touched her.

She took her time, loving being the center of attention, for a group of young, smiling and laughing males, at times noticing the curious salesmen and women walking down the hall, lingering at the window, too overwhelmed to make out any particular faces. She was more interested in gazing at the banquet she craved, as Mark shot five rolls of film.

When each was done, she said; "Come on, guys, the day is still young."

Benito was still seated in his chair and calmly said;  
"Where are my fucking pictures?"

"I'm trying my best, master."

"Well, you're going to have to do a lot better than that. You're not through, you incompetent slave." He pointed at Tony, a twenty-two year old, swarthy Puerto Rican, his grinning face smiling lewdly through his unshaven brown face. Benito continued, saying; "You're his slave for the rest of the day. Tony, make her do everything."

She went to Tony, who pulled her through the dirty repair shop. She was careful not to skin her knees on the greasy floor, but was also excited to be dirtied and painfully yanked. He put her in the back seat of his souped-up orange Chevy and drove away.

He parked at a downtown car repair shop and went in. In a minute there were many black and brown faces looking at her through the car window. She smiled at their hardness. Tony opened the door and pulled her out of the car. She was led into the shop's work area and men grabbed her all over leaving dark smears on her body. Tony stopped her at a chair near a lift, sat down and said; "Wouldn't you just love it?"

She excitedly said; "Yes."

He said; "Tell me how much."



She was pleading as she whispered; "I'll do anything you want. Please, please, please."

Tony gave her what she desired and the group watched, eventually each having his turn.

When they were through with her, Tony said; "Okay, pig, go home."

Connie looked outside at the darkness and was excited to see that she would soon be living her deepest fantasy. She got up and walked through the line of men, being roughly grabbed as she went. Reaching the open garage door she was torn between her hot fantasy and the fear of the cold night air in an area she didn't know. The fear took over and she walked back in the garage and approached the men, who were now joking and not paying any attention to her. She again got on her dirty knees and said to Tony; "Please take me back to the dealership."

Tony said; "Why should I?" as his friends looked at her and laughed.

"Because I can't go out there like this. Please."

Tony looked around at his friends and said; "Okay, I have an idea." He pointed at an open chalice and said; "Me and my friends are going to fill this up and if you drink it all, I'll bring you back." The men just coldly stared at her.

They didn't know that Connie was excited at the thought, but she merely said; "Okay," as if she was repulsed by it and

closed her eyes. She stayed in her position as the bowl was filled. She put her head in and started to drink, as she was called various things.

Connie was not inexperienced, so she was not surprised and settled into the action as the men watched and laughed. She went back to Tony and asked for more. He obliged her, as did the others.

Tony looked at her in amazement. He retrieved a towel, handed it to her and said; "Clean yourself up some before you get in my car."

She did and followed him back to the car, this time taking a front seat. She leaned over all the way back to the dealership. Tony left her in the car, used his keys to enter the place, got her dress, came back and threw it to her.

She decided not to put it on, only retrieving her car keys from the pocket. She walked back to her car. Tony watched her swaying, smiled and called out; "See you again?"

She turned and slowly ran her tongue around her lips and said; "Any time you want."

She drove home with one thing on her mind and it was Warren's pulchritude. She entered the kitchen and found him waiting. She parted her feet, let him kiss her for a minute and then said; "I'm in a different mood today. Someone once said; 'Do unto others, etc., etc.' and I'm feeling holy. Let me....."

Warren pulled her into the family room and said; "Make like you're in church." He sat in front of her and gave her the beverage she craved. Connie swallowed and swallowed. When he was through he sat in his chair and said; "Get over here and receive communion." She opened wide.

When he was through with her, they got more traditional.

Mark had his photos developed and took them home where he found Allison combing her blond hair, still wet from a shower.

He said; "May I?" She nodded; "Yes" and sat on the couch draping one leg over the arm and watched Mark put the photos in a kitchen drawer. He was famished and gently munched his dinner.

When she was though she got up and they reversed positions. In a minute she had to go to the bathroom, did so and took a look at the photos in the kitchen drawer. She had a number of thoughts. She was annoyed that Mark was around this sort of thing, but knew that if she said anything, he would say it was his job and she didn't want to ruin the mood. She flipped through them all and enjoyed what she was seeing on another level and proceeded to satisfy her own hunger.

They continued playing into the early evening.

Earlier in the day, still upset with him, Candy called Callie;

"Hello."

"Callie?"

"Yeah."

"I have to see you."

"Got interested?"

"No. I have to get some things straightened out."

"Using your linguistic talents?" he laughed.

"You're getting to be a real asshole. Pick me up at the corner tonight."

"I've got lots of work here."

"Do it tomorrow. This is important to me."

"I can't. These documents have to be ready tomorrow for the sales to get closed and...."

Candy hung up, not only certain that he wasn't Sir Galahad any longer, but also seeing him as she saw most everyone else; nothing special. She also felt very hurt and maybe a bit foolish. She went back to her room, laid on her bed and cried into her pillow.

Shari was looking for something and unbeknownst to her, shortly after Candy's call, she too called Callie.

"Hello."

Shari playfully said; "Ready for the time of your life?"

"I think so. Who is this?"

"Shari, stupid. Are you going to let me have it or not?"

"Sure, baby. I was just joking. I'm anxious to see you. Give me an hour and I'll come get you at the corner, all right?"

"A whole hour. I'll have to go plastic."

"Bring it with you. I'd like to see that."

"Okay, in an hour, at the corner." She hung up, not aware that Candy caught bits and pieces of the conversation and was very curious what would be happening "in an hour, on the corner." Candy decided to follow her.

A hot, humid early evening, Shari put on a red bikini top and severely cut off denim shorts and watched herself undulate in the bathroom mirror, as she practiced with her toy, testing it everywhere it could possibly go and enjoying the warm hum. She practiced her culinary skills and saw that her mother was more advanced from many years of training. She thought that she could make up for the technical deficiency with enthusiasm, especially tonight.

She left the bathroom and the clock told her it was time to get going.

She descended the stairs, not seeing Candy near the crack in her door, ready to follow. She left the house and walked quickly to the Boulevard with a shadow 300 feet behind.

A group of boys she knew were sitting on a car and greeted her by waving their flags at her, one saying; "Come on over, baby. I know what you want."

She walked by, saying; "Not tonight." She then thought that she didn't want to appear insulting to her friends, walked back to them and demonstrated her kindness for a few seconds on each beauty. She said; "How about later?"

One boy said; "We'll be here," and Shari blew them a kiss and continued her journey.

Candy stood still, saw the activities and was revolted. She wondered how two biological sisters could be so different. Though she was wearing a floppy T-shirt and loose jeans and did not know the boys, when she passed the boys again showed their patriotism, one saying; "Your sister's loss is your gain." Candy slowed down and looked at each of them, said "Fuck you," and kept walking.

When Shari got to the corner, Candy saw her climb into the front seat of a new black Cadillac and lower her head as he drove away. She saw the blond crew cut, back lit by the soon to set sun. She would not have believed what she saw 48 hours ago and still couldn't fully accept it, trying to think of other things that she might be mistaken about. She slowly circled the block, so not to again pass the boys and thinking about how foolish she had been to trust this man and tried to come up with

a way to forget about California and her father. How could her own sister do this to her, knowing that she loved him? She also knew that if it weren't her sister, it would be somebody else.

Mark and Allison's pleasant early evening was shattered by the blaring ring of the phone. He winced, said, "Oh, shit," and answered on the fourth blast.

"Hello."

"Hello, Mark?"

"Yes."

"Hey, this is Russ. I think your couple is here. I put them in 111."

Mark sighed, but wanted to sound grateful for the favor and said; "Great, thanks. I'll be right there," and he hung up.

Allison was almost pleadingly looking at him and Mark said; "I'm really sorry. I have to go." She closed her eyes and he put on a dirty old plain T-shirt and blue jeans, anticipating the dirt he would pick up in the heating duct. He kissed her disinterested cheek and left. She went back to the kitchen drawer and took another look at the photos of Connie, wondering why it was this type of "work" Mark chose to be involved with.

## CHAPTER 12

Mark quickly got the black Mercury to the Thunderbird and parked in front of the office. He walked in and said; "Thanks a lot," to a solitary Russ, who was occupied with an open copy of "Screw Magazine."

"No problem. I think you're in luck. She looks hot tonight."

"Candy?"

"The young girl. I don't know her name. Come on; get up there before they leave."

Mark climbed the metal stairs and crawled into the dirty duct. Through the grating, he was able to see very well into the room as every possible artificial light was on. Callie was sitting at the head of the bed with his eyes down on the long haired girl. Mark took out his camera and took six shots. He considered leaving, wanting to get back to Allison, but thought that freak mama might have wanted photos of "penetration" to other areas and so he waited and watched. His patience paid off and he snapped more shots of the world voyage. Callie settled in Calcutta and Mark got some more good shots and then heard Callie call out "Oooh". A few seconds later, Mark got a few more shots of that and worked his way out of the duct.



He descended the stairs and again entered the office from the rear. Russ looked up and Mark said; "Thanks a lot. I owe you one."

Russ said; "Get something good?"

"Pretty ordinary..... but good enough."

They both laughed and Mark drove back to his apartment. He found Allison still standing in the kitchen, looking at his photos. She had a strange look on her face that Mark interpreted as potentially troublesome. He attempted a joke, saying; "You like my artwork?"

She looked at him and said; "Do you keep copies for yourself?"

Mark sensed danger, but decided to be honest and said; "Yes, as a matter of fact, I do. I keep a copy at my office, just in case the client loses theirs."

She rubbed her forehead and looked down at the pictures. "Do you get hot over them?"

Mark hesitated a second, but said; "Yeah, sometimes."

She looked at him and said; "Do you.... you know.....?"

He had come this far in the conversation, so there was no sense in backing off now and he said; "Sometimes, do you?"

Alison surprisingly laughed and said; "Yeah..... sometimes." Mark picked up the photos, carried them in one hand, taking Allison in the other to the couch. She sat down,

took the photos out of his hand and looked at them. Mark got very comfortable.

Callie left Shari at the corner and she bounced down the street, hoping her young male friends were still around. When she caught up to them it was obvious that they were very interested in her.

She said; "Isn't there someplace better we can go?"

One boy said; "We can use my house. My folks are away. My stupid little brother is the only one there."

Shari said; "Sounds excellent. Has your brother reached puberty yet?"

"Yeah, he's thirteen."

"Great."

Shari put her hands on two exposed old glories and said; "I am so hot and humid. That old guy I was with wasn't enough to knock me out."

The boys put their arms all around and over Shari and led her to the house. They played all sorts of games, the boys much better at it than the old man. After she and the guys finished the ninth inning, she put on her few items of apparel and went home, tired and perspiring.

Candy spent the night in her room, sulking, crying and feeling as hurt as hurt can be. Her mood switched back and forth from suicidal sorrow to murderous anger.

## CHAPTER 13

Mark and Allison woke up to the sound of something pelting the window. He looked out, seeing that there was a low dark sky filled entirely with black cumulous clouds and the rain was torrential, forming huge puddles in places after five minutes of activity. He got up and closed the window as she stretched her body out. When he turned to her he saw his favorite sights, but the dark, sudden coldness, put him in a strange mood, bordering on ominous. She felt the same way and donned his heavy robe and met him in the kitchen, where he was preparing coffee. Both silently made their breakfasts.

The phone rang at the Roe Household and Connie got her tired but still exhilarated body moving, answering it with a witty; "Hello?"

"Benito. I hear you had a great time last night."

"Yeah. You got something set up for today?"

"No, that's why I'm calling. You're supposed to be getting me some pictures and I think you're too busy having a good time."

"I've got somebody working on it."

"Well, here's the bottom line. NO more parties until you produce."

"Come on, baby. Don't you like what I do?"

"I know that you do. So that's you're punishment, slave."

"Please, honey. Wouldn't you like a voyage to parts unknown this morning?"

"Not as much as I'd like those pictures. And what part of you is unknown, anyway?" He hung up.

Connie knew she had a problem. Benito knew how to administer the ultimate punishment; nothing. She saw the rain and thought; "Dammit, now I'll have to go out in that to see the jerk." Warren silently walked behind her and found refuge. She felt much better. Someone needed her. She wiggled around happily. She said; "You're a lifesaver, baby. But, I've got to go take care of some business."

"You're a busy girl."

"Not the way you think."

Mark's phone rang. He was also particularly imaginative and said; "Hello."

"Hi Mark, it's Vicky. You've gotta get over to the office. One of your clients is here and she's upset."

"Connie?"

"Yeah, I think she's gonna break something."

"Okay. Tell her I have exactly what she wants and I'll be there in half an hour."

He hung up and put on a t-shirt, sweat shirt and blue jeans, telling Allison that he had to leave, but wouldn't be long.

She said; "I feel weird today. I'd really like the company. Hurry back."

Mark scooped up the loose pictures, his camera and the film and went into the downpour. Allison thought that she'd liked to have had a few more minutes' observation time, but he had left so quickly. She decided that she'd ask him for copies of a few. He took the black Mercury to the photograph emporium and had the film developed. While he waited, he looked at those of crazy Connie. She was quite a girl.

Entering his vestibule wet and ebullient, he saw Vicky at her desk and she just indicated with a thumb; "In there." He gave her the pictures of Connie, saying; "Hold onto these." Vicky was glad to.

He went into the office and saw a petulant Connie pacing the floor. Her attire consisted of a calf length dress and a button up blouse, covered by a small jacket. Everything was some shade of brown and appeared "business-like" to him. This was exactly the feeling Connie had hoped him to have, taking a cue from Benito's treatment of her.

She looked at him, saying; "What do you have for me?"

While other times he might have made a playful response, he merely took the photos from his pocket, handed them to her and said; "Just what you asked for."

Connie put the photos on Mark's desk, spread them out and reviewed them. She was surprised and disappointed for two reasons, the former because she didn't know until now that Shari, too, was carrying on with Callie.

She stamped her foot and agitatedly said; "This isn't Candy, it's Shari, you idiot."

Mark's temporary good feeling deflated. He didn't know what to say, so settled on something stupid; "You're sure?"

"I'm their fucking mother. I ought to know.....  
Goddammit."

"Well, at least you can now confront your other daughter."

"Why? What good does that do me? I don't care. Shari's nineteen and legal. Candy's fifteen and statutory. That's the entire point, asshole." She was livid.

The implications of what she had just said were new to Mark and he started to think of a number of scenarios, none convincing, so he stuck with the simplicity of the focus that he had gotten the wrong thing and Connie's concern for her under-aged daughter. In desperation he said; "I can keep working on it and in the meantime, maybe you can pretend that the photos are of Candy."

Though she thought that that was absolutely stupid, she, too, was desperate, but not for the same reason the nitwit thought. Having no other current option, she took the pictures, saying; "I'll give it a try, but it probably won't work. I ought to kick you right in your ass."

"I'm sorry. You probably should. Look, I'll keep trying whether you pay me or not. I owe it to you."

Connie's anger almost dissipated in the face of the apology. She just said; "Oh, Mark," and left. She attempted to silently walk by Vicky, her mind on more important matters than petty courtesy. Vicky was distracted by the photos she was holding. She did a double take at Connie and what she held in her lap and murmured; "Wet all over. Hmmm, hmmm."

Connie took that as a reference to the rain and just said; "Bye."

She drove to Benito's Toyota dealership very slowly as the windshield wipers failed miserably at providing good vision in the continuing torrent. She would take a desperate shot at buying some time and action. She barged into Benito's office, where he sat alone; signing some documents and silently placed the photos in front of him. He put his pen down and took a hard look, picking some up to get a better view. She nervously watched and then he disgustedly dropped them on the desk,



saying; "What kind of shit are you trying to give me? This is Shari. Everybody knows her."

Connie was as prepared as she could be and replied; "Maybe we can have them doctored."

"The cops will pick that up easily, stupid. We know it's going on. Shari's of legal age! Get me pictures of statutory rape. That's all I want."

Flustered, Connie tried to be playful, but Benito pushed her away. She hoped that this might be the start of a new game and tried again. But Benito again pushed her aside and said; "Take your stupid fucking pictures and get out of here. Don't come back without what I want. Then, maybe I'll allow you something.... Maybe."

She had been treated roughly in the past and generally liked it, but previously she was always rewarded. This was a new strange feeling that she didn't like, so she took the photos and left. The soaking she received getting to the car didn't cool her off.

Mark took the pictures from Vicky and put them in one of his desk drawers. He dejectedly said; "See 'ya. I'm going home." When he got into the hallway, he saw two burly men in soaked, dark, pinstriped suits walking quickly his way and before he could think, one grabbed his arm, spinning him around

and the other punched him in the stomach. The wind knocked out of him, Mark fell to his knees, but they picked him up and frisked him, slamming him into the wall.

He got another shot in the belly and slumped down, thinking that these guys looked a bit like the duo he met at the warehouse entrance on Hook Harbor Road. They pulled him to his feet by the arms. One took out a knife and held it to Mark's throat, saying; "This is a friendly message from Callie. If you keep following him, the next message will be delivered by the bad guys."

They let him go, turned to leave and one turned back to give him another one in the gut. Mark fell to the ground again. His assailant pointed at him and said; "Don't think we're fucking around. You're getting close to stuff that's way over your head." Mark sat there, not yet ready to move and remembered Connie's comment about "statutory." For the first, time he considered that he might be totally in the dark. If Connie was concerned with statutory rape, why didn't she go to the cops? She must have meant "statutory" as a short hand way of merely describing the situation. And given her and her family's lifestyle, why did she have a problem with Candy's desires? Maybe Connie considered it too early to be playing with a fossil. But it's 1972 and anything goes. And what kind of "way over my head" stuff is the thug talking about? Sonny

and the Feds had warned him about Hook Harbor Road. But, no one said anything about the Thunderbird. He wanted to continue as he was making good money for the first time in his life. He knew he was missing something important.

When he felt better he dashed through the rain and drove back home, dripping wet. Allison greeted him at the door, saying; "I'm glad you're back. I'm really feeling strange today." She let the bathrobe slip from her shoulders, took him by the hand and said; "Come on, baby. Make me feel better."

She sat on the couch, the only sound in the apartment the driving precipitation drenching the windowsill. He forgot about his bellyache.

When Connie got back home the first thing she did was put the photos in the family room chest of drawers where she kept Mark's business cards. Warren entered the room wearing a robe and kissed her neck. He said; "Everything go okay?"

"No, but I don't want to think about it."

"You're not in any trouble, are you?"

"No. I just may have lost an admirer."

He slightly laughed and said; "Well, you'll always have me."

She gently kissed his lips and continued with increasing fervor. She said; "I love you so much."

"I love you, too."

"I'm also hot as hell."

She sat down and he went down until the rain stopped. She got up, took his hand and put him in the chair. In a few minutes the precipitation again struck the open window. He stroked her hair tenderly and again said; "I love you."

After five languid minutes, Connie got up and said; "I think I'm going to sleep the day away. I've been through a lot and I'm really tired."

He said; "I'll rest, too.... on my favorite pillow."

She rubbed his cheek, saying; "Thanks, honey, but not now. I really need some sleep." They kissed and she went upstairs to bed. Warren was wide awake, dressed and decided to use the idle time to check on Mark's progress. He drove Connie's Camaro to Journal Square. When he entered the vestibule of Mark's office, he saw Vicky with her voluptuous black legs up on her desk, reflecting on the pictures she had taken out of Mark's drawer of Connie's exploits.

She was startled and embarrassed and quickly put her feet on the floor, knocking Connie's photos all over. Warren bent down and picked up some of the pictures and was immediately elated.

As Vicky straightened her dress, Warren said; "Don't be embarrassed. I do it all the time. Are there any more of these photos?"

"No, they're all here."

"Great. That's what I came for." He continued picking them up off the floor. Vicky picked up the phone and said; "I'll get Mark."

"Don't bother him. This is what I came for. This is good stuff. Tell him to keep getting more; I'll be glad to pay."

"This IS good stuff. Mark hasn't been paying attention to me lately and I'm lonely; you know what I'm saying."

Warren used his advantageous position to get a different view of her rainy Afro. He kissed her and when she didn't move, he got up and locked the outside door.

She continually moved around on the chair. She said; "You white guys are crazy freaks. But, I love it."

After an hour they thought was five minutes, she said; "I've got to get to the other little room." He held her and said; "No, right here is fine." The rain once more blasted and Warren imagined that he detected water on his face and hands.

He said; "Thanks, baby, you're great."

She said; "You've got to visit more often."

He got all the photos and said; "Tell Mark I'm serious. I'll pay for all that he can get."

Vicky said; "Can you get me some copies?"

Warren smiled and while exiting, said; "I'll bring them next time."

Mark and Allison kissed and nuzzled until she pulled away saying, "Enough, enough. It's getting sore."

He ignored her and tried to continue. She said; "Stop. Come on. It tickles."

He tightened his arms firmly around her. She was finally able to stand up and when free she said; "Dammit, Mark. When I say no, I mean no."

He frowned, looked up at her and said; "I could do this all day."

"Same old Mark. Isn't there anything else you like to do?"

Mark gave her an evil grin which answered her question, but it also reminded her of old times.

She turned her back to him and said; "Try this."

She watched him in the mirror, excited at his exuberance and the thought of him doing the same thing with others. She recalled someone's insight of; "I don't want to have sex with somebody I respect." She wished there were two Marks.

She remembered when she was with him years ago. She was walking alone near her home, when she met two female friends from school.

The first said; "When you kiss him, can you taste me?" and they both laughed.

The thoughts further excited her, so she settled in with Mark #1 and enjoyed another half hour of feeling superior. She got tired of standing and ordered him to stop. She again turned around and presented her other side and said; "I've got a special treat for you." The cloud burst decimated the windowsill and thunder cracked. She loved the feeling of power that she had over her debauched slave.

She said; "Isn't there something else we can do all day?"

He looked questioningly at her and said; "Like what?"

She had her answer, but it wasn't one he wanted to hear, at least not at this moment. She looked discouragingly at him, put her best foot forward and started reading more of "*Funkytown USA*."

As he paid lip service to the entree, she started to call him various names. When she said; "You're not sexy, you're just disgusting," his feelings were hurt. He thought that he was doing something nice for his love, which she requested and wound up chastised for it. He knew it as his joy, too, but he thought that was the case only because he liked giving pleasure to those he cared about. He remembered the beating he had gotten. He felt embarrassed and silly in front of the girl he loved, who now treated him disdainfully. He decided he had to get away for

a while and get even with Callie, somehow. He tried to catch Allison's eyes with a hurt, questioning look, but she ignored him and looked at her book.

Candy spent her day thinking about her situation, sometimes angry and sometimes crying. She decided that the best thing she could do is settle the matter once and for all, so she called Callie with a new modus operandi.

"Hello."

"Callie, it's Candy. I can't stand it anymore. I need your company desperately."

Callie forgot about his busy day and said; "When can I come get you?"

She suspected that he would answer something like that and was both disappointed and angry, which she was controlled enough not to show; "How about right now?"

"Be there in a few minutes." She hung up.

Mark would like to see Callie get in trouble for a few reasons. He was being paid and he liked the payee. He didn't think old farts should be bothering with underage girls and his belly was still not quite as good as it was when the day started. He dressed, kissed Allison goodbye and drove the red Corvair to Liberty Lane.



Allison turned on the television and settled on a channel, having some kind of "investigative report." A thirty-ish commentator, with a wrinkled brow, a dark mustache and long hair, was questioning four young bullet headed men in military uniforms. The four testified that they were members of four different units, each laughingly referred to as "Zippo squads." They, of course were not participants but saw first-hand the rest of their squads burn down South Vietnamese villages, after raping the younger women while their husbands watched and then killing everyone there. The charred bodies had already been found inside the former huts by the "investigating authorities."

After answering a few questions offered by the seemingly shocked and outraged commentator, they unanimously stuck to their sordid stories, emphasizing that they were not participants, that they knew of no military reason for the actions and wanted to come forward now in an effort to get these appalling acts stopped. Mr. Mustache thanked them and they left. He then went into the audience with his microphone to get reactions. There were five steady refrains; 1) "I don't believe it;" 2) "The four were unpatriotic to be saying such things;" 3) "Why didn't they come forward sooner?" 4) "They should have pursued this through military channels;" and 5) "How much money did they get to come on television and say this?"

Allison's simple thought was that absolute power corrupts absolutely, but also realized that the absolute power Mark had given her because of his love, was enjoyed by her in a non-loving way. Or, was it a loving way? She shut the television, put down the book and drowsed, with unanswerable questions circling in her mind. She was certain she now saw the true meaning of love-hate.

Mark, trying a bit harder to be inconspicuous and having the luxury of gas and the money for more, circled Liberty Lane rather than parking. The torrential rain had ceased, leaving puddles he splashed through. People were coming home from work and there was no reason to take special note of him in the bustle. On his third trip, he was rewarded seeing what looked like Candy steadfastly striding out of number 694 and walking toward the Boulevard. He remembered that Connie had told him that Candy usually wore lighter clothes than her sister and this determined looking girl had on a pink blouse and long white pants.

As he got back to the Boulevard he saw her enter the shiny new Caddy and he followed.

He could see arms waving around in an agitated manner and "lawnmower head" gesturing with his palms up, in a seeming effort to assuage her and end the apparent argument. No such luck as the girl tried to smack him in his head.

The same scene continued for a few blocks and then the girl made a more furious concerted onslaught on Mr. Flat Top, at which point he hit the gas hard, picking up a lot of speed. Mark got stuck at a red light and lost sight of them. He continued on another half mile to no avail and then drove to the Thunderbird Motel, but did not see the Caddy. His activities diluted the hurt feelings he had before and he was now glad to go back and see Allison again.

As he entered the apartment she got up from the couch, ran over to him, put her arms around his neck and kissed him on the mouth, saying; "I'm sorry. I'm so, so sorry."

He was happy, smiled and said; "For what?"

She lovingly looked into his eyes and he took her hand, leading her back to the couch. He picked up the book and said; "Come on, let's find a better place to live."

Callie went down a side street and circled around, coming back to the Boulevard, heading quickly back toward Liberty Lane.

The in-progress conversation/yelling match continued him saying; "Fucking goddammit. You said you were desperate. What did you expect?"

Candy said; "I only said that because that's the only time you want to see me."

"What's wrong with that?"

"I don't believe you just said that." She made another attempted smack at his head.

"Would you rather play checkers?"

"I don't remember where this whole thing started, but it's just damn stupid now. If you just want something desperately, there is plenty available right around the Thunderbird."

"That's just where I'm going after I get rid of you."

She started to cry and said; "This isn't the way it's supposed to be."

The car screeched to a halt at Liberty Lane. He pushed her roughly on the shoulder and said; "Get the fuck out of here."

Her pride hurt, she did exactly that and watched the car pull away. Oblivious to everything around her, she walked home, went to her room and put on the television for company, dazedly watching the second showing of Mr. Mustache and the four military "Zippo squad" informants. She wasn't as shocked as other viewers. After her last few days she was ready to believe almost anything.

## CHAPTER 14

A new summer day and, excepting Candy, all the people arise hopeful of another chance at meeting their goals and dreams, as the brilliant summer sun burns through the haze left by yesterday's downpour, the clarity, leading to new outlooks.

Candy lay in bed. She didn't sleep much thinking about the unpleasant surprises she had been receiving from callous Callie. It seemed such a short time ago that she had the highest expectations. Though the sun was beckoning she didn't want to go out and face a world she now saw as universally brutal and perverse, so she wandered the large house in her Mickey Mouse bathrobe, looking at nothing in particular.

Warren showed Connie the new pictures he had gotten, saying; "You are the hottest thing on this planet."

She looked at them, smiled at him and replied; "These are pretty good. How did you get them?"

"Some detective on Journal Square."

"Not Mark Cinchapport?"

"Yeah, you know him?"

"Yeah." She thought that Mark must really be turned on by her now."

Warren put his head in a book about the Bermuda Triangle as a rejuvenated Connie laid back and tried to count her blessings. If Benito only wanted her for his "business," the loss could be minimized by hanging out at most any bar. She felt grateful for Warren in many ways and smiled as he tickled her. He was particularly excited this morning as he had his new collection of Connie photos in his hand and mind. "Slow down," she said and he couldn't. She panted, groaned and served his morning juice long before she wanted to and then he made her breakfast.

As Connie greedily gorged herself, she thought back to the beginning of her fascination. As soon as she heard the word blowjob, she couldn't wait to experience it. The young girls she knew in school regularly talked about it, but always said how disgusting a thing it was. Connie thought that the frequency of the conversation indicated something else.

After her experiences became public knowledge, she was accosted by her female classmates in the girl's room and was forced to perform. She was then turned her over, without a stitch, to the boys waiting outside. She secretly enjoyed the adventure. When she got back home she played the fiddle and drank egg creams straight from the bottle for hours.

She let go of Warren and said; "Turn around." She soon found new life, shifted again and got her reward.

She said; "I feel great. I'm really rested after yesterday, very aroused and I've got an idea that might kill two birds with one stone." She thought that it was possible that Mark needed a different kind of incentive to obtain her precious photos. Warren watched her derriere as she walked to the phone to make a call. He heard;

"Hi, Mary Lee, this is Connie."

"Fine, very fine. I got an idea."

"How about you and your friend Roberta meet me at my house and then we'll go see a guy who just loves tasty surprises."

"Oh come on. He and I can be your slaves. We'll do anything you like."

"If he doesn't, I'll do it myself. Please. I want your big, black, hairy presences for lunch."

"Yeah, that's fine, too. Anything you like."

"Okay, see ya."

Connie then called Mark's office and was informed by Vicky that Mark was at home.

When he heard the knock at the door, Warren hid behind the couch, as Connie let Mary Lee and Roberta in. She led them into the family room and they sat down. Connie kissed them and said; "Here's my plan. We'll each put on one of my loose dresses, go to this guy's apartment and when he answers the door, we'll show him the news and say, "Lunchtime, slave."

Mary Lee, a thin light skinned black woman, originally from Georgia, said; "What if he's not interested?"

Connie said; "I told you he loves it.... And if I'm wrong, I'm your slave all day."

Roberta, a heavy chocolate delight, with a big grinning face, said; "White slaves have to start on the dark side of the moon."

Connie smiled and said; "No problem. I've already had a white one today and I crave dark meat. Probably both he and I will both love it. Come on, take off those clothes and put on one of my dresses." She watched the two change and planted more kisses. She donned a dress herself and they left. Warren saw the activity and thought he felt a drop on his hand. He said to himself; "That is the perfect girl."

When she saw her debauched mother leave, Candy felt free to stroll the rest of the house. She didn't have any idea what she was looking for, but thought that maybe an answer would pop out at her from somewhere. She looked in closets, drawers and boxes, getting lost in memories of where and who she was when that item was purchased, when this picture was taken and when that book or record was first discovered. It was a bit strange to be fifteen and looking back already, but she was the victim of a broken heart and she found that can happen at any age.



She opened the magic drawer and all sense of reverie disappeared. She had strong suspicions, but to see pictures of Callie and Shari worthy of a porn magazine, shocked her back to a demented, crying, angry and vicious mindset. She kept looking at the photos to see if there might be something there that would indicate that they were taken some time before she had met him. The opposite happened when she saw that the watch Callie was wearing was the one she had given him two weeks prior. She suddenly got focused, put the pictures back where they were, retrieved the card of Mark Cinchapport and intended to go see him. Candy wasn't sure for what purpose, but thought something might occur to her on the way. Today was destined to be one of reckoning and perhaps her shock had left her with a numb, resolute will. She had taken enough shit from her mother, Shari and most of all, the one who was supposed to love her forever, Callie.

She walked to her room, oblivious to her surroundings and changed into an uncusomary dark green blouse and black pants. She descended the stairs, conscious of the old carved spindles attached to the banister. They were painted white, but nothing could hide the nicks and chips they had gotten over the years.

She got outside, warm in the torrid sun and started her slow ten block walk to 22 Journal Square.

Mark and Allison were lying on the carpet, getting warmer and warmer from the incandescence streaming in the window. As he contentedly rested, gently nibbling on the "breakfast of champions," he flashed back to the early times he enjoyed the restful position. His first crush happened in the eighth grade and he made all kinds of overtures to Amelia, who handled them dismissively, but not in a derisive manner. One afternoon he was doing his usual flirtation routine in school and she must have been in a particularly foul mood and blasted him in the presence of the entire class. As everyone was pointing at him laughing, he went into a kind of shock, never before feeling so stupid, surprised that people would find it hilarious to belittle one who was trying to express lovely feelings.

So, attempting to elevate his position, he told what he thought was his best friend that he didn't really like Amelia, anyway and that his real passion was for Barbara, who was in the other eighth grade class. To really push things he said that he would love to go south with her, slightly outrageous in its time. His "best friend" must have broadcasted the news, as the next day when he was walking home, Barbara was alone on the corner grinding against a metal mail box. As he got nearer, she told him how good it feels when it vibrates, as she hit the mailbox with her fist.

He tried leaning against it and found the feeling a pleasant one. Her round face was partially covered with medium length straight black hair and the early developing beauty wore a tight white knitted top that partially covered her sizable protrusions. The tight black shorts did not hide the fleshy ripples evident when she moved to and away from the mailbox. She said; "You know what HJR stands for?"

After a few seconds of unproductive thought, he said; "No."

She explained that Rosalie was her best friend. "Know what BJB stands for?"

"He had a good guess for this one, but chose to play dumb, saying; "No."

"Barbara."

"Is that you?"

She put three fingers of her left hand in her mouth and smiled.

He said; "Do you know what CLM stands for?"

She continued her smile and said; "You."

Actually he had no previous experience in anything other than fantasy, but said; "Yes," and stuck out his tongue, licking his lips thoroughly, then added; "Is your mother home now?"

"No, she's out with some guy I can't stand."

He said; "Come on," and they walked to her first floor apartment and closed the blinds. In part out of nervousness, he

said; "Let me do you first," knowing that he would not experience an inability to perform, but mostly because that's what he wanted to do.

He practiced his soon to be specialty and then she hers.

The next morning, he scrutinized his face in the bathroom mirror and was encouraged when he found no warts, or any other physical evidence of his activities. Barbara had other boyfriends, but they would continue to periodically meet for the next few months.

High school started in a month or so and Mark got the thrill of his young life, when sitting alone eating in the cafeteria, three women, who were the school cooks, brought their trays to the table next to his and sat facing him. One had medium length frizzy black hair and looked about forty. She was both dark and light complexioned, a Jamaican Dugla girl. One had meticulous long blond hair and was a little younger. The third looked about sixty with short pinned back black hair. What they had in common was that they paid no attention to him, sat with legs slightly parted and didn't seem to be wearing any underwear. He did his best not to be obvious, but was compelled to solve the panty mystery with prolonged observation. After determining that today was a laundry day, he continued his gaze and his pants got tighter. This was too good to be true.

"They must know what they're doing," he thought. He tried to catch an eye and when he did he would lick his lips and the eye would turn away. Though he desperately wanted to, he couldn't get up the nerve to approach three older women; one young one was difficult enough.

The same thing went on for days, Mark continually aroused and thinking that this was no accident. Why didn't one of them at least look his way? Was every day laundry day? Why did they always sit where he had the view of paradise? Don't they ever cross their legs? He wished that he could meet all three of them, one after the other.

Then one day the frizzy black haired woman showed up alone and took her customary seat. Having no one to talk to, she put a book in front of her face; *"The Catcher in the Rye,"* and sat with her legs as widely open as nature would allow. Mark looked at her brown unadorned skin and centered on one spot. The hair seemed to cover the entire region and was sticking up as if it had just been back combed. He couldn't stand it. He kept trying to catch her eye, but both remained behind her book. He fantasized. After twenty minutes passed, he realized that she might leave any time and that he may never again get the opportunity, so he picked up his tray and walked by her, dropping his spoon near her feet. As he bent down to retrieve

it, he whispered; "I see that you've prepared more goodies for me today."

She took her eyes off the book and put it on the table, Mark afraid that she would yell out something. She spoke in a low tone and said; "What took you so long?" Mark heard the sweet patois and learned that she and her friends loved providing munchies.

Mark learned where Frizzy lived and was invited to visit, where he was taught the finer points (or buttons) of the arts. He liked the taste, aroma and texture of her long curly hair so much, that he became a frequent guest, eventually meeting the other two.

The three continued their lunchtime game, though now all smiling, as he focused on the beauties. He never joined them at their table, not wanting to call attention to his "friendship" with them, but also because he liked the view from his current seat.

Allison's voice broke his reverie; "It's been an hour. Are you going to do this all day?"

"Um hmmm."

"Well, okay, but I have to take a break."

"I can save you the trip."

Allison always had mixed feelings about the procedure; at times it excited her to do what seemed to be a heightened kick

and other times she thought there was something wrong about it. Today she decided to oblige him, saying; "All right. If you really want it."

"I want to taste all of you," and he did.

The door opened and in walked Connie, Mary Lee and Roberta, each holding up their fabric with two hands, legs spread slightly, showing their prizes. Astonished, Mark broke from his drink and ogled them. Allison got up and ran to the bathroom. In a southern drawl, Mary Lee said; "No need to go, baby. We can wait until you're done, or we can make it a four on one." The three newcomers unbuttoned their obstacles, dropped them to the floor and stood near Mark, massaging themselves and smiling at him.

Candy continued down the wide broiling streets, which led to Journal Square. While she wanted to think of something brilliant, all her mind could focus on were the puddles left from yesterday's rain, the discarded candy wrappers and paper cups; and the dog shit. She kept her head down, resolute not to step into any of the hazards. To her it only seemed that a minute had gone by when she saw 22 Journal Square. She climbed the irregular steps and made her way to Mark's first floor office, opened the door to the vestibule and saw Vicky sitting on her chair, legs crossed, her tight black skirt at her upper

thighs, displaying a lot of un-stockinged black flesh. Vicky didn't move and said; "May I help you?" in a somewhat condescending tone, recognizing Candy's age and solemnity.

"Yes. I'm looking for Mark Cinchapport."

"Are you one of his clients?"

"No, I just want to talk to him."

"Well, he's not here yet. Do you have any money?"

"No, I'd just like to see him for a few minutes."

Vicky decided not to disturb Mark about someone with no cash, so she said; "Okay, have a seat in his office and he'll see you when he gets here."

"When is he expected?"

Vicky laughed; "Whenever he finishes breakfast, most likely."

Candy wasn't sure what that meant, but had some suspicions. Not having any other questions, she walked into Mark's office and sat. Ten minutes went by and she got fidgety. She saw that Vicky could not directly look into Mark's office from where she sat reading a magazine, so Candy opted to do some exploring. She opened drawers and cabinets, containing a lot of papers of no interest to her, but then came across a manila folder with "Roe, Constance" typed on it. When she removed it, she found another with "Roe, Warren" as the title, behind it. She put them on Mark's desk and opened the first, finding a



picture of Shari and her and another of Callie Majors. More than her worst suspicions were confirmed and she felt more alone than ever before. She read through the handwritten notes and saw "Candy and Callie sex acts. Penetration." She now was certain of who was following her around, but couldn't quite fathom the perversity of those around her, each moment's revelation leading her to new disgust. Her mother wanted photos of her "in the act" with Callie. Her sister had been photographed "in the act" with Callie, when she knew full well that he was her love.

She stared at the blank wall, hoping she was in a bad dream. She had read books and seen movies about tragedy in a cruel, uncaring world, but never before thought that her own would rival theirs; after all they were only fabricated words and images concocted to attract a bored audience. She looked into the Warren Roe folder and found a clothed picture of her mother. She found this amusing, as she thought it would be easier to get one of her unadorned. She read through the notes and saw "Sex acts with anyone." That sounded like her mother all right, but she was mildly curious why Warren wanted someone else to be the photographer. Another question struck her; "Who wanted the Shari photos?" she had seen at home. While she didn't really understand why Warren would desire photos of her indiscriminate mother, she considered it the height of

perversity to have a mother request shots of her daughters. She knew enough and didn't dwell on some corrupt thoughts she didn't want to understand. She was surrounded by a licentious mother, a debauched step-father and a sister with no sense of propriety. Worst of all, Callie, her hope for escape, didn't really love her and wanted others to watch them doing things meant for privacy. Though the others were people she inherited and eventually would get away from, she thought that Callie was the worst. He was the one who raised her expectations, only to be secretly laughing at her innocence, while he got another notch on his belt.

She had worked herself up to a hatred she never previously approached. She ripped up the thin folders and stuffed them in her pants pocket. She looked through the rest of the desk drawers to see if she had missed anything and there it was; a beautiful, shiny black handgun. She picked up one of Mark's kerchiefs, a pale yellow and used it to put the gun in her jeans pocket. She knew what she had to do and the consequences would be irrelevant. She was sick of this rotten life and the devil must pay for his sins. She didn't intend to get caught, but accepted the possibility, justifying it with the thought that she would merely be trading one prison for another.

She walked through the vestibule where a disinterested Vicky didn't look up from her magazine. She said; "I'm leaving. I can't wait all day."

"Suit yourself, baby."

Candy stepped purposefully through a now crowded Journal Square, passing by people ambling about, in an apparent attempt to stay somewhat cool on the scorching day. Candy liked the feel of the sweat she generated, wiping it, only out of necessity, from her eyes. It was the first thing human she experienced in her young day.

Mark tried to follow Allison into the bathroom, but she locked the door. He rapped at it and called out; "Allison, I don't even know these people."

Connie laughed and countered him with; "You know me well enough."

Allison had made up her mind. She was tired of the same old shit, slipped on a simple light white dress and stuffed her other clothes into a duffle bag. She opened the door to see the four of them in all their glory.

Mark reached for her hand, but she pulled it away, saying; "Mark. This is over. I'm not going through this again."

He said; "I love you, Allison," and tried to engage her resolute blue eyes with his pleading brown ones.

Allison said; "You love everybody. Go drink up," and she moved quickly out the door with Mark in pursuit.

He said; "It's not my fault," and received no reaction from Allison, who continued out the front door of the building to her two year old light green Volvo and drove away. Mark stopped at the front door, not wanting to walk Headwaters Road in his present attire and watched her fade into the brightness. He dejectedly walked back to his apartment and saw the girls standing near the couch, with their hands on their hips. He looked at Connie and angrily said; "Who the hell do you think you are to just barge in on me like this?"

Connie was not surprised at the tone under the circumstances and softly replied; "If your girlfriend has hang ups, it's not my fault," while Mary Lee and Roberta smiled and nodded.

It touched a nerve. Mark always thought that Allison was slightly hung up and he couldn't take his gaze off the three waiting treats, thinking of them as different flavors; vanilla, butterscotch and chocolate. The girls sensed his compliant demeanor and Connie approached, grabbed him and said; "Come on over here baby. We'll make you feel better." A prisoner of his passions mark allowed himself to be led to the couch, where the three took seats.

He was out of control and instinctively wanted to taste the drumsticks Connie brought with her. She said; "This is a special incentive for boys who do what they're told and get photos." She massaged herself and watched him. He elevated to the drumsticks and saved her the trouble of massaging herself.

"Good slave," she said; "But you're forgetting my friends." She pulled his hair and diverted him to Mary Lee's light brown delights. He started low and worked his way slowly up as Mary Lee coldly watched. When she was done, she said; "Go get my friend's dark chocolate."

Mark shifted over to Roberta and climbed the sweet ladder. She said; "Tell me how much you love it." His entreaties worked and he was rewarded with a drink he sloppily got all over himself.

Allison had second thoughts, wanted to see if Mark's words had any meaning and drove back to his apartment. Rather than entering the front way, she walked through the side alley to the back yard and peered in his first floor window. She saw a drenched Mark on his knees animatedly eating dark chocolate as Connie lay on the floor enjoying her own choice morsel. Allison was glad she made the trip, as she was now 100% convinced that this would be the last one ever. She slowly walked back to her Volvo and casually drove into the burning sun, reflecting on the

clear picture she had not wanted to obtain and wondered what she would do next. "*California Dreaming*" played on the car radio.

For the next two hours Mark and Connie did as they were told by Mary Lee and Roberta, getting whatever food or beverage they demanded from the kitchen. They danced upon command, having their bodies slapped and pinched while grinding away. They begged and if done well enough were allowed to sample dark culinary delights. They were head over heels with each other on the floor as Mary Lee and Roberta watched the performance and verbally evaluated it. The two black women gave Mark and Connie treats if their deeds were good enough. Sometimes they greedily kept them for themselves and sometimes they shared them. When they left, Connie said; "There's more of this available to a good photographer."

## CHAPTER 15

Warren didn't know what to do with himself as he awaited Connie's return and put on the television to see a news report of a demonstration in Saigon. South Vietnamese mothers and fathers from outlying regions brought their napalm burned children to the big city to highlight the effect the drawn out, pointless war was having on them. Some held up photos of dead burned babies. They cried and talked excitedly to the news cameras, thinking they might have some effect on the situation. A Buddhist Monk set himself aflame and the camera stayed with him until his body broke into pieces. Realism and time would suggest that their efforts were in vain, easily superseded by the needs of the defense contractors, black marketeers and those military men with the authority to give out contracts. He shut the television, preferring to reserve his patriotism for Connie's assets and her adventures.

Candy continued her determined, perspiring walk to Major's Chevrolet, about six long blocks from Journal Square on the Route Nine Highway. She passed through old residential areas; originally "least cost" housing, now the lower levels converted to commercial use. Open windows of the rectangular three story attached structures permitted the sounds of loud family

discussions and kids playing to hit the streets. It probably wasn't heard by the others that were coming and going from the retail stores, occupied by their own concerns, looking for a good buy, or yelling out greetings to friends, endeavoring to be heard over the constant stream of cars. The narrow concrete sidewalk proved a hazard for Candy, as she looked up to the windows releasing the sounds, causing her to brush by others at her quick pace.

"Hey, watch it," one fortyish eastern European woman called out. Candy paid no attention. "You should be more careful, little girl." The woman shook her head disapprovingly as did two other associates, as they watched Candy continue her rapid pace. Candy focused on the sounds of family life. She wondered what "normal" kinfolk acted like. She heard cries of;

"Get out of my way."

"I'm getting the hell out of here."

"Don't touch me."

"Get out of here and get a job."

"Do that and I'll break your head."

"Shut up. You'll wake the kid."

"Mommy!"

"Mommy!"

"Mommy!"



The last short street before the highway was inhabited by abandoned, boarded up, collapsing houses and open lots tall with green weeds, wherever the dumped garbage allowed. A few male teenagers were walking slowly through the rubble, smoking pot, with heads down, perhaps looking for "new," interesting garbage. Whatever, they didn't pay any attention to Candy. She saw the back of the dealership surrounded by an eight foot chain link fence, topped by two twisted strands of barbed wire. She circled it, slowing her pace in an effort not to be tripped up by the garbage and discarded construction materials.

The back of the building was dark with many exposed pipes and ducts. Dumpsters brimmed with overflowing styrofoam, broken plastic parts of something or other and torn cardboard boxes, some of which were adept at escaping in breezes and now lay on the asphalt ground. If any people were present they chose to make themselves invisible, perhaps hiding behind the dumpsters.

When she walked far enough to see the front, she thought she had entered another world. It was a one story structure with a huge electronic sign which said "MAJOR'S CHEVROLET", the lights only visible when a passing cloud cast some shade on the area. The façade on which it rested was entirely comprised of clear glass panels, held in place by thin aluminum slats every eight feet, the tops covered with red, white and blue drapes and a sign saying "PRE-INDEPENDENCE DAY SALE" and a smaller sign

which indicated "FACTORY FRESH 1972 MODELS - CLOSEOUT BELOW BOOK VALUE." The huge asphalt parking lot was two-thirds full, the spaces closest to the building taken by shiny new cars with price tags on the windshields.

Candy entered the sliding doors which magically opened as she neared and saw pandemonium. Salesmen perspiring in sports jackets which did not match their pants were following around potential buyers assuring them they could get anything they wanted with zero down financing. A small crowd of salesmen and customers surrounded a black floor model, on which sat two well-developed women of about thirty, wearing red thong bikinis, jiggling about as they laughed, smiled and posed for onlookers. No one paid any attention to Candy as she passed through the area lined with "assemble yourself" pressed wood desks covered with plastic strips intended to look like dark maple and the neighboring small red upholstered chairs on plastic wheels.

She entered a thin corridor of three small unoccupied offices and saw Callie sitting behind the desk of the last, manically shuffling papers. She entered the open door and he looked up, saying; "What are you doing here?"

His now customary less than gallant behavior didn't upset her and she deadpanned; "I wanted to see you."

He took note of her perspiring face and wet shirt. He thought he was being sly when he said; "Hot?"

She murmured; "Yeah."

He looked around the room and out of the eight by ten glass window with a hallway view and said; "I've really got to get through these documents. You can strip and get under the desk." He watched as she put her right hand into her pants pocket, thinking that she was undoing them. She pulled out the yellow kerchief and carefully used it to hold the gun. Callie was staring dumb-foundedly as she pulled the trigger, the bullet entering his chest. His body went limp and slumped to the side of the chair, his head resting on the top of it.

Candy was surprised how his eyes remained open and seemed to bulge and how the blood spurted from the bullet hole like a fountain. She thought; "He must have been under a lot of pressure. Maybe I relieved it." Never before having seen a corpse, she wasn't sure that he was dead, so she fired a second shot in the same general area and watched the body make a small lurch and then again sit still. She looked at the second wound and was unimpressed as the geyser was nowhere near as good as the first. She looked out the window at the un-populated hallway and correctly concluded that the noise and commotion of the big sale made her sounds insignificant. She threw the kerchief and gun in his face and watched them slide down and come to rest in his lap.

She no longer felt hot. She was stone cold, determined and calmly walked out, again taking note of the nervous talky salesmen, the customers feigning disinterest with polite grins and furrowed brows and the two ladies, laughing and leaning against the floor model, each trying to pull down the other's bikini top, enjoying the rabid entranced attention.

As she slowly made the forty-five minute trek home, she thought how easy it was and wondered if she was supposed to feel something. "What's next?" was the only thought that continued to concern her. As she unemotionally walked through the squalor she had called home for fifteen years, she made a big decision. She didn't need Callie or anyone else to get her to California and see her dad. She could do it by herself, probably with fewer complications.

When she got home she went through the silent house to her room and put on the television to hear the day's death count; 23,286 Viet Cong and 858 Americans. She chuckled and whispered "859." She rested on the bed, cried and slept.

Shari felt bored, left her room wearing a white bikini top and tight cut-off shorts, intending to find something to spice up her day. As she passed by the family room she heard the phone ringing and decided to answer it.

"Hello."

"May I speak to Shari?"

"This is Shari. Angelique?"

"Yeah, it's been a while."

"What's up?"

Angelique smirked; "Everything I can get a hold of." They giggled. Angel continued; "John and I have found a great place in New York City; Plato's Retreat."

"Plato's Retreat? Never heard of it."

"It's pretty new. It's an old warehouse in upper Manhattan, that's now being operated as an orgy place."

"Far out."

"Far fucking out. John and I have been there a few times..... and I was thinking; how about you and I go ourselves."

"What's it like?"

"Well, you have to enter as a couple.... I mean no single males. Inside people are walking around naked or with a towel. It's pretty much still the old warehouse, with mattresses on the floor. But, people are doing EVERYTHING!"

"S and M?"

"Yeah. Every area is for some specialty. Last time we were there a woman was strapped down spread eagle by her boyfriend. He sat on her chest and she started begging for

refreshment. He told her that she'd have to do everyone else who had a need first."

"Holy shit."

"Yeah, but listen. After a bunch of guys and girls had fun with her, her boyfriend gave her a champagne cocktail."

"Any guys like doing that sort of thing?"

"Yeah, some guys want to do whatever a woman tells them to and be rewarded with champagne."

"Freak show."

"I guess so, but it's 1972 and anything goes. They're nice people. No assholes."

The conversation continued until the daring duo established a date in two days.

Warren was napping in bed, got up, went to the kitchen and heard Connie's car returning. He usually woke up enthused and today was no exception, so he removed his robe and waited until she entered the room.

He got on his knees and started kissing her. She said; "Get up. I want to do a number one."

Warren was insistent and said; "No, I want this."

Connie thought a second; "Okay, but I want to sit down." She led him to the family room where she reclined and said; "If you do it good enough, I'll let you have a drink."

Warren did his usual best and the gourmet begged for her warm beverage.

Candy woke up, shut the television and went down to the kitchen to find something to eat. She heard part of the Warren and Connie show. Un-surprised and un-interested, she made a sandwich and brought it back to her room. As she ate she put some clothes in a satchel, used a magic maker to write "California" on a piece of cardboard and wrote a note which said; "Mom, I'm going to California. Don't worry. I'll be fine."

As she left the house, she put the note on the kitchen table. She purposefully walked back to the highway and continued on, holding the cardboard sign where it could be read by oncoming cars. After ten minutes, during which Candy really discovered how hot it was to be walking in full sun on asphalt, a 1970 light green Volvo pulled over to the shoulder in front of her. She ran to the car, looked in the open passenger window and saw the young blue-eyed blond, who said; "Well, get in."

Candy opened the door, threw her satchel and sign in the back seat and sat down. As the car started to again move, the teenager said; "How far are you going?"

"All the way."

Candy was elated. She said; "I think I'm gonna like you. That's the only way to be." She reached to the back seat, retrieved her sign and the Roe files, ripped them up and threw it all out the window, saying; "That's for New Jersey," as they watched the five brick, ten story abandoned projects fade in the distance.

The two looked at each other, started laughing and couldn't stop.

Mark and the sun were still overheated, when he walked to his office, hoping to see Vicky. He entered the vestibule quietly to see her asleep in her chair. He got under the desk. She jerked away, looked down and saw him. She said; "Oh, mark, it's you. What a nice way to wake up." Vicky repositioned herself and pulled his head toward her. "Back to the old, Mark?"

"Umm-hmm."

"Missed you, honey."

After both were through, Vicky said; "Oh, shit, I almost forgot. Business stuff. The other day, some friendly guy showed up here and took the pictures I had. Said he wants more."

"I think I know who that was. Get a name?"

"No. Mostly, I only saw the top of his head."



"I definitely know who that was." Mark and Vicky smiled at each other.

"And some little girl said he wanted to see you, but got tired of waiting."

Mark was quizzical. "Don't know who that was."

Vicky offered; "She said she didn't have any money and I KNOW you're not into little girls."

"I like 'em big and black, with lots of hair and experience." They gave each other wicked looks and Mark again put his face in the happy hirsute comfort zone.

The door opened and neither cared. Shari closed it behind her, chuckled and said; "The party started without me?" Her long black hair was pulled back and tied in a bun at the top, creating a severe appearance. The white bikini top and tight cut-off jeans made her other attributes the center of attention. Vicky rolled her eyes making no response. Mark looked up, smacking his head on the bottom of the desk. He crawled out backwards and saw the long white legs in front of him and thought that they looked familiar. He gazed at her face and he knew.

He said; "The party will continue in my room. You don't mind, do you, Vicky?"

"Hell no, as long as you do me first."

Mark led them to his office and locked the door. The three watched each other, exchanging friendly grins. Vicky seated her meaty torso in Mark's chair and hung one leg over the arm. He greedily put his face back where it belonged, while Shari watched the show from behind, fondling him.

After Vicky spasmed, she got up and said; "Salt and pepper, honey."

Shari smiled, sat in the chair and allowed Mark his culinary privilege while Vicky laid on the carpet floor, utilizing a hand for massage, with her eyes looking up at the activity.

Mark couldn't hold back any longer and as he nourished Vicky, he pressed harder against Shari, opening wide. Vicky succeeded in keeping his interest.

Shari watched both Vicky and Mark doing their jobs efficiently and passionately and went over the top distractedly moaning "Oh, shit". Mark kissed her feet and Vicky stood up and said; "Kiss mine."

He gladly did and the two girls put their hands on the desk with their backs to him and leaned forward. Mark needed no command to know what to do, switching back and forth, so no one would feel left out. Vicky pulled Mark to his feet and the ladies paid attention to him, one in front, the other in back.

Desperate to be relieved, Mark called out; "I need someone on my face."

Vicky obliged him and Shari produced an explosion. Mark stayed in his position and paid homage to both lover's feet and middle regions thanking them profusely.

As Shari left she said; "I told you I need a regular."

Mark replied; 'You got it, any time you so desire."

Vicky used a high pitched tone to say; "How about me?"

Mark smiled at her and replied; "All you want, whenever you want. How about later at my apartment?"

"You want to be my slave."

"Yeah."

"I'll be there, honey lover."

The two left and went home, each needing a siesta before tonight's fiesta.

## CHAPTER 16

As some were quietly savoring the day, four police cars, sirens blaring, pulled into the "Major's Chevrolet" parking lot, stopped near the front door and eight cops pushed their way through the crowd and entered.

Callie's body was still where Candy left it, slumped in the chair with a handgun and kerchief in his lap. After the cops determined who found the body and when, they questioned the employees and customers, but none had seen or heard anything of significance. There was little to do, but take names, addresses and phone numbers of the sizable crowd there on sale day. The morgue was called and the head cop used his handkerchief to put the gun and kerchief in their own plastic bags. Those people still inside were asked to leave and the dealership was roped off with yellow plastic strips saying; "Crime scene. No admittance."

A salesman asked the head cop; "Can we come back to work tomorrow?"

"No, this place is temporarily closed."

"When will it re-open?"

"I don't know. Whenever we're through."

"What do you think happened?"

"How the hell do I know? I just got here. You've got the advantage over me. You tell me."

The salesman drew a blank and started to worry about where his next paycheck would come from.

Two cops remained to guard the site. The crowd carried on nonsensical conversation, some talking about presumed enemies of Callie, which others expanded and repeated to more others. Before everyone left, the general consensus was that the dealership had not been moving cars out very well and as a consequence, Callie was in financial difficulty. Opinions varied on the death being either; a suicide; a murder by unsavory creditors; or a murder by his well-insured wife.

The bikini girls held a private conversation. One said; "This was the best job I got in some time."

"Yeah, a whole month of steady income."

"Shit."

"What now?"

She shook her head, looking down at her high heels; "Back to the fucking Thunderbird, I guess."

"I really hope they catch the bastard."

Connie had her usual head service going and was surrounded with photos of her recent exploits when the phone rang. She

said; "Hello, I hope this is good," as she glanced down at a grinning Warren, adjusting her legs.

Benito answered; "It's better than good, it's excellent. Callie is out of the picture."

Connie's mind was on other pictures, didn't immediately understand and said; "What?"

In an ebullient tone, he said; "Somebody offed him, whacked him, did him in, wasted him, blew him away. In other words some angel killed the fuck."

Connie was thrilled, thinking that she would now no longer be ostracized for her photo failures and said; "Who can I thank?"

"My cop friend told me that the gun used is registered to Mark Cinchapport, a local private eye. Is that your guy?"

Connie was stunned, but extremely rational, so responded; "I know a lot of guys and I don't discuss them with anyone except Warren."

Benito chuckled; "I'm sure of that. He must love you a whole lot."

Connie's excitement took a step up and she pushed against Warren; "Yeah, the slut is loving me right now." Warren looked up at her face and then went back down.

"Point is, I got the slave show and you can be my star."

Connie said; "Are you sure?"

"Yeaah, I just got a call from my Viet Nameese contact. Cut the questions. Put on your special stuff and I'll be there to get you in an hour. We'll celebrate on Hook Harbor Road."

"You got it." She hung up and anxious to get out, faked, got up, grabbed Warren and said; "Come on. Let me." He stood up and watched her, glancing at the photos of her doing the same thing with many others. He loved her eagerness and was soon satisfied. She licked her lips, got up and said; "I've got to get ready."

"That phone call?"

"Yeah, mind?"

"No. Tell me about it when you come back."

She put on bright red lipstick and messed her hair. She did a bumping and grinding dance to Warren's delight, swaying in circles.

She jiggled her way into the kitchen, thinking about what a great day it was. She eyed the note on the table, picked it up and read it, recognizing Candy's handwriting. She thought; "Oh, no, California. It's probably no coincidence that my baby left, Callie was dead and Mark's gun was found all at the same time. Protection is the order of the day. Short great day."

She went back to the living room and put on the dress she had left on the floor. Warren looked at her quizzically and she said; "Put on some decent clothes and wait here." She went up

to Candy's room and saw that some of her clothes were gone. She found Shari in her room and said; "Come down to the living room, it's important." Shari was still in another zone and said; "Whaaa?"

"Just come with me. You'll find out." They walked in on Warren nervously pacing the floor. "Sit down," Connie said to both of them. She retrieved the photos of Callie and Shari, as well as Mark's business cards from the drawer and showed them to her older daughter.

Shari said; "C'mon, mom. You know it's all right."

Connie assured her; "Not a problem," and proceeded to strike a match and set the items on flame, placing them on the fireplace grating.

She turned back to the group and said; "I can see that we all know Mark. The problem is that Candy has split for California and that Callie is dead, shot with Mark's gun. If anyone asks, we all are better off saying that we never met Mark.

Warren picked up his valuable photos and said; "I'd really like to keep these."

Connie liked them, too and said; "Okay, but nothing with his name on it." She sternly looked at both of them.

Warren said; "I'm fine."

Shari added; "Me, too."



Connie said; "Have either of you left anything at Mark's office that can be traced to you, like a check?"

Warren said; "I paid cash."

Shari laughed and said; "I didn't pay anything."

Connie said; "And neither of you know him."

They both nodded and said; "Right."

Connie went back into the kitchen and cried. She was sad that her little girl was gone and that she may be in gigantic trouble. She was unhappy with herself, not being the mother that Candy needed and thought that maybe she should have acted differently, at least until the children were grown. She visualized a serene setting of a family picnic at a park and the girls bringing home boys they wished to date. Wasn't that the way it was supposed to be? She sat, put her head down on the table and cried uncontrollably.

Warren and Shari heard her and entered the room. Upon seeing them Connie thought that these two were pretty happy and loved her. **The world changes.** It's 1972 and anything goes. She was what she was and that's all that she was. She got up, wiped her eyes and hugged both of them, saying; "I'll be all right." The two left the room and Connie defiantly pulled her dress back over her head and threw it on the floor.

A new deep blue Lincoln pulled into the driveway. Connie went out the door and walked down the driveway fully exposed,

with her hands behind her head, hips rolling from side to side and she let herself in the front passenger's door. Benito sat in the driver's seat with his motor running. She slid over and kissed him, super turned on by being watched by his two friends in the back seat.

After a few seconds, Benito said; "Enough, slave. I want to see you with my friends." She said; "Don't leave yet. I want Warren to see this." She got out, as did one guy in the back, allowing her to get between them. She put one hand on each and smiled at them. One said; "What are you waiting for?" She switched back and forth between the two and after a few minutes of live entertainment for Warren, the car left and drove to Hook Harbor Road. The only scenery Connie saw was the glistening kind she loved.

Benito parked in the center of the crowded parking lot and as the four walked to the entrance, the latecomers watched as Connie tried to keep both hands busy as she walked looking down. She paid no attention as they watched her jiggle.

The men took seats near the rear, while Connie preferred to use her knees near Benito balancing things by resting her hands on his friends. The group got plenty of nearby attention, despite Jimmy Park's having concluded his opening announcement and the curtain rising.

A fortyish white American woman stood at center stage, her head shaved bald and hirsute with long curly black hair elsewhere. Her 5'5" 160 pound body was covered with elbow length black leather gloves and black lipstick.

Thirty shackled slim Viet Nameese girls danced onstage and made a beeline to the American dominant, pushing each other aside for the privilege of worship. In a cluster they reminded one of shorn sheep who haven't eaten for days at the food dish. The sneering white woman allowed them their passions about fifteen minutes and then commanded; "Stop..... Go to your frames."

They did as they were told and waited patiently until their commander attached them. As each thanked her for her work, the American sprayed their faces. After they were all firmly in their places, thirty dark Vietnamese males marched out. They took turns kneeling before their white mistress, each allowed four brief kisses.

Connie's eyes darted to the swinging dark prizes, let go of Benito and said; "Please, master. Let me go on stage."

He was expecting that reaction, looked forward to seeing it and simply nodded his head. She said; "Thank you" and gave each of her friends one last tongue kiss. She proudly walked through the crowd of chairs and people; her red lipstick smeared an inch from her wet lips and climbed the steps to the stage.

All eyes were on her. She thought the proper protocol would be to submit to the dominant American white woman. She knelt before her and said; "May I." When she heard; "Yes" her excitement compelled her to try to outdo all of her predecessors. She was rewarded with a river.

Her temporary owner said; "I want to watch you with all the guys," and the thirty dark men lined up, each allowed a minute or so. Connie was then ordered to approach the back doors. She was now full of tastes very exotic to her and started touching herself.

The dominant American mistress said; "No one gave you permission," kicked Connie's hand and gave her back two strokes with a small whip, leaving red lines, as Connie winced.

She was instructed to approach each of the bound Vietnamese girls and to give them four lengthy kisses.

The boys paired off with the girls, the fruits of their labors used to feed Connie sixty treats, topped off with juice.

The mistress unchained the Viet Nameese girls and instructed them and the men to leave. She had seen that Connie as the hit of the show, so she positioned her alone on stage. The dominant one sat a few minutes and then announced to the audience that they could come on stage.

Before the show was over, approximately one hundred members of the audience took advantage of the offer, fully covering her.

When all were through, she cleaned herself and said; "My favorite food!"

The curtain came down to resounding applause. Connie was probably more excited and proud of herself than any other time in her life. She jumped off the stage and ran to Benito and each of his friends. She got her dream and she was driven home unable to stop her stage act, the dirtiest slut of all time, enhancing her pleasure.

Warren heard the car enter the driveway and saw Connie get out and saunter to the door. She moved her shoulders, her glistening body jiggling in all the right places. He wondered how many neighbors were watching the show as the car occupants loudly called out various commentaries.

Connie looked back, blew them a kiss and entered the kitchen where she saw Warren very anxiously waiting. He was standing at full attention, when he silently took her by the hand and hurried her to the living room chair, where he spent the rest of the evening showing his admiration.

Vicky brought her 5'6", 170 pound frame to Mark's apartment and walked right in. He was sitting on the couch listening to a news report. Army officials said that the four confessed "Zippo" squad soldiers have been under military psychiatric care for some time and have found no evidence of theirs or anyone

else's involvement in such things. "The investigation continues, as the United States forces persevere in the protracted victory with 30,156 Viet Cong dead today versus only 658 Americans."

Mark looked up as she shut the door behind her and got very comfortable. She said; "Turn that shit off, get over her and pay proper respects, slave."

Mark thought, "Perfect" and did as instructed. He removed his robe and walked to her with his eyes on her long Afro. Vicky smiled evilly as she said; "From now on you will only do what I tell you and you will call me Victoria. Your name is CL."

CL looked up to say; "Yes, Victoria," and she slapped his face, saying; "Who gave you permission to stop."

CL said; "Sorry, Victoria," and went as low as possible.

She said; "Good boy. Now, the moon is full."

CL was very aroused as he tried to explore all the lunar possibilities.

She felt it and pushed back against him. He slurped and she said; "You are a disgusting pig."

He kept on and she pulled away, turned around and again slapped his face, saying; "Well, aren't you?"

CL said; "Yes, yes. I'm the most disgusting pig there is."

She slowly walked to the chair as CL instinctively crawled behind her like a dog. She sat widely and said; "Main course."

CL said; "Thank you," gorged and sniffed the aromatic jungle, his arms wrapped around her.

Victoria rested her legs on his shoulders and watched him, thinking about all the fun she could have with her white slave. CL was immersed in the moment, thinking about how much he loved what he was doing. A half hour passed with Victoria wiggling around. CL was sloppy and dripping with sweet juices.

The door again opened and CL was too hot to care, but Victoria jumped up, her body pushing him back and he fell on the floor. When he looked up he saw Vicky hurriedly putting on her dress and shoes in the presence of four police officers. Mark was frustrated at being disturbed during his favorite meal, waved his hand and loudly said; "Is this against the law now?"

The lead cop flatly said; "Not yet. But murder is. Put on some clothes. You're under arrest for the murder of Callie Majors."

Vicky, now fully dressed, nervously said; "Can I go?" and the lead cop nodded "Yes."

Now, not only frustrated, Mark was dumbfounded by the charge and upset that Victoria chose to leave him in his demise. He felt abandoned to the wolves.

The lead cop again said; "Get on some clothes now, or we'll take you out of here naked, asshole. Move!"

Mark knew it would be a waste of time arguing trying to straighten things out, so he put on a loose pair of blue jeans and a white button up dress shirt to impress. The lead cop cuffed his hands and he was led out. The neighbors he hardly met knew him now as they crowded the hall and street, curious about what had happened. They pointed at him and made comments in languages foreign to him. He sadly watched Vicky rumble down the street.

He was brought downtown and put in an interrogation room, accompanied by two cops who sat across a table from him. Mark put his cuffed hands on it, folded them and considered praying.

Cop #1 pushed a typed piece of paper and pen at him and said; "Sign the confession. It will make things easier for you."

Mark said; "Confess to what? I didn't break any laws."

The cops looked at him, then at the ceiling.

Cop #2 replied; "Come on. Don't waste our time. We've gotcha."

Mark excitedly said; "You've got squat."

Cop #1 deadpanned; "No, you've got squat, literally. Your gun was found at the scene; two Federal cops will testify that they saw you tailing Callie; two of Callie's employees also saw



you; a clerk at the Thunderbird Motel will swear that you photographed Callie; and your landlord said your rent is up to date for the first time since you moved in."

Mark didn't plan on revealing his employer, but sensed that it was a necessity. "I was tailing Callie for Constance Roe."

Cop #2 said; "Why's that?"

Mark said; "She thought he was carrying on with one of her daughters."

Cop #1 told Cop #2 to check it. Cop #2 slowly got up and said; "This is bullshit."

Cop #1 said; "Probably," as Cop #2 exited, then he turned to Mark and added; "Even if it checks out, how'd your gun get there?"

Mark sighed and replied; "I don't know. I haven't seen my gun in weeks."

Cop #1 asked; "Did you report it stolen?"

Mark said; "No, it wasn't stolen. It was in my desk at the office."

Cop #2 bursted back into the room and said, "She said she never heard of him."

Mark just stared at the wall, not expecting the response he heard. He said; "There's got to be some kind of mistake."

Cop #2 said; "No mistake. She don't know you, man."

Cop #1 said; "You have a check?"

Mark said; "She paid me in cash."

The cops' four eyes surveyed the stained drop ceiling.

Cop #2 agitatedly said; "This bullshit is getting nowhere. Where were you yesterday at 12:30PM?"

Mark said; "Home."

Cop #2 asked; "Can anyone vouch for that?"

Mark replayed the day in his mind, looked at the desk and slowly said; "I was there with Allison, but I think she left before that. I was with Connie and two black chicks until late afternoon; and later Vicky and Shari."

The cops stoically stared at him and #1 said; "Okay, let's focus on the time of the murder. At 12:30 PM you say you were with Connie and two black chicks, right?"

Mark said a simple "Yes."

Cop #1 said; "Well, Connie has already said that she doesn't know you. Who were these two black chicks?"

Mark said; "I don't remember their names, or if they ever said them. They were Connie's friends."

Cop #1 said; "What did they look like?"

Mark said; "One was thin, light skinned, had a Southern drawl and big feet. The other was chocolate and heavier."

Cop #1 queried; "Their faces?"

Mark knew the answer would do him no good, but it was the only one he had. He said; "When you're in a room with three naked women, do you look at their faces?"

Cop #2 said; "Depends what we're doing. Come on. This is getting fucking ridiculous."

Mark insisted; "There's got to be some mistake. Can you check with Connie again? She has bleached blond hair and black elsewhere."

Cop #1 again asked #2 to check with Connie one last time and then asked Mark; "You spend any time in 'Nam?"

Mark said; "No..... flat feat."

Cop #1 laughed and said; "Your story is starting to hit me as funny. Just between us, do you do any drugs?"

Mark indignantly said; "That's against the law," then choosing to appear co-operative, he remembered a recent event and added; "Well, the feds gave me a lot of acid."

Amused, Cop #1 said; "The feds did that?"

Mark said; "Yeah."

Cop #1 said; "Are you looking to go psychiatric; not guilty by reason of insanity?"

Cop #2 came back in the room and said; "I spoke to Constance Roe, Warren Roe and Shari Roe. No one knows you. Constance said you must be having some LSD fantasies. Sign the damn confession."

Mark said; "No fucking way."

Cop #1 smirked at Mark and said; "Come on, you're getting booked."

In desperation, Mark said; "Shari Roe was one of the girls I was with at day's end."

Cop #1 got up, took Mark by the upper arm, shook his head side to side and said; "Come on." He led Mark to the booking area, where he was turned over to other cops.

When they were alone, Cop #1 said; "He's either going to be killed or put in solitary for life."

Cop #2 said; "He sounds too stupid to have gotten that close to the big stuff."

Cop #1 said; "Maybe he knows how to act stupid."

Cop #2 said; "Well, he's fucked now."

After the booking procedure was through, two cops led him outside to a police car and put him in the back seat. As they drove, Mark recalled the route from his ride with the acid feds. They went over the rusting bridge into Newark, passing abandoned factories and warehouses, sandwiching decaying hovels with angry looking people in front. They made a left a little further down the line onto Humble Grave Road. Mark suspiciously eyed the cemetery, somewhat surprised by the identical nature of the two by three simple slabs of granite used on all the tombstones.

At road's end Mark saw the sign; "Federal Prison #166." It was a five story brick structure surrounded by an eight foot chain link fence topped by the meanest barbed wire he had ever seen. There was no vegetation, only lights and cars. The car was stopped by an armed guard at the gate. After the driver showed proper credentials, they rode to the entrance, parked and were again checked as they escorted Mark inside.

He was turned over to two other cops, who led him to his new home. They took off his handcuffs and rudely pushed him in the cell, one saying; "You're gonna be here a long time, asshole," as the empty sound of metal on metal rang in his ears. The eight by eight room was decorated with a silver metal sink, silver metal toilet, a padded bench hanging from the wall on chains and a gray blanket. One small barred window sat above the furry bench offering a view of the dark Hudson River. In frustration Mark tried to rip out his amenities, but only succeeded in exhausting himself. He sat on the bench wondering but not caring if he was being watched. He put his head in his hands and stared at the concrete floor, wishing that at least he had gotten the license plate number of the truck that had demolished him.

Mark heard a voice. "Hey, honey lover. I hear you're going to be my prisoner a long time." He looked up and saw 250 pound Dorette in a gray prison guard uniform with a red stripe

running down both legs. She carried a maroon sweatshirt and matching pants both emblazoned with orange letters stating "PROPERTY OF US FEDERAL PRISON SYSTEM". She purred; "Corinne works the day shift. We're gonna be giving you everything you need to eat and drink. You gonna be in church a lot." She moved her big beautiful black body against the bars and showed him her well-oiled long afro. She said; "This job doesn't pay shit, but it has great fringe benefits." Her house of worship shone with glory.

Mark's countenance elevated when he saw his dream. He got in a better position for a close up viewing and savored the offering. Dorette's eyes smiled as she looked down, watching him. She looked both ways down the hall, took one of the keys from her chain of many, opened the cell door and closed it behind her. She slipped a silver chain around his neck with a gray medallion imprinted with "#312312312" in black letters. She held his new duds in front of her and ordered; "Strip for me, slut." Mark's excitement went through the roof and when his clothes were off he looked like a bleached mahogany coat rack with a spindle for decoration. He smiled and danced playfully as he rotated his hips.

Dorette sauntered to the bench and sat on the left side of the cushion. He ogled the curvy pillars with pedestrian footings and was compelled to pay proper homage. She put his

new clothes on the floor saying; "That's to cushion your knees. You'll be using them a lot." He went into a trance, got in his church position and began his adoration at ground level. She lit a long thick light purple candle and put it in the center of the seat. She got extremely comfortable leaned back and said; "Take and eat of this, for this is my body. Take and drink of this, for this is my blood." She laughed.

Mark eyed the cracked moon and the gentle folds above it, which led to the higher paradise that he couldn't stop desiring. He rubbed his face all over the aromatic, furry, wild nature he so loved, feeling the soft, warm, black flesh surrounding him. She rested her legs on his shoulders. He glanced upward and saw a silent impassive face staring at him. He closed his eyes and continued on; following his natural instincts, hoping his sacrificial offering was worthy.

He murmured; "I hope you and Corinne bring in many parishioners." He didn't wait for a reply as he was so hungry, he quickly put his face back into the nappy, pulpy, French West Indian caviar and swallowed a strong stream of golden wine that ran all over him. Feeling high he passionately kissed, licked and sucked her hairy prize, his left arm tucked under her upper thigh, his hand rubbing the crack in the globes. "It's 1972 and anything goes," he thought, as he slowly touched himself using his right.

In a few glorious minutes he heard a sound, looked behind and saw Corinne standing at the cell door. She was still in her civilian uniform; a red tank top and a light black leather mini-skirt at the upper end of her deep chocolate thighs. She smiled and put her right hand between her legs. Mark grinned and showed her his tongue. Dorette pulled him by the hair, jamming his face hard back into the bushy dark swamp.

Corinne used her key to enter, locking the door behind her. She said; "Piece with honor." The girls laughed and Corinne took a seat at the right. She, too, lit a candle, this time a tall flat red one and placed it next to the other, between the two sisters. She crossed her legs, watched and waited her turn. Dorette's body spasmed and she groaned; "Dominus verbiscum. Dominance for this cum."

Corinne chuckled; "Et cum spirit te tuo."

Mark imagined that he looked skyward and saw a heavy, leaded, painted, glass window above him. It reminded him of the thick, stained glass casements he saw in church as a kid. However, rather than depicting some martyred saint suffering, blocking all light, this portal was comprised of random shapes and forms, containing all colors of the rainbow and despite its making a half-assed attempt to be opaque, he could see the light streaming through it. The trio was blanketed in a golden glow. They all felt it and smiled.



Mark crawled to Corinne's feet. Careful not to miss anything, he slowly worked his way up to the triangle at the apex, continuing his nourishment and adoration. In his entire life he never, until now, expected to wind up in the house of God. The furry texture pressing against his nose caused him to sneeze. The laughing girls encouraged him and after joyous labor he was rewarded. His thirst was satisfied with a sudden strong quenching. A contented, black, warm and fuzzy feeling came all over him.

## **The Living End**





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