

## *Chapter 21*

We just made the last available tee time. Tom picked up the greens fees, claiming it was his birthday present to me, though usually I'm not much of a golfing fanatic. I may not even beat him, slice and all, but golf was hardly the major reason for getting out of the house. It was just a very good excuse to be outside with the sun and sky, the hills and trees. And Tom was right about one thing, anyway. Once I got out in the fresh air, I felt better, with or without anything to eat. Coffee was just about all I could stomach, so it was just as well we didn't stop for anything.

"Don't I get a couple warm-ups?" I asked as we walked to the first tee.

"What do you need a warm-up, for? You'll probably beat me, anyway. Why would I want to give you any more advantage than you already have?"

"I think you got that wrong. I hardly ever beat you."

"We hardly ever play, anymore," he complained. "When was the last time? Two years ago? Three?"

"I dunno. Not since the band's been together, certainly."

"Since you been with Kerrilyn, we haven't done hardly anything together, let alone play golf."

"That's not true. It's not because Kerrilyn's living with me. We never did anything before that, if I remember correctly. You live way out here in the fucking boondocks, and we both work too damn hard all the time. That's the reason we never do anything—not some girl. Besides, we've been playing music together all the time for almost a year."

"Not quite a year. I think it was August when we finally got it together."

"Whatever. Music is a very jealous mistress." There were two groups ahead of us, so we still had to wait. I wandered over to some benches and sat down.

"Almost as jealous as a real woman, eh what?" Tom sat down, too.

"Don't go getting poetic on me. It'll destroy any concept I ever had of you."

"You think you're so smart, all the time. You think you're the only one who has a brain, around here?"

"Most of the time—I am."

"Hah." That was all he said, and we sat there silently for some moments. First one group went out, then the other. The starter came up to us.

"When's your tee time?" he asked. Tom told him. "You're next," he announced, and looked us over a moment. "The grass is pretty wet, this morning," he clucked. "You might find the footing pretty slickery, without any spikes." I suppose he was referring to me, in my raggedy tennis shoes. Tom had his golf shoes on.

"I'll be careful," I promised.

"We got several areas roped off 'cause of the rain yesterday. Ground rules say you can drop your ball outside casual water, no closer to the hole, without a penalty."

"Oh," I said, "we're just playing for fun."

"Fun?" the starter clucked, bemused. "Son," he said, "golf is like life. If you don't give it everything you got, it don't give back everything you want from it." He smiled, though, and winked. "Sometimes you lose anyway, but nothing's more satisfying than putting that 150-yard approach shot five feet from the pin, or holing out a forty-foot putt. And you can't do those things without putting everything into it." He stopped philosophizing, and turned, "You're up, boys. Have a nice day."

"Some hayseed philosopher, huh?" said Tom as we picked up our clubs and began the trudge up the hill to the first tee. The second guy in the group ahead of us was just addressing his ball, so we still had to wait.

"Music is like golf, too," I replied, not commenting specifically on the qualifications of our starting official. "If you give to it, it gives back."

"So you're gonna turn into a philosopher, too?"

"I *am* a philosopher. I thought you knew that, by now. Everything's a philosophical argument, with me."

"Ah, you think too much. Sometimes you just gotta *do it*, and stop thinkin' about it." He was right. *Praxis*, again. The time to act. He went on, "It's like that in football, you know. There's a time for thinking, and a time for planning, but that time is not when you run out on the field. If you stop and think about it too long, those linebackers will eat you alive. Believe me, I know."

"But if you didn't think, and didn't plan, and didn't consider all the

options, you wouldn't win, would you?"

"It's like I said. There's a time for thinking, and a time for acting. Like right now. You're up."

"No I'm not. The first guy hit his ball into the woods to the left, there, and we'll have to wait while he finds it."

"How do you know that?"

"I saw him pointing over there while the others hit their tee shots. I think he's maybe going to try to find it."

"Good luck. There's a huge downhill slope in there. He may think he'll find it, but it's probably gone for good. He shoulda just hit another ball and let that one stay lost."

"Well, he didn't." I paused a moment and changed the subject, back to the subject of my thinking too much. "I don't think all the time, you know. Sometimes I know when to act, and not think. I knew when to take Kerrilyn out of that apartment she was living in, to get her away from that boyfriend who was beating her. I didn't over-analyze that one." I stopped, but he didn't reply right away. "If I'd thought about that more, I might not have done it."

"So that's what was going on with her. I didn't know. You never said, and Kerrilyn won't talk about it."

"She hardly talks to me, either."

"What do you mean?"

"All I know is some guy named Danny beat her up. Real bad, too. You've seen the scars on her back?"

His expression bordered on wide-eyed horror, "Wow," he said, as if trying to fathom how someone could hit her that hard—that many times. There was no fathoming it, for anyone. Especially not me.

I explained, "I don't even know if she was living with him, or if that was her apartment, or anything. The only thing she's told me is that she was born in Alabama, near Huntsville, and that she moved to Atlanta about two, maybe three years ago when her grandmother died. She's got a driver's license, so at least I know that Kerry Lynn is her real name. But MacDonald could be her married name, for all I know."

"She's married?"

"No, I'm not saying that. I don't think she is, but since she won't hardly talk about *anything*, she could be, I suppose."

"Pretty weird." But his expression said he was glad she was with me, and not him.

"She's a complete mystery."

"She is." He cleared his throat. Maybe he was remembering December. Maybe he was thinking about the night before, up in their

bedroom. More mystery. She claimed she was in love with me, yet she could fellate my friend Tom right in front of me. And Sheree, who should absolutely despise her by now, was still her very best friend. A *really good* friend. Then Tom echoed my very thoughts, "Sheree really likes her."

"She seems to, at least."

"You have no idea."

"What are you talking about?"

"The way she talks about her, you'd think Kerrilyn was the most important person in her life. I should be, but the way she carries on sometimes, I wonder."

"What do you mean?" This was news, somewhat.

"Just what I said. Sheree thinks Kerrilyn is the greatest thing."

I noticed that the ball-loser hadn't found his ball, so he was dropping a new one in the fairway about eighty yards from the tee and was hitting his second (third?) shot. In a few moments, then, they'd be out of the way and we could get on with the game.

Tom just looked at me, but I could see the wheels turning. "I'm not sure what's going on with her."

Again, "What do you mean?"

"I don't know whether to be angry, or just figure I probably had it coming, or ..." he shrugged, not sure how to continue "... I don't know. Maybe I should just get over it." He looked away, out over the fairway.

"It *was* pretty strange, last night," I commented, *very* lamely.

He looked back, "You seemed to rise to the occasion, all right, anyway."

"I was drunk—and stoned."

He smiled, wholly of irony, though. "I think I've used that excuse before, myself."

"So, we're even, then." Almost a question.

Then, out of the blue, "I'm not sure we should trust the two of them together."

"What? You think Kerrilyn might do something with Sheree?"

"Unless I'm mistaken," he said, cryptically, "it'll probably be the other way around." He shook his head then, changing the subject, slightly.

"Man. That *was* something last night, wasn't it?"

"I know I was surprised, at least."

"I don't think 'surprised' quite covers it, old boy."

"So you're not mad?"

"Mad?" Then he had to think awhile. "That was a pretty good slam on me," he finally said, "her fucking you in the hot-tub."

"Slam?"

"Yeah. She smacked me up side the head real good." I heard a good amount of chagrin in his voice. He also said it while looking away from me.

"Because of Kerrilyn." Not exactly a question.

He nodded. "Yeah. She told me way back in January that she would get back at me for that. And it looks like she did. But good." Then he turned to me, "Consider that one hell of a birthday present, my friend." The ball-loser had hit, again, and this time it stayed out of the woods. Tom advised me, "You're up."

I stepped up to where my ball was teed, and addressed it. A tad nervously, too.

"I suppose you could call last night a birthday present, but she didn't have to do it on my account."

He just looked at me, shaking his head. "Just hit the damn ball," he said.

I took a deep breath, let it out slowly to calm my nerves, and before I could get nervous again, I hit the damn ball. My eyes followed it up, and damned if it wasn't a pretty reasonable hit (for tennis shoes, anyway). It landed about one-eighty out, more or less center fairway. Better than pretty reasonable, actually.

Then, he said, "Now, about what happened up in the bedroom ..."

Did he want me to comment on that? Well, my first instinct was to think, no way! But I also felt that if he'd had the same chance, he would have done exactly what I did. So I changed subject. "If Sheree hadn't gotten in your way, you would have fucked Kerrilyn, for sure. I didn't do anything any different from that."

"Well, that's not what I'm talking about, but you're probably right, anyway." I thought he shrugged. "I was talking about *them*," he said.

"Then you're not mad at me?" I didn't want to say what for.

He seemed to find the notion ironic. "It's not like it was the first time, you know." But he didn't say how he felt about it.

"But you were talking about Kerrilyn and Sheree ..." I let the statement trail off.

"Uh-huh. What did you think when my wife went down on your girlfriend?" He finished putting his ball on the tee, then addressed it, after a couple practice swings. I thought I'd wait until he hit before answering. He looked at me, once, then reared back and smacked the ball—hard. He hit it slightly left at first, but it spun back toward the right and landed in the rough about twenty yards ahead of me. Not bad, for Tom. He only raised an eyebrow, and we started down the fairway with our golf bags.

"Well," he turned to look at me, "What did you think?"

"Not a bad shot," I shrugged.

"*Not that.* About the women."

"Oh." I allowed us to walk several paces before responding, "I'm not sure what I'm supposed to think. Seems to me they were just doing something we might have expected them to do, anyway. I don't know." I stopped, "Maybe it was just more of the same."

"More of the same ... what?"

"Her getting back at you. I don't know."

"You don't think there's something else there?"

What? Like what? "Well, I don't think women, in general, have the same problems men do when it comes to being affectionate with members of the same sex, but I don't think we need to worry about either of these two women being gay, if that's what you're thinking."

He seemed almost lost in thought. "I don't know what I'm trying to say." We were at my ball, finally. "I guess I'm not saying anything." There was a pause. "I really do like Kerrilyn, you know," he said, "as a friend."

"I never thought you didn't." I pulled my 3-iron out of the bag. Then thought, probably too much club, so I put it back and retrieved the four.

"She's not just some piece of meat, to me." But, I'd never accused him of thinking that. He went on, "We work pretty well together." He was obviously clearing his conscious about her, for some reason, so I let him. "And I really like her as a friend. She's really quite intelligent, she's *very* pretty, and she's a really fine vocalist, too." He almost looked stricken, "I'm sorry, man."

I got an uneasy feeling. "About what?"

"This has been on my mind for a long time. I said some things to you, way back at Christmas, when all the shit hit the fan about Kerrilyn and me. I really didn't mean all that stuff I said about her. Or you, either."

"I know. That's OK."

"No!" he was really upset about it. "It's *not* OK. I had no right to accuse her of all those things. She's your girlfriend, and I need to keep that fact squarely in my mind. I would never *ever* let someone say something like that about Sheree, you know. It don't matter what I think about her, no one has *any* right to say one word. Ever. Period."

"I know." But I wondered, "Did I ever say anything about Sheree that was out of line, to you?"

But, instead of answering, he said, "We're brothers, you know."

"I know."

"We've shared a lot of things, over the years."

"I know."

"Can we survive this thing? Can we survive it if we start sharing our

women with each other?"

Fuck if I knew. "I don't know."

"Me, either."

But we were holding up the game. I'd better hit or we'd be in trouble. So I got my act together and hit the ball. Not bad, it even made the green. If I kept this up, I'd almost certainly win the round. Tom could hit harder, maybe, but I was a deadly putter. On that I could feel my confidence growing. Oh the other, I was just beginning to worry.

"Maybe we should quit while we're ahead," I commented as we walked toward his ball, in the medium rough to the right of where mine had been. We could even see it from where we were.

"I think it's probably too late, already."

"No it isn't. There's nothing that says we have to have another night like last night. There's nothing that says we *have* to share our women, if we don't want to."

"What if it's what *they* want?"

What? "I find that pretty hard to believe. Who's going to want *that*? Kerrilyn?" Then I thought, sure, Kerrilyn is *always* at the center of every controversy. Why should this be any different?

But, no. He said, "You remember when I said how much Sheree seems to like her?"

"Yeah. So?"

He only said, "Well, just don't be surprised if Sheree suggests we all get back in bed together, sometime."

"You've lost me, there."

"Call it a husband's intuition, or something, but I think last night's 'affair' is only the beginning." He quickly addressed, then hit his ball. Bummer, he overshot the green about ten yards. He cursed and slammed his club into his bag, and we walked off toward the green.

"The beginning of what?"

He stopped, "I'm not sure I want to say what I'm thinking. I'm not even sure I can *believe* what I'm thinking, but that doesn't stop it from being a possibility." He started walking again, "A real possibility."

"Possibility of what? You're *not* thinking Sheree might have ... an interest ... in Kerrilyn, are you?" Yeow!

"I'm trying not to think *anything*."

"Wait! Have you talked to her? Did she actually say she was interested in Kerrilyn?"

"No, but she *implied* that if I could be interested in that redhead of yours, then maybe she could, too."

"Wait a minute!" That was a pretty incredible statement. "What did

she say, exactly?"

"She said, 'I been wondering what all the attraction was.' So I said to her, 'All *what* attraction?' and she said, 'What the big deal was.' 'What big deal?' I asked. 'The big deal with Kerrilyn,' she said. 'Well,' I told her, 'have you found out?'" He seemed to want to explain, "I was just being sarcastic, mind you. It's not that there's *anything* going on between Kerrilyn and me."

"When did she say all this?"

"This morning."

"So, you talked to her this morning?"

He seemed to think my question stupid. It was rhetorical, maybe, but not stupid. "So, I asked her if she found out."

"And ..."

"She said, 'I think I have'."

"That doesn't mean anything."

"It might if you knew how she said it."

"Tom, I can't imagine anything going on between those women. It doesn't make any sense. Neither of them are even the slightest bit bi."

"I know, and before last night I probably would have said the same thing, too."

"But?"

"But now, I'm not so sure."

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There's another shoe to be dropped, of course. Everyone is wondering if we did it, or if we didn't do it. I want to say it doesn't matter, but everyone also knows that it does. Talk is one thing, and we all know talk is cheap. But actions ... they speak louder than words. Actions define you, not your words. We've heard it. Talk all you want, but put your money where your mouth is. 'Put some skin in the game,' in other words. Hah, hah. I didn't mean that literally, but I suppose it applies. It don't matter, if you don't back up your words with your actions. It don't matter, if you don't risk something to gain something. You can say you love me, but when the time comes, will you prove it?

Even if I had thought of the consequences of what I was doing, it wouldn't have changed what I did. I thought of Marc, and of the love and trust he was placing in me, but I also thought of someone else, too, and the *extreme* love and trust that she was also placing in me. I've done too much

letting down of the friends I love, not to be aware of the risks I was taking.

I'm not going to say what happened, at least not yet. All that's necessary is to say that things felt somewhat different between me and my girl when the men rolled in about one-thirty.

After the all-day rains of Sunday, Monday (Memorial Day) turned out to be a beautiful day, hardly a cloud in the sky. Much too nice a day for girls to be inside, but much too warm an afternoon for girls (especially freckly redheaded ones) to be sunning themselves excessively. While we did lay out on the deck awhile, letting our tans develop, by about noon I was definitely beginning to fry.

"Whoof!" I exclaimed, "It's gettin' pretty hot, I think. I may be gettin' close to medium-rare, here." I poked my arm with a finger, looking for signs of sunburn, but overall the sun was too bright to tell if the red went away when I pressed (and returned when I let up). "I hate to say it, but I think I'm gonna have to go inside awhile."

"I can put up the umbrella," Sheree offered. "We should be OK in the shade." She sat up on her lounger and squinted in my direction. "Or," she got another idea, "I can move the umbrella to cover the hot-tub, and we can get in the water."

"Won't the hot-tub be too hot? Not only would I be broiled, then, but *parboiled*, as well."

She shook her head, "We don't heat it when we're not using it. It should be nice and cool, about now."

Well, I looked in the direction of the tub. The top was flush with the deck, and someone had covered it, probably Tom, and probably this morning. I judged it should be most comfortable. Especially since I thought I could feel my skin beginning to peel. "OK," I said, then had a thought, "What am I gonna wear? I can't exactly go nude."

She thought a moment, too, then cleared her throat. "*Ahem*, well ... Do you think you can fit into one of my swimsuits?"

I sat forward. Stood up. Hmmm, I compared my hips to her hips, my bust to her bust. "What size would it be?"

She grunted, "*Oof!* Probably a four." She was busy moving the umbrella's base over in front of the tub. She managed to wrestle it into position.

"Uh, I think it'd be just a tad too tight." I regarded the width of my hips again. "I might rip right through the bottoms if they didn't cut off circulation to my legs, first."

"All right, Miss 'Fat-Butt-Can't-Find-Nothing-to-Wear,' what do you suggest?"

"I could pretend I'm a white trash slut and just go swimming in my underwear."

"Maybe I'll just get you one of Tom's T-shirts that I sometimes use for a nightshirt. That way you won't get too sunburned."

"What are you gonna do?" I asked.

"I'm gonna put on my brand-new *teensy-weensy* bikini." She grinned, "You should find it quite ... *stimulating* ... I think."

So, later when the men came stomping through the house looking for us, Sheree and I were outside in the 'pool,' sipping our wine and toking our joint, just relaxing and cooling it, and feeling no pain whatsoever.

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I wasn't sure how things would be once we finished with golf and got back to the house. On one hand it was easy to simply forget the 'festivities' of the night before and just go on like nothing had happened. Actually, that was probably by far the easiest thing to do. On the other, I didn't want to think my girl could be interested in a bisexual relationship, but I would have been a complete fool to ignore the facts of the matter. I fully expected that as far as Kerrilyn was concerned, nothing would be off-limits. What she'd done with Tom had taught me that her idea of what constituted 'acceptable behavior' was fairly broad. Quite broad. *Incredibly* broad. Oh well. Let's just hope they're not in bed together when we get home. That would be just too difficult to deal with.

But they weren't in bed, and they weren't doing anything even remotely suspicious when we came upon them out on the back deck.

As we walked up, Tom gave me a brief look that said he was mildly relieved when he saw they were just in the hot-tub. He stood over his wife, hands on hips, where she was floating contentedly on her back. "What's going on, here?" He sounded slightly amused, not accusatory or serious.

She just ignored him. Kerrilyn, up to her neck in the water and wearing what looked like a gray T-shirt, held a half-full bottle of wine in one hand, and a joint in the other. As I watched, she lowered the bottle to her lips, carefully, and took a rather long drink from it. She didn't look up at us, either, just followed the wine with a toke on the joint. I suspected they were both probably drunk, and utterly, unquestionably stoned out of their minds. It seemed like a good thing for a holiday Monday, to me. Sheree's hand snaked out slowly and Kerrilyn handed her the joint. She

took a hit, held it, then handed the joint back to Kerrilyn.

"Y'all look pretty comfortable there in the water," Tom commented. I'm sure he noticed the scarceness of his wife's bright pink bikini. I was several feet away, and it was quite noticeable to me.

Sheree let the smoke out slowly, eyes narrowed to slits. "Very," she said as she exhaled, still not looking in our direction.

Then Kerrilyn murmured quietly, "Why don'tch'all come join us, for a while." She smiled, *so* stonedly, to herself. It was a little secret only she knew. "We missed ya." Kerrilyn then allowed herself to float around where she could see me, more or less. She looked up, drawled, "Hey there, buddy," and grinned toothily. That was all *I* needed.

"Well, old buddy," I said to Tom, grinning myself, "I don't know about you, but I'm gettin' in the damn tub."

He grinned, too. "Same here." He knelt down and started untying his shoes.

So did I.

In moments we were stripped down to our underwear, that being at the express requirement of Sheree, who said she didn't want any dirty, grass-stained clothes in the tub. Once reduced to our skivvies, we both slid quickly and quietly into the water alongside our women. The water itself was almost warm, and I knew if I stayed in it too long it would just put me to sleep, especially if I got as high as the women already were. OK, that sounded like a pretty good idea, too, so I politely and gingerly wrested the joint from my smiling, sweet, semi-comatose girl, and took a deep, satisfying hit. She then offered the bottle, and after I passed the joint to Tom, I had a drink. A large one.

Felt good.

Kerrilyn was wearing a T-shirt of some kind, but since she stayed mostly below the water line, it was hard to tell. She floated up close to me, and without having to be prompted, wrapped her arms warmly and snugly about my neck. Then her soft, pale, pink lips found mine for a most enticing kiss. I reached around her to hug her slim waist. Yep, T-shirt all right. I felt down around her rear end. Panties too, apparently. Good. No surprises, then.

At first I didn't even notice what Tom and Sheree were doing, but they were together with each other. Good. Better. Yes, much better, because that was how it should be—how I wanted it to be.

Kerrilyn and I kissed more. The joint (at my request) eventually found its way back to us, and we each took another large hit. She seemed about ready to pass out at any moment, but like the trooper she was, she hung in there and held her own as I started to feel the warm, fuzzy, liltng

high come upon me. I passed the joint reluctantly back to Sheree, who held her hand out for it, her attention almost completely focused on her husband.

After some satisfying minutes of necking with Kerrilyn, I noticed pieces of our hosts' clothing being passed up out of the water and thrown onto the deck. Which pieces they were, I couldn't quite tell, but since neither one of them had had much on to begin with, it seemed likely that either or both of them were probably naked. They stayed below the water line, so kept their nakedness to themselves. I didn't particularly see it as a problem. Not a problem, at all.

I turned back to my girl, raised one eyebrow in a half-questioning gesture. Sort of, like 'what the hell,' or 'why not?' Then I whispered to her, "You wanna get naked?"

She had no answer except to push away from me, briefly, and promptly pull her T-shirt up over her head. It was large, heavy cotton, and very soggy, and when she threw it, it landed with a wet *splap!* on the deck behind us. She scooted back toward me, pulling her panties off as she came, and once she was wrapped arms-and-legs around me again, reached up and tossed them out to lie abandoned near the T-shirt. I started to go for my own underpants, but she beat me to it, quickly pushing them down with her legs. Once they cleared my ankles with a little manipulation from her feet and toes, they were also grabbed and thrown out of the water.

Oh, of course I was more than ready for her. Who wouldn't be, after all? One thing about having sex in the water, it's guaranteed to be very wet, very slippery, and almost effortless. And since the sun-warmed water also imparted a pleasant, cocoon-like numbing effect, it helped me relax somewhat and hold off my orgasm until I was sure she was ready. I tried to be quiet and circumspect about it when I came, but Kerrilyn always liked to make a lot of noise, and thus announced her 'progress' in a loud, vocal, and most humorous (if self-satisfying) manner. No one seemed to mind, much. Not me, anyway.

I held onto her and stayed snug inside her as long as I could. In fact, we were still joined (albeit loosely) when Sheree, clothed again, eventually came over and offered our clothes back to us. "*Ahem.* Excuse me," she said, and smirked, "Thought you might need these, maybe." Then the two of them gave us a measure of privacy by promptly turning and going in the house. They shut the glass doors behind them. While I knew they could probably see us quite well from inside the house, I hoped they weren't especially interested in seeing what they could see.

I gently allowed Kerrilyn to slip off me, noticing her unhappy frown

as her vagina lost physical contact with me, then boosted myself up to a sitting position on the side of the tub. Yeah, I know I was still naked, but my back was to the doors, so there was little chance they'd see anything more than my bare butt. I inspected my underwear, and though they were wet and cold, I put them on anyway. Kerrilyn tried to find the opening in the T-shirt so she could put it on, but after about thirty seconds of fussing with the wet, twisted mess, she gave up and decided just to put on her panties and forget the rest. She got out of the water, then, and while she held her hands rather modestly across her breasts, both of us dripping wet, we started for the door.



Later, on the way home from Sheree and Tom's house, Marc and I talked about some ... things. I guess I had expected it eventually, but with the *very* nice afternoon we had spent together, by the time he finally got around to bringing it up, it caught me somewhat off guard. And not only that, I was still a little drunk (and high, too). But then, sometimes things just aren't left up to us to decide. Oh, well.

As the afternoon had worn on it had become quite sultry. While the humidity had been reasonably low earlier in the day, by five o'clock it was 85° and steamy. I would have wanted to keep the windows closed and the air conditioning running in the car, but of course I needed a cigarette, and a cigarette wasn't to be smoked in a closed car. This according to Marc's rules. He always made me open the window if I wanted to smoke. And being the frugal SOB that he is, he also turned the air off when I rolled the window down. Ugh! I could barely breathe in the thick, hot, suffocating air that blew across my face. But I did want a cigarette, anyway.

I started looking through my purse for the pack, but apparently I'd either left it back at the house, or just as bad, emptied the last one sometime before we left. I truthfully didn't remember whether there'd been any cigarettes left, or not. Sigh.

"I'm out of cigarettes," I said, to no one in particular. But of course, Marc was there to hear me.

He regarded me, evenly, "You want to stop and get some?"

"I don't know," I said. "Maybe." Then I got an idea. "Lemme see if I got any in the glove box."

"You know what?" he said, "I think you do." Then he said, "If you do find any, I want one, too."

We each got our lit cigarettes, there having been a pack stashed in the glove box, probably just for such an emergency. I wonder who'd thought to prepare us this way? Anyway, the boy and I smoked in relative peace and quiet for a few minutes. He got tired of the cigarette, though, and tossed it out the window when it was still only half-smoked. No way would I have wasted that much good tobacco.

"Did you have a good time, today?" he said, glancing my way.

I had to smile when I thought of making love to him in the tub, "Uh-huh, wonderful! Truly delicious. It's always very, very nice when we make love." I almost had to grin when I thought again of his gentle touch, "You're my favorite guy of all time."

"Thanks. I'm glad. I enjoyed it, too."

Some moments passed. He spoke, "I think my birthday party was a success, in spite of the rain."

"I thought it went pretty good, too."

"Whose idea was it?"

"Your birthday party?" I didn't understand. He knew who'd planned it.

"The hot-tub."

"Oh," *that*. I took a drag. "Sheree's, of course." I eyed him suspiciously, "Didn't she tell you it was?"

He nodded, "Yeah, something to that effect. I was just making sure."

I wasn't particularly worried, but yet I had to ask, "Why?" As in, 'Why do you ask?'

"No reason, I was just wondering."

But something in his tone sparked my attention. "Is there something on your mind, maybe?"

Then, by his look, I knew there was. *Shit!* Why hadn't I just kept my fucking mouth shut and let the whole thing pass? But alas, no, it was too late.

He exhaled, fully. *Uh-oh*, I thought, *here it comes*. I hate being cross-examined. I hate being put under that microscope and having things in my life inspected and dissected so cleanly and mercilessly. Especially things I had nothing to do with, like what he was about to ask me ...

"What did you think when Sheree ... went down on you?" He tried to make it sound oh-so casual and innocent. Hardly.

I wasn't fooled, so decided to let him wait for the answer. Not very long, just long enough to make him think that I was thinking about it. But, "It was nice," was all I said.

Not the reply he'd been expecting, apparently. "Was that all it was?"

Oh, I knew where he was going with this, and the idea pissed me off,

too. But, let's not get angry. At least not just yet. "Yes," I assured him, enunciating carefully, "It was nothing."

He seemed to consider my words, nodding, "You ever do anything like that, before?"

"With her?" I snorted.

"With *anyone*."

This time I did have to take time out to think. Should I be truthful with him and hope he accepts the explanation, or should I lie and take the risk that he'll not believe me? And what if he *doesn't* believe me? What, then? Well, caught in the clutch and decided on the spur of the moment, the truth seemed preferable. Marginally.

"Yes," I said, "as a matter of fact, I have."

"With Sheree?"

*Why ask me that again?* Because, until ... last night ... Sheree and I hadn't been anything but the best of friends. Goddamn it! I *really* hate being cross-examined! It really pisses me off when people don't trust me—don't believe me. "How in the world can you ask me such a thing?" My voice just naturally rose with the force of my growing anger.

He was undeterred. "So, last night was the first time you and she have ... gotten intimate with each other?"

"I think that's what I'm trying to say! *Geez!*" **Grrr!**

But he wasn't letting up, yet. "How do you feel about it?"

I thought he'd already asked that. "*Like I told you!* It was nice. That's it! That's all!" (Calm down Kerrilyn, I said to myself.)

Then he said, slowly, carefully, "How do you think she feels about it?"

All right, then. He'd snuck up on me, the bastard! But ... "*You'll* have to ask her that yourself, if you really wanna know. It wasn't my day to watch her." I continued, "Besides, this is probably something *just between her and her husband*, if you know what I mean."

He seemed to accept that, or maybe he was just setting up for his next attack run. Then he came back with, "So, you've had bisexual experiences—in the past?" I was right, it was a flanking maneuver. He'd circled back around.

"Yes," and this was definitely making me angry, "*I told you I have!*"

"Since we been together?"

Oh, was that so unfair! And he knew it couldn't be true, too. All I could say was, "How can you think that? That's *really* unfair. Totally."

And he agreed. "I'm sorry, Kerrilyn. I wasn't thinking when I said it. I don't really think you've been doing anything behind my back, you know."

Right, sure. But my voice faltered, quivering in spite of my efforts to control it, "It *sounds* like you do." I'm sure I sounded as though I was about to cry, but I was too angry. This whole conversation had become quite unpleasant, and I was more than ready for it to be over.

If he noticed the hitch in my voice, he didn't show it. "I never pictured you as bisexual, particularly. You seem very feminine, and you do seem to like me." He smiled, maybe hoping to make me feel better. Or perhaps be less angry with him.

I calmed myself a fraction before speaking. "I *do* like you! But femininity has nothing to do with being bisexual, or being a lesbian, either. I've know some very feminine women who were completely gay, and some pretty butch ones who were straight hetero. It's all in what floats your boat." And I hurried on with, "Boys float my boat."

"So, if Sheree made a pass at you, you'd tell her you weren't interested?"

"Just exactly when and why would she be making a pass at me? And who the *fuck* gave you the idea that she might do that, anyway? *I'm* the bisexual, you know. You should be more worried about me!"

He raised his eyebrows, glanced over at my 'interesting' comment. "Well, I didn't know you were, and anyway, you're not really interested in women. Or so you've said."

"That's right," I agreed, gaining some energy back. "That's what I said. But where did all this shit about Sheree come from, anyway? Why are you even asking me about this?"

He paused, considering what to say, "Tom said some things, about Sheree." He looked at me, briefly, "I don't know. It made me wonder, so I had to ask. I trust you to be honest with me." He looked back to the highway. "Just tell me there's nothing going on, and I'll believe you."

Sigh. So, here was the crux of it. Well, unfortunately this was the point where me and the truth had to part ways. "You guys are both fucking idiots. There's *nothing* going on. We ain't done nothing. Nothing at all."

I had to protect Sheree. Despite the fact that I had just lied to my boy, I still had to protect her. He asked me directly, and I just had to lie about it.

Understand me, though. I felt I could never tell anyone what had gone on between us. Ever. It had nothing to do with what we may or may not have done, or any 'transgressions' we may have committed. Nothing except the need to keep our secret. It would have been nice to think I could have told Marc the truth, and trusted him, since he'd never done anything (other than question me, *Gestapo*-style) that he could be blamed

for, but then ... I also had myself to look after, too.

And no, I don't think he would have understood me, quite. I mean, my motives for having done what I did. If I look at all this from a distance, separated from the distinct pressures and influences of the person; if I forget what it felt like to have another willing to accept me and *know* me for what I was—without judgment or reservation—then it's possible (and practical) to think I should have resisted any temptations. I know who I am. I know what I want. Now.

Now, it's easy. Then, it *wasn't* easy. No, Marc wouldn't have understood me, because for him all those decisions were, and have always been, simple. I'm sure he never suffered from the awful ambiguity of having a love and an attraction that (under normal circumstances) shouldn't have been. I'm sure he never found himself entrusted with a friend's most carefully guarded, deep-dark secret. One that only he could know, and that only he could protect. What was I to do?

I know what, though, and it's exactly what I did. No regrets, Sheree. No regrets.

At home later, while we watched TV together on the couch, I played back to myself the conversation we'd had in the car, and tried to sort out more accurately the exact tenor of Marc's questions. He'd asked if I'd had a good time. Which, of course, I had. Had he asked me what Sheree and I had done while they were gone? I didn't think so. He did ask who had come up with the idea of Sheree making love to him in the hot-tub. Or did he just ask whose idea was the hot-tub, in general? No, definitely that second thing. No mention of any of his 'extracurricular' activities with her. That made a perverse kind of sense. He *wouldn't* say anything about that, to me. Too hard then to avoid having to say how much he'd gotten off on it—which he did! But that didn't bother me, though. It was just a little adulterous fun between friends. And besides, I had been right there to keep an eye on him.

Then came that question about what I thought about Sheree—how had he put it? because he'd said it well—right, about her going down on me. Yep, that was how he'd phrased it. I had just said it had been nice. No lie there. (And while I sat there on the couch, I just had to grin to myself. Her exuberance with me had been a bit of a surprise, and had warmed me in a most delicious, enticing way. Yes, it had!) But I guess when I said it had been nothing, that wasn't quite an accurate statement. Oh, well, that little white lie wasn't going to harm anyone.

He followed up by asking if I'd ever had sex with another woman, before. Sheree's *attentions* may have been orally applied, but they were

still sex. (Trust me, wet genital contact is almost *always* sex. I liked to joke that 'if you gotta clean up afterward, then it was sex,' but I think Marc wouldn't have thought it funny if he'd known the context in which I'd first made that joke. Oh, well. That was in the past, and it was going to stay back there, where it wasn't ever going to come haunt me, again.) I told Marc that I'd had female partners, before, and he seemed to accept that truth with reasonable equanimity. But, what else had he asked me? I had to go back to my memory of the events in the car to remember the exact words he'd used. I had to catalog what I'd said in response. What else had he said? Then I remembered. He'd asked me if I'd ever done anything like that with Sheree, before. I remember, then, thinking how ridiculous that was, but ... what possible reason could he have for even thinking that? But what did he ask next?

Oh, he asked me how Sheree felt about having sex with her best girlfriend (me), and I said I didn't have any idea how she felt. Lied through my teeth on that one, but really, I just said he should ask her himself if he really wanted to know. And that it wasn't any of his business, anyway. That, though, was probably a matter of opinion. It probably *was* his business.

There was that uncomfortable exchange where he accused me again of having had sex—with a woman, no less!—while he and I have been together. And again, it made me both ashamed and furious to think that that was all he thought of me. Make one little mistake one night when you're drunk out of your mind, and you have to live it down forever. But, I suppose that's just what I deserved.

Then he came back to Sheree, again. What had he said? He'd asked me, hypothetically, if Sheree ever did make a pass at me, would I tell her I wasn't interested? And in response, I reminded him who the bisexual was, and it wasn't Sheree—it was *me*. I felt like the mother bird flopping around on the ground like she had a broken wing, just to keep the predator away from her babies. She was willing to risk everything, including her life, just to ensure that no harm came to those whom she was responsible for protecting. Why in holy hell would I go and remind him—again!—that I had had sex with women? There were reasons, of course, but all things considered, I would have really preferred he not think of me that way. Well, what's done is done. He probably thinks I was trying to shock him, or something. I wasn't, but he can think that. And then he asked me to assure him that there was nothing going on between Sheree and me. That if I told him, he would believe me, but I *had* to tell him. Well, he was a fucking idiot.

But there was something else, something important that I felt like I'd

missed. Some clue. What had he said?

Then it came to me. He'd said that Tom had said some things about Sheree. Presumably he and Tom had talked, and Tom had expressed some 'concerns' about Sheree—her state of mind, maybe. Then all the questions about bisexuality, Sheree making a pass at me, him wanting me to tell her 'no' if she ever came on to me, him wondering how she felt about going down on me, et cetera, et cetera ... They all made sense.

I wanted know what Tom had said. If we (me and my girl Sheree) were to successfully combat this threat, we needed to know everything about it. And though I didn't want to bring the subject up again, I found myself breaking the vocal silence to once again delve into the sticky, seamy subject of my having had sex with Sheree. A girl. My best friend. Oh, and the wife of my boyfriend's best friend. Let's not forget that.

I spoke up, taking the fingers from my mouth. I didn't remember putting them there. "Marc, what did Tom say to you about Sheree?"

My buddy was sitting next to me. After all, since I was close enough to have tucked my toes up under his leg, he had no problem hearing me. For a moment, he looked at me as if I'd not said anything intelligible, but in retrospect he may just have been doing what he sometimes calls a 'context swap'. "Tom?" he asked. "What? When?"

"I dunno *when*, but earlier today you said he 'said some things about Sheree,' and I was just wondering what those things were." I smiled, as sweetly as possible, "That's all."

He didn't think the question unusual. That was good. "Uh," he scratched his stubbly chin, "he only said that she seemed to like you. A lot."

"That's all?" I had to shake my head, "And from that you got the idea she might be coming on to me? Or was it 'making a pass' at me?"

"No. He said Sheree talks about you. Apparently a bit more than he thinks is appropriate." He shrugged, "You talk about *her*, a lot, too. I don't think it's particularly unusual. So I don't know exactly what he means. He did say, though, that she apparently thinks you're the 'greatest thing,' or something like that."

"I ain't so great."

He smiled with sardonic amusement, "That's for sure!" But he was only kidding, as he shook his head slightly to contradict his words. I got it.

"What else?" I just had to smack him on the arm for being such a shit. "Go on."

"Let me think if he said anything else."

"He must have said something, because he got you thinking that your two women might have suddenly gone 'lesbo' on you. You all must have

gotten the idea from *somewhere*."

"Just hang on a minute," he gave me a light tap on the knee, feeble retaliation for my hitting him, I suppose. "He wondered if we should trust you two together, and it made me think. *Who* couldn't be trusted? So, I asked him if he was worried about you, since ..." He let it go unsaid. "But he isn't worried about you, sweetheart, he said he's worried about his wife."

"That's fucking ridiculous," I said.

He said with irony, "It should be, anyway."

I had no ready answer to that.

Marc went on, "He thinks Sheree did it to get back at him for that ... thing ... with you, back in December."

"She did. It don't take no fucking genius to figure that out."

"I know, but he was talking about what Sheree did with me in the hot-tub. Not what she did with you."

"Oh."

He sat in silence for some moments. I let him, since it was apparent he was thinking, trying to remember what had been said. My boy is nothing if not complete and accurate in everything he does. (I'm so proud!)

Finally, he remembered, and what he remembered made him clear his throat before speaking. "Tom said Sheree had told him, and I'm trying to quote as best I can, 'I wondered what all the attraction was about, and I think I just found out.' Something like that."

"She was probably talking about you, stud-muffin." I winked at him, teasing.

"No, I don't think so. Tom said she was definitely talking about *you*, sweet-cheeks."

I had to pause a few moments to think. Then, "Really?"

"That's what he said."

More serious than I thought, then. She should have kept her damn mouth shut, because she's just asking to be caught. Exposed. Under normal circumstances, I'd say that being caught (or not being caught) was entirely up to the party of the first part—her business all the way—but since I was the party of the second part, I knew just how ugly it would be for me when that time came. Yes, indeed. It was much more serious.

I think I said, "Oh," and then let the conversation be ended. To Marc's credit, he seemed to agree with that assessment.

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The way Kerrilyn acted when she found out what Sheree had apparently 'let slip' when talking with her husband, it suddenly became apparent to me that whatever had happened between them—the women—was not the 'nothing' that Kerrilyn had tried to make it out to be. I expected it not to be the awful extreme that was the primary source of Tom's fears, but I knew by her body language and general tone of voice that she was definitely involved, somehow.

It was only a few minutes after she dropped the conversation when she announced, "I think I need a drink. Can I get one for you?" She slipped her bare, pink toes gently out from under my leg, swung her legs down to the floor and stood up.

"Sure," I said. I don't know why she was asking me about a drink, because I very rarely ever said yes, but for the first time in a long time, I felt I understood her need for one, and agreed with her. In fact, I thought we were both probably going to be drinking a lot, if things went the way they seemed to have started ...

She went off to the kitchen and poured two large glasses full of scotch. "You want ice?" she asked, after clinking some into her own glass.

Of course I wanted ice. It's only civilized. "You know I do," I told her.

"Fine." She dropped some cubes in my glass and padded back to the living room. She handed me a glass, almost as full as hers, and when I made eye contact with her, she smiled crookedly and we clinked the glasses together. She made a toast, "Here's to getting drunk as skunks."

Well, it sounded about right, to me. I agreed, "Here's to getting shit-faced and throwing up in the sink." (Prophetic, that was.)

She only shook her head, smiling, and upended her glass. She drank about half of it in one gulp. Ugh! I've never seen anyone drink so much booze, so fast. It was almost scary to see how fast she could suck it down.

"Good stuff," she said, smacking her lips. She resumed her comfy spot on the couch, and we resumed our TV show.

I don't remember exactly when I stumbled off to bed, having myself gotten very drunk with Kerrilyn, but I do think I remember worrying that I was probably going to regret it in the morning. *A lot*. Oh, well. It was almost worth it to forget things for a while.

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I must have passed out on the couch. I woke up and it was dark. The

TV was off, so Marc must have done it. It took me some moments of steady breathing to clear my head enough to move, but before I could roll over something very rudely announced itself. My stomach, usually a semi-cooperative participant in my drinking, was most insistently pronouncing its state of extreme upset. In fact, it hurt so badly I had to lie gasping for an interminably long time before I felt even remotely able to sit up. My head also hurt, too, a fact I noticed almost belatedly as I finally swiveled myself up rather unsteadily to a sitting position. Then I got dizzy. What's going on? I've *never* felt this bad, before. OK, OK, so hold your head between your knees until your vision clears and you can stand up. Maybe.

What time is it? I wondered, almost speaking aloud. I took several deep breaths and gently (oh so gently!) lifted my head enough to see the clock in the kitchen. No glasses, of course. Could not read the fucking clock to save my life. Where were my goddamn glasses? Even *trying* to think, my head swam dizzily. *Ugh!* Can I even get up to get some aspirin, or am just I going to have to tough it out right here on the edge of the couch, with nothing to kill the pain? No, I said to myself, with determination, you have to get up and get something for this fucking pain.

When I stood finally, my stomach pain seemed to subside—but only slightly. Good. I didn't feel like puking, quite so much. Onward to the kitchen. But though I didn't feel as though I was still drunk, as I stumbled past the kitchen counter I misjudged the clearance and slammed my hip hard into the sharp corner. Oof! *Ouch!* I did make noise, then, yelping out and cursing in the dim stillness. I only hoped Marc was fast asleep. I didn't really want to have to deal with him in the shape I was in. I didn't even want to deal with myself, but if I didn't get something to help the pain, I thought I might pass out. Yes, it was *that bad*. Now closer to the clock, I could see that it was about four-thirty. Good. Still early.

At the sink finally, I grabbed a cup from the cupboard and filled it with water. My God, was I thirsty just then! I slugged it down as fast as I could, then poured myself another. This too was drunk hastily, and for a few moments I thought I was going to be all right.

Then it happened. Before I even had time to react or catch myself, or make a move toward the bathroom, everything I had just drunk, along with whatever junk that was still left in my poor stomach, came up suddenly. It was violent, abrupt—most rude—and though I tried my very best to hit the sink, hot, acidic vomit sprayed all over the counter and onto the floor. A brutal convulsion then struck me again, but as I tried to stumble forward to lean over the sink, I stepped in the goopy, disgusting

mess I'd just made on the floor, and without much fanfare or prior warning, my feet slipped out from under me. *Boom!* And as I went down the bottom of my chin clipped the edge of the sink. I think I stayed conscious, because stars filled my vision and I landed on all fours on the floor. But then again, maybe I did pass out, because I swear the next thing I remember was waking up on my back in the dark, lying in a pool of horrible, wretched stink in the middle of the fucking kitchen floor.

I tried to clear my head. My tongue hurt so badly I was afraid I'd bitten it in two. I felt around inside my mouth, gingerly, tasted blood, thick and pungent, but though I think I might have bitten a hole through it, no pieces seemed to be missing. Thank God for that small favor, at least. My chin felt like I'd been hit by some very large and very angry boxer. Then I smelled the acrid stench of the vomit I was lying in, and the uncontrollable retching began anew. I had to roll to my side or I was going to spray puke all over myself. There was no holding it back—it was going to come out one way or the other.

Fortunately or unfortunately, there wasn't much left in my stomach, but that didn't stop me from gagging and choking with the dry heaves for quite a long while. So long, in fact, I wondered why Marc hadn't wakened up to come and see what all the noise and commotion was about. He must have been sleeping pretty soundly not to hear me. Dead, maybe. Or just dead drunk, more likely.

Once I was able to control things in my stomach, somewhat, I managed to push myself up to my hands and knees. The floor was still wet and slippery, but eventually I was able to hoist myself more or less to a standing position. I wasn't sure I wanted to see the extent of the mess I'd made, but it seemed obvious that unless I wanted to involve Marc in my pain and embarrassment, I needed to clean up the kitchen (and myself, for that matter) before he woke up. The clock said it was about four-forty-five.

I was still dressed, wearing my sleeveless pink blouse and khaki shorts. I felt my front, then my back. *Ack! Phooey!* Covered with puke from head to toe! The clothes had to come off, then. So with suppressed gags, I began to strip down. Panties and bra were also wet and smelly, so they came off and joined the rest of my clothes in the kitchen sink. There didn't seem any better place, for the moment.

I looked around in the dimness, trying to formulate a further plan. Well, I had to clean up, but not unless I could see what I was doing. Lights, then. But, if I turned the kitchen lights on, Marc would no doubt see them and wake up. Think. Think. He won't wake up if I close the bedroom door. So, let's go close it. I took a tentative step forward. Nope, no good. Feet were covered with ... well, covered with stuff I *didn't* want

to get all over the carpet. So, wash them off. Is there a washcloth around here, somewhere?

Well, to make this sorry long-ass story somewhat shorter, I did get myself cleaned off and managed to close the bedroom door without waking the boy. Then I turned on the kitchen light to see the extent of the 'damage'.

Oh, God! I almost puked again when I saw how much of the awful, smelly, chunky, *slimy* stuff I had deposited literally on every horizontal surface anywhere in the vicinity of the kitchen. Had it been *that bad*? Apparently. Oh, and it didn't help that I could see where I had passed out—right there in the fucking middle of Puke Central. I almost didn't notice the faint traces of red blood scattered throughout the whole mess.

Oww! My stomach hurt so badly! Had I vomited up blood with all the food and drink? Again, apparently so. Well, that idea scared me pretty badly, but still I thought, 'Let's just get it cleaned up as best we can. We won't say anything to anyone about the blood.' That would not produce anything even resembling a desirable result. But, could I afford to take anything for the pain in my head? Aspirin, normally no problem for me, seemed like the very last thing I wanted on top of the kind of extreme abdominal distress I was feeling. But, that problem was secondary, because I needed to mop up the sink, the counter, and the floor, and disinfect the whole lot in about an hour. That was when dear Marc was due to get up, assuming he wasn't so hung over himself that he overslept or simply decided to call in sick. Truthfully, I wouldn't have minded particularly if he did decide to stay home with me. But, like it or not, I was going to have to buck it up, and hold my nose while I used scads and scads of paper towels to wipe up every trace. Which I did. I even made it into the shower, finally, just about the time I heard Marc's alarm go off.

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The clock radio blared for several minutes while I tried to insert my brain back into my head. Well, at least that's what it felt like. I tested the spot next to me where I expected to find Kerrilyn asleep. But, no woman there. Then I heard the shower running. That was odd. What's she doing up this early in the morning? And taking a shower, no less.

I slid out of bed to investigate. Sure enough, there she was in the shower, soaping off. OK, then, maybe I'll just join her. Hot water certainly wouldn't hurt. So I slipped quickly out of my clothes and slid open the

shower door. But by the way she jumped, then, I don't think she'd known I was there.

"Oh, it's you," she said, squinting and brandishing a bar of soap toward me.

"Whom were you expecting?"

But, she wasn't interested in conversation. By her sick expression and general unhappy demeanor, I gathered she must be feeling more than a little hung over.

"Too much to drink last night?" I asked. "I feel pretty rough this morning, too."

She just frowned in my direction and finished rinsing off. Then handed me the soap and appeared to be making ready to get out of the shower.

"Where are you going?" I called after her.

"To bed," was all she said. Then she took a towel and began to dry off.

After I finished in the shower, I went back to the bedroom to check on her. Of course, I didn't know about the mess she'd made in the kitchen. She seemed to be asleep already, but when I looked more closely she opened her eyes and looked sideways up at me.

"What?" she complained weakly, whining.

"Are you OK?"

She rolled away from me. "No," she said.

"What's wrong?" She seemed awfully grumpy, even for her. Even for her with a hangover.

She mumbled something I didn't quite catch.

"What?"

She turned her head back toward me, spoke with irritation. "I said, I threw up in the fucking kitchen. Made a mess. I just want to go back to sleep, now."

"You did clean it up, didn't you?"

Foolish question. For a moment she seemed to be looking for just the right cutting remark to shoot back, but apparently decided it wasn't worth the effort. She only scowled and turned away.

Well, I checked the kitchen. She had cleaned up, but it still smelled like someone had puked their guts out, anyway. And it was probably the last thing I needed to be smelling, considering the shape that both my head and stomach were in. So I decided to go finish getting ready for work. And as I left later, I wondered if we had any Lysol. Because we were going to need a lot of it if we were ever going to be able to cook in

that kitchen, again.

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I was awakened sometime later to the insistent ringing of the telephone. I almost said 'fuck it' and let the damn thing go, but then the answering machine picked up. I heard Sheree's bright, girlish voice coming over the speaker, so I reluctantly forced myself out of bed to go answer the phone in the kitchen. Why? Because that's where the fucking answering machine is.

"Hello?" I said, hitting the STOP button. No sense recording the whole conversation. "Sheree?"

I must have sounded pretty bad, because she said, "Kerrilyn? Vix? Is that you?"

I cleared my throat. Twice. "Yeah," I croaked, "It's me."

"What's wrong? You sound sick, or something."

"Well," I coughed, feeling every bit like death's first cousin (you know, death once removed), "I don't feel so hot, right now."

"Are you hung over?"

"Not really." But I changed my mind. "Yeah, some." I decided not to mention throwing up all over the kitchen. And speaking of the kitchen, it still smelled a little ... funky. Ugh!

"How hung over?" She sounded perturbed.

"Marc and I celebrated a little too much, last night. He didn't feel so hot this morning when he got up, either." I felt a whole lot worse than 'not so hot'.

There was a short silence. "You gonna be OK?"

"Sure," I tried to sound reassuring, "It's no big deal." I didn't think I was very convincing.

Apparently I was, though, because she asked, "So, would you be interested in getting together for lunch, today?"

Well, my stomach still felt rotten, but since early that morning (and about a half bottle of antacids later), the pain seemed to be losing its sharp edge, somewhat. And besides, I really didn't want to tell her no. "Well, I'm not sure how much I could eat, but we can get together, if you want." I looked up at the clock, commented, "It's about eleven-thirty."

"I know," she said.

I exhaled. The pain in my stomach rose momentarily, then quieted. "Can you give me some time to get ready?"

"Sure," she said. "How much do you need?"

"I dunno, a while."

There was a short pause. "We don't have to go out, you know. If you're not feeling good, we could just ... hang out, or something."

"There ain't much food in the apartment. I think I need to go shopping, maybe."

"That's OK," she said. "We can find something to eat, I think."

But it hurt to think.

She showed up ten minutes later. I let her in, of course, and led her over to the sofa, where I had turned on some completely inane daytime TV show. Then I went to the kitchen to get a drink—of water. I wish I felt better, but I was almost afraid to even take any aspirin for fear they would upset my stomach more than it already was. Almost better to simply withstand the pain. A hangover eventually goes away on its own. Eventually.

"You don't look so good," She said, surveying me briefly, then sitting on the couch. She had kicked off her shoes—tiny shiny black high heels, and was draping her suit jacket over the sofa arm nearest her. Underneath that proper blue jacket she wore a pale yellow, sleeveless satin blouse. She tucked her feet up under her as best she could, since the suit skirt she was wearing wasn't as loose or as comfortable as she might have liked.

She looked very nice. Contrast that to me. I, of course, looked and felt like shit. "I'm sorry I don't feel very good," I said from the sink.

"That's OK," she said.

But, I thought I detected something in her voice. Judgment, maybe. It made me defensive. "This isn't a regular hangover. I never feel this bad, normally."

But, she had no comment to that.

I walked back to the living room, slowly. I was barefoot, having just thrown on a blouse and some shorts. I hadn't even finished buttoning. So, I began doing up the buttons on my blouse as I walked over to where she sat.

She regarded my buttoning activity, "Don't worry about getting dressed. You look fine."

"Uh-huh."

Then she saw the bruise and swelling under my chin. "What'd you do to your chin?"

Well, at least she didn't think it was something Marc had done to me. "Nothing. I kinda slipped in the kitchen." I touched the bruised spot, gingerly. "Hit it on the edge of the sink."

"Ouch! That must have hurt. But you're still talking, so you must not have bit your tongue off."

I felt around in my mouth again, just in case. "No. I'll live, I think."

"Why don't you come have a seat, here, for a while."

"I'm sorry I don't feel better," I repeated, as I also tucked my feet up under me on the couch, next to her. Our hips touched, barely.

She put her hand on my knee, rubbed it gently, briefly. "You don't need to apologize."

I liked the sensation of her touch. It was comforting, reassuring. She smelled good, too. The perfume I recognized, but just then I realized that I had had so few opportunities to see her all dressed up—dressed up for the office. I shook my brains out and took the time to look over my very businesslike girl. Her hair was perfectly done up, and curled all around her ears and her forehead in such a cute, business-pixie way. In her ears were a pair of small, diamond earrings—so cute!—and her face was made up quite nicely. Makeup subtly, but very effectively applied. The blouse she wore, itself, was a relatively sheer almondy-yellow acrylic, but beneath it she wore a pretty, lacy white camisole that both accented and effectively hid the charms enclosed within. Her skirt was fitted, and hit just below the knee, so it was quite impossible for her to be comfortable in the position she was in.

"What did you want to do about lunch?" I asked. Not that I was the least bit hungry.

She only regarded me, thoughtfully. Changed the subject, with, "Did Marc say anything to you?"

That caught me off guard. "About what?"

"About Sunday night, after the party."

"Oh." I had to recall the conversation. "Yeah, we talked about it." I didn't particularly want to discuss it, though.

"And?" She was pressing, but I wasn't sure where she was going, exactly.

"I dunno. I told him I didn't mind him having sex with you in the hot-tub, if that's what you're asking."

"He didn't think you and me making love in front of them was a bit ... unusual?"

Then I thought I got where she was going with all this. "He seemed to get off on *that* just fine." I had to grin, almost.

She smiled, too. "Well, that's not exactly what I meant." Then her smile faded, "Tom had quite a few questions for me, after you all left, last night."

"About what?"

She cleared her throat. "Well, not to put too fine a point on it, but he thinks we might be having an affair."

"You and Marc?"

"No, silly." But she didn't immediately say, just looked at me. Pointedly.

I understood, though. "You mean us." Figures.

She nodded, slowly. It was hard to judge her exact reaction to my realization.

I went on, frowning, "Did he happen to say why he thought we were 'having an affair'? Because there's no way either one of them coulda seen or heard anything."

She sniffed. "I think Tom is mainly upset that he didn't get to fuck you." Something about the idea was mildly distasteful to her. "Since I made love to you and he didn't, he's jumping to the conclusion that it must be because ..." she faltered "... you know. *Because.*" She lowered her gaze. Looked at the floor.

"I don't believe this. You still love him, don't you?"

"Of course!" Her eyes shot up to meet mine, "Whatever gave you that idea?"

"Oh, you don't have to convince me, sweetie. I was just wondering if maybe he had some other reason for thinking ... what he was thinking. That's all."

She stared at me, eyes hard. "It's true, though."

I let some seconds pass before answering, "What's true?"

"Kerrilyn, I *do* love you."

• • •

When I came home from work to pick Kerrilyn up for rehearsal (the regular Tuesday night event), I found her in the bedroom lying on top of the quilt, fully clothed, and fast asleep. I woke her because we were late and needed to get going. But she wasn't quite ready to go.

"I don't think I can make it to practice, tonight," she said. She was still on the bed, flat on her back, holding her hand over her eyes.

I had a sudden chill feeling. Was she drunk again? After being so sick this morning? I went over to the bed and looked her over, carefully. "Are you all right?" I asked.

"No," she said, shaking her head.

I smelled for booze, but she really didn't seem to be drunk. That

would have been pretty bad, considering we were supposed to be having a rehearsal. No drinking allowed before rehearsal. But, I had to ask anyway, "Have you been drinking?"

She took her hand away from her face, looked up at me, defiantly. "No. I'm too fucking sick to drink." She shook her head again, softening. "I tried one earlier, but it almost made me throw up."

"Should I take you to the doctor?"

"Not a chance. I just wanna stay in the bed a while, till I feel better."

"What about rehearsal?"

She coughed, "I'm not sure I could sing tonight if my life depended on it. They'll probably be mad at me, but I really am sick."

"I think it's probably just a hangover."

She rolled onto her side, away from me. "Uh-huh. And I think you should go fuck yourself, asshole."

"Come on, girl. I think you should come to rehearsal, even if you don't sing. No one will be mad at you if you show up. No one expects you never to get sick, but you don't look like you need to be bed-ridden, either."

"How do you know what I look like? How do you know how I feel?" She rolled back to glare at me.

Instead of answering her rhetorical questions, I looked her over. Her face looked reddened, somewhat, and seemed to be tear-stained, but the streaks could have been a lot of things. Her eyes were red, too, but that, too, could have been something else. Then I saw the bottom of her chin. It looked very much like she'd hit something (or something had hit her). Hard. She had a sizeable bruise.

"What happened to your chin?" I asked her.

"Last night while I was puking my guts out, I slipped and hit the edge of the kitchen sink."

*Oww!* "Are you OK?"

"You mean—did I bite off my tongue, or something?" She very carefully rubbed the bruised spot. "No. My tongue is still there." She looked away. "But thanks for asking, anyway."

I ignored her sarcasm. Spoke sympathetically, "I'm sorry. It looks like it hurts. Is there anything I can do?"

"You could go away and leave me alone."

"Why are you in such a bad mood, tonight? What did I do to put you in such a foul mood?"

"Nothing." She sighed, "It's not you. It's just been a pretty rough day, that's all."

I tried to be consoling, "Come on, Kerrilyn, get up. Let's go. You'll

feel better once you get out of the house.”

“No.”

“No?”

She whipped her head around, blasted, “**No!**”

“OK. Fine,” I said, and turned and walked out.

I’d thought Kerrilyn not showing up to rehearsal would cause a problem, but I was wrong. When I told Dancer she was sick, he had little, if not nothing, to say about it. In fact, he didn’t seem to be particularly in the mood to play, so having the singer not make it only seemed to him to be a good excuse to cancel the whole thing. Which he did.

Tom was late. I’d have thought that since he worked there, he could have certainly managed to show up on time. What the hell could he be doing that he couldn’t even be there for our seven o’clock start? Well, it didn’t matter, because by the time Tom got there, it was called off. Mel and Dancer had already gone home. That just left me there, alone, sitting at my drums in the deserted room.

“What’s going on?” he asked from the doorway. “Where is everybody?”

“Gone,” I said. “Kerrilyn is sick, so Dancer decided he really didn’t want to play tonight.”

“She’s sick?”

“Yeah. Apparently, she threw up in the kitchen last night, slipped somehow, and hit the bottom of her chin on the edge of the sink.”

He let out a low whistle. “Is she OK?”

I shrugged, but it really wasn’t how I felt about her. “I don’t know. Probably. She didn’t look that bad, to me. I mean, she didn’t break her jaw or bite her tongue off, or anything.”

“So Dancer just went home—no argument?”

“Apparently.”

“We gonna have rehearsal Saturday?”

“I guess so,” I shrugged again. “I don’t see why not. I mean, we *do* have a gig next week.”

“Kerrilyn gonna be all right to sing, by then?”

I said, again, “I don’t know. Probably.”

“So she’s not hurt bad?”

I shrugged, yet again. “I don’t know. Not that I could see.” I shook my head, tapped a couple drums with my sticks. “She was in a pretty bad mood, though. She wouldn’t have been much fun, tonight, even if she had come.”

He didn’t really have anything to say about that. Instead, “Sheree and

I talked, last night.”

“Yeah?” I thought about asking him what they had discussed, but decided he was probably going to tell me, anyway. I was right.

“I asked her if there was something she and I needed to talk about.”

And again, I was tempted to ask him what it was he thought they needed to talk about, but decided I probably knew, anyway. And I really didn’t want to know what she had answered. But I said, anyway, “And ...?”

He shrugged. “I pointed out how the thing ... she did ...” he hesitated “... to Kerrilyn ... could maybe look to a man.” He coughed. Embarrassed, probably.

“Tom, it could have been nothing but pure and innocent ...” but I couldn’t say what. “Nothing more.”

He agreed, though. “I told her that. I said, ‘I really want to believe that eating out your best friend was nothing more than having a little harmless bisexual fun at my expense, but you gotta admit that you’ve been acting a little ‘strange’ around Kerrilyn, lately’.”

I was surprised. “You didn’t actually *say that*, did you?”

“Yes, I did. I also said that if she’s having an affair, or thinking about having an affair, she should tell me up front, so I don’t have to find out about it later. Especially not from someone else.”

“And what did she say to that?” I could hardly believe it.

He shrugged, then. “She only promised that if anything like that ever was to happen, I’d be the first to know.”

Uh-huh. “That’s nice. But she didn’t admit to anything, did she?” I was fairly certain she would not.

“No,” he said.

“Did you *really* expect her to?”

“No. I guess not.”

Despite all my earlier fears and worries, I had decided that we were probably wrong about the women. Completely out in left field. “Come on, Tom. I wouldn’t worry too much about it.”

“Why not?”

“Because Kerrilyn isn’t interested in women.”

“You talked to her, then? She told you that?”

“Of course I talked to her. What did you think I was going to do, ignore the whole thing and just pretend that nothing had happened?”

“No. So, what did she say?”

“Well,” I had to collect my thoughts. Should I tell him? Oh, well.

“Kerrilyn did admit to having had sexual experiences with women, in the past. But—”

“—*You’re kidding!*” He seemed fairly blown away. Was my admission too much?

Too late, though. “No, I’m not kidding. I believe her. I’m pretty sure she has. But if you ever say anything to her—or anyone!—about this ...” I pointed with my drumstick “... I will personally kick your sorry fuckin’ ass from one end of this room to the other. Twice!”

He shook his head, smiling, “Not me, ole buddy.” But then when I didn’t continue right away, he asked, “So ...?”

“So? She said she likes boys. She admitted she could make love to a woman, maybe, but that women didn’t ‘float her boat,’ if you know what I mean.”

He was unimpressed. “And that doesn’t worry you?”

I almost had to laugh. “No, it doesn’t. Why should it? I mean, we can’t undo the past, can we? She can’t go back and become someone she isn’t, or undo something she’s done. All we can do is start where we are, and go forward from there.”

“And she said she wants to ‘go forward’ with a man?”

I nodded, “Yeah. She does. *This man*, in particular.” I pointed to myself.

“That’s good. I’m happy for you.” He didn’t seem too fucking happy about it, though.

“I wouldn’t worry too much about Sheree. Kerrilyn isn’t interested in women.”

“That’s fine.” But he wasn’t buying it. He shook his head slowly, “Kerrilyn may not be interested in women, maybe, but I think Sheree may still have feelings for her.” He walked away, then turned back. “Do you have any idea what it feels like to lose your woman—your wife—to someone else?”

“No, I don’t.”

“So, you can’t imagine what it feels like to lose your wife to another woman.”

“No. But you’re not losing your wife to another woman—or to anyone else, for that matter. That’s fucking ridiculous.”

“I hope you’re right.”

“You know I am,” I said. And I hoped I was. Right, that is.

## Chapter 22

I got home a little while later. I fully expected to find Kerrilyn in bed asleep, but I was more than surprised to find her on the couch watching TV, and even having a drink. Apparently, she wasn't nearly as sick as she'd led me to believe. And I was plenty angry about it, too.

"What the fuck are you doing?" I set upon her as soon as I closed the door.

She didn't answer, just looked at me, blankly. I couldn't tell if she was surprised that I'd come home so early, or if she was just embarrassed to have been caught playing 'hooky' from rehearsal. And drinking, too.

I shook my head. "Sick, huh?"

"I started feeling better a little while ago." She had a glass in her hand. Scotch, no doubt. She looked at me, then at the glass. "I didn't think you'd be home so early."

I explained, "When you didn't come to rehearsal, Dancer decided it wasn't worth even having it, so it was canceled. I told everyone you were sick." I walked into the kitchen, where the scotch bottle was still sitting on the counter. "They were all concerned about you."

"I'm sorry," she said, quietly. "I *was* sick."

"Not now, though." It was an accusation.

"It's been a rough day," she said, as if that explained it.

"Earlier you were too fucking sick to even get out of the bed, and now you're just sitting here watching TV, and even having a couple of fucking drinks before dinner." I walked to the couch, looked down on her imperiously. "I don't like it when you lie to me."

That got a reaction from her. "I wasn't lying! I felt rotten all day! All fucking day!"

"But not now."

She half shrugged, and responded most rationally, "The pain in my stomach quieted down. I dunno, I just thought I might as well relax while

I'm sitting here all alone."

But I was angry that she'd begged off going to rehearsal. It was something important to me, and something I thought should be important to her. "Kerrilyn, we don't skip rehearsals. Especially not just so we can stay home and get drunk."

She stood up. Fumed, "I'm *not* drunk! This is just my second one!"

"But you *are* drinking."

She blinked. "Yeah?" She seemed not to quite understand my point.

"Isn't the band important to you?"

She walked by me to the kitchen. I thought she was going to get another drink, but instead she just set the glass next to the bottle. "You know the band is very important to me."

"It doesn't look that way."

"**Goddamn it, Marc!**" she blasted at me, "I was fucking sick!"

"And you just happened to get better after I left, right?"

She calmed, a little. "I certainly didn't plan it that way, if that's what you're insinuating."

I waited a moment, then changed the subject. "What am I going to tell the others? If they can't trust you to show up when you're supposed to—"

"—I always show up!"

I was tired of arguing. "Kerrilyn, I'm really disappointed in you," I said.

You'd have thought I slugged her.

• • •

I woke up Wednesday morning about eleven, late as usual. I felt better, enough better to have a drink or two, and was quite surprised a little while later when Sheree showed up at the door. The day before she'd said she was going to be busy, so I was definitely not expecting her to be there at my door, so early.

Well, what else could I do? I let her in.

She immediately saw my glass, still half-full of scotch. "You've been drinking," she said, looking down at the glass. She almost seemed surprised, but I thought I heard judgment—damnation—in her voice.

I immediately went on the supreme defensive. "Yeah, so?"

"I didn't know you drank so early in the day."

Oh, there was a definite pronouncement of sentence in that remark. So I lied, "Sometimes."

She removed her stare from the glass, which was then freed to rise to my lips. But, she wanted to still try to be up-beat. She smiled, "I got good news."

I didn't feel so damned 'up-beat'. I was pissed off. "What?"

"I got the whole afternoon off!" She seemed quite elated by it. "I told them I didn't feel good, and said I was going home."

"You're not worried they'll try to call you at home?"

She was definite. "No chance. I was hoping maybe we could go somewhere for the afternoon—like to the park, maybe."

"Which park?"

"I thought Piedmont Park would be real nice, maybe. Is that all right?" She walked past me to the living room. "It's another *beautiful* day out, and I thought it would be lots better than staying all cooped up in this stuffy apartment, all the time."

"Piedmont Park, huh?" I don't think I liked the idea, much. "Why? So we can stroll around with all the *other* lesbians? Maybe I could wear a short-short dress for you, right up to my crotch, with nothing on underneath. You think, maybe? We could be just like a couple of regular fucking dykes." Her eyes showed her utter and complete shock. But I was on a terrible roll, and went on anyway, "Hell, I'll bet we could even fuck each other, too, right there in the middle of the goddamn fucking grass. Put on a pretty good show, too."

Her eyes were huge, very white. "You're drunk," she said.

"Not yet," I replied, as she slammed the door behind her.

I admit that after the things I said to her on Wednesday, I didn't expect Sheree to call me or come by on Thursday. Friday, either. I knew what I'd said. I didn't know why I'd said it, but I couldn't deny or ignore the heartless and cruel words that had come to my mouth and escaped, before I could either stop them, or edit them out. I was so ashamed of myself and my horribly damning words that there didn't seem any way I could possibly make up for them. I couldn't take them back—they were out there and gone—the damage already done. Sure, maybe I could have apologized to her, but I figured she'd probably heard enough empty, hollow apologies from me to last a fucking lifetime. Believe me, it wouldn't have been just a 'hollow' apology, but I couldn't see how she could forgive me—knowing what I'd said—so there was really no point in even saying anything. No point in making the situation worse.

What was I thinking? *Was I* even thinking? She'd done nothing to warrant such mistreatment. She'd said nothing to make me angry, nothing that should have provoked such a venomous outburst. I'd had no reason

at all to attack her, but yet the words had come from *somewhere*. I couldn't possibly have planned it, either, since I hadn't known she was coming over. I simply had let my guard down an instant, and out came ... *utter vilification*. I'd gone straight for the throat and torn her wide open. Then, bleeding and down, I'd finished by disemboweling her right there on the fucking carpet.

What had she said to me? 'You're drinking, already'? Something like that. Maybe she'd said, 'I didn't know you drank so early in the day'? Harmless enough comments about my habits, coming from a good, close friend. Surely not an attack. No reason to become so defensive—to launch such a powerful, scathing, counter-offensive. No reason at all. How many times in the past had she chided me about my excessive alcohol consumption? Too many to count, for sure. And even so, I'd always laughed her off or made some lame excuse. That she would call attention, once again, to my drinking, could hardly be surprising, or considered out-of-line, or deemed invasive.

She wanted to go to the park with me. It was a glorious day, full of sunshine and flowers, birds and warm breezes—a perfect day for two friends to have the afternoon off together. Piedmont Park was considered *the* place for such exalted post-meridian sojourns, too. Acres of lush grass tickling bare toes; huge shade oaks and rock-skipping lakes; verdant rolling hills with the outlines of Midtown office buildings framing the hazy skyline. If we'd had bicycles, we could have ridden until our legs were like rubber bands, and then collapsed in the shade of the largest tree we could find. Laid out on blankets and daydreamed, hip-to-hip, of babies and husbands; friends and lovers; bands and hit records to be made. *Our dreams*. We could have murmured with the bees and the breezes; dozed with the daisies; finally slept innocent as babes in the warm-gentle caresses of the butterflies, fluttering in the glow of our own sweet-smelling nectar.

So much did I long to relax with my girl, safe and secure! With her, I didn't have to allow the world and its pressures to interfere with the silence and solitude of our companionship. Alone together in the anonymous expanses of that famous park we could have chosen to cement our love. Keep it safe for yet another day.

She had placed no pressure on me to decide or commit. Her patience had been the patience of honest love, content to be there on the sideline, merely observing the growth and metamorphosis of that most treasured soul—mine. She loved me, and her love swelled up around me to envelop my being in a glistening bubble of timelessness. So much! I wanted to escape the movement of the planet and the roaring, rushing whoosh of the

blood in my veins, to lie so completely silent and still in her arms. To welcome death, if in death we could be together forever, never having to part. So much!

But I had had two drinks that Wednesday morning, and sometime before those drinks were gone, I became another person. The person I became loathed the open outdoors. The vision of God looking down upon us in His wondrous, shining love, only shriveled and desiccated the person I became. Only the cool darkness of the shadows and the smoky, dun fire of the bottle interested the person who usurped my soul, once I put the drink to my lips. The selflessness and calm closeness of companionship agitated and irritated the selfishness and self-centeredness of the poisoned creature I became, when I drank.

How dare she question what I did! How dare she call attention to my reason, to my justification! What right did she have to attack my helper and my crutch, my friend through all the times of mindless fucking and sucking—the endless, enduring stickiness. The pungent, heady-foul odor that seemed to permeate my very soul? It was only my friend the bottle that had helped me get through the night. It had only been my friend who was always there. Only my friend made it possible to forget. And here she was, forcing me to *remember*.

If I remembered too clearly the tortures of being a whore, of being abused and raped, of being lost and then abandoned, the pain of my remembrance would destroy me completely, and as easy as that might be to accomplish, I really didn't want to be a coherent, active party to my own destruction. I had no choice if I remembered. It was either drink and forget, or remember and be destroyed. But go insane before I finally killed myself.

Sheree couldn't understand what was at stake. She was the unwitting intruder on my private escape from/into hell, and had interfered in matters that she was better off not being party to. She had not hurt me, but I could not permit her love to draw me away from the salvation/destruction that was in my bottle. Her love attracted the sunshine, invited the brightness to invade our beings, but the fresh air and open sky only frightened and angered the black roots that had grown so thick and strong around my soul. They were not to be destroyed by the light—they simply hated the light. Because, to be subject to its honesty and clarity meant to cast off deceit and darkness, and be subject to open, public scrutiny. To be giving and forgiving, to walk toward the light and cast off the shackles of that endless cycle. Pain and forgetfulness, pain and forgetfulness.

I was sick, but the limit of my sickness was only just beginning to extend into the physical realm. She demanded wellness and strength in

the face of difficult decisions, but I was too weakened and fearful of discovery.

I never feared the repercussions if we were discovered loving each other. Being labeled 'gay' or called a 'lesbian' wouldn't have harmed me, it was the necessity of truth in the face of my alcoholism that I really feared. I could have withstood a thousand voices calling me 'queer' or 'lezzie' or 'cunt-licker,' but to endure just one whisper that I was an alcoholic—a boozier—was more than I could bear.

I didn't understand the anger or the venom I'd let loose upon her. I couldn't see the hurt within me, just below the surface, waiting only for the booze to be let out. I wouldn't examine the desperation and confusion that her attention raised, only protect them by pushing her away. Her love caused me to question myself—question my sexual orientation and my relationships. It caused me to question everything about me that had so far escaped close examination. I could only love her if I were honest with her. If I couldn't be totally honest with her (and therefore be honest with myself), I had to question *all of me*. All of my 'love'. All of my so-called 'relationships'. All of my actions, including—and especially—the drinking.

She'd asked for it all without realizing she couldn't have it. She thought she was only asking for love, companionship, support, and understanding, but the cost to provide those things to her was far, far beyond my ability to pay. I had hurt her deeply, but I couldn't simply say I was sorry. I thought there was nothing I could say that would make any difference, so I simply didn't make the effort to apologize to her. If she hated me as a result, then that was only what I deserved. Maybe then, I may have thought, she'll leave me alone and let me drink in peace. Let me stay in my hole and drink till I die. It was perhaps better that way.

I wanted to get plastered again on Thursday, but I was too sick, again. I woke up—'came to' is perhaps more appropriate—sometime after noon on Thursday, and almost immediately had to run to the bathroom to throw up. There wasn't much inside to come up, except some blood. That should have scared me for real, then, but all I could do was go back to bed and try to calm my fiery insides. All I could do was lay there, cold and shivering, and hope and pray Marc would come home before I passed out.

But I didn't pass out. Marc came home late, and very angry, but I wasn't drinking and I wasn't drunk (I was far too ill to even think of touching a drop), so his anger in preparation for our confrontation was somewhat defused. He wanted to berate me for having passed out drunk the night before—and he did—but even if he thought my illness was

brought on by excess consumption, he still took some small pity on me. Maybe there was something else wrong, he wondered, something that was made worse by drinking. Kerrilyn, if you'll stay in bed and take care of yourself (i.e., don't drink), then maybe you'll feel better. If you want, I'll even stay home and take care of you (that is, keep you from drinking). All this he told me, and I tried to appreciate his desire to watch over me. Normally I might have actively discouraged his meddling assistance, but I was just sick enough to realize that it didn't matter if he was there, or if he was not. I couldn't drink, so he had nothing to worry about. I wasn't going to drink, but I had *plenty* to worry about.

I think I had said something to Sheree at one point about 'laying low for a while,' but that's not what we did. I think she thought we could see each other during the day, and keep everything hidden from prying eyes, but she hadn't counted on my perverse nature. I had sabotaged the whole arrangement quite effectively, so by the time Saturday morning rolled around people were beginning to wonder what the hell was going on with us.

Marc had sensed something between Sheree and me, even though I had no contact with her. I don't know how he picked up on the stresses between us, but he did, despite my denial. He didn't stay home Friday, as he had suggested, but I was a good girl anyway (not drinking anything) and felt much better by Saturday morning. I wasn't completely healthy, but at least I could hold food down. Singing was difficult at first, since my voice had seemed to rust considerably since my last rehearsal, but in time I warmed up and began to get some useful work done. I had tried very hard to downplay the rift between Sheree and me, and may have even thought I was succeeding, too, until Sheree showed up at rehearsal.

I didn't exactly fall off my stool or miss a beat, but I'm sure my voice faltered noticeably when she walked through the door and sat down, right in front of me. What could I do? I just pretended she wasn't there, and stared off into space while I tried to keep on track. Better to ignore her and have many *mea culpas* to say later, than lose it and have the whole band know we'd had a fight. Being at odds with a friend shouldn't have seemed that unusual, but I knew that too much had happened to keep suspicions from becoming most *rampant*.

The others *had* to sense the uncomfortable barrier between us. No way we could sit there, *obviously* not speaking or noticing each other, and not arouse curiosity. Even if no one but Marc and Tom knew what we'd done the previous weekend, and even if no one—*period*—knew what we'd been doing since, Sheree and I had been such close friends for such a long

time ... to have us fighting in public would be drawing too much attention to ourselves. Way too much.

I didn't know what my problem had been on Wednesday. I hadn't felt good all week, so I supposed it was probably just a combination of having been sick and, of course, whacking my chin, having had a tiff with Marc over missing rehearsal, having been a little drunk (so early in the morning, as she pointed out), and having been surprised by her showing up completely unannounced and unexpected. Tuesday had been very nice, though—very relaxed and stress-free—so to turn it all around 180° from one day to the next—that had to be both baffling and frustrating for her. And for me, too.

I dared to look at her sometime during the second song. I tried to make eye contact, but she was feeling rebuffed by my apparent cold shoulder upon her arrival, so avoided and denied all attempts to establish communication. If she would just look at me, now that my head was a little better screwed on, I was sure I could warm the air between us. But regardless, break time would be coming up, soon, and then we could talk.

When we finally broke for a cool ten, I got up off my stool and started to walk toward the door. I had to walk past Sheree, and as I did, she followed my movements. I tried to look very unthreatening, so she must have sensed something, because she never said a word. She simply got up and followed me out to the parking lot. On our breaks, Mel Howe usually joined me for a smoke, but she found a way to be someplace else, for a while. That helped, ensuring our privacy (to some degree).

But Sheree didn't seem too angry. How was that possible? I'd been the most cruel and hateful person to her on Wednesday. Maybe she was saving it—her anger—and waiting for a better opportunity to express it, but as we walked out into the sun away from the cool, breezy side of the building, she seemed almost relaxed in my presence.

"How're you feeling?" she asked, once we were well away from prying ears. "Tom said you were sick Tuesday night, and didn't go to rehearsal." She sounded perhaps a bit cool, a bit reserved, but not angry.

"I was sick, but I'm OK now, I guess." I sniffed, and fished in my shirt pocket for my cigarette pack. I love loose-fitting clothing, and Marc's old dress shirts are my favorite. I was wearing one—a blue one, sleeves rolled up—over my favorite old raggedy cutoff jeans, but barefoot otherwise. The pavement was hot under my feet. "Want one?" I asked, gesturing with the pack, not really expecting her to say yes.

"Not right now," she said. Then I heard the first real hint of sadness in her voice.

It deserved an answer. "I'm sorry," I said.

But instead of commenting on my apology, she said, "You really hit me hard, the other day."

I just looked at her. There was more, I was sure. I just wanted her to tell me and get it over with.

"What? Nothing to say about that?" Now she seemed angry.

"I'm sorry," I repeated. Just that, nothing more.

Then she moved right ahead with, "Kerrilyn, have you ever thought about the possibility you might be an alcoholic?"

That seemed surprising, somehow. "I'm not an alcoholic. Why would you think that?"

I think she found that somewhat ironic. "Oh, no particular reason. I just thought it might explain a few things."

"Like what?"

"Like ... how you could treat me like such a piece of shit, as you did." She forced me to look at her. I didn't want to, but she held me captive in her stare.

I faced her, contrite but perhaps a little defiant, too. "I don't know what that was, but it wasn't anything to do with the booze."

She spoke quietly, but pointedly, "'The booze,' huh? You even have a name for it. How nice." She smiled, very sarcastically.

"What do you want me to call it?"

She flashed, suddenly angry, "*What it is!*"

But I wouldn't take the bait. Quietly, "What's that?"

"I think it *was* 'the booze' talking on Wednesday, that's what I think." I didn't reply, just let her talk. "That's the only conceivable, even somewhat rational explanation I can come up with to explain how you could be so ... *fucking caustic!* ... toward me. I've tried, but there's no other possible explanation I can think of for how you could be so loving and gentle one day, and the absolute *worst* kind of hateful bitch the next.

"Except the booze," she concluded.

I hadn't even lit my cigarette, yet. In fact, it just hung from my mouth limply, lighter unlit but poised to strike. How could I even respond? What did she want me to say? Just open up, admit I was an alcoholic, and tell her I would quit drinking, just like that? That seemed highly unlikely. I wasn't an alcoholic. Furthermore, I wasn't about to quit drinking, either. I liked to drink. I enjoyed it. Why would I want to quit something I enjoyed so much? Never mind the near constant pain it caused. And the irrational, emotional outbursts. Or the unpredictable rollercoaster mental/emotional state, either. No, never mind *those*.

I lit the cigarette and took a large drag. "I don't know what was

wrong with me, but whatever it was it didn't have anything to do with my drinking."

"Uh-huh," she said. Like, 'I don't fuckin' believe you.'

"Sheree," I took another drag, "you can think whatever you want, but it wasn't because I was drunk."

"Whatever you say."

"No! I mean really!"

She didn't seem angry, just resigned. As if my response was what she had been expecting. Hoping against, maybe, but expecting. "That's OK," she said. "I understand."

"*What* do you understand?" I was almost angry.

"Nothing." She held out her hand, irritatedly. "Gimme a fucking cigarette." I did. Then lit it for her. "I love you anyway, you know. I wanted to be real hurt by what you said, but I told myself it wasn't really *you* who was talking to me and saying those awful things. It was that other person inside you."

That made me fully angry, and very uncomfortable, besides, but I didn't understand why. "*What other person?*"

Sheree didn't seem to catch my anger. "I don't know. Whoever it was, it *wasn't* the sweet, gentle Kerrilyn I know. It couldn't have been that person, because *she* doesn't say things like that. The Kerrilyn I know is very loving, not vile and hateful." She turned to me, her almond-shaped blue eyes so pretty, "The Kerrilyn *I* know—she says she loves me. So, it must have been someone else."

I observed, "You must be crazy, or something." Ah, but it probably wasn't *her* who was crazy.

"Oh, I'm crazy all right," she agreed, laughing lightly, but with high irony. "But it's probably not for the reason you're thinking."

"Are you saying you're crazy to love me?"

"Oh, at the very least!" she laughed again, quite insincerely. Then with a bit more seriousness, "But I do, anyway."

"Stop teasing me." Because it made me feel very ashamed. Unworthy.

But she had stopped laughing. She became deadly serious. "First Tom—then you. All the ones I pick to love end up having other plans."

"It's not like that! I don't have other plans."

She shot back, "*Oh yes you do!*" She puffed her cigarette, then pointed with it toward the building, "Marc."

Well, all right. "But you knew that long before ..." I couldn't quite find the words.

"You're right. I knew." She sighed, puffed again, very lightly. "I knew, but I still wanted to pretend that I didn't."

"Don't," I told her.

"Don't what?"

"Don't do this. Don't go thinking everything's over—because it's not. Everything is just beginning. We've hardly even gotten started, here." I took in the two of us, gesturing with my own cigarette. "It can't be over." I decided, "It's *not* over."

"I'm glad to hear you say that, but are you sure you know what you're saying?"

"Yes, I'm sure."

"It's a good thing you didn't try to call me on Thursday," Sheree began, again, changing the subject. "I was pretty upset, and if you'd called me then, I don't think I would have spoken to you." She had grown tired of the cigarette, and snubbed it out with her foot. She always did that. Three puffs and then—smash. "I went home Wednesday and cried all afternoon. It's a goddamn good thing Tom didn't get home till late, 'cause it took me till then to straighten myself out. But of course, by then I'd also decided I never wanted to see you again."

But she'd changed her mind, obviously. I wanted to ask why, but kept my mouth shut.

She went on, "I see you're wondering why I'm here, today," she stated/asked. I nodded, penitently. "Are you also wondering how come I've decided to forgive you, yet *one more time*?"

To that, I shook my head.

"You're not?!?" She thought it ironic, or something. "*You should be.*"

"If you've decided that you want to hate me, I guess I can understand."

"*You can?!?* Would you rather I hated you, instead of loved you?"

Oh! *That* was a good question. Did I? Was it easier to simply let everyone around me hate me, than have the pressure and responsibility of having them love me? One part of me said 'maybe,' but I couldn't think about that, right then. Because whether it was true or not, it *was* easier if I saved my relationship with Sheree, and kept the status quo, than let her walk away and bring everything down on top of me. Because she would. I mean, she'd *have to*, to protect herself. She couldn't allow herself to be made into a fool, and do nothing about it. If I said 'yes,' that it was easier if she hated me, then she'd destroy me. That simple. "No," I finally said. But the long pause while I thought about it had been rather too long.

And she'd noticed it. "Why don't you want us to love you?"

"I *do* want you to love me."

"But sometimes it might be easier if we didn't."

"I didn't say that."

"But you're thinking that."

I wanted to explain, but it was difficult and frustrating. I tried to speak, to tell her exactly what I was thinking—how I was feeling—but every time I began I found something else I either couldn't tell her or yet something more that I wanted to tell her. The net result was that the harder I tried to explain how I felt, the less I was able. In complete, utter frustration, I finally gave up. "I don't know *what* I'm thinking. This is all too complicated. I really wish everything was simpler, so I wouldn't have to think about it so much."

She surprised me, with, "I wish it was simpler, too. It isn't, but I wish it was."

"Can you forgive me?"

"Sure," she said.

That easy? Just like that? "Are you sure? I don't know what to say except 'I'm sorry,' and that it'll never happen again. I don't know what was wrong with me. I don't know where all that *shit* came from. Really, I don't."

She just looked at me. Did she doubt her decision to forgive me? Did she believe my explanation? Did *I* believe it, even?

My mouth rushed on. "I want to make it up to you. We'll get together, tonight, maybe. We can take a little time, just you and me alone, so we can work this thing out. Marc and Tom won't mind."

She still only looked.

"We can make up some excuse ... I don't know, tell 'em we're talking about 'girl things,' or something. What do you think?"

"I think maybe *they* will expect to fuck us both." She seemed to find ironic, bitter humor in that statement.

I went on, mindlessly, "We can do that, if you want." I wasn't thinking. Mouth in gear, brain somewhere else, counting daisies. "I know Tom sure wants to get in my pants. You think Marc will want to fuck you, again?" Jesus! What a stupid idiot! Ignorant cunt! I'd said *that* to Sheree? What a fucking idiot! I'd made it sound like I *wanted* Tom to fuck me.

"Oh, I'm sure Tom *does* want to fuck you," she drawled, slowly.

"That's hardly news, considering the way you parade around like a bitch in heat, all the time." She shook her head, "You come on to *everyone*."

But that surprised me. "I do?"

"You mean to tell me you're not aware of the effect you have on others?"

"Sheree, I'm just being me. I like guys, but I'm just being myself. I don't think about 'coming on to' anyone. I certainly don't *say* anything to anyone to make them think I'm coming on to them. I don't even flirt."

"That's true, you don't. But haven't you noticed all the attention you seem to get, all the time? Haven't you noticed how all the men in the room seem to just flock around you, like you were the only thing there?"

"They don't do that." I was sure.

She frowned, ruefully, "If you were another woman in the room, I think you'd notice."

"What do you want me to do? I can't not be myself."

"If I didn't know better, I'd say you should try."

Then it was my turn to simply look. Judgment was passed, and I was found guilty. But whatever she was noticing about me was just me—just the way I was. And as much as I might have wanted to change myself, I knew significant change was highly unlikely. Better to move on to something a bit more promising. "Sheree, I'm sorry I said that, about Tom. I wasn't thinking."

"Oh, I'm glad you said it, finally. It's something I've known for a long time, so I'm glad to see that you're finally aware of it, too. Of course, I don't necessarily know what you plan to *do* about it."

"I ain't done nothing about it." Had I?

"You gonna keep holding him off, forever?"

Indeed. "What do you want me to do? I can't just spread 'em for him, or something. It's certainly not what you want me to do. Marc either." Marc, especially.

"So, what *are* you gonna do?"

"OK, so let me ask, are we gonna get in the bed with them again, tonight?"

"I don't know." But her tone said she was considering it.

But, just then, Mel Howe called to me from the doorway. "Hey you! Kerrilyn-girl! Get your butt in here! It's time to play!" So we had to end our conversation.

The way we'd been discussing having sex with Marc and Tom made it sound as though it was almost a normal thing between us. Could it be—normal? What could Sheree's motives possibly be? Why would she place herself in such a position, one of losing exclusivity with her husband, to being reduced to having to beg for love among the three of us? Not that 'beg' is even the right word, anyway. If I had anything to say about it, she wouldn't be begging for anything. And what about Tom? It wasn't a question at all of what I was capable. I could have easily withstood making love to him as often as he wished. I know this sounds very mercenary—very cold and hard—but I'm merely stating the fact. I had become so used to being a piece of meat, some *chattel*, that it almost didn't

matter anymore.

It almost didn't matter anymore. That was the real tragedy. Where did my heart and my true feelings come into play? Where was the real Kerrilyn, inside? And there *was* a real Kerrilyn inside, and she had real, genuine feelings *that mattered*. She'd found Marc in the midst of the worst time of her whole life, and she had *loved him*, and then she'd had the sense to love Sheree, too. Kerrilyn didn't love Tom, and never would, but in order to keep the balance between the four of us, I *knew* what I had to do.

I just had to detach from the inside of me—the heart of me—and allow him to touch me. Just count ceiling tiles while he did his thing. Like the old joke. 'What does the Jewish woman think about during sex? She thinks, Blue, I think I'll paint the ceiling blue.' That's about how into it I'd be.

But why didn't all this *disattachment* from the act and the feelings behind the act mean my love for Marc wasn't sincere? I don't know. Marc wasn't in the same place. He had (and still has) a very special, *very* separate spot in my inner heart that wasn't/isn't affected by what I may have had to do. When I made love to Marc, I was *really* making love to him. For him I wished I'd never been or done any of the things that made it so possible for me to have had sex with all those others, and all with such professional detachment. But that's the situation I'd been in, before. It was what I had been expected to do. But if I had a choice concerning those whom I had chosen (which I didn't think I had, really), I think I'd rather it were just Marc and Sheree, and me, without Tom, but I also knew it would never happen—could never happen. Marc and Tom were the very best of friends, and had been, longer than either Sheree's or my involvement with either of them. Dynamite wouldn't have blasted them apart, so hoping Tom would just suddenly disappear from the scene, seemed wholly unlikely.

But it didn't mean I didn't like Tom, however. I don't want to get ahead of myself, too much, because I believed we'd been pretty good 'buds' as far as the band was concerned. We got along fine, worked together as friends quite nicely. Outside the band, though, it was kind of difficult to say. Did we even have a relationship that was distinct and separate from the music? What was there that I could say was something we had together, that didn't involve our work together in the band? I didn't know. It was impossible to identify anything.

And where did Sheree's feelings come into play? Just before we'd gone back to rehearsal, again, she seemed almost to be considering the possibility of submitting us to another night of indiscriminate sexual activity. I'm sure that's how she felt. The weekend before had been her

choice and her decision, but the intervening week had changed things, more than just a little. I'm not sure what evidence either of us had to think the men would want to 'do us' again, but it still seemed a definite expectation. Especially if the four of us were together again in another 'ambiguous' situation.

Maybe Sheree and I wanted it, too. Maybe we were just too timid to admit openly that we wanted to be wanted by them—*both of them*. I pretty well knew Sheree wanted to be wanted by her husband, at least I assumed as much, and I wanted to be wanted by Marc, which should hardly be surprising. I didn't care if I was still wanted by Tom, but I knew I was, anyway. Did Marc want Sheree? A part of me said 'how could he?' since that part believed that once a man had me, he wouldn't ever want another, but was that really true? I know it was only an extremely misguided idea—hardly true, at all—but maybe I wanted to believe it.

Sharing Marc with Sheree wasn't too much of a concern for me, since I knew I would also be loving her right along with my boy. He'd share her with me, no problem, so no one would be left out. No one. A group of three seemed ideal to me, but for some reason a fourth seemed to be about one too many. I had tried to hold Tom off, knowing intuitively (or instinctively, maybe) that it was the better way to go, but if we did all get naked again, together, that would change. There was no doubt in my mind that if Tom came within ten feet of me without his pants on, he'd be in mine before I could say 'oh, my!' Of course, if I allowed him to get that close, who would I be to deny him?

A triangle is a very stable structure, though. Put it on any side and it holds together. Put stress on it from any angle, and it keeps its shape. Obviously, its total strength is limited by the strength of any one leg, just like a chain's, but within the limit of each member's ability, the triangle is a very strong and complete arrangement.

But a foursome—a square—is hardly stable. Push on it in any direction, and without some additional reinforcement, it simply falls over, flat. You have to create more connections than the four that normally exist. I don't want to get too carried away with my geometric-sounding analogies, because if Tom were connected to both Sheree and me, then our 'square' would be more like two attached triangles, and altogether pretty stable. But the flaw I saw in that arrangement was Marc. Marc wasn't as confident when it came to competing with another man. I think that was his problem with the idea of a foursome. He was more concerned about feeling inferior to Tom than in just relaxing and letting things go where they wanted. What he didn't realize was that I would bring Sheree into the circle *with us*. Not to exclude Tom, specifically, but I could make sure

Marc never felt left out or second-best to anyone. Marc would get more than his fair share of attention, and opportunity—I could see to that, and would—with much happiness and satisfaction.

Marc wasn't wishing for his 'chance,' with anyone. He was always the most gentle and patient soul when it came to loving, and being loved. He always waited for me, never asking for sex or expecting me to provide it on demand. He only wanted what I was prepared to give, freely and willingly, and was ever held in awe by the mere idea that a woman wanted him, and wanted to make love to him. I wanted him to be so happy. It was pure joy to see how much he appreciated having us, and I wanted him to have everything he wanted.

Sheree, too. If she could know the joy and happiness our love generated, I knew it would be made that much stronger and greater by her inclusion in it. She would bring such loving to our world. She would love me, and love Marc, and the three of us would be most happy together. If Sheree wanted to love me, she could. I could explain it to Marc; he'd understand. He wouldn't be left out. I would explain it to Sheree; she'd understand. I could keep both of them from wanting *anything*, ever. But because I wasn't in love with Tom, and would never be, that was the problem. If I couldn't hold it together, then I didn't trust it to stay together. If there wasn't going to be any effort expended on my part to ensure Tom was an equal part of the relationship, then who would do it? Would Sheree? Marc may want (on principle) to see his buddy included, but did he really want that? If they weren't into doing anything with each other, like 'really, *really* good friends,' then where would that leave things?

Marc loves Kerrilyn. Marc loves Sheree. Sheree and Kerrilyn love each other. Kerrilyn loves Marc. Kerrilyn loves Sheree. Sheree loves Marc. Sheree loves Tom. Kerrilyn submits to Tom. Neither Marc nor Tom touch each other. Nope, not equal. The only strength is between the three of us, Sheree, Marc and me, by my estimation. If Marc wouldn't love Tom, then there wouldn't be a 'fit'.

Marc wasn't about to do anything with Tom. I wouldn't have cared if he did, and couldn't have cared less if he didn't, but it wasn't going to happen. So, where did that leave us?

Indeed. Where *did* this leave us?

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Everyone noticed the distinctly chilly atmosphere once Sheree arrived at rehearsal. No doubt about it, the two women—Kerrilyn and Sheree—had had some kind of serious, knock-down, drag-out fight, and were still obviously not on speaking terms. I could almost read Tom’s thoughts as he watched his wife and my girlfriend face down each other, silently, coldly. ‘Lover’s quarrel’ those thoughts said, and though I continued to wonder if any of our concerns over them had any truly solid or tangible foundation, I almost had to agree with his unspoken assessment. The way they were acting looked and felt *exactly* like the ugly, emotional shit-storm typical of fighting lovers.

Fortunately for everyone, though, their falling-out didn’t last long. When we took our first break, Kerrilyn predictably went outside for a cigarette, and Sheree followed. Mel started to head out with them, maybe to have her own smoke, but Tom held her back, suggesting politely that she might want to leave the two ‘lovebirds’ alone. Yes, he used that term *literally*, and it raised more than just my eyebrows. He may have been only teasing them from behind their backs, but it brought them unwittingly to the center of everyone’s attention, something he probably hadn’t wanted to do.

When the two ‘lovebirds’ then came back to rehearsal, finally, the air between them seemed considerably warmer—everything *much* more relaxed and ‘chummy’. Of course, that had been the reason why Sheree had come to rehearsal in the first place—to have it out and make up with *the girl* so we all wouldn’t have to deal with their spat any longer than necessary. Of course after that, then, rehearsal went on quite smoothly and easily. Kerrilyn’s concentration may have been a bit off, but she certainly seemed less stressed and strained by everything. Where before they had fairly ignored each other rather icily, once rehearsal resumed, they seemed to notice little else *but* each other. And I’m sure I wasn’t the only one to notice that, either.

At the second break (we always kept a ‘strict’ schedule about those things), Kerrilyn came to me with a request.

“Hey, buddy,” she began, scuffing her bare toes little-girl fashion against the carpet. “Sheree wants us all to come up to the house after rehearsal, today. I know we were planning to go out to a movie, maybe, but think I’d really rather go up to the lake, instead.”

“So, you and her kissed and made up, then?” I glanced over toward Sheree, who sat—expectantly, I thought—some distance away.

Kerrilyn seemed to find a certain air of thinly veiled mockery in my comment, but decided to play along, anyway. “We did,” she said. “And she’s some kind of great kisser, too, I can tell you!” She briefly licked her

pale-pink, pouting lips with the tip of her tongue, and then stuck it out at me, grinning. "We were thinkin' about gettin' in the hot-tub, again, maybe." She winked. I just hoped no one had overheard us.

But, no big surprise there, unfortunately. I knew exactly what she meant. And I wanted to check with Tom, first, before I said anything. But the boy wasn't anywhere in sight. "We'll see about that," I told *the girl*. "Let me talk to Tom, first, before we talk about getting in the tub with them, again."

She teased, "What? Is he your keeper, or something?"

"No," I told her, pointing pointedly, "I'm *your* keeper." And with that I got up from my perch to go find Tom.

I found him outside, taking in a little warm sunshine on a bright, breezy Saturday afternoon. When I walked alongside, he squinted in my direction.

But before I could even say a word, he said, "Let me guess." I just looked at him, squinting myself. He smiled, ironically, "Did I predict this, or what?"

"How do you even know what I'm gonna say?"

"I *know* what's been going on with the women, this afternoon."

I couldn't be sure what he was referring to. "What?"

"They had some kind of really big fight earlier in the week." He looked for some response; I just indicated my general agreement. "So, today they made up. Now, they want the four of us to get together up at the house, later. Right?"

I had to nod. "That's about it."

"So, did I tell you this would happen, or what?"

"All right, smart guy," I poked him on the arm. "So ... what are we gonna do about it?"

"Are you worried about what might happen if we do?"

"If we do—what?"

"Anything ... with the women."

OK. "Are you still worried ...?" I had to think how to phrase it "... about them?" I wasn't certain he would get it.

He did, though. "I dunno. What's the worst that could happen?"

"The worst is that we find out something's really going on, and by letting them get together, we only add more fuel to the fire." And I, for one, wasn't particularly interested in finding out just how hot that fire was. Better to remain ignorant, in this case. Much, much better.

He didn't agree, exactly. "Do you really think either of them are lesbians?"

I didn't want to go down that road, again. "Tom, we already had this discussion, before."

"I know," he said, "but we were still buzzed from all that dope, and from all their goddamned hormones, too." He shook his head. "I don't think the women are gay. Just friends, maybe, who like to get naked with their men."

But, this was a strange new attitude. Why the sudden change? "What made you change your mind about all this? I thought you were convinced Sheree had some kind of 'thing' for Kerrilyn." Even as I said it, it sounded seamy, sordid. *Wrong*.

"I dunno. She and me have been doing a lot of talking, this week."

"And?"

He shrugged, again. "You've already fucked her. Can't put that worm back in the can." He smiled at his unintentional penile reference.

"And you're OK with that?"

"Don't matter anymore what I think, now, does it?"

"Sure it does, Tom. She's your wife."

He thought a few moments, frowning and squinting at me in the bright light. "Actually, between the two of you, I think I'd rather have you be the one fucking her." He stopped, but felt the need to apologize, or something, "No offense."

"Hey, why should I be offended?" I was flattered, if a little nonplused. I wanted to tell him—reassure him—that I didn't want to fuck his wife, but sensed it would be marginally better if I didn't say anything more, just then.

He sighed. "I almost don't care, anymore. All this bullshit is ridiculous."

Meaning ...? "Which is it? You don't care, or the whole thing is just ridiculous?"

"Let me ask you this," he began, apparently in answer to my question, "How do you feel about sharing our women with each other?"

Ah, then. That was the real question, wasn't it?

*Ahem*, well. Since I couldn't exactly put *that* worm back in the can, either, it seemed only fair to ...

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I wanted to ride up to the lake with Sheree, but she thought it would cause too much trouble with the others if I did. Sheree and I still needed to

talk—and a bunch—but how were we going to do that if we didn't have any time together? As I explained it to her, it's not like anything was going to happen right there in the fucking car! But she replied, with a mischievous grin, 'Oh, yeah? Show's what you know!'

But I asked the band if I could leave with her, anyway. Marc seemed basically OK with it, but he did say he really wished I would stick around and help pack up all the equipment. You see, we had a big, two-week gig coming up, starting the following Monday night, and they—the band (obviously)—wanted everyone's help to load up the equipment while we were all still there. But Sheree needed to get going, since she had errands to run up in Gainesville before they closed down all the stores for the day. If I went with her, then I wouldn't be there to help pack up all the shit. Tom bailed me out, though, and said it was all right if I left early. As far as he was concerned, he said, I was almost as worthless as Troy Dancer, who had heard the comment and growled back, 'She can fuckin' go if she wants. I'll stay and help pack up the shit.' So, see how things can work out? Not only did I get to leave early, but I got Troy to stay and do his part, too.

Things started out very buddy-buddy between us, in the car. Sheree was very happy to have me along, though I still privately wondered how she could go from hating me only yesterday, to being head-over-heels in love with me today. It was a mystery all right, one that I didn't think wise to question too closely, considering the circumstances.

I had been alcohol free since that awful Wednesday, both from being sick and from fear and contrition over the strange and shameful way I had treated my girl. But I didn't feel there was any particular prohibition against dope, so as soon as we departed the parking lot, she gave me a joint and I lit the sucker up. A few good tokes between us, and we were well on our way.

The weather was stunning! Just magnificent! We had all the windows wide open (but I still was wishing she had a convertible, anyway), and before too long we were both cruising away. She smiled at me, all red eyes and curly brown hair. I smiled back, very nicely stoned as well, then leaned over and kissed her. Very warmly. On the mouth.

She returned it, also warmly.

She laughed then, a bright, girlish sound that seemed to crawl inside me and wiggle around most deliciously. It felt so nice to be so close, with the wind blowing my hair all about and billowing my shirt up all around me. And you know me! I'm always thinking naughty thoughts, especially if I have something to help me. But even if I didn't want to break the

fragile, companionable mood as we raced along the freeway, heading north, my rampant libido was calling to me, and telling me to *do something* with this person. Her joke about something maybe happening in the car had only given me the idea, but as I sat there, I was only wondering how I could accomplish it in broad daylight, and not make things look too suspicious. Didn't seem very likely. The last time I'd done anything like that it'd been full night out. Not only night, but cold as hell with all the windows closed and the heater blasting. Should I make her stop so we could run off into the woods and have at it? Or should I just bide my time and wait until we could get up to the lake, where we would have complete privacy from all those curious, prying eyes? I didn't want to wait that long, because who knew if I was still going to feel the way I was feeling, once we got there. Who knew, as well, if Sheree was still going to feel like she was feeling. Who, indeed. We just sat there grinning at each other like Cheshire cats, both stoned out of our gourds. I could almost see her thoughts.

I put my hand on her leg, very lightly. She put her hand on top of mine, and we stayed like that for some time. Not much was spoken either, when I unbuttoned my shirt and laid my head back against the headrest and closed my eyes. I wanted to touch her more intimately. It's difficult to explain, but in that moment I saw no difference between loving Sheree, and loving Marc. Their love both seemed as normal and as natural as life itself.

I wanted her. I'd always wanted a man like Marc, and I had one, but there in the car it occurred to me I might want a woman like Sheree, almost as much. Once I'd experienced what the gentle loving of another woman could be like, how could I possibly feel satisfied loving only men, from then on? So I decided, with my eyes closed and Sheree squeezing my hand, that from then on I was going to be openly bisexual. It didn't matter what others might think—what Marc might think, either—I was always going to want my girl to be there.

Marc, I felt I could handle. He wouldn't be happy at first, but he'd adjust to it and eventually come around. Because, after all, it was *me* he was in love with. It was me doing the asking. If I couldn't make him understand how good he had it, then maybe he wasn't the man for me. But he was, and he would. I was sure. And for the time being, at least, I had Sheree, too.

I decided we *should* love each other. If she wanted to experience a woman, then I decided I should be that woman. What better lover than me?

How to break the news, though? Should I tell her of my decision, or

should I let her discover it gradually, over time, as a natural evolution of our relationship?

Well, subtlety and the 'natural evolution' of things might be nice, but they're hardly my style. I was hot, and growing hotter and hotter with the imagined tender touch of my shy and timid girl. Could I unleash the possibilities in her mind, open up the floodgates of her love, and have her pour down upon me in an avalanche of arms, legs, of lips and hearts beating in time to the pulsing rhythm of the river of energy on which we floated?

Sure, I could.

Poetic stuff, that. But I do have in me the heart of the poet. Somewhere, deep within me it's only waiting and needing the right environment in which to emerge. Don't speak to me of the pain and degradation of prostitution, I only want to hear the words of love and feel the hands of gentle, loving touch. Let me float awhile on your smile, let me feed of your voluminous, voluptuous body while you murmur tender endearments in my soul. Let me hear only the sounds of love, feel only the warmth of togetherness as we break away to become one with all life.

You bet.

In time, my hand found its way to the warm, inviting softness between her thighs. Her shorts were almost as short as mine, but not too short for proper Southern propriety, even considering the hot weather. But though I was patient, and slow, and gentle with the tender girlhood beneath my fingers, she seemed hesitant to accept me. She didn't pull my hand away, but she resisted me, refusing to relax to the inevitability and insistency of my loving strokes.

Please Sheree! Please relax and let things come. I so much want to love you, and have you love me in return. Please, please open up to me and let all those bad, inhibiting thoughts just float away!

But no.

"What are you doing?" she finally asked.

Well, *that* was a sure-fire way to dampen the mood. You can't think about floating away on the gossamer wings of love when that lover's hoarse voice is wondering just what the hell you're doing to her, now can you?

I answered, "I was just touching you." I was almost embarrassed, and it surprised me. "I thought you liked it."

She cleared her throat. "I do." Well, then. Maybe things weren't so dismal, after all. She blushed, "I like it a lot."

"Then, what's wrong?"

She took some moments to collect her thoughts, then began, "I

thought I wanted you to love me like you love your man—boldly, openly, without any shyness or hesitation. It feels like a dream come true to me, knowing that another woman loves me, and isn't afraid to show it—so *publicly*."

I wondered, "But now you're not so sure? Right?"

"Well, it still feels right, to me, somehow, but now I'm not sure that the woman who should be giving that love to me—should be you."

And that simple statement devastated me. I had all but given myself over to her, and now she was telling me she wasn't sure I was the one she wanted. I pulled my hand back, as if stung. "Are you saying you don't want me, anymore?"

But she was honest. "I think maybe I want you more than ever." She looked at me, briefly, then looked back to the road. "I'm just no longer sure it's the right thing."

"But Sheree, how could it be wrong?"

"What do you mean? I could tell you a dozen ways it could be wrong. Where do I start? First, you're much too involved with the men in my life. It's almost like they're arguing over who gets to be first in line to fuck Kerrilyn. Where does that leave me? I can't even get a word in edgewise."

I didn't like her emphasis on the words 'fuck Kerrilyn'. "But that's not how I feel about you. You're very special to me."

"No I'm not. In the end you'll go back to your *man*, and I'll be left with nothing."

"You don't know nothing of the sort! You don't know what's on my mind—you don't know how I'm feeling! You think I'm just using you for some sick, twisted reason, but I'm not! You don't know what I'm thinking. You don't!" Her words hurt like nothing ever before. I was terrified of losing that very slim hope of love that she had held out to me. It felt more important than the hollow offers of a hundred men, however humble and sincere. "You don't know what I'm thinking."

"I don't know what you're thinking?" she echoed.

"That's right. If you knew, you wouldn't be saying this to me."

"What are you gonna say that's gonna change my mind?"

"I'm gonna say this. I've decided that from now on I'm not gonna love just men. I'm turning over a new leaf. I've decided that I want to be bisexual, and to hell with what anyone else thinks about it."

She shook her head, smiling slightly. "I don't think bisexuality is just something that comes to you, one day, you know. I think it goes a little deeper than that."

"How do you know how deep it goes?"

She agreed, somewhat. "*I don't know* how deep it goes, with you!"

Until now, I wouldn't have even thought it was hardly there at all, let alone how 'deep'! *You tell me* where all this supposed desire for being 'bi' comes from."

I was even more crushed. "I thought you would be happy to hear this."

But instead of addressing her happiness, she said, "On Wednesday you accused me of being a lesbian—I was a *fucking dyke*, you said." She exhaled, sharply. "Kerrilyn, you really hurt me with that, but I tried to tell myself it wasn't really you that was saying all those things. It was only the alcohol talking. You tell me *that*—then you tell me *this?!?* Kerrilyn, old friend, just how the fuck did you expect me to respond?"

I looked away, disconsolate in the extreme. "Like this, I guess." Did she even hear me?

"Sweetheart, I'm sorry," she said.

I swallowed my heart. "Then it's over."

But she didn't say it, exactly.

"Pull over," I said. "Let me out."

"What? Out here in the middle of nowhere?"

"*I said, pull the fuck over!*" I tried not to raise my voice, too much.

"I'm not pulling over, and you're not getting out of the car."

"That's what you think." I almost opened the door, and since I wasn't fastened in with any kind of seatbelt, I'm sure I would have flown out of the car and skidded along the pavement, but probably only a few hundred yards or so. Maybe if I was really lucky, another car would've run me over before I would've been forced to wake up in a hospital, somewhere, without any skin. Or bones, either.

She tried to hold me in my seat, but I guess my heart wasn't really into committing suicide that afternoon, because I allowed her to keep me there, just barely. She didn't stop or even slow down, since she obviously knew that if she did I'd make a break for it, for real.

"**Sit still!**" she ordered.

"**Fuck you!**" I shot back.

She just glared.

All right, so we were at an impasse. I wasn't moving, but she had shut up. Then unbelievably, I started to cry. Blame it on the dope, maybe, but I couldn't hold it back. She had taken my love and simply ground it under her heel like she had so many cigarette butts over the months. She'd taken the love I'd offered, used it awhile for her own pleasure, then discarded it like a nasty habit—a bad smell to be waved off with a wrinkled nose. What was so wrong with me that she couldn't accept my love?

Oh, I really cried, then.

Sheree let me cry most of the rest of the way up to Gainesville. She didn't try to calm me down or talk to me, just drove silently and stoically while my leaky eyes soaked the front of my shirt. It felt wholly ironic. Here I was, the master lover, capable of putting out for *anyone*, crying because some stupid bitch had changed her mind about me. I should be glad to be rid of one more complication and entanglement, but instead I'm lost within myself, bemoaning my fate. A fate, I might add, I richly deserved. Mere hours ago I had been secretly contemplating having the three of us become some kind of 'love triangle,' and now one leg was threatening to pull out. Could the other leg be far behind?

When we finally stopped at some dry-cleaners in town, she seemed no longer worried that I'd try to escape. Maybe she didn't care anymore if I did, but regardless, she simply stopped and got out of the car and left me sitting there, face dry, but the front of my shirt very damp. I thought briefly about just taking the damn thing off, but figured my skimpy, lacy bra probably looked a little too much like underwear (which it was, of course), and it probably wasn't quite proper to be flaunting it in public. So I kept my wet shirt on, though I still left it purposefully unbuttoned.

In a few minutes Sheree came back, and only then seemed prepared to speak.

She laid her dry-cleaning in the back seat, a handful of dresses. Tom never wore suits. Then she spoke, so calm and conversational, "Did you want something besides a baked potato with your steak, tonight?"

"What? You're asking *me* this?" I croaked, hoarsely.

"Yes. If we're gonna eat later, I need to make a grocery stop, and I wanna know what I should get."

Steaks? Baked potatoes? "How the fuck should I know?" I looked away. Fuck her.

There was a short pause. Maybe she was thinking—or perhaps *rethinking* things. "Kerrilyn, look at me," she said. No way! I was happier looking out at the fucking highway. "**Look at me!**" she ordered.

I turned, then. Growled, "*What?*"

"I'm sorry I said those things to you. I'm not sure—any more than you are—where those words came from. I didn't mean to reject you like that. I certainly didn't plan it. It just came out that way."

"But you *don't* want me, anymore."

She got in the car, but didn't start it. "No, that's not true. Not any more than your words last Wednesday meant that you don't want me. They were simply cruel words, spoken in a moment of extreme emotional

distress."

"I was sincere back there on the highway, you know."

"You mean, about wanting to jump out of the car?" She seemed to think it was sickly humorous, somehow. My scowl said otherwise. She decided to get serious. "Oh. You mean, about wanting to be 'bi'?"

"Yes."

"Are you sure that's what you want? Because if it ain't, we're gonna both regret it for a very long time."

"Why? Are you saying that if I decide I'm in love with you, then you're going to decide that you're in love with me, too?"

"I think I'm probably gonna love you whether you love me, or not." She closed the car door.

But I had an idea. "If I decide to go along and be your lover, then are we gonna come out of the closet and be true bisexual women?"

She smiled, apparently at the thought of us, together. "I'll think about it, maybe. But it's *not* going to happen today—or tonight, either." Then she frowned, "If you say one word to either of the men, I swear ..."

I shook my head, agreeing, "Not tonight, Sheree. If we decide we're definitely going to be bi, then we both got a lot of work to do to keep our men from deserting us."

"I'm not sure even you could convince Tom."

I eyed her, questioning. "Do you still want to stay with him?"

She was shocked. "What kind of a question is that? Of course I want to stay with him. Why wouldn't I?"

"Oh, no particular reason," I shrugged, nonchalantly. "Just wishful thinking, maybe."

"You don't like him, very much." I couldn't tell if the thought upset her, or not.

I shrugged again, "He's OK. He's just not my idea of the perfect man, that's all."

"Has he done something, or said something to you?"

I played dumb. "Like, what would he have done?"

"I don't know. Like, you tell me. Has he?"

I lied, but it was a small lie. "Not that I know of. We're fine."

"So, what *were* you thinking?"

"About you leaving Tom and deciding to come live with us?"

"Oh, so *that's* your plan!" She grinned.

I had to grin, too. "It could work, you know. Marc would be in heaven to have his two most favorite women in his bed, always at his beck and call."

She thought it almost absurd, by her expression. "While we,

meanwhile, fuck each other's brains out every chance we get?"

"If you like, sweetie. It's really not that important to me." As if that were true.

"Sure," she shook her head slowly, smiling disbelievingly. "Like I can believe that."

"Marc's a very well-endowed boy. I'm sure you saw that the other night."

"I don't think I so much saw it, as *felt it*. But you're right. He's very ... nice."

"He doesn't just have size, though."

"Are you trying to sell me on something, here? I admit Marc has all the right equipment, if that's important to you, but it's like *you* said. It's really not that important."

"I find myself thanking me for Marc, literally every day."

"So what? You think Tom can't fuck like a horse?"

"Well, I wouldn't know about that, Ms. Germaine." I lied again.

She started the car. "Well, in the mood I'm in, I'd almost tell you to go find out. Maybe if he finally fucked your brains out all this mystery would be over, and we could get back to business, for a change."

So I offered, "I will, if you want me to."

She started to back up. She *must* be stoned, or something, because she said, "OK, you got my permission. Do it."