

Chapter 23

Tom and I didn't get up to the house until fairly late in the afternoon. We'd run into a problem, namely that Mel's brand-new keyboard and amplifier were larger than their predecessors were, enough so that not all of the equipment would fit in the van anymore. Not even if I put most of my drums in the back of my car. And there was even a point in the fiasco where we were actually contemplating the rental of a trailer, but thankfully that idea was eventually discarded. In the final solution, using a combination of creativity, brutality, and pure necessity, we managed to cram everything but a couple of my drums in the back of the van. Only then did we find our way up to the house, arriving finally about five-fifteen.

When we walked in the living room, looking for the women, I saw Kerrilyn suddenly pop up from the couch. Its back was to us, more or less, so all I could see were her head and shoulders. Her hair was in a state of casual disarray—it was all in her face and stuck out oddly—and for a moment I thought it looked like her shirt, one of my old blue dress shirts that she'd appropriated for herself, was unbuttoned. She pulled her hair back out of her eyes, smoothed it down, and turned to look back at us. It almost looked like she'd been asleep, maybe, but then Sheree's head popped up from the spot right next to Kerrilyn as she, too, sat up. Neither one of them said anything, right away.

Tom was the first to speak, "What's happening?" But he didn't stop to interrogate the women, just headed for the kitchen and a cold beer.

I wasn't sure whether I should get any closer to the couch—and the women—than I was already. It looked like something had been interrupted by our walking in. I didn't want to know what it was.

Tom opened his beer and took a large swallow. "Whatch'all been doing?" He sounded as though he thought nothing at all of the apparent scene in front of us.

"Nothing," said Kerrilyn, squinting and smiling. "We was just here on the couch, watching TV." Well, the TV *was* on, at least. She made no move to close her shirt or cover herself. From her twisted-around position, I could see the profile of her breast through the opening in her shirt, only just barely covered by her bra.

"We didn't interrupt anything, did we?" I asked, finally.

Kerrilyn frowned as if I was an idiot to be asking that question. She countered, "What could you possibly be interrupting? I told you, we was just laying here, watching TV."

Sheree seemed to wake up, then. She yawned and stretched, and ruffled her hair to restore it to its natural, casual curliness. She grinned, then, apparently happy to see her man come home, and scampered up from her spot to join Tom in the kitchen. As she went by, she clicked on the kitchen lights. Kerrilyn, used to the semi-darkness, was momentarily blinded, and covered her eyes.

"I'm glad y'all finally got here," Sheree said. "We almost fell asleep there on the couch, waiting." She went to her husband's arms as if drawn by a large, powerful magnet, and he hugged her to him. They kissed, warmly and openly. I noticed the same short, navy blue shorts and white T-shirt that she'd had on earlier. She quickly hopped down from his embrace, though. "I hope you boys are hungry." She went to the refrigerator, opened the door. Rummaged inside noisily. "I bought steaks for dinner. Rib eyes." She stood with several packages of meat in her hands. "They were on sale at the Food Lion." She set the packages on the counter, wiped her hands on a towel. "I hope they're OK."

"I'm sure they are," said Tom, finishing his beer in a gulp. He tossed the can in the garbage, then inspected the steaks carefully.

Kerrilyn turned back to face the TV, putting her back to me. Can't have that. I walked over to the couch behind her, and leaned down close to her ear, gently putting a hand on each of her slim shoulders. She felt very warm under my touch, and as my face came close to hers, I caught a small, delicious whiff of her perfume. Oh, man! She smelled very, very good. And I also managed to ascertain that her shirt *was* completely unbuttoned, and hung open somewhat revealingly. "Did you know your shirt is unbuttoned?" I asked, my voice only a whisper in her ear.

She looked down at herself, briefly and perfunctorily, then closed the shirt, somewhat. She eyed me from a distance of about two inches. "Yeah, what about it?"

OK, I was satisfied with that answer, I guess. Standing up, I answered her, "Nothing." I patted her shoulders, then walked around the couch so I could sit next to her. When I got near she scooted over, slightly, so I would

have plenty of room. When I sat, she moved back so her hip touched mine. Then she pulled my arm away from my side and wrapped it around her shoulders, like a shawl.

"That's better," she announced, voice hoarse and husky, and snuggled in close to me. She was, indeed, very warm. Turning to her, finally, I found the soft warmth of her bare belly with my other hand, and we kissed. She seemed to radiate something ... warming, invigorating ... in all directions.

We watched Sheree and Tom begin dinner preparations. He grabbed some grilling tools and went outside on the deck to get it—the grill—ready. Meanwhile, Sheree began pulling various kinds of food items from the refrigerator and pantry.

"How are you feeling?" I asked Kerrilyn, quietly.

As if in answer, she gingerly touched the bottom of her chin. It made her wince, slightly, but she quickly dismissed the pain. "I'm OK, I think. It still hurts, but not too bad." She stuck her tongue out. "See?" She proffered its wet, wide, pink expanse for my examination. "Almost healed."

I was glad her tongue was better, but I had to think, too. Had I smelled any alcohol on her? I checked again. Nothing but her sweet, heady perfume. But, I think I was rather too obvious in my impromptu sobriety test, because she noticed me sniffing her critically, and seemed to take a rather large measure of resentment from it.

"I ain't been drinking, buddy," she informed me. "I've been too fucking sick to drink. For several days, now."

"Well," I said, "three, anyway."

"Three, four—whatever." She poked me in the ribs with a sharp fingernail. "You don't need to be worryin' about me, any."

"I never *worry*," I said. I didn't need to worry—she *always* got drunk. She just stared at me, expression very closed and hard.

But, I stroked her girl-soft tummy with my hand, trying to calm her, or maybe reassure her that I wasn't trying to be the bad guy. "I'm sorry, Kerr'," I soothed, and tried to lean down to kiss her. But she resisted, twisting her face away most petulantly. Typical. "Come on, Kerrilyn," I said, "Don't be angry. I didn't mean to be getting on you about your drinking."

Fortunately, she seemed to reconsider. "I know," she said. She reached up with her mouth, then, and allowed me to kiss her. Short, sweet, but still perhaps preoccupied with other things. She sighed, "I guess I'm still stinging from what you said to me, the other night."

"What other night?"

But, she remembered quite clearly. "When you told me how disappointed you were. With me." Her green eyes were large, clouded, and quite sad. "I really do wanna do the right thing, you know."

But I had to kiss her again, forgiving her. "I know, Kerrilyn. I'm sorry I said that," I said.

"But ...?" She seemed to think there was a 'but' waiting to follow my apology.

But, I thought (but did not say) you *still* got drunk even after you told me you were too sick to go to rehearsal. I just decided it wasn't worth saying. Not with a warm Kerrilyn under my arm, anyway. "There's no 'but' to that. I'm sorry I hurt your feelings. OK?"

She seemed to relax a little, then. She changed her mind, accepted my apology, and smiled, reaching up with both arms to encircle my neck and bring her toothy, freckled face in close to mine. Her boobs rubbed against my chest, and she concentrated most insidiously on that rubbing action. I thought her bra could very likely come undone if she wasn't careful. Maybe she was even hoping it would happen, too. Tom was outside. Sheree was busy in the kitchen. No one was watching us.

Facing me then, Kerrilyn carefully placed her knees on either side of mine, and then straightened. This made her taller than me, and also placed her still-covered breasts directly in line with my nose and tongue. She rubbed my face in her cleavage, and I obliged her by licking most cheerfully at her sweet, tangy, sweat-moistened folds. She reached behind herself then, and without hesitating, unfastened her bra. The lacy front literally sprang away from her breasts and they tumbled free to completely cover my face. They filled my nose, mouth, and eyes with wonderful, heady, soft and squishy woman-flesh. I resumed my licking and caressing, making sure the bra was pushed completely out of the way.

But, after only a few moments of this heavenly foreplay, she pushed away from me and suddenly stood up. I was hugely disappointed, and began to miss the touch of her charms immediately. She arranged the bra to (at least somewhat) cover her boobs, and reached out for my hand. "Come on, buddy," she said, rasping noticeably, a sly, devious expression plainly evident on her arousal-flushed face. "Let's go upstairs for a while."

I gave her my hand, of course, and allowed her to pull me to my feet. Sounded good to me, but, "You sure?"

"Trust me," was all she said.

We walked around the end of the couch and turned right to steal quickly around to the base of the stairs. Sheree still didn't seem to be paying any attention to us. I thought maybe Kerrilyn was simply going to invite us up to the bedroom without so much as a word to anyone, but

when we reached the edge of the kitchen doorway, she stopped suddenly. I almost bumped into her. She spoke back over her shoulder. "Sher'?"

Sheree stopped what she was doing and looked at the two of us, grinning like cats caught with canaries.

"We're going up to the bedroom." That was all Kerrilyn said.

Sheree seemed to think the idea was fine with her. Apparently. She glanced up at the kitchen clock, then back. Smiled, "I'll let y'all know when dinner's ready." And that was all Sheree said, too.

Kerrilyn led me quickly up the stairs, shedding clothes as she went. First came the shirt. She pulled it from her shoulders and flung it back in my direction. I caught it with one hand and flipped it over my shoulder. Next came her bra, but I missed it when she threw it back in my face, so I had to stop on the stairs to reach behind me for it.

"Leave it," she said, and scampered the remaining few stairs at a trot, undoing the buttons of her cutoffs as she went. Before I hit the top of the stairs, her shorts hit me in the chest.

I followed her to the master bedroom, and watched while she quickly whipped down her panties and made a low, sweeping dive out into the middle of the waterbed. It sloshed, rhythmically.

"Come on in, buddy," she teased, rolling onto her back as she bobbed, "the water's fine."

She then lay there, naked, panting slightly, and regarded me thoughtfully as I struggled to get my clothes off. While I worked on my pants, I noticed her hand sliding slowly down her abdomen. Once past her patch of reddish-blond pubic hair, she slid her fingers—bright red fingernail polish plainly visible—into the cleft of her vagina, pushing two of them very easily and deeply into herself. Her eyes seemed to glaze over with the purely sexual sensation of being penetrated, her back arching as she moaned breathlessly in masturbatory pleasure. She slipped them out, brought them slowly to her mouth, and began to lick and suck on them with obvious satisfaction.

She closed her eyes and smiled.

"Wait for me," I think I said, wishing I could be there to insert my own fingers where I'd just seen hers placed. And then taste what she was no doubt tasting. She was sure to be delicious.

"Hurry up," was her inviting reply.

Soon, I was on the bed with her, naked, too, and we set about making love.

I don't know how much time passed with just Kerrilyn and me on their bed, alone. I mean, she was rather turned on and I fairly lost all track

of the time. I don't think I ever saw (or felt) her so—*excited*—in all the time I'd known her, and that's saying something somewhat significant. This woman was always positively, permanently, perennially and perpetually 'in heat,' and ready, willing, and able to couple at anytime. That afternoon she was simply, purely, absolutely and completely alive and on fire, a taut bundle of white-hot fire in my touch. She was so much out of her head with a fever and desire for loving, that I wondered how I could possibly ever hope to keep up with her. I sincerely doubted my ability—anyone's ability!—to please the girl as much as she clearly wanted (and needed) to be pleased.

But, you know, I was surely going to try. I mean, *someone* had to!

And strangely, she seemed not to be in any kind of hurry, either. I don't know how she held herself back, because though all of my most pointed and directed ministrations seemed successful in raising the level of her pleasure and arousal, she never allowed those sensations to take her over the edge. She would let me bring her just to the very brink of explosion, then gently hold my hand or mouth still for precious long moments while she collected herself and readied herself for the next orgasmic assault. After three or four such halted, abbreviated launches, I began to get the general idea, and started to play into her little 'game' with some careful planning and clever execution tactics of my own. Her elated grin, then, communicated everything I needed to know. I pushed her and stalled her, and pushed her and stalled her, until she was sweating and panting and flushed, unable to speak or almost even to breathe.

And then Sheree joined us on the bed.

I hadn't noticed her at all until she slid, also naked, alongside the two of us. I saw her timid, questioning blue eyes peeking over the bridge of Kerrilyn's nose, whites exposed and pupils dilated.

"Hey," she said, whispering. Sheree's small hand then came up to caress Kerrilyn's moist, flushed, and heaving breast.

There are perhaps many questions I could have asked, and some others I probably should have asked, as well, but the one that came prominently foremost to my mind in that moment was, "Where's Tom?" Because, whatever else happened or didn't happen, I surely didn't want him to be surprised, and find Kerrilyn and me in his very own bed, with his very own wife. Especially since it was apparent that all three of us were naked, and if things worked out, would be getting somewhat more intimate with each other at any moment.

She raised her head a bit, so she could see me more clearly. Her eyelashes fluttered briefly, "He'll be up in a few minutes."

"You told him you were coming up here?"

She closed her eyes, perhaps embarrassed, and nodded. Then she opened them again, looked squarely into my eyes, "I hope that's OK." Then she giggled, "'Cause if not, you all got about ten seconds to get your asses off this bed and outta here, before he finds us."

I replied, "If he's OK with this, Sheree, then who am I to say no?"

"Are *you* OK with this?" she asked. She glanced down at Kerrilyn.

So far Kerrilyn seemed completely unconscious, and had neither moved nor opened her eyes at all during this conversation being conducted from either side of her head. But just then she opened her eyes to me, and with soft pleading in her voice, said, "Please? Can we love them, please?"

I just sighed, and laid my head down on the slowly undulating surface of the bed. My hand had been gently stroking Kerrilyn's hip while she lay, and I continued to stroke her as she promptly rolled away from me and into the arms of her girl.

I don't know what I had been worrying about. That is, about the relationship between the women, because the truth presently became obvious to me. It wasn't a shock, nor was it a disappointment; it just suddenly made sense, completely.

Kerrilyn, with my hand touching her and sensing her body and her emotions, was slowly, softly kissing and nuzzling Sheree. They lay in each other's embrace, stroking and reassuring, and touching their bodies together. I felt Kerrilyn sigh, very raggedly, all the adrenaline and pent-up desires she had been accumulating escaping in a single exhalation. Through her, I sensed how innocent, disarming, and unassuming their love was for each other. But still I lay with my eyes closed, and participated passively in their gradual coming together. Now. Finally, with family in attendance, openly, for all to see and know.

How could I fault them for the love they held? It wasn't mean, it wasn't crass, it wasn't meant to keep others out—especially not me—as I could plainly sense.

Kerrilyn snuggled back against me, purring roughly when she felt my erection poke her in the small of the back. My hand slipped from her hip to the soft well of her abdomen, inches from her soaked and enraged vagina. I longed to slip my fingers into her again, but she barely gave me time to reconsider the action before she rolled over, bringing Sheree on top, across, and then deftly, neatly, between us. I felt the sudden coolness of Sheree's back and behind as a distinct difference from the moist, slippery, flushed and burning flesh of my most sexual girl.

But Kerrilyn wasn't done with us, yet. Though Sheree tried her best to

keep her attentions on Kerrilyn, Kerrilyn would have nothing of it. Struggling all the way, Kerrilyn forcefully urged her girl to turn over and face me. Turn toward this man who was holding the two of them with a heart full of gentle love. With her eyes averted and down, Sheree and I finally came face-to-face. I kept my arm firmly locked around Kerrilyn's waist, holding her to Sheree, and giving Sheree no room to wriggle free or escape. She was mine, for the moment. Kerrilyn, now on the outside and not sandwiched between two naked furnaces, only closed her eyes and breathed slowly and deeply through her nose, resting, calming, and cooling off.

"Hi," I said to Sheree, aware that a part of me had positioned itself most prominently and conspicuously between her thighs.

She obviously felt my manhood stiff against her skin, because she reached down with a small hand and patted me there. "Hi," she said back, blushing and smiling.

Kerrilyn's arm then came up over Sheree's shoulders and her hand clamped on my arm, pinning Sheree in even more securely.

"Kerrilyn is burning me up," said Sheree.

"Get used to it," said a breathless, glowing Kerrilyn, who reached down to pinch Sheree on the butt. Kerrilyn's arm then returned to hold Sheree fast between us.

Sheree then said, "OK," and her eyes closed as she silently asked me to kiss her. I did.

Over the next few minutes, both of us—Kerrilyn and me—held Sheree snugly and tightly, and both of us fondled, petted and kissed her. Kerrilyn would not allow Sheree to turn away from me, but nibbled and sucked at her from behind, exploring her neck, her ears, her shoulders and her arms. Every part that her mouth could reach she tortured—with lips, teeth, and tongue. From time to time Kerrilyn's hand would stray to fondle a small, heaving breast, or caress the sensitive hollow of a neck. If any part of my girl came within reach of my own wandering, hungry mouth, I would kiss and lick, and nip at her burning skin. Kerrilyn was fully ablaze, more heated, more amorous—more *carnal*—than I'd ever felt her to be. She would smile when I would kiss her face, her hand, or her arm, but still would slap me away playfully if I caught too much tender skin with my teeth.

Sheree's mouth became hungry for my skin. She found the base of my neck with a purpose, and bit down hard on me. Her teeth scraped raw skin and sent flashes of sharp pain echoing down my chest and then straight into my sex. I almost exploded involuntarily as she began sucking

on my neck, drawing painfully hard against the thin, sensitive skin there. I knew she was putting her mark on me, and the thought of being so marked by her, helped open, ready, and loosen me to her ownership. As I lay there vulnerable and weakened, and Sheree sucking most urgently and ungently on the side of my neck, I finally noticed the huge, savage, swollen, dark, red and purple—almost bruise-like—place that Sheree had already made on the side of Kerrilyn’s neck. All right, then, we were both Sheree’s property, and we wanted to be, too. I started to think, as Sheree continued to work on me with growing excitement, that Kerrilyn and I were going to have to endure some not inconsiderable teasing when we showed up at the gig with huge, dark ‘love bites’ on our necks. Considering we’d never really done anything like that before, we were no doubt going to have to do some serious explaining to all our ‘uninformed’ friends.

But then I suddenly thought, where the hell is Tom?

Kerrilyn’s hand reached down most gently and found my full, almost bursting testicles. I sensed she felt the stress, the urgency there—my arousal being long past the comfortable stage, having already progressed to that painful, tense, gut-wrenching ‘blue-balls’ stage. So she decided to take the situation into her own hands. It was time, she obviously felt, for me to have some relief. I know she would more than gladly have provided it to me, since she still had yet to have an orgasm of her own, but she had put her girl Sheree between us. And for a reason. And since Sheree was naked, female, and quite disposed to being loved, Kerrilyn used her hands, her arms and her body to gradually slide Sheree down until the blood-engorged lips of Sheree’s moist vagina finally contacted the tip of my aching penis. I attempted to invade her near-dripping womanhood, to penetrate her and feel her snugness envelop me, but she resisted, holding me back weakly with her hips and hands.

But Kerrilyn wouldn’t have any part of that. She shoved roughly against Sheree from behind, urging her to accept me. Kerrilyn forced her hand between Sheree’s clenched knees and pulled them apart, a nonsense maneuver, forcing her to admit me. But Sheree had little strength and no desire left to fight it, so she slowly, but willingly enough parted her knees widely. Then, pushing Sheree forward and down, Kerrilyn guided my penis with her hand until the tip slipped neatly under Sheree’s pubic bone. Feeling I was positioned well, I relaxed and eased in the final few inches, sliding softly and smoothly—and fully—into Sheree. Sheree too then relaxed, finally, and seemed to accept my love—*our* love really—with no more indecision or hesitation.

Kerrilyn rocked in time with us, compelling her girl against me almost as if she were the one receiving my love, not Sheree. I don't know if Kerrilyn was touching herself, or if she was relying solely on casual, intermittent external stimulation from Sheree, but I had lost all desire or need to hold my orgasm back, so with relatively few strokes inside snug little Sheree, I came. And when I came, so did Kerrilyn, calling out loudly, hoarsely, as she clenched, bucked, and shuddered against us. I held them there close to me, and waited for the last few spasms of our bodies to relax and subside.

In time, Sheree slipped off me. She hadn't come, but still didn't seem disappointed or let down in any way. She smiled, reached up and lightly kissed me, then turned back to Kerrilyn, who lay behind her, breathless, spent, panting, and profusely sweating. Her red-gold hair was wet, and had plastered itself limply to her head. Every auburn freckle stood out darkly on her pale, flushed, glistening body. Sheree embraced, then began kissing on Kerrilyn, who barely moved or acknowledged her presence. Kerrilyn was wasted. Kerrilyn was spent. And it was probably going to take a few minutes for her to regain enough energy to properly return Sheree's warm, tender affections. I was in no hurry. It should be fun to watch.

But it was then I noticed Tom was there. When had he come in the room? What had he seen? He sat naked opposite the women on the edge of the bed, and seemed to be nervously patting and smoothing the sheets against the water-filled plastic mattress. Why hadn't he joined us? He could have—quite easily—either before or during any of the events of the past several minutes. Had he come and laid down with us, on the other of Kerrilyn perhaps, I know she would have welcomed him and brought him in with us to enjoy the open loving we were all experiencing. Well, it wouldn't have bothered me at all. Not a bit. Let him come to us. Let him join with us. Let him play with us. Let him love, with us. Plenty of love for everyone. Plenty of woman for everyone. Plenty.

I couldn't see Sheree's face, since her back was to me as she smooched Kerrilyn, so I didn't see the silent exchange between her and her husband. His expression remained unreadable to me, but he seemed to take a cue from his wife, and in moments climbed onto the bed to slide over to where the women were locked and intertwining.

I thought maybe then he would join us and perhaps have his own little 'three-some' with the women—certainly OK with me—but he seemed interested in only one thing. Without speaking or looking to me at all, he simply reached out and took Kerrilyn away from Sheree. He pulled her—though she came away and went with him without any resistance or

hesitation—away from his wife, and slid her over some distance until there was no longer any contact between Kerrilyn and Sheree. It all happened so quickly. It seemed to make no sense. It was nothing but a very cold, unloving way to behave in the face of the very loving and intimate atmosphere that the three of us—Sheree, Kerrilyn, and I—had made.

Sheree was obviously distressed by the loss of her lover's preternatural warmth, but still did nothing stop Tom's advances on *the girl*. She turned her head, briefly, to look at me, an expression of confusion, sadness, and perhaps disappointment evident, but did nothing. I reached out and only hugged her small body to my chest, her breasts and soft abdomen cradled securely beneath my hands, and we watched Kerrilyn and Tom.

Kerrilyn probably knew who was preparing to mount her. Actually, I know she knew what was happening, but at the time it seemed as though she might not be in full control of her faculties, so there was still some doubt that she was fully aware of him. But she had no disinclination or made any efforts to resist or deter him at all. She only rolled onto her back: calm, docile, and pliant, and when he positioned himself between her knees, she raised and sweetly parted them, almost lovingly, almost reverently. He only moved over her, arms planted firmly at her shoulders, and quickly, purposefully slid inside. He entered her almost without any effort.

We watched them, then. Kerrilyn only lay back with her eyes closed, her heels resting lightly against each other as her legs loosely, comfortably, encircled his back. We watched, then, as a slight smile of satisfaction gradually crept into the incongruous serenity of her reddening, blushing, glowing face. He pushed against her, moving her whole body with each powerful thrust. And with each forceful onslaught of his body against hers, she arched her back ever so slightly, deepening his penetration, inviting and encouraging him. She never opened her eyes or acknowledged her surroundings in any way. For all it seemed, it could have just as easily been me taking her that way, and not someone else. Eventually Tom came, almost brutally beating his hips against her. In time he stopped, too, and relaxed, and laid his body on top of her, and rested.

Kerrilyn had not come with him inside her, though. As he rested on top of her, her head turned to the side, she opened her eyes upon us, and I thought I saw a small tear. But, it must have been an illusion, because the images of her strange, satisfied smiles as he slapped and slapped and drove himself deeper and deeper into her body were still burning the backs of my retinas.

Of all the things I could regret, especially now in light of finding out that Kerrilyn had been a prostitute before she met me, it is this image I have of them—of her. As much as I've tried to erase it from my memory, or rationalize it into 'just something that happened,' I can't seem to escape the deep, unsettling disquiet that I feel—that I felt while watching her. I think I can live with it, mainly because I have, but no matter how much time passes or how many loving, longing looks we share, I simply cannot remove the memories of the sights and sounds of that night up in Tom's and Sheree's bedroom.

I don't even know, now, how things could have gotten so far. In retrospect, I think it was at least half my fault for giving them 'permission'—for giving her permission, maybe. I should never have allowed that, but unfortunately, what's done is done.

But even then, the images of her obvious enjoyment and satisfaction weren't what made their way into the most indelible recesses of my psyche. It took the sounds she made: the slight grunts of satisfaction, the mewling, cooing, moaning sounds, and finally the sloppy, wet, squishy, *smacking* sounds of his hips hitting her squarely on her flat underside. It took those sounds of love—animalistic, base, sexual sounds—to bring together the picture that won't ever leave my memory.

No, it wasn't any one thing that has stuck with me. It wasn't that she allowed him to make love to her—to *fuck her*—so readily, so easily, or so effortlessly. It wasn't that she enjoyed it, either, because I knew—I know—quite well that she *always* enjoyed sex no matter with whom or in what situation. It wasn't that she grunted with satisfaction as he rammed her, or even that he smacked against her and made those awful, hollow, wet, skin-on-skin slapping sounds. It was all those things, together. It was the indelible image of the shameless, wanton prostitute: soul-lost, unaware, uncaring, only living in the moment and existing just to take another man between her legs and hold him while he raped her—relentlessly, inexorably—until he reached orgasm. Because that's what he did. That's what I saw, and that's what I'll never forget.

Chapter 24

“Kerrilyn,” Mel asked me, “What’s that on your neck?” She pointed, obviously, to the still huge, dark, purple love bite on my neck.

I guess there’s no getting anything past this woman, is there? Despite the fact that I’d tried to cover it with makeup, it was still more than a little visible—proudly, arrogantly perched there at the base of my neck. The low-cut dress I had on didn’t help, either. Well, I couldn’t exactly wear a turtleneck sweater to the performance, could I?

But she only shook her head, smiling, “What’d you and Marc do last night? He must have been doing some mighty powerful drugs to completely lose his mind, like that.” Doing drugs, indeed. Just doing Sheree, more likely. She went on, “Or was it you?”

I spoke finally, “Or was it me—*what?*”

“Nothing. It just looks like something you’d do, maybe. I’ll bet he was angry when he found out that you’d given him a sucker bite.” She was referring, of course, to the similarly sized and shaped love-tattoo that Marc carried.

I let her believe whatever she wanted. I just teased her, knowing that she’d once had Marc, and had let him go. I touched the spot on my neck, briefly and tenderly, “He’s quite a lover, you know.”

I thought she was going to reply, perhaps to agree, but she just looked at me, apparently thinking that Marc and I had somehow lapsed back into adolescence, again. Back to that place where such things as love bites were still naughty novelties, borne out of a childish need to have everyone know what you were doing. Everyone *did* know what we were doing, but it was hardly news. Well, what Marc and I were doing with each other wasn’t news, anyway. The rest of it would have raised her eyebrows, for sure.

We were due to begin our first set, so the conversation was momentarily ended. And it had gotten my mind off my stage fright, as

well. As it was, I didn't have time enough to get nervous again, as the first song was already beginning. Then my cue arrived and I had to sing. And I hadn't even thought about the huge crowd of people just sitting out there waiting for me.

Sheree had wanted to come hear us play. Well anyway, *I* had wanted her to be there, but she had felt compelled to stay away on that Monday night, mostly because of the silent, strained relations between her and Tom. That, and the nature of the relationship between her and me.

To my knowledge, I don't think Tom and Sheree were fighting over Saturday night's 'festivities'. I had only talked with Sheree on the phone since that night—once Sunday afternoon, and again late Monday morning. She had been too busy at work then to come over to the apartment for lunch. But when I asked her if everything was OK, she didn't seem too upset or worried. Of course I asked her to come listen to us, and she said she wanted to, but thought that maybe she shouldn't, since things seemed kind of 'strange' among the four of us.

Strange, indeed. Tom had watched Sheree making love to me, but I think he'd also seen Sheree making love to Marc, too. Maybe he'd seen how she had initially resisted our mutual efforts to get her fucked by a man, instead of a woman, but nonetheless it had been Marc who had penetrated her, and had come inside her, too. And I know Sheree had seen how Tom had reacted to that, too. He had simply come over, taken me by the arm, and dragged me off so he could spread my legs and fuck me. There had been no resistance from *moi*, since I'd been given the permission and the reason to allow it to happen. Besides, it really isn't in my nature to refuse. Him or anyone.

I couldn't say I knew everything that was going on inside our incestuous little family, but there were no open hostilities or brash, heated accusations. So whatever it was, we were keeping it all to ourselves. For the time being.

At the gig Monday night, Tom was finding it difficult to even look at me, apparently. I'm not sure why, because I never said anything or did anything to give him the idea that I might not be quite as *enamored* of him as he had apparently been of me. When Marc and I arrived at the club around six PM, pulling in right behind Tom's van, we disembarked to begin unloading the equipment. I only looked around, making sure that Sheree hadn't somehow come with him and yet still remained hidden, and said, "Hey, Tom. Where's Sheree?" That's all. No negative words or emotions. Then I simply started grabbing things out of the back of the van and began carrying them inside. I don't even think he answered me.

At the first break Mel Howe grabbed me by the elbow as I left the stage. I was headed to the bar, though, and a brief tug-of-war ensued while she tried to usher me to a back table instead of allowing me to get something from the bartender. Well, I won, but only momentarily, as she waited while I got a scotch, then motioned me to sit down with her. I sat.

I took a sip of my drink, initially desiring to make it last (we were working, you know), and she handed me a cigarette. We lit up. Then once I'd had both a drag and a drink, she spoke.

"What's going on between you and Tom, tonight?"

I considered playing coy about it, but discarded that idea after a brief moment of thought. On another night I might have preferred sparring with her, but on this night I really felt more like simply getting on with the discussion and getting it over with. "I think he might be pissed at me about something," I said. I had to shrug, then. "It's no big deal, Mel. He'll get over it, I think." I hoped, anyway.

"He's been really quiet, tonight," she said. "Whatever's going on, he's definitely not himself." She looked me over. Why she would think Tom's mood had anything to do with me was a mystery, but I was damned if I was going to get into it by asking her. She took a puff from her cigarette, "What is he pissed about, if you don't mind me asking?"

I sipped from my scotch, keeping my expression carefully neutral. "Actually, I think I do mind. Don't take this the wrong way," I puffed, trying to look mildly offended but ultimately disinterested, "but not everything that goes on around here is your business."

She seemed to grasp the fact that I'd accused her of being a nosy busybody, but didn't seem terribly affronted by it. "OK," she sat back, billowing a cloud of smoke as she exhaled, "That's fair. It probably isn't any of my business." Then changed the subject, somewhat, "By the way, where is Sheree, tonight?"

"She's not here," I said. It seemed pretty self-evident.

"You and her getting along OK?" I thought she masked her true intentions quite well.

Of course Mel had been there Saturday, at rehearsal. Of course, she'd seen our ... fight, too. What I didn't know was what Tom had said to her. Had I known ... well ... "We're friends," I only said, "We're fine."

And though I thought she would persist with her questions, she abruptly stood up and snubbed her cigarette out in the ashtray. "I hope so," she said, and walked away.

What was that all about? I wondered. I had little choice but to gulp down the rest of my drink and hightail it after her.

"Hey, wait a minute," I said as I caught up with her, almost to the stage, again. "What was that all about?" I asked, verbalizing my silent question of only a few moments ago.

She was evasive, though, "Don't worry about it, Kerry."

She'd used my old name, but I didn't try to correct her. It didn't seem entirely accidental. "I'm *not* worried about it," I told her. Then I became somewhat defensive, and whined, "Why is everything always *my* fault, around here, anyway?"

She stopped, and seemed to find my fine whine worthy of some small measure of contempt. "That's because, Kerrilyn dear," she used my preferred name, "you *always* seem to be involved, somehow." She turned again, and started up the steps to the stage.

Christ! Was my reputation really that bad?

Well, I needed another drink then, so I went and visited my *other* best buddy, the bartender. Work or no work, I needed to reduce my stress level, and fast, so I ordered another scotch. A double. And I remained standing at the bar, too, well away from the stage and the table where the rest of the band all sat. Once or twice I spied Marc looking around, probably for me, but I needed to get a little more alcohol in me, and I didn't want anyone to know where I was, just yet. They wouldn't have been happy about it either, had they known, but regardless of what they might think of me, they're still not my keepers.

After another couple of good doubles, I wandered back to the stage and took a seat next to my boy, who only frowned in my direction. I hid the smell of the alcohol with a cigarette, and hoped he wouldn't be too suspicious. After another three or four cigarettes it was time to start, again, so I wandered back up on stage and took my place in front my microphone.

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Kerrilyn was rarely the same person from day to day. She changed more often than the weather, first smiling and happy, a joy and a wonder to be around, then angry, moody, depressed, crying, refusing to talk or be sociable. I never thought much about the reasons why she might be that way, but even so, it seemed intuitive that her excessive consumption of alcohol—scotch mostly—had to be at the root of the problem.

Of course there was no getting her to stop, or even control her drinking. Don't even suggest it unless you want a fight and an angry,

sullen outburst. Because then if you made her angry, she just got even more drunk in retaliation. Well, maybe not in direct retaliation, but certainly her response to any stressful or uncomfortable situation was always the same. She simply drowned her troubles in the bottle, and to hell with the consequences or the sick aftermath.

Though she was obviously an alcoholic, and I should have done something to help her straighten her life out, I believe I always feared that if I intervened in her drinking she would just take the problem elsewhere. I was afraid she would simply leave if I tried to get her to stop, and I didn't want her to leave. For all her moods and unpredictable behavior, she was still a smart girl, she was still an amazingly beautiful girl, she was still a supremely talented vocalist and composer, and she still claimed she was in love with me.

So, as long as she stayed with me, I wanted to stay with her. And I tolerated her drinking as only the very best codependent enabler can.

Monday evening started out calmly enough. Though I tried to stay out of it, Tom seemed still to have some kind of problem with Kerrilyn, and generally avoided her, refusing to talk to her or even interact with her in any overt way. Maybe he was feeling some shame for what he'd done to her, maybe not. Maybe he'd seen how the women had touched each other, and was simply looking at the reason why he was probably going to lose his wife. I wasn't sure it should be Kerrilyn's fault, so much, but I could certainly see why he might feel that way.

It was hard to think of my girl in that very unflattering light, too, but though I could have self-destructed over it, I simply tried to remember that she—Kerrilyn—still came to my bed at night, and still cuddled with me. If she brought another friend along to cuddle, now and then, then that could be OK, too. I don't know, maybe my exposure to homosexuality in my family had prepared me for acceptance of it in my own 'family'. I didn't think Kerrilyn was going 'gay' on me, but it seemed as though Sheree might be. Kerrilyn simply didn't see any difference between loving a man and loving a woman, and quite honestly, in the context of what I'd learned and what I knew, I wasn't sure I could, either.

I hoped Mel would leave things well enough alone. 'Love bites' and strange moods notwithstanding, I viewed her involvement in our affairs as a little too invasive, though at the same time I knew it was her role and her standard operating procedure. She could have become a psychiatrist in another life; certainly, she liked to play counselor and mother confessor to everyone. Normally I didn't object very much, since she had provided words of wisdom to both Kerrilyn and me on more than one occasion, but

on Monday as we began that long, difficult, two-week gig, I felt that Mel's interference would do nothing more than upset the tenuous, teetering balance we'd achieved in the aftermath of Saturday night. But then again, maybe 'balance' isn't the right word, at all. The situation obviously was anything but balanced. There was a tension between us, a taut electricity that said things could fall apart at any moment.

I'm sure Mel saw Tom's quiet mood and avoidance of Kerrilyn as evidence that things weren't 'all right'. She knew too much; suspected too much. Tom had said too much and given Mel the idea that *something* was going on between Kerrilyn and Sheree, so when Tom showed up for the gig in a rare funk, sans Sheree, and proceeded to treat Kerrilyn like a bad case of the crabs, she sorta put everything together and came to a conclusion. I thought it was perhaps the wrong conclusion, but with so much actually going on, just how far off the mark could she have been?

Ah, but some wounds heal more quickly when you don't go probing around in them.

Kerrilyn thought I hadn't seen where she went once Mel finished with her. No, I saw. I mean, where else would she go? What else would she do?

After talking with Kerrilyn during the break, Mel returned to get something from the stage, then came back and sat down with the rest of us. When she sat, I just looked at her with barely concealed disdain and shook my head.

"What?" she said, scooting over to sit close to me, and to hear my reply.

"You should have left well enough alone, Mel," I said.

"What are you talking about? I didn't say anything to her."

I saw that Kerrilyn was still standing at the bar. She was trying to keep hidden from us, but I could just barely see the side of her face. The profile of her pudgy, sunburned nose was distinctive. "Nothing? You see where she is." I nodded very slightly in the direction of *the girl*.

She didn't argue with me, though, just said, "I can go get her, if you want."

Well, did I want to come between Kerrilyn and her booze? Was it worth it to have her upset, sulking, and bitching that no one trusted her, or felt she could make a good decision, or anything? Probably not. How drunk could she get? (I should have known better, because she could get very drunk, very fast indeed.)

"No," I said to Mel, "Leave her alone, for now. In fact," I went on, "You could do me a big favor and leave her alone the rest of the night." I

looked, very briefly and surreptitiously in Tom's direction. "This is not her fault, entirely. Not this time."

Mel nodded. "That's what she implied, when she told me it was none of my business." Then looked over to the bar, where Kerrilyn was still hiding, and still drinking. "But she's still getting plastered, anyway."

But I defended Kerrilyn just the same, "Just cut her some slack, maybe, OK?"

Mel thought that was an interesting comment coming from me (famous for not giving Kerrilyn much leeway, at all), but said nothing.

Kerrilyn wasn't very good that night. Except for the first set, when she was still sober, she had too much to drink during the first break and basically fucked up the entire rest of the night. Especially the second set. Well, to be fair, I've heard and seen worse from other musicians, including Troy Dancer in particular, but there was no doubting that Kerrilyn had gotten drunk during the break and came back on stage and proceeded to sing rather ... erratically. She missed cues, cracked notes, even sang off-key a few times. She didn't exactly fall over or break anything, but by the time the second break came around, she had about three of the remaining four band members giving her angry looks. Tom still pretended she wasn't there, but the rest of us were ready to strangle our vocalist.

"You're fucking up a lot," I told her as we exited the stage. She still seemed disposed to visit the bar, again, but I held onto her arm and prevented her. She, *the girl*, tried to break free of my hold, but I wasn't done, yet, so I pulled her toward our table there next to the stage. "Stay here. I'll get you a Coke."

She groused, "I don't want a fucking Coke," but she sat in the chair I offered, anyway.

"Well, you're not getting any more alcohol. If you don't want a Coke, I'll get you a glass of water."

She made a face, "Ugh! *Water*? Who drinks that?"

But, instead of answering I only repeated, "You're fucking up too much. Everyone is getting pretty pissed. You have to cool it with the booze, or we'll both be in trouble."

But apparently, she wasn't as drunk as some might have thought. "Why are you in trouble? What'd you do?"

"I don't know, Kerrilyn." I sat down next to her. She took out a cigarette and lit it. Avoidance therapy, it seemed. She could more easily hide behind the smoke and the stench. "You need to cool it for a while, and sober up. We need to get through this gig without any more problems. Especially tonight."

She regarded me with her patented steely-eyed stare, “Why is tonight so fucking special?”

But because Tom came up, just then, I only shook my head. He sat down opposite us, took a sip from his beer, then set it on the table. When I looked at him, he gave me a wan, half smile, but said nothing. He still didn’t look at Kerrilyn, or even acknowledge her. She only sat next to me and puffed imperiously, thankfully not pressing me about why I thought the night was so ‘special’.

Instead, she announced, “I need something to drink.”

“Coke?” I asked her, starting to get up.

She gave me a sullen, resentful scowl, but said, “Sure,” anyway.

So I went to get her a Coke.

I don’t know why I always end up responsible for her. All she has to do is get drunk, and suddenly everyone is looking to me to take care of her and the situation, to somehow make things ‘all better’. I think I have enough to worry about with my own playing, and the sound, and the equipment, et cetera, without having to worry about what *the girl* is doing. What she is drinking. How badly she is fucking up.

She listens to me even less than she listens to the others. I can’t tell her anything most of the time, or it puts her in a snit—a mood—that I will only have to deal with later, once we get home. True, she usually lets me appease her eventually, so we can get to bed in peace, but still ... it’s not always worth the aggravation, quite. Yes, there is a substantial resentment there, and it’s a well-earned resentment, too.

I set the Coke down in front of her. She picked it up, took a tentative sip, then a much larger one, and set it back on the table. I guess it was acceptable, then.

“Thanks, buddy,” she said, no longer complaining.

Tom, meanwhile, had gotten up and left the table. Probably when I went to get the Coke, so he wouldn’t have to talk to Kerrilyn. I figured I was going to have to talk to him, eventually, but I wasn’t sure if he really wanted to talk to anyone. He didn’t seem to have a particular problem with me, which I might have expected, but he hadn’t attempted to enjoin me in any conversation, either. On the other hand, he seemed to have a substantial problem with Kerrilyn. No, I didn’t understand why. She hadn’t done anything but what he’d wanted.

I sat back down next to Kerrilyn, feeling that the night was very likely going to be a long one. And I was already tired of it. I asked her, “Has Tom talked to you at all, tonight?”

She took another sip of Coke before answering, “No. Has he talked to you?”

“Not really.”

There was a pause while she finished her cigarette. She snubbed it out. “I don’t know what I did to make him mad at me, but obviously it was something.” Grabbed another cigarette; lit it.

Well, I didn’t really want to get into it, especially not with her being half-drunk, as she was. Later we could talk about all the possible reasons why Tom might be upset with her. Though in truth, I might have to agree with her in principle—there was nothing I could see that she’d done that should have Tom not speaking to her. Kerrilyn may have encouraged a very sexually ambiguous threesome between her, Sheree, and me, but Kerrilyn certainly hadn’t drug Sheree upstairs naked and forced her to get in bed with us. That was clearly, completely all Sheree’s doing. I felt rather strongly that if Sheree hadn’t wanted to get fucked by one or both of us, she shouldn’t have ‘jumped in the middle of things,’ so to speak.

But then, there was that small matter of the love bites that both *the girl* and I carried. Since Tom wouldn’t talk to either of us, Kerrilyn or me, it was hard to say what he thought of that. Perhaps nothing at all. Perhaps it was just something on my mind.

Kerrilyn interrupted my reverie, “Do you want me to try talking to Tom, maybe?”

“How drunk are you?” I asked, but I hadn’t thought through how she might interpret such a question.

It was the wrong thing to say, apparently. She stood up, and her manner was clipped and abrupt when she said, “We’ll talk about this, later,” and walked away.

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I decided to approach Tom after we were through for the night. For what I wanted to discuss, I didn’t want to be constrained within the time limit of a twenty-minute break. Besides, Marc was essentially correct in his assessment of my sobriety. It took a couple more sets before I felt somewhat sober. And fortunately, having to concentrate on playing music (well, singing, maybe) kept me from becoming too stressed out about it.

Tom was off the stage before the echoes of our last song had even died out. He threw his bass in the case, closed and latched it, and started toward the door. I had to leave the others behind to run after him as he headed out into the warm, sultry night. I caught up to him just as he was getting to the van.

He had the door open and was about to slide up into the driver's seat, but stopped when I called to him, "Tom! Can you wait up a second?"

He didn't say anything right away. He just stood there; hand on the door, looking at me, bass case lying across the seat. I finished hurrying, and stopped a few feet away. I had to catch my breath before speaking. I puffed. He waited.

"Can I talk to you, a minute?" I asked him, still out of breath.

"I'd like to get home," he said, finally. "I have a long drive ahead of me, and I have to work tomorrow." He looked almost irritated, I thought.

So I came right to the point. "Why are you mad at me?"

He had to think before answering, apparently, because he was silent a long time. But, eventually he decided he should probably talk to me. "I'm not angry with you, Kerrilyn."

It seemed an ironic statement. "You could have fooled me, Tom," I said, smiling and shaking my head. "You've been avoiding me all night long. Everyone noticed, and they're all asking me what's going on."

"So, what did you tell them?"

"I didn't tell them nothing. I don't know any more than anyone." I was still a little winded, maybe, so I paused to let my lungs (yeah, all those cigarettes are hell) catch up with the rest of me. I went on, "What's wrong? Do you not like me, anymore?"

He didn't answer right away, though.

My strength and resolve just seemed to evaporate as he stood there looking at me. I cleared my throat as a sick, strained feeling seemed to well up from inside. Uck. Not good. But I said, anyway, "I still think we can be friends, you know. If you still want to." I was specifically remembering how he'd taken me up in their bed, Saturday night. I could look past it and get on with our lives, if he could. I really wanted to keep this from killing my chance—the band's chance—to do something good.

It took him several seconds to formulate an answer. "I still want to be your friend, Kerr'." I thought he shrugged. "So," he said, leaning back against the side of the van, "you're not upset about ... Saturday?"

"I'm fine, Tom," I said, and I tried to sound as though I wasn't lying, either. I don't know if I succeeded. "I think I can handle this, quite well." Despite how I might have been feeling at that moment. "I'm more concerned about how you're reacting to everything, 'cause it sure looks like you been having a hard time with it."

He was fairly quick in answering, "I'm OK, if you are."

I wanted to say something more, like, 'let's *not* do anything like that, again,' but decided it would be better, maybe, if I kept that sentiment to myself. Then the sick feeling decided to subside for a few moments. I

almost sighed with relief. Instead, "Like I said, I'm fine."

He didn't seem very encouraged by that. "What does Marc think?"

"About what?"

"About ..." he seemed to find the words difficult "... what we did—you and me."

I shrugged, but it didn't mean I didn't care, "I don't know. I think you need to ask him, yourself. But ..." I paused, thinking of whether to go on with my thought, or not. I decided. "But, since he made love to Sheree, too ..." I had to let my statement trail off, feeling my face and neck flush, suddenly. Embarrassed, obviously, but why? Why did all this frank discussion about our amorous group activities embarrass me? Not me, surely. Not this experienced courtesan.

He only shrugged, but didn't say anything. I could probably guess what he was thinking, but if he didn't want to talk about it, then neither did I. No need to delve into subjects better left alone. Like Sheree's all-too-obvious attraction to me, for one. Like Sheree's all-too-obvious marks of sexual ownership on both of us, for another. No need to talk about what those things might mean.

But even so, I still noticed how much stress those thoughts gave me, because just then my sick stomach woke up again. It cramped suddenly, unexpectedly, and sent a jolt of sharp pain straight through me. "Oww!" I was forced to gasp, and I had to grab my side. It almost doubled me over, it hurt so bad.

He came forward and grabbed me by the shoulders, helping hold me up. "What's wrong, Kerrilyn? Are you OK?"

That seemed a foolish question, though. "No! Oof!" I gasped, again, as another sharp pain raced through me. This time I had to double over and hold my arms over my stomach.

"Here," he pointed toward the curb in front of the van, "sit down over here. I'll go get Marc."

And, speaking of Marc, where the hell was he?

With Tom's help, then, I shuffled slowly, carefully to the curb where I all but crumpled over in a cramped-up heap. I put my legs out straight in front of me and tried to lean forward, hoping it would somehow help the pain. Well, if not, then at least it would keep me from passing out.

"Are you gonna be OK?" Tom asked again, sounding quite worried. "I'm gonna go find Marc. Can you make it until I find him?"

"Yes," I whispered, holding onto my middle, sucking in air with the third strong cramp. "Go!"

Then, I think he went off to find Marc. Meanwhile, I tried my best to keep from passing out.

I succeeded, I think, in keeping myself together sitting there on the curb until Tom returned, with Marc in tow. The boy came right over and scrunched down next to me as I brought my head up and came to an upright (more or less) sitting position.

"Hey," he said. His face was barely visible in the dim yellow glow of the parking lot lights; he looked worried. Hell, even *I* was worried! "Are you all right, babe?"

That word 'babe' sounded awfully good, to me. And the pain was beginning to subside a little, too. I gulped air, and exhaled strongly. "Whew. Man!" I was feeling better. Lots better, in fact. "That was no fun, I can tell you."

"What?" he was still quite concerned for my health.

"I dunno," I unwrapped my arms from around my stomach, and stretched my back out, allowing some of the kinks to un-kink. I explained, "I got a stomach cramp, there, for a minute."

"A cramp?" He frowned, "It looked like it had you doubled over in pain. That's some stomach cramp."

I had to agree, nodding. "Oh, you got *that* right. It hurt like a motherfucker. But," I put my hands on the edge of the curb, pushed off, standing up, very wobbly, "I'm feeling a lot better, now."

He wasn't convinced, though. "We're going to the emergency room and get you checked out." He stood then, too, and held out his hand to me. "Come on, Kerrilyn."

Should I take his hand and allow myself to be carted off to the hospital? Where I just knew we'd spend the entire rest of the night sitting in some fucked-up, god-awful waiting room? Only then to be told I probably shouldn't drink so much? No, I don't think so. "I don't wanna go to no emergency room," I told him. "Let's just go home."

But he wasn't happy about my refusal. He just stood there glaring at me in the semi-darkness, hands on hips: irritated, frustrated, and perturbed. Worried, too. Tom, on the other hand, seemed mainly to want to be somewhere else.

"Well," he said, removing himself from the 'situation,' "I gotta get home and get some sleep. OK?"

Marc glanced toward Tom momentarily, then returned his eyes to me. "Whatever," he said.

Tom didn't seem to take any offense by Marc's irritated remark, since it was fairly obvious Marc was only irritated with me. "Nine o'clock tomorrow night, then. See ya." And he opened the driver's side door to his van, got in, started it, and drove away.

The boy and I stared each other down for a good minute or two

longer.

"You've been getting sick a lot, lately," he said, finally.

"So?" I said.

"That doesn't worry you?"

But, instead of addressing the state of my 'worry,' I said, "I'll be OK," as if saying it would make it true. "Let's just go home, now."

It was some moments before he answered my implied question. When he did, it was obvious he'd given up and given in, because the stiff set of his shoulders had softened. "All right," he said. "I'm tired, too. Too tired to keep arguing with you. Come on girl," he turned toward the car, two spaces away, "I gotta work in the morning."

Then, as we were getting in the car to go home, I said, "I'm sorry, buddy."

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"For what?" I asked, because other than the fifty-thousand *other* reasons why Kerrilyn should be sorry, I couldn't quite put my finger on the one exact reason why at that very moment she might be feeling that way. I started the car; we closed our doors; I began to back up.

"For getting sick," she replied, voice contrite.

Once I'd backed out and made sure I wasn't going to hit anything, I took the opportunity to glance her way. "You used to hardly ever get sick, you know."

"I know," she said.

"I worry about you, is all. That was no simple little 'tummy ache' you had, back there. Something could be wrong."

She shrugged, "I've had these things before. It's no big deal." She tried to sound reassuring, "I'll be fine. OK?"

"I still would feel better if you went to the doctor, though."

She practically shuddered, I thought. "I don't like doctors."

By that time we had reached the street. "So I gathered," I said, being droll but not really angry, anymore. "I don't like them, either, but I still wish you'd reconsider."

She didn't seem very happy. "I really don't want to talk about this anymore, tonight." But, before I could complain, she said, "But, I will make you a deal."

"OK. What is it?"

"If it happens again, I'll go to the doctor and get checked out."

"You promise?"

She opened the window. Smoking time, apparently. "I thought that's what I was doing. Yeah, I promise."

"OK, then," I said, and the discussion was over for the night.

Later at home, she merely stripped down to her skin, her usual bedtime attire, and when I laid down on the bed she immediately crawled over on top of me. I wasn't really in the mood, but she massaged my penis with her hand until I was reasonably hard, then pushed herself onto me. She did all the work, clenching me tightly and slowly and gently pumping me until I finally came. We barely kissed the whole time. She seemed mainly intent on giving me an orgasm, because she came nowhere near one, herself. Once I came, she just gave me a quick, light, goodnight kiss and rolled off. She did snuggle up next to me, putting her arm over me in a friendly, familiar, Kerrilyn-way, then promptly fell asleep. I rolled over to face her, and buried my face in her voluminous, sweet smelling hair. If this was indicative of how things were going to be, then I decided that things could be a whole lot worse. Of course, I didn't know how much worse things were going to get.

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I felt pretty good the next morning. I woke up about nine or so, a little tired, but otherwise feeling hardly any trace of hangover. In fact, in light of my apparent return to complete good health, I decided to give Sheree a call and see what she was doing. If she could get away, I couldn't imagine a better time than to scoot off someplace with my girl, where we could maybe 'let our hair down' a little. Then maybe, too, I could find out just what the hell Tom's problem was.

So I called her about nine-thirty. "Hey, babe," I said when she answered.

"Oh, hi!" she piped. Good. She seemed very glad to hear from me. "What's happenin'?"

"Nothin' here, Sher'." I sat back on the sofa, flopping my feet up on the ottoman. I had thrown on a T-shirt when I'd gone out to the living room. So when I changed positions, then, I had to pull the bottom of it down over my newly exposed pubes so they could keep warm. "I just got up," I went on, "and thought I'd give you a call. See what you was doing later on, maybe."

"Hmmm," she said. "I dunno. What'd you have in mind?"

"Well," I said, "I was wondering if maybe you could play hooky from work, today."

She laughed, but said anyway, "I wish I could, Vix."

"So," I was immediately disappointed, and a bunch, "you can't get away from work?"

"No," and she sounded pretty bummed about it, too. "Sorry, babe. I can't." She explained, "We got an author coming in this afternoon, and I got a whole bunch of things I gotta do to get ready for him." She sniffed, "He a real asshole. Everything has to be *just so*, or he walks out."

"Christ! Why do you even put up with such an idiot?"

"Because this *idiot* makes us a lot of money, that's why."

"And you gotta deal with him."

"Yep. That's my job."

"Bummer."

"You got it."

"I'm real bummed, too," I told her, "that you can't get away, today."

"I'm sorry, Vix." Then she lowered her voice almost to a whisper, "I miss you. I really wish I could see you, today, but I can't." Then she returned to her regular speaking voice. "Maybe tomorrow. How's that?"

"I don't know if I can wait till tomorrow," I told her. I was feeling quite bold in asserting my feelings, so openly. I'd learned from experience that such confident optimism was very often punished, and severely.

"What time is this guy leaving, today? Maybe you could leave early, or something. I'd really like to see you." Then I whispered, "I love you, you know." Of course, there was no reason why I needed to whisper.

There was a pause of a few seconds, then she whispered back, "I love you, too, Kerrilyn." Then in her regular voice, "OK, babe. I'll see what I can do. Call you later?"

"OK, Sher'," I said, "Call me later. I'll be waiting."

"Sounds delicious," she said, and we said goodbye.

In a few minutes, then, I called Marc. "Marc Huffman," he said into the phone.

"Hey, buddy," I said.

"Good morning," he greeted me. There was a smile in his voice. That was good. "How are you feeling?"

"I'm feeling great!" I told him. "Just peachy. I'm not sick, anymore."

"Good," he said. But, "Isn't this kind of early for you to be getting up?" It was just past nine forty-five.

"Maybe," I said. "A little."

"So," he said back, "what can I do for you?"

Figures. "I dunno. Nothing." I spread my legs apart, slightly, getting the mood started, so to speak. "I was just sitting here all alone, thinking about you." I lightly touched the inside of my thigh, imagining it was Marc touching me. "Are you real busy, right now?"

"Not especially." He paused, sensing the change in my tone of voice, perhaps. He cleared his throat, "You do sound better, this morning."

My soft, breathy sigh was his answer.

"What are you doing?" I could imagine his consternation at not being there to see for himself.

I sighed again, feeling skillful fingers slip into me. I was being quite naughty, you know. "Oh, nothing. Just ... missing you, maybe." I moaned, then, very quietly.

"You're a mess, girl," he said, but he was interested in what his ears were telling him. "You're making me wish I didn't have to be at work, you know."

"Uh-huh," I said, distracted by my own 'handy-work,' "That's the general idea."

"I can't just leave work." He paused, "As much as I might want to, I have things I need to get done, today."

I pulled my fingers out that most private place. No sense getting carried away. Too soon. "Everyone seems to be having that problem, today," I complained, pouting, "Except me."

"Sorry, babe," he said, and I did detect a touch of regret in his voice, too. It helped. Not to make me feel any less lonely or neglected, but to reassure me that at least someone still found me attractive and desirable.

"I wish you could be here right now, buddy," I said.

"So do I," he said, trying to soothe me. Then amazingly, he said, "Why don't you give Sheree a call. Maybe she's not doing anything."

Ahem. What was that about? I just had to ask, "Are you actually suggesting I call a girl to take care of ... things?"

"No, of course not," he said. And I thought he was quite embarrassed when he realized what he had said. "Uh, I wasn't thinking of ... *that* ..." he was definitely embarrassed "... at all. I just meant that if you're feeling lonely," and he seemed to pause when he realized he had accidentally stumbled across another of my euphemisms for sex, "you could give her a call. To talk, maybe." He was doing his best to recover, I thought.

"OK," I said, "As long as you're sure that's what you meant."

He cleared his throat. "I'm sure, Kerrilyn." And the fun in his voice was gone.

"I'm sorry," I said, losing the mood completely, too. I decided to tell

him, though I wish I'd thought it through before I did. "I already called her, anyway."

And he went to the exact wrong place with it. "So, when she couldn't get away from work, you called me."

He wasn't too happy to be thinking he was only second banana in my bunch. Of course that wasn't at all the case, but my words could have certainly been taken that way. Damn it, fucked up, again! I tried to be patient, and neither angry nor defensive, "That's not how I feel about you. That's not it, at all."

He was silent. And that made it harder to go on, but I did, anyway.

"I did call her first, because I thought you'd probably be busy. You're never able to get away from the office."

There was a rather long pause, then he said, "But, you still called her, first."

"Come on, buddy!" I said, because things were sinking fast. "Why are you thinking this way? That's not how I feel about you, at all!"

He took several more seconds to think things over before answering, "You know, I think I really wanted to believe there was nothing going on between you two. Not really."

I suddenly found myself wanting to deny it, but also knew there was no point. He'd seen the truth ...

He continued, "But that's not the case, is it?"

What could I say, but "No, it isn't."

"Jesus, Kerrilyn."

"I know," I said, "I'm sorry." But yet, he'd been there, and he *knew*.

"Who started it? I really hate to be discussing this over the phone, but I have to know. Who started it? Was it you?"

I had to clear my throat, because I was suddenly close to choking up. "No. Sheree."

"Sheree." He seemed to consider that, then.

"Yes, Sheree. You saw what we did up there in their bed. Come on!" I just wanted to be sure his brain had actually been there when she was pawing, kissing, sucking, and loving on me, because his *body* had sure been there, poking me most rudely in the back.

There was another long pause, then he exhaled, a sigh. "This is pretty fucking unbelievable," he finally said.

Unbelievable? "What's there not to believe?"

"I guess I didn't realize how serious things were. And it *was* Sheree who made the first 'move'?"

"What do you mean, 'first move'?"

"The first time you and her ..."

OK, I get it, now. "Yes."

"When?"

"When—what? You mean, when was the first time?" It was déjà vu all over again.

"Uh, huh."

I had to cast back in my memory, though it had only been a little more than a week. "Memorial Day, the day after your party when you and Tom went off to play golf."

"What did you think when she came on to you?"

I answered quickly, "That wasn't how it happened."

"How *did* it happen, then?"

"We talked about it, I guess."

"OK," he said. "So, what did you think when she talked to you about it?"

"I was surprised, of course." But no, not really. I had suspected something on her mind for quite some time.

Then he said, "You lied to me." He sounded very disappointed. Of course, I suppose he had a right. I had lied.

"I know. I'm sorry, buddy, but I had to. I couldn't tell you what was going on, or it would've ruined everything."

He seemed to find that very ironic. "And everything is not ruined, now?"

But I felt pretty damn low when I answered, "I hope not. I don't want things to be ruined; it doesn't have to ruin everything, you know."

"So, does this mean you're bisexual? Is this something I'm going to have to contend with?" He lowered his voice, "Other women?"

"I don't know." I had to think, a moment. "I guess it must be true, but I really *do* like boys. I like *you!*"

"You told me that, before. I'm glad you like me."

"It's true. You don't got nothing to worry about, buddy." I hoped I was reassuring enough.

"Maybe I don't," he said, though he didn't sound very convinced of that fact, "but I do know someone who very likely does."

I thought a second. He was referring to Tom, of course. Yes, the shit was really going to hit the fan if Marc said anything to Tom. "Please don't say anything to Tom, about Sheree."

He sounded rather sardonic when he replied, "I wasn't planning to, but he probably already knows, *girl*. That's probably why he's been so ... quiet ... around you. He's probably ready to strangle your ass, but he knows he can't, or he'd be brought up on murder charges." Then he laughed, briefly, pointedly. "I might be tempted to do it, myself."

But I was angry, though, “Then why the fuck don’t you?”

He was quick with the answer: “We shouldn’t even be talking about this, but I don’t just strangle you because until a few moments ago I thought I was in love with you. Jesus Christ, Kerrilyn! This is one fucking huge fucked-up mess.”

I had to disagree. “I don’t think it’s as bad as you’re making it out to be.”

“It’s probably a whole lot worse.”

Then I had to spend some interminable moments thinking. What could I possibly say to fix things? Was it even possible for me to repair the situation? One that I’d sworn never to tell anyone about? Because I had known that if I did tell, everything that was happening right now would be happening, and there wouldn’t be anything I could do about it. What had I been thinking when I allowed Marc to be there in the bed with us when me and my girl made love? No matter that all we’d done was kiss, and pet, and touch. He had to know how we felt about each other. He had to know. And yet, he’d seen it and felt it for himself, but it hadn’t hit home until just a few moments ago. And now he was upset and angry, and making statements that called into question his very love for me.

I just had to know, then. “What did you think when you saw what we were doing up in their bed? I mean, she gave me a fucking sucker bite! She had her fucking fingers in my goddamn cunt! Didn’t that mean *anything* to you?”

He was quiet, calm, when he answered, “Kerrilyn, I didn’t see everything that happened. Maybe I was just pretending that nothing unusual was going on—I don’t know—but I guess I didn’t make the connection, right away.”

“I thought you knew about this. I thought you knew, and you were OK with it.” I was getting some energy back—picking up a little speed. “I don’t understand. Why is this such a problem?”

He sounded very surprised, “*You don’t understand?!?*”

I had to think. Well, OK. “All right, maybe I can see how you might be upset about this. But,” I still thought I had a point, “I still don’t know how you could have been there, and not know how she feels.”

He spoke very slowly, “I don’t know how, Kerrilyn.” He paused, “Maybe I just thought it was more casual than this.”

“More casual? *Geez!*” I had to admit to experiencing a slight disconnection of the universe, because I could have sworn that a *casual* affair would have been so much more damaging to me than anything else. “You would have been all right with this if it was nothing more than a *casual* thing?”

He backtracked, some, then. "That's not what I meant. I meant ..." he was having some difficulty finding the right words "... I meant that I guess I thought it was something that maybe *you* were more casual about." He seemed to consider how his words sounded. "Maybe that doesn't make any sense, but I guess I didn't realize that you could have feelings toward her, as well as her have feelings toward you."

"Well," I said, "the truth is that Sheree has very strong feelings toward me. And if I'd gotten into this thing as only a casual affair, then I'd have caused her a really huge amount of pain and hurt. I wouldn't have done it. I couldn't have done that. It would have crushed her." I paused to catch my breath. "I'm really sorry, buddy. I guess this is way more than you thought it was, but ..." I couldn't finish my thought, quite.

"Do you still love me?" he asked, then.

"*What?* You know I do. Yes, very much." Then I got a thought. "And so does Sheree, too."

That surprised him. "What do you mean, 'Sheree, too'?"

"Don't forget that ... *love bite* she gave you. Don't forget who gave it to you—or why—'cause I can promise you *she* won't forget it."

"I don't understand. What are you saying?"

"I dunno, Marc," I said, but I was on a roll. "Just that you better think twice before you go off telling Tom and the whole fucking world and everyone else about what you and me been doing with her, that's all."

"I haven't been doing anything with her, Kerrilyn. You have."

But I knew I that wasn't true. "I don't think so. We *both* been making love to her, and she's been loving *both of us* back." I waited just a moment, to let it sink in. "Face it, buddy, you're in this, now."

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Jesus, she may be right! What the fuck had I gotten myself into?