

Chapter 9

In the second week of December, after having rehearsed about two months, the band *Dancer* played its first gig, with me singing lead vocals. I think it was one of the most significant things to happen in my entire life. Well, certainly up to that point, anyway. It was also one of the most difficult things I've ever tried to do, as well. Before that, if I thought I had *any* idea of what it might take to be a professional musician, all my naive and foolish ideas were completely and summarily shattered when I stepped up onto the stage in front of that crowd, for the very first time.

Oh, yeah! I was nervous, all right. And ready to throw up, too. So, did I try to hide in the van? Did they have to come and find me when it was time to start? Did Marc forcibly drag me inside, then? Yes, I'm sorry to say, all those things.

Mel Howe, though, helped me the most in combating my stage fright. She seemed very calm, cool, and relaxed as we were getting ready to start. Here we were, both made up in short, tight, slinky, *sparkling* outfits, and I was so nervous I could hardly stand up. Standing there off to the side of the stage, well out of the way—and out of sight—of the crowd, all I could do was fret and chew on my lower lip, hugging myself around the waist. I shivered, too, but I wasn't cold. I couldn't see myself, but I'm sure my eyes and expression quite resembled that proverbial 'deer caught in the headlights'. There I was, just standing there transfixed, helplessly accepting my deadly fate. I thought I was going to *die!* If I hadn't peed three times already in the previous half hour, I'm sure I would've had to go again. I desperately wanted to run away and hide in the van, again, but Mel was right there watching me, making sure I couldn't get away.

Make no mistake, though. I *wanted* to sing in the band. I *wanted* to be a professional musician. I mean, I really like the word 'professional'. It has the right ring; the right sound. This performance was every bit a dream coming true for me. For the first time, here I was, actually picturing myself

singing in front of the band. Here I was, too, actually *doing* it. I could literally see myself up on the stage singing, as if I were out in the audience watching the performance. It made me almost dare to think of the term 'successful' in the same context with myself. Could I dare to be successful? Could I do it? I didn't know, but the deeply seated doubt that I might not accomplish this thing I wanted; that I might fail and make a total fool of myself—that nagging uncertainty was making me want to lose my lunch. That thought was purely *terrifying* me.

I looked at Mel, standing there so relaxed and confident, and silently, hopefully pleaded for some help in dealing with this nearly terminal case of stage fright. My first of many, I also might add. She only smiled, and lit a cigarette for me, making sure I got it to my mouth. And it wasn't easy.

I took a huge, *huge* drag off the cigarette, and breathed the smoke deep into my lungs. The ensuing nicotine rush was enormous, almost welcome, but the volume and strength of the smoke was much more than I could handle, so I started to cough my guts out.

"Take it *easy*, Kerry!" She put her arm around me, though mostly just to hold me up. I just gaped at her in anguish from my doubled-up, cramped position. Mel was so cool, so *supremely* confident, it made me wonder, but seeing this was also an immense help. "You'll be *fine*, Kerry." She patted me on the back, "Just relax."

Just relax. Relax; be cool. OK, I could try to chill out. Then, naturally, I thought about the first song. Oh, God! The first song!?! My mind was a complete blank, and I struggled, with yet even more rising fear, to suck breath into my lungs, wincing, "I can't remember the words to the first song!"

So calmly she asked, "What *is* the first song, anyway?" and suddenly I was more than terrified. I knew the song title, I thought, but this strange and coincidental memory lapse of hers reintroduced the severest of doubts in my mind. When I thought of the horrifying prospect that we were both going to walk up on stage, and *neither* of us were going to remember how to begin—I was in a complete, total panic.

"What do you mean?!? 'What is the first song?'" My eyes must have been very large, since she gave me the strangest look, her smile momentarily fading.

"I'm only kidding, Kerry!" Mel pulled me upright, rather forcefully. "I haven't forgotten the song, and neither have you." She poked me on the shoulder, "Think. I know you know it. Tell me what it is."

Thinking carefully, I took another deep, shaky drag off my cigarette. "Karla Bonoff, right?" Mel nodded, smiled. "'*You Got Me in Trouble, Again*'." My audition piece. My favorite.

“Right. And what’s the first line?”

I tried to focus, to relax enough to remember it. I *knew* I knew the first line. I had sung it probably hundreds of times. (Well, maybe not hundreds. But lots and lots, anyway.) That was the main reason we picked it as the opening number in the first place. It was something I knew, and knew *cold*. Well, at least I was supposed to know it cold. But standing there, with less than two minutes to go before we were to start, I wasn’t sure I could even remember the first line. Mel was waiting, and I wasn’t answering.

“Come on, Kerry. You *know* it.”

“I know.” I bit my lip, “I just can’t remember it right now.”

“OK,” she said. Marc and Tom were going up on stage, and it was going to be necessary for the two of us to join them, and real soon, too. Dancer was already on stage, doing some last minute tuning, and if Mel and I didn’t get our act together, they were going to start without us. That would have been all right with me, maybe, but I doubted it would have been OK with any of the others. After all, we *were* a band, and I was part of it. Mel leaned close to my ear, finally, and said, “Well, I wake up in the night now ...”

I was relieved. “That’s it!”

She smiled. “Just keep those words in your mind. And hum to yourself.” Her finger pointed at my chest, right between the boobs. “Feel it here. It’ll relax you, and help keep you from cracking the first note. Don’t worry about anything else.” She waved her hand, “Just pretend the crowd isn’t there. The lights will be bright, and it won’t be that easy to see them out there, anyway. And *don’t* forget the first line.”

I took a deep breath, bleeding off tension. “What first line?” I faked a panicky look, then laughed. It was working. I *was* less nervous, at least for the moment.

She punched me in the shoulder, shaking her head, and laughed right along with me. “Relax, Kerry. You know the song, and I know that you know you know the song, too. You know?”

I nodded, curtly, and took another, much less drastic puff on my cigarette. “I know.” I looked around, noticing what was going on, and repeated the litany. “Don’t think about messing up. Just think about doing it right.”

“Right,” she was nodding vigorously, “you got it. Now, let’s go do it!”

Somehow I managed to keep the first line focused in my mind. I thought of nothing else. Well, almost nothing else. I pretended the crowd wasn’t out there, as Mel had suggested. And she was right. With all the

lights in my eyes, it wasn't all that easy to see them, either. I could hear them, talking and laughing out there, but I simply pretended the entire universe consisted only of the area of the stage, and I made myself focus only on the things around me. The wires from the mikes; Dancer's electronics, all taped down around his mike stand; the two stage monitors positioned right in front of my mike stand; the little table off to my left holding all the various percussion instruments I played; *my* mike stand. And it held *my* microphone. With my head held down, so I wouldn't have to look anywhere but at the stage, I put my hand on my mike. Nervous, dazed and disconnected though I was, the microphone felt familiar, somehow. Concentrating furiously, I carefully pulled it free of the clip, and brought it close to my mouth. I could smell it. How odd! I smelled very familiar to me. It *was* my mike. My most excellent microphone. And the strangeness of this familiarity struck me so profoundly I presently realized I wasn't nervous anymore.

I looked over at Mel, to my left. She was adjusting some stuff on her keyboards, and looked up expectantly when she saw me. I smiled, but weakly, and she winked in response. I looked back at Marc. He was alertly looking around at the rest of us, his hands poised above his drums, ready to begin at any moment. I turned around, and looked at Dancer and Tom. Tom looked ready, and was looking at Marc. Dancer twisted one of his tuning screws, leaning down to listen carefully for the pitch. Then suddenly, he looked up, saw me looking at him, and struck the first chord.

In case anyone wonders, I made my cue. I remembered the first line. And once I sung the first line, I remembered the second line, too. In fact, though I did become nervous in a couple spots, especially at the spot where I first screwed up during my audition, I didn't miss *any* of my cues, or any of the notes. I made it through the song, and I didn't die, either. And, by the way, *Dancer* was very, very good.

I found by the second song my stage fright was mostly gone. I wasn't nervous or scared anymore. The others were truly excellent musicians, much, much better than rehearsal would have ever prepared me for. Things came out while we played that completely blew me away. I thought I had heard how good we could be, and I was sure we were pretty damn good, but up there on stage in front of that audience of a couple hundred people (they told me later that it was a comparatively large crowd, considering where we were performing), we were **electrifying**.

We were tight. *So-oo tight!* I think I was the only one who made any mistakes (at least that I could hear), and even *I* think I did pretty good, considering my lack of experience.

Dancer handled all the guitar parts. I think I said before that he could play as much as any two other guitar players, and that's roughly accurate. The cat's good. Very, very good. Despite his dick-brained attitude and basic, complete asshole personality, when he's on stage and playing in front of a crowd, he *really* comes alive and comes together. He hits every cue, plays every lick, and sings extraordinarily well—and all at the same time.

Mel Howe filled in the rest of the accompaniment, sounding like a whole orchestra at times, and then when called for, she backed me up singing. Our voices just seemed to work well together. Actually, I may be understating it, just a tad. But her coolness, though, is what I admired most.

You couldn't talk to Dancer before he started to play. He had his own form of stage fright, which he kept pretty well hidden by spending a *lot* of time tuning and retuning, and then by tuning again. You couldn't ask him to do anything if it was less than an hour before the show. But Mel Howe—she seemed never to show any nervousness or stage fright, at all. Mel was my best buddy when it came to fighting off that sick, jumpy, nervous feeling. She could joke around, laugh, talk, and distract me with such accomplished ease. It seemed like nothing ever fazed her, not in the slightest bit. And I think she realized, from that very first performance when I was literally dying of stage fright, that it was going to be her role to keep me together long enough to get started. And I can certainly tell you I want her to fulfill that role, too.

Marc and Tom may have had their own share of being nervous, of course, but they always had a lot to do. They handled most of the equipment, especially the sound system and the lights, and since they were both so perpetually busy with all the thousands of details of setting up, I'm sure they neither one had time to get really nervous. (Lucky them.)

But, that night, I was all right after the first song. Thank goodness for that. As I said, I did mess up—several times—but I just bit my lip and kept on going. Stopping really never seemed to be an option, so I just got used to 'carrying on' despite how badly I fucked things up. I also noticed, after awhile, that the rest of the band seemed to always follow me rather closely. If I missed a cue (and I *did*), they just kept on playing. After the end of the phrase they would just come back around like nothing had happened, and Mel would nod to help me start again at the right spot.

I guess one of the problems I *didn't* have was being out of key. I would never have thought of it as a serious consideration, especially, but in listening to other bands I soon learned some other vocalists *did* have

this problem. To hear them sing flat or miss pitches altogether made the advantages of being a singer with good pitch control particularly obvious. When I commented on it, they (the rest of my band) told me I was always excellent at staying on key. Like I said, I never thought too much about it, but I could actually sing an entire song *a cappella*, and end in the same key as I started. In fact, I've been told I have damn near perfect pitch, meaning I can 'hear' the notes in my head, and sing them without having to have someone play them first. It's strange how easy it is to take your talents for granted, especially when they're talents that others might envy.

The first set flew by. It was over before I realized it, and the audience was very appreciative of our performance. As we walked off the stage together, I was, to put it mildly, bouncing like a rubber ball. And as I stepped down onto the floor of the club, Tom was right behind me, and wrapped his arms around my shoulders. He almost lifted me off my feet as he whirled me to the side. I felt the warmth of his body and caught a whiff of his cologne. He did nothing to change my comfort level. I felt fine. Grinning, he leaned over and planted a big, wet kiss on my cheek.

"I'm in love!" He squeezed me, hard, then let go. "But I just had to tell someone, you know."

"Be careful who you tell that to," I admonished, "because they might just believe you."

"I don't give a shit," he gestured with his hand. "Sheree will just have to share."

I teased, "Oh, I wouldn't count on that." He laughed, and squeezed me again. But Mel Howe glided up to us, just then. Not wanting to leave her out, Tom unhooked one of his arms from me and wrapped her up, too.

"I just told Kerry I was in love," he told her, grinning, "and she told me to go to hell." He looked at me, then at Mel, again. "What do you say to that?"

She chuckled, apparently not taking him any more seriously than I was, and said, "I think I'd have told you to go fuck yourself, too."

Tom accepted that in the spirit it seemed to be intended, and firmly kissed Mel on the cheek, too. I could see that Mel liked Tom a lot, but she seemed momentarily more concerned for her bedmate, Troy Dancer. He was known not to have much of a sense of humor, about most things, and it's a shame, too. So Mel, gently and smoothly, taking care not to hurt Tom's feelings, wriggled free of his grasp, and having escaped, took me by the wrist.

"Come on, Kerry," she said, starting to pull me with her. I came free of Tom's arm, but then she stopped, suddenly, leaving me hanging. While

I watched, she turned to face him, placing her hand on his cheek, very briefly. I wondered what was going on—and tried to decide whether to go, or stay. I saw them share a look, one I was not completely privy to, and then the two of us, Mel and I, scooted off.

Once out of earshot, I ventured, “What was that all about?”

Mel took her time before answering. While I waited impatiently for her response, she casually fished out two cigarettes, one for each of us, and lit them both before considering my question. “I don’t want you to get the wrong idea,” she said, amid a cloud of smoke. “Tom Germaine and I are good friends. I like him a lot.” I shrugged, figuring I already knew as much—her statement didn’t tell me anything new. She finished, “I just wanted to be sure things didn’t get out of hand.”

Oh? That was curious. “Out of hand?”

“Yeah,” she nodded slowly, and puffed on her cigarette. “Well, I could be wrong, I suppose ...”

“I think you lost me, there.” I didn’t understand what she was saying.

“I thought he seemed a little too *friendly*, maybe.”

“Too friendly? It was just an innocent kiss on the cheek.” Then I thought, “I mean, he kissed you, too.”

She just puffed.

“Tom and I are just friends.”

“You sure?”

Then I was offended. “What do you mean, am I sure? What *exactly* is supposed to be going on?”

“Nothing, I hope.”

I had to think about what had just transpired between Tom and me. I saw absolutely nothing devious or unusual about what had happened, except for the look Mel had given him. And when I thought about that, I had to ask, “So what was that look you gave him?” I thumbed toward the stage, where Marc and Tom were stringing cables, or some such.

She shrugged, enigmatically, “Oh. Nothing.”

“Christ, Mel,” I had to shake my head, “you must be dreaming, or something. What Tom did was nothing.”

“So, he didn’t give your boob a friendly little squeeze right before I walked up?”

That completely floored me. But I had to think, anyway. Had he touched me on the boob? He could have, I suppose. And then I had to think even more seriously and studiously. Would I necessarily have noticed if he had? I had been fondled so many times, by so many men ... It seemed entirely possible that he could have felt me up, and I wouldn’t even have noticed. I just looked at her, dumbfounded.

"He did, didn't he?" She seemed rather certain.

I still just looked at her dumbly for several more seconds before answering, "He could have, I guess. I don't really think he did, but he could have." I felt a strange need to explain things, even though I knew I couldn't quite come forward with the real explanation. "I don't think he meant anything by it. I mean, it didn't offend me, or anything, so what's the big deal?"

"You don't think he could get the wrong idea from something like that?"

"Why would he get the wrong idea?" I didn't like her implication. "He knows I like Marc. And only Marc."

That seemed to satisfy her, somewhat. "As long as you're sure."

"Mel, you don't have to protect me, you know. I can take care of myself."

She remarked, pointedly, "I don't doubt it."

I growled, "What's that supposed to mean?"

But Mel almost laughed. "Don't blow a gasket, Kerry! I'm certainly not the pot to be calling *anyone's* kettle black, but you've never impressed me as someone who was terribly naïve about these kinds of things." She smiled condescendingly, I thought, "Blind, maybe, but not naïve."

Blind, my ass! "What am I supposed to be so goddamned blind about?"

"You haven't noticed how Tom looks at you?"

I was sure. "He doesn't look at me any particular way. We're friends."

She nodded, slowly. "Uh-huh." She took a puff. "He may be your friend, but I still think he'd like to jump your bones, if he got the chance."

But, all I could think to say, just then, was, "So what?"

"So, you tell *me* 'so what'."

So what, indeed! But, "You still haven't said what that look you gave him was all about." I got an idea, though. "If I didn't know better, I'd say you were setting yourself up to get your own bones 'jumped,' maybe."

She smiled, "Hmm, that's very perceptive." Her eyes said I'd been essentially correct in my assessment. "You're right. I was just reassuring Tom that if he was interested ..." she made a very slight shrug "... I was available."

Well, this was getting really old in a hot damn hurry! I *did not* want to know anything about hers—or *anyone's*—involvement with Tom, because I didn't want to have to hide anything the next time I saw Sheree. I couldn't (as I stood there) even *picture* hurting Sheree that way. She loved Tom so very much, and I knew without a doubt she had no room in her

life for Tom to be having an affair. I knew also, that for my part I wanted no part in or knowledge of Tom having an affair, either. None of it. Period. I had to catch my breath and light another cigarette before I could continue. "Why the fuck are you telling me this? I don't want to know about *any of it*."

"Well, I figured I should probably tell you—since it involves you." She lit another cigarette, as well.

"I don't believe it. **Fuck!**" I was *incredulous*. The implications were obvious. "This could break up the band!"

"You bet it could," she agreed, nodding, "but we aren't going to *let it*, are we?"

I was furious. "How is having an affair with Tom going to keep the fucking band together?"

"Look, Kerry," she said, calmly, "don't get mad at me. I was only trying to keep Tom away from *you*. If I don't, and Tom gets too friendly, Marc will almost certainly quit the band—and take you with him." The next was enunciated very clearly, "*And I don't want that to happen.*"

"I wouldn't quit the band," I said, very quickly, but I wasn't convincing. To either of us.

"Yes, you would, and I wouldn't blame you, either."

"Even if you and Tom get 'involved,' what would happen if Sheree found out? Wouldn't that mean Tom would have to quit the band? Wouldn't Marc quit then, too?"

"If Tom leaves, and I suppose it could happen, we would just have to find another bass player." She looked me squarely in the eye. "But Marc will stay. You and I can make certain of that."

I wasn't too sure of the 'you and I' part, but I accepted it as a possibility. "OK," I wanted to play this out all the way, anyway, "What about Troy Dancer? I *know* that boy won't put up with you foolin' around. He'd more likely run *you* out, than can Tom."

"No, Kerry, you're wrong about that." She shook her head, slowly, "He'd throw Tom out in a heartbeat. Boom. Gone, just like that."

OK, I guess I had to agree, considering their constant feuds. But I wasn't totally stupid, either. "Then, you're just doing this to get rid of Tom. Because, any way you look at it, he ends up losing—no matter *what* happens."

"You're wrong about that first part. I *don't* want to get rid of Tom. I *like* him." She stabbed the air with her cigarette. "I wasn't lying when I told you that. But, I think you just may be right about the last part. He *would* lose if something happens, and anyone else finds out."

But, I still wasn't satisfied. *Not at all!* "So why take the risk? You gotta

tell me this—why do you wanna go break up the band? I mean, we just got started!”

She sighed, and seemed to consider the possible truth in what I’d said. “Well, Kerry, maybe I’m wrong about Tom.”

I pounced, “I think you are.” But I was back to being very nervous, again, anyway. “Please, Mel, can’t we just leave this whole thing alone? I mean, don’t make any passes at Tom, and please, don’t try to protect me from him. I can take care of myself.” And I almost believed it, too.

“All right,” she seemed to agree, but sounded reluctant, nonetheless, “I won’t make any moves toward Tom. Of course, it’s not like I’ve already made any, either.” I nodded, OK, I guess I could agree with that. And she concluded, “But now you know, though. And you also know what will happen if he ever did make a ‘pass’ at you. So, *don’t let it happen.*”

But all this intrigue was finally getting to me. “Mel, answer me this, though. I’ve been around this whole time, and I’ve seen how Tom acts toward both you and me, but I’ve *never* seen him make a move toward either of us.” She just looked at me, patiently. “So, if things have changed, then where was I when all this was going on?”

“Kerry, child, trust me on this. You and Marc have been completely oblivious to nearly *everything.*”

I suppose it would have gone on, but it was time to start again.

The gig was a short one, only three sets, so there was only one more break. During the second break I made a special point of *not* talking to Mel—or Tom, either. Marc had things to do with the wiring, the lights, etc., so I just hung around him for the entire twenty minutes of the break. He seemed very pleased with the way the performance was going, as was I, and he winked and kissed me behind the ear when he finally had a second to catch his breath. I rather guessed what he was trying to tell me, and I was in basic agreement. (Fun later!) But the thing between Mel and Tom—and incredibly, **me!**—was very much on my mind, and I worried interminably about what might happen if Tom decided to take Mel up on her ‘offer’. It really pissed me off to think—no! to *know*—that she would still crawl in the sack with Tom, even knowing she could break up the band if anyone found out.

It didn’t matter what I’d said to her. I could see it in her eyes. It didn’t matter *at all* that she had agreed not to encourage him. I was certain if he wanted to get together with her after the gig, or anytime, for that matter, she would do it. Just friends. Indeed. Good grief!

Why she thought Tom was after me, I still had no clue. I would never have concluded that based on the fact he had put his arm around me—

boob feel or no boob feel. Marc certainly didn't seem worried, or jealous about it, either. And I know he saw us together, too. I wanted to trust Marc's instincts. He wasn't very secure or self-assured about our relationship, and if he didn't read anything into Tom's actions, then why should I? And furthermore, why should Mel? Why should she make such a big deal over it, and spend the whole first break talking to me about it? I hated to stir shit—unlike Melinda Howe, obviously—but I really needed to talk to Marc about it. Marc and Tom were best friends, and Marc would know. And besides, I really liked both Tom and Sheree. I'd really hate to see *anything* get in the way of our friendship.

Believe me.

I helped break down the equipment when we were done for the night. It gave me the opportunity to stick close to Marc, which I felt I needed to do. Tom, of course, helped us tear things down, since it was mainly him and Marc who'd put everything together. Tom seemed happy and friendly, but if I were any judge, he seemed a little quiet, as well. I know I was thinking heavily about everything Mel had told me, but maybe I was just reading something extra into Tom's mood. He didn't act 'too friendly' with me, at all. He seemed relaxed and casual—not the slightest bit nervous or jumpy. Of course, I couldn't say quite the same thing about me. All the intrigue and innuendo over 'who wanted to have an affair with whom' weighed very heavily on my mind. Very heavily. We untaped the cables, unhooked the amplifiers, got the PA speakers down off their stands, and unplugged all the stage lights. The three of us, Marc, Tom and I, together did all the work. I really enjoyed the chance to do something useful, instead of just feeling like a fifth wheel all the time.

Mel Howe was pretty quiet after the gig, as well. She did tear down her own stuff, which took a little while. I tried to help her, but she waved me off, telling me she could take care of her own equipment. I'm not sure there was anything going on with her, but she wasn't in the mood, obviously, to hang around with us. Of course, I wasn't surprised by this, either. Since she'd told me she wouldn't do anything to lead Tom on (not that he was expecting any such thing), with all four of us climbing around on the stage there was exactly zero opportunity for Mel to get Tom aside. Tom certainly didn't seem interested in getting Mel aside, so by the time we finished, I was feeling pretty well pleased, on the balance.

Where was Dancer during the teardown? He put his own guitar in its case, unplugged his amplifier, and left. Curious that he should be leaving without helping us, I asked Mel where he was going.

"Oh," she said, "he practically never helps tear down the equipment."

Of course, I said to myself, he doesn't help set it up, either. She went on, "When he's finished for the night, he usually just puts his own stuff away and splits." She shook her head. "It *has* pissed a lot of people off. Unless you all think you can convince him why he should help set up, and then stick around to tear down, you're just going to have to get used to it."

"Actually," I finished tying off a mike cord and tossed it into the pile at the edge of the stage, "I don't really care. As far as I'm concerned, Troy Dancer is basically worthless." But I then realized I had quite possibly insulted his 'girlfriend'. I wouldn't have liked it if someone had said that about my 'lover'. "I'm sorry, Mel," I told her, hanging my head. "I didn't mean to trash your 'boyfriend'." (I put the word in 'quotes' because I wasn't quite sure of their relationship.)

She stopped a moment, looked at me, then over to where Dancer had stood during the performance. She shook her head, but smiled, "Apology accepted. But you're right, though."

"About what?"

"It doesn't say very much about me." I saw her smile fade. "I mean, my choice of a lover."

I had to agree. Something in the back of my mind woke up and wiggled, and I knew both the right and the wrong of what she was saying. I'm glad we let the conversation drop after that.

When Mel was done with her keyboards and amplifier, Marc and Tom helped her carry all her stuff out to the van. It took them two trips, and after the second trip, only Marc and Tom came back inside. I asked Marc where Mel was. He said only that she had gone home. I relaxed then, because that left just Marc, and Tom, and me. And I think I rather liked it that way, too.

I've often thought of them as 'my two guys,' and it seemed fitting and proper that it should be the two of them and me putting the last of the equipment away. When we were finally finished, the three of us just piled into the van and drove away.

"Where are we going?" Tom asked, turning briefly so he could look at me. He was driving, I was in the passenger's seat, and Marc was perched on the edge of one of Mel's keyboards, wedged between the two front seats. I said nothing, right away, since I was busy lighting a cigarette. Marc, too, said nothing as he held out his hand for one, so I pulled another out of the pack and lit it for him, as well. "Well?" Tom prompted, again.

"I don't care," Marc said. He surveyed us both, Tom and me. "I'd say 'let's party!'"

I took a puff off my cigarette, still thinking and trying to decide

whether or not to say anything about what Mel Howe had told me. Otherwise, I watched Tom drive. For the next few minutes no one said anything, but it was me who eventually broke the silence. "You know me," I joked, self-deprecatingly, "I'm *always* ready to party."

There was another pause, then, and both of us, Marc and me, seemed to be looking at Tom. He finally chuckled. "Me, too. Where's the dope?"

Marc pointed me in the direction of the glove box, and I dutifully fished around in it a few moments. I found three joints altogether, and brought out the most likely looking one for us to light up first. Then I got the honor of lighting it, and we passed it around, each getting good, deep hits, to settle back and let the high come on. It was, as usual for Marc, very high quality dope, and I know I expected to obtain a very high quality buzz from it, too. Between lazy, solemn tokes, I continued to puff on my cigarette. I wanted a beer, or something alcoholic like it, and after a few minutes of solemn toking, I asked about it.

"I need a beer," I said to no one in particular.

"So do I," Tom answered.

"Well, then," Marc said, "it's unanimous." He looked at us, I looked at him, and Tom looked back at the two of us. Marc laughed. "Did anyone think to bring the beer, maybe?"

"Certainly not you," Tom chided.

"Hey!" Marc protested, "I thought enough to bring the dope, asshole. Can't you do something once in a while?"

Tom laughed, too. "Oh, right! Like I didn't have anything important to do. All I did was load all the fucking equipment in the van."

"Not *all* of it, son." Marc passed the joint to Tom.

"Maybe not," he took the joint, toked, and said while holding the smoke in, "but most of it."

"Next time," I spoke up, then, "if you'll give me the money," I poked Marc, "I'll get the fuckin' beer."

"All right," Marc grinned, and poked me back. I giggled and squirmed in my seat. "It's a deal."

"So, where are we going?" Tom asked us, again. "Are y'all hungry?" I looked at Marc, and we both nodded, and said we were. "Fine, then. Where do y'all want to eat?" There was silence, again, a few moments.

Then I got an idea. "Let's go up to the lake."

Tom passed the joint, which was getting quite small, to me. I carefully accepted it, and took a good hit. Yes, I was definitely beginning to feel the effects. It was warm, and friendly, and was making me *very* horny, per usual. I passed the joint on to Marc, and for the moment kept my horniness to myself.

"It's OK with me," Marc said, and took possibly the last large hit, "but my car is at the fucking studio."

"Do you want to stop by and get it?" Tom asked. Marc was putting the joint on a clip, and messed with it while he thought. Then Tom got an idea. "This is all I got," he said, meaning the van, "since Sheree's car is at the airport." Sheree was out of town, and wasn't due back until the following afternoon. "I got to bring the equipment back down to the studio tomorrow morning, anyway, so why don't we all just ride up in the van?" He turned around, since we were at a traffic light.

Marc continued to think. He knew I didn't care what we did, since I would be riding regardless, but I think he was worrying about getting together with me later on for a little 'foolin' around'. I deduced this partly from my knowledge of Marc, and partly from the way he was looking at me. He had that certain look; that certain smile—that certain wink. It was pretty obvious what he was thinking.

Tom was back to driving, again. With Marc's full attention on me, and Tom's attention on the road, I decided to tease the boy a little. I ran my hand slowly down the inside of my thigh, and very slightly arched my back. He followed my hand, then, as I brought it up and slowly slid my index finger into my mouth. I closed my eyes and gave poor ole Marc a sample of what might be in store for him, later. Oh, I was *so bad!* I felt sexy as hell, and the look of rapt attention and breathless anticipation Marc was giving me brought delicious warmth and copious slippery lubrication to my pubes. I had a sudden urge to just forget Tom, and the van, and everything else, and just slip my panties off for him, knowing he would really enjoy it, but that thought brought back a memory that shocked me very coldly back to reality.

I was scared, and for a few seconds I couldn't understand why. I felt my sexual ardor drain away, to be replaced by a cold, clammy sweat, and a shapeless, dark fear. I must have stopped sucking my finger. I think I was staring at Marc, who was just becoming aware that something was wrong. His look of helpless incomprehension probably matched my own.

Marc held his hands up and gave me a questioning look, silently asking me what was wrong. I think I was breathing heavily and raggedly, my finger still in my mouth, and with a certain degree of embarrassment, I let it slowly slip out. I was afraid, almost terrified, and though I think I knew why—though I must have known what scared me so—I just sat there alone in the darkness and could not escape it.

I remembered eyes. Dark eyes, wild eyes—insane eyes. Those eyes bored into me, and contemplated my rape as I lay exposed, vulnerable, naked. I could feel the mind behind those eyes, remember the tearing of

my clothes, the rending of my dress. If I resisted, they would smile, and force me with dark, animal grunts of satisfaction. If I didn't resist enough, they would anger and bring fists to hit me—hurt me even more. They wanted to penetrate me, to spread me out and violate me, harm me. **Rape me.**

Hide! I wanted to find a hole I could crawl in and hide! Escape from the hideous insane malevolence of those eyes. But I wasn't strong enough. I wasn't smart enough—*determined* enough to get away.

I got a flash, then, of a scene from somewhere else very deep in my memory. I smelled an old sofa. Dusty, mildewed—the vague odor of very old beer, vile human excrement, urine. It was all around my face! I was suffocating! I couldn't breathe! I struggled, panicking, and tried to twist my face away from the rough fabric that smothered my nose, my mouth, covered my eyes. I strained with all my might, twisting my head though hands held me down—held my head to the sofa cushion.

I tried to kick with my legs, but huge weights pinned them down, too. I felt something lace sharp pain across my behind. I felt it hit me, again, sharply. Almost thankfully, I became partially numb, only tingling, unfeeling of the blows. Then something huge, hot, and truly horrible to my mind was rammed mercilessly between the cheeks of my ass. It hurt! **Oh God! IT HURT!!** I screamed into the sofa cushion, emptying my lungs and raising my level of panic even more. It rammed me again, and the pain, almost too much to bear, doubled. I felt I was being torn apart—split in two by the horror penetrating me! I fought the arms, twisted and kicked, and fought and screamed, and tried and tried ...!!!

(*Oh, help me, God!*) I was gasping, but not getting any air. I was struggling, but not getting free. I was brutally rammed again, and I know I was passing out. There was only one thought, only one hope going through the fog of my mind as I lost consciousness—I hoped I was dying. I prayed to God that He was going to let me die.

The whole memory lasted less than a minute, and then I was back again in the van, in the dark with Marc and Tom. It was cold—I was frigidly cold—and my light jacket wasn't going to be nearly enough to stave off the chilling reminders of the past. I looked around, saw Marc's kind, concerned face, and was a little less afraid, then.

I could see how worried he was for me. He was obviously confused at my abrupt change in mood, and when he put his hand on my shivering knee, I placed my own hand over his. He felt warm and gentle, but in contrast my hand felt cold, clammy, a horrible skeleton's paw. I was shaking uncontrollably, and he noticed.

"What's wrong, Kerry?" Marc asked, whispering. But I couldn't say

it. Though I certainly had a sizable high going off the marijuana, it wasn't enough—it wasn't going to be nearly enough—to put my memories away.

"I need a drink," I gulped, pushing my fear back. I looked at him, eyes large. "*Bad,*" I told him.

"Are you sure?" I think he said.

Tom, though, was in agreement. "I sure could use a cold beer," he said, and it was apparent he had no knowledge of what had just transpired. I'm not even sure *I* understood it, but the fear and the very bad feelings were fading, thankfully dimming, and the terrifying memories that had surfaced to nearly destroy me all over again, were slowly and painfully returning to the deep, dark holes where they lived.

"God Marc," I whispered, then spoke aloud, "*I really* need a drink."

Chapter 10

When we got to the house around two AM, it was both cold and dark. There was no one at home, of course, since Sheree was in Minneapolis until Sunday afternoon. Tom, to attempt to make the place more livable, went immediately to start a fire in the fireplace, and I went to the refrigerator to get us all beers. Kerry, however, had a slightly different idea on the subject of alcohol. She searched, immediately found a bottle of scotch in the kitchen cabinet, and promptly poured herself what must have been at least a triple. She wasn't even going to use any ice, at first, but I saw what she was doing and dropped a couple cubes in the glass for her, anyway. She thanked me, saying ice wasn't really necessary, and downed the booze in a single gulp. I couldn't imagine how she could do it, so easily, but it was a somewhat familiar scene.

Tom was a few minutes getting the fire lit, but it wasn't really all that challenging since the fireplace had a gas starter. I returned to the living room, while Kerry stayed in the kitchen, starting on her second triple scotch. I handed Tom his beer, and we sat on the cold stone hearth and waited for the flames to grow.

"Is Kerry upset about something?" he asked me, quietly, nodding in her direction.

"Apparently," I surmised, just as quietly, "but I don't have any idea what it is." I took a sip of my beer, slowly. "When we got in the van I thought she was fine. You heard her. I thought we played pretty good, tonight."

He agreed, "We did." Then he thought, "Did you say something to upset her, maybe?"

"In the van?" I was a little defensive, and my voice got louder, "You were there. Did *you* think I said anything?"

Tom made 'get quiet' motions with his hands. "Hey man, I'm not accusing you of anything." It was obvious he didn't want to get between

Kerry and me. "But I do worry about her sometimes, though."

"I worry about her, *too*, Tom." It made me feel inadequate being cross-examined this way. "I don't understand how she can change so quickly, from one moment to the next. When we got in the van she was fine. Then poof! ... all of a sudden, she can't wait to get smashed. I don't understand it."

"She's unhappy about something, isn't she?"

"What do *you* think?" I looked over toward Kerry. Our vocalist, paying no attention to us, was in the process of downing her third huge scotch. If I didn't intervene, and soon, it couldn't be very long before she would be passed out, drunk. And I found myself wondering, and not either for the first or last time, if she might just be trying to kill herself with the booze. Sadly, I thought, if it were true, then one of these days she just might succeed, too. "I'd better pull her away from that bottle before she empties it." Tom only nodded.

I got up and went back into the kitchen. Kerry was standing there, glass in one hand and scotch bottle in the other. Not really knowing what to do—or even if I should do *anything*—I pulled the bottle out of her hand and made her come with me. She resisted, but she was already quite smashed and didn't seem to have her full desire in it anymore. For the moment lacking a better plan, I took her to the couch where I could 'hold her down,' or something. She wanted her bottle, but I refused her, and forced her to sit with me awhile. Feeling less and less interested in her all the time, I put my arms tightly around her and forcibly held her there.

Well, she didn't have a lot to say. Mostly, she just wanted to get drunker, and as such, the extent of our conversation was limited to her asking for another drink, and me telling her to just relax and take it easy. Actually saying 'no,' which I tried the first couple times she asked for more booze, only made her angry and resentful of my interference, so I changed my tack and simply told her to relax and take it easy. Eventually, she did calm down. Eventually, she seemed to fall asleep, and I was very glad.

I decided I wasn't upset she had gotten drunk. I don't know, maybe I was sympathizing with her, or just trying to be more tolerant, or something. Actually, the whole weird mood she'd gotten herself into made me want to get drunk, too, and I drank about four or five beers while Kerry peaceably dozed next to me.

The fire was roaring in the massive stone fireplace, and Tom turned the lights off so we could all sit and watch the fire. He joined us on the couch, sitting just on the other side of Kerry, and she continued to sleep without stirring. He and I talked about the gig, planned new songs we

were going to do, discussed Mel Howe and Troy Dancer, and eventually got around to discussing Kerry. I don't remember exactly what we said about her, but evidently she wasn't quite as soundly asleep as previously imagined, and in time 'awoke' to comment on our conversation.

"Talkin' 'bout me?" *The girl* swiveled her eyes blearily up to look at me. She held her stare a couple seconds, then swiveled to stare at Tom.

Tom laughed, "Thought you were asleep, girl."

"Not quite," she said, slurring the words slightly, but noticeably. Tom looked at me; I just shrugged. She turned to me, again, "I'm awake *now*, buddy," and ran her hands through her hair, pulling it back out of her face, "an' I'm horny as **fuck!**"

Of course, that got our complete attention.

Tom cleared his throat, raising his eyebrows at me. I said nothing right away, sort of hoping she was just trying to be funny, or something. Considering her condition—very drunk—I seriously doubted it was her intention. And unfortunately, I wasn't wrong.

I felt Kerry's hand snake its way into my lap, and slide down the inside of my thigh. I wouldn't have thought much of it—except perhaps for Tom's presence—but when I looked down I noticed she had her other hand on the inside of *Tom's* thigh, too. For a second he seemed afraid to look at me. There was no way we were going to look at Kerry, or acknowledge what she was doing, in any way. He noticed me looking at him over the top of Kerry's head, and gave me a look that I understood. I tried to return the same look, one of a certain amount of helplessness and inability (or maybe unwillingness), to be in control.

I felt Kerry's hand move. She ran her fingers deep into my crotch, moving down to caress my balls through my jeans. She rolled her palm across my penis, curling her fingers around it, measuring it with satisfaction from base to tip, and then slowly, carefully, sliding her hand back down toward my knee. And yes, she seemed to be doing it to Tom, too. I guess there could be little doubt, now, of her intentions. It was *more* than weird. I say that, because, odd as it was, and even stranger than true, it wasn't the first time the two of us had been in this type of situation. I mean, something resembling this had happened before—to us, Tom and me. And a girl. And alcohol. And dope. Uh, and sex, too.

As I said, this was *weird*. I wasn't excited. I don't think Tom was, either, but I didn't exactly ask him.

I can't explain it. I was powerless to stop Kerry. Maybe I didn't want to stop her. Maybe I wanted her to go on. Maybe I wanted to see what she would do. I don't know. I don't think I quite believed what was

happening. Twice in one lifetime? It's like lightning striking. It just doesn't happen to us mortals.

The first time we were both, of course, drunk and stoned. So was the girl. Tom wasn't married then, actually, not even close—we were both still in high school—so at the time neither of us had any good reason for preventing the inevitable from happening, whatever 'it' was going to be. But the first time, too, neither of us knew the girl, and we also knew that neither of us would ever have to deal with her, again. You can do anything, sometimes, if there's no price to pay the next day.

This second time, since we were both having the same attack of déjà vu and couldn't claim *any* ignorance, we really should have stopped her. One of us, at least. I think I thought Tom was going to intervene. I think Tom thought I should, since Kerry was my girlfriend. I already said I was powerless, and for his own reasons, Tom just didn't stop her ...

Kerry levered herself up off the couch, somewhat unsteadily, but not nearly as wobbly as I expected her to be. She walked over to the fire, shedding shoes as she went, and stood there facing it, arms out wide to soak up all the bright warmth it radiated.

"I love this fire," she called out, quite loud enough for us to hear clearly. "It warms me all up inside!" She hugged herself briefly, then put her hands on her head and rocked back and forth, apparently lost in some dream or fantasy all her own. Us two dummies just watched her, dumbly.

She started a kind of dance. At first it was difficult to grasp the meaning of what she was doing, but in a few moments it became evident that she was, indeed, very horny, and was starting some kind of bizarre mating dance. I'd never seen anything like it before, and it's only in retrospect that I realize what it was. It was designed and intended to get our attention. And, it was working.

Kerry hugged herself again, threw her arms out, spun around on her toes and flipped her long, red-glowing hair over her shoulder and then from side to side. She hummed to herself (or maybe to us, I don't know) and began to sing a lilting, lyric tune—the words unknown and indistinct—as she pirouetted sensuously in front of the fire. I hazarded another look in Tom's direction, and he looked back at me. I saw a combination of things in his face. A look of uncertainty (certainly); a look of unhappiness (I think); a look of desire for Kerry (which I understood, but found hard to take); a look of questioning—questioning me for some direction or guidance. Damn it, I was clueless for an explanation, and completely incapable of acting in a sane, rational manner. I mean, I was stoned, bordering on being drunk, as was Tom (I think), and Kerry—dancing there in the darkness and in the red-hued glow of the fire—was

certainly both stoned *and* very drunk. Kerry, whose thoughts and motives were lost to anyone and everyone, was loosening up in a most amazing way, and was preparing to reward her 'two favorite guys' with more than a quick little feel and a simple firelight dance. Her intentions were to become completely known in just a few moments ...

As she danced, she casually reached behind her and started to unzip her dress. I don't know if I had expected it, or if I was surprised, but I remained glued to my spot on the couch, regardless. The zipper came all the way down, and she took a moment in her sinuous gyrations to slip the dress off her shoulders and down to her waist. I almost missed it when it hit the floor and was kicked away, leaving my girl Kerry dancing in her bra and half-slip. The slip was very soon slipped off, and joined the dress in a heap.

Then Kerry stopped dancing, momentarily.

She regarded herself, standing there in front of the fire, in pantyhose and bra. There's no elegant way to remove pantyhose while you're dancing. In fact, there's really no elegant way to remove them, at all.

She didn't take long to decide what to do. They had to go, and she slid them down to her ankles just as fast as she could manage. Then another type of 'dance' ensued, with her working the clingy, elastic garment off her feet, but despite her trouble, she eventually managed to be rid of the nylon nuisance, leaving her only in her lacy white bra and skimpy, lace bikini panties. She stopped a moment, and ran her hands through her hair again, arching her back and showing off her most ample curves in the glow of the fire. She placed her hands sensuously on her thighs, and brought them slowly up, up, up, until each delicately cupped a breast. She held her breasts up with her hands, and seemed then to grin at us. Maybe it was only a trick of the light—or my drunkenness. Her dance resumed then, more energetic than ever.

Around and around she whirled, arms and hair flying, and she hummed and sang and stretched and kicked—it was quite a performance. (I wondered if she was at all conscious of what she was doing, and not just blacked-out. I wondered, too, that even if she *had* been conscious, would it have mattered?) So far, she had not gotten down to any *true* nakedness, but I'm pretty sure both Tom and I expected some skin at any moment. Thank God for the alcohol, I guess. And the dope. Without them, I'm sure I would have stopped the performance. I don't know, maybe I *should* have stopped the performance, but I didn't.

I know it's hard to understand my attitude. In truth, I'm not too sure I understand it, myself. At the time, I know I didn't think I owned Kerry, if indeed there ever has been a time since that I could truly say I did.

Furthermore, I was pretty drunk, stoned, and also horny, myself, and Tom's presence notwithstanding, Kerry was beginning to excite me. Oddly, I found it very easy to forget he was even there, and just let myself go, and become thoroughly involved in all the festivities. If he reacted the same way I did—well, then—he reacted. In a perverse way, I was proud of my horny little vixen dancing for us up there in the warmth of the fire. If she could excite and please us, then it was to her credit that she could. Consequences were for tomorrow morning.

Stop her, maybe? I suppose so, but it was *far* more fun just to sit back and watch. Who knows, maybe she had talents I'd only dimly dreamed of existing in a girl. Was I going to lose her to Tom? I didn't think it likely, since Tom was already taken by another woman—and married to boot. Was I threatened by her obvious interest in Tom, then? Maybe a little, but as I said, he was already taken, and in some strange way it made him seem safer. Was I going to freak out and leave her out on her own come the next morning? Sitting there on the couch next to Tom, and watching this girl that I thought I knew dance her dance of lust and desire—I had absolutely no idea. In all truth, I did not give it a thought.

During all of Kerry's dancing and disrobing, she had not overtly acknowledged us, or spoken to us, either. It was indisputable that her little show was for our benefit, but we had remained completely passive up to that point. That passivity was, however, about to be denied.

She seemed to have a plan, almost. She slowed her frantic twirls and the sensuous dips and flips (of her hair), and brought her arms in close to her body, wrapping them about her waist and lowering her head. She bounced and swayed and rocked, and seemed to be inspecting her toes. Her back was to us, mostly, but she slowly and purposefully turned to face us, to look at us directly. As she turned, I realized she had unhooked her bra (from behind) and as she brought her head up, the bra fell away from her breasts. In a dramatic sweep, she brought her arms out and away from her midsection, and as she did, the bra flew off into the darkness. In the flickering glow of the fire, I could just barely make out that her large, lovely nipples were massively erect and protruding, and I found both them—and her—quite erotic. Kerry slowed, then stopped, and ended by simply standing and looking at us. Her eyes, mostly dark and hidden, were nonetheless trained upon both Tom and me. Her expression was, however, and true to form, blankly unreadable, but her words were not.

"I want you both," she demanded, panting a little, though her words were clear and direct. "I love you, and I *want* you. I want you both. I want to make love to you. I want to *fuck* you both!"

She held out her hand. At first I thought it was for me, but I noticed

(at the last second) that she had almost imperceptibly turned toward Tom and was inviting him up into the glow of the fire. Tom noticed it, as well, but he didn't do anything about it. Instead, he just looked at me, again.

With his eyes he asked me what to do. I could see his uncertainty even more plainly than before, but I had already decided to check out of the conscience department for the night, and my helpless and indefinite expression told him what he needed to know. Or rather, what he had hoped he wouldn't discover.

For me, that night, Kerry was just another person. I no more had the power to control her than I had the power to make her stop drinking. I no more considered stopping her from doing whatever she was going to do with Tom, than I would have stopped her from doing something with me. And I would not have stopped her from doing *anything* with me—at all. Tom was completely on his own, as far as I was concerned. I hated to see him do anything to hurt Sheree, since I loved her dearly, but Tom and I were thicker than any marriage. If Tom decided to have an affair with another woman, under the circumstances, I was not going to get in the way and cloud up the moment with a lot of moralizing. Especially if I didn't really believe half the things I would have ended up saying. No mistake, I was having a moral dilemma, but I knew well enough (at least) to leave others alone to deal with their own moral dilemmas, in their own way. Kerry became Tom's business the moment she held her hand out to him. I loved her, it's true, but I would never presume to own, control or prohibit the precious wantonness she exhibited, lest I in some way diminish her.

Call me stupid, call me crazy, call me an asshole, call me less than a man—I don't care—at the bottom of it all I still wanted to see what she would do.

Tom stood up. I'd have been shocked if he hadn't. I think he had come to a decision, and I sincerely hoped he had come to the right one. For him to risk losing Sheree was a truly serious consideration, and to risk breaking up the band was its own most serious consideration. Hell, even to risk losing me as a friend might have been something to consider. But Tom had already seen in my look all he needed to know, as far as the safety of my friendship was concerned. There was to be no risk with me. The rest, well ...

He went to her, and she enveloped him in a tight, heady (I'm quite sure) embrace. *The girl* has the feminine power to sway almost any man, and I was not at all surprised to see he responded to her almost as well as I did. And would have.

As I watched, he bent over and kissed her. His stoop wasn't nearly as

pronounced as with his wife, but Kerry was still almost a foot shorter and had to go to her tiptoes to meet him properly. I was affected by watching them kiss, but it did not make jealous or insecure. I felt I was in effect giving Kerry to Tom, and since he was accepting my gift, I wasn't worried about it.

Kerry's hands roamed his back, feeling the muscles and size of his tall, athletic frame. They continued to kiss, and their kisses lengthened and deepened, and his hands, originally placed around her shoulders most conspicuously chaste, began to move down and explore the contours of the female body molding itself most closely to his. He slowly and gently squeezed the cheeks of her ass, and in automatic response her leg came up to wind its way around his thigh. She pushed against him, in a rhythmic, rocking motion that could mean only one thing, and as I observed this redly lit spectacle, I noticed the size and urgency of my own erection making itself known.

Kerry pulled away from him, suddenly. I thought something had happened, but she only wanted a better position from which to undo his belt and zipper—which she did—and in a moment she frantically pushed his pants toward the carpet. As they went past his knees, she went to her knees, and in a flash she whipped his shorts down. It caught Tom by surprise—hell, it caught me by surprise!—but Kerry, she was intent and insistent upon making love to Tom.

Tom was between Kerry and me. All I could see in the relative dimness of the fire's glow was his back, and the back of his bare ass. Not exactly the most preferred position, certainly. Kerry's hands momentarily went to the place where my eyes were focused—on Tom's ass—and then they disappeared around to the front. Things were quieter, then, and in the sudden stillness, I heard Tom let out a sound. A moan, clearly sexual in nature. It was then I concluded she was fellating him—sucking him. I even heard a wet smack, now and then, and his grunts confirmed it. I smiled drunkenly to myself, since I was almost certainly next. She and I had done it before, many times, and it was (in my drunken and stoned estimation) worth the wait. It's almost unbelievable, I know, to say something like that. I should have been so ashamed, so contrite at my own moral turpitude. But I was horny as hell and all I could see before me was Miss Right—or at least Miss Right Now. I relaxed, and waited patiently for the inevitable explosion when Tom came. And I didn't have to wait very long. Poor Tom.

After he called out, orgasming at Kerry's expert manipulations, several moments passed while nothing happened. She didn't pull away from him immediately, and neither did he move. Patient though I might

have been a minute or two ago, I was getting a little anxious at the sudden and (apparently) unnecessary lull in the action. If Kerry was finished with Tom, then I wanted her. That she could be lingering with him longer than absolutely necessary, brought out some particularly uncomfortable feelings. Though moments before I had been content to 'share' Kerry with Tom—my best friend by far—now I was beginning to feel left out and second best. That 'second best' feeling, then, brought out other, older, worse feelings that threatened to overwhelm me and completely destroy the mood. I wished Kerry would come to me, and very soon. Any further delay would be deadly to us. Just deadly.

But I was only letting my mind carry me away. In a few seconds, Kerry and Tom separated, and she rocked back on her heels, hands on knees. I heard her say something to him, but it was pitched too low to make out all the words. It sounded like 'I really enjoyed that,' or something to that effect, and I saw her smile devilishly. Tom's response must have been nonverbal, since I completely missed it. She held up her hands, and he hauled her to her feet. Tom, with his pants and shorts down around his ankles, sheepishly turned toward me. Whatever else I was thinking and feeling, none of it was directed toward Tom, and I hoped my expression communicated that much. Of course, it's hard to look smooth and in control when you've got your pants all wadded down around your ankles.

Kerry kissed him very briefly, once again on tiptoes, and slowly walked over to where I slouched on the couch. I saw a smile and a twinkle in her eyes, and they warmed and excited me to the point I completely forgot my unease and fears of only a few moments ago. Of being 'second best'. I saw that in Kerry's eyes, at least, I was the one. The best one, the one you save for last. And as she approached and held her hand out to me, I was feeling more ready than ever.

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Until I woke up there on the couch snuggled between Marc and Tom, I don't think I ever gave any serious consideration to what Mel and I had discussed during the first break, at the gig. The thought that Tom might be interested in me hadn't even crossed my mind until she brought it up, and after that I think I really never thought of anything else. I got pretty drunk, I know, once we got to Sheree's and Tom's house, and in a little while I fell asleep there all cozy in front of the roaring fire.

Distantly I heard my name, as if I were dreaming it. Momentarily, I realized it was Tom's voice, and I wasn't dreaming. Awakened, but without stirring, I listened to them talk. They were discussing me, and I had to suppress a smile when I heard them say how good they thought I was. I know it seems pretty strange, but Marc and I had rarely spoken to each other about my singing, at least as far as what he thought about it. To hear him say some really nice things about me, and then hear Tom agree and say the same, nice things, made me smile.

Well, smile maybe, but the smells of those two very manly guys rubbing shoulders with me, and the relaxed friendliness the three of us were feeling, made me get *very* warm inside. Booze or no booze, I was getting wet as I sat there thinking about the prospect of Tom taking charge and doing something about his supposed desire for me. But I did think about Marc, and I was a little concerned that he wouldn't accept it very well if I acted so rashly on my thoughts. Whatever I did—whatever happened or didn't happen—I had to make sure that Marc didn't feel left out. Of course, even then I couldn't be sure he'd know how to take it, but I didn't really think the whole thing through. I never do. I wanted Tom. I was *extremely*, hopelessly horny. I figured somehow I could keep things smoothed over with Marc. Somehow or other I would keep things from falling apart. I figured I could do it, some way or somehow, but again, of course, I never thought it through. I know, too, that even if I had, I would probably have done the same thing, regardless. Oh well, what's done is done. We survived it, but on balance it wasn't worth it. And I'm still so ashamed of all the trouble I've caused, but ...

When I couldn't stand it anymore, I jumped up and went over close to the fire. It was deliciously warm and bright, and I stood there with my arms spread wide to soak up as much of the glowing warmth as I could. I felt *truly odd*, and my mind drifted and floated dreamily in the crackling heat and flickering light. Distantly, I remember dancing around, humming and singing, but I was already carried away by the heady feeling of the moment, and far too excited to stop myself. It didn't take long until I was stripped down to just my panties, and once I reached that state I just had to get my Tom. When I offered my hand to him, he came to me, as if on a string. And, I remember, it gave me huge pleasure to be able to call him, presumably whenever I wanted him.

He seemed very hesitant—undecided and unsure—but I was very confident and secure, and I guided him up into my realm of light and heat, to honor him with a deep, warm kiss. By the way he returned my kiss, then, I could see he *was* very unsure, but when I offered him my tongue, pushing it forcefully past his lips, he accepted it and relaxed,

slightly. Our mouths then communicating, our bodies began to speak for themselves, intertwining and molding—blending—together. To feel Tom's strong, masculine arms cradling me so lightly, I envied Sheree. Tom was a powerful, but gently loving man, and she had this man all to herself.

Except right now.

Though I thought about Sheree, and though I cared about Sheree, and though I thought I would *never* do anything to hurt her—or hurt Tom, either—I *was* hurting them. There really was no excuse or explanation for it. I was wanton, lascivious, consciously and completely amoral—and immoral, too. I was promiscuous, covetous, acting totally selfishly and inconsiderately. I was only interested in my own sensual pleasure and sexual conquest, and willing and able to trample over anyone who thought to get in the way. I wish Marc had objected, or intervened, or something. Maybe I thought he would if I continued, but I don't think I should have expected him to control me, when I was so unwilling to control myself. I needed to be responsible for my actions, and I was acting very irresponsibly. Ultimately, there is no excuse.

I felt Tom's large erection against my belly as we kissed. It was nothing less than what I expected, and in a few moments I went to my knees to avail myself of his swollen, turgid manhood. I pulled his pants and undershorts down to his ankles, and with blind, pleasurable purpose, I wrapped my hands around his seething, hot shaft. Almost absently I noticed that though he was physically a bigger boy than Marc, he wasn't more ably endowed. No matter—he would serve my purpose and suffice most admirably. With a knowing smile I gently licked him, tasting and testing, and heard a guttural exclamation of hedonistic delight escape his lungs. *That* was something I was *very* familiar with, and I took him deeply, fully into my mouth, pushing the head easily past my tonsils and into my throat. He let out a ragged breath as I pulled back to smack my lips against the tip. It made me grin to myself. He may belong to Sheree Germaine, and he may stay that way, but for tonight and for right now he belonged to me, and nothing was going to change it. Not Sheree, not Marc, not Tom, and least of all, not me. As he came, then, and as I had expected, it didn't take very long (few men can resist long when I use my full abilities), I happily and hungrily swallowed his voluminous seed.

I lingered for some moments, drinking deeply of his tangy, pungent fluids, rhythmically squeezing his balls with my hands, urging their copious production to continue, until his powerful spasms calmed, and there were no more sweet juices to be milked from him. He placed his hands on my shoulders, lightly, reverently, and gently started to push me

away. So with only the slightest reluctance, I relinquished my tight suction grip on his flagging member with a light, smacking kiss, and sat back. Satisfied.

He stood there a minute, his eyes and mouth closed, and breath coming large and labored through his nose. I waited patiently, and as he opened his eyes to me, I gave him a bright, happy, friendly smile. As I expected, he was quite undecided how he should act or react, but I gauged my expression carefully, to reassure him that everything was OK, and that he would be 'safe' with me. I wanted him to know, too, that I had no untoward expectations of him whatsoever—just that he continue to be my friend. Even if we were never to make love again—or if it *were* to happen again—I was going to regard our loving merely as an intimate, physical extension of our friendship. I hoped he would understand, and regard it in the manner. Ultimately, I knew I belonged to Marc, and it would always be to Marc's bed, and to Marc's love I would be returning, but I wanted Tom to know—and more importantly, I wanted Marc to know—that my making love to Tom was not going to affect my relationship with Marc. Or, with luck, with Tom.

Briefly, Tom and I shared a look. He was embarrassed, I could tell, but I reassured him that everything was all right—that I understood. He smiled, sheepishly, very much like a little boy looking for forgiveness, and I think I said something to him like 'that was very nice,' and he helped me to my feet. I *had* enjoyed satisfying Tom, but I was soaking wet between the legs and still *very* unsatisfied myself. It was for my dear Marc that I was saving the best, and most intimate part of myself. Before I turned away, I gave Tom a small, tender little peck and then turned my attention to my best guy. My best guy whose savage, huge erection was threatening to bust out the zipper in his jeans.

I was very glad Marc was undaunted by my making love to Tom. That would certainly have made things much more difficult, if not downright ugly, had Marc felt cheated or ignored—or even betrayed. I sincerely hoped he would understand me and my motives for sharing myself with Tom, and not think I thought any less of him for it. In truth, how I felt about Marc was completely unaffected by what I had just done with Tom, and considering the rapt and loving look Marc gave me when I approached him—my feelings toward him then grew immensely. If he could share me with someone else, and still love me and care for me, then he really *was* the one I had been looking for all my life. I was never more glad of having anyone than when we kissed lovingly, and he welcomed me into his waiting arms.



As Kerry approached where I sat on the couch, I held out my arms and she came into them—seemed to simply flow into them. She smelled strongly of her perfume and also of semen. I especially noticed the tangy and unusual aftertaste of it when I kissed her.

Odd, but I wasn't put off or repelled by the thought of tasting Tom's semen, however vaguely. Some brief homophobic fears may have flitted through my mind, but I told myself I was tasting this taste on my *lover's* lips, and it didn't indicate anything about me. Never at any time have I had any sexual feelings toward Tom, and to my knowledge he has never had such feelings toward me. We are as close as any two men can be, and I feel—especially since we have shared a lover—that though I would do almost *anything* for Tom, I guess there are still a couple of things we aren't going to share. Sometimes I have felt pretty stupid when I think about these kinds of things, considering that I know my own sexual orientation pretty well, but in my family there is considerable precedence for homophobia, and for discrimination against homosexuals. From time to time this familial attitude gets in the way. Anyway ... as I kissed Kerry, I forcefully worked to suppress the pointless and destructive wanderings of my mind. I wanted to savor and enjoy the charms of my most excellent girl, and if I continued to dwell on the association of Tom's semen to my irrational and unreasonable fears, I was going to risk losing a substantial part of my desire. And I especially didn't want that to happen. Especially not this night. Especially not *right then*.

I have to hand it to Kerry. I've never known her not to be 'in the mood' for loving. I know without a doubt that her sexual appetite greatly exceeds my own, and I am (still) forever being taxed to be up for, and to perform physically with her. Not ever wanting to fall short of her expectations, I've done the best I can to please and satisfy her. On this night, however, there was no lack of interest or doubt about capacities or capabilities. I was very ready for her—more than ready—and as we continued to share our long and very deeply felt kiss, we fell back onto the couch, her in command on top, and frantically working at my belt. What happened to Tom, I never noticed, nor particularly cared.

In no time my jeans were wrenched off along with my undershorts, and it was only absently that I noticed Kerry was suddenly likewise unencumbered. With intent, but calm purpose she straddled my waist, positioned herself and slid down quickly, fitting to me most adequately. Our mouths found each other again as she worked hastily to undo the

buttons of my shirt. As the last one came undone under frantic stress, she practically ripped the shirt from my shoulders to render me naked under her. It was so nice to be at home inside her once again, so nice to feel her vaginal muscles clench snugly around me, and to have her hips gently rocking against me to bring her ever nearer to orgasm. I have never thought of myself as being the most capable or skillful of lovers, but with me it seems she has always been able to come very easily, at times almost without us touching. It's been very gratifying to be able to please her this way—and so easily.

Kerry suddenly sat up and leaned back, arching her back and digging her fingernails painfully into my arms. I heard an impassioned gasp—something of surprise almost—and then Kerry came, squeezing me tightly in long waves of orgasmic rhythm. It was wonderful, *extremely* erotic and impossibly more than I could stand, and in a few seconds I came, too, and hugely. In sympathetic response to me, her orgasm extended to ride out with my own, and we stiffened together and called out in unison. She bounced and rocked with each of my contractions, loving me and feeling my sperm fill her with intense, deep satisfaction. I strained and bucked with every ounce of energy I had, and felt all the strength and power of my body drain into hers.

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Morning came soon enough for Marc, Tom, and me. Pretty plainly, the light of day would see the ardor and desire of the night completely gone. When I awoke, *extremely* hung over and in dire need of about four or five aspirin—or something on that order—I was very grateful neither Marc nor Tom were awake, yet.

I raised my arm, stretching, and felt the cool morning air prickle goose bumps under the fine hairs of my forearm. The air was chilly against my skin, but I was toasty warm, snug under the blanket that Tom must have provided us. Very gingerly, and as carefully as I could, I pulled the cover back, and pulled myself painfully up from the spot at the end of the couch where I had apparently fallen asleep. Marc's bare feet bracketed my head, but he was contentedly snoozing away under his own blanket (I couldn't exactly say he was *snoring*) so I tried my best not to disturb him while I got up. As soon as I stood, though, my head seemed to suddenly swell up. I got dizzy and sick to my stomach, and every pore—every square inch of my body—seemed to ooze, to fairly reek of the prodigious

amount of scotch I had consumed. Don't get me wrong, though I was in serious pain, I knew where my pain came from and I accepted it. I knew it as the price I was always to pay for even a little while away from the bigger and *very much less* tolerable pain of my life. But reality was back—with a vengeance—and I staggered, naked, to the kitchen to see if I could find something for my head.

I saw by the clock on the kitchen wall that it was about eleven-fifteen. We had slept quite a little while, then. The sun was out (of course!) and if it weren't for the drapes on the lower half of the window wall, Marc and I would have been baked and blinded by the intensity that even the winter sun provided us. The overhang of the roof blocked most of the light that streamed in through the windows on the second story, but even so, the entire living room and dining room/kitchen area was awash in bright, cheery sunshine. And I never wished more for a pair of dark sunglasses, than I did just then. The sunlight sent bullets of searing pain right to the central core of my mind, and threatened to make all other considerations moot.

I had to keep my eyes scrunched shut as I groped about first for the bottle of aspirin, and then for a glass of water to wash the painkillers down. Eventually (and thankfully) I managed it, and with my head pounding and stomach still lurching with each stiff, painful step, I drug myself back to the couch where my likewise naked Marc was still sleeping away. In my movements, he'd lost half his covers, and he lay, spread-eagled, with his body exposed from the waist down. I thought of covering him up, briefly, but deemed he looked far too content to disturb. Tom, as I half expected, was nowhere around (most probably up in his own bed), so I dispensed, too, with finding and reassembling any of my clothing onto my body. I returned shakily to my still-warm spot on the couch, and with the last of my strength and energy, pulled the corner of the blanket up around my shoulders, leaving my legs open to the blessedly cool, refreshing air. It wasn't as easy getting back to sleep as I might have wished, but I think in a few minutes I did finally doze off. I'm not sure how long I slept, then, when I heard noises that woke me, again.

With a start, I was awake. I immediately noticed I felt much, *much* better than I had earlier, but I was also momentarily disoriented and confused, since as soon as I opened my eyes I became aware I was *not* at home in Marc's apartment. In a second, though, it was obvious where I was. How stupid of me to forget, since I had only recently been up and gotten some aspirin for my hangover. Since Marc's feet were still on either side of my head, it wasn't Marc, so ... who was up?

I sat up, and saw Tom in the kitchen, getting a drink of water. His

back was to me, fortunately, and it was with a sudden feeling of *nakedness* that I noticed I was completely undressed and not anywhere near my clothes. With foolish (and perhaps unnecessary) modesty, I pulled the blanket across my waist, and attempted to cover my breasts with my arms.

“Uh,” I said, announcing my presence, “good morning.” He turned, apparently not too surprised to find someone awake. His glass went up in a kind of greeting, but otherwise he said nothing. I went on, “I was up earlier, but I guess I fell back asleep.”

He stood and regarded me, silently, and I have to admit I was beginning to worry about his quietness and mostly unreadable expression. I hoped he wasn’t thinking drastic thoughts about me, about himself, or about Sheree. I hoped what had happened was because it was what we had wanted, and not because I took advantage of him or the situation. I wanted to say something, but instead I decided to wait him out. If there were to be consequences or repercussions, I wanted to face them head-on, and not avoid or ignore them. I figured if I waited long enough, he would talk to me.

“Good morning,” he finally said. “I heard you get up about an hour ago, and I debated about coming down, then,” he went to the refrigerator for some ice for his water, “but I decided you probably felt pretty lousy, and that it would probably be better if I waited.” He cocked his head. “Was I wrong?”

“No, but I *do* feel a lot better, now,” I told him. I paused a moment, measuring how I could draw attention to my nakedness without embarrassing either him or me unduly. “I guess we never decided to put our clothes back on last night.” I laughed, embarrassed, and looked down at myself.

“I know,” he nodded. “Don’t worry too much about it. I’ve seen the boy without his clothes on before, and though I’ve never seen you naked before—I *have* seen naked women before.”

“I figured that out already.” But I noticed that he wasn’t naked. He was wearing his robe, but again I knew I wasn’t really all that uncomfortable being in the nude—I just didn’t want to complicate an already *too* complicated situation. Still, I remained where I was, and I continued to cover myself with my hands. “About last night—”

He held up his hand to stop me. “If you’re worried about it ... it’ll never happen again.”

“No, that’s not what I wanted to say. You and Sheree are two of the best friends I have, and I really don’t want to ruin our friendship. Especially not *this* way.”

"I don't know what you're thinking of me," he said, "but I never intended to ruin our friendship—or hurt Sheree."

"I know. I didn't want to hurt her, either. But we did, anyway." Forgetting myself temporarily, I got up from the couch, sans blanket. He didn't seem to notice. "I took advantage of you last night." I walked toward the kitchen.

"No, you didn't," he disagreed. "I was just as much to blame—maybe more—since I've taken vows to love only my wife." He paused, "And I *do* love my wife. Terribly. *Hugely*." He turned from me as I approached, and I sensed he was very ashamed and contrite, ready to do penance for his crime.

I wanted to reassure him, to assuage his fears, but I also realized that if this were his 'time in hell,' he was going to have to live it in his own way. Of course, I guessed this might also be my time in hell, too, if there ever was to be one. Ironically, I considered that for me, most of my life was like being in hell, and that now, finally, for the first time it looked like I had some chance of escaping it. Some slim chance. If, that is, I could ever get my act together. And, truthfully, I considered that what I had done the night before was definitely *not* getting my act together.

He kept his back to me as I got another drink of water, using the same glass I had used earlier. I filled it, downed it completely in one gulp, and set the glass down on the counter. "You know," I told him, "I really am in love with Marc." And realizing the utter truth of what I'd said, my eyes were suddenly filled with hot, bitter tears. The shame blew in on me without warning, and without mercy.

"I know," he said. His voice was quiet, hushed, strained, and he looked like he might cry, too. I bit back my tears, wiping at my eyes angrily.

"I love you, too, Tom—" but I stopped, choking on the words, unsure of what I was saying—"not the same way I love Marc, but you've been such a good friend to me ..."

"Thanks," he said, and turned around to face me. I watched his eyes first look me squarely in the eyes, then drift down to my bare boobs, then continue down to take in the nest of short, wiry red hair between my legs. He lingered there a few moments, then returned his eyes to mine. He seemed unashamed and totally unaffected by my nudity, and I figured it was probably all for the better. "You're very pretty without your clothes on," he said, finally, and he laughed, briefly. "You can get naked in my house anytime."

I knew he was kidding, but I sensed that there was an element of irony to it, too. I regarded myself, rather critically, and almost told him he

was wrong about my apparent 'beauty'. I thought better of it, though, and decided to take his compliment (of sorts) at face value. "Thanks," was all I said.

We stood there looking at each other for some moments, neither speaking. I was relieved that we—Tom and me—had survived our night of complete, utter indiscretion with our friendship seemingly intact, but I was nonetheless still concerned how Marc was going to feel about it when he finally woke up. Though nothing that happened the night before had seemed to faze him then, I could in no way be sure he would feel the same in the bright light of this day. Hell, I wasn't even too sure how *I* felt, now I that was no longer drunk (or stoned)—or *horny*—anymore.

I looked to Tom for some reassurance. "Do you think Marc is going to be upset when he wakes up?" Why I thought Tom would know, I'm not sure.

"I don't know, Kerry. Have you ever done anything like this with him, before?"

Before?!? "Are you kidding?" I shook my head. No way.

"No," he said, pointedly, "*I'm not*. I'm not around you two all the time, you know, so I don't necessarily know what y'all do for entertainment on all those lonely nights."

I was dismayed. "Not *this*, certainly." I didn't like what he was insinuating. It hurt. "But I should have guessed you'd feel this way about me, since I've really proved I'm nothing more than a loose, cheap whore."

But, he disagreed. "Wait a minute! I don't think you're a *whore*, Kerry," drawing back from his attack, somewhat. "I'm sorry if it sounded that way. I want to respect you. I *need* to respect you since we work together, but we've been bad little girls and boys, and even if I have an open mind, and try to keep this thing—this situation—in perspective, it's still hard not to have a somewhat 'different view' of you. Do you understand what I'm talking about?"

"I guess so," I lowered my head. He was right. I was wrong. Period. "I really didn't mean to ruin the whole thing, you know."

"I know." He went over to the sink to fill his glass again. "Believe me, I wasn't trying to ruin anything, either." He turned toward me, "But even though we were *trying* to be good, we weren't. We weren't, and there's no going back. We can only pick up from where we are and try to go on." He took a long drink. "And I still do want us to be friends."

"Me, too," I nodded.

"I think that means we can't *ever* do this again. Don't you?"

"I guess so." I guess I didn't sound very sure.

"*You guess so?!?* Kerry, we were very indiscreet! Even you have to

agree with that." Yes, I had to agree. "Well," he went on, "I have a very beautiful and caring wife who'll be here in about five hours, and when she gets back I have to be ready to pick up with her as if nothing at all happened while she was gone. I mean *nothing*. I can't have anything complicating our relationship any more than it is already. *Nothing at all.*" He stopped a moment, thinking. "No one is going to say anything to Sheree about last night, unless it's about our performance. What we did when we got back here after the gig has to remain a secret forever. The bottom line is that I was wrong to let things get out of control, and I don't ever want it to happen again."

"OK," was all I said, as Marc woke up just then.

We ignored him while we continued to stand in the kitchen, now only looking at each other. I figured he would join the 'party' soon enough, and despite that, I wasn't feeling especially good about myself, just then. Marc did find us in a few moments, and I noticed he'd also found his jeans and put them on, too. He also noticed I was apparently the only one not even partially dressed.

"Oh," he said, giving me a strange, almost bemused look, "I see you two have met." He gave me the same basic once-over look that Tom had, except that he started down at my pubes and worked his way up. I expected as much, I guess. I looked at him, he looked at me, and then we looked at Tom. Tom just looked at us. "What's going on?" Marc asked.

"Nothing, much," Tom replied. "We were just talking about last night."

"I figured as much," Marc said. He didn't sound *too* upset, but it was still pretty early to come to any conclusions. "I've got a killer headache. Do we have any aspirin, or anything?"

"Sure," Tom said, and opened the cabinet that contained the desired pain relievers. He handed the bottle to Marc, who immediately opened it and shook out about three.

"Take at least five," I offered. "They work better in teams." I smiled, hoping he'd see and appreciate my joke. He responded by giving me a sideways glance and shaking out a couple more of the white pills. I filled my glass at the sink and offered it to him.

"Thanks," he nodded, once, and downed both the pills and the water. Then there was silence, again, for a strange few moments.

It was Marc, then, who finally spoke. "Uh, Kerry, you'd be a lot less distracting if you'd put something on. Maybe Tom doesn't mind you running around here in the nude, but it makes me damned uncomfortable." He made direct eye contact with me to emphasize his point. "What do you say?"

Under different circumstances I might have told him to fuck off, and maybe only jokingly at that, but considering where we were and what we'd done, and how I was totally undressed, I decided he was probably right, anyway. I only said 'OK,' and went back out to the living room to find something to put on. All I could readily find was my dress, which I didn't really want to wear, but I guess I had to put it on, anyway.

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Tom and I talked a few minutes while Kerry stalked about the living room trying to find her clothes. She didn't seem at all happy being told to put something on, but I figured she would get over it.

"How are you this morning?" he asked me.

"Fine," I told him, "except for this damn hangover."

"I know," he agreed. "We had a little too much to drink last night."

"Too much of *something*, I can tell you that." I paused a moment.

"What happened, exactly, by the way?"

"I hoped you'd enlighten me."

"I'm clueless." But we both *knew*.

"Marc," he sounded serious, "I want you to know I didn't plan what happened."

"I know. I didn't plan it, either." Kerry had planned it.

He seemed to follow my thoughts, "Don't be too hard on Kerry. She was pretty drunk."

But, I rounded on him, "That's no excuse, Tom. It was *our* fault. We should have been in control and stopped her before anything happened."

"Even though I agree with you," he shrugged, "that's not as easy as it sounds. We were *both* pretty drunk—and stoned, too. Shit, we were *all* out of our minds." There was a pause.

"I won't tell Sheree." I wanted to make sure he knew that.

"That's right," he nodded, "and I appreciate it, too. As far as I'm concerned, what happened last night is in the past, and it's never going to happen again. I love that woman, and I'd really hate for something like this to get in the way."

"I don't blame you," I agreed. "She's very special. Hell, they're both pretty special as far as I'm concerned." I was referring to Kerry and Sheree, the alliteration twins.

He didn't comment on Kerry's 'specialness'. Instead, "Kerry said she was in love with you. Did you know that?"

"Yes, I did. I think I'm in love with her, too. What of it?"

"I'm not pointing any fingers or blaming you, Marc. Don't get me wrong, I just didn't want you to do something rash—like break up with Kerry, or quit the band, or anything."

I thought about it a moment. "No," I finally concluded, sighing, "I'm not going to do anything stupid like that." I turned to look in Kerry's direction, and watched her while she fumbled irritatedly with her dress. She seemed not to be having a very good time. Too damn bad.

"Good," Tom said. "I definitely want all four of us to be the very best of friends," and he was talking about Sheree, Kerry, him and me. "But probably not *such* good friends, if you know what I mean."

I smiled, though I didn't especially feel like it, "Oh, I don't know, buddy boy, about that." And I was just trying to keep things light.

"You're right, 'buddy boy'," he grinned, weakly, but I didn't think he felt much like it, either, "it could happen." He was referring, as was I, to the possibility of the four of us ending up doing something as a 'swinging foursome'. It seemed pretty remote, but just barely possible, I supposed. It was probably the only way he'd ever get to do anything with Kerry, again. Friends were friends, but next time he'd have to share something of his own.

"*I'm hungry,*" Kerry called to us from the living room, obviously less upset than previously imagined. "When can we all get something to eat?"