

UP AND DOWN

An Erotic Tragicomedy without the Tragedy

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WHO SHOULDN'T READ THIS

This is a work of erotic fiction. If it is illegal in jurisdiction to read it, please don't. If you're under the age of majority (likely 18 or 21 years old) in your jurisdiction, likewise you shouldn't read this. If there's a snowball chance in hell that you'll read this and go, "That's a great idea! I should try that sometime!" for the love of all things holy, do not read this. Fantasies can be symbolically powerful and very pleasurable, but that doesn't mean that it's a good idea to try to act them out. Much of the humor in this work comes from people not acting like they really would if put in such a situation. If you read this work of fiction, you agree to take responsibility for your actions.

WHO SHOULD

The eroticism of this novel is based on the themes of naughty nudity, high stakes erotic bets, and embarrassment, with a strong whiff of domination and submission. It contains reluctant exhibitionism and bondage. If these intrigue you, you've come to the right place! (If they might trigger negative reactions based on personal experiences, please don't read. This is supposed to be a fun piece.)

It is also mostly heterosexual in orientation. Feel free to rewrite it as a gay novel. Just read the Creative Commons license first to see how you can do it. I would, however, consider it a breach of the license to make the characters under the age of twenty-one (the part of the license about the author's honor).

THE ASTERISKS

This piece is longer than what you want to read in one sitting. The names of chapters that make good break points are surrounded by asterisks. That way you know ahead of time where you might want to stop.

Part the First

**Swim, Swam, Run;
Or,
The Edyssey**

Chapter One

When I told the woman whose condo I was going to rent that I liked to swim, she had a funny look on her face. Almost a smirk. That puzzled me, but I forgot about it until I stopped by a few days later to pick up the keys. "Have fun in the pool," she said with that same mischievous look.

"What?" I demanded. She hummed the theme song to *Jaws* in response. "Tell me!" She only shrugged her shoulders. "If there's something wrong, I'm legally entitled to know." I waived the lease for emphasis.

"Nothing, nothing at all."

I couldn't help but roll my eyes in contempt at such silliness. "Whatever."

Six weeks and thirty moving boxes later, I stood at the edge of the pool. The ceramic tile said the water was only five feet deep at its deepest, but I dived in head first anyway. I knew if I inched into the water, it would feel agonizing cold, and when the cold water got too close to my testicles, I'd change my mind and wait until spring. But I wanted to get in one swim in my new building's pool before September turned to October and the water was drained.

It was a long narrow pool, good for one person doing laps. If they didn't mind feeling on display. I had a feeling that whoever designed the building designed it and then noticed this long sliver of unused land by the front entrance and said, "Hey, let's put a pool there!" Well, they did, and anyone walking in or out the front got a good eyeful as they followed the sidewalk along the length of the pool, which was surrounded by a fence of iron bars that made it feel like a cage. Then the street was right there, barely blocked by two malnourished shrubs, so even drivers passing by got a good view of everything above the waterline.

I decided the best thing to do was to be nonchalant about it. After half a dozen laps, I forgot where I was and just swam. A few more very fast laps and I started to ease from being warmed up to slightly tired and made a mental note

to spend more time on my triceps in the weight room. (Okay, I'll admit it: I tended to focus on muscles that had more of a visual impact, like biceps and abs, and less on muscles that triceps and anterior deltoids that while important functionally didn't bulge as much in response to weights.)

I touched the wall to turn around and as I kicked off, I suddenly realized I had seen ankles. I flipped over to see and swallowed some water and choked.

I had seen ankles.

"Hi," said a sweet shy voice.

I rubbed the water out of my eyes and looked up. As I focused, I tried not to make my grin look too idiotic, but I don't think I succeeded. I saw her so briefly in that first glance that I couldn't describe her, not even her hair color or what she wore. All I knew was she was stunning. And I was stunned. I desperately wanted to say something witty, but my silence was making me look like a moron, so I said, "Hello."

"You seem pretty serious about your laps. Do you want me to come back later?"

I blurted out, "God no!" before I realized I had even opened my mouth. To kill the awkward silence, I hastily added, "I was told no one ever used the pool!"

"That's not true at all." The words twinkled like notes on a harpsichord. Her hair was dark brown and almost went to her elbows. "I was going to do some laps myself, but I really don't want to bother you."

"You wouldn't bother me at all."

"So I can..." She wiggled her butt and started pulling her t-shirt up.

I started worrying that I had hit my head when I dived in and was hallucinating in a hospital bed. Then I started taking her in. Wavy, if not frizzy, auburn hair. Big playful eyes that combined with a wide toothy smile

that gave her a dazzling playfulness even though she had the oh-so mature body of a woman in her early thirties. Since I was looking up at her, her long smooth legs looked even longer. To think that I'd see her in a one-piece in a matter of seconds was causing excitement in a place I was glad was hidden beneath the surface.

"You know," she said interrupting my revelry, "you'd get in trouble at work for looking at someone with such elevator eyes. Now you're blushing."

"I'm sorry," I said and launched myself horizontally across the pool, swimming as fast as I could from my embarrassment. I always prided myself in how I treated my coworkers, so the suggestion stung and I felt guilty. But then I realized I was being silly. None of my coworkers ever stood in front of me at the end of a pool, miming stripping down to a swimsuit. And none of them looked like her.

There was a splash. As I swam back, I had to steer slightly out of the way of a whirlwind of gurgling bubbling waves. She was a blur but a blur wearing a black bikini. My heart pounded faster. I didn't need to keep swimming to get my cardio. I could get out of the pool and watch her.

I switched to a frog kick, swimming beneath the surface, so I could look ahead more clearly but have my head hidden under water. We each did four or five laps, with my only getting glimpses. It was frustrating. I couldn't even tell how well endowed she was.

Then she was standing at the end of the water, visible only from her elbows down, her head and chest hidden by the distortion of the water's surface. I focused directly ahead as if I was but alone. As I reached the wall and surfaced to breathe, she shouted, "Hey, hey!" I stood up.

She quickly added, "I didn't mean to embarrass you just then."

"You mean to embarrass me later?"

A look flashed across her face, one that reminded me of my landlord humming *Jaws*. Then I was distracted by my first good view of her chest. She

didn't have the obligatory melons of celebrities but they were perky and proud and the cold air was having an effect and it was a struggle to listen to what she was saying. I hastily agreed to a question that I only knew was a question because of the rising tone.

"So then why don't we race?" she asked. "It'll beat these exaggerated displays of staying out of each other's way when we swim past and since I'll be focused on beating you, I'll find it easier to resist the urge to check out your butt."

I suddenly knew I was going to get lucky that night. "Yeah, we can race. Keep racing until one of us is a lap ahead of the other. That should be plenty of exercise."

"What should be the prize?"

"Prize?"

"Without the proper motivation, I'll just slow down when I get tired and let you win. And I like the view from behind."

For a second, I hesitated. Women only flirted with me like that around closing time in bars when they had too many. No one stone sober had ever been so forward. Then I remembered a line of my freshman year roommate. "Okay, then, if you win, I have to take to dinner. If I win, you let me take you out to dinner."

She paused for a second to unravel that. She put her hand on my shoulder. "Seriously, for a moment. I don't want to create the impression that I'll sleep with you if you take me out to dinner. I've just met you. You have a nice body and all, but maybe you are a compulsive gambler or my cat might not like you or... or... And I'm a lot pickier than when I was in college."

I guess I should have felt rejected, but her talking about us having sex, even to say it wouldn't happen, was thrilling. I felt like I was floating somewhere above the pool and not fully in control of my vocal cords. "Understood," I croaked.

"So..." she said with a giggle. "The loser loses their bottoms."

"You're kidding!" I looked towards the street to emphasize the absurdity of it.

"You're right. That's too crazy. How about a hundred dollars? That would hurt but not too much."

"Maybe you're the compulsive gambler."

"No, my only compulsion is that I just need everything clean and organized. The medication is helping and I've resisted the urge to shave my cat to keep it from shedding, so I'm getting better. A hundred bucks it is?"

I laughed. I had no idea what to make of this woman. Other than she was ridiculously gorgeous. I tried to think of some double entendre about pussies and shaving but drew a blank. "Well, if we're being so honest, I have to say that I never bet money. It's something my parents drilled into my head."

"Then bottoms?"

"I'd rather see you topless than bottomless underwater," I said slyly. I couldn't believe I was talking to a stranger like this.

She laughed her crystalline laugh. "I bet you would. But..." she meaningfully nodded towards the very visible street. "Bottoms then?"

I couldn't believe it when I agreed. She held out her hand to shake. "And you said one of us wins when they get a lap ahead."

I nodded. I positioned myself to kick off the edge of the pool. "Is this a trick? You weren't like a state champion in high school, were you?" I asked with a mixture of suspicion and flirtation.

Instead of the lazy, almost childlike smile, there was something more intelligent and wicked. "You'll find out. Three two one!" A splash as she kicked herself towards the middle of the pool.

I chased after her. It took two laps to catch up. Getting ahead of her, however, took a lot out of me. When I kicked off for my seventh or eighth lap, I saw her standing in the water at the other end and stood myself. "You win," she said, gasping for air, only her head and neck visible above the water. A shocking expletive that I couldn't reconcile with her beauty burst out of her mouth. She started walking through the water to me, slowly emerging as she made her way to the shallow end, the delicious little swells of her chest rapidly pushing up and out with each ragged breath. Once she got to me, she swore again. "Can we call this off?"

I started to word in my head a bargain that ended with my taking her out to dinner in exchange for her keeping her swimsuit in place. I opened my mouth to speak when she abruptly raised her hand and waived it in my face to cut me off. "Don't respond to that! I'm so sorry. I shouldn't have said that. I shouldn't take advantage of gentlemanly impulses." She swore again.

"I should explain," she said. "When I first moved in seven years ago, just out of college, I ended up swimming alone with the guy who used to live in 103. He kept pushing me to make a bet like this. He wouldn't leave me alone. He didn't think to ask whether I was a state swimming champion. Embarrassing him was better than all the sex in college. A couple of years later, I got a guy to agree to a bet like that and I won again. I'll admit it: I came down here hoping to steer you into such a bet. It wasn't supposed to end like this." She ran out of air and then gulped some deep breaths. Finally: "Were you on the swim team?"

"No."

"Then I must be getting lazy in my practice. Or older. How old are you?"

"Twenty-four."

"Ugh! I've been beaten by a puppy." She waited a moment until her breathing was even and then without warning cussed again and pulled down her bikini bottom. I again wondered whether I bumped my head and was in the hospital. Then through the water I saw the brown/black tuft between her legs. She stood upright again and with an air of defeat asked, "How long do I have to

keep them off?"

I didn't want to say anything threatening but I didn't want her to put them back on again anytime soon. With a sheepish smile, I said, "Awhile," almost as a question.

She rolled her eyes and punched me in the chest. Then she balled up the bottoms as she turned around and tossed them onto the deck table three or four feet from the pool. They unraveled in flight but made it anyway. It was my turn to gasp: there was no way she could retrieve them without getting out of the water and giving me and maybe some neighbors a show. She and her dark tuft turned back towards me. "Happy?"

"Almost," I said. I dropped my head underwater to get a better view. She self-consciously tugged on the hairs but then pulled her hand away and took half a step forward.

When I came up for air, she said, "Happy now? Even though no Brazilian wax for me?"

"I'm not complaining about anything right now. I'm glad I'm in water because I think my knees would give out otherwise."

"A flattering puppy!" she said with a laugh. "Now I suppose you want this." She gently tugged at the string connecting the two triangles of her bikini.

Chapter Two

Then she added, "Not that you can't pretty much everything see almost everything already. And as an FYI, the only reason my nipples are sticking out is that the air is cold."

"Of course," I said.

"Of course," she repeated with a giggle. "I'm not a very good liar, am I?" She looked out at the street to see if anyone was around. "I suppose you want to do double or nothing."

I nodded my head most enthusiastically.

"The problem with that is if I won, I'd still not see your family jewels and I won't have the energy for a third race."

"Then you should have won the first race."

"Well, I didn't. Okay, if I win, I get to put my bottoms back and yours go off. And if I lose, my top goes. That should count as two because I have two of these," she squeezed her breasts.

After I got done choking on air, I pointed out, "No, it's only one piece of clothing." I knew I was pushing my luck but she seemed like game for anything.

"Then, how about... okay, I got it. I lose. You get to keep my swimsuit for the day. I'll have to make my way back to my condo in just my towel."

"Would you really do that?"

"I'm not going to deign to answer that question. But, oh, as soon as you get home with my suit, you have to wash it in cold water to get the chlorine out."

I suddenly remember that there was such a thing as thread that dissolved in water. That had such opportunities. "Agreed."

"Here's to hoping that your erection causes a lot of drag." Instantly, there was an enormous splash in front of me and she emerged from under it, heading towards the other end of the pool.

It took three laps to catch up. Then we were neck and neck until I lost count of the laps. Ten? Eleven? Twelve? Fifteen? I sometimes surged ahead but I couldn't make my lead grow. At one point, she got ahead of me. I panicked and went all out. I quickly caught up with her again, but then the soreness of my muscles could not be ignored. I tried switching strokes to keep any one spot from getting too cramped, but that seemed to slow me down. It no longer felt like I was gliding through the water but was instead struggling through

peanut butter and then, as I grew more tired, cement. After maybe twenty minutes of violent swimming, I realized that I was definitely losing. She was more than a length ahead of me and the splashes from her legs had me choking on water whenever I frantically inhaled.

But I pressed on. I ordered my burning muscles to swim faster but nothing seemed to happen. I might as well have been ordering the sun to stop turning in the sky. I kept going. I hated losing and I wasn't about to blow the opportunity to see her naked.

Then my head bumped into something as I reached out to touch the wall at the deep end of the pool. Shocked, I stood up in the three feet of water. She was sitting on the edge of the pool and had stuck out her leg. My head had hit the bottom of her foot.

"You... lose..." she announced as she desperately wheezed for air. "Though this might be like that children's story — John Henry? The guy who gets into a tunnel digging contest with a machine. He wins but immediately drops dead. If I collapse, call for an ambulance before you get to carried away giving me mouth to mouth."

I slipped back down into the water so only my head was standing out. All I could think was, "Oxygen! I need oxygen!"

We were both silent, too busy sucking on air to talk. Eventually, she said, "Don't you want to get out of the water? I jumped out the instant I knew I won because I thought I was going to throw up. I don't think I've ever swum that hard. Not even in the state championships." She looked at me curiously, trying to figure out why I was suddenly silent. It didn't take her long. It was a very straight line from my eyeballs to her pussy. I looked up, knowing I was caught. She made intense eye contact and then scanned the street. There must have been no one behind me because she shuffled her knees open slightly with a smile. "You lost, but you deserve at least that much of a view."

"You're an exhibitionist, aren't you?"

What happened next was educational. I had only ever seen women fully

dressed blush. I hadn't ever thought about where the line of redness stopped on their body.

She nearly said something but stuttered the first word and gave up. Then she stood up. Another wonderful angle. She walked over to the table and grabbed her bikini bottoms. She let them fall to the ground. She positioned herself between them and me, so I got a fabulous view of her derriere and her long, shaking legs. Widening her stance, she bent over straight-legged to grab the crumpled bikini. She took her time getting it straightened out and then slowly start pulling them up her legs. I couldn't believe the view. Bush or no bush, I could her labia quite clearly.

Her upside-down grin was enormous. "Does that answer your question about any exhibitionism?" she asked.

I stupidly bobbed my head.

She sat at the front of one of the lounge chairs. "My legs!" She rubbed them. "I can't even stand! I wonder if I'll be able to get out of bed tomorrow." Her chest was still heaving nicely. "Okay, now your turn. Off with the trunks!"

I panicked for half a second at the thought of shedding my trunks and then relaxed. She wanted to be stripped and shown off, so that's what she would get. "Quadruple or nothing?" I asked.

She slumped her shoulders in defeat. "I didn't save anything for another race! At least let me enjoy the view while I catch my breath and we negotiate the penalties for the next round."

"Let me keep my trunks for the next race. I'll pay at the end if I lose again."

"Didn't I give you a good view?"

I looked around. No one. No sound of car doors. Silence. I shed my trunks. It felt incredibly naughty. I put them tightly in a ball by the ladder. "Why did you put them there? You should put them up on the table like I did," she said.

I said in a near-whisper, "People walking by will be less likely to notice them right there and if they're a tight ball, they might be mistaken for a towel."

She laughed loudly. The same laugh no longer seemed quite so musical when you're afraid someone might look in your direction. "Oh my, do you realize that if anyone walked in or out of the building while we were swimming, they would have seen my ass? Did you see anyone go in or out of the building?"

"No." I hoped that she would get the hint from my talking softly to talk softly herself. She didn't.

She giggled. "Why don't you wrap your trunks in your towel? Then if anyone comes, all you have to do is move to the closer edge of the pool and they won't be able to see you below the waist. Just don't do the backstroke for our next race." Without waiting, she reached forward and grabbed my trunks. I tried to stop her but was too slow. (My tired arms still felt like they belonged to someone else. Maybe someone in another state.) She put the wet trunks in the middle of my towel, which I had put on a chair. My keys fell to the ground when she did that. When she was done with the towel, she put the keys back on top of it. I breathed a sigh of relief. I sometimes got stage fright but it doesn't compare to someone touching your clothes while you're naked outdoors. She then said, "Your towel's going to be a tad damp." Then she finally lowered her. "So why did you try to grab my arm just now? Were you trying to stop me?"

"I didn't want you to take my trunks. I'm a wee bit nervous right now. Duh."

"What did you think I would do? This?" Standing, she snatched my towel and keys. When my brain registered that she was running, I opened my mouth to call her name but then realized I didn't know it. When she grabbed her own towel, I began scrambling up the steps. My legs felt like they were going to give out. I was deck side just as she kicked aside the door jab that had been keeping one of the two glass doors back into the building open. I grabbed the door handle just as it clicked behind her. I immediately tried the other one. It shook noisily. Or it would have been noisy if it were possible to hear over her laughter.

"This isn't funny!" I yelled.

She tried to speak but it took her a few moments before the pause between her squeals was long enough that she could say, with something resembling a straight face, "Everyone's entitled to their own opinion."

I pounded on the glass. She dropped everything she was holding and held her hands up in mock fright, like someone in a bad 1950s horror movie. "You're scaring me!"

I again wished I knew her name.

She squatted down to pick up the towels and my swim trunks. When she had everything, she rotated on her heels to face me. She was eye level with my crotch. I begged her to unlock the door. She ignored what I said as she studied me intently. Her smile was so delicious that I found myself getting hard, which made her smile even bigger.

I pounded on the glass again. "Okay, you've had your fun. You've had a very nice view. We can mutually have nice views in one of our units, but this has gone on long enough."

"You think so?" she said, her voice slightly muffled by the glass.

"Quite. I'll admit you got me. But I need to cover up before someone sees me."

"But a lot of someones would appreciate the view." She giggled again.

"You know what I mean."

She started walking backwards away from the door and towards the elevator.

"This isn't funny anymore!"

She pointed at a slight angle. I looked over my shoulder. An SUV was parallel parking. I looked back at her. She had hit the elevator call button.

"Don't you dare," I growled as loudly as I could, discovering no matter how threatening a growl sounds, it's not that loud.

"I'm shaking in my boots! Or would be if I wore boots. But as you can see, I'm not. Neither are you. In fact, you don't seem to be wearing anything at all."

The elevator door opened.

"Please?" I said in a sudden no-pride-left begging voice. I think my voice cracked.

She blew me a kiss as she stepped into the elevator and hit a button. It absolutely had to be the open door button and she was just messing with me. The doors closed. I heard the SUV door slam close too. I closed my eyes for half a second, hoping to see the elevator doors reopening when I opened my eyes again. Instead the light above the elevator indicated it was on the second floor.

A feminine hat was bobbing up and down as it made its way around the SUV. I dived for the pool. At the last second, I thought of the implications of diving with an erection and cannonballed my way into the water.

Chapter Three

They say that how fast time passes depends on what side of the bathroom door you're on. Vaguely true, I suppose, but nothing like being stuck nude in a pool that could only be accessed through a locked door for which you didn't have a key. A pool quite visible from a public street. A display cage for all intents and purposes. And in it, time didn't crawl. It stopped.

The woman from the SUV appeared from the far side of the vehicle. There was something mean about her looks and I had the feeling she wouldn't take my attire too well so I darted to the side of the pool closest to her and acted like I was taking a breather. She waddled up the long sidewalk past the pool, scowling at me for apparently watching her. Then she studied the concrete.

"You made the big splash just now?"

It didn't feel like a question. It felt like a reenactment of Mrs. Smith's examination of the paint covered kindergarten wall and my paint covered hands. "Yes, ma'am," I croaked.

"You got water all the way out here. You shouldn't do that."

"No ma'am."

She looked around the pool area. "You didn't even bring a towel. You're going to drip water all over the carpet and elevator."

"Sorry, ma'am."

After her fearsome form disappeared into the building, I spent an eon kicking myself for not asking her for a towel. It would have flowed so logically from the conversation. But the fear of being spanked by the principal, of her telling my parents on me, of being grounded for two weeks, paralyzed me long enough for her to disappear. Surely the nameless exhibitionist woman would come back. She couldn't just leave me here forever, could she? And weren't her last words to me, "Later?" Or did I just make that up? Maybe I made the whole thing up. Maybe I invented her and simply had hidden my towel and swimsuit in the trash. I knew it was a ridiculous thought, but she seemed like a phantom and I was locked outside, naked in a pool. But after the third time a pensioner walked up the street with his three yapping miniature poodles I went and checked the trash container by the door. I wasn't surprised that it was empty. And yet still shocked. I was back into the water in ten seconds. I DID see that pussy.

I of course imagined every way possible to get back to my unit unseen. It was hopeless. I could climb the metal fence and jump down onto the sidewalk. I'd be out of the pool area but just as locked out of the building and the elevator and stairwell doors required keys, so I couldn't even get near my floor. I don't think anyone else in the building had a spare set of keys to my unit.

No, I was going to have to ask for help. And pretty quick before my skin

shriveled to the point of prune-ness. I resigned myself to asking the next person who came by. I rehearsed in my head what I would say, like I would preparing for the Q & A period after a presentation at the office. I couldn't come up with good answers to obvious questions like, "Where's your swimsuit?" (Don't know) and "Why did you take it off?" (Don't know) and "How could you be such a naive goose and let someone steal your trunks?" (It all happened so fast — oh, great, that made it sound like a car accident.) I practiced a helpless, hapless inscrutable look that I hoped made me look pathetic but in a harmless way that people would want to help. (I'm new to this building, I would say, and there was this crazy woman...)

I began fantasizing that the next person to walk by would be this super cute woman on the second floor whose name was Liza or Lisa. I sometimes saw her coming home from work. What she wore always showed off her decolletage. I imagined standing in her living room, drying off as she looked me over very carefully. I imagined her rescuing me would create an intimate bond between us. I had so much time on my hands, standing in the pool waiting for someone to walk in or out of the building, that I began fantasizing having sex with my heroine on her living room floor.

Then I heard the front door being pushed open. I steeled myself to ask whoever it was for help. I hoped they weren't in a hurry.

It was her. No not Liza-or-Lisa. The source of my woe. I was taken back by how she was dressed. She was wearing a dour looking professional outfit (on a Saturday morning?). She had on a neat dark brown jacket and skirt, matched with a white blouse. It was what someone might wear to a job interview, save her high heels were too sexy for the get-up and the skirt was too short. She was busy talking on her cell phone and putting on sunglasses. She took ten steps out the door and turned to face me. She motioned for me to wait. After she said goodbye into the phone, she said to me, "Hold on. I need to send a text."

"Oh, come on!" I yelled.

"Be nice," she said as she knit her eyebrows in concentration as she typed on the little keypad. "This phone has a camera." Then she closed the phone with a "There!" and put it in her purse. "I'm sorry I took so long. I went to wash

your swim trunks and put them up to dry in your bathtub, but your unit was such a wreck I had to do something to it. You shouldn't tempt me like that. My meds can only go so far. I don't see how you could have gotten it so messy so fast after moving in. Anyway! I'm off to work. You probably want your keys."

"And at least a towel!"

"A towel wouldn't be very sporting," she said as she started fumbling around in her purse. She pulled out some keys, seductively jingled them a few times and set them on the ground at her feet. "That should be juuuust out of reach." Her cellphone rang. She fished it out and looked at the Caller ID. "Can't they wait until I get there?!" Then she looked up at me and added, "Well, ciao! It was nice meeting you. I'd be up to doing this again. It's certainly cheaper than a dinner date." She flipped the ringing phone open and said, "Hey, what's up?" She absently waved goodbye and turned and walked away. I started to be mesmerized by the sight of her delicious ass swaying from side to side when I realized I needed to do something. I jumped out of the pool and yelled, "Hey!" Without turning around or even slowing down, she waved to me again. She kept talking until she disappeared inside the Jaguar I had seen parked around the building so often.

The car always stood out in my mind. It had one of those license plate frames that made a joke about toplessness that you normally only see on convertibles and I had wondered why someone would risk fender benders by parallel parking a Jag on the street when they likely had a space in the garage below the building. Now I knew why they'd take the risk. The owner was mental.

I ran over to the keys and reached through the bars. Like she said: just out of reach. I tried sticking my leg out between the bars. All that did was give a thorough rear view to anyone walking by. As I scanned the pool area for something long with which to drag the keys to within reach. With hindsight, it should have been a warning of how much I was in for when I saw that the net for cleaning the pool was missing.

Then it hit me again. I was naked, locked out of my building. It kept happening: once I got thinking about something, I'd forget, for maybe ten or

fifteen seconds, my predicament. Then a warm wave of butterflies would flutter up from my stomach as I would discover once again that I was stark stark naked and then I would cover myself with my hands as best I could. I'd get thinking again and let my hands relax. Then remember again. Total starkers.

"Pee, dammit!"

I looked toward the street. A woman in her fifties was standing right where the sidewalk from the entrance joined the sidewalk running along the street. She looked like she was trying to get her dog to pee on the tires of a particular car as an excuse to stay in one spot and look at me. The dog, a poodle (what was it about poodles?), was uncooperatively pulling on the leash. A war erupted in the woman's face between an idiot grin and embarrassment at being caught looking. The grin won.

"Can you help me?" I begged.

My question delighted her. She started walking towards me with a look that made me think she was more interested in getting closer than in helping.

"How may I be of assistance?" she asked, sounding all the world like a teenager giggling through their first attempt at customer service at a fast food joint. I'm sure any customer service manual would have emphasized making eye contact. She was looking intently all right, but not at the right place.

I wanted to cover up, but I didn't think she would approve, so I leaned forward to try to shield myself. "Could you hand me my keys? They're right there on the ground." I edged towards the steel bars.

"Why did you put your keys here?" She said, looking down at them as if they were a dead bug.

"I didn't."

"Then who did?"

"It's a long story."

"I've got time."

At that moment, her poodle advanced and started sniffing the air in my direction. "Don't even think of getting your nose any closer. I smell like chlorine, you dumb dog," I growled.

"Hey, hey, hey! Don't you dare call Fluffy-kins dumb. Stanley Coren, in his extensive research on dog intelligence, concluded that poodles were the second smartest of the hundred most popular breeds. Besides, Fluffy was never so silly as to misplace his fur or keys."

"Fine, fine! I'm dumber than your dog and I'm sorry I insulted... it, but for the love of all that is holy, could you please hand me my keys?"

"You don't sound apologetic."

"I'm really, really, really sorry I insulted your beautiful poodle."

"Really, you think he's beautiful?" she beamed. For a moment, she made eye contact. My surge of hope died as quickly as it came as her eyes were instantly pulled back down as if by gravity. "So what's this long story?"

"You're just trying to prolong this."

"True. And the story?"

"Look, I'm a victim here. You got your eyeful, now please, please give me my keys!"

"Victim? Did someone hold you down and rip your clothes off?"

"No, but..."

"So you walked out here naked?"

"No, I..."

"You took your clothes off out here?"

"Yes, but..."

"In public? Don't you know that's illegal?"

"The sooner you hand me my keys, the sooner I'll stop breaking the law."

"I don't think I want to help an admitted criminal. Wouldn't that make me an accessory after the fact?"

"You're enjoying this, aren't you?"

"You already asked me that. No wait, you asked me whether I was prolonging this. The answer anyway is yes to both."

Out of the corner of my eye, I saw another woman, serious eye candy, stand at the end of the sidewalk, looking intently at me. She blushed when she saw that I saw her and walked on. I was tempted to get her attention, but I was afraid that two women would egg each other on. At the rate my day was going, they'd probably agree the best thing to do would be to mail my keys to me.

"I'm still waiting for your story."

"You're not going to hand me my keys, are you?"

"I'm considering it. Do a slow 360 for me."

Would this be enough to get some mercy? I figured I had nothing to lose, so I slowly rotated around.

"Do that again."

The third time she asked me to do it, I refused. She said, "I must admit you have made my day, young man, but I think it'll make it a better lesson in responsibility if I don't hand you your keys." She started walking off. Then

she muttered to herself, "Kids these days!"

I shook the bars in frustration. I tried reaching for the keys again. Surprisingly, when talking Fluffy's owner, neither my legs nor arms grew.

I had to admit that my unhappiness was being compounded by a warm throbbing feeling below. It was exciting in a perverse way that the poodle owner took so much blatant pleasure in looking at me. While I felt reasonably confident in my looks based on comparisons to other guys in the weight room in college, I had to admit that reactions of women could have been more encouraging. In high school and college, girls said that they were always interested in me for my personality. A couple insisted that this was the ultimate compliment, but still, it would have been nice if even one said they were just interested in my body. It didn't help that my best sex ever had been with a woman I had blindfolded.

The warm feeling. I saw that I had grown to half-mast and jumped back into the pool. It was one thing to be naked in public for reasons that were not my fault. It was another to appear to be enjoying it.

I needed a plan. A plan. A kingdom for want of a plan. But I was at a total loss. Then an older man started walking towards the entrance.

"Excuse me! Excuse me, sir!" The waving of my hand probably looked like I was trying to get a waiter to bring the check in a crowded restaurant. He kept walking. "Please! I know you can hear me." Then I entertained the possibility that maybe he was deaf. But his body language had changed after I started calling to him. An uneasy stiffening. He had to have heard. As he opened the door, he kicked the keys a few inches towards me with an exaggerated display of having done it accidentally and yet somehow still wasn't aware that there were keys on the ground.

As soon as the door clicked shut, I made sure the street was clear and jumped out and ran over and grabbed the keys. They felt light but I didn't stop to check until I was at the pool door. Then I noticed that not all my keys were there. My car key, the elevator key, office keys and the key to my unit were missing. All I had was the building door and mailbox key. I couldn't get

home. The best I could do was hide in the stairwell. I wasn't sure that that was better. While strangers on the street couldn't see me, someone in the stairwell might feel more threatened by a naked guy than when I was safely locked into the pool area.

I stepped into the lobby. I peeked down each hall to make sure no one was there. A blissful silence. I wondered why she, that nameless She, left my mailbox key. Maybe too lazy to remove it? Then there was a cold icy feeling as it hit me that she wanted me to check my mailbox, that she had something planned for me.

I crept over towards the entrance and made sure no one was coming into the building. I opened my mailbox. There was an envelope and it was too early for the mail. No stamps or postmark. And the name "Josh" on the outside. (Josh?) I grabbed envelope and ran to the exercise room, which, as I hoped, was empty.

I tore open the letter.

Dear Josh,

I want to first say that although your driver's license in your wallet by your door says that you're named Edward, you don't look like an Edward, so I'm not going to call you that. Awfully old-fashioned, don't you think? I hope I'm not insulting some relative that you're named after.

With any luck, by the time you read this, I'll have been at work for some time and you've been nude for even longer. ;-)

You probably wondered how you can end this predicament of yours, not that I personally am interested in ending it. I for one am going to have a spring in my step all day at work thinking about you.

I wonder where you're reading this. Are you huddled in a stairwell? Maybe you grabbed the letter and snuck down to car before you realized that your car key isn't on the ring? Not that that would have done you any good. (By the way, that nice yellow raincoat you keep under the passenger's seat is now hanging in your hall closet. You really should have folded it neater. Those

ugly folds will eventually cause creases that'll dry out and crack and let water in, defeating the whole purpose.) Did you go back to the pool? If you did, then I'm not the only one wet right now.

In this envelope you'll find the key to the storage area in the basement. In the space for your unit, you'll find a box. Inside it you'll find your house key.

You might anyway. Personally, I wouldn't trust me when I'm in "one of those moods." Do you have any other options, though?

Playfully yours (or rather, right now you're playfully mine),

Meg (Yes, that's my name. Thank you for taking a break from staring at my pussy long enough to ask.)

Chapter Four

My mind whirled. The storage unit? What the heck? Was this woman crazy?

I heard a clicking sound. I froze. It must have come out in the hallway. I envisioned endless scenarios of being discovered that were endlessly embarrassing. Then silence again.

Not seeing any forgotten towels or anything else of use in the exercise room, I concluded that I had little choice but to make my way to storage. I opened the door and listened. A faint rhythmic sound. I waited but it didn't go away. Must be an a/c unit. It was warm, but not hot enough for the air conditioning. I couldn't imagine what else it would be, so I snuck out, leaning down, one hand covering my privates. I didn't go ten feet before I heard the sound of something falling and then laughing. I spun around.

The rhythmic sound was a broom being swept. But then it wasn't. The woman sweeping dropped it in surprise. She was using both hands to cover her mouth (but not her eyes). She started speaking to me but not in English. For a second, I hoped it was Spanish because I might remember enough from high school to ask if I could have part of the roll of cheap brown paper towels hanging from a hook off the trash bin on wheels behind her.

But it wasn't Spanish. I communicated anyway. I gestured around her at the trash bin. She looked confused and shook her head. I walked around her, still leaning almost horizontal. I pointed toward the roll and with one hand and gestured wrapping it around herself. Her eyes went wide. For a moment, I thought she understood.

The problem was, she did. She yelled, "No, no, no!" and picked up the broom and threatened me with it.

I alternated between pointing towards the towels and my crotch.

"No, no, no!" she repeated. "Better!" she added as she got between me and the trash bin and tried to use the broomstick to pull my hand away from my privates. Then she said, "You!" and did a little dance with her hands over her head. "You!" She gestured for me to spin around. Did she know the poodle woman?

"Oh, come on! I'm not a freakin' puppet!"

"Say cheese!" she said.

That made so little sense that I said, "What?" and stood up straight.

She didn't respond. Instead she concentrated on digging something out of her pocket. The next instant she was flipping out a cell phone and pointing it towards me and I was running down the hallway. Despite a few years of track in high school, I had never learned that if you run naked certain somethings flop from side to side.

I burst into the stairwell and was instantly confronted with a guy my age holding a huge tv box making his way up from the garage.

"Dude, you gotta help me!"

"You must be the new guy!"

"Help me!" I still heard the laughter of the cleaning lady back in the hallway.

"And get on Megan's bad side? I don't think so. Sorry." He did look sorry. "What you're going through, well, it's like death and taxes. Inevitable around here. Try to take it in stride. It only gets worse if you get embarrassed."

" I AM embarrassed."

"You're making things worse for yourself. Why should I help you if you're not even willing to help yourself?"

"You have an extra towel in your unit."

"Yeah, but Megan's got a wicked imagination. You're just a naked guy in a stairwell. You'll be in my shoes someday and understand. This tv is getting heavy." He brushed past me and continued up the steps.

For the first time, I didn't mind being naked simply because I was too busy being indignant. "Screw these people," I muttered to myself.

I walked down the steps slowly, mainly to minimize the side to side motion. The door to the parking garage made me nervous because someone could be right there on the other side. I opened it and stuck my head out. The coast looked clear and I didn't hear anyone.

I started sneaking past the car near the entrance. My new typical stance: leaning forward like someone advancing under fire, one hand over my crotch and another out front to ward off who knows what. A naked nervous version of the Heisman trophy. I sidestepped to avoid a puddle of oil and brushed up against the car door handle.

The deafening alarm sent me three undignified feet into the air. I was suddenly more embarrassed by reaction than by my Garden of Eden costume. After that, I decided, "Fuck it," and strutted across the parking garage, holding my key ring as purposefully as possible. I decided if I saw anyone, I'd say good morning and keep walking.

The storage room was, as you might have guessed, a room. A big one. It was divided into spaces four by five foot, separated by chainlink fence that went to the ceiling. Imagine a kennel for gorillas in which people instead stuck old ladders, golf clubs, skis, gallons of paint, stereos and anything else that didn't fit in their unit. Mine was in the back corner and still empty, because even though my landlady stressed the storage space as a reason for renting from her, I had taken the high-minded route of thinking that if it couldn't fit into my unit, I should throw it out. That was as close as I was going to come to voluntary simplicity. (Being naked was an involuntary simplicity of dress that I had no intentions of ever repeating.)

My unit wasn't as empty as it was when the lady I was renting it from showed it to me. There was an enormous cardboard box in the back. I flipped opened the door (I hadn't bothered getting a lock for it since I didn't have anything) and went back to the box. On the top of this box was taped a handwritten note, "Looking for your unit key? Here is a proverbial haystack. P.S. There are no needles inside, so don't worry about poking yourself."

From the faint meadowy smell, I knew what was inside before I even opened the box. Literal hay. I started to groan but caught myself. I wasn't going to let this Megan character get the better of me. I'd get my key, go home and plot revenge. She was going to get it. She thought she was smarter than me, but I'd show her.

After maybe five minutes of going through the hay, I heard a click and spun around, covering myself with a hand that still had a fist full of hay in it. Meg was standing there. It took a second to register that the chainlink gate to my storage unit was shut. I lunged for it. Meg laughed as it made a loud clanking sound when I hit it. I grabbed at the latch, but it had an enormous combination padlock on it, one that bolt cutters would do no more than scratch.

"Just a sec," Meg said, beaming. She disappeared. I peered around to see where she had gone. I couldn't tell where but she was back soon. She dropped high heels onto the floor and then leaned over to start putting them on. "The shoes are noisy, so I couldn't have snuck up on you with them on. Okay, now that I'm fully dressed, you can melodramatically act frustrated that I tricked

you into a cage and locked you in."

I shook the cage.

"Good," she said.

"You're crazy!" I shouted.

She sputtered, "And you're a naked horny bastard trapped a cage, so there!"

Snappy comebacks weren't forthcoming.

"There isn't anything in that box other than hay, by the way. I don't know why guys never think to take the box out of the storage unit before going through it. You're all so amazingly consistent. How do you like these heels?" She turned her ankle sideways like a model to give me a better look. "I normally wouldn't wear heels like this to work, but I figured that today was such a special day for you that I should dress up. Do you like them?"

I'm not much of a fan of super-heels, but knowing that she wore them for me made me light-headed. I finally nodded my head to say that I did like them, very much.

"I can't wear them when I drive, which means that I have to take them off while in the car and that the brake pedal and the accelerator will cause runs in my pantyhose. Then once I get to work, I'm probably going to get hit on even more than usual. How I suffer for men!"

She knelt before the cage to get a better look at me.

"You've already done that, back at the doors to the pool," I pointed out to her.

She was concentrating too much on studying my body to respond. There was something very erotic about the mischievousness of her smile. "Yes, yes," she whispered to herself as I started to grow again. (Jez, it was like it was doing push-ups: up, down, up, down, up, up, up.) That made me feel warm in the face, so I covered myself with my hand. For the first time in awhile, she made eye contact and glared. I sheepishly let my hand fall to my side.

"If you don't know what to do with your hands, lock your fingers together behind your neck."

I did, but it was so patently submissive that I instantly dropped them. She glared again and added, "People don't come down here to the storage room very often."

"Oh, come on!"

"Don't be difficult. Hands at the neck."

I rolled my eyes and did what she asked. She stood to take me in. It was humiliating, the way she looked me over like I was a piece of meat. Her eyes wandered up and down, up and down, never getting higher than my chest. Her nipples started poking out against the fabric of her blouse. Her breathing started to become rough and she moaned as she collapsed against the chainlink gate. She finally looked me into the eyes. I wanted to stare her down but hers was such a penetrating gaze that I involuntarily looked away.

"Keep looking at me," she ordered softly, panting.

I tried. It took several attempts before I could stare back. Then after a few seconds, I was trapped. I couldn't look away but it wasn't two equals staring into each other's eyes. I knew I wouldn't be able to describe her eyes at all, yet she was stripping my soul far more intensely than she had stripped my body. Her panting grew louder and louder. Although I didn't dare break eye contact, I could tell by the way the skin around her eyes moved that she was smiling at me, a very intimate smile. All the lovers I ever had felt like complete strangers in comparison to that moment.

Then she punched the gate in frustration and burst the air with a violent curse word. "I am already soooo late to work. Here." She slid a manila folder that I hadn't noticed her carrying under the chainlink gate and stepped back. "Inside are directions on how to figure out how the combination to the padlock. And as an incentive to get out, if you're still locked in here when I get back from work, I'm *really* going to rake you over the coals. Besides," she added,

covering her chest with her hands, "it gets cold down here!"

"You certifiable," I groaned.

"Actually," she said, holding up one finger like a person making a point during a presentation. "I'm not. I was worried about that, so I talked to my therapist. I was thinking, you know, something like histrionic personality disorder. What did she say? 'You majored in philosophy in college, so you're not superficial enough to be histrionic. You seem happy when you're not stressed out by messes. You have many close friends, you get along well with your family, you get good reviews at work, you're just the world's most ornery flirt, and even then every man that you get into a predicament you make sure he takes his own clothes off.' So no, Josh, not certifiable. Not certifiable at all." She looked smug. Then she grew serious. "You realize, right, that you're quite safe, that no one has ever died from blushing? I'm just flirting with you and your..." She wiggled her finger and as she nodded towards my crotch.

Then she added, "I do take care of all the guys in the building. I think of you as my harem and I feel like you're my responsibility. If you need help setting up a date or need advice on women or need your plants watered when you're on a trip, I'm your gal. Except for 217. That bastard untied my bikini top without permission then categorically refused to even pull his trunks down to his knees even after he lost a bet. I don't even say 'hello' to him in the elevator. And 215 was just too painfully shy. When he lost the bet, he started crying, so I just let him go. I would say hello in the elevator to him but he's still avoiding me. Some of the other women in the building tell me he's a jerk, but he seems harmless to me." Then she groaned and it wasn't pleasurable like the minute before. "I so have to get to work! But oh, you know how the light in here is on that shut-off timer? The most I can give you is two hours before the lights go out. And another thing, don't try to cover yourself up with that box when you get out, not if you know what's good for you. And oh, oh, oh! Some of that hay fell out onto the concrete. I need it all for next time and just seeing it on the floor makes me want to... ugh! Could you put it back and then put the box in my storage unit, number 117, and lock it with this lock?"

I leaned down, grabbed a handful of hay and began sprinkling it on the floor.

Like a cat presented with a dangling piece of string, she charged forward for a few steps and stretched out her hand to take the lock. Then she froze and smirked, "Nice try."

I kept sprinkling hay on the ground.

"You're sooo naughty! Well, I like a man who understands how I think. But I do need to get to work! Bye-bye!" She rapidly headed towards the garage, her heels clicking loudly.

"I'm going to get you for this!" I yelled as I grabbed at the chainlink gate.

The sound of the heels stopped and then came back towards me. She had an enormous smile on her face. "Is that a threat or a promise?"

That was too dangerous of a question to answer.

Then she rolled her eyes in disgust and said, "Men! They're all hot air!"

The heels clicked away. Then I heard the ti-ti-ti-ti sound of the timer switch being turned and then the door closing and being locked. I could faintly hear heels but then the sound faded away.

I grabbed the envelope from the floor. There were maybe four or five pieces of paper. The top one was a cover letter. (Okay, Meg is also a professional.)

Dearer Josh,

Once you get out of your cage, your next step will be the HOA president. She's in 306. She told me yesterday that you hadn't stopped by and introduced yourself yet. That was very rude of you. Now's your chance. She'll have something for you.

To get out of the cage, just play the sudoku puzzle attached (see page 2). On page 3 is the code for turning the answers in particular boxes into a combination for the lock. I've also very thoughtfully included directions if you've never done a sudoku before (but realistically speaking, if you haven't,

you're screwed 'cause this one ain't easy). Before you complain, yes, yes, I'm aware that you don't have a pencil. I thought that doing it in your head would help your concentration and keep your eyes off the picture of me included.

Affectionately,

Meg

I looked inside the envelope. Inside was a 5" by 7" glossy of Meg in a one-piece beside a pool. (Not the one in our complex.) She was sitting on the end of a pool lounge chair, looking out past the camera. She was blushing as one hand was covering her mouth in embarrassment and the other had just finished pulling down the zipper that went most of the length of the suit, leaving the top as two flaps, one of which had been caught by the wind almost to the point of showing her nipple. I'll probably burn in hell for it, but I wanted to masturbate right then and there. Only I couldn't figure out anything to do with the resulting mess that wouldn't have me dying of embarrassment later. I put the picture in the box of hay to keep it from distracting me.

While I only had my current job for the eighteen months since college, it required a lot of flying so I've done many sudoku puzzles to kill time in airports. I had never done one in my head. I quickly discovered that Meg had picked a near impossible one, especially with the picture of her within reach and the timer on the lights going tick...tick...tick...

Eventually I got into it. It was quite a challenge. I hadn't memorized much since grade school, but for the sudoku puzzle, I created mnemonics. A street address, a birthday, all the odd numbers completed in one box, all the evens in another, a backward clock. By the time the combination lock satisfactorily clicked, perhaps an hour had passed and I had the sense of accomplishment that I hoped to get at work but always seemed elusive. Once I opened the door and stepped out, I suddenly remembered that I was naked and still didn't have my house key.

I looked high and low through the chainlink fencing at other units' storage, looking for a sheet or blanket or something else that I could use to cover

myself. All I found were matching towels that screamed "disappointing wedding gift!" but they were in the back of a storage unit. I tried to grab a golf club that I could use to get those towels, but the handle was tantalizing out of reach. I got a finger on it, only enough to push it out of reach. I really leaned into the fence to grab it, but that sent the entire bag of clubs crashing to the concrete, which caused several rolled up oriental rugs to fall down on top of them in a huge pile of dust. I stepped back and looked down at myself, trying to decide what to do. I had the pattern of the chainlinks from my knees to my chest. Not how I would want to be remembered after passing on to the next life.

I considered using the box of hay like naked people in comics used barrels. Just like Meg said not to. I wondered whether she would even find out if I had. I bet she didn't even work on Saturdays and was spying on me somehow. I wondered what she would do if she learned that I disobeyed her. Then I realized that I wouldn't have to worry. I had the manilla envelope. I smugly put the box of hay in her empty storage unit (as empty as mine) and locked it shut.

I grabbed my keys off the floor of my storage unit and went to the door to the garage, prepared to cover myself with the manilla envelope the moment I went out. Taped above the door handle was a short note: "If you want to keep the picture of me, put it and the envelope and all the sudoku paper in your storage unit. Otherwise put everything with the box of hay outside my unit. Don't even think of using the envelope to cover yourself as you go talk to our HOA president. Thx and kisses. Meg"

I rolled my eyes in disbelief. Then I stood there, stumped. If I left the envelope behind, I'd be complicit in my nudity. If I didn't, I didn't know what would happen. Meg seemed capable of anything. I groaned and put the envelope back in my storage space.

Chapter Five

I walked to the door to the garage, took a deep breath and opened it. I stuck my head out. No one. Silence. The building had a lot of silences, it seemed. I turned toward the nearest stairwell when I saw that another note had been taped to the outside of the door. "Don't forget to lock the storage room. The

last guy didn't do it. Hugs (with hands roaming down to your ass), Meg"

I locked the damn door. I charged up the stairwell. I ran past a man and woman. My face burst into warmth and looked down at the steps. It was, "I'm so sorry, excuse me," over and over again until all that could be heard was the woman's hysterical laughing and a "Come back!"

On the third floor, I opened the door to the hallway. Coast was clear. The numbers started at the other end, so I had to walk the length of it. I buzzed 306 and then flattened myself against the wall so only my head would be visible when they opened the door.

A dog barked inside. I sighed. Then the door sprung open.

"I am soooo sorry," I said, staring at her feet and clutching my hands tightly over myself to make it clear that this wasn't my idea and that I was mortified.

"Took you long enough."

When I found myself fending off a sniffing poodle, I finally screwed up the courage to look her in the face. "You!" I shouted, pointing accusingly, forgetting to cover myself. "You!" I repeated, not sure of what else I would be appropriate.

She shrugged her shoulders and said, "What can I say? I got excited and impatient so I had to look early. When I was a kid, I always sneak down earlier and untape one end of all my Christmas gifts under the tree and then retape them. Impatience is in my nature. I had to get an early eyeful."

"You could have helped me earlier. Meg had already given you something to give me before you went out and looked at me!"

"Did she?" she asked, all innocence. "I must have forgotten."

"You!"

"Your vocabulary is disappointingly small. I know public schools aren't what

they used to be, but I would have thought that they got past pronouns."

"You!"

"And Fluffy. Fluffy is a co-conspirator." She bent down to scratch the poodle behind the ears. She seemed delighted to discover that stooping gave her a better view of my crotch. I covered with one hand.

"Do you have my unit key?"

"Good gracious no. I only have..." Her voice trailed off as she went into her kitchen. Her absence made me more self-conscious about standing in the hallway naked. Fluffy started growling at me when I tried to step in to the doorway to hide myself from passers by.

"You know, Andy and Rich are going to be so pissed at Meg for doing this while they're out of town."

"Who are Andy and Rich?"

"A couple on your floor. Haven't you met them?"

"No, and I don't need to meet them today."

"Everybody needs an audience. Anyway, this might be of use. I think this is directions on where to find your unit key." She waived a sheet of paper.

I didn't even try to hide my disappointment. "You really don't have my key?"

"Can you imagine the legal issues if I started having keys to some of the units? What a headache!"

"That's b.s."

She did that innocent look again. "Is it?"

"Yes," I said testily.

"Oh do relax. You've got nothing to be ashamed off." Her eyes went into elevator mode and she added, "Nothing at all."

It reminded me of the time in high school when my gang of friends was hanging out by somebody's cousin's boyfriend's father's lake. Jenny Dreyfus did this most artistic dive off the nine foot board. Before she even surfaced for air, her bikini top was floating on the surface. Gerry Johnston urged us to act like nothing happened. Even the girls went along. It wasn't until Jenny was out of the water for maybe two minutes and she noticed that every last one of us guys had pup tents and there was something wicked in the eyes of the girls did she stop and look down. When she ran off, it fell to me calm her down. I told her not to worry. She had a beautiful body, that she had the most amazing chest I had ever seen.

<—***Idiot***—>

The HOA president made an almost accidental step forward. I grabbed the sheet of paper from her hand. All that was printed on it was a smiley face. I flipped it over in disgust. My ignition key was taped to the back. I took off running.

"Don't you want you want something to drink? I've got..." The voice trailed off. The stairwell door closed behind me to the words, "He's very rude, isn't he, Fluffy?"

My car (my dad's old Lexus) fit into a parking space near the elevator, in this funny space into which I had to park parallel. I had been naked so long that I didn't even think of covering up. It was curious to think that all of us might only be two hours from rejecting clothes.

I expected a note taped to the steering wheel. No such luck. While I was relieved that there wasn't a note telling me to go to the roof or worse, it was frustrating. I looked down by the emergency brake, on the dash, under the seat, the glove compartment. Any sign of something left by Meg. I got out and bent over to check under the floor mat.

"My god, you're naked!"

I banged my head on the handle bar above the door when I spun around. She: a jogger: a curvy thirtysomething in short shorts and a sports bra that didn't waste any fabric. Very environmentally friendly, that. She had an iPod on a band around her upper arm and one earphone dangled towards the ground. She was drenched in sweat.

"I can explain," I said, taking a step forward.

A panicked look swept across her face as she shuffled backwards. She pulled a cellphone out of her cleavage and whipped it open and pointed it at me like a weapon. A camera. Time stopped and turned sideways. If I had been wearing anything, I would have been at serious risk of wetting myself. I stepped back and covered myself with the car door as best I could.

"Whoa! Look, lady, I can explain. This is not my idea," I said.

"Oh wait, you're the new guy!" she said with a delightedly laugh as she lowered her cellphone, took the second earphone out and relaxed. "Edward? I think I've seen you in the elevator but didn't recognize you. I didn't realize today was your big day or I would have gone running earlier so I could see the whole show." Her voice was so light and crystalline she barely touched the words. "This is what I get for sleeping in! I certainly wouldn't have yelped when you leaned over like that if I had known! I would have just enjoyed the view. Quietly. How did Meg get you? The pool? Strip poker? The trick with the towel?"

Was I really having this conversation? "The pool, if you must know."

"Don't sound so snooty. You finally went swimming, eh? Last night, Meg was over at my place for drinks and was complaining, 'Isn't that motherfucker ever going to try the pool?' For someone who's so obsessed with cleanliness, she's got quite the potty mouth after a couple of glasses of wine."

"Do you know where my unit key is?"

"Probably. Meg tends to stick to something as long as it keeps working. Very ritualistic, that girl."

"Could you tell me where it is?"

"What do I get out of it?"

I didn't like that sound of that. I couldn't think of a response.

"I'll tell you what. Turn around and put your hands on your car, like you're being arrested. That'll let me check out your backside."

"And if I say no?"

She held up the cellphone and gleefully waived it.

"If I show you, no pictures?"

She nodded her head and I turned and put my hands on where the roof of the car met the rear side door. She gurgled. "Meg sometimes only does this to guys so they don't feel left out, but you're nice looking." Then I heard the clicking sound of a picture being taken.

"Sorry," she said. "I don't have many guys in my pilates classes, but I wanted a close-up so I can show them what we're trying to achieve with their asses."

"I don't do pilates. I lift weights." My butt erupted in pain.

"I told you, don't be snooty! And ouch! That really hurt my hand! Say, do you have anything in your car that I could spank you with?"

"Do you honestly expect an answer to that?"

"For someone who can't keep track of their clothes, you are *awfully* snooty."

"How you would act if you were in my shoes?"

"You're not wearing any."

"Smart ass."

"Red ass."

I changed the subject. "Where's the key?"

"Oh first, let me give you one of my business cards. Keep your hands on the car and keep staring ahead. It'll take me a sec to get the cards out. I keep a couple under iPod." She paused for a moment. Then she reached down past me and put a card on the seat. "It's sweaty around the edges, but you can still see the url for the studio. I'll let you take a few classes for free if you promise that you have better manners when dressed." Her position gave her a new view and her eyes went lower. "Then again, I don't think there will be too many complaints if you showed up naked for class."

"The key?"

"The key, the key! Men are so impatient." She stepped back away from the car. "Hold on, just a sec." She texted someone and then snapped her cellphone closed and returned it to inside her sports bra.

"The tailpipe." Then she was gone.

*****Chapter Six*****

Inside the tailpipe was a piece of paper. I dusted the black smut off it and my fingers and then unrolled it. All it said was, "Southern stairwell."

I locked up my car, put its key on my keyring and went to that stairwell. The stairs were a series of concrete slabs. As soon as I opened the door, I saw a piece of paper dangling down from the under side of one of the steps. I pulled it down, ripping the tape. "Up a floor, but leave this paper here."

I dashed up to the next floor. The paper there said, "The northern stairwell."

I realized I was being forced to walk the length of the first floor. So I did. Leisurely, twirling my key ring on my finger. I ran into a guy walking the other direction. I casually said, "Morning," and he answered in the same tone of voice. Right as I got to the other stairwell, he yelled back, "It's afternoon." I agreed and then went and found the next sheet of paper.

I wasn't surprised that it said, "Up a level." Up a level, the next sheet of paper said, "Southern stairwell."

I saw the game. Meg wanted me to walk every hallway. I figured out that the zigzag pattern had to end directly above me. Instead of walking the length of the second floor, I jogged up to the third floor. I found a piece of paper in the same place. I grabbed it with a smirk.

It said, "Think you're clever? I said go to the southern stairwell on the second floor."

"Okay, Meg," I said out loud. "You got me. You really got me."

I went back down a floor and walked across the length of the second floor. A woman with her hands full of grocery bags whistled at me. I curtsied with an imaginary skirt and kept going, walking even slower than usual to show that I didn't care. It wasn't until I got to the stairwell that it occurred to me that I could have tried to hide behind one of the giant houseplants.

The piece of paper said, "Up a level." There, the paper said, "Your unit key is taped to the underside of the bottom step in the northern stairwell."

I went back to the northern third stairwell. The piece of paper scolding me for trying to shortcut the walk through the building was where I left it on the floor. I put my hand under the bottom step and felt around until I touched hard metal. I pulled the tape off it and walked to my unit.

When I pushed the key into my door, I was briefly tempted to, in an act of defiance, grab a towel and only a towel and then go back to the pool area. Then I remembered the sexy picture of Meg down in storage and started to

get hard for the first time in awhile. I went inside and locked and chained the door behind me. To the left was the living room and kitchen.

I did a double-take. It looked like a model unit. Everything was put away. The carpet had that smoothness that it has when it's been vacuum swept but hasn't been walked on. The kitchen floor was shiny. Even the tv was missing its dust. I wondered how long it would take me to find everything. Starting with the chairs around the kitchen table. Why??? Why would someone steal chairs? Oh well, I concluded. Meg was a total nutter. She was probably holding them hostage for some other game of hers.

Then I realized that I hadn't felt relieved to get back home. Being naked didn't matter anymore. That felt good. But I was suddenly very tired. The day had been exhausting.

Then the fatigue vanished. The picture of Meg. My plan was simple. Get dressed, hurry down and get the picture and then come back and masturbate. I started to get harder thinking about it. I reflected back on the day. There were some awfully erotic moments, starting with the first sight of Meg. I found my hand stroking myself. I needed to get dressed fast and get the picture before I went too far.

The bedroom door was tight as usual, so I had to lean into it to open it. I strode into the bedroom, looking down as I turned toward the closet. I'm proud to say that I didn't even blink when the cheering erupted. Three women were sitting on my bed. Then four more were sitting in a row of my kitchen table chairs in front of it.

The Poodle Queen was there, but Meg wasn't. I was disappointed, but as I had never been naked in front of even two women before, I was undergoing too complicated emotions to dwell on it. I didn't even try to cover up, until I realized that I wasn't simply naked but well past half mast. I fought off the modesty and asked, slightly sarcastically, "Has everyone gotten a good look?"

After the clapping stopped, the women started talking amongst themselves as if I wasn't there. I stood there until they started standing up. They filed out,

each deciding to get a good feel. Woman number five (I don't remember anything about her appearance other than her bright red nail polish) gave me a long stroke as she smiled and walked by. I nearly lost it.

Number six hesitated. Her body language said that she had been dragged into this and wasn't completely comfortable what they were doing. Yet she obviously wanted to touch and was only restrained from a concern that it would offend me. She stood still for a few long seconds, trying to build up her courage. It gave me time to focus on her. It was Lisa-or-Liza, the woman I always checked out when I saw her. She was about my age and very cute. Nice long black hair. Her t-shirt was from the college I attended. Those few seconds lasted forever, it seemed, but then she darted forward, pecked me on the cheek and whispered, "Unit 201."

She started to walk away, hovering at the door, reluctant to leave.

The Poodle Queen was last. She pressed an envelope against the center of my chest. This left her forefinger over a nipple, which she caressed until I stepped back, collapsed back, into the wall. I was afraid that the unwanted jolt of pleasure would make me orgasm right then and there, right in front of who-cares-if-it's-Liza-or-Lisa-I-know-where-she-lives, but fortunately my body stopped at my veins throbbing. The women left, talking amongst themselves animatedly.

I heard the outside door close and ripped open the envelope.

Dearest Josh,

I am so sorry to miss the grand finale. Believe me, I desperately wanted to be there, but I'm out of vacation days or sick leave and I'm going to have to sweet talk my boss as it is about arriving late. (Feel free to stop by and apologize for that, by the way. It took you long enough to get that cute little ass of yours into the storage area! Really, Josh, time is money.)

First things first. If you want another excuse to stop by, you could also ask me where I put things away. Your vacuum sweeper bag needs to be emptied, by the way, but like I said, I'm running late for work to work as I type this.

Dinner tonight is at eight. I'm paying. I was serious about not sleeping with you. At least not for awhile. Judging from your apartment I don't think your standards of cleanliness are enough for a long-term relationship. Maybe if you had practice being my naked maid, it would help?

After you get this, please call me. Sorry to be such a feminine cliche, but I want to talk about feelings. I'm so curious about what goes through men's heads at times like this. I hope you're good at describing your embarrassment.

I'm serious about calling. Right now. The number is on your fridge. Most guys, in my extensive experience, do one of two things. As soon as they finish a letter like this (and no, I didn't cut and paste any of this, this is letter was especially written for you, George), the younger guys take advantage of their privacy to masturbate. Then they take a nap. Older guys take a nap and then masturbate.

Now, the topic that's been on your mind all day. Revenge. You caught me out quickly. I'm exhibitionist. Strutting around naked is all very fine and well. (If you want to see what I mean, pound on my door sometime when you hear me vacuum sweeping. If I'm in a good mood, you'll get an eyeful.) But that's not my fantasy. To be honest, I did this mainly to provoke you, though I will fight like a dog when you try to get your revenge. I want you to succeed, but I can't help resisting. (I'm actually furious with you for losing the second swimming race.)

Here are the rules. Not when my family is around. And my grandma arrives tomorrow and is staying for a week. Unless you got something wicked up your sleeve for dinner, you'll have to wait for two weekends. This should give your evil ideas time to gestate or ferment or whatever evil ideas do. I'm serious about being out of vacation and sick days, so if you try something on a weekday, you won't have much time to get back at me because I'll have to get to work. If you haven't gotten your revenge by January, I'll have be able to take some time off work and you'll have more flexibility. Also, I know I have a lot coming to me (none of the seventeen men that I've done this to have ever succeeded at getting me back), but don't be mean. Mean is not fun.

But the only thing I hate more than meanness would be for you to not try at all.

You should be able to find plenty of co-conspirators. Fourteen of the guys still live in the building. Even Andy and Rich may help you. I don't think they'd get anything out of seeing me naked, but they're going to be unhappy to find out I stripped you while they were out of town. I only do this to the new guys, but some of the men who moved in before me have made it clear that they wouldn't mind seeing a lot of me either.

Affectionately yours (I hope),

Meg

P.S. Are you sure you got all the hay back in the box?

P.P.S. I mean nineteen guys. You're number nineteen. Okay, I lied. I did cut and paste a few paragraphs. This is getting to be like online dating. Keep having the same conversation over and over looking for Prince Charming. It's like looking for a needle in... never mind. So the question is before you, Josh. Will you make my dreams come true? Will you put this damsel in distress?

**Second Verse Same As The...
Okay, a few things have changed**

Andromeda Straining

Chapter One

"What a rotten, miserable..." I hissed under my breath as I looked out the large window by the elevator and down at the pool. I ran back to my unit, holding the halves of my robe together. I hadn't even gotten dressed when the image from the rinkadink camera I have mounted over the pool showed that someone was swimming. It might have been Josh but the image was too blurry to tell for sure and the HOA prez had said that a new guy, single to boot, was moving into the building. The guy in the pool I didn't recognize: the new guy. That called for a very proper welcoming.

But seriously, who goes swimming at eight o'clock on a Monday morning? A Monday? Any normal soul is injecting caffeine into their veins to get the asses to work. This guy was doing laps. It simply wasn't decent. In April, no less. They had only filled the pool the preceding week.

This guy, though, did have a decent, Josh-like ass. Surely, he'd go swimming on a Saturday afternoon someday? Preferably one in which I didn't have to work? I finished the rest of my coffee in one swallow. Couldn't risk it. One of the guys in the building would talk. It would make my life a lot easier if this guy didn't know what hit him.

I had to get my caffeinated ass to work by ten o'clock. Almost two hours. Have him stripped by 8:50 AM, locked in storage by 9:10. That would leave me five minutes to gloat, ten minutes to tape up all the signs and take care of his keys. I'd get into my work clothes by 9:40, be out the door by 9:42. With no traffic jams, I'd be in the office by 9:58. Cutting it close. Better not waste any time gloating. What's the fun of that? Then I realized that I didn't even know what unit he lived in, and that that was going to cause so many complications, mainly that I couldn't very well trap in his storage unit if I didn't know which one it was (the empty one?) and I didn't know how to set up the scavenger hunt so he had to walk through the entire building naked to get home. I could ask him, of course, but I preferred to have everything arranged before I ambushed him. That way I had everything properly set up. Swimming in April indeed!

I watched the monitor as I hastily brushed my teeth. He was a pretty strong swimmer. Maybe he was the one? My personal Neo? I twisted my lips in preemptive disappointment. I couldn't risk getting my hopes up. I was despairing after Josh failed. If he couldn't do it, who could?

Josh, I admit, had come close to stripping me in retaliation for what I had done to him. He did take me out to dinner after I showed him off to the entire building, but it hadn't taken long to realize that we would never make a couple. In fact, it only took until I went back to his unit and saw how messy he had made it since I had cleaned it earlier in the day. But even after I looked around his living room in dismay and said, "We're never going to be able to live together, are we?" there was still a serious sexual tension in the air. We both knew that I had it coming.

At first it was exquisitely nerve-wracking. Whenever we made plans, I was a wreck all day, waiting and waiting. I shook in his presence. I had to concentrate on eating when I was around him to avoid choking. But I slowly despaired. As weeks became months, hope died.

I didn't think anything of it when he asked me over to help him assemble some bookcases that he had just gotten himself for Christmas. He had made his move when we were carrying junk displaced by the bookcases down into his storage unit. There was something about how he fumbled his keys when unlocking the storage room that made me realize he might still be thinking of revenge after all those months. I think he knew the jig was up when he noticed my nipples poking out against my t-shirt. But he valiantly plowed ahead with his plan.

A few minutes later, there was a flurry of giggly action that ended with a satisfying click and my leaning against the chainlink fencing across the walkway from his storage cage, panting for breath and asking him, "You don't have much experience wrestling, do you?"

He remained silent, peering out at me from the locked gate of his storage unit.

"See, if you had a couple of older brothers, you would be out here and gloating." I then asked whether he ever read the Edgar Allan Poe story called

"The Cask of the Amontillado." He forlornly looked out at me and said no.

"I don't recommend it. The story is way too gruesome. But this guy ends up on the opposite side of a wall from what he intended. The consequences aren't good for him. I thought you might be able to relate." I smiled.

He smiled back but he looked nervous. I said so. He admitted it.

"And you should be nervous."

That made him look even more anxious. He checked the lock. He checked the latch, hoping it was loose enough to pry open even with the lock in place. The results were predictable. He wasn't going anywhere.

"Too bad you didn't use a combination lock," I said to him. "Then you'd know it and I wouldn't. Sloppy planning on your part. Do you have any other keys to this lock other than the one on the keyring?" I pointed to the one on the floor and then picked it up. In the shuffle it had landed out in the walkway well past his unit. I stuck my finger in the ring and twirled it around. His eyes followed the keys like a cat mesmerized by a toy.

"I warned you not to try to pull a George." That's what I called brute force methods. George, bless his poor soul, attempted to get back at me by simply tried to rip my clothes off in the hallway. Martial arts training kicked in and I kicked. There was no conscious thought involved. He ended up naked on my kitchen floor with an ice pack you know where and my apologizing with every apologetic word in the thesaurus. In a soprano voice, he said it was quite all right, that he deserved it, etc. Still, it was the least erotic nudity to come my way since nakedness meant I was seconds away from another diaper.

"I wasn't trying to muscle you into my unit," my Josh said to me from within his storage-unit-cum-cage. "You were supposed to walk in first and... oh, forget it."

"Yes, let's not dwell on the past. Let's look to the future." If I had a mirror to check, I would have, but even still, I'm reasonably confident that my smile

fell into the wolfish category. "Josh, Josh, Josh, what am I ever to do with you? What you planned was quite naughty and to fail was unforgivable. Do you know how many hours, days, months — years! — I've put into getting a guy to strip me? Now, even you've failed me. You've had the most potential of any guy in ages." Then I clutched my hands together and did my best Princess Leia imitation, "Obi-Wan Kenobi, you were my last hope."

He didn't know how to react. Well, I at least thought it was funny.

He finally said, more to himself than to me, "You can't imagine how desperately crazy it's driven me these past few months to not see you with your clothes off. I couldn't even sleep last night."

"Still the flattering puppy." I softened for a second but then understood that that's exactly what he wanted. Better to nip it at the bud. "Okay, kiddo, off with it all," I said.

"What?"

"Don't 'what?' me! You lost and now you pay up. Underwear too."

"No."

"Do you want some time alone to think about your position? I have two movies to send back to Netflix that I was planning on watching tonight. I can come back. It'll get real cold down here."

He didn't say anything.

"After all yours clothes are in a pile out here, I'll take my top off."

He perked up instantly. "Really?" Then his smile turned shy. "Does that include your bra?"

"No," I said. "But," I added. I turned my side towards him and pulled up my sweater and t-shirt so he could see a hint of what made him desperate. "As you can see, the bra cup is one of those translucent lacy kinds. The best of

both worlds: you'll get to see everything but it'll still have that gravity-defying quality that you men so unrealistically lust after."

His clothes made a smaller pile on the concrete than I would have imagined. The thinness of the materials made it easy to pull them through a hole in the fence. For a minute, we devoted ourselves to the puzzle of how to get his shoes past the chainlink fence with the same casual air that we had when making sense of the directions for assembling his bookcases. Then I said, "Maybe for what I intend on putting you through, you had better have shoes on anyway. It's kinda slushy outside."

He dropped the shoe he was holding onto his foot.

"Now that was ironic," I said, "dropping a shoe on your foot."

He ignored me. He was fixated on my chest. "Oh, right, my sweater and t-shirt. Do you want them off?"

He bobbed his head enthusiastically.

"You realize that you won't see anymore than when you first saw me in a bikini? I suppose, though, that I'll have some serious pokies given how cold it is down here. Why aren't you shivering? Are you that hot and bothered?"

"Please," he whimpered.

He had been shriveled and shrunken but his interesting bits started coming to life, especially when I teased at the bottom of my sweater.

Then I said, "Nope, changed my mind."

"You said you would!"

I did my best Arnold Schwarzenegger imitation. "I lied." It wasn't very good. In response to the sound he made, I added, "You know, that I think was the most amazingly loud whimper I have ever heard." He did it again. "Yes, that." I lowered my voice and clutched against the fencing separating us. "Josh," I

said huskily, "that sound, that was hot." Still with my voice low, I asked, "Tell me, what were you going to do to me?"

At first he refused to say. I pleaded. He noticed that my chest was pressed against the fencing. He started rubbing with one finger, like someone using a touchpad on a laptop, teasing one of my nipples into pokie-mode, obvious even through the sweater.

He started telling me his plans. It was making me so weak in the knees that I ended up leaning back against the storage unit across the way with one hand inside my panties and the other taking turns on my nipples. He was equally turned on by what he was saying, to the point that speaking became a struggle for him.

"You have trouble completing sentences when you're horny, don't you?" I teased. He didn't like it when I ordered him to concentrate on proper enunciation and keep his hands off himself. "Don't want you to go blind," I said with a wink. "You know, I think we invented a new kind of sex: chainlink fence sex. A mixture of phone sex and those booth things at strip clubs. You know, you get to watch a woman for a minute for every dollar. Sorry. I don't know what to call them. I've only seen them in movies."

Afterward I climaxed, I adjusted my clothing and shook my hair to even it out. It's a good thing masturbation isn't always that good otherwise I would never get out of bed.

"Was that good for you?" he joked. Or rather, choked.

"You're good. You're really good. Imagine what you could do with that tongue of yours if you could actually touch me with it instead of just talk to me with it." I sighed. "Too bad you're such a slob." I pushed the index finger of the hand that had been in my panties through the chainlink fence. "Smell what you did to me."

That amazingly loud whimper again.

I let him suck on my finger. Yeah, he was good alright.

"I'm torn," I whispered. "Part of me is so grateful for that orgasm that I'm tempted to let you go, but it's also heart-breaking to know that I'll never be the victim of your plans. I think you should be punished."

He pulled his mouth away from my finger, pleaded with his eyes, and suggestively wiggled the lock.

"You know, come to think of it, I'm not that grateful," I said. "It's your turn to be grateful."

"Why?"

"The first idea that popped into my head was to tape your house keys to a stop sign on the next block. That's why I made the comment about the shoes. I've decided against that. So say thank you."

He suspected a trap but said thank you anyway. He wouldn't have gotten a perfect ten for sincerity.

"Instead," I said. I dragged the sentence out as I picked up and folded his shirt. "Instead, I think I'll give your keys to Liza."

"You wouldn't dare!" he growled. I don't think he would growl that way if he knew how cute women found it.

"She has a crush on you, you know, from the day she first saw you naked. Yet you barely spoke to her when you two happened to get your mail at the same time last Wednesday. She was hurt."

"But I was trying to get my revenge on you before I asked her out!" he protested.

I couldn't help but smile. "Josh, that's so sweet! Why didn't you tell her? She would have understood. I know she's more conservative than me — well, that's not saying much — but she would have understood."

He was at a loss for words.

"You're a catch, Josh. A very caught catch at the moment. I think you and Liza need to have a heart to heart right now."

"Okay, give her the keys, but give me back my clothes first," he begged.

"Josh, you silly boy, you know that's not my style."

In fact, when I knocked on Liza's door and handed over the keys, it was resting on a neat pile of clothes that made me think of a wedding ring being carried down the aisle on one of those special cushions. I didn't think I had much of a choice: Liza wouldn't believe my story if I didn't give her Josh's clothes as well as his keys. I told her, "I have the guy that you have a crush on all nicely locked up in his storage unit where he can't *help* but give you his undivided attention. Remember that when you're thinking of what to get me for my birthday next year. Big gift, big gift!"

They started dating within half an hour. I didn't see much of Josh after that. He blurred into this Josh/Liza creature that was rarely seen in public.

The thing I don't understand was Liza's reaction once she got down to the storage area and released Josh. When I called her cell phone asking her whether she wanted me to shut off the security cameras I had set up down there or whether she wanted a memento of her first time with her new man, an ugly string of four-letter words came out of her mouth. I know was interrupting, but they hadn't gotten past three buttons on her blouse.

I was just trying to be considerate.

Geesh!

Chapter Two

The new guy, the new guy. There was a new guy in the pool. Helen, our HOA president whom Josh always referred to as the Poodle Queen behind her back, hadn't remembered the new guy's name when she tipped me off that I had a new victim moving in in a few weeks. We had been passing in the hallway and it was a simple, "Hey Meg, I heard that there's a new guy moving into the building in April. I heard he was cute but don't remember his name. Will tell you next time."

It didn't matter what his name was. I had to concentrate. I stripped off my robe and donned a bikini, tying knots in between ordering my computer to print out new copies of the signs that I'd have to tape around the building once I got him locked in storage. (I know, I know, I should recycle!) Once I got the bikini bottoms on, I told the printer to make a copy of the sudoku puzzle and directions. Did I even have any envelopes in my unit? How could I be so unprepared?

At my door, I took a deep breath. I asked myself whether I was in the right mindset or whether I was taking an unnecessary risk in my haste. This stakes were too high to screw up.

I blushed thinking about the mistake copying and pasting on the letter to Josh when it had been his time to play Odysseus. That had been harmless. But what if I screwed something else up, something bigger?

No, I decided. I was prepared. A new string bikini (for luck), a t-shirt, keys and a towel. I was properly armed. I stepped out into the hall. It felt naughty to wear that little after being bundled for winter for so long.

When I looked down at him through the big window while waiting for the elevator, I suddenly felt confident. I had done this so many times, I told myself. I could strip any heterosexual male I wanted.

To my pleasant surprise, when I turned around to get on the elevator, Josh was there waiting to go down too. The elevator doors closed behind and after I hit the button for the first floor, it started to move. Slowly, as it always does.

Josh shook his head "no" when I pointed to the basement button.

"Don't you park in the garage?" I asked.

"Normally. On the street today. Family's in town, so my space down in the garage is already in use."

"That's sweet of you. Especially," I added playfully, "since you're such a jerk."

"What did I do?"

"Nothing. Nothing at all. You never tried again. That's unconscionable. What does a woman have to do around here to get stripped naked?"

He was lost in thought for a moment and then announced, "*Charade*."

"Pardon me?"

"That line, you stole it from the movie *Charade*. Audrey Hepburn asks Cary Grant if he knows what's wrong with him and then she says, 'Nothing!'"

"I don't steal anything. Ever."

"Men's clothes."

"No," I said indignantly. "I do NOT steal men's clothes. How could you say such a thing? I find crumbled heaps of men's clothes in the strangest places, by the pool, in the storage area, in the garage, and I either return them to their hangers or put them in the wash. I bring order to chaos. There's no stealing involved."

"You're whacked."

"That's a separate point. And the meds are helping." He didn't respond. Talking about the drugs for my brain made him uncomfortable, I remembered, so I decided to change to a topic that I knew he liked better. I pulled up the side of my t-shirt and presented him with my ass. "Do you like

my new bikini? I got one held together with knots. That way if you men continue to be so incompetent at stripping me there will still be a risk that a knot will come undone."

He started to say something and then stopped. He opened his mouth again. "Sometimes you leave me at a loss for words."

"Well, at least stay at a loss for words until you get to your car. The new guy is in the pool."

"Your next victim, eh?"

"Does saying that make you feel like an old hand around the building?"

"Yeah, almost."

The elevator doors opened.

"Not a word to him."

Josh looked bored by my comment but said, "I'm going to walk out this elevator and keep walking. I'm not even going to turn my head."

I watched him and he did exactly that.

I went over to the entrance of the pool. I unlocked the door and opened it. I adjusted the door jam very carefully. I needed it open so it wouldn't interrupt my running into the building with the new guy's clothes, but I also needed to be able to quickly kick the door jam out of the way and lock the guy out before he knew what hit him. Stripping men was an exact science.

I saw that the net-on-a-pole thingamajigger for cleaning the pool was still on its hooks. Normally, a couple of days or weeks before I pounced, as part of my master plan, I hid the pole on the ledge along the wall. After I trapped a guy naked in the fenced-in pool area, I'd go put up all the directions for the scavenger hunt that would make him have to sneak through the entire building before he got back to his unit. Then I'd come back and leave his keys

just out of reach on the sidewalk, so he'd have nakedly to ask a passer-by to hand them to him. But if the net-pole was still on its hooks, then the guy could get the keys himself simply by using the pole. (I should also say that everyone in the building knows to look for the pole on the ledge, so I'm not hiding it for the building's regular residents. Like I said, an exact science.)

If the new guy could use the pole to grab his keys off the sidewalk, I would have to develop a new way to make it tough for him to get his keys. Something all new. But still embarrassing. And I didn't have much time to do it. I was being sloppy and I knew it.

Still, momentum had me walking toward the pool. I looked at him as I took those fateful steps.

And trembled.

He finished a lap and stood up in the pool, his head and chest rising out of the water like a god. Josh was ultimately a nicely toned nerd, but this guy!

I knew there was no way I could beat him swimming. None. It's a cliche, but I had butterflies in my stomach. I tried to think of some other bet. (See who could hold their breath under water longer? Who knew more Presidents?) None of them sounded remotely plausible, even to myself. I'd feel like an idiot suggesting them. My plans were disintegrating. I just wanted him to hold me.

No, I couldn't think like that. Concentrate, Meg, concentrate! I told myself. Come up with a bet. Something intellectual. He looks so damn young, he can't possibly known anything.

He smiled at me.

Oh shit.

Chapter Three

Normally, I ask a guy whether it's okay for me to join him the pool and make it clear that I am worried that doing so would be imposing upon him. That way he's forced to make it clear that he wants me there. (It's a cheap thrill, I know, but I like it when guys admit that they're attracted to me, especially when they are uncomfortable doing so.) But with this new guy, I was feeling flustered and let myself get distracted: while he had his towel neatly folded, its tag was sticking out. I scurried over and neatly tucked it in.

"Sorry," I mumbled. "Things out of place like that... a mosquito buzzing in my ear."

"That's okay," he said, his voice wise and magnanimous.

Hell, I thought to myself. He isn't wise. He's twenty.

I got my elbow stuck in the front of my shirt as I took it off. I only took two seconds to free myself and my face was shielded from him by the fabric in the meantime, but it was a bad sign and I knew it. I was acting like a schoolgirl and I didn't act like a schoolgirl when I was a schoolgirl.

For a second, I thought I was safe. He had to be gay. Had to be. They don't make straight men that chiseled anymore.

But then, in one smooth motion, he propelled himself out of the water and sat at the edge of the pool with his feet dangling in. Then he motioned for me to sit over by him. It made me feel giddy. I yelped when I put my feet in the water.

"It's cold!" I squealed. Ugh. I never squeal.

"It is the second week of April," he pointed out.

"I know, but... I'm Meg." I held my hand out to shake. Oh brother, I'm acting like I've met him in the office.

He looked at my hand with a sense of bemusement before he took it. His grip was firm. His biceps bulged when he did it.

I pointed to his muscles and blurted out, "Can I touch?" I said that?

The bemused look again. "Sure," he said with the magnificent tone of a king deigning to give a boon to a peasant.

When my fingers seductively traced his muscles, his face quivered slightly. I'm quite familiar with that look. It means he's losing control and is usually one of the first signs that I was going to get my man. When my fingers got down to his forearm, I moved them over to his ridiculously solid stomach. His lips started twitching. I gave him a sexy smile. Damn, he'd look good naked. And he probably knew it. Once I got him stripped, he wouldn't even bother to cover up. He just let his testicles hang there proudly, emerging out of his neat forest of pubic hairs like...

Concentrate!

But I didn't concentrate. Instead I completely blew it. "You're like liquid rock," I exclaimed despite myself.

His confident smile returned again. "Care to swim?"

Words failed me, so I bobbed my head enthusiastically.

He slid into the water. I followed with an ugly splash. We stood two feet apart, facing each other. It was hard not to kiss him.

"Usually, if two people swim laps," I croaked, "they each swim close to the sides so that there's enough room. This pool is on the long narrow side." Did I just make a phallic reference?

"I can see," he said with a slow smile as he looked down the length of the pool.

I blushed.

I nearly suggested a bet before I remembered that I usually swam some laps first to warm up. Then I would act bored and joke about a bet to liven things up.

"Are you a fast swimmer?" he asked. His teeth were perfect. So terribly perfect.

"Second place in the state high school championships." I couldn't believe I told him that. That was my secret edge.

"I don't get to swim that much myself these days. Do you want to race?"

"Uh, sure." This was happening too fast.

"Do you want to place a bet on it?"

Wait, he was asking me??? I sputtered another "Uh, sure" before I knew I had done it.

He asked, "The stakes?"

I was shivering. And it wasn't just from the water. "A hundred dollars?" I couldn't think of anything else to say.

"My parents told me to never bet on money. How about dinner?"

A new, calmer part of my brain kicked in. I've had this conversation before. And I knew my lines. "Dinner sounds like a commitment. Even if you lose and pay, then you'll get it into your head that I'm dessert." There, I said two complete sentences. I felt like an accomplished drunk.

"Then suggest something." There was a slight stutter in his voice.

It didn't make sense. I was the nervous one. Then I figured out why he sounded uncomfortable. He was looking down at my chest and without looking I knew that my nipples were pressing hard against the bikini, which

was the thinnest, flimsiest one I could find in the three department stores I checked. And did I mention that the water was really, really cold? I took his chin in my hand and pushed it up so that his eyes met mine. He tried looking away and then looked back again. Caught and he knew it.

Sensing the initiative, I said, "Bottoms. Whoever loses has to take theirs off." I suddenly felt sexy and in control again. My clit sent out that little reminder to my brain, "You have a clitoris and it's ready to be touched."

Going in the for the kill, I asked, "How old are you anyway?"

"Twenty-three," he said it indignantly, trying to use his manly voice again but sounding like a petulant boy.

"Bottoms?" I asked again.

He looked nervously at the street past the steel bar fence, past the two ragged trees that someone probably thought would provide privacy.

"Well?" I said, sounding bossy, squeezing his chin for emphasis and still forcing all my willpower at his eyeballs, which were trying to look at me but couldn't, like someone repeatedly trying to pick up something too hot to handle.

Then there was a ripple across his face. The nervousness I had seen only seconds ago was long gone again. Back was the aloof, liquid rock Adonis god/demigod that didn't need one pixel's worth of airbrushing.

"No," he said calmly. "If you take off your bottoms, I don't win anything. I can already see your pubes. I want everything."

Huh? I frowned for a second trying to make sense of what he said. I looked down at my bottoms through the water. Then it hit me. I wasn't planning on being in a bikini until late May at the earliest and I had rushed out of my unit so hastily and, well, I hadn't trimmed my bushy bush.

<---Embarrassing--->

I crumpled. I tried to remember all the arguments I used against guys to get them to agree to a lopsided bet of their trunks versus my bottoms. Suddenly, they all seemed stupid and I couldn't believe they ever worked.

"Fine," I sputtered, not even thinking of what I was saying, "Entire swimsuit it is. It doesn't matter. You're going to lose anyway. You're all overbuilt muscle. I'm sure your cardio sucks. First one to get a lap ahead of the other wins, got it?"

"Fine."

To steal the lead, without warning I kicked off the side and leapt towards the far end. I expected to open my eyes underwater and then shortly hear a big splash as he took off in pursuit. I opened my eyes underwater alright but then I was hit by a jolt that I couldn't understand at first.

Then I realized. He had grabbed my ankle. It was all I could do to keep from opening my mouth and inhaling water. He let go and I stood up.

"What the hell are you doing?" I said indignantly.

"No cheating. We start at the same time. Dive into the pool."

Doing a miserable job of sounding confident but shivering to the core, I said, "Fine, fine!" I jumped out of the pool and put my toes over the edge. "Hurry up!"

He didn't hurry. He deliberately got out of the water, giving me time to look down and nervously tug at my exposed pubes as I showed the world that all my hair colors matched.

"Ready?" I snapped.

"Ready."

I think he gave me a half second head start. My dive was messy. I opened my

eyes underwater. Half a second later, there was like an underwater bomb up ahead to the left. He emerged a full length ahead of me.

It still pains me to think of what happened next.

Three laps and it was over. Three. Three!

When I joined him at the end of the pool closest to the door, he wasn't even out of breath and I could barely speak. "Did you spray Teflon on yourself?"

He shrugged and then complacently leaned against the side of the pool. He held up one finger and twirled it around.

Oh, shit. I had bet everything. I tried to think of something to say but systems were shutting down fast.

"Maybe I could take this off back in your unit? Then we could have some real fun." As soon as I said that, I realized that I did in fact want to bed him. Desperately. I took a seductive step forward and put my hand on his chest.

"No."

"No? What do you mean no?"

"No," he said again.

"Come on," I whined. "Look. The water is three feet deep, so I'm visible from the belly button up. We can see the cars on the street which means they can see us."

"I understand that."

"Let me wrap my towel around myself first, okay?" I turned to get out of the pool and get my towel. There was a hand on my shoulder. A firm, hard hand that would have felt very sexy if it hadn't been accompanied by the word, "No."

"Bloody hell, guy, you're like the raven in the Poe poem."

He shrugged his shoulders but continued his implacable look.

Oh god, it was happening. I fantasized about this moment for years and suddenly, it was staring me in the face. I was scared and confused and suddenly it seemed like the most urgent thing in the world to have him gaze at my chest. (Don't ask me to explain or untangle. Just chalk it up as more proof that Meg is weird.)

"You can't leave me naked for too long. I need to get to work. I only meant to swim for maybe fifteen minutes."

He nodded.

My heart rate soared. Here it was: a safe way to be naked for a few minutes in front of someone I wanted to excite. In an exquisitely embarrassing manner. Emphasis on the embarrassing.

Even though I was no longer swimming, my breathing grew even more frantic. I pulled on the strings at one side of the bikini bottoms. "Oh my god," I stuttered to myself, "it's finally happening. It's finally happening." I was so clumsy that the second side helplessly knotted, so I had to bend forward and take them off like regular panties. Holding the flimsy fabric in my hands, I struggled to breathe and tried to lighten the situation by asking, "Do you know what to do if someone starts hyperventil... hyperventanana... you know... what I mean?"

He grinned and said, "I passed a first aid class two weekends ago. Besides, I'm pre-med."

For a moment, I thought I was going to faint, but he put his hands on my shoulders as I started to wobble. Even with the chlorinated water all over us, his hands radiated pleasure.

Whenever I had lost my bikini bottoms before, I tossed them onto the deck table to make sure the guy knew I was naughty and up for anything. This

time, it suddenly seemed very important to have them close to me even if I wasn't wearing them, but it seemed silly or dangerous to leave them at the edge of the pool. I couldn't hear my thoughts over my breathing, so in a confused, sheepish voice, I asked, "Where should I put my suit?"

He gestured for me to hand them over. Shaking, I surrendered them, reminding myself that I had to at least retain control over key ring, which was with my towel on the deck.

Then he said, "Hold out your hands."

Baffled I did so. He dropped the bikini bottoms onto my open palms.

"Do you want to keep your top?" he asked. His voice was nice. It really was.

I was struck with a horrible disappointment. I was going to get left off the hook. As much as I wanted to be exposed, I'd couldn't help but take the out. I had come so close to being stripped but the guy had some stupid fantasy about rescuing damsels in distress and was going to let me keep my top on.

Dick.

Chapter Four

I bit my lip in disappointment, which probably looked like a sign of relief. I nodded my head. "Please let me keep my top." Now I knew what my brother felt in high school. He had an agonizing cycle. Step One: develop a crush on a girl but be afraid to ask her out. Step Two: create a situation in which he was guaranteed to have a few moments alone with her so he could ask her. Step Three: come home furious with himself for losing his nerve at the last second and failing to ask her out. Each time, though, I knew that amidst the disappointment in himself, there was infinite relief at being spared rejection. Now I understood.

My Adonis smiled empathetically and then said, "Let me do something first. Don't move."

I was a statue. He stepped forward. My fingernails poked into his chest, and I wanted to move my hands away but I felt like I needed his permission to do so.

He leaned toward me and reached around my neck—skin on skin, wow, that felt good—and untied the top knot of the bikini. He didn't pull down the strings as I expected but instead reached around my arms to untie the back knot. I was perplexed by what he was doing that I looked at his face for clues.

I fell into his eyes.

Pupil dilation of course indicates desire, and his pupils pressed outward to leave nothing of his irises. I couldn't tell what color his eyes were. There was just the blackness of the pupils sucking me in.

What happened next still confuses me. I've obsessed about it for hours, even tried to reenact it in front of the bathroom mirror. He had been practically hugging me as he undid the bikini knot at the middle of my back. (His eyes were so close!) Then he stepped away. I suddenly felt a tangled feeling on my arms and instinctively tried to pull back. My elbows went out but my wrists didn't move. In the postgame debriefing, I often imagined myself breaking free by kicking up my knees and letting myself fall into the water and away from him. In real life, I didn't do that. Instead I stood there in disbelief as he wrapped the strings of my bikini top around my wrists and tied them off. When I realized I was staring stupidly I started fighting but he was so strong it didn't matter.

I couldn't think of anything intelligent to say, so I continued to stupidly look at my wrists and asked, "What did you just do?"

He leaned forward again. "Meg," he whispered, "I know all about you."

I couldn't look him in the eyes anymore. "I don't know what you're talking about."

"Well," he said in a slightly louder tone, "if you want to be coy, I suppose that's cute too."

"You tied me up," I whispered back. I took stock of a predicament. A guy I didn't know had me bound, naked, outside, but the very exposure made me feel safe. There wasn't much he could do to me. If he tried to take me some place more private, I'd kick his testicles into the fourth dimension. I decided I could let go and float with the situation. I tried smiling at him. I think my lips quivered too much for him to tell what I was doing. "What... what are you going to do with me?"

He raised my wrists over my head. I turned my head to see if anyone on the street was watching, but my hair got in my way. I tried clearing my vision by brushing the offending strands against my biceps. It didn't work well. He took a finger and gently pushed the hair to the side. I suddenly wanted to kiss him. He looked me up and down again and again, hesitating always over my breasts.

"Can't you answer a poor girl's question? What are your intentions?"

"To get out of the pool," he said. "But," he added with a laugh, "I need to wait for my pup tent to go down."

I started laughing too and then we were laughing together. For the first time since I opened the door to the pool area, I felt comfortable around him. He let me lower my wrists.

His voice sounded lighter, more playful, when he said, "I can't help but noticing, you have some serious pubes."

"Ah, yes, my bushy bush! Here's my theory. I'm between men at the moment," I shyly slyly glanced to see whether he got the hint, "and I have an..." Why was it so hard to say? "I have an exhibitionistic streak. I figure having a lot of thatch down there makes me look very naked from a distance. Besides, don't you think a nice velvety patch of hair is feminine?"

He smiled but didn't seem inclined to respond.

"Now, I suppose," I said feeling more confident, "you like women shaved

down there. I guess that would feel very naked and vulnerable, with your clit completely exposed and everyone who sees knows that you've intentionally made your pussy totally open to the public. Damn, that does sound hot, now that you mention it."

"I didn't say a word."

We both laughed.

"But," he added, "you're not helping me lose my erection."

We both laughed again.

"I do need to go, though," he said.

"Me too. As it is, I'm going to be a few minutes late to work even if I hurry through a shower. I know I have to play 'Meg the professional' for the next eight or nine hours, but I'm most eager to pick up where we left off when I get home," I said. To emphasize my point, I started exploring with my bound hands towards his swimsuit.

"We're not done," he said. He stepped forward and in one fluid motion swept me up off my feet.

Literally. I never expected any guy to do that to except on my wedding night. (And even then I always envisioned spending the next day massaging my poor husband's back as he was groaning in pain in bed.) I yelped and found myself equally torn between fear of being dropped and being turned on. I quickly realized he had as much chance of dropping me as the Statue of Liberty had of sneezing and dropping her torch.

There were steps in one corner of the pool. He made his way over to them and carried me out as I pressed my face against his very nice pects. My arms were folded over at a funny angle, which had my right thumb pressing against my left nipple. I put it to work.

Truth be told, I hate being tied up. Now you might think it's because I'm a

control freak. Well, that too. The real reason, though, is that it drives me crazy to be teased. Let me clarify. It drives me crazier. I don't do well when I want stimulation but can't have it. If a boyfriend isn't doing enough, I like to take matters into my own hands. It usually shocks them, but I'm usually past the point of caring when it happens. And when I can't give myself what I need, I burst. One boyfriend said that it was very sexy when I got desperate. He said I mewed nicely and he liked how I promised to do all kinds of things to him when he pinned my wrists over my head and teased my nipples. Personally, I disagree. It's not a pretty sight when I'm desperate. I feel like I'm about to go cross-eyed.

But with my thumb at least able to do some old those elementary school finger exercises, being bound didn't seem too bad. My only concern was that I'd orgasm before he got to do whatever he intended and I'd ruin his pleasure. But I didn't worry too much. It felt so good. The bolts of lightning from my nipple to my pussy—I hadn't had so much fun with my thumb since, well, never.

I hardly paid attention to the sound of him pushing deck chairs aside with his feet as he maneuvered me around. That swinging sensation whenever he turned his torso, it was like the adult version of the spinning teacup ride at Disney.

Then abruptly he stood me up by the fence, pulled my hands over my head and began tying as he softly sang the Rolling Stones' "You don't always get what you want."

I was jolted to my senses. "Uh, I don't know your name, but what are you doing? In case you hadn't noticed, I'm really naked and we're really outside."

"And I've just finished tying your hands over your head. To a fence."

I pulled. He was telling the truth. "Seriously for a moment, I need to get to work."

Instead of answering, he went back to singing as he walked over to his towel. He unfolded it, revealing two pairs of handcuffs. When they went

click-click-click on my wrists, I started to feel like I was floating again. (I know I just said I didn't like to be tied up, but this was getting confusing, okay?) Then the second set of cuffs locked the first to the top horizontal bar of the fence. Then he simply took the bikini wrapped around my wrist and broke it away.

"I need to g-g-get... work," I stuttered, too turned on to think straight. I was still safe. Tied to the inside of the fence, near the entrance of the building, I wasn't that visible. Someone walking out the door could see my derriere but no one on the sidewalk would see me unless they looked very carefully. I was safe but nicely exposed at the same time. I couldn't even do the old "one hand over the breasts, one hand over the pubes" routine.

"You look good," he said, stepping back. "On behalf of my future children, thank you for not kicking me in the nards. I figured you would if you didn't want to play along."

"F-f-f..." I started to say. Even in college, I never had a one-night stand. "What did you say?" he asked, stepping forward and putting his ear close to my mouth. "Fuck you?" he finally asked.

I nodded my head desperately. "C-c-condoms in my dresser. Keys are...are... towel."

"Fuck you?" he said again.

"Please," I wished.

"You have such a potty mouth."

I shook my arms in frustration. The rattling noise was disconcertingly loud.

Then I had an idea. "I'm cold. Could you towel me off?"

He looked like he was trying to think of a witty response but he was obviously getting turned on too. He got my towel and started patting me down with it. Heavenly.

Afterward, I said, "Sorry, but my bushy bush is wet again. Could you redo that area?" I couldn't believe I actually said that.

"No."

I stuck out my tongue and then said, "You like that word too much."

"No I don't."

"Don't get funny! I'm getting turned on here!"

"And I have to go." He tossed my towel on one of the deck chairs.

"You can't leave me here."

"Yes. I can."

Clawing for some connection with him, I practically screamed, "What unit do you live in? What about tonight? What are your plans tonight?"

"I don't live here. I just stayed with my brother for the weekend. Honestly, it's been fun meeting you but I do have to go. I have a quiz in my advanced o-chem seminar. I can't afford to miss it and it's an hour drive to campus from here. I'm a fifth-year senior, by the way, busy figuring out which med school to go to." He picked up his own towel and began drying himself off.

"You can't leave a girl like this!"

"Of course I can," he said. "It's the fastest hundred bucks I ever made."

"What?!"

"Yeah, my brother Edward thought that since I've finished up my eligibility for Division I collegiate swimming, that I could do what he couldn't. It really was nice to meet you by the way. I have to admit, though, that Ed understated your looks."

That sounded insulting, so I couldn't resist asking, "What did he say?"

"He said you were gorgeous, fucking gorgeous quote unquote."

"Unlock me and you can lock me back up after work."

"Once the school week starts, I can't be driving back and forth between here and campus. Besides, I've been living with him for the last three days and he's starting to drive me batty. The guy's a total neat freak. Gotta run."

"Whoa, whoa, whoa, seriously, you can't leave me like this."

"If I want to earn a hundred bucks, I can and I will." He put his towel over his shoulders and put his hand on the door.

"No, no, you can't do this!" I wanted to add his name but then realized I didn't know it. I changed tack. I tried to sound playful, curious. "Say, you never told me your name."

"Me? I'm Joshua. Nice meeting you." He kicked away the door jam I had hoped to kick away myself when I was running back into the building with his clothes. He casually walked inside himself, ignoring my cries of "You dick!"

Chapter Five

I looked through big window into the lobby to see what Joshua was doing, but on both sides of the window were potted plants that obscured the view. I waited a long minute to see if he was coming back. He wasn't.

My situation was urgent but not desperate. With my hands handcuffed overhead to the fence behind me, I was very much on display in a public setting (something I've needed all my life), but it was unlikely that very many people would see me (from the point of view of my career, probably a good thing). People walking out of the building would likely go right past me unless they were happening to look to their left and people going in would get a good view of my backside, which, from my point of view, didn't count.

Indeed, since I couldn't imagine being left there for more than fifteen minutes at the absolute max, there was considerable risk that no one at all would see me until someone came to uncuff me. A relief and disappointment at the same time.

It was hard to think about the man who planned all this. I didn't even know what to call him. I knew from the first day I met (and stripped) him that his name was Edward, but he never looked like a Ed. He looked like a Josh. I guess his parents must have agreed and decided to have another son to correct their error. I guess I have to call the elder brother Ed as it would confuse the heck out of everyone, especially you dear reader, if I called them both Josh.

Ed was probably the one to come out and uncuff me. I'm sure he'd gloat. He certainly had the right to. No, wait, he had gone to work. My stomach went bungee diving. If he had the key...

Imagining being left out there long enough that it was guaranteed that someone would see made hot and bothered again. I've heard of women being able to masturbate themselves by doing Kegels. I never quite believed them. I suddenly found myself hoping I was wrong. To assist Ms. Kegel, I squeezed my thighs together as best I could, but it was a far cry from what I needed. This is humiliating to admit, but I tried turning around, hoping that if I faced the fence I could rub my nipples against the bars. The links of the short chains on the handcuffs folded over themselves and wouldn't even let me go ninety degrees. Since my legs were free, I tried to stretch a foot over and snag a deck chair. I figured I could hump the back of the chair. Fortunately for my honor, all the chairs were out of reach.

You know what? Let's pretend I didn't write that last paragraph. Too humiliating. A sense of honesty and completeness made me write it, but imagine that memory eraser from the *Men in Black* movies zapped it right out of you.

Just think of me as this innocent woman, chained to the pool area fence against her will, unable to cover anything, just able to shyly twist in embarrassment. And if the security camera I set up for the pool area happened to record me trying to get my foot around a chair leg, it was part of

an escape plan.

Got it?

Good.

In truth, I wasn't given long to revel in my predicament. If this had been my fantasy, I would have had ten minutes by myself, but within only three or four, someone was behind me.

"Edward?" I said as I twisted around to see. It sounded funny to call him that.

I twisted to one side and couldn't see who it was. I twisted to the other, but even before I got around, I knew who I'd see. The whimpering of a dog tipped me off.

"Helen," I said, "I am so glad to see you. And Fluffy too." The poodle whined appreciatively. "You gotta help me."

"What does it look like I'm doing?" she asked, carrying an assortment of handyman's supplies.

I stopped trying to looking pathetic for a second and asked myself that question. What *was* she doing? She was standing on her tip toes, messing with a key and the rusted lock that was holding shut the gate. The gate? I hadn't even realized that the fence had a gate to the outside. I thought it was designed so your only choice was to enter the pool from the inside of the building. I twisted around to get a better view of the gate. I was surprised to discover that I was in fact locked to it.

"I figured this would happen," Helen said to herself. Then she pulled out a can of WD-40 that she was holding under her arm and sprayed the lock. "Sorry," she said to me, "I should have taken care of this ahead of time." Then she went back to fussing with the lock.

"Uh, Helen, you do realize that I'm naked here? My towel's over by the pool."

She reached down and grabbed a rubber mallet she had set by her feet. It made me nervous to see that she also had a roll of duct tape down there.

"Helen, what are you doing? To get my towel, all you have to do is walk back into the building and come out the pool entrance. Unlocking the gate doesn't help anything."

Instead of replying, she started banging the lock with the mallet as she twisted the key. It clicked. "There!" she said with an overwhelming sense of satisfaction. She pulled the lock out. The latch was resistant, so it got the WD-40 and mallet treatment too.

"My towel? It's right over there," I said. Then I went "Whoa!" as she started opening the gate, pulling me out onto the sidewalk that led from the building to the street. It was clumsy to walk backwards when my hands were up over my back. "What are you doing?" I screeched.

Once she had the gate open, she leaned against it and reached down and grabbed the duct tape and started taping the gate open, wrapping the layer upon layer until it looked like a giant steel ring had fastened the gate to the fence.

"Helen!!!" I yelled. "What are you doing?"

"Helping you. Really, I don't know why I volunteered to be the HOA president. Instead of showing gratitude, people yell at me. Don't they Fluffy? No gratitude at all." She ripped the tape holding the gate open free from the roll and scratched her poodle behind the ears. He looked grateful. She commented on his good manners.

Then she looked up at me and then stood to face me squarely. "Not a wrinkle or ounce of fat. I remember having a body like yours. The boys' attention was fun, at least when they were sober. This is what you'll end up like." She whipped up her blouse and one bra cup. "This is what having three kids will do to you."

I would have never predicted it, but I suddenly found myself envious. Her

breasts seemed so much more powerful than mine, like mine were just waiting around to be like hers. A bizarre moment for maternal impulses to kick in, but I found myself hoping that being on display would get something out of my system and allow me to feel comfortable with settling down.

At least a little.

"Helen, my towel."

"Oh, thank you for reminding me."

For a moment, she disappeared from my sight as the pool was now behind me. While waiting for her to return, I looked down the sidewalk to the street. I was no longer hidden. Anyone in select units in the condo building across the street could tell I was naked. And anyone walking on the sidewalk on our side of the street... oh shit.

Helen came back to me. "Got your towel and your keys and your cellphone. Anything else?"

"Wrap the towel around me, you nincompoop!" I blurted out.

Helen looked down to consult with Fluffy. Fluffy was inscrutable, at least to me. His owner finally said, "No, we're sticking to the plan."

"Do you have the keys? No, not mine! The handcuff keys!"

Helen looked baffled. "Why would I have them? Do I look kinky to you?"

"Fine, Helen, fine. The joke's on me. But I swear that if you don't get me a paperclip or bobby pin, I will vote for you for HOA president as long as I live in this building."

She looked ashen for a second. "That's below the belt, Meg. This is your fantasy after all." She didn't wait for a response from her interlocutor and consulted again with Fluffy. "Poochie, she wants to delay our walk. Can your bladder hold out for a little while longer?"

Fluffy apparently said he did not have a nervous bladder. Helen picked up the mallet, tape and WD-40 and went back inside.

The situation started to sink in. I was now very, very exposed (as in very, very, very exposed). I tried to pull down on my arms to see if I could cover my nipples with my elbows. Not even close.

Realistically, most people who were heading out to work had already done so. But it was still likely that someone would pass on the sidewalk every five to ten minutes and maybe there was a fifty-fifty chance that they would look my way (with a zero percent chance that they would walk on as if it was perfectly natural and normal to see a naked woman bound to a fence). Anything more than twenty minutes was going to be push my luck to the extreme.

It was far naughtier than anything else I've been involved in. No, that wasn't true. It was far naughtier than any other time when I had been on the exposed side. I had put a couple of guys who really deserved it through worse. From my side, though, I had many times answered the door *au naturel*, temporarily lost my bikini bottoms in a few bets and had had one chance to go to a nude beach that was exhilarating beyond belief. Then, of course, there was that one outdoor concert.

But this was naughty naughty naughty. Sopping wet naughty. I started to reach down to scratch the itch but was instantly stopped by a cling-cling of the handcuffs brushing against the fence. I sighed in frustration but then decided to see how loud of a clang I could make. I was reasonably satisfied that I could get the attention of any cute guy that walked by looking the other way.

And to answer your question, yes there was part of my brain going "BAD IDEA!!" at the idea getting anyone's attention. But it didn't keep me from testing out how much I could jiggle. It would have been more spectacular if I were mammose, but the effect wasn't bad, not bad at all. I was busy trying to crane my neck to see how much I could make my chest bounce around when Helen and Fluffy came back out.

"I'm not even going to ask what you're doing, Meg, shaking yourself like that. Instead, I'll apologize for taking so long. I didn't mean to leave you out here like this," she said. "I had to write an email. You know how it is these days, going five minutes without the Internet is like going five minutes without air. And my daughter is trying to get me on Facebook! Like I have the time! Anyway, here's your paperclip."

"Great! It's one of the small ones, right? I forgot to specify that. You should be able to bend the end and get it into one of the lock holes on the handcuffs. You have to experiment to see which way to twist it and..." I was cut short when she stuck the paperclip into my open mouth. I reflectively bit down on it.

She walked off, discussing with Fluffy-kins the size of his bladder. I tried to yell at her to get her attention but I was afraid of opening my mouth for fear of the paperclip falling out.

Then she stopped and turned. She muttered the singular word "Forgot. Senior moment." She came back, pulled out a permanent marker out of her pocket and put her signature across my stomach. I was too surprised to be ticklish. She pocketed the marker and then walked off again. Fluffy looked back and gave me a look that seemed to indicate that he thought I was getting what I deserved.

Chapter Six

Alone once more, I tried to get my fingers on the paperclip. Turn my head to the right. To the left. Stand on tiptoes. If I had long fingernails, I might have pulled it off. I was working on a combination of twisting and sticking my tongue out with the paper clip on the tip when I was distracted by the disgusted groan of "This is why I hate politics!"

I was so startled I let the paperclip fall. It was my friend Jenna. Jenna holding a duffel bag on her shoulder, carrying one of those chairs that doubles as a stepladder in one hand and in the other a huge blueberry muffin with exactly one bite taken out of it. She made eye contact and said, "We spent twenty

minutes at the last HOA meeting discussing whether to tie you to this end of the fence or the end by the street where you'd be more visible. Back and forth, back and forth, they went!" She lowered her voice to imitate a man's. "Meg will only experience this once, said one side, so we should make it as intense as possible. No, we want to give her a sense of safety and make it so no cops will see her, said the other side. The this-will-only-happen-once crowd won out, meaning you're supposed to be tied to the fence right by the street but yet here you are, tied at this end! And people wonder why I'm cynical about voting!"

"Why do I have sinking feeling that you don't have either a towel or bolt cutters in that duffel bag? You'd be my hero if you did."

"And you!" she snapped, ignoring what I said. "You didn't last ten minutes. I've been told that it usually takes you half an hour to strip a guy and here you are, already butt naked. I didn't even get this muffin out of the microwave and there's the email from Helen: it's time! You could have at least made a show of resisting. But no, you couldn't." She dropped the duffel bag on the ground with an exaggerated display of disgust. She bit into the muffin but didn't tear off a piece but instead held it with her mouth so both hands were free to unfold the chair and face it towards me. Then she grabbed the muffin and said, with her mouth full, "I don't have any pilates students until one o'clock and I was hoping to sleep in. You always screw up my sleeping in. Damn morning people. No decency."

She theatrically plopped herself down on the chair. She swallowed but then violently tore off another mouthful of the muffin. She rolled her eyes to indicate that she bit off more than intended and it was delaying her from saying something else on her mind. After much chewing, she finally said, "Meg, you really are naked."

"Thank you, I had no idea."

"I mean truly profoundly naked. What are you going to do if some guy from the street walks up here and asks you how you got into this predicament?" Another bite of the muffin disappeared.

"I'll wing it," I said tersely.

"Oh, I think you'll have plenty of time to think about it and rehearse something."

"What do you mean?" I didn't like the sound of that.

"You know that joke about the guy who drops a penny in the urinal and then intentionally drops in more money?" Another bite.

"Not really a priority for me right now. Did you see where the paperclip landed?"

Jenna leaned forward as she visibly entered joke telling mode. "So there's this guy who has to take a pee, right? Public restroom: as he pulls his hands out of his pockets to unzip, he accidentally pulls out a penny and it falls into the urinal. So he grabs the rest of the change and toss it in too, right? There's a guy at the next urinal and he asks, 'Why did you do that for?'" Jenna took another bite. So impatient to get to the punchline, she said with her mouth full, "The man says, 'You don't expect me to stick my hand in there for a penny, do you?'"

I gave her a blank look. "How is this relevant?"

"You don't expect us to go to all this effort and only have you naked for a little while, do you?"

The butterflies in my stomach suddenly started feeling seasick. "Jenna! Explain yourself!"

"You know you'll make a good mother some day. You really have that maternal tone. Relax, don't worry. We have to have you inside the building before the high school gets out."

"That's like three o'clock!"

"Something like that." Jenna pushed some crumbs on her lip into her mouth.

"I'm not responsible for the schedule. I only saw that I was second and you know me, why worry when you don't have to?"

"My boss! I'm supposed to be at work in a few minutes."

Jenna stood up, dive her hand down the front of her blouse and extracted a cellphone from her bra. "What's the number?"

"Please, Jenna, you're not serious about keeping here for a long time are you?"

"You know you're going to be late anyway, so you'll need to call."

I gave her the number and she put the phone up to my ear when it started dialing. Just as I said, "Hello," she pinched a nipple. Instantly all the signs of arousal kicked in: the weak knees, the giddy feeling centered on my bushy bush, the pounding heart. I sucked air and scowled at her as I struggled to say, "Hello, Norm, it's Meg. Hi! Nothing too urgent going on, I hope. I think I'm going to wait a few hours to come in. I'm feel flush, light-headed. I can't concentrate. It's one of those feminine things."

Norm laughed.

"Uh, Norm, could you try for sympathy since I'm..." I forgot the rest of my sentence as I was distracted by Jenna menacing my nipples like a B movie villain.

"Meg, Meg, Meg," Norm said very grandfatherly. "I've had you penciled in on my calendar that you were taking the day off since this past Thursday."

"What?" I yelled, unintentionally and not very lady-likely spitting on the phone.

"I know, I know. I'm old-fashioned. I ought to use one of those newfangled scheduling software thingeeboppers that your generation loves, but I guess I'm stuck in my ways. I don't know why you're so shocked, the calendar's always right here on my desk."

"No, not the calendar. Thursday!"

"You're going to miss this Thursday too?"

"No, you ninny!" I hesitated for a half a second as it dawned on me that I had called my boss a ninny. Then I decided to charge ahead before he realized what I had done. "Why did you LAST THURSDAY put me down as missing today?! That was five days ago!"

"Exactly. That's when the five-day forecast showed that today was going to be unseasonably warm. Obviously."

Jenna's cellphone got another round of my shocked spittle.

"I think you're very busy today, Meg, so goodbye. Wait, do you want me to stop by your place in the afternoon and catch you up on what you missed today?"

"That's very generous of you but that won't be necessary."

"Oh, but I want to. It would be my pleasure."

"Really not necessary, Norm."

"Oh, but it is. I have my own selfish motivation. I get annual reviews too. My last one said that it would help productivity if I encouraged a more collegial atmosphere, expressed more of an interest in my employees as people." He giggled.

Yes, he giggled.

"Maybe you should have a four martini lunches and spend the afternoon under your desk. If I'm not there, you won't have to worry about me being called in as a witness."

"Those lunches went out of style with disco pants, my dear."

"Nostalgia?"

"You're usually not this obstinate, Meg. Anyway, let me make sure I have this written down correctly. The high school gets out at 3:14. Does that sound right? See you before then."

"Norm, you're married."

"It's masturbation that's supposed to make you go blind, not marriage."

"I'm a professional. This wouldn't be..."

"Relax. You're an acquisitions editor. Literary agents spend their time kissing your ass in hopes that you'll suggest to me that we buy the schlock they're hawking. They wouldn't dream of complaining if you did anything unprofessional. They need to be on your good side."

"I'm bored!" Jenna abruptly announced. She pulled the phone away from my ear. She snapped it shut and returned it to its bosomy storage area. "We have to get busy." She clapped her hands together and rubbed them. She looked around thoughtfully and then shuffled the chair and duffel bag around, whispering to herself things like "That goes there." She pulled a wooden box out of the duffel bag and set it on the top step of the chair.

She turned towards me and studied my face. "Your hair is still wet. Too bad I didn't think to bring a hair dryer." She flipped the box open, grabbed a tiny sponge and began rubbing my face. "You have nice pores, Meg, and good complexion."

She fussed with me for a good twenty minutes. My eyes gradually fell shut and I dozed off several times I think, letting her move my head around as needed to, say, make it easier for her to comb my hair. I woke up when I felt her hands on my shoulders. "That looks pretty good, if I don't say so myself."

She got out a small mirror and held it up so I could see my face. I blurted out the first thing that came to mind. "I wish I looked that good!" For someone who had just been in a pool, my eyelashes were perfect and even I couldn't help but think of sex when I looked at the redness of my lips. "Thank you," I

murmured. Jenna seemed pleased with my reaction.

Chapter Seven

"Now let's keep going!" Jenna dived into her duffel bag. The first thing she pulled out was an SLR camera.

I was suddenly very awake. I've long fantasized about being photographed nude. I've come close but have never gone all the way. Every ex probably has at least one photograph of me in a swimsuit and one, a fashion photographer, took a few of what he called "implied nudity" pictures. But at the end of the day, he was basically a PG-13 kind of guy and never suggested anything more. I fantasized about being reluctantly talked into stripping further but his modesty prevented that. I hinted, for sure, but he didn't get hints. Involving sexuality or anything else.

But I digress.

The one really naughty film experience was the result of my listening to the weather on the way to an outdoor concert. A chance of showers was forecasted for halfway through the show, so after much agonizing, I screwed up the courage to don a white t-shirt I had in the trunk and leave my bra in the glove compartment. (At least I'm not one of those women who throws theirs on stage and are out money!) "Showers" was an understatement for what happened. There was briefly a video clip on youtube that had maybe twenty seconds of my soaked t-shirt leaving me essentially topless (with my hands strategically busy shielding my eyes from the pounding rain). In the clip, I'm shouting over the downpour, naively asking the guy holding the camera, "That thing isn't on, is it?" An ex-boyfriend sent me the link, hoping, I think, to embarrass me. I watched it maybe thirty times that day and then it was deleted. (This is before it was clear how squeamish youtube was and before it easy to grab streaming clips off the web.)

I stared at Jenna's camera resting on the second step of the chair-ladder. It was scary and exciting at the same time. I was too busy squeezing my thighs together to notice that Jenna had begun giving me press-on nails. I asked her to stop. She told me to live a little. I replied, "How am I going to be able to

type?"

"Ask your secretary how she does it."

Since she already had two done, I figured it was best to let her continue. I got back to staring at the camera and doing thigh exercises. Then she said, "Open up," and I heard a buzzing sound.

I looked down. She was kneeling before me with an electric razor in hand. "No!! Not my bushy bush!"

Jenna giggled. "That's what you call it? I've known you all these years and I had no idea you named your pubes! But yes, this forest is going."

"Jenna, seriously, I like how I look down there."

"Then you should have spoken up at the last HOA meeting. It was 24-0, with Liza abstaining, to shave you."

"That's not fair!"

"That's another thing I hate about politics: people who don't vote still think they're entitled to an opinion. The meetings are only one night a month."

I did my best whine this side of prepubescent trips to Toys 'R Us. I must have gotten rusty because Jenna suddenly looked ferociously stern and said, "Either you stop complaining or I'll find out who has the keys and unlock you."

"But it'll take all summer for it to grow back!"

"Get your legs apart, or else!"

I had never seen Jenna this way. She's always doing this playful Americanized Zen thing, rarely getting agitated over anything worse than the existence of mornings. "Could you at least take a few photos of me this way first?"

"Oh, alright." She snapped a few and I reluctantly wobbled my feet out to the side.

She started the buzzing razor on my legs, starting with the hairs that I accidentally had shown Joshua. The world went to slow motion as bunches of pubes gently fell to the ground like dandelion seeds.

"You're damp," she said. She put her fingers over the precious bits to protect them. I'm not bi in the slightest but I couldn't help but thrusting forward.

She looked up at me and said, "I'm not bi."

"I know! I'm merely desperate, like a guy in prison who has no access to women."

"You may be like a guy in prison, but I'm an artist at work. Stop moving."

"Wait," I said slowly analyzing what she had said to me. My heart skipped a beat. "You don't have the key to the handcuffs?"

"Nope! I don't even know who has them."

"So what happens if a cop comes?"

"Before or after I run?"

As the buzzing continued, I fantasized about the cops finding me like this and that their handcuff keys not working on the ones I was sporting. I imagined taunting the officer, saying something like, "Okay, take me down to the station!" and shaking the handcuffs in defiance. This left him flummoxed, so he had to consult with lots of other officers, who all converge on at our building's front entrance. They all stood around me, taking their time figuring out what to do.

Of course it would never work out that way, but a girl can dream, can't she?

"Meg!"

I looked down. Jenna was wiping her hand on my thigh.

"You're beyond damp, and it's making my job difficult. Stop it!"

To hint at her to hurry up, I tried acting bored and impatient. I started whistling and sighing. And doing my best job of pretending to look at the watch I wasn't wearing. I couldn't really even see my wrist, so she probably had no idea what I was doing.

"Wait again! You said it was unanimous except for Liza abstaining. That means you voted for me to be shaved!"

"She catches on."

"Traitors go to hell."

"Hold still. This is a once in a lifetime opportunity." When I opened my mouth to protest against her twisted logic, she added, "How many times do I have to tell you? Hold still!"

So I did. I watched the sidewalk. Where was everyone? Surely Fluffy wasn't the only dog that felt the call of Nature on a pleasant April morning.

"There you go, sweet peas!"

I looked down. Holy crap! I was nakedder than Eve. (I know what you're going to say, but it IS a word because I'm using it and you know exactly what I mean. The same goes for you, spellchecker.) In my twenty-nine years on the planet, I hadn't realized that my hood stuck out so much. I guess I should have. I've certainly explored enough down there, but I never imagined what it looked like with all my sensual bushy bush being clear cut down to the merest of stumble.

"Now, a few more things." Jenna rummaged the makeup kit for some glossy red nail polish. I watched the street for anyone coming by. No one. I also

waited for someone to come out of the building. No one. Don't my neighbors have to go to work?? I know the economy's bad, but this was getting ridiculous.

"That's that," Jenna said as she finished my fingers and nails. "Now, finally!" She pulled out some high heels. She ignored my protests and insisted that I put them on. They completely changed my posture. I had to stand much more proud. My pelvis was thrust forward.

"Oh, and I forgot! Senior moment!"

"You're not a senior," I pointed out.

"Age discrimination!" she giggled as she squatted down again and pulled out two long lengths of rope. I was about to ask what she was going to do when she suddenly immobilized my right leg by sticking it between her knees. She sloppily tied my ankle to the fence. Then she ordered me to stick my left leg out to the side. I refused. She reached up and tickled my belly. In the ensuing semi-restrained jitterbug, my left leg kicked out to the side and she trapped and tied it.

"Can't you make neater knots? They are insulting bad. If I could get my fingers anywhere near them, I'd be able to untie them in a second."

"Sorry," Jenna said with an absentminded smile, "Dave usually does the tying, so I don't get much practice." She seemed to be distracted by a happy memory.

I asked her if she could sweep up my pubes. When she didn't respond, I snapped, "Earth to Jen-Jen!"

She looked startled and said, "Sorry. What were you saying?"

"Could you clean up my pubes? They look so messy down there."

"I thought I would leave them there."

"Jenna! You know how well I deal with messes. It'll spoil my day."

She wrinkled her nose but made her hands like a miniature broom and dustpan and swept up the hairs. "You're so demanding. Imagine what someone would have to put up with if they kidnaped you." Once she was done, she said, "Happy?"

"Thank you."

She stood up, grabbing the SLR camera as she went. "Showtime!"

I wasn't sure what expression I should have on my face. Everything felt silly. I decided to try them all. Anger, embarrassment, boredom, Chesire Cat grin. The camera clicked so fast it sounded like it was purring. The rapid shuddering of the camera (holy cow, I was being photographed naked!) turned me on so much I lost control my facial expressions. Then Jenna started doing close ups—and not of my face. I protested and her response was a playful smirk and the words, "I feel like photographing this spot. If it bothers you, go stand someplace else."

The final shots were of my face. By then I had a glazed over look. My mouth was hanging open, but I didn't care. "Jenna," I whispered, "touch me." We had been friends for so long that a moment of immodesty wouldn't change anything.

She lowered her camera, which gave me half a second of hope as I thought she was going to reach down with her free hand. Instead she smacked herself in the forehead and went, "How could I forget?" She put the camera back in the duffel bag and pulled out a wood veneered placard with a string around it. She promptly put the string around my neck and adjusted the sign so it was level as it rested on my decolletage.

She saw me straining to see what it said, so she read it to me, "We encourage you to look to your heart's content, but please do not touch the merchandise." Then she added, "In a smaller font it also says, 'Just ask for assistance' and 'Debby's Glass Delicacies.'"

"I suppose you want me to grateful that it doesn't say, 'If you break it, you buy it.'"

"Quite."

"I'm not sure that I like the concept though. I want to be touched." I accidentally thrust my pelvis forward for emphasis, which caused the heat of a blush to warm my face. "I need to be touched.. I'm not feeling too particular about who does it. This ain't flag football."

"We all agreed to this sign, so you're stuck with it."

"I don't like it. Not one bit."

"Typical whining from those who don't vote. You could have gone to the last HOA meeting. You're a free rider, letting the more conscientious residents of the building do all the work." She stood back. "You look like mighty fine, if I don't say so myself." Then she rummaged around the duffel bag for a second and found a permanent marker. "I suppose I should sign down here since I was the one to do this to you." She put her John Hancock right above the stubble, closed the pen and set it on the ground. Then she packed up. I asked her how long I was going to be left like this and her only response was, "Ciao!"

Finally, I was alone. I had encouraged guys to be severe in their revenge, but I figured that would mean streaking the building. I certainly hadn't expected to be tied up on display for hours.

I hate being tied up. I want to be touched when I want to be touched. It was delicious that I couldn't cover myself at all, but that deliciousness led to some pretty obvious urges and I didn't like them to be thwarted. The throbbing sensation was no longer localized but I was feeling like I was having an out of body experience.

I looked down at what I desperately needed to touch. What the electric razor had done made feel very exposed. With my legs spread wide and the high heels on my feet, even when I wasn't thrusting forward, I was still lewdly

thrusting forward. This was so far beyond naked. This wasn't like Eve before the Fall. This was Eve Does Paradise.

Chapter Eight

It was quiet. A car drove by but too quickly. Then silence again. Birds singing. A cute guy walked by but as soon as I shouted, "Hey!" I saw that he was wearing an iPod. Then he was gone. A few minutes later, I heard footsteps and assumed it was him coming back. I shook my wrists. It made the whole fence shake. The racket was loud. I was pleased. It WAS the guy. I was even more pleased. He was dancing along to the song blasting into his ears. He was soon out of my sight. I was not pleased.

Fucking iPod users. So inconsiderate! They just zone out and ignore the world.

I had a few minutes to try to Kegel myself, but it didn't do anything for me. I was ready to kill for some friction. I had waited my entire adult life to be exposed. The fantasy was that the stripping would last maybe five to ten minutes and then, depending on whether I was dating someone at the time, send the guy to the moon and have myself along for the ride or, if I were single, running off to find some privacy and masturbate myself into orbit.

But to be exposed for a long time and not be properly stimulated? Let me put it this way. I don't do well with itches. It takes a lot of willpower and ice to keep from scratching mosquito bites until they bleed.

Okay. Sorry. That was gross. The point is, I have needs. They were doing their damnedest to get my attention. It was like my clit had been replaced by a klaxon.

The front door of the building opened by itself. It confused me until I saw Rex glide out the door in his wheelchair.

"Rex! Thank God! Am I ever glad to see you!"

Rex wheeled his chair until he was right in front of me and then spun abruptly

to face me squarely. His eyes were dead level with my nipples. He whispered to himself, "Being able to walk is so overrated." Then he looked up. "Hello, Megan."

"Hi, Rex," I said.

"You look good."

"Why, thank you!"

He suggested, "You ought to do this more often."

"This will probably get exhibitionism out of my system."

"A pity."

"Then make the most of today."

Rex furrowed his eyebrows. "What do you mean?"

"Here I am defenseless. I couldn't stop you if you copped a feel." I couldn't believe I said that. It made me feel lightheaded.

"The sign says not to touch." Rex nodded his head towards the shop sign hanging from my neck.

"Never mind the sign!" I said irritably. "I'm about ready to burst."

"The women at the HOA meeting were very insistent about it, especially Liza. She would only agree to this if there was a no-touch rule."

"I did not consent to the sign!" I wailed.

"I'm sorry." He did sound sorry. Then he twisted his lip. "You know, I've always been disappointed that you limited your stripping games to the new guys and didn't involve those of us who moved in before you."

"But I wanted to ambush the unsuspecting. After the first guy, you were all

on the alert."

"I thought you wanted to lose."

"I wanted to lose, not set myself up for failure. Besides, what bet could we have made? I like to make swimming race bets because guys underestimate my speed."

"Since I can't kick, you probably do swim faster than me. I'll concede that. But we could have played strip poker. I was a dealer in a casino for five years and I know a lot about games of chance and how to read people."

I pouted. I hate it when I blow opportunities. Hate it, hate it, hate it. "Why didn't you tell me! That was so selfish." Then I smiled suggestively. "We could still play sometime."

Rex laughed. "At the risk of pointing out the obvious, why would I play strip poker with you? By being right here, I've already won."

"If you unlocked me right now and we went to your place, we could start with me naked and play for sexual favors?" I couldn't believe the words coming out of my mouth. The itch between my legs was bordering on pain, so I added, "Pretty, pretty please?"

"Even if I had the key I wouldn't be able to reach."

"Yes, you could."

"No, I couldn't."

"Get some long handled bolt cutters."

"Don't have any."

"Dude, meet me halfway. As I've gotten older, I've gotten extremely picky about with whom I sleep with and I'm throwing myself at you and I barely know you. Let me be blunt, you're what? Forty-three?"

"Fifty."

"How often do you have women in their twenties throw themselves at you?"

"More often than you think. Chicks dig muscles." He pulled back his right sleeve and curled his biceps.

Despite my frustration, I was impressed. Within five seconds, however, the itch overpowered the awe. I shook the fence. "Rex! Do you want me to beg? Fine, Rex, I'm begging you. By all that is holy, touch me."

"I can't."

"Can too."

"No, I can't."

"Can too, can too!"

"I like how having your arms over your head pulls up on your breasts and makes them narrow."

"Really?" I looked down to try to see what he was talking about.

"It shows that they're not fake."

"You're just trying to distract me! Fine, you want to talk about my breasts? Feel if they're real."

"You just said that they were."

"I lied." My Schwarzenegger did not improve with age.

"Besides, my hands have touched these wheels and not just the steering rims, which means that I've essentially been touching the ground with my hands. It would be unsanitary."

"Ask Helen for my house keys. She has them. Under my kitchen sink, I have practically every cleaner ever invented. They'll clean your hands. They could dissolve your skin off if you want."

"And probably contain carcinogens."

"Don't play the disease-phobia card now. Just cop a feel. I only need an itty, bitty grope to get me off. I won't tell."

"I think I'll take a picture instead." He rolled back and got out his cellphone.

"If you're not going to fondle my back, I'm not going to scratch yours!" I stuck my tongue out and made decidedly unsexy faces. He gave up after a few shots. "Have a good day, Meg," he said after putting the camera away. He rolled towards the street.

"You're a bad Samitarian, Rex! How could you leave a damsel in such distress?" I yelled.

Mr. iPod walked by again. He stepped aside so Rex could pass but never looked my direction.

I needed new neighbors.

Chapter Nine

Drunk. That's what it felt like. I was woozy and horny and ready for just about anything.

Except 215. He waltzed out the door and turned to face me. "Just heard about you!" he said with a smirk.

"No, no, no! You have no right to see me this way. I beat you fair and square in that bet and you refused to take your swim trunks off. You cried! Cried! You have absolutely no right!"

"Whatcha gonna do about it?"

"You sound like a playground bully."

"Nah, nah, nah, nah!"

I rolled my eyes. "Dude, you're fifty years old."

"Forty-three," he said indignantly.

"And you're acting like a five-year-old. Worse. My nephews and nieces don't even act like this."

He made gloating sounds that I have no idea how to spell.

I was not a happy camper. "Buddy, let me put it to you this way. You owe me. Saturday morning, I want you to knock on my door and I want you naked and to be a good sport about it. I'll put you through your paces. Let a few of the women in the building see every inch of you. But I'll be nice about it. If you're not there, though, your ass will be mine."

A nervous look shot across his face. He struggled to return to that swarmy smirk.

"Unless..." I motioned with my head for him to step closer. He did. "Even closer," I said quietly, "This is embarrassing." His t-shirt rubbed up against my left nipple. My gasp must have been like a gunshot in his ear because he involuntarily stepped back. I steeled myself and just came out and said it. "Get me off and I'll forget about your renegeing on your bet. I felt sorry for you at the time, but for you to come out here to see me like this, you're asking for trouble."

There was lust in his eyes and hope in my heart. "We'll be even?" I nodded my head vigorously.

Then the door opened. My old friend Samantha came out. She took one contemptuous look at 215 and made a sweeping gesture with her hand. "Brad! Shoo! Shoo! You don't deserve to see her. Go on, get, get!" He

blushed and reluctantly retreated down the sidewalk a few steps and then stopped. "Shoo!" I said," Samantha yelled. He retreated a few more steps and stopped, looking slightly angry. Samantha's eyes went wide in disgust. She strode very purposively toward him, waving her arms aggressively, and boomed, "Get, get, get!"

"Come back here!" I yelled. "We weren't done." He was still slowly backing, obviously intimidated by Sam. "Get back here or we're on for Saturday!"

Not even my threat could get him to come back.

As she walked back toward me, Sam said, "Growing up, if one of our steers showed an attitude like that, he'd been on the backyard grill faster than you could sneeze."

Then her harsh look was replaced with an enormous smile. "Look at you!" She charged up and hugged me. Then she took a step back and looked me over head to toe. "Wow, all decked out for the occasion, huh? You must be so excited!" She squealed. "Actually, I can tell you're excited. You're getting kinda messy down there! Going down your leg. Wow, I wish I had your courage. I envy you. Honestly, it looks like it would be fun to be in your shoes, even if those don't look like the most comfortable heels. But boy, I'd never have the nerve!"

"I had no idea you wanted to be stripped. Do you think all women do?"

She seemed surprised by my question. It momentarily broke the momentum behind her gushing. Then she got going again. "Absolutely not! It was you who put the idea into my head. It wasn't until I saw all those guys who were so obviously excited despite themselves when in your clutches that I got to wonder, but in truth, I'd never put myself in your position and I'd still rather have a guy who could cook and liked to give foot massages."

"Well," I snorted, "at least my fantasies are realistic," I replied.

She poked me in the side conspiratorially. "I heard it took Ed's brother seven minutes to strip you and get you this way. Didn't even try to resist, did you?"

Another poke.

"As a matter of fact, I did...."

But she wasn't listening. "Meg, I always knew that you were the Brazilian waxing type. Show off everything! But you got caught out when you had let the stubble grow out, you slacker. That must be so embarrassing! That'll teach you to take better care of your appearances!" She giggled.

The warmth on my face was abruptly cut short by her asking, "Are you ticklish?" She wiggled her fingers up my sides. It was my turn to squeal. "Sorry," she said with a laugh. "Your armpits seem to be screaming, 'Touch me!'"

"No, it's my boobs that are saying that. Say, Sam, do you think you could take this sign off me?"

I was starting to wonder if Samantha might not be slightly stoned as she laughed for awhile before saying, "Nope! I don't have the authority."

"Seriously, Samantha!?"

More giggles. "Then the next thing you'll ask me for is a bobby pin or paperclip to jimmy the handcuff locks! You wanted this as long as I've known you, so I'm not going to spoil it. We're better friends than that. Well, I have an eleven o'clock meeting and I'm already late. Sayonara!" She pinched my nipple as a goodbye, which made me gasp in unexpected pleasure. "Now, Meg, you know I'm not Amy." Amy was her sister, a terrible flirt. When she was drunk, she'd even flirt with guys. "Nearly forgot." She pulled a permanent marker out of her pocket and signed my tummy. She closed with "Another hug!" and wrapped her arms around me and the fence bars a second time and rapidly hobbled away in her high heels, saying hello to Fluffy and Helen as they came back.

"Hanging in there?" our HOA President said.

"This was fun, but I really need to get down."

"Arms feeling tired?"

"A little."

"Need to pee? Fluffy did a good job at that this morning. Practically repainted a fire hydrant. Very impressive, my little Fluffy-kins!"

"That's great, Helen, but..."

"I usually try to get him to use one of the tires of Brad in 215, but I couldn't find his car this morning. He's such a jerk."

"Helen..."

"Maybe we'll find that bad man's car tomorrow, won't we, Fluffy-wuffy?"

"Helen!"

She looked up, startled.

"Thank you. I don't need to pee, my arms are fine. I'm just need to get off, okay?" Her puzzled expression looked like it needed to be cleared up, so I used that four-syllable word "masturbation."

Her face turned to horror. "Kids these days! So forward! Don't you know that there are certain things you shouldn't talk about in public??" She fumbled with her door keys. Fluffy caught her mood with a panicked whimper and scratched at the door. They stumbled over each other fleeing inside.

I don't think she heard me yell, "I'm not a kid! I'm a woman! With needs!"

Baby Boomers. They're so repressed.

I prayed for a young man to come rescue me.

It took two minutes to get an answer. Mr. iPod walked by again. My efforts at

shaking the fence was desultory. I didn't want to raise my hopes. Then he walked by again. And then again. He was taking sneaks at me.

"Dude, take those out of your ears and get your ass over here!"

The earphones seem to jump out of his ears on their own accord. He did this ultra-innocent "Who me???" look.

"Thank God! I got someone's attention. Hey, hero, get over here. Yes, you!"

He slowly approached.

"Look, you can tell I'm a naked woman chained to a fence. You want to look, so get closer."

His speed didn't improve, but he was running out of sidewalk between us.

"My very own Perseus!" From the blank look on his face, I knew he didn't get it. "Never mind. The thing is I need a favor from you."

"W-what?" He didn't know where to look.

"Do you see the paper clip down there?" I nodded with my head towards the ground.

He had a hard time tearing his eyes off my goodies to look at the sidewalk. He eventually looked up and shook his head no.

"It's right..." I looked down myself. Shit. It wasn't there anymore. Jenna must have gotten it when she cleaned up my pubes.

"Plan B. Hey, Perseus, what's your name?"

He stuttered something, so I asked him to repeat. It didn't help. I was starting to worry that he was hyperventilating.

"Okay, Perseus, hang in there. I need you to do something for me. Can you

concentrate? Hello, I said... oh shit, you're a virgin, aren't you?" His look told me the awful truth. "How old are you?"

"Tw-twenty."

"Twenty? And you're still a virgin?"

"O-one."

"Twenty-one?! Shouldn't you be in college right now, staring at some coed's chest while pretending to take notes in some boring lecture class?"

He didn't respond.

I grumbled, "Kids these days."

Oh lordy, if there's anything worse than turning into your mom, it'd turning into Helen. If I get a poodle, shoot me. I raised my voice. "I need you to get me off, can you do that?"

He gave me a blank look.

"I need you to do some rubbing."

Blank Look 2.0.

"Clit? Clitoris? Pussy? Beaver? Snatch? Do any of the terms mean anything to you?" When he shook his head no, I said, "Don't you look at porn?" Another negative head shake, accompanied by a crimson blush on his cheeks. "For heaven's sake, what do you do online?"

"Fox News."

"For the sake of my sanity, I'm going to assume that was your idea of a joke. Let's start over. With the basics. You know what breasts are?"

He smiled nervously.

"Okay! We've found some common ground! Wooohoo! Okay, now: Touch. My. Breasts."

He opened his mouth in shock.

"Okay, that'll work too! Now keep your lips open and put your mouth on one of my nipples. Doesn't matter which one. That's it, step closer. This is very similar to what you did when you were six weeks old. You can do it again. It's like riding a bicycle."

"But the sign says I'm not supposed to touch."

"Pretend you're illiterate. You're halfway there anyway. Step forward, step forward. You can do this."

"Is this like Punked?"

"What? No, it's... What's Punked?"

"It's a hidden camera tv show."

I guess I should have been happy that he was using full sentences. "No, it's not a hidden..."

He suddenly bent forward and clutched his hands to his crotch to hide what was beyond a pup tent. Dang. He was bordering on a circus tent.

"Dude, do you mind? Stop worrying about covering up. I'm the one who's naked here."

He bent over even more, which forced him to really crane his neck to keep looking at my crotch.

"You have to work with me on this," I said. "Hey, shouldn't you be covering ME up? Come on, play the hero." If he was covering yours truly, at least I could do the rubbing.

"Where's the camera?" He started looking around.

"There isn't a camera! Just breathe regularly and cop a feel. We're not talking rocket science here."

"What do you call that?" He pointed towards the sky accusingly.

I looked up at the side of the building. "Oh, that? That's for me to spy on guys so I know who's using the pool. Don't worry about it. The resolution is terrible."

He screamed and ran away, still covering his crotch, shouting, "This'll ruin my chance at being President!!!"

I groaned in frustration. What's a girl to do?

Chapter Ten

The morning traffic had long since died down. I had time to listen to the birds. They sounded much less frustrated than myself. I'd keep getting my hopes up. I'd think I heard footsteps down by the street or maybe the elevator doors inside, but they were always false alarms.

Then there was Andy and Rich, both dressed in business suits.

I sighed. "I've been praying for men to come by and I end up with men's men."

"We're happy to see you, too, Meg," Rich said.

Andy quickly added, "Actually, we're not. We wanted to see Ed's brother naked. That guy is hot! Asphalt on an August day hot! I thought Ed was something else. And you stripped him the weekend we had to go to that real estate conference. Very naughty of you."

Rich cocked his head to the side and looked at his lover. "It's a good thing

that we have such a solid relationship that I don't mind you saying things like that." He underscored the playful criticism by grabbing Andy's butt for emphasis. Andy yelped.

"Hey, Rich, do that to me!" I said.

"Sorry, my pendulum doesn't swing your way. Neither does his," Rich said.

Andy asked, "Since you got what you wanted, does this mean that you're going to go into retirement?"

"Maybe," I said. "But no, wait. 215 had the nerve to come out and look at me. He's the one who started crying when I beat him in a bet. He's got his comeuppance coming."

Rich said, "Good luck with him. Give us the heads up, will you?"

Andy cut in, "Don't bother. He's the ugly one."

"No!" Rich said indignantly. "That's 217 with the crazy..." He stuck his hands to his head and wiggled his fingers like they were spikes of hair. "He's the one who undid her bikini bottoms. Meg, if you ever decide to avenge yourself on him, we'll take a pass." He pulled a marker out of his pocket and said, "I guess we should sign you and go off to meet our client. She wants to buy a home in the million dollar range... cash. So we can't afford to be late." He signed the side of my pelvis.

Andy signed me on the exact opposite side. "Should I leave this for the others?" He waved the marker.

Rich said, "Leave it on the ground, by the other one. Ciao, girl!" They walked off. I could tell by their body language that they were flirting. After all these years. I suddenly wanted that.

Then came this college guy who always seemed uncomfortable around me, like he was terribly afraid I would catch him checking me out. I could probably get him to touch me. He stared very intently at the ground as he

walked by.

"Hey, would you at least look at me? I ain't Lady Godiva. You're not going to go blind."

"No, my momma always said I should be careful to look at women respectfully and not look at disrespectful women," he stopped and said to his shoes.

"Have I just been insulted?" I asked out loud to no one in particular.

"My momma..."

"Tell your momma if she wants to have grandkids she's going to have to sing a different tune because at the rate you're going, buddy..."

"I'm getting you a towel to cover up. I saw the email this morning and thought it a disgusting joke."

"I'm not interested in your perverted little saving the damsel in distress fantasy. I don't want a towel."

"I'm getting you a towel," he said, stamping his feet petulantly.

"Look, mister, this is my fantasy. Do you hear? Mine! I don't want no stinking..."

"You need a towel!"

"You cover me with a towel and I'll strip you naked in front of the entire block. I'll have you know I'm 19-1 against men in this building! That's quite a winning record, so if I say..."

"You're a silly woman who can't be trusted to know what's in her own best interests."

I looked to the sky and said, "God, I know you can hear me and I know you know the difference between a towel and a handjob, but your prayer

answering service in my neighborhood is on the fritz."

"Not only are you loose, you're blasphemous!"

"And you're acting like the Taliban, so go away."

The door opened. I breathed a sigh of relief. "Mitchell! Am I glad to see you!" I looked up at the sky and winked. Then I radiated lust in Mitchell's direction. Mitchell has the biggest, hairiest testicles I have ever seen and he was such a good sport about getting stripped naked by me that he let me cup them in my hands. And he was such a gentleman that when he immediately had an accident, he took my semen-stained dress to the dry cleaner himself unlike... oh never mind. "Mitchell, Mitchell, Mitchell! This pervert called me loose and threatened to cover me with a towel."

Mitchell glanced contemptuously at the momma's boy and flicked him on the back of the head. "Dick!"

The guy slunk off.

"My hero!" I said.

He beamed.

"Cop a feel," I said, still smiling.

"Can't."

"Dick!"

"As of this past weekend, I'm going steady now with Kim."

"Oh, then I guess you're not a dick," I said quietly. "But it's not fair! Couldn't you have waited one more week?"

"It wasn't my idea! I knew today would be the day, so I was trying to stall, but a coworker bought her a dozen roses. He forced my hand."

There was a pause and then we simultaneously yelled, "Dick!"

There was another pause and then I said, "Men's attraction to other women keeps causing me problems. Liza had a crush on Ed and now Kim took you." I sighed. "Okay, sign me and get out of here."

Chapter Eleven

More time by myself. More attempts at Kegels. I could do them. But they weren't doing me. Then I noticed feet walking by without even stopping. I looked up. It was the UPS guy. He rang a doorbell as if he hadn't even seen me.

I bit back my indignation and asked, "What unit?"

"215."

"He's out."

"Thanks. I guess I'll be back tomorrow." He put one of their stickers on the glass by the doors. He started walking away.

"Excuse me! I'm naked here!" I pointed to myself as best I could. "I can't cover up in the slightest. Aren't you going to take advantage of the situation at all? Am I ugly? Am I in a midsummer night's nightmare and have the head of ass?"

"No, it's not that. It's just, well, quite frankly, I get so many offers and I'm slightly behind my schedule. But..." He gave me the first good look. "You're a heckuva lot better looking than the average lonely housewife." He stepped towards me and gave me a quick ass grab. "You're definitely the finest looking package I've seen all day."

I moaned. "My, what strong hands you have. Do that again."

He considered it, I'll grant him that. "Sorry, I'd love to help. But I can't afford

to get reported and everybody knows what the brown means." He pointed to his uniform and then hummed a bar of their jingle on tv. "There are only two trucks in your neighborhood today, so I'd be too easy to catch. If you had a package due, then that would justify a much longer conversation."

"I'm 215!" I blurted out.

He looked at that electronic do-hickey that we have to sign when we get a package and said, "Okay, Brad, what's your last name?"

My moan wasn't very happy.

"Could you at least take this damn sign off?"

He peered forward to look at it. "Better not. I think it's there for your own protection."

"If you're worried about people's welfare, well, the woman who put it there... she used to be my best friend. If that sign remains on me, I'm going to kill her once I get free."

He sighed thoughtfully. "Sorry, I'd love to help, but I can't."

How the mighty have fallen: "Can I at least get another ass grab?" He looked hesitant, so I growled, "It's customer fucking service."

He stepped forward again.

"The other cheek this time," I said with a smile and twisted to assist.

It felt good. Then my not quite knight in shining armor left me.

I savored the memory of his fingers as long as I could. Then George came out. I blushed in embarrassment, as I always do when I see him. I tried sticking my chest out as much as possible for him.

"I'm so glad to see you!" I said. "I've always felt bad about that kick."

His tongue wetted his lips as he looked me over. The way he did that was so erotic. I hadn't been attracted to him before, but suddenly I had fantasies of that tongue going everywhere. The sexual tension went from zero to vibrating guitar strings in a second. For the first time in a good hour, I felt naked. Not merely undressed, but nakedly vulnerable, nakedly exposed.

"I hope you get something out of seeing me like this," I whispered.

He nodded vigorously. When I saw where his eyes had drifted, I spread my legs as best I could.

"Take me," I ordered. The front of his pants were growing tight. We were panting in time.

"I'm sorry. I can't."

My shoulders slumped as the tension broke. "No, that's the UPS driver's line. Your line is, 'Yes, ma'am! I'll be more than happy to help you.' What do you mean you can't?" I said with as much irritation as I could pound into each word. "I've already had that conversation four frickin' times in the last forty minutes! My pride is gone! It's in shreds! It's... It's... it's wherever my pubic hairs are! I am begging you, George, get me off!"

"Liza said she'd cut the balls off anyone who touched you."

"Fuck Liza! No fuck me!" He was unmoved. I sighed. "I suppose I ought to be happy you still have any balls left after I kicked you."

"This isn't easy for me. Your tits are like... like, wow."

"Don't say tits. They don't sound sexy that way."

"Sorry."

"Don't be sorry. Just touch."

"Can't. I'm afraid of Liza."

"Touch me or I'll strip you again." I gave him my most malicious grin.

He started shaking. "You wouldn't!"

"I would!" I sneered. "And I'll use handcuffs, too. Behind you so you can't even cover up."

The poor guy was sweating.

"So who would you rather have after you... me or Liza?"

He doubled over and bounced back. "Living in this building is so difficult! My family was like, 'Move to the big city. There are more job opportunities there!'"

"Pity yourself after my orgasm," I growled. I was getting good at growling. This itch was well past funny.

I thought he was going to cry and he inched forward and took a breast in each hand. I shuddered and moaned, "Oh George." I tried to kiss him on the lips but was so delirious with pleasure I missed and got his nose instead. "Oh George," I said again. Sometime during the morning, I had dried up but suddenly had a tidal bore down below.

He panted very loudly. I tried to buck my pelvis forward enough to get his jeans. Just out of reach. "Get your legs closer." Instead he dropped down to use his mouth on a nipple. I had to bite my lip to avoid screaming. I wanted the neighbors to see, but I didn't want them to interrupt.

I tried to say, "George, that feels good," but if he understood a word of it, he's a heckuva linguist. Pleasure had shattered my control over my vocal cords. He was clumsy. (After all, he was the guy who simply tried to rip my clothes off, so he wasn't going to win an award for subtlety in this life or the next.) But I was beyond caring. He was good enough.

Then I saw a shadow move toward the door from inside the lobby. I had half a second to warn George, but he didn't pay attention until the door handle hit him in the butt. He jumped up.

"Liza!" we said, trying not to sound guilty, which only made us sound really, really guilty.

"What are you two doing?" she boomed.

"For my part, I was just standing here, naked, cuffed to the fence, courtesy of your boyfriend's conspiracies, so don't sound so self-righteous."

"And George? What are you doing?"

To demonstrate his innocence, George ran away.

"He was..." I stammered. "He was admiring my areolas and he's nearsighted."

The look Liza gave me could only be described as withering. I smiled in response, which broke her composure.

Why did I smile? I knew she'd let me go for free and then I could have a rendezvous with my Hitachi Magic Wand. Very soon.

"I suppose your muscles are getting pretty sore," she said. She said it so gently.

I bobbed my head in agreement.

"First, let me get those high heels off."

As soon as she said it, I realized that legs were in fact quite tired. "Thank you." Her touch was downright lovely. There was something very nice in how she grasped the back of my ankles and then quickly rubbed my soles after pulling off the shoe. Suddenly I wished I was an octopus.

She dusted off her hands and said, "Now it's time to deal with that." She

gestured towards the handcuffs and then put her hands in her pocket. "Do you have any idea what time it is?" she asked me.

"I'd say it's almost eleven. But obviously I'm not wearing a watch."

"Try one o'clock," Liza said as she pulled the key out of her pocket. "You know," she said as she walked around the fence to get behind me, "I'm still not comfortable with all of this. I don't know why you're so interested in stripping and being stripped. And I don't like the way that Ed has been so fixated on seeing you naked. I only agreed to this because I didn't think he'd ever be completely focused on me until I let him do this."

The sound of her voice started making me nervous — there are certain conversations you don't want to have with girlfriends when they hold the key to your handcuffs — but then suddenly my cuffed arms fell down in front of me. The muscles around my elbows and shoulders screamed in gratitude.

Liza stood in front of me again. I held up the handcuffs so she could unlock me. Instead, she massaged my elbows. It felt amazing in a completely unerotic way.

"Thank you."

The look on her face was impossible to read. It wasn't quite affectionate, more like a mother who discovered that her super-cute kid had filled their diaper to the brim. That distasteful "the things I do because I love you" look.

Once she let go of my elbows, I jingled the handcuffs to signal to her to unlock them. She stepped forward and worked on my shoulders and neck. I wouldn't describe that as "completely unerotic." I gurgled a thank you. When she stepped back, I held up the handcuffs again. The second pair, the pair that had locked the ones I was wearing to the fence, dangled from the chain between my wrists. She unlocked that pair and put it over her shoulder. Then I expected her to unlock the steel around my wrists. Instead, she put the key in her pocket.

I didn't have much time to be confused before she asked, "Where do you want

your arms? Behind you or out to the sides?"

"Sorry?" I said. I think I sounded very British saying that.

"Out to the sides or behind you?" She took the cuffs draped over her shoulder and pointed to different parts of the fence with them.

"Aren't you letting me go?"

She laughed. It was icy. "I don't think so. You need to get this out of your system. You need to get this out of Ed's system."

"It's way, way out of my system. Gone. Vamoosh! Over the horizon! I just need to masturbate and this will turn into a pleasant memory."

She wrinkled her nose at the mention of masturbation and said in a very strict motherly tone, "Either you decide or I decide for you. And 'vamoosh' isn't a word."

She was as bad as my spellchecker. I decided I would break free when she uncuffed me. I smiled. "Arms behind me. It'll make my chest stick out more."

"You're crazy."

I was working on a snappy comeback when she took the loose pair of handcuffs and cuffed my right wrist to the fence.

"Hey!" I said. "Couldn't you at least let my arms be free for a moment so I could some stretches?" I'd make a break for it then. When her look didn't look promising, I added, "Please, please, please?"

She ignored me. Instead, she knelt down and unlocked the cuff that connected my right wrist to my left. It should have been a moment of freedom for my left arm but her hands were like vise grips as she pulled my left wrist across in front of me and then latched it to a bar of the fence slightly above my ass.

"Liza, uh... how long am I going to be kept out here?" I asked.

Liza smiled mysteriously and shrugged her shoulders. She started undoing the ropes holding my legs to the fence. It felt good to be able to move them, but I wasn't so easily distracted.

"Tell me! How long?" The butterflies in my stomach were flapping their wings, getting ready for flight.

"Bossy! I don't have the schedule memorized!"

I whimpered. I felt like I should beg for something but the butterflies were taking off en masse and it was hard to think straight. Finally I stuttered, "Could you take the sign off me?"

"Nope! No can do, kiddo! We voted on it and I'm not going to go against the majority."

"But everyone tells me that you were the one who insisted on it."

"And they agreed. So imagine how it would look. People would be like, 'Liza is such a hypocrite. She insists on the sign but then takes it off herself.'"

"But I need to get off!" I shook my arms for emphasis. Then I shook everything. The racket ran down the fence to the street. What a flimsy fence. The HOA ought to do something about that. The noise and the jiggling left Liza completely unmoved. Why did she have to be straight?

Her face slipped into a funny look that I couldn't quite explain. She picked up a permanent marker and signed right over my heart before she capped the marker and tossed back onto the sidewalk. She stiffly said, "Adios, Meg. Enjoy the rest of your day."

"I'm thirsty!" I smiled to myself. I had found a legitimate complaint.

"That's taken care of. It's in the schedule somewhere." She was walking away.

I still didn't understand that look on her face. Or why she was acting so odd. I get the whole irritation with her boyfriend wanting to see me naked, but I saw some sunshine between that intermittent iciness. (Oh geez, I'm turning her into a weather forecast.)

Got it.

Envy.

"Liza!" I yelled.

She spun around. Headlights were turned on. Bright.

I couldn't help it. The Chesire Cat took over my face. I couldn't believe what popped out of my mouth. "Liza, you're next." I don't know why I said that. I've left naked women in my wake when I've pursued men's clothes, but I never intentionally targeted a woman.

The way Liza's composure collapsed, however, made me want to try. It was like she lost control over every muscle and she collapsed into a heap and yet somehow remained standing. It wasn't simply the blushing, the twisted lip, but what had me soaring was the way her eyebrow ticked uncontrollably and how she nearly jammed a finger up her nose when she tried to cover her mouth in embarrassment. She sputtered something that took me awhile to figure out what it meant. It was "You wouldn't dare!" She started walking back towards me.

"Of course I would. After all, against your own reluctance, you bit the bullet and let your boyfriend fulfill my ultimate fantasy. It's the least I could do for you. I owe you a favor big time." Although I know she would deny it, the look on her face was pure encouragement, so I continued, "I know you. I know your type. You're the kind that's turned on by being looked at, but you don't want to seem cheap as to show off so you want it in a safe situation which is somehow out of your control. I know what it's like. Leave it to me, I can arrange something. You're in the hands of a professional."

It was cute to see her shiver. She shook her head in protestation but didn't say a word.

Butterflies grounded. I was warmed up now. "But if you take this damn sign off me right this instant, I'll make sure it happens indoors and only a few people can see. Otherwise..." I let my threat linger in the air.

She fled faster than Mr. iPod. But then again, she wasn't trying to cover her crotch either.

Chapter Twelve

A few more men stopped by in the next hour. The pleasure was of "you had to be there" sort, so I'll spare you, dear reader, the details. But they weren't very good conversationalists, I'll tell you that. If my voice came from out my other lips, then I could probably say that they were very attentive. But in truth, they mainly stared and babbled. Trying to get any of them to grope was hopeless. In response, I got nonsense about Liza and their wanting to keep their testicles attached. One guy though had a sports drink for me. He volunteered at the HOA meeting to keep me hydrated, he said.

Another guy held his hand over his eyes as he walked past, mumbling, "I can't look on the account of my girlfriend," he said. I engaged him in banter. The way he crossed his knees and shuddered, I could tell it was agony for him to use his willpower to resist looking. When I pointed out that he had allowed cracks to appear between his fingers, he snapped, "Did not!"

"Did too!" I snapped back.

We ping-ponged back and forth until he got so frustrated that he pointed his finger at me and yelled, "I did not... Oh no!" He suddenly realized he was staring.

I tried to look demur and demurred, "I think you did."

If any sound came out of his mouth, it probably would have been a stutter, but the lips moved in vain. He fled down the sidewalk too. I was getting a lot

of that.

Then I was left alone and for the final time. My muscles were getting stiff, so I did as many calisthenics as I could with arms still cuffed to the fence. Then I started thinking about how, since my arms weren't locked above my head but to the sides, I could rub myself against the fence. As soon as the thought was in my head, I knew I was in trouble because I knew I would do it. I tried to talk myself out of it by assuring myself that the rectangular steel bars wouldn't feel good or might even hurt. But that didn't seem important. I visualized what it would be like if someone saw me. The rational part of my brain knew that it would be awful if someone caught me rubbing myself against a fence. But the idea of someone watching was also an incredible turn on. The siren song of self-seduction continued.

I listened to make sure no one was around and kept looking up and down the sidewalk. I turned to my left and stepped between the fence. I was shaking so hard that I nearly kicked the bars. I had been turned on too long. I needed to do this. Then I realized I was being silly. There was a much easier way. By turning at a right angle and stepping between the fence, I had placed the fingers on my left hand directly in front of my clit. Crash-bam! Since I was right-handed, I'd have to turn around to do this properly. I couldn't resist a few circular rubs.

Wow.

There's no other way to put it. "Mission control," I giddily yelped, "we have contact!" After hours and hours of frustration, it was GOOD. I leaned back against the bar behind me to steady myself. I was about to enjoy the sensation of steel as it nestled into the split of my derriere, but then my fingers were out of reach. I leaned forward. Heaven again. I circled my fingers around so aggressively that it reminded me of whipping egg whites into a meringue. I bit my lip to keep my whimpering down.

And this was with my left hand. It's probably TMI, but I had never gotten off left-handed before. I was afraid that it would ultimately be a weaker orgasm and if I did this right, it would be one for the history books, so I wanted to switch around to use my right hand but I couldn't bear to lose contact, even for a second.

But my left wrist was getting tired. It wasn't used to the work out. I finally decided I had to switch. I wanted to do it as quickly as possible but I had to do it slowly to avoid jamming a toe.

I took a deep breath and carefully stepped back out from between the bars. I twisted my pelvis to go back into the fence the other way when I heard a familiar "Hey, Meg!"

Red fireworks erupted across my face. I willed myself to look up.

"Josh! I mean Ed! I..."

Fuck! Did he see?

I wanted to wipe my fingers off but only stopped myself when I realized it would be an admission of guilt.

He didn't say anything, so I felt compelled to feel the sinful silence. "Uhm, Ed... You never mentioned having a brother named Josh. Ed?"

Guys all day had their eyes in elevator mode. Up and down, up and down, check out my pussy, check out my chest, check out my pussy, check out my... Ed was doing something more intense. It was like he was visually scanning my bone marrow. When his eyes got up to my chest, I did wipe my fingers on my ass.

I said again, "You never said you had a brother named Josh!"

"You didn't ask." He was too busy ogling to put any enthusiasm into his words.

"What did you expect me to do? Say, 'Do you happen to have a brother named Josh?'" No response. I added, "Where have you been all day?"

In that same distant monotone voice he said, "Oh... standing at the end of the block watching for kids or cops. George has my spot now."

That idea was so hot. Not only was he protecting me from a distance, it must have been driving him crazy to have to wait to take a look-see. I was teasing him without even knowing it.

"So Saint George is protecting me from the dragons?"

"Your nipples look so hard. It's like they could cut glass."

"Do you mind? I'm trying to have a conversation with you to cover the fact that I'm horribly turned on and you caught me masturbating!"

I froze. Oh, dear, I said that out loud. The next five seconds proved conclusively that you can't blush your way into a nosebleed because if it were possible, I would have done it.

Only the final word of what I said caught his attention and then he rediscovered this thing called "eye contact."

It was so intense it hurt. It was, ever so briefly, like an erotic stare down contest. I lost. I quickly looked down and mumbled something that didn't even make sense in my mind. Then the voice of sanity told me to do what's right. I took a deep breath and looked up. "I think you had better go. I wouldn't want us to betray Liza."

He nodded in agreement. He hesitantly, reluctantly, slowly turned to go, his eyes still glued to my body. Then his cellphone rang.

Like an attentive gentleman, he answered it. (Does my sarcasm come through in print?)

Have you ever noticed how the birthrate has declined in direct proportion to cellphone use? It makes sense to me. They're such mood killers.

Ed quickly said, "Okay, thanks." He slammed his phone back into his pocket and fished around for something. "Cops," he whispered as he stepped forward, plucking the key out of his pocket. He unlocked the left handcuffs from the bar. Then he undid the right.

I stepped away from the fence. As he went to unlock one of the front doors of the building, Ed pushed me in front of him to block the view of me from the street. It was the most physical contact we ever had. Even though I was suddenly afraid of the cops, I did realize that if he hadn't been wearing anything he was in perfect position to take me from behind. He wasn't thinking that way: he was frantically trying to get his building key out of his pocket and jam it into the lock, which seemed to have done an Alice-in-Wonderland shrinkage. I heard a car in the distance slowly driving down our street.

"Hurry!"

"I am hurrying!" he snapped.

The key went into the lock. There was the old reassuring click and Ed pulled roughly at the door. He shoved me inside. I don't think he even noticed that he had his hand on my ass.

At the same time I was appreciating the digital massage to my hindmost, something difficult to describe happen. As I was propelled forward, my hands instinctively came up and the handcuff attached to my left wrist reached up and grabbed the handle to the door that Ed hadn't opened. I suddenly stopped while Ed continued to hurl forward, brushing by and landing on the floor. I didn't want the open door to close on the handcuff. (I had visions of it jamming.) So I put one foot back outside. Ed, hasty to undo the cuff, pushed me further out. He did this without any digital manipulation of my nice parts. (Bad Edward! Bad Edward!)

The cop car drove by. The uniformed guy in the passenger seat made eye contact right as Ed got me free. I disappeared into the building before I could see his reaction.

We ran down the hall, the cuffs on my wrist occasionally banging into the wall and my boobies doing exactly what you might expect them to do. And that "Don't touch" sign? Well, that accursed thing started going in circles around my neck.

"Where are we going?" I yelled.

"Your place! My place! No, shit! Liza would kill me either way," Ed yelled back.

I don't know why we were yelling.

We barged into the stairwell. We ran up a floor. Ed opened the door. We raced down the hallway. Right before we got to the rec area and the big windows, we came to an abrupt halt. Panting, he rested for a second and stuck his head around the corner and looked down at the front entrance of the building. Then he rejoined me hiding against the wall. "Two cops on the sidewalk," he whispered.

We could hear them.

"See! There's nobody here!"

"I tell you I saw a naked woman. She was pretty hot."

"I think you had better call your wife and tell her that she needs to come home from her sister's early because you're getting horny and addled living by yourself this week."

"You don't believe me!"

The other guy laughed and flatly said, "No."

"I'm not making this up. This is the same building where I've seen a couple of naked guys over the years."

"You have got to be the most perverted hallucinating bisexual cop in the history of the force. Let's go."

We heard footsteps. "I tell you..." the voices and their argument faded.

Ed peeked around the corner. "Coast clear," he said.

We laughed. Loudly. It made much more sense than our yelling. Relief.

Then we were face to face, nose to nose. He was looking into my eyes.

"Shit!" I whispered as I reached behind myself and locked my wrists together.

Ed knitted his eyebrows and stepped back. "Why did you do that?"

"You do still have the key, right? You haven't lost it?"

"No, I haven't, but why recuff yourself?"

"It's to keep me from doing something I'd later regret. Liza was generous to allow you to do this. We can't betray her. And we both know you wouldn't take advantage of a naked bound woman, so as long as I'm helpless, we're safe. The handcuffs are like Tristan's sword."

"You could still go down on me," he suggested.

I was about to say something indignant and scolding when I saw that he was having a hard time holding in his laughter. When I realized he was teasing me, we were both reduced to giggling.

He took me by the upper arm and guided me toward the rec area.

"I guess I should lock you here," he said. "Until the party."

"What?"

Actually, that wasn't very good writing. It didn't convey what I actually said. Let me try that again.

"WHAATTT?!?!?!?!!!!"

There, that's better.

"We're having a potluck this afternoon. Early dinner. You are of course the guest of honor. There are people in the building who haven't seen you, let alone sign you."

The old tingling in the nether regions again.

"Can I at least pee first?" I said, probably looking and sounding as sheepish as I felt.

"Sure."

The rec area had restrooms. Ed guided me to the women's. Now, if you have a golden shower fetish, you can imagine him watching. If you don't, you can imagine that I did my business, considered masturbating and opted against it because I figured if I were feeling fucked out while at this party, I'd be humiliated but not turned on by having so many people look at me. What really happened? I ain't saying.

All I will say is that at one point leaned forward and shook my head until the stupid sign fell to the floor. I stomped it a few times out of spite. It didn't seem to mind.

Ed guided me out to the sofa in the rec area. I was probably the first person to sit on it in years.

"Now what?" I asked.

"The party doesn't start for two hours."

"I'm not going to stay here handcuffed for two more hours. Besides, it's kinda cold."

He looked at my nipples and said, "Here I was thinking that you were turned on."

I stuck out my tongue at him.

"It's hot outside, so maybe I should open some windows."

Two minutes later, I said, "Doesn't help."

"Very well." Ed began walking away.

"Where are you going?" I yelled.

"You should use your indoor voice," he said as he kept walking.

Not having anything to do, I sat there on the sofa and waited. I figured, however, that I should come up with some snappy comebacks in case anyone walked by and commented on my attire.

I heard a door close down the hall and started to worry. I couldn't tell whether it was the door to the stairwell, which would probably mean my rescuer, or whether it was a door to an apartment. I didn't know what to do. If I stuck my head around the corner to check and it wasn't Ed, then I might get the person's attention and they might come over and talk to me. I did not know what to do. Act casual? Play the damsel in distress? Footsteps got closer.

"Ed? Is that you?"

No answer. I considered running for the restroom.

Then Ed appeared carrying a blanket (how gentlemanly of him) and belts (eh?). Without a word, he set the belts on the couch. Then he opened the blanket on the floor and motioned for me to sit on it. Then he motioned again. I obeyed by rolling over onto my stomach. He undid the cuffs. My wrists fell to my sides. Then he quickly pulled half the blanket over me and tucked it in. Then he began rolling me over.

"What...?"

After he bundled me up, he set me on the sofa and began tightening the belts over the blanket.

"I see, I'm an involuntary mummy."

"This is in case you get cold feet about the party."

"But I AM going to get cold feet."

Once Ed was done, he stepped back and said, "You're right. I'll be back."

After he disappeared, I did something I suddenly had an incredible, lusty desire to do. I fell asleep.

Part Thirteen

It was hot. Unbearably hot. I tried to roll over in my bed but something got in my way. It didn't know what it was, but it was irritating.

"Shhh! I think she's waking."

Then memories cascaded down on me. I wasn't in my bed at all. I suddenly became aware of the blanket tightly around me. And sweaty socks on my feet. I needed to open my eyes but was afraid. I serendipitously checked to see if I had somehow miraculously acquired panties. The results of my search were not inspiration for the faithful.

"Don't pretend to be asleep. We know you're awake." The voice was very, very familiar but I couldn't place it.

I resigned myself to the inevitable and opened my eyes. I was surrounded by a mob of faces that each had enough anticipation to be called leering but showed too much amusement for that term to apply.

"Are you ready?"

I didn't see who said this. There were so many crowding around me. I asked, "Ready for what?" As soon as the words escaped my lips, I realized how

ridiculous they sounded. If I had any doubt what was about to happen, they were ended the eruption of disconcerting chuckling, the style of chuckling you only hear when someone knows they have you over the rocks and you can't do a damn thing about it.

I suddenly felt naked in a way that I never had in my entire life. It didn't matter that I was still covered from ankles to neck in a blanket. I had waited my entire life for this. No clothes and a full blown crowd.

And I panicked. I clutched at the blanket — what good did that do? — as white heat detonated just below my heart. Then I was cold. Then hot. Then cold. I was very, very hot. The room must have been eighty degrees and the blanket around me was wool and starting to itch.

There was no doubt about what would happen next. The blanket was coming off. I was spinning and floating and... and...

"Please no!" I said.

I apparently have a possible career path as a stand-up comedian. Once people stopped laughing, a female voice in the second row asked, "Please no what?" A few others volunteered similar versions of the question. So generous.

Now, I have to wonder. Does any of your face expand or change shape in response to repeated blushing? You know, like how muscles grow and bulge when you keep using them? I worried that because of that day my cheeks would start changing shape. I don't know, maybe becoming all puffy.

Rex wheeled over to my feet. He started taking my socks off. I fought him. Or tried to. He grabbed the soles of each firmly. And his firm was firm. "Aren't your feet getting hot?" he asked.

"Yes, but...!"

It suddenly became important to not let people even see my ankles.

"But what?" Rex asked. When I couldn't say, one sock came off and then the

other. The cool air felt good, I admit, but it made me feel even nakeder. (Dear spellchecker, we've already discussed this. It's a word. And no, I'm not trying to spell the word "anteater.")

I don't know why I was surprised by what happened next. Here was a guy with two bare bound feet directly in front of him. Are you surprised that he started tickling? Silly me, I was.

I flopped around the sofa like a fish on a dock. Given the roar this produced, this apparently was the heights of humor.

"Come on, guys!" I pleaded when I could breathe again. I looked down at my body. My moving around was causing the belts to loosen and slide down. Rex attacked my arches. Floppity flop. Then one knee was sticking out. Completely exposed. I stuck it back inside as best as I could, but the blanket didn't line up nicely by itself. It stayed open and gave every indication that as soon as it got done smoking a cigarette, it'd go back to the business of falling off my body and leaving me exposed.

I rolled over as best I could but not all the blanket came with me. This left my shoulder bare. The pleasant coolness there made the rest of me feel even hotter and the blanket, even scratchier.

Hands were on my feet again. I initially kicked but the hands didn't budge. Instead, they began a firm massage. While I can't get myself off with Kegels, I do have very sensitive feet. And Rex knew how to give a massage. Imagine your feet having a sense of taste and then imagine stomping around in a vat of chocolate mousse. I squeezed my fingers into my butt to distract myself from the intensely pleasurable sensations. There was no way I could have an orgasm in front of my entire building. I bit my lip. Nothing helped.

"Listen to her breathing!" a guy whispered.

That made me stop breathing to figure out what he meant. It belatedly hit me that I had been panting. Stopping breathing didn't help matters.

I tried to avoid talking, but I couldn't. "Mercy!" I finally groaned.

"She sounds like she likes it, so why is she asking to stop?" someone asked.

"Because I don't want to cum in front of all you, you stupid fuck!" I snapped before burying my head in the sofa in shame.

"You have a choice," Rex said gently. "I either continue this or go back to tickling you." The tone of his voice made me realize that his comments early about not having a shortage of women interested in sleeping with him weren't empty boasts.

"Neither," I whimpered, turning my head to try to see him. I couldn't. Damp hair stuck to my face.

"That's not an option." He kept massaging. I couldn't keep from pressing my thighs together. And the damn nail extensions had to be practically drawing blood but the orgasm was getting closer and closer.

Every inch of my body began panicking when I knew I was so close that I might not be able to say anything at all.

"Tickle me!" I squealed in a burst of agony. Picture the hero of an action movie, seemingly dead, willing themselves to stand up deliver the final blow to the villain. That's how much energy it took to ask him to tickle me.

The hands withdrew from my feet for a few seconds. I greedily sucked in air. Then came the evil words, "Yes, ma'am." Fingers attacked. I must have looked like a butterfly trying to break dance my way out of a chrysalis.

Then there was shouting and the tickling stopped. It took me a second to become coherent enough to understand what had happened. I was flopping around so much that I had flipped over and begun falling off the sofa. There was no shortage of volunteers to catch me.

My legs were still on the couch, but torso was off. Half a dozen sets of hands were holding me up. (Oh those chivalric men!) The blanket was completely out of kilter, only providing coverage for one breast. Still under the belt

around my waist, I slid my hand around to cover my pussy and was shockingly stabbed by short little spear points of useless, useless, useless pubic hairs that weren't doing their job of providing even a modicum of privacy for my clit. Then another texture startled me. Down there I was sticky slippery messy.

Unit 105 had his hands under my ass and his nose not too far above my pussy said, in what I think was meant to be a James Earl Jones voice, "The smell is strong in this one."

If he was trying to make sure that I didn't go five minutes without blushing that day, he succeeded.

"You have a girlfriend," I finally said trying all the world to sound extremely judgmental.

"What about me?" said a voice. I looked up. It was from the woman cradling my head.

My favorite part of stripping a guy (other than the first moment of seeing his dick) is the next time I see them the next day or the next week. He would always be back in some clothes, of course, as I ran into him in the hallway as he was going to work or getting groceries. Invariably, he was embarrassed to high heaven. I had seen every inch of him and had left wanting to see me. Partially in hopes of provoking retaliation, I liked to tease the guys about how I had totally owned them. But the tables had turned. Walking in and out of the building from that day forward was bound to be a very different experience.

"Let's get the show on the road, shall we?" said Jenna as she leaned over the guys to undo the belts. Because of the heat, she had switched into short shorts and a bandeau bikini top.

It didn't take her long to undo all the buckles. She aggressively pulled the blanket away. I didn't try to stop her. Then with a big grin, she took my hand and motioned for me to stand. The guys moved back in a semi-circle. They didn't move far.

Now, the question is, what do you do when you are butt naked in front of a

group of people? Especially a crowd that has gathered for the specific purpose of seeing you naked? Do you try to flee? Protect your modesty even though it's been shot to hell already? Beg for clothes? Grab the blanket? Just what do you do?

I decided to fake some insouciance. I used both hands to get the hair off of my face and asked in as grand a tone of voice as possible, "Now what?"

No one said anything. Instead people continued to look at me, devouring me with their eyes. My moment of attempted arrogance collapsed. I wanted to cover up but that seemed like admitting defeat. I wished my hands were still cuffed behind me so I didn't have to worry about what to do with them because every possibility seemed wrong.

I was starting to worry that they wanted me to masturbate for them. Then Jenna shook a marker she was holding over her head and said, "Who needs to sign her? Don't be shy."

No one moved. *Waiting for Godot* goes NC-17.

I rolled my eyes and pointed to 105 and said, "You first."

My neighbors quickly discovered that my skin was too damp from sweat to properly write. There was no shortage of volunteers to towel me off. In the end, it took a good fifteen minutes for everyone to sign me. It could have been done a lot faster, but I detected a decided lack of urgency in the men, who argued over who got to sign my boobies. The women's expressions were curious, much like Liza's Mona Lisa blend of uneasiness and envy.

The line of people got shorter and shorter and the ink on my body grew more and more elaborate. I stopped paying attention to who was actually signing me until the last fellow said, "So this is what you do with your time off? Sorry I missed you earlier, but work was busy."

My boss.

Bulging blush muscles.

"Good afternoon, Norm," I said, looking down at his shoes. I wasn't sure how I'd make eye contact in the office the next day either.

"Good indeed!" He stretched out "indeed" to about three syllables. His eyes jumped up and down my body so much I thought they might get carried away and punch his brain. "Why don't you ever dress like this to work?"

"I'm not going to descend to the level of that question," I miffed. It wasn't a very good miff.

Ed saved me from further embarrassment by apologizing to Norm for interrupting and then taking my arm and steering me over to the mirror in the weight room. What a curious sight to behold. My first impression was that it was like someone had inked a black one-piece swimsuit across my body, save it didn't cover my ass, which still had marks from where I dug in my nails. My second impression was that I looked like I had been fucked silly and enjoyed the process too much. I was left alone for a minute to confront myself and then Jenna came in, carrying a CD in a case.

"This is for you. The pictures from Jenna's camera this morning. Liza insisted that no other copies be made, so don't lose this. I wanted to post a few of the PG-13 ones on the web, but Liza threatened to remove my Fallopian tubes. She's such a conservative young lady. In an aggressive violent way."

"Thank you." It sounded like a dumb thing to say but I couldn't think of any other response as I took the disc.

"This was supposed to be a potluck party but everyone was too distracted. We're ordering pizza."

The reader probably knows where that is going but I didn't, not yet, so I only said, "Yeah, I have barely eaten all day."

"Was this a good day for you? You wouldn't believe how much planning went into this."

"Oh," I laughed, "I think I can. Remember I've done this to almost every guy in the building."

We went back to the rec room. Someone with cookies arrived during my brief absence. Time passed. It's strange to be standing around, talking about the unusually warm weather and eating cookies when you're the only one naked. Try it sometime.

Chapter Fourteen

Everyone was getting too comfortable, I decided. Some people had come to the party dressed in swimsuits and actually had the nerve to go to the pool, actually walking away when I was still naked. I could hear them splashing about down below. Utterly unprincipled. I had to do something.

I strolled over to Jenna. "Aren't you hot in all those clothes? It's gotta be almost ninety."

She giggled. She and Samantha: the Princesses of Mirth. "I'm fine."

I waited a few second and said, "I did mean it when I said thank you in the exercise room."

She very playfully said, "Of course! We're friends."

"I mean, I've been the center of attention all day."

"Not a problem! It's your special day."

"My parents always told me I should share."

She only started to look puzzled when I reached out and yanked down her top.

She yelped. The sexual tension in the room was back to where it should have been. I spied Samantha. Although she hadn't abandoned me like the pool people, she had in fact worn a string bikini to the party, but hid the bottom in

a ridiculously conservative wrap. I had to at least get that off her. (Wrap, cover-up skirt. I'm not sure what to call them. I only know that Sam likes them. They always struck me as the dumbest use of cloth ever invented. That is, until a boyfriend suggested, while we were at the beach, that I wear one with no bikini bottom underneath. When I tried to borrow the one Sam was wearing not three feet away, that fellow, now an ex obviously, suggested I was drunk, even though I was our designated driver.)

I considered walking over and yanking it off when Ed came up behind me and pulled at my arms. Click-click-click. The handcuffs again.

I rolled my eyes and asked, "What is it this time?"

Liza, who I hadn't seen sneak in, stepped forward and held a small stack of twenty dollar bills in front of my face and waved for me to open my mouth. "Just use your lips and don't get drool on them."

I had been hoping to talk to her. "You're next," was all I could say before she stuck the bills so far forward that I had to bite down on them to avoid having them go into my mouth.

With a look of someone whose smirk was interrupted by fear, she leaned forward and whispered into my ear, "I'd like to see you try." She stepped back. She was trembling. She put her hand on my shoulder. I couldn't tell whether it driven by affection or the need to steady herself. Maybe both.

"Steps or elevator?" Ed said.

Unable to move my lips for fear of dropping the bills, I mumbled something that sounded like "Darth Vader."

"Elevator it is."

On the short ride down, I started worrying about what would happen next. What if the pizza delivery guy was gay? Or offended?

The woman in the Mizza Pizza baseball cap and holding a stack of seven pizzas as she waited right outside the front door didn't look very offended

when Ed let her in.

"Hello, there!" she said to me.

I grunted the same.

"Hello, there!" she said again, this time much more salaciously.

I didn't respond.

"What happened to you?"

"Mong morry."

"Long story, I bet." She handed Ed the pizzas without looking at him. Then she took the bills out of my mouth. She started to count the change when he said, "Take it all as a tip. That's for your silence."

"Yeah, right. My girlfriend works for UPS and she's always making me envious of what she gets to see. She won't believe this." Then she tugged on her baseball cap and said, "Order pizza any time you like!"

She had her hand on the door when Ed started to say, "Certainly we..." But she cut him off. "Not you!" she snapped, looking at him for the first time. She started to say something to me but then turned toward Ed and snapped, "Do I look bisexual to you?" Then she turned to me with a smile. "I don't suppose it's your phone number on the delivery address."

She looked saddened by my shaking my head no. She drank me in and then announced, "I can't think of any way of dragging this out any longer and I don't want to get any complaints about cold pizza, so I will bid you adieu."

She had the door opened before I remembered, "You need to sign me! Ed, do you have the pen?"

He did. The woman took it and gave me elevator eyes again. She laughed. "Those are signatures!" She studied them and said, "I don't want to ruin the shape."

"Her ass is still blank," Ed said. Helpful man.

She grabbed me by the shoulders and spun me around. "Holy shit! Handcuffs! And why are you carrying around a CD? I've got to hear this story."

"The pizza's getting cold," Ed said.

"You know, the human race could survive if it were 95 percent women," she said to him icily. Then she put a finger on my shoulder and pushed. "Bend over."

I began complying but then froze when I realized what kind of view she would get. But she kept pressing.

Later, with the help of my bathroom mirror, I discovered that what she wrote: "Signed by the Pizza Lady." Then she added, "Nice!" She underlined it and drew an arrow from the word to where my legs joined. Whether she was complimenting me front or back, I shall never know.

Guys of course took turns feeding me pizza. I was hungry and bit a couple of fingers by accident, but no one seemed particularly upset.

Then I told Liza that the handcuffs were getting old. They came off. Once she undid them, she held them between two fingers at as great and distasteful distance as she could. She set them on a table and contemptuously tossed the key on top.

I said that she acted like they had the cooties.

She wrinkled her nose. "They're nasty."

"Really?" Samantha said, walking over and innocently picking them up. "I don't think I've ever touched a pair before."

I held my breath. She wouldn't, would she? I wanted to goad her but I figured

anything I said would make her suspicious.

She closed on bracelet around one wrist. My heart was pounding.

But then she unlocked it and took it off. My heart sank. It had been too long of a day to think of anything encouraging. Fatigue was setting in. I would have to mark it up as a useful note that Samantha was fascinated by handcuffs and wait for another day. Oh wait, I had decided to retire. I'd have to limit myself to teasing her about it in front of a guy she liked.

Then she put it back on her wrist again and prepared to shut the other bracelet on her other wrist.

"No, behind you!" I blurted out.

She giggled. And giggled some more. Then she stuck her hands behind her and I heard that clicking sound.

In stunned disbelief, I walked behind her. She was laughing so hard that I had a difficult time examining the steel. "They're handcuffs not laughing gas," I said.

"I'm captured! Weeeeeee!" she laughed.

"Samantha, are you high?" I said, finally seeing the cuffs were in fact rather loose. She was too busy being indignant at the suggestion that ever smoked anything when I turned her wrists outward. It sobered her considerably to hear the extra clicks.

"Okay, Meg, that's enough."

"Let me grab the key," I grunted. I did as I said and fidgeted with the locks. "There," I said when I was done.

"What did you do?" Samantha whispered, which was silly because everyone was looking at us and heard every word.

"I double-locked them so they wouldn't get tighter."

"You were supposed to unlock me."

"Was I?" I said with as much naivete as a horny, tired twenty-nine year old could muster.

"If you're not going to unlock me, give me the key," she said, turning around. "You want this?" I said, holding it up before her.

She took a step forward. I took a step back. It became a dance as we worked toward the weight room in the back. With every couple of steps, she said "Meg!" an octave higher. She was seriously squeaking by the time we got to the door of the weight room. "Oh, no! I don't know what you have planned, but I'm not going in there alone with you!"

I grabbed the string between the two triangles of her bikini top.

"N-n-n-n-n-no, you don't!" she protested as she was forced to move forward to keep the triangles of fabric on the job.

I closed the door behind us. For some mysterious reason she started looking panicky. "Don't give me that look," she tittered.

"What look?" I asked, trying to sound disdainful. I don't do disdain very well. I walked around her and put my hand on her shoulder. She jumped. "Why so nervous? We've been friends for years."

"You have an evil side, Meg."

"I don't know what you mean," I murmured. I do dreamy much better than disdainful.

"You're going to strip me."

"So let me get this straight. You think that because I have been naked and embarrassed seven ways to Sunday since nine o'clock this morning and you happen to be helpless and wearing clothes that I might do something like..." I

pulled at the back string of her bikini.

She shouted and pressed her arms against her sides.

"Sssh!" I whispered. "You don't want the guys rushing in here to see what's the commotion, do you?"

She pressed her against her ribs as tightly as she could. It made it tougher to pull, but the string kept coming.

I teased, "This is such a nice bikini, I think I'll keep it." It *was* a nice bikini. Against a pleasant green background it had a pattern of rows and rows of white circles and the whole thing was held together by bright yellow strings. (Sorry. I know most people who read this are guys and don't care about such things, but sometimes I fixate on details.)

Samantha whispered, "Meg!!!!!!" and her knees gave out. She tried curling into the fetal position on the floor.

Then her voice got serious, like someone who had been elbowed in the eye during a pillow fight. "Stop, Meg, the string came out. The whole thing is falling apart. Neither one of us is going to be able to wear it."

I stopped and leaned over to look. The end of the string was in the middle of her cleavage. My voice got serious too. "Sorry. Uhm, shit. Uhm. Don't go anywhere," I said as I got up to leave. My flustered is even better than my dreamy.

"Don't let anyone in here!" she yelled at my back.

"Don't worry," I said as I waved dismissively. I closed the door tightly. A couple of guys looked at me very hopefully. "Don't go in there," I ordered. They looked so crestfallen that I added in a conspiratorial undertone, "Good things come to those who wait."

I found Helen. "Got a safety pin? A bobby pin will work too."

"You and your pins! I'm the HOA president," she retorted. "I'm not your

mother's pin cushion."

Since I needed a favor, I wasn't about to point out that neither bobby pins or safety pins went into pin cushions nor that earlier I had asked for a bobby pin or a paperclip. I simply said, "Please?"

While she did not have Fluffy with her, she did have her purse, which owned one safety pin. I said, "Thank you," and ran back to the weight room. Once I opened the door, I turned and loudly said to everyone, "It's important that you don't come into the weight room for the rest of the day."

A couple of guys grumbled and said that they wanted to see what I had done to Samantha. "Hey!" I snapped. I pointed to myself. "Obey the naked lady, would you?"

I closed the door and hurried over to Samantha.

"Thank you," she whispered. She was sitting on a black bench. "Where's the key?"

"Oh shit!" I said. "I set it down when I was getting the safety pin from Helen. Don't look at me like I'm a moron! In case you didn't notice, I don't have pockets!" I sighed. "Do you want me to go get it?"

"No, I don't want the door opened again until I got it back on. I can't believe I let Ed talk me into wearing a bikini to this. He said it would be a pool party. I should have known that there would be trouble if you were..."

With interrupting no-nonsense, I said, "I'm sorry but I can do this a lot faster if I take this off you." She didn't resist. Once she was officially topless, she leaned forward as much as she could as if it would hide her. As if. [When I had Ed edit this, he started blubbering some rot about how deliciously would have been the side view of her breasts dangling down. Whatever. I had a very nice bikini to look at and I was busy and wouldn't have noticed even if I wasn't.]

I got to work. I attached the safety pin to the free end of the undone bikini string and worked it through the loose triangle. There. I made it sound easy. It

actually took maybe seven minutes, with me hunched over and my back to Sam to give her some privacy. We made small talk. I related some of the various embarrassments of my day and she laughed. She apparently thought it was funny if *I* were the one to be embarrassed.

I hate other people's hypocrisy.

"All done!" I announced. I held it up to myself. "I couldn't even use this if I wanted to. You're... What's that term guys use? Racked? Stacked, that's it. Don't you get back pains?" I didn't await an answer but immediately added, "Let's get this baby back on you."

"Thank you, thank you," Samantha said as she pushed her elbows up to give me room to work. It didn't take long. I made the knots secure and then tied all the loose strings in back up at her neck. I patted her shoulder to let her know I was done. Then she stood up. "Could you go get the key now? It's embarrassing for them all to see me again handcuffed and I'm afraid a guy might try to pull one of the strings."

"I double-knotted the knots. Quite tightly. No one is going to be able to pull them loose on you. Don't get them wet or you'll never get them out."

"Thanks."

"A proper thank you would be to let me wear your wrap around."

She looked mortified by the suggestion, all the more so because she saw the fairness of it. "I don't know, Meg..."

"You planned on wearing your bikini in the pool, so don't get all modest on me."

"I know." She took a deep breath. "TFF, I guess: take it."

I took it. I modeled it in front of the mirror. It was somehow naughtier than being fully naked. It made it look like I intentionally chose not to wear a full kit. I undid the knot. "The guys won't let me keep this on." I wrapped it around her and took care of the knot.

"Thanks. And now the key."

"What?" I'm good at playing dumb. An expert.

"You said you left the key with Helen."

"Ah, the Trojan War? No, my dear, we're in *The Wizard of Oz*." Then I started singing.

Samantha interrupted me after I started doing my rendition of the song about the wizard being the only and one destination on Dorothy's itinerary. She snootily interjected, "Meg, seriously! What *are* you talking about? Or singing about?"

"I'm good at doing the wizard. Much better than I am a Terminator." I lowered my voice. "I lied." Back to normal voice. "Nope. Can't do it. No wait, that's a different Schwarzenegger movie. Truth be told, I never did pay attention to all those movies my boyfriends made me sit through. Guns and explosions and then explosions and guns. Just get me to the credits! How I could end up serially dating guys whose idea of fun was to rent VHS tapes of action movies that the parents didn't let them see when they were younger, I will never know."

"Are you overdue for your meds?"

"Come to think of it, I am, but it won't be for eons before you can tell, so stop distracting me from my tangents. Okay, back to Oz: I'm the wizard and you're, say, the Scarecrow or the Cowardly Lion."

"Meg! Concentrate!"

"At least I'm leaving you with your pubic hairs." Then I cocked my head to the side. "I *think* I am!" Then I put a finger under the front of her bikini bottom and pulled it back so I could have a look. "Don't be indignant. I know you voted for me to be shaved."

Samantha hastily stepped back. "What's the point of all this Emerald City crap?"

"Oh, that. You see, I'm like the wizard. You want something..."

"Give me the key." Her growl on one a scale of one to ten would be, well, I'm not sure, but definitely higher than Ed's.

"You want me to give you something, dearie, but you already have it. You just don't know it. Like the Scarecrow who wanted courage. No, he wanted... No, no, it's the lion who wanted... Sorry, I'm confusing myself."

"Meeeeeeeeggggggg!"

"She doesn't want a heart," I said, more to myself than to her, "but what she wants *is* close to her heart. At her decolletage to be precise."

From my playing dumb to her sincerely looking dumbfounded: I reached forward and played with the string between the triangles of her bikini top. She looked down.

And saw the handcuff key.

"Omigod, Meg!" she wailed. She tried to grab at her top. I was glad that I had turned her palms outward or this wouldn't have worked. She quickly tried different approaches, bringing her hands around front, straining for the back string, pushing the tops off her shoulders with her chin. Vanity, all is vanity. After thirty seconds, Sam stopped, gasping for breath. "Meeeggg! I'm serious! I can't reach the key."

"Then I guess you'll have to ask someone else to do it for you. Quite frankly, I'm rather sick of handcuffs for the day, so don't bother me about it."

She frantically renewed her efforts, straining for the back string. She got a finger under it but let go very quickly. I think she suddenly understood that trying to get the key would more likely just mess up her top than get the key into her hands. She grew quiet and didn't say anything for a moment. Her voice quivered when she finally spoke. "Meg, you can't be serious. There's

no way to get the key to cuffs without taking off the top and...." I kissed her forehead and left her standing there in her stupefaction.

Once I got back out side, I said in a loud voice, "Remember, stay out of the weight room!" I wondered how long it would take Samantha to dare to come out.

Jenna came up to me. "So," she said with maybe a hint of vengeance in her voice, "it's time for you to masturbate and then we can all go home."

I nearly fainted. My ultimate fantasy was to masturbate in front of an adoring crowd. An obvious fantasy I know. One of the ones that you probably shouldn't do. Not very consistent with maintaining a professional reputation.

But I decided not to do it for a very different reason. I liked the looks of unfulfilled desire on the men. Always leave your audience wanting more.

Before I had to worry about someone pushing the issue and insisting on my getting myself off, Joshua appeared.

"Josh!" I exclaimed. He walked through the crowd over to me. "I thought you weren't coming back! It's long drive to campus or you had a quiz." It's a wonder my face didn't crack from smiling.

"I forgot to sign you."

I lowered my voice. "Do it in my unit."

"Now?"

Instead of answering, I jumped up so he could catch me. He recovered from his surprise in time and I landed in his arms. That swept off my feet feeling again. I grabbed the CD off the table as we glided by.

Liza followed us out to the elevator and pressed the call button for us. Samantha came bouncing up. "Meg! Don't you dare leave me like this!"

"Samantha, Samantha. If it's one thing I learned today, it's that this building has plenty of good Samaritans. Well, no, that's completely true. I spent most of the day begging men to get me off but they were too afraid of her," I looked snidely at Liza for a second. "But I'm sure you'll find someone else willing to assist you."

"I'll get you for this, Meg!"

"Is that a threat or a promise?" I asked.

She sputtered a response.

I turned to Josh. "Women can be as unreliable as men." Then I added to Sam, "Mitchell is a gentleman in excess. He'll minimize the embarrassment. If you want an orgasm out of this, ask Rex to help you. I suspect, though, that he's a dom, so unless you want to start calling him 'sir,' I'd be careful about asking him."

Samantha spun to face Liza squarely and pleaded with her whole handcuffed body. It was a nice jiggle. I could learn a thing or two from her. "Liza!"

"I..." Liza looked so torn. She turned to me and said, "I don't approve of your games, Meg. I want that to be clear." She turned back to Samantha. "But I don't see how I could do what you want without touching your boobs a little and if my boyfriend did that, I'd castrate him, so it would be hypocritical for me to do so."

By this time, Josh and by extension, yours truly, were in the elevator. Liza reached in and pressed the button to the third floor for us, waved goodbye and said, "You're such a neat freak, Meg, that I would have thought you would have stayed for the party clean up."

"I'll do clean up after we get you!" I said with a wicked grin.

She looked like she had sucked a whole lemon.

The doors closed to the tune of Samantha begging for Liza to undo the knots.

To my eye bulging surprise, Liza said, "You mean this?" and tugged at the knot holding the wrap around in place, not knowing that when I reknotted it, I worked into it one of the strings of her bikini bottoms, so they both came undone when Liza pulled the ripcord, so to speak.

I nearly reached over to hit the "open door" button to see how it turned out, but I realized I would only be delaying my orgasm. Josh's response to the disappearing scene in front of us was to say, "Your friend apparently doesn't subscribe to your theory of bushy bush."

I cuddled up to Josh and said, "You do understand that we don't have any chance of a long-term relationship. I need a guy who's neat."

"And I'm likely moving out of state for med school this summer. Then it'll be years before I have any free time."

"Today made me decide that I'm ready for a long-term relationship. It's time to settle down. Well, okay, I still need to strip Brad and Liza. They both need some exposure. But *then* it's retirement time."

The elevator doors opened.

"So what are we doing?" I asked. "You're carrying me naked to my unit. This could get triple-X real fast."

"I'm leaving and you want a long-term relationship." He said it so sadly that I was afraid he was going to set me down and leave. Disappointment rippled up my spine. But then he added, "Maybe we could look at this way. As much as you want a long-term relationship, I don't think you're going to find one until all the signatures are washed off your skin and that's not going to be several weeks."

"One last fling?"

"One last fling."

When we got to my door, I remembered I didn't have the keys, but it was unlocked. I opened it and my keys were on the floor right inside, with a pretty

ribbon tied to them.

"I should warn you, though," I said. "I'm way too tired for sex tonight. When you wake up in the morning, wake me up immediately and I'm going to give you the most memorable thank you of your life. Unfortunately, all that's going to happen tonight is that you're going to give me a bath and then you get to hold my Hitachi Magic Wand."

"What's a Magic Wand?"

I rolled my eyes. "Kids these days..."

THE END