

Sex Weapons and Valentines

**How to Survive Divorce After a Long
Marriage.**

by

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Publisher's Note:

This is a work of fiction. Names, characters, places, and incidents are the products of the authors' imagination. Any resemblance to actual persons, living or dead, to events, or to locations, is entirely coincidental.

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PREFACE:

This book is dedicated to those divorced men and women, who have entered that age period, called the Golden Years, alone. Some are divorced, some widowed. The story that follows relates the experiences of a few people, over forty-five, who still feel young and think young. Many have stated, one way or another, that they didn't expect "to get this old and still have the same feelings, and thoughts, they had when they were in their twenties."

These characters are based on real people, who have raised their children, found themselves facing what is left of life, as single people, and took the responsibility to make it as golden as they could.

They look at their grown children, some with their own families, with love and concern. They realize their loved ones will have much of the same problems in life, which with they struggled.

Their firm belief is that they have devoted their entire adult lives to raising and providing for their family.

These people still have the same sex drives, as do those in their middle thirties.

They look back on their years of child rearing and working for the family with satisfaction.

Each has come to the same realization.

Each has made the same decision:

Now, It's My Turn.

FORWARD

**“Men give love for sex; women give sex for love;”
“Men give money for sex; women give sex for money.”**

CHAPTER ONE

In the rear-view mirror, Richard was watching her car pull out from the parking lot and pull up behind him. His mind was racing ahead to his apartment where they were going to “listen to records.” That is what he had suggested to her. But her look told him she was agreeable to more than just music.

The rain, a cold downpour that turned on and off, typical of Southern California, made it difficult to tell much about her car. The headlights on his rain splattered, rear window broke up into multi-colored sequins. There was no distinguishing pattern to the beams coming from her car. He would have to go slow, to keep her locked onto his tail lights.

He was glad he lived only three minutes away, up Imperial Highway, in Yorba Linda. His instincts, not his experience, had led to this first, probable, sexual encounter since his wife walked out. He pictured his place as he left it.

Yeah, it was not too fashionable or modern. It was like him. His Marine training, during the Korean War, was still with him. His bed was made and everything was squared-away.

He wondered at his own reactions, here he was, going on his first pickup date after his divorce.

He laughed to himself, ‘Fifty-three years old and having my first sexual adventure outside of marriage. Wow, that’s really too much.’

He kept glancing in the mirrors. ‘Would she turn off, after having second thoughts? She was so attractive, she might not want this,’ he feared. He thought she may change her mind and “get lost”. He was amazed that it seemed so natural. His thinking about it, anticipation of it, and even his occasional dreams of sexual encounters must have prepared him to be so relaxed and sure of himself.

‘It really isn’t a one-night-stand, I guess,’ he reasoned to himself. He had talked with her for a while, and danced a couple of times, the two previous Saturdays.

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He thought back to when he first asked her to dance, two weeks earlier. She'd been standing behind him, at the bar, as he turned to look at the dance floor. The mob of people made it tough to see anyone who wasn't at your elbow.

Her name was Carol and she was a cute package. Five-six or so, with a trim figure and well formed breasts. Her attractive face was surrounded by dark blond hair. She wore a pair of dark green slacks and a light gray blouse, which matched her heels.

She was the best looking women he'd seen in a long time.

She was trying to get to the bar to order a white wine, she had said. She had been very friendly after he had gotten the drink for her, which she insisted on paying for.

They had talked briefly, exchanged names and he had asked her to dance. He remembered, she had a slightly, distracted attitude. She had been looking around as they danced. He had asked her if she was expecting someone.

She had laughed, self-consciously, "Is it that obvious? I'm watching for someone, I made friends with, last week," she smiled, "I didn't realize I was so obvious, I'm sorry."

"No problem. Do you come here, often, or do you have a date?" Richard had asked.

She had answered, a trifle hastily, "No, it's not a date. I've only been here once or twice before. How about you? Are you a regular, here, Richard?"

"I love to dance so I come here once or twice a week. I started coming about two months after my divorce. I decided I better get out and quit moping," he had smiled, with some embarrassment.

"How long were you married?" Carol had asked. "My divorce was final on my thirty-third wedding anniversary, he replied."

She had been startled and leaned back to look into his eyes.

He went on, “I guess the judge was being poetic, picking that date,” he had chuckled, with chagrin.

He hadn’t been expecting the look of surprise, mixed with interest that had flashed across Carol’s face.

Carol had been taken aback. She had never met someone who had been married so long. Richard had then told her he had seven grown kids. She was intrigued by his obvious bitterness toward his wife who, he had told her, had walked out on him.

Richard was over six feet and had a very trim figure with wide shoulders. His dark eyebrows, and dark eyes made him a good looking man and his nice face was attractively set off by gray hair. She had guessed he could be anywhere from forty-five to ten years older. Richard had danced with her a couple of times and then she had excused herself to approach the man she had met previously. Richard noticed that the man looked quite a bit younger than Carol. He had watched as Carol asked the younger man to dance. The rest of the evening they were dancing and talking and left together about one o’clock. Then, last Saturday, she had been there again.

She had danced a couple of times and had told him she was “keeping her eye out for a friend.”

Richard had replied, “Are you against making a new friend?”

She had laughed and mentioned that she was meeting a man that she had gone out with previously. The scene seemed to be a repeat of the prior Saturday. After dancing a few times, she excused herself and left to join the same, younger man. Richard supposed she had something serious going. His impression was that she would be unavailable, if that guy had any sense.

Tonight, he had seen her again. He was standing at the bar when she came in. She saw Richard looking her way and came over. “Hi, Richard, you’re at the same old stand, tonight. How’s it going?”

“Fine, Carol. You’re looking good. Meeting your friend, tonight?”

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She was dressed in dark brown slacks and a pink sweater that clung to her firm breasts and accented her trim shape.

The slacks looked expensive and so well tailored, her firm buttocks were a sight to behold. The week before, when they first met, she had told him she was forty-three, after he had guessed that she was in her middle thirties.

“I guess I’ll never learn. Those younger guys are looking for a mother who will take care of them. I should know that by now.”

Richard suddenly remembered their talk about her new “friend” whom she had met two weeks earlier. Carol had been impressed by the younger man's not having a girl friend since his divorce. Rich had made a mental note of that special look that had come into her face when she told him that. He wasn't sure whether it was pity or another kind of interest.

“Like I said, last week, Carol, you may be better off with a man of my maturity,” he smiled. “I’ve noticed that the men your age, usually go after women in the early thirties. I guess the younger guys like woman your age for different reasons. They’re after more than just a relationship. Even sexy, good-looking ones like you,” he had grinned at her appreciatively.

“Do you think I’m attractive?” she had asked teasingly. “How come you didn't come on to me when we met last time?”

“Well, the trouble with me is, I’ve been out of action, so long, I don't know how to put the make on strange women. I'd be out of my element,” he confessed.

“Come on,” Carol replied with a look of disbelief. “Do you mean you never had a girl friend, when you were married? Why did your wife leave you, then?”

He was silent for a minute or so. “We can't figure her out,” he said, almost as if thinking aloud. “Even my kids thought my wife didn't know why she didn't want to be married anymore”

Carol had felt a feeling of compassion swell up in her breast. Here was a man who really seemed lost and bewildered. He was not quite what she was looking for, but his long marriage made

her think that she might be mistaken. On second thought, his long marriage seemed to indicate he would be “dependable”.

“You mean you haven’t been to bed with a woman, since your divorce?” she asked, surprised.

Richard was pleased by her direct manner. He had replied, “I’ve only been making the dance-bar rounds a few weeks. I’ve been trying to get adjusted to this new life-style.”

Carol, herself, had been divorced over ten years, now, and had decided to make a change in her life-style. She felt she better get a relationship going while she still had the things a man wanted; the physical things, not the material things that she found the younger men looked for.

She asked, “Come on, Richard, you’re a good looking man. You must have been sleeping around.”

Richard was really intrigued by her straight forward attitude. He replied, “I’m looking for something more permanent than a one night stand. I’m not good at picking up women that way.”

That was all it took. After a few dances she had been very “friendly” from that point on. Pressing against him so persistently when they danced, he was sure she felt his hard-on.

They danced every dance. She was holding on to him after each dance, keeping him on the dance floor. It was a good thing. He didn’t want to walk back to the bar with that obvious bulge in his pants. Now, she was following him to his apartment.

The rain didn’t let up and Rich’s slow driving kept her car close. They turned off Imperial and went north a couple of blocks to the driveway behind his apartment building. The rain let up, as if on cue. He pulled into his slot and had Carol pull directly behind his car. No one was around at this hour, so he waited until she turned off the motor. He opened her door to help her out. She rose right into his arms. Her kiss was wide, wet, and made him tingle all over. It brought his erection back like an aroused cobra. He was certain she felt it pressing into her lower stomach.

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She pulled back and smiled saying, “It might rain some more. Let’s go in.”

They reached the stairs to his apartment and he put his arm around her as they walked upstairs, one flight, to the door.

“I haven’t had a woman here, before,” he explained. “Don’t expect too much.”

“Like the man---‘The Continental’--- on that late night TV show, in the early 1960’s used to say, ‘It’s only a man’s apartment,’” he smiled.

They went in and Carol smiled with a combination of interest and surprise. She felt that no woman had helped decorate this apartment. She looked with a mixture of curiosity and understanding at the rugged, heavy oak furniture with a ranch, or Southwest look. The floor had a wall to wall carpet, in a dark brown, with a short pile. At the center of the room, the carpet was overlaid with a rug of a Navajo design. The walls had Cowboy & Indian artworks that were well framed. On the wall over the TV was a large, dark wood framed desert landscape. There was a smaller Indian blanket, above a personal computer on the far wall.

Carol felt that this gave her a good insight into the kind of man Richard was.

Not everything matched. Mixed with the oak pieces, was a dark maple hutch with stereo equipment. Another maple hutch held records. Across the room was a maple bar with stained glass doors. The pieces looked like they had been in use for a long time.

She thought to herself, ‘Here’s a guy who keeps something he likes, no matter the changes in fashion.’

The furniture looked like leftovers from the home of a family, sundered by divorce.

“You like country things, Richard?” Carol said, without thinking. “Call me, Rich, okay? My Ex called me, Richard. It’s western

things, really,” he replied a bit defensively. “I’m a cowboy at heart, I guess,” he smiled.

“Would you like to hear Neil Diamond or Bruce Springsteen? How about a drink?”

Carol replied, “Sure, I’d like a white wine, if you have it.”

He went into the kitchen. Carol noticed that there were pictures of his children on the wall near the door. There were two boys and five girls,

“You have a beautiful bunch of kids,” she said, loud enough so he could hear her from the kitchen.

“Yeah, I’ve been blessed that way. I wish my Ex hadn’t turned the girls away from me. I only hear from the boys, now. The girls stay away. I guess their mother is what they need most, though,” he said as he returned from the kitchen with two glasses of wine.

“This is White Zinfandel. It’s Beringer....a nice flavor.” Setting the glasses on the table, he put a couple of albums on the stereo. Turning with a smile, he excused himself, saying, “I have to take...make a pit stop. I’ll just be a minute.”

He went into the bathroom to rid himself of the night’s liquid collection. He washed his face and hands, putting on some aftershave.

While Rich was gone, Carol kicked off her shoes and stood listening to Neil Diamond. She walked around the living room, looking at the Indian blanket and western prints. She was thinking to herself, “We can dance slow in the kitchen. He seems a bit uptight. I need to get him back in the mood.”

When he returned, “*Red, Red Wine*” was playing and she said, “Let’s dance.” They started dancing slower than the music and she could feel Rich’s interest stirring against her belly. She slowly moved him onto the living room carpet and as the song ended, she pulled him down to the couch, kissing him passionately. Savoring his hungry lips, she slowly pulled away,

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smiling at him tenderly. “I’ve got to replace the moisture, you’ve got me all worked up,”

She reached for the glass with her right hand and he smiled, “I could use some, too.” They both took a drink of wine, as if to replenish their fuel for what was to come.

They were sitting close and as they both lowered their glasses, she looked into his eyes. She could see his need and his uncertainty. He took her glass and placed it with his, on the table. He took her in his arms and kissed her with energy. Carol responded with a probing tongue, which stirred Richard’s loins to attention, again. Her warm, firm body and strong sensuality aroused him in a way that he had forgotten.

‘Take it easy,’ he thought to himself. ‘Let her relax and have some wine.’ He, reluctantly, let her go and she asked, “What is that aftershave you use?”

He handed her the glass and he took a long drink, as if anxious to empty the glass. She took a sip from her glass and continued, “I like it. It makes you smell sexy.”

“It’s Polo. My son and daughter-in-law gave it to me for Christmas. I’ll have to use it more often. I just splashed some on to help me feel more attractive to you,” he laughed. “On the way here, I’ve thought about having you in my apartment. But thought you might change your mind and just keep on going. I’ve never done this before. You really turn me on,” he replied.

Carol put her glass next to his and returned his kiss with a wide mouth. His tongue plunged into her wet openness and she felt his hand press her left breast. She knew her nipples were getting hard and the warmth started spreading, deliciously, through her entire body. She turned and pressed her body into his. The nipples of her breasts stood erect as his obviously aroused manhood pressed against her thigh. She was delighted that he was so eager.

She pulled away and whispered, “Where’s the bedroom?”

Rich led her down the hall to his king-size bed. It was of dark oak and the light from the living room made a soft glow on the white bedspread. He pulled her to him as they stood next to the bed and Carol could feel his aroused length pressing against her stomach. In a minute, they were lying on the bed and she felt a warm tingling between her legs. She pulled him on top and began nuzzling his ear. He took her ear into his mouth, licking the lob with his searing tongue. He pressed his iron-like armament into her thighs, so she spread her legs in welcome. He began fumbling at her sweater and slid his hands behind to undo her bra. She squirmed to make it easier. He slid the catch and moved his hands up her front. They revealed her luscious breasts. He moved down and started kissing them tenderly with fervor.

Soon, they were pulling at each others clothes and she whispered, "Let's get under the covers." Rich rolled over and they began undressing. Carol was watching as he pulled his pants down. His erection looked enormous. She slid out of her slacks and sweater and placed her clothes on the dresser as Rich murmured, "My God, you're beautiful. What a body you've got,"

"You have quite a body yourself. Most men your age have a potbelly. How do you stay so firm?" she asked as she got into bed.

"I like to ride a bike on the weekends, I've always been sports-minded and like to keep in shape," he replied. Rich joined her under the blankets and they embraced with heated passions.

"Go slow," she murmured. "I want to make this last. I want to please you."

She could feel his hard shaft pressing into her thigh and became excited. Taking his hand, she moved it to her tingling warmth. "Rub me between the legs," she murmured. "There, that's it...slowly and soft.... that's the way. Uum...that's wonnerful." She was tingling as he stroked her at her junction. His mouth was on her right breast and licking her nipple. His right hand

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was stroking her left nipple in rhythm with his left hand on her moist swale.

“Let me have you, now,” she whispered. “There, that’s it. Oh, oh, easy, easy... You’re so big.”

Rich was almost in shock. Her firm body was something he’d fantasized about for the last two weeks. He couldn’t believe his own feelings. He had never dreamed he would be in this situation. After being married so long, Carol’s excitingly erotic, sensuously shaped body was so unlike what he was used to. His wife was so different. Seven children had taken their toll on his wife’s shape. He could hardly restrain himself from pouncing on Carol like some ravishing beast.

Rich was trying to be gentle. Her wetness was a welcome warmth as he moved his engorged rod into her. He moved it slowly in and out with only the tip entering her warm moistness.

“There,Oh, more, more,” she moaned. “Put it in. Oh, Oh, slowly now.”

Rich was trying to keep his mind on her reactions. He had learned that during his long marriage. He knew, if he thought about his own sensations, he would get off too soon. He had learned, from a wife who would have sex only three or four times a month, to make his love-making encounters lasting. He was stroking her breasts slowly as he lay between her legs.

She was pushing up and down on his hard shaft. It was everything he could do to keep from coming.

“Oh, that’s it. Put it all in,” she moaned. “I want it all.”

He moved against her with slow, firm strokes as she put her hands on his rear cheeks. She was pulling him into her, deeper and deeper. She squirmed against him and met his thrusts with active pushes of her own. They were locked together and he hoped it would never end. Carol was running her fingers through his hair with one hand. The other was stroking his broad back, caressing him like some well-behaved tiger.

She began to murmur, “Now, now, aaah ...oh, oh, what a feeling. That’s wondrous. There’s nothing that can compare with this,” she whispered.

The tingling sensation reached to her toes. She felt the exhilarating tickle with each pulsing throb in her super-heated reactor, with his rod, between her legs. Rich had succeeded in holding back. He didn’t want it to end. He had been so concentrating on her pleasure, he hadn’t climaxed. He lay still with her warm, wetness, clamping his hardness. She relaxed all over and he kept his elbows at her sides, so he didn’t put all his weight against her body.

“I think I’m falling for you, Carol”, he whispered. “You’re a terrific lover. Have I worn you out?”

“Let’s lay here, for a while. I love the way you cuddle,” she murmured into his ear. He rolled to his side, pulling her to her side as they stayed locked and interlocked. Carol remembered her drive, following Rich to his place. She thought to herself, ‘I was so worried, he’d be one of those ‘Wham, Bam, Thank you, Ma’am’s.’ What a surprise! His long sexual drought must have given him a tremendous appetite.’ It had gone through her mind that he may not be able to perform adequately. She usually had gotten her older sex partners off, too soon, if they could get it up at all.

‘What old wives tales, about older men. At least, this one was a real stallion,’ she told herself. “My God,” she said, after a few minutes, “You’re still hard.”

“I told you it had been a long time,” he said again. “I have an enormous hunger for you. You’re so lovely, I can go all night.”

“No wonder you had seven kids,” she giggled. “I’ve only had one. Let me please you, some more.” She rolled on top of him. She started moving from side to side and soon had him surging in and out, with renewed energy. He began to move faster and faster. She stroked his inner thigh with her hand and touched him lovingly under his scrotum.

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“My God, you’re wonderful,” he moaned. “Do that, yeah... that way, here I come, baby.”

She moved up and down against him faster and felt him make one final thrust and stop with his throbbing maleness inside her hot warmth. She let go a long sigh and climaxed again.

“Oh, Oh there it is, again,” she whispered, passionately, as she moved against his firmness with her wet cleft. “I’ve never gotten off so soon, again, before,” she murmured. “You’re wonnerful.”

Finally, Rich rolled her off and pulled her to him. “That was the best sex I’ve had in years. I never knew it could be like this,” he told her. “You’re fantastic. Touching me under my balls was too much.”

Carol put her hand on his thigh and felt his manhood. “I can’t believe you’re still up”, she whispered into his ear as he nuzzled her breasts with his warm lips. “You’re so exciting, I can’t get enough of you,” he chuckled. “How long has it been for you,” she asked.

“My divorce was final last August. That’s six months, now. Before that I only had sex once, the spring before. It was on a business trip and we both had been drinking too much. She was a State employee I met at the hotel in Sacramento. It was nothing but two people using each other for sex.”

Carol was surprised. She needed sex at least once a month. She asked, “That’s something, having so little sex. How do you do it.”

“I do without,” Rich laughed. “I keep busy and keep my mind off it.”

Carol squirmed against his embrace. “You must be a camel,” she laughed, “...going without so long. It’s hard to believe you can go without sex for months.” She giggled. “I think I see how. You stock up in great sessions to carry you through the dry spells. Your hump is still ready for some more.”

“I told you, you’re so exciting. I can go all night with you,” Richard laughed as he pushed his hardness between her legs. I’m

hoping you'll spend the night. It's probably still raining. Are you able to keep up with me?"

"I can't believe you. You're the best sex athlete, I've ever met," she giggled. "But my teenage daughter's home alone and I've got to work tomorrow.... today, really."

Carol left Rich in bed even though he suggested following her home. It was late, about four A.M. He asked her to go to dinner and a movie tomorrow. She told him she worked late on Sundays but would call him.

Rich was persistent about his calling her. He was afraid she may get busy and forget. It pleased her and she gave him her business card. She agreed it would be all right for him to call her at work, that afternoon.

He gave her his phone number and as she leaned to kiss him, good night, she felt an urge to get back in bed. She forced herself to go. She was puzzled by her reactions. She thought, maybe the cold, combined with his ravenous appetite for sex, was what made it so hard to leave.

Carol insisted he stay in bed. She didn't trust her libido if he got up and she saw his naked body and his lanky dick. Dressing hurriedly in the chill, she failed to notice she had let her necklace fall behind the dresser. She finished dressing, stopped a minute in the bathroom, and then, found her way to the living room to let herself out.

The rain had stopped and the night sky was clear. The constant smog of Southern California was washed away. The starlit sky gave Carol a start. It was so beautiful. It matched the tingle she felt when she thought of the last few hours. Driving home, she mulled the situation over in her mind. She never had such great sex with anyone before. Rich was equipped with an enormous plunger, she thought to herself. Yet, he was gentle, loving, and like to cuddle. He didn't demand a blowjob, like so many of the others she had dated.

Rich was so good at straight sex, she got all tingly between the legs, as she thought about going down on him. That would

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cement his feelings for her, for sure, she mused, ‘I’ll save that for a special occasion.’

She was usually very direct, but thought she might have to be more reserved with this new find. He’d been cooped up in a long marriage and might get the wrong idea. She laughed to herself, ‘Come on, Carol, the right idea, but with the wrong type of guy. This might be his last time on the market. When he commits, he really commits.’ She went to bed, as soon as she got home, still tingling between her legs as she remembered the two climaxes that thrilled her.

‘I’ll think some more about all this, tomorrow.’ she promised herself as she drifted off to sleep, smiling.

The next morning, Carol was up at eight, getting ready for the office, when her daughter, Kim, poked her head around the open door of the bathroom.

“Okay, Mom. What’s the story? I heard you humming and giggling, in here, a few minutes ago. Who’s the heart-throb?”

Carol and Kim had always been very open with each other. Kim was sincerely interested in her mother’s finding a steady boyfriend and hoped, this time, it would work out.

“You’ll meet him soon enough, Honey. I’m thinking of settling down with an older man. What do you think?” Carol asked her daughter.

Kim had not been too enthusiastic about some of Carol’s young men. This time Kim smiled, saying she hoped to meet him soon. She kissed her mom and left to go to her part-time job at Denny’s.

Over her morning coffee, Carol began to muse, about her feelings about Rich and the events of the previous night. She had been planning on meeting someone who would be reliable and sexually dependable. Her husband had been a disappointment. He had walked out when their daughter was only five. He had run off with her best friend, who was seven years younger. That, she would never forget or forgive. It made

her a loner. She would never trust a woman friend, again. She had been stunned at his abandonment of them.

After going on welfare for a few weeks, a high school friend, who was in Real Estate, talked her into taking a Realty Training class. It had been hell, the first few years but Orange County was booming and she soon was making good money. This made her feel independent of men and she had thrown herself into her career with very little social life for several years. Being a working-mother had been a full time job. She finally promoted a down payment on a run-down condo and they moved out of that small two-bedroom apartment in Fullerton.

Carol had been her own contractor and decorator in refurbishing the condo and was proud of her financial prowess. She wanted a man who would accede to her financial equality. Most important, he had to need her, sexually, more than she needed him. Her Real Estate experience had convinced her that managing the home-life situation was just as important as controlling the sale. She didn't want to be disappointed again. She'd been devastated by her husband's abandoning her with a five-year-old daughter. She hadn't wanted to get emotionally involved, yet. She wasn't sure Rich fit the outline she had in mind. He was mature and seemed so sure of himself. He might be hard to manage. He would, also, be attractive to lots of women. She had better get to know him a lot better, before she quit dating other prospects, she thought to herself. Carol felt that Rich, after his long marriage, with a non-working wife, would surely appreciate a self-sufficient, contributing partner.

'He probably had enough responsibilities with that large family, and a wife that was a homebody,' she speculated. 'He should appreciate a woman who has raised a daughter, all by herself, while making a success at her career. I'll show him what I've accomplished, all by myself.'

Carol knew she was very perceptive. If you were to be successful in sales you had to be. It was also important to keep the main objective in mind. She wanted Rich to get emotionally

involved with her. 'It would be nice to be courted, again,' she imagined.

She decided to take the initiative and call him when she got to work. She phoned Rich after ten that morning. She was pleased by his warm reception to her suggestion that he come over for a "pot-luck" dinner and a movie on the VCR.

Rich was languishing in bed when the phone rang.

He had been thinking of Carol and was enjoying the musky aroma of sex--that invisible mist--wafting around him. Rich was both pleased and surprised by her early call.

'Women, sure, weren't so forward, when I was young,' he reflected, smiling at her directness. He decided to behave as a gentleman, that evening. He didn't want her to think, he was only interested in her for sex.

Carol left the office early, Sunday afternoon, unusual for her. She usually stayed until after six.

Rich found her condo in La Habra, with little difficulty. He thought, 'It's a good thing, she's in Real Estate. She knows how to give clear directions to difficult locations.'

He was there promptly at six and was very warm and friendly to Kim, her daughter, who came down from her homework to meet him. Rich seemed very appreciative of her home and remarked at the attractive decor. He was very relaxed and was a good listener at dinner as she discussed her job and the effort it took to upgrade the condo from what it had been when she bought it.

She was rather disappointed at his lack of aggressiveness after dinner. He sat with his arm around her on the sofa but made no sexual overtures. Carol didn't understand that Rich was concerned about the daughter being upstairs. Carol had explained, earlier, that Kim had her homework and her own TV.

She thought that would be enough to ease any concern about their being interrupted. Carol didn't consider that Rich might be

very sensitive to the opinions of children. His many years as a father made him concerned about Kim's attitude towards him. He didn't want to jeopardize his stature with her daughter.

They watched a tape of "*Jagged Edge*". He was puzzled by her questioning as to whom, he thought was the murderer. She had seen the film before and persisted when he declined to make a guess.

He laughed at her persistence and refused to guess.

Carol was adamant and insisted that he make a choice. His continued refusal seemed to irritate her, further, to his amusement.

Finally, he guessed incorrectly and Rich had an insight that gave him the idea that Carol felt better. She had either gotten her way, or she had proven he was not too sharp.

Carol was a bit irritated at his blasé attitude. She seemed to feel he was more amused at her persistence than she was, at her getting her way. When he excused himself after the movie to leave at eleven o'clock, Carol was even more disappointed. He had not given her the opportunity to prove she was more than a "one night stand." As he left, Richard asked her to go to a movie on Wednesday. She agreed reluctantly. Rich was puzzled by her obvious hesitation at accepting another date. He felt that she was having second thoughts about him.

Carol had been expecting him to be more like her former dates who had been delighted by her sexuality. She had looked forward to putting Rich off when he tried for another sexual repast. She wanted him to be the one who wanted her, more than she wanted him. She made sure her good night kiss was especially sensual, holding him tightly and rubbing her thigh against his crotch. Richard excused himself, reluctantly, saying he had "an early day" tomorrow. He threatened "to take her home with him," laughingly. Carol did not take the opening to ask him about his reluctance to be amorous. She took his reserve as a lack of interest.

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He hesitated, but Carol was lost in her thoughts. He finally said, “Good Night, Luv. I’ll call you Tuesday to ask what movie you want to see.”

Rich was worried what Carol might think about his reactions to her phoning him. He was unaware his perceptions were out of date in the singles’ culture he had entered, so late in life. He was sure she wasn’t calling him to come over and have more sex. Rich didn’t want her to think that was his only interest. ‘Surely,’ he reasoned, ‘She would remember the meager sexual diet I’ve been living on.’ But she had seemed so withdrawn, to him. He believed that a woman who was so direct, when they first met, and who had phoned him the very next day, after a night of sex, would be consistent. He began to think, ‘Maybe, she’s a player of games.’

Monday morning at breakfast, Kim, who considered herself Carol’s equal, came downstairs saying, “Hey, Mom, that was some dude you had over last night. He was a lot older than the other guys you’ve had over. Is that why I didn’t hear any heavy breathing from down here?”

Carol laughed with her daughter, “I really don’t know. He was a handful the night before.”

“Well, I thought he was real nice, Mom.”

“He has seven kids, five of them are girls. He seemed to talk to you very warmly. I guess he misses them,” Carol replied. “Did you really like him?”

“Yeah. He made me feel comfortable. He looked me in the eyes, just like I’ve always thought a Dad should,not the way some of those other guys peered at me,” she said with emphasis on “peered.”

Carol was aware that her daughter was very mature for fifteen. She placed great store in Kim’s thinking. Her young, attractive face and body might be too alluring to some of these younger men, Carol had realized. This was another plus in Rich’s favor. He’d raised five girls through the teenage years.

Tuesday, Carol was less sure Rich was the man for her. She had talked to an old friend in whom she had great confidence. She was convinced this middle-aged neighbor, who was an amateur astrologer, was psychic. Carol had described Richard, his appearance, his divorce, and his obvious bitterness towards his ex-wife, to her friend.

Her friend had told her that his reliability was obvious but his strong-willed attitude was, also, unmistakable. This wise, older woman had remarked that most men, who had their wives leave them, often stayed committed to the mother of their children. In Rich's case, her friend predicted, his change of heart towards his wife after his long marriage, definitely indicated a strong personality. Her friend thought, knowing Carol's strength of purpose, this could be a source of conflict in a relationship. Also, Carol had been told, such men often go back to their wives. That both, men and women, married so long, often, change their minds, was thought by Carol and her friend. She urged Carol to be patient and to bring her Rich's birth information.

Carol thought this made achieving a relationship with Richard even more interesting. He was a challenge, which she was sure she was up to. It might be good to move slowly, rather than follow her sexual instincts, which told her to grab on to this man.

Rich and Carol went to the movie in La Habra, Wednesday. When they pulled up to her condo afterwards, Rich said he wanted to talk and get to know her better. Carol expected a petting session to ensue. The cool attitude, Rich displayed on Sunday, was a perplexing situation to Carol. She was expecting a more aggressive sexual approach after his performance Saturday night. She thought to herself, 'He must make the first move, if he's interested in more than talk.'

Rich wanted to put Carol at ease. He didn't want her to think he was only after her body. Carol told him that Kim liked him and he responded, "I've always had a great deal of respect for kids, no matter the age. You've, obviously, done a great job raising her. I know how tough that is for two parents. let alone for one,

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by herself. It's awesome. You've built up a lot of points on the Big Score board, for that," he smiled, with feeling.

Carol was pleased at his understanding and remembered her neighbor's request.

"I appreciate your opinion with all the kids you've raised. I was talking to a neighbor whose opinion I respect about people. She asked me to get your time and place of birth. She's good at charting people. Do you mind?"

"Not at all. I was born in LA, on Thursday, in the morning at 10:55 AM, April 13, 1933," he smiled. "I happened to look at my birth certificate about a week ago. What about you?"

"It was Wednesday, November 5, 1943, at 10:30 AM. She already charted mine," Carol smiled.

As they sat in the car, after the movie, and he made no "moves" on her, Carol was beginning to re-evaluate his candidacy for a relationship. Saying she had an early appointment, Thursday, she got out and walked around to his side of the car. He got out and put his arms around her. She kissed him, "Good Night" as he murmured how "desirable she was." She tried to be tactful in letting him know that she, "Would have to be more sure of your intentions" before any further sexual interludes.

Rich was puzzled at Carol's lack of warmth. He had held her hand during the movie and on leaving the show was surprised, she sat against the door driving home. He had hoped she would be more direct, as on the previous Saturday, when she was so up front and forthcoming. He began to wonder, if she was one of those women he had watched at Valentines. There were a lot of women who like to play games.

Rich couldn't understand her change in attitude, so he decided to play it her way. Rich responded casually, "I follow you, Carol. Maybe we'll see you at Valentines next weekend. Thanks for going to the show. Good night, now."

His friendly nonchalance convinced her she would have to take another tack with him. She began to think of a plan which would

allow her to determine if there was any genuine interest on his part, as to a sincere emotional and physical relationship.

Carol's real estate sales experience and her many lessons in sales strategy, which she had from books and on the job, gave her confidence. She was sure that Rich, soon, would either be a serious prospect, or she would have to look elsewhere.

CHAPTER TWO

Friday, Rich got home early and showered and shaved and used his Polo after-shave, thinking about the possibility of seeing Carol again. Her stand-offish behavior at her home Sunday, and her coolness on Wednesday after the movie, reminded him of the younger women he had met previously.

They, all, were alike. Their attitude was like one you see in the movies. They expected a guy to woo them and to behave as if he understood the “courting rituals.” He thought back about the first time he had come to Valentines. It was much like Carol’s. She had told him of bringing a prospective homebuyer for lunch in the restaurant. It was a classy eating place and she wanted to make the right impression. She had overheard two women talking about the bar and dance band. They had mentioned the large crowd of men that frequented the place on Fridays and Saturdays.

Carol had said she had stopped in the next Saturday and met “a friend” that same night.

Rich had heard some people talking about the place, called Valentines, when he was at the bar at Rueben’s in Orange. He had gone out after several weeks of moping about his wife’s divorcing him. He and his wife often went there to dance. The disc jockey would play a good variety of tunes, including big band music. He and his wife had danced “Swing” together since their high school years.

Rueben’s brought back too many memories. So a couple of weekends later, he went to Valentines for dinner and stayed to check out the band and the crowd. He was there about seven-thirty, for dinner. The music started at nine. The restaurant served fine food and was located near Anaheim Hills, an affluent area along the Riverside Freeway. When he entered the bar area, Rich noticed that most of the people looked as if they stopped in after work. Many of the men were wearing business suits with ties. The women were fashionably dressed in skirts and jackets.

Rich later learned many of the Friday night crowd came to Valentines rather than fight the Friday evening freeway traffic into Riverside County. After he saw the more mature clientele that went there, he returned several Fridays and Saturdays in a row, watching the “action.” The many weeks he had stood at the railing watching the dancers and the “mating rituals” were very instructive. He especially noticed women, who sat at the bar, near the dance floor. There seemed to be a pattern in their behavior. A different group came on Fridays, when it was packed to the rafters. Saturdays were nearly as crowded but the roster of characters changed from those on Friday.

The bar was on the left of the restaurant and was already busy when he usually arrived about nine. The sitting area, outside the bar proper, was furnished in comfortable, upholstered chairs grouped around small coffee tables. The walls lower half were paneled in dark oak. There were expensively framed English hunt scenes on the upper walls.

Fridays, these seats were usually filled with men and women. He was standing near the rear entrance where he could observe the by-play. He noticed the ratio of men to women was about two to one on Saturdays. There were more women on Fridays.

Several weeks went by before he got up the courage to ask one of the Saturday “regulars” to dance. He had observed that she was a good swing dancer and this encouraged him. She wore a nice dress and heels and had a pretty face. She smiled a lot and he liked that. She was heavier than he liked but he had seen that she followed her partner well and did the turns similar to the way he and his wife used to dance. He had asked her to dance the second time the band played a swing tune. Her name was Alice. She was very good and he really enjoyed the dance. Later that same night, he had been surprised when she came up to him and asked him to dance. He had noticed her glancing his way.

After the band had played several rock and roll pieces, she had come over at the next big band tune. “Come on, Richard, let’s try this one,” she had smiled.

He had tried to hide his astonishment. ‘They sure didn’t do this when I was young,’ he had thought to himself. He remembered the “girls cheat” dances, which were few and far between in high school. He had met his wife, that way, when she had asked him to dance a girl’s choice. He thought to himself, ‘I’m going to enjoy this liberated, feminist behavior.’

Richard had thanked Alice earnestly and said, “You’re a great partner. I’ll look to find you when they do this again. Thanks for asking me. Alice.”

They danced every time they played Swing that night. He liked her friendly attitude but was puzzled, when she said, “How come you don’t dance to the slow ones, Rich?”

He didn’t realize until weeks after, that the women never asked a man to dance to a slow love song. As he learned, later, there was some significance if you were asked to dance “close” at Valentines. It was some part of the “mating rituals” if you did ask, and were accepted, more than once. But a woman would never ask twice. A man was expected to do the follow up.

He had joked with her, “Well, I’m shy, especially around younger women, like you, Alice. I hate to be rejected,” he laughed. He was again surprised when she came back with, “I’m thirty-six. You aren’t too old for me,” she smiled into his eyes. This time Richard was shocked. She not only told him her age, unasked, she looked into his eyes, with such a direct look, he felt strange. “Please forgive me, Alice, I’ve been divorced only a short time and this is all too new to me. I don’t know the ground rules.”

She laughed, delighted. “Well, the next time you want to slow dance, you ask me. I come here every Saturday.”

“That’s the best suggestion I’ve had in months, Alice. Thanks for being so understanding.”

She smiled sweetly into his eyes and rejoined her friends at the bar.

This incident was the first lesson, about the Singles’ Scene, engraved on his brain. Eye contact was everything. If a woman

returned your look, that was first base. A look with a smile was a sure sign that a home run might be possible. He never was turned down for a dance after a smile and a look in the eyes, even if it was a slow dance.

The next Friday, he came to Valentines again, earlier this time. The dance floor was off to the right of the fireside seating area, on the long side of the bar. It was raised about a foot above the rest of the floor. The railings around the dance area were dark, polished oak, also. On the opposite end from the bar was a raised platform with audio equipment and music stands, waiting for the musicians to arrive. He found a place at the railing nearer the bar this time. By nine-thirty, the crowd was so packed, Rich was encouraged to be bolder. He decided to stand nearer the corner, where the women would pass on their way to the dance floor. Standing there, watching the dancers for about a half hour, Richard saw a tall, slender black woman, expensively dressed and very attractive, squeeze into a spot down the railing to his left. She stood there nodding her head to the beat of the band. She looked to be in her late twenties.

Richard hadn't seen a black person at Valentines in the time he'd been there. Tonight, this woman was all alone.

She stood there for more than double the time that any white girl, of similar appearance, would have. Rich had observed, taller women were asked less often, but the good-looking ones never were so ignored.

In the Marines and in college, he had often played on football teams with black players. Being married at the time, he had socialized with a few black players and their wives. He had gone to high school in a black neighborhood, also.

'In those days, you didn't dare call a Negro, black,' he remembered, with amusement. Richard admired any woman who would come to Valentines by herself. He figured it took a lot of get up and go. 'A lot of times, I have to force myself out of the apartment and I'm a horny man,' he reflected to himself with a smile. 'A woman has to have courage to brace this place.'

A black woman coming here alone is a special case of fortitude,' he decided.

Richard moved over behind her as the music died. He waited until the band started playing a good beat tune. They started a fast version of the country tune, "*You Can't Hide Your Body, Now*".

She turned and gave him a shy smile, "I'd love to," she smiled, in reply to his request to dance.

She was over six feet in her heels. She danced to the music's beat with such moves everyone began watching them. Rich leaned forward to speak over the music, into her ear, "You're the best looking dancer in the place." She grinned with a devastating smile, "Thanks, for asking me to dance. I felt conspicuous standing there by myself. You're a good dancer. Where did you learn to dance like this?"

"You won't believe me but I went to high school in Watts, in South LA," Rich grinned at the incredulous look on her face. "It probably was before you were born," he laughed. She laughed with him and seemed to be enjoying herself. After the dance, Richard walked interference for her back to her spot and thanked her for the dance. She replied, "I thank you. Let's do this again, sometime," with another radiant smile.

Richard never had a chance to ask her. Following their dance she was dancing every piece the band played. It seemed there were a line of men, mostly younger than he, waiting to ask her. Richard didn't even get her name. He glanced at the crowd at the bar and noticed a friend of Alice's, a large woman about forty, looking in his direction. He had seen her dancing the previous Saturday. Alice had pointed out her friend, Ann. Rich had met her, briefly.

The next fast dance, a good rendition of "*He Don't Love You*," Richard squeezed through the crowd and asked her to dance. She was smiling broadly and while they danced, Richard looked into her eyes several times. He was convinced she was higher than a kite. Her eyes were fixed in a "thousand yard stare."

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The smile was fixed and she didn't speak or change expression, when he asked her if Alice was here. He couldn't believe she could still dance so expertly. She moved to the beat with good rhythm but seemed to be somewhere else.

After the music stopped, he walked her back through the crowd. He kept her in front as they made their way back to her stool at the bar. She moved through the pressing crowd with ease. People seemed to feel her bearing down on them. They got out of her way.

He thought, 'I've found the perfect blocking back.' He thanked Ann and returned to his half-full glass at the corner of the railing. He chuckled to himself, as he thought about these "learning situations", here at Valentines. The year 1988 was a different world for someone born during the Big Depression. The many incidents, over the past several weeks, gave him an insightful window into this strange, new world. The majority of men, here, were in their late thirties to middle forties. The women ranged from their twenties to late forties. Very few of the men, maybe four or five of those he saw more than once, were of his age group.

He had made up a picture, in his mind, about the type of woman he was looking for. He had been observing the singles crowd, for several weeks, now. The younger women were too wrapped up in their games and maneuvers. He felt the older women would be more appealing after watching the crowd at Valentines. He liked the more, mature crowd he found here. Each weekend, it seemed the cast of characters changed. Or, at least, the majority of characters did. There seemed to be a few individuals that were "regulars".

Rich had been standing at the bar early one Saturday and a man in his late forties was talking to two younger women. Rich had seen him several times. He always seemed to have a tall, attractive young woman on his arm. He was probably six foot, three, and dressed expensively. Rich couldn't help but overhear his conversation with the women.

“They were talking about our trip to Mazatlan,” the man chuckled loudly. “I don't know which they liked better, Mazatlan, or my vibrator.” The women laughed uproariously. The man grinned at Rich as if should be laughing with them. Rich grinned at him and moved to the railing by the dance floor behind the trio. It stumped Rich, what was so funny about a vibrator, although he had heard about their use by women.

It would be several weeks, before Rich would be educated in the use of this accessory and its sexual ramifications.

It didn't take but several weekends, before Rich had devised an operational plan.

Valentines layout was such that a seating area with numerous cocktail tables and straight-backed chairs was located, along the right side of the dance floor, an area which looked about half again as big. Couples could sit there and observe the bar and the dancers. This seemed to be the area, most of the women who were not “regulars”, occupied on most nights. Across from the bar, this standing area, which Richard favored, was spacious enough to leave room for people to walk to the seating area, on the far right of the dance floor.

Along the railing, where he had been standing, couples going to dance entered at either end. They came and went, to and from, the dance floor at the corners near the bar. He decided to stand in the same place each time he came to Valentines. He had noticed that the other regular patrons had their favorite places.

Rich chuckled to himself, ‘Just like Cheers on TV. Each player has his spot.’ The spot he chose, on the railing of the enclosed dance floor, was on an aisle wide enough so patrons could stand at the polished oak railing. Along which was a ledge for drinks and ashtrays. The railing along the left side of the dance floor, where he had first been accustomed to standing, had similar standing room. On the right side of the elevated dance floor, the railing had no such ledge. People at the tables, there, had an unobstructed view of the dance floor.

This was close to the spot where he had been standing when he met Chuck Warden. Chuck would introduce him to the group that he came to call the “gang.” They were a group of regulars who had been coming to Valentines for a couple of years—but only on Saturday. One of them always came early enough to grab the corner of the bar at the bartenders’ access, an open section at which the bar top usually was raised in the early evening. Different individuals would stand against the wall and grab the spot made, when the section was closed.

He had met Jack Anders, a couple of weeks, earlier. Jack had been introduced to him by Chuck Warden. They had introduced him to their group, Al and Inga, Ron, Gerry, Marline, and Katrin, whom they called KC.

As it was the Friday after he had met Carol, the “gang” wouldn’t be there, so Rich stood at the railing until the bartenders’ access section was lowered. He had moved across the aisle, with his drink, to the closed pass-thru part of the bar. This corner spot gave him a better view of the dancers. Rich was standing to the right of the waitress station, at the corner of the bar. People could walk along the wall behind him to get to the dance floor.

He decided immediately that he liked this location. It was situated so one could observe most of the entire room. Also, he had noticed, when it was very crowded, women came up to the waitress station, on his left, to order drinks for themselves, rather than wait for service.

How the three waitresses made it, with trays full of drinks, through the densely packed crowd, was a marvel to Rich. He could see why thirsty patrons didn’t wait for service from them.

This spot suited his purposes ideally. He could check the women out from head to toe. Rich had an aversion to fat women. He didn’t understand why women who were interested in meeting men would let their bodies go. He had decided that if they were serious about a relationship, married or not, women should have enough self-esteem to keep themselves attractive to their partner.

Tonight, as he re-took this “station,” he noticed two women sitting at the bar, near the corner on his right. The blonde on his right near the corner met his glance with a direct look. He smiled at her and she smiled back. “Hi, I’m Rich, when does the band start?”

The blonde smiled back, “Oh, in a half hour or so, I guess. I’m Linda and this is Ann,” nodding toward her friend on her right. “We don’t come here often,” she smiled, “We like to dance to this band. They play good swing tunes. Do you dance swing?”

They appeared to be in their late thirties or middle forties. Both were heavier, in the face, than he liked, but, at least, they weren’t playing coy. Rich smiled back, “I love to dance. That’s why I came tonight. A friend said they had a good band, here.”

Some weeks earlier, during his exploration of the dance-bar scene, Rich had found that most women would, hastily, explain their presence at Valentines, as a “seldom done” visit. They didn’t want to be misjudged as to being “on the make.” He felt it was good to do likewise. Later, he learned why. Some people referred to Valentines, disdainfully, as “the flesh market.”

Ann spoke up, smiling with interest, “We belong to the West Coast Swing Club and look for places that have a good swing band. We’ve danced to this’un before. They’re real good.”

“We’ll try it when they get here,” Rich replied. “Do you, two, work around here?”

“No,” Linda answered, “We work at Hoag Hospital, in accounting. We don’t come here very often,” she stressed. “We dance mostly at the Swing Club on Sundays and Thursdays. The crowd there is more mature and more our speed,” she smiled.

“From the looks here, so far, the crowd is more senior than most places I’ve been. I’m over fifty and don’t like to go to places where everyone’s under thirty,” Richard smiled. He watched their reactions. Ann looked interested. Linda looked surprised.

“Do you mind if we asked you a personal question?” Linda said, smiling. “Do you dye your hair?” Rich laughed, “That’s not the

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first time I've been asked that. Do you think I would dye it gray?" Ann laughed, "We think it's beautiful. It's white, not gray. It's so uniform and with no off-tones. We were wondering about you, ...it," she added quickly.

"No, it comes like this after every shower," Rich grinned, "I guess I'm too proud to dye it like other guys. I started going gray at twenty and just got used to it, I guess."

"You'd be silly to do that," Linda smiled back. "It's very attractive. Are you really over fifty?"

"Yeah, I was married at twenty and my wife walked out a couple of months ago. I'm not used to the single life but decided I didn't want to sit home night after night, so I go dancing every chance I get," Rich smiled.

"I would have guessed you were in your forties," Linda smiled.

"I thought, maybe, you were forty-two or three. Our age at most," Ann grinned.

"Thanks," Rich said, with a smile. "I was married to the same woman, for over thirty years, and have seven grown kids."

Linda gasped, "Thirty years and she walked out? I bet she wants you back, by now. You'll probably get back together before long, won't you?"

Rich replied with firmness, "That will never happen. She has ruined the family, the only thing that was really important to me. I can never forgive her doing that."

Silence greeted his grim and fervent expression of mental bile.

"How about you, two? Are you both divorced?"

Ann replied, "I've been divorced four years, after fifteen years of marriage. Linda's husband died three years ago."

"I was married seventeen years," Linda added. "I don't plan on getting married again. I'm happy the way things are, now," she smiled.

Rich saw the musicians enter at the door to the left of the bandstand. "They're setting up now," he nodded towards the dance floor. The two women turned and looked to the bandstand.

"I hope they start with our kind of music," Ann smiled. "We sometimes have to wait, though."

"I'll go up and see if they'll play some swing," Rich volunteered. He grabbed a five off the bar and walked up to the girl who appeared to be the singer. "Will you play a few swing dances?" he asked as he placed the bill in her hand that was at the mike, adjusting its height. "Thanks," she smiled. "We sure will. Have fun," she added as he turned away. The band had a sax, an electronic piano-organ and an electric guitar. The girl played drums and sang. The band started off with a Glenn Miller's arrangement of "*Tuxedo Junction*."

Rich asked Ann to dance and was surprised at her smooth moves and her lightness on her feet. They did a few turns and he took her in his arms and did several quick turns of the "Whirl", letting her go into a swing turn, off his left hand.

"You dance just like Ken Jarman, the instructor at our Club," Ann smiled. "Where did you learn to do the East Coast Swing?"

"In high school," Rich laughed. "We called it the New Yorker. I didn't know it was called the East Coast Swing."

"At the "Club" we do both East Coast and West Coast Swing," Ann smiled. "You're a good dancer. You ought to come to the Club on Sunday," she added.

Rich was pleased at her ability to follow his turns and grabbed her two hands and started the "Switch." Swinging the right leg out and across the other and then the same with the left leg. They were keeping their pace in time with the beat. Ann followed him on the second switch and they continued for a half-minute or less. He smiled and said, "You really are very good yourself. I haven't met a woman who could do this as well as you. You're a great partner," he grinned as the music stopped.

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He was breathing rapidly. “I haven’t danced with anyone as good as you since my divorce.”

“Wait ‘til you dance with Linda. She’s better than me,” Ann smiled.

On returning to their places at the bar, Linda was smiling at them. “You two look like you’ve been dancing together for years. It’s my turn next.”

Rich took a long drink and said, “Let me catch my breath a minute. I’m not used to this.”

The band started another swing dance, playing “*American Patrol*”, the Glenn Miller standard.

CHAPTER THREE

“These guys are good,” Rich grinned. “Let’s try it, Linda.”

Again, Rich was surprised at how light on her feet Linda was, for a woman who was no slim chicken. “You are really great, Linda. I’ve never expected to meet two women, who dance the swing like we did in high school, and do it so well. You and Ann are really good,” Rich smiled.

Linda grabbed his two hands and started the “Switch” in time with him. People at the bar were watching them as they were the only couple on the floor, this early. Linda was really enjoying herself and the attention seemed to please her. “You’ve got to come to the Swing Club, soon,” she smiled at him. “Promise, you will?”

Rich chuckled, “Sure, I always like to try new things.”

After several swing turns, a few “Whirls” and another session of the “Switch”, the music stopped and they returned to the bar.

“You, both, looked like pro’s up there,” Ann smiled as they took their places. Linda and Rich were both breathing faster than before.

“I’ve got to rest a dance or two,” Rich laughed. “You, two, are going to wear me out. I haven’t danced so much in two to three years,” he laughed, taking another drink and wiping his brow with his handkerchief. “I’m out of shape.”

“We’ll dance the next slow one, okay?” Linda smiled at him. “You can rest then,” she added.

“That’s a deal. The place is getting more crowded. There won’t be room to dance the Swing, before long.” Rich nodded his head towards the entrance where a large crowd was entering.

The band started playing a slow rendition of “Yesterday” and Linda asked Rich, “Is this our dance?”

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She grabbed Rich by the hand and he followed her through the stream of people passing by, on their way to the seating area to the right of dance floor.

“We’ll be able to dance the Swing, only if this crowd doesn’t do it, too,” he said as they started dancing.

“I like to dance slow, too,” Linda grinned at him as she pressed close to put her head on his shoulder. “You didn’t tell me your last name,” she said into his ear.

“Most people don’t believe my name, so I don’t volunteer it until I’ve gotten to know them better,” Rich smiled.

“Why is that?” Linda asked. “Is it that strange? I still go by my married name. It’s Laven. What’s yours?”

“My last name is Millions,” Rich said with a serious face that he always put on, when telling his name. “My friends call me, Rich,” he added.

Linda leaned back and studied his unsmiling face. “Come on. You’ve got to be kidding,” she smiled at him.

“I always get a reaction like that,” he said seriously. “It really is Millions. I’m not kidding.”

Linda pressed her body more firmly into his as they danced. He began to get an erection as she continued, “Tell me your real name. I don’t believe you.”

“I’ll show you my driver’s license,” Rich smiled as he led her to the side railing and pulled out his wallet. Linda took his wallet and held the plastic window with his license to the light. She started laughing, “My God, it really is Millions. I still think it’s a put on. Is this genuine?”

“I told you, your reaction is something I’m used to. It really is Millions.”

Smiling broadly, Linda held him even tighter as they started dancing. “I’ve always wanted to meet a man with Millions. Wait until I tell Ann. She’ll die. Her last name is Penny,” she laughed.

The band swung into the faster beat of “*Yesterday*”. Rich turned Linda into the Swing, pushing her out onto his left hand. She went under his arm and they soon had more room, as several couples, who had been dancing slow, left the dance floor. Soon there were only two other couples dancing.

Rich and Linda were lost to the beat and danced as if they had been dancing together for years. Several of the people seated to the right applauded them, as the music died. Linda grabbed his hand and put her arm around his waist as they returned to their places at the bar. She continued to hold on to him as she sat down next to Ann. “You won’t believe what Rich’s name is, Ann,” she giggled. “It’s Millions. Isn’t that something.”

Ann looked at Linda hanging onto Rich and didn’t smile. “You must have told him my name. He’s just putting us on,” she replied with impatience.

“Show her your driver’s license, Rich. She’s sensitive about names.” Linda turned to take his proffered wallet. “There, look at his license. I knew you wouldn’t believe it. Neither did I,” Linda added.

Ann studied the license under the dim overhead light at the bar. “This has to be a put on,” she smiled.

“Friends call him Rich, not RichardRich Millions. Isn’t that great,” Linda laughed pulling Rich close, as she leaned against him. “I’ve finally met a man with Millions,” she giggled. Ann looked at them both and saw they were serious.

“I’ll never feel bad, again, about people calling me, Annie Penny,” Ann chuckled. “You must get more ribbing than me, with a name like that,” she said to Rich.

“I’ve gotten used to it after fifty years,” he smiled. “I have a tough time remembering other people’s names but they always remember mine.”

“Are you a banker or in the Market?” Ann asked smiling. “You ought to be a stock broker.”

“Everybody says that. I’m a computer consultant. It’s always been an asset, having my name,” he smiled. “People always remember me, for good or ill,” he laughed. “The reaction is really hilarious, sometimes. Not long ago, I was talking to a younger guy, I had known for awhile. A young, woman friend of his came up and started talking to him. A minute went by and she said, ‘Who’s your friend, Dan?’ He was half in the bag, I guess and said, ‘Oh, he’s RichMillions.’ The pause before my last name had quite an effect.”

Linda laughed appreciatively. Ann asked, “Wha’da ya’ mean? Wha’d she do?”

Rich smiled, “Well... all of a sudden I was very attractive. I couldn’t figure it out. But I learned one very valuable lesson. You can’t hurt a woman’s feelings, if you turn her off by saying, ‘You’re too young for me’.”

The band had started playing “*Key Largo*” and Linda broke in, “Let’s dance, Rich. That’s one of my favorite tunes.” She swung off her stool and hanging on to him, they made their way to the dance floor. She held him close and leaned her head on his shoulder pressing into him tightly. Rich could feel his erection returning. Linda pressed her stomach against him and put her two hands around his neck.

“I love that part about Bogey and Bacall, don’t you?” she whispered.

“That’s one of my favorites, too. It has just the right touch of nostalgia and romance,” he smiled,

Linda looked into his eyes and replied, “That’s just what I like about it, too. You put it just right. You must be a mind reader.”

They were really into the music now and Rich leaned down and nuzzled her on the neck. “I guess you’re not too young for me, after all,” he said, “We think alike about music, anyway.” The music ended and Linda held onto Rich to wait for the next tune. He was just as glad as he was worried about walking off the floor. He wasn't sure if his erection would show.

When the band started a fast version of “*Rock Around the Clock*”, they returned to the bar. Linda was holding onto him so firmly, he could keep her to the front to screen his bulge, much to his relief.

Ann had been studying them from her place at the bar. When Linda sat down with her left arm around Rich and he had reclaimed his drink, Ann was watching closely.

“Let’s go to the ladies room, Linda. Hold our places, will you, Rich?” Ann suggested.

Rich pressed in to the corner of the bar, which had become very crowded. His drink was to the side, on the bar top at the bartender’s pass-thru, next to Linda’s seat at the end. He took out a ten and held it over the far ledge of the bar, to order another drink. The woman bartender came over, saying, “You’re a dancer. You dance really good. What’ll you have?”

“It must be the partner, she’s really good. I’ll have a vodka and tonic, tall.”

When she returned with his change for the ten, he placed a one on the inside ledge of the bar. She smiled, “My name’s Dotty, what’s yours?” “Rich,” he smiled. “Nice to meet you, Dotty. Is it always this crowded?”

“Friday nights are the best. During the week, it’s better for dancing. Not so crowded,” she smiled. She tapped her hand on the bar top, as she picked up the dollar tip.

From that point on, Rich never had to look for Dotty, when he needed a drink. She would bring his vodka and tonic whenever he would signal her with his hand. He guessed most people gave only the quarter change as a tip, after the three, seventy-five for the drink.

In the ladies room, Ann and Linda were combing their hair. Ann asked Linda, “Are you getting it on with Rich, Linda? I thought you weren’t interested in the older guys.”

“Ha, ha,” Linda laughed, “He’s getting it on, not me. I could feel his hard-on when we danced. I think he would be a good screw,” she giggled. Ann was silent for a minute. “If that’s all your

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interested in, why would you change from taking on the younger guys? You know with all Harry left you, you're not serious about him. You can screw the young guys like you usually do, and give me a chance."

Linda was surprised. "I thought you had given up on finding a relationship after those two guys you went with from the 'Club'. Do you think this one's different?"

"Anyone who's been married for so long, to one woman, must be different. If you'll give me a chance, I might find out if Rich's worth catching. If he isn't, you can always screw him later, if you want," Ann said with some feeling.

"I like the younger, hard bodies, anyway," Linda replied, "Even though, Rich seemed hard enough," she giggled. "I'll lay off and you see what you think."

Ann was relieved. Linda was a great friend. They had been going out together for over three years and she always was considerate and hopeful that Ann would find another partner. Linda was only interested in dancing. She chose a sexual interlude with any man who was not a threat to her widow's security. She wouldn't consider sharing the small fortune her dead husband left her.

While Linda and Ann were in the ladies room, Richard observed that the crowd was growing larger. Women, in two's and three's, were gravitating to the seats and tables to the right of the dance floor. The ratio of women to men was improving rapidly.

He felt someone bump him from behind. Turning he looked into the dark eyes of a young girl in her late twenties. She was about five-two and with her shapely, young body, cute face and smiling eyes, a sad reminder of one of his daughters that he didn't see enough of, anymore. She handed him a five and, as she couldn't get near the bar, asked, "Will you get me a white wine, please, sir?" Richard took her bill and extended his hand over the far edge of the bar. Dotty came over in a moment and asked, "Another V & T, Richard?"

"And a white wine", he smiled.

Richard had learned not to offer to buy drinks for strange women, early on, in the “Singles’ Scene.” He had watched other men offer that and saw that look come into the women’s eyes. They either took the guy for a hustler or a fool. He had observed many “approaches” and the “...buy you a drink?” opener was too trite and amateurish. The women, he had an interest in, always insisted on buying their own drinks. They didn’t want the men to think they owed them any thing---even a conversation.

Dotty came back and took the ten, which Richard had picked up from his change on the bar. Dotty brought back three ones and Richard turned to give the wine to the girl, along with the three ones. He took two dollars from his change and placed it on the far ledge.

The girl handed him a one back and said, “That’s for your friend. You get good service that way, huh. I’m Rolanda.” She said, “You’re Richard?”

Richard smiled, thinking to himself, ‘This kid is a good, perceptive observer. She’s got some smarts.’ “Yeah, Dotty watches out for me,” he smiled, “I come here often. I love to dance. You come here much?”

“No, I’m meeting a friend but I don’t see her. I was watching you and your friends dance. You three dance real good.”

Richard replied, “Do you swing?”

The smile left Rolanda’s face and she stared at him. “I mean swing dance. Do you dance the swing?” he added quickly.

“Oh, ...dance fast that way. No, I... we dance different where I went to school. You know, No hands ...just to the beat,” she replied. “We didn’t dance that way. But I think it’s nice the way you do it.”

“Linda and Ann belong to a Swing Dance Club and I just met them here tonight,” Rich explained. “They make me look good.”

“You looked like you, all, danced together before. You were real professional looking,” she smiled.

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“Well, after forty years of dancing, it gets easier. You don’t find too many women who can follow as good as these two. They are the best I’ve met in a while,” he smiled. “Would you like to try it?”

“Oh, no,” she smiled. “You’re too good for me. I’d make you look bad.”

“Well, if you change your mind....” he smiled back.

As Richard was talking to Rolanda, Ann and Linda came back to their places. Ann had been watching Rich and Rolanda talking, as she made her way through the crowd. She pretended not to notice his “new friend” and sat in the seat that Linda had been using.

Rich turned toward them. He noticed they had switched seats. Ann was next to his end of the bar. Linda was talking to a younger guy standing behind her. The mass of humanity seemed to have grown, significantly, since they left for the Ladies’ Room. The dance floor was packed and the mob was so dense, Ann wondered where they would all stand, when the music stopped. She mentioned the mob to Linda and remarked that it was too crowded to dance the Swing, now.

Until he turned back to face them, Ann was studying the younger woman talking to Rich. ‘She seems so young,’ Ann thought to herself, ‘Is she making a play for Rich? My God, she’s so young and slender.’ Ann, without realizing it, got resentful and decided it was time to go.

“We think we’ll leave,” Ann smiled at Rich. “It’s getting too crowded to dance.”

Unaware that it was the new company that helped Ann make the decision to go, Richard thought fast and replied, “Why not come here next Thursday? The bartender said it won’t be so crowded and we can dance some more.”

Ann turned to Linda, “You want to come here, again, Thursday? Rich says it won’t be so crowded.”

She replied, "That's fine." Linda, finishing her small talk, turned, and said goodbye to her "new" friend. He looked very disappointed. Each, taking a swig that finished off their drinks seemed in instinctive agreement about leaving. Ann turned to Rich, "We'll see you Thursday. Bye now."

Rich chuckled. 'They must be an entry,' he thought to himself as Ann and Linda squeezed away through the crowd. He had not expected them, to come on Thursday, as a couple. He had wanted to meet Ann by herself.

He realized, then, that she was not like the other women he had seen, who were so eager to meet someone, that they would come, alone, to Valentines.

Turning back to Rolanda, who was standing tiptoe to peer around the bar, he said, "Are you sure your friend is coming?"

"She always comes late to everything," she smiled. "I think I'll go over to the entrance to see if she's been sidetracked. See you later, Richard."

Rich was pleased with the night, so far. It was only ten-thirty and he had a "sort of date" for next week. Even though, Ann didn't want to meet him on a single basis, he looked forward to dancing with them, both. Ann's wanting Linda with her, made Rich certain that dancing was all that they were meeting him for.

Smiling to himself, he decided, 'That's another indicator in this "Single's Scene." You best spend your time with women, who come alone or, at least, bring their own car. I'll remember that,' he promised himself. It was so crowded, that Rich couldn't move from his place, at the bar. The seats, Ann and Linda left, were quickly claimed by a couple, who were talking so quietly, he moved slightly to his left, so as not to intrude. The place was so packed in, you couldn't move without meeting someone, face to face. Richard liked that forced intimacy. You couldn't help saying something, when a woman was standing right at your side, in close contact, because of the pressing crowd.

He decided that Fridays were better than Saturdays. It seemed everyone was without a date. 'Friday is when you make

arrangements for the weekend,' he surmised. He looked around and noticed a few of the regulars he had observed for several weeks. Alice and her group were just down the bar on the dance floor side. He saw several other familiar faces. None seemed to be with a member of the opposite sex. This observation made Rich feel more certain about his analysis of the situation. The regulars came not to dance, but to meet those new swimmers—the ever-changing, flotsam and jetsam—that washed up into Valentines, on the currents and tides of the “Singles’ Sea.”

He noticed two women coming his way, squeezing through the crowd at the entrance of the seating area. The redhead looked to be in her forties and the dark-haired one looked about ten years younger.

Six or seven people were waiting for the waitresses to leave their station, so they could order their own drinks. They made it impossible to approach the bar. Rich was turned with his left to the bar, facing the dance floor. He was watching the redhead, askance, as the two women, slowly moved through the crowd. They came up to his right and the older one pushed a ten at him. “Will you get us a scotch and water, and a white wine?” she smiled into his eyes.

Watching her coming, he had seen they were empty handed and needing a drink. He had time to think up his approach. He replied with a grin, “Only, if you tell me your name.”

The redhead looked pleased and smiled, looking directly into his eyes, “I’m Tasha and this is Sharon. What’s yours?”

“Nice to meet you, I’m Richard,” he returned her look, and then he turned with their ten to stretch his right hand over the far edge of the bar.

Not a minute later Dotty was there and asked, “What’ll it be, Richard?”

He took out a twenty and handed it to Dotty, placing the ten with his change on the bar. “A scotch water, a white wine, and a V & T, Dotty.”

Tasha had seen Rich dancing. She and Sharon had been sitting near the entrance to the bar on one of the couches. While he had danced with Ann and Linda, she and Sharon had moved to the tables in the area near the bandstand. Tasha was intrigued by Rich's swing dancing and with his obvious maturity. She had dragged the reluctant Sharon, up to get their drinks, knowing exactly how she would approach him.

"You must be somebody," Tasha smiled. "She, sure, came over, quick."

"I've been here, before," he smiled. "Do you come here, much?"

She hesitated, like the other women he had asked that same question. He asked it on purpose. He liked to see their reactions when he did so. "We work at the Broadway in Orange, and sometimes come here after work. We get off at ten," Tasha replied. "We just stopped by for a drink, on our way home."

"Well, I'm glad you bumped into me," he turned to get his change and handed Dotty, three ones. Turning, he handed the two women their drinks and gave a five back to Tasha.

"I see why you get such good service. It's true you get what you pay for," she laughed. "Are you rich, Richard?"

"That's what I'm called," he laughed. "My friends call me Rich. I like your name, Tasha." She laughed and looked directly into his eyes. "Are you?" she asked.

"Not really," he replied. "I do all right but I'm not rich. Are you? You make the other women, here, look tacky with that green dress. It really sets off your hair. It's golden under the light."

Tasha was pleased and smiled, "You're very distinguished looking, yourself, with your hair. It looks silver."

"Thanks, I'm probably too old for you, but I appreciate the compliment," he smiled into her eyes.

Tasha's friend, Sharon, was talking to a guy her own age and Tasha seemed oblivious to her, as she leaned her hip into Rich's. "I'm probably older than you think. I was born in 1936."

It was Richard's turn to be surprised. "You've got to be kidding. I was born in '33." He put his right arm around Tasha's waist and pulled her under the overhang that extended above the bar, where one dim light was struggling against the dimness.

Tasha tilted her head back to let the light play on her face. "Well, what do you think?" she asked.

She had very few smile wrinkles around her eyes which were a pale blue. Her face was very fair and her golden eyebrows peeked through the darker pencil she had used. Her light eye make-up was a perfect highlight for the clear skin of her cheeks. Richard thought she looked like a younger Lucille Ball.

Rich remembered how Carol had thought he was not coming on to her, even though he thought he had held her tight and, for him, had been very forward. He decided to let this one know he wanted her. Rich leaned down and kissed her, for several seconds, and said, "That was too good to waste. I hope you don't take it the wrong way."

Before answering, Tasha stalled for time by getting a cigarette from her purse and asking Rich to join her. He took one and reached for the matches on the bar, saying with a smile, "I never like to kiss a smoker, unless I've been doing it, too."

He saw her smile warmly. Tasha had returned his kiss and, now, pulling back asked, with a smile, "Do you always work this fast?"

He took a minute, lighting, first her cigarette, then his.

"I couldn't resist. I've finally found someone my own age, who looks ten years younger," he smiled, noticing that she was still leaning her body against his. "Would you like to dance?"

Tasha set her glass on the bar and turning to Sharon, asked, "Sharon, will you hold our places?" Tasha handed her friend the shoulder purse, Rich hadn't noticed she was wearing.

Sharon, who was engaged in a conversation with the same guy, turned and smiled, "We'll hold your spot, so you can do the same, next time."

The band was playing, “*You Belong to Me*,” the slow, love song made popular by Joni James and Jo Stafford. Tasha put her arm around Richard’s waist as they squeezed onto the crowded dance floor. They were dancing, locked together swaying to the music. Tasha leaned her head on his shoulder and said, “I love that song. It brings back lots of memories, of before I was married. Are you divorced, too?”

Remembering how his long marriage had impressed Ann and Linda, he said, “My divorce was final on my thirty-third anniversary. My wife got tired of being married. How long were you married?” he asked.

Hesitating briefly, she replied, “Don’t be shocked. I was married three times,” while leaning back to observe his reaction. She continued, “I’ve two girls and two boys. From twenty-four up to thirty-three,” saying it with a proud smile.

Richard smiled into her eyes, “Just what I’ve been looking for, a woman with more experience than me. I’m impressed.”

“What do you mean impressed?” Tasha asked somewhat firmly.

“Anyone that can get three guys to ask her to marry, has to be special. Lot’s of women can’t get married but once,” he smiled, kissing her open mouth.

Tasha seemed mollified and returned his kiss with wide lips, probing his mouth with a flicking tongue. She pressed her body into his and swayed in time with the music. Richard could feel his arousal, stirring to life.

When the music ended, Tasha put her arms around Richard's neck, holding him on the dance floor. He was pleased that she was so direct and open. The majority of couples remained on the dance floor, waiting for another tune. The jam of dancers made it difficult to move, much less dance. The band, obviously, cued by the waiting throng, started playing, “*Slow Boat to China*.”

Tasha and Rich started dancing very slowly, locked together.

“What’s your last name, Tasha? Tell me and I promise I’ll remember it,” Rich whispered in her ear.

“My parents were born in Russia. It’s Takovich. I’m first generation American,” she responded proudly. “What’s yours?”

“Don’t laugh. I’m not kidding you. My last name is Millions.” Tasha leaned her head back, keeping her body tight against his, studying his face. Rich could feel his erection pressing into her thigh. After a minute, she responded, laughing into his eyes, “I believe you. Is that why you carry a roll of coins in your front pocket?”

Richard couldn’t believe his ears. She was actually referring to his hard-on. He almost choked from laughing, as he held her tightly. He couldn’t catch his breath for a minute and, between gasps of laughter, replied, “I’m falling for you. I really like a woman who is ‘up-front’ like that. As you can tell, I’m up-front with you.”

When they, both, finally quit laughing, Richard noticed his roll of coins had become loose change.

The band, appreciating the crowded floor, played another slow tune from the Fifties, “*Your Cheating Heart*”, made famous by Hank Williams. One of the first, crossover country tunes that made it as a popular love song, in the late Forties.

Tasha was very loving as they danced and Richard was enjoying it immensely. It was a direct relation to his arousal, which she seemed to press against, “by accident.” He was sure Tasha was deliberately trying to turn him on, more. She seemed totally unaware of the people crowded around them. Richard was glad for the pressing crowd. No one could observe his situation when the music ended. The press of the crowd was a perfect cover for the bulge of his pants as they made their way back to the bar.

Tasha greeted Sharon’s friend, “Hi, I’m Tasha and this is Rich. What’s your friend’s name, Sharon?”

“I’m Chuck,” he said sticking out his hand to grab the hand Richard had around Tasha’s waist. Tasha had her arm around Rich and was leaning her head on his shoulder. “You, two, are a great looking couple,” he smiled.

“It’s your turn to dance. Thanks, for holding our spot,” Tasha smiled, pleased by his compliment.

When they had regained their places at the bar, Tasha turned to Rich and put her arms around his neck, pressing, again, against his coins. “Do you really feel that way, about me?” she asked teasingly.

“We’re old enough to know that we shouldn’t waste time on games of touch and tease,” he smiled. “Did you and Sharon drive here together?”

Tasha took another cigarette from her purse, offering another to Rich. She took her time in answering, allowing him to light her up, first. She wanted to make sure he knew her hesitation was not uncertainty. “Boy, you don’t fool around, do you?” she replied. “I have to watch out for you. You really turn me on,” she giggled.

“I’d like to take you out this weekend. Do you want to go to a movie, or something?” Rich asked.

“I have to go to my son’s tomorrow night and Sunday I go to my parents’ for dinner. I’ll meet you here Wednesday, after work. How’s that with you?”

“That’s fine,” Rich replied. “What time?”

“Give me your phone number and I’ll call you Tuesday to confirm, for Wednesday,” Tasha responded, “is that okay?”

Rich took out his business card and wrote his number on the back. “Why not give me your number, in case you forget?” he smiled into her eyes.

“You work so fast, I have to be careful,” she said. “I’ve just gotten out of a bad situation and am some reluctant to take chances. You know what I mean?”

“Not really,” Rich replied, “But I’ll take your word for it.”

Tasha pulled him down and kissed him wetly and long. “You can wait until Wednesday, if I can,” she whispered. “You won’t be sorry.”

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Rich wasn't sure who was working faster. This sounded too promising to be real.

They were still standing, embracing, when Sharon and Chuck came back from their dance. Sharon hesitated, as Tasha and Rich were talking softly. Sharon stared at them waiting for a pause in their intimate conversation. Finally, she tapped Tasha, on the shoulder, and asked her if she would go to the Powder Room with her.

Tasha gave Rich a big kiss, saying, "Don't you go off dancing with some young thing, now. Okay? I'll be right back?"

Rich replied, "You promise?" with a smile.

Tasha smiled, "That's for sure. Be right back."

Rich wondered if there would be a change in them, when they came back, as was the case with Ann and Linda, after they went to the rest room.

On the way to the Ladies' Room, which was usually well attended, for a couple of reasons—pit stops and/or snow drops—Sharon stopped in the lobby and pulled Tasha aside, saying, "I knew you'd been out of the action, since you broke up with Paul, but you're really making a play for this guy. Are you going home with him or are we going to spend the night, as you promised?"

Tasha was used to Sharon's need for all her attention. She replied, "Look, Honey, you know how long it's been since I've had a man? Over six months. Give me some room."

Sharon pouted and replied, "You promised I could come over tonight." Tasha realized how much her young friend looked forward to staying with her and agreed, "Okay, I'm not going to go home with him. Don't get upset. Let's go take a pee."

CHAPTER FOUR

In the absence of the women, Chuck and Rich were getting better acquainted. “You and Tasha been going together for a while?” Chuck asked.

“No, I just met her tonight. Did you know Sharon before?”

“No, just tonight. I think she’s playing it cool. But, you, two, looked like you’ve been together for sometime,” Chuck replied. “You, sure, were hitting it off,” he smiled.

“I want to take her home but she put me off. I guess she’s being cautious,” Richard answered. “I was moving too fast, I guess. Have you been coming here long?”

“Yeah, for over two years. This is the best place in Orange County to meet women. I think the younger ones come to meet older guys and the older ones get hustled by the younger guys,” Chuck replied. “I’m forty-six and can go up or down the age scale,” he smiled. “I like the younger ones but I’m not choosy, after being single for over eleven years, I like it. Too many younger ones are only looking for to get married. I’m not playing that game, again.”

“Yeah, I was married all my life. I think this single life might be great, if the last couple of weeks are any sample,” Richard laughed. “I’ve not met anyone like Tasha, though, she really seems to be a special person. She fascinates me,” he laughed again.

“Better watch out, you sound like you might be smitten” Chuck laughed. “She’s a good lookin’ lady. You and she might be just what you’re both looking for.”

“One thing I’ve learned after fifty years,” Richard smiled. “Time is the great seasoning. It makes good things better and bad things worse. I had a long marriage to view other people from, and don’t plan on rushing into another.”

“What do you do for a living?” Chuck asked. “I work at Beckman Systems.”

“I’m a computer systems consultant. I work for a couple of regular clients, pretty steady, but free-lance systems design is ‘my bag’,” Rich replied.

“Really, that’s neat,” Chuck responded. “I just got my own PC and am trying to learn ‘RBase for Dos’. Are you familiar with that?”

“Sure, I’ve been doing RBase programming, since it was called RBase 4000,” Richard answered. “It’s the best PC database, after Dbase. I used Dbase IV when it was just Dbase One.”

“What a coincidence,” Chuck smiled. “I have been looking to ask someone about the problem I have. Do you mind?”

“Not at all. Here’s my home number, on the back of this card,” Rich wrote it down saying, “I always work on my PC, Saturday afternoons. Call me when you’re at your PC and I’ll walk you through any problems, you may have.”

“I wouldn’t want to impose on you, for free help,” Chuck replied, hesitantly.

“It’s my hobby. I’d be glad to help. If I do, you can buy me a drink sometime,” Richard laughed. “What’s your main RBase problem?”

“I have trouble with the Report Function,” Chuck responded. “I can’t seem to get the layout right.”

“That is tricky,” Rich responded. “You have to stick to a columnar layout. I use the Extended Report Writer, XRW, for most output. I can put X’s into pre-printed squares on forms, with it.”

“Call me tomorrow and I’ll be glad to help. Like I said, It’s my hobby. I just happen to be in the same business.” Rich laughed.

“Thanks, I’ll call you in the afternoon, OK?” Chuck asked.

“I’ll be expecting you,” Rich replied with sincerity.

The women made their way back through the crowd and Tasha squeezed in next to Rich. Chuck stepped back to make room for her. Tasha took a long pull on her drink and said, “You two

seem to be like old friends,” Tasha broke in as she squeezed her way back to the bar. Sharon was still making her way through the crowd.

Chuck picked up what was left of Sharon’s drink and handed it to her. She finished it off, saying, “We, working girls, have to be going.”

Tasha volunteered, “Why don’t you guys walk us to our cars?”

Chuck replied, eagerly, “We were just talking about doing that. Let’s go.”

Tasha and Rich finished off their drinks and followed the others out through the crowd. The night air was crisp and it was slightly overcast as the four left the building. Tasha was parked on the North side of the building and Sharon on the west. The four split up at the front door. Rich and Tasha walked to the right as Tasha steered him towards her white Olds 88.

“Want to get in for a minute?” she smiled at Rich.

“Sure, I want to talk a bit, with you,” he smiled.

They moved to the passenger side and Tasha unlocked the door. As she slid into the car, Tasha grabbed Rich’s arm and he followed. Turning, she put her arm around Rich, pulling him against her, as if she was waiting for this more private moment. Tasha met him with a wide, burning kiss. Her body pressed close to his as he pulled the door shut. He closed around her with his right leg. She plumbed his waiting mouth with her pink, darting tongue. He moved his left hand to the front of her dress and slid his hand, over her out-stretched, encircling arms, down inside to her breasts.

“My God,” Rich said, startled. “Your breasts are as firm as a teenager’s.”

“The more to please you with, my dear,” she giggled. Pulling his body more firmly to hers. “You’re pretty firm, yourself.”

“Why not come over to my place, tonight? Do you want to sleep alone, again, tonight?” Rich asked.

“I’m really tempted, but I wouldn’t want to be too fast,” she replied soberly. “Can’t you wait ‘til Wednesday?”

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Rich released her slowly and smiled, “That sounds like a promise. Will you go home with me, then?”

“I wouldn’t want to sleep with someone I don’t know more than one night. We can get to know each other better Wednesday. I’m funny that way. I don’t want to be a one-night-stand. You know what I mean?” she said soberly.

Rich replied, “You’ll never be that to me. I can wait. I’ll be looking forward to it.” Kissing her mouth, with tenderness, he pressed against her, with his firm demand. Rich knew she could feel his need as she pushed her stomach firmly against his hardness.

“Let me drive you to your car,” she replied. “Where are you parked?”

“Around behind the building, there to the right.”

She slid over and backed her car out and drove around the parking area where she waved at Sharon and Chuck, standing by a car embracing and kissing. Sharon waved and Tasha pulled all the way around to the east of the club where Rich was parked. He pointed out his Buick and Tasha pulled next to it and turned off the motor. Rich took that as an invitation and slid over next to her. He slid his right hand inside her dress and fondled her as he kissed her welcoming mouth.

“How long has it been for you?” she asked. “I am hardly able to resist you. I think you’re a silver-haired devil,” she giggled. She moved her body so her left thigh was pressing against his erection. “You must have a roll of dollars, now,” she giggled. Before, I thought it was a roll of quarters.”

“Would you like me to make a deposit?” Rich chuckled, “You’re going to be my bank, if you don’t watch out. I better let you go or my interest rate will get out of control.”

Laughing, Tasha replied, “You’re too quick for me. I better let you go, until Wednesday. Then, I’ll do an audit on you, if you let me.”

“I’ll be looking forward to an intensive audit,” Rich chuckled.

He kissed her with longing and forced himself to open the door and get out. “I’ll be looking for your call Tuesday, ‘bye, ‘til then, Luv.”

Richard went home wondering if she would really call. He was thinking how much of a contrast there was between Carol and Tasha. Carol had gone home with him the first night he had the chance to come on to her. Afterwards, she seemed to be cool to him, as if to show that she was having second thoughts about her own impulsive decision.

Rich thought that Tasha was much more direct. While they were dancing, her up-front references to his hard-on were open and funny. ‘She had more experience,’ he guessed. ‘Tasha was, at least, ten years older than Carol,’ he surmised

He wondered, ‘If experience gave her more confidence, tempered by some caution, she had learned?’ Rich smiled to himself, as he remembered the almost, direct promise of sex, Tasha had made tonight. She had asked him to wait until Wednesday. She had, virtually, promised to go home to bed with him. He hoped she was as good as her word.

When Rich finally went to bed that night, he was smiling to himself in anticipation, ‘I’ll know a lot more about women, after I spend a night with Tasha, she’s been married three times, to my, once.’

Tasha would not disappoint him.

By Friday, Carol was puzzled by Richard’s failure to call her. Her years in Real Estate had given her enough experience with the opposite sex to make her certain of her appeal to older men. She was puzzled by his lack of sexual aggression, on their two dates. She knew he was not lacking a strong sex drive. His performance last Saturday night was proof of that. She hadn’t had sex like that in quite a while. She thought he had probably learned how to restrain himself during his long marriage. The truth about not having had sex for so long, seemed to be borne out by his wonderfully lustful appetite and energy.

She began to think about him compared to the other men she had gone to bed with. She had been without sex for several months, after her divorce. She remembered her first sexual encounter, after that long abstinence.

When she had first joined Robbins and Associates, ten years ago, she had thrown herself into her job to the exclusion of any social commitments. Her instinct for self-preservation was stronger than her need for sexual gratification. She submerged her sex drive with her drive to succeed in Real Estate.

Her dedication to her work was noticed by the owners, Chuck Robbins, and his wife, Adele. Both were all business. Adele handled the office and Chuck's skill at training new sales people had enabled them to grow to three offices in just three years, prior to Carol's start with them.

She passed her Real Estate exam, with Adele's help and Chuck's continuing training, which extended from prospecting, listing inspections, or "walk-thrus", to the final close. Chuck did such a fine job of qualifying prospects before showing the house, the walk-thru was the critical part of the close. They never wasted time showing a home which the prospect couldn't afford, or didn't like.

Carol remembered her first walk-thru training with Chuck. The office training was so thorough and Chuck and Adele were so much "all business", she was still surprised by what happened.

Two days after passing her exam, Chuck took her to a listing for her final walk-thru, prior to showing the home to a "warm" prospect. It was an experience Carol would never forget and which changed her life. Her attitude about men was transformed over-night.

It was a warm, summer day. Thursday, she remembered. The memory was as bright as if it had happened yesterday. She got that funny feeling in her loins every time she thought of it. They had left the Buena Park office, about eleven.

They were going to a home in Sunny Hills, which was being sold for a couple who were moving to New York.

Chuck had asked, as they were leaving, if she would like to stop for an early lunch, to discuss the listing. He suggested she follow him in her car. Carol had been pleased, as she had never had a chance to talk with her boss on a one-to-one basis. She was anxious to get a solid start in this exciting, new career. She felt that Chuck's experience, if she could pick his brain, would make her more successful. She was determined to become financially independent through Real Estate. She'd heard countless success stories of other women, during her training sessions.

Carol couldn't foresee how much she would learn from her boss. It would be much more than just home sales.

They had stopped at Rueben's, on Orangethorpe, and had a nice lunch. Chuck had three martinis and she had two glasses of wine. The conversation started out, all business. However, Chuck was soon asking about her, obviously, limited social life. He asked her how her boyfriend put up with her long hours. She was quick to assure him she didn't have a steady beau.

"I haven't had time, since my divorce, for anything, except my six year old daughter and Real Estate," she stated with resolve.

She had wanted her boss to realize she was a go-getter. She felt Chuck was favorably impressed by her sense of purpose. He had looked into her eyes with interest and admiration.

As they were finishing, Chuck had asked, "What do you think of Adele, Carol?"

Carol had been surprised at the direct question. Susan, her friend, who had gotten her the job and worked in the Anaheim office, had told her that Chuck and Adele had been married three years. Chuck was over six feet and reminded Carol of John Garfield. He was in his late forties, or early fifties, Carol had decided. He had curly, graying hair, which enhanced his strong features.

Adele was a buxom blonde with a full face that would have been exceptionally pretty had she less plumpness. She was about ten years older than Carol but her use of make-up was exceptional

and offset the roundness of her face, somewhat. They made a prosperous looking team as they dressed to the “nines.” Susan had said that everyone knew that Adele was largely responsible for their success.

They had ordered another drink. Chuck had seemed anxious to talk. He told Carol about being in the business fourteen years before he met Adele. When he had one office, he had hired Adele, shortly after his first wife had divorced him. Adele’s management and sales skills had contributed to the success of the operation. After a few months, they had married and soon were expanding. Adele was the spark-plug and organizer. She and Chuck were a great team and everyone knew they were a love match.

“I really admire her ability. She really knows the business,” Carol responded. She wasn’t sure of the reason for the change in their talk, or where he was leading it.

“Yeah, she is a sharp business woman,” Chuck smiled. “I mean, what do you think of her as a person,” he continued. “She spends every waking minute at the business. Have you noticed that?”

Carol was silent for a minute. “She is very dedicated to your company. Her help with the details of the business were a big reason for my passing the Exam so quickly,” Carol replied. “I really admire her,” she added.

“What I mean,” Chuck went on, “Have you noticed how much time she devotes to the office? We never go anywhere together. Even, conventions and business conferences, one of us stays to man the fort. I don’t know if she married me or my business.”

Carol was taken aback. “I never thought about that. Don’t you vacation together or take a weekend away?”

“Adele doesn’t want to delegate the responsibility, so we spend every waking minute in Real Estate,” he repeated, with feeling. “I wish I could be sure, I’m the reason we got married. I feel

she's more in love with the business than she is with me," he said wistfully.

Carol was beginning to feel sorry for this man, who had so impressed her. She admired his success and the achievement of financial independence, he had attained. Nearly twenty years older, at fifty-two or so, he had it made, she believed. She had been stunned at his obvious feeling of inadequacy. 'Adele must not be providing the things he really needed, she thought to herself. What a surprise!'

"Well, I Just wondered about your observations," Chuck had continued. "It's good to get another woman's perspective," he smiled. "Let's get on to the Listing. I'm interested in your approach to the walk-thru."

They finished their drinks and Chuck said she could leave her car in the restaurant parking lot. He mentioned it would be better if only one car was at the house. They went on to the listing in his car. They pulled up in front of a larger "California-style", white stucco with a red, Spanish tile roof. The front yard was well manicured, and the house sat back on the lot about twenty-five yards. On both sides, the half acre lot was set off by a half a dozen avocado trees. Parking at the front curb, Chuck had led the way to the front door. He showed Carol how to get the lock-box key and unlocked the large, double doors. The double door's dark wood was well set with black iron studs. There was a glass window, with a wrought-iron grate, in each door.

Closing the door after they entered, Chuck had placed the lock-box key on the dark oak table, in the wide entry-way. The hall was floored with large red, Spanish tiles. As he bolted the front door, he had said, "That's so another Realtor won't interrupt your sales pitch. Always put the key where you can see it, so you don't forget to replace it, on leaving," he smiled.

Chuck had led the way to the sunken living room. It was lighted by the afternoon sun, filtering through the several eucalyptus trees on the back of the lot. The room would have been very dark but for the light coming in through the large, arched

window. The view looked out on an expanse of lawn in the rear, which sloped away towards a panoramic view of the hills of Brea.

They, both, had looked at the furniture which was draped with dust covers. It, all, appeared as a group of somber ghosts, crouched in the half-light of the north-facing window. Chuck had remarked with displeasure, "We'll have to get that taken care of. Never show a house that doesn't have the lived-in look. Those make the house look dead," he complained.

They proceeded through the large, formal dining room to the comfortable family room with a large fireplace, which was on the reverse side of the living room fireplace.

"You don't see that too much, anymore. They don't build new, like this. Be sure to point out things like that," Chuck had explained, "Emphasize the strong points and walk on by the weak ones." They had walked into the adjoining kitchen, as Chuck took Carol's arm, in a friendly way. She enjoyed his touch and felt relaxed from the lunch and wine. It was very companionable, she thought, 'Not like a boss and employee, at all.'

The kitchen was sizable, with an island in the middle, in which there was a range and stove. Above it was a large wrought-iron hood-vent that looked like it weighed a ton. The island had colored tiles on the top with extensive cabinets underneath.

"Be sure to show the wife, the advantages of a large cooking area, for entertaining, and so on. Remember you sell the wife, even though, the husband buys the house," he smiled. "You are very attractive, so it's important to talk directly to the wife, at all times. Don't let her think you're selling her man. You know what I mean?"

"Yes, I follow you. I plan on making friends with the wife. She's the meal ticket, in this business, I believe," Carol smiled.

"You're not only very attractive but very perceptive, too," Chuck smiled into her eyes. "You'll do well with us, if you're

as smart as you seem. The floor time, which you're assigned, is very important. Which office you work, also, and what hours and days, makes a big difference in your commissions," Chuck stressed. Carol was aware that Chuck assigned the salespeople their desks and hours. She replied, "Well, it sure makes sense to keep in good with the boss. I plan on making lots of money," she smiled back at him.

"I know you'll do well," Chuck replied, pleased at the point he had made. "Let's go to the second floor. The bedrooms in many of these homes are often the weak cards," he said as he lead the way to the stairway that led from the front hall. The graceful curve of the stairs was accented with a wrought iron railing, which was pleasingly enhanced by the red Spanish Tile steps. They walked, still arm on arm, up the stairs.

To the left of the stairs was a double door entrance to the master bedroom, which took up the front half of the upper floor. Here, too, they found the furniture was covered with dust covers. Chuck had led the way to the windows overlooking the front lawn. "Be sure to point out as many features as possible. When you strike on something that sparks interest in the clients' faces, that's the item to dwell on," he went on. "This bedroom is large enough. Let's look at the bath." Carol entered the bathroom ahead of Chuck and saw it was well floored with Alhambra tiles. "That should be a good selling point," she blurted out, looking at the large, sunken Roman Tub across the ample floor space.

Chuck laughed, "You have to be discreet, here. Try to make the clients visualize themselves using the bath, together. Of course, you can't say that directly. What would you say to give them the right mental picture, Carol?"

Carol was silent, visualizing bathing in such a luxurious setting. 'The dark marble of the tub, with its delicate pink coping tiles was a perfect spot for a sexual tryst,' she realized.

"What about, "Have you ever bathed in the 'Roman Style?'" Chuck prompted. "What do you think, Carol?"

“I, uh...the...that is something to think about,” she stuttered, his question interrupting her train of thought.

“What about you, Carol? Have you ever tried a bath like that?” Chuck moved up behind her and she could feel him close to her back. “Shall we try it out?” he whispered in her ear. She turned bumping against him, lifting her mouth to welcome his kiss and enfolding arms. They embraced, with the heat of the filled tub, pictured in both their minds. Their mouths drew the consuming passion from their loins. Minutes later, they were on the bathroom carpet fumbling at each other's clothing. Their kisses engulfed them in the demanding idea of bathing together. Her blouse was undone and she was pulling at the buttons of Chuck's shirt. He raised up and loosened his tie to slip both over his head.

Carol was slipping out of her skirt and slip, as he undid his trousers. He stopped to open both water taps to full flow, flicking down the stopper lever. In one swift move, Chuck stepped from his trousers and moved against Carol. He had pulled her to him, reaching behind her to undo her bra. The unbound wealth of her breasts took his breath away. “My God, you have a beautiful set,” he murmured as he bent to nuzzle her breasts with wet lips and burning breath. They slipped to the floor, as if drawn by some invisible current, pulling them both down. They writhed on the floor, panting with their pent up need. Their tongues probed each other's hot mouth. Chuck slid her under-pants down as she arched her back, to open her womanhood to his searching fingers. She moaned and moved in rhythm with his fingers. Gently stroking her cleft, Chuck was so gentle with his long slim fingers, her shivers of pleasure added to their twitching desire for each other.

“Let's get in the tub,” Carol muttered. Chuck pulled her up and they got out of their shoes and socks. Chuck stepped out of his shorts as Carol tested the heat of the simmering water. “It's not too hot,” she said, slipping into the ample grandeur of the spacious Roman Tub. Chuck stood over her, his armament prominently at attention. His chest was coated with small curls

of dark hair. His fifty-plus years showed in his shape. He was a bit paunchy, with slender legs, darkly adorned with smaller curls.

“You’re bee-ootiful, Baby. I love the slender shape you have. I don’t see any fat. How do ya do it?” he said with awe. “I better get in the water before I explode.”

They had lots of room. The vastness of the bath was realized, once water filled it. Their bodies brought the water level up, so they were just covered at the hips. Chuck turned the water off and slid down between Carol’s legs.

“I’m going to kiss you, all over,” he muttered, half to himself. He started at her toes and worked up her legs slowly, nuzzling her ankles, then her calves, with his warm lips and moist tongue. Carol moaned with pleasure as he slid his mouth over the inside of one thigh, and then the other. He was slowly kissing her flanks and stroking her breech with his left hand. His right hand found her plump breasts and stroked the nipple of one, and then the other. He plunged his face into her cleft, stroking her womanhood with his wet, hot tongue. Carol squirmed and writhed under his expert tenderness. She had never experienced anything to compare with this. Chuck was a wonderfully, gentle and patient lover. She gasped, as he found her pleasure nipple at the top of her cleft. A few minutes of his tender, adept attention and she writhed with a gigantic climax.

“That came up from my toes,” Carol murmured. “Oh, that was fantastic.”

The ecstatic feeling washed over her as Chuck lifted his head to observe her pleasure. Wave after wave of twitching, tingling pleasure engulfed her, from loins to the tips of her toes and fingers.

“You know how long it’s been for me, Baby? I need your head so much, I can hardly stand it. I don’t get that any more in this marriage,” he confessed as he moved to straddle her. Before Carol knew what was happening, Chuck had his knees on each side of her chest. His hands grabbed the tub rim, next to her

shoulders, to keep his weight off her. She opened her eyes and saw the length of his swollen stem, at her chin, demanding her loving attention. She had heard about this, but in her whole marriage, had never been asked to perform such a love act. There was a brief moment of fear and, then, Chuck started stroking her between her legs, holding himself on one knee and one hand. Rapture coursed through her and she started licking the head of his engorged manhood. He moaned with pleasure and increased the rhythm of the stroke that was giving her such currents of ecstasy. Starting in her loins, then, it moved upward to the nipples of her pert breasts.

She enclosed him with her moist lips, running her tongue around the prominent ridge of his pink cowl. She moved in and out, over it, as she suckled his pleasure limb.

He stroked faster and faster and Carol kept in time with his wonderfully, gentle caresses. She became so excited she moved her head faster and faster over the tip of his member. He uttered a load groan as Carol engulfed him fully. Then, he throbbled his elation into her moist cheeks.

Carol reached such a height of excitement, from this new experience, she climaxed and felt the throbbing pleasure, course through her entire body.

Chuck, slowly and regretfully, withdrew and slid down to embrace her and fondle her breasts in time with his caressing touch of her pulsing cleft. Chuck, slowly and expertly, evoked each pulsing wave of pleasure from her loins with his gentle fondling. Carol was swallowed up, in the warm, glowing, sensation of exquisite attainment. She found herself in wonder. 'Why hadn't she found such sensations in lovemaking when she was married?' Chuck's mouth intruded on her thoughts. It found hers and she succumbed to total relaxation. Chuck's hands came to a welcome stop on her quivering cusp, which Carol believed, she would have wished, never. After several minutes, Carol awoke from her welcome slumber. She found Chuck sitting on the tub ledge, watching her.

“Baby, I can’t believe how terrific you are. You’re the best looking woman I’ve ever been with. You know I can’t afford to fall in love with you, don’t you?” Seeing the expression of both affection and sadness, on Chuck’s face, made Carol appreciate the risks, they, both, faced.

“I’m smarter than you think, Chuck. I know what Adele means to you and your business. Don’t worry about me. I intend to get financially sound. My daughter takes all the time left, after Real Estate. I can’t afford to get involved, either.”

“I knew I had you figured for a sharp woman. You’ll do very well with our firm,” he smiled. “I hope you’re a slow learner, though. I would like to help you with your listing inspections, from time to time,” he chuckled as he leaned down to kiss her with a tender but wide kiss.

Carol smiled lazily, “I don’t have time for a social life. The walk-thru training will be the highlight of my career.” She added with a serious face, “You can be sure I’ll be discreet.”

They put the two towels in the laundry hamper. As they cleaned up the bathroom, both of them were aware of a rising fever, as they moved naked around the room. Chuck saw Carol staring at his languishing manhood and felt a stirring in his loins. ‘God Almighty, she has a beautiful body. What tits and ass,’ he thought to himself.

Carol was looking at Chuck, admiring the length and round, sleekness of his dangler. She saw his look, fixed on her naked form. Her eyes dropped to his lank tube and she saw firm attention raise its head. She stepped across the floor and met his searching lips with a wide, yearning, wet kiss. She needed him inside her, now!

They slid to the welcome softness of the carpet and Chuck mounted her welcoming warmth as she greeted him with wide spread legs. Again, Carol was amazed at his gentle energy. He moved his deadly looking round, slowly and lovingly, into her demanding breech. Warmth and pleasure ran up and down her spine. She murmured, “It’s been so long, oh, so long.”

They rode the waves of passion that swelled through their loins like a flux of throbbing drums. Their mutual climaxes were conjoined with groans of delight from two mouths, with interlocking tongues. They languished on the thick carpet for several minutes, embracing and cuddling. Carol enjoyed the throbbing maleness of him, within her body. It had been the vehicle that lifted her to a peak of ultimate fulfillment. They lay together, reluctant to move, enjoying the feel of their mutual nakedness. Finally appeased, the two slowly dressed and finished their mutual toilet. They had generated so much heat, with that from the tub that every piece of glass and metal had to be wiped free of dew point moisture. Carol was standing naked, busily wiping the shower door, when Chuck collected his things and said, "I'll leave the rest to you, Sweetheart. If I watch you do that, while in the buff, I won't be able to resist and be after you again."

Carol was pleased and smiled tenderly at him, "Get going then, I'll finish up here." Downstairs, Chuck was waiting, as Carol slowly descended the stairs, combing her hair and smiling at her new teacher.

"I would like to be an invisible observer, when you show this house next week," Chuck laughed. "You'll be great when you show the Roman Tub."

Carol chortled, "I won't have any difficulty getting them to visualize using the bath, I'm sure."

"I can't wait to read your Walk-Thru Report. It'll probably turn me on," Chuck smiled with a tender look on his face.

"You better not talk about walk-thru's at the office," Carol replied smiling. "That will turn me on." Chuck laughed in surprise. He was pleased that she had enjoyed his attentions. He smiled, lovingly, at Carol and said, "I can't remember the last time I got off twice, like that. You're really something. Where did you learn to make love like that?"

Carol was pleased and surprised by his compliment. She replied, "I don't know. I never had sex like that before. That

was the first time I ever did oral sex. My husband never made love to me like that.” It was Chuck's turn to be surprised. He uttered the thoughts he had been thinking while she had been sucking him off. “You’re a wonderful blowjob artist, Sweetheart. No one’s ever did such a loving blow job to me.” He was startled at his unrestrained honesty. Carol was delighted and returned his compliment with like candor, “I never did that before. I just did what came naturally.”

Chuck was stunned. “Really? I can’t believe how wonderful you are. I never had such a loving, in my whole life. You must have been saving up your natural talent.”

Carol was silent. She didn’t know what to say. She was too surprised at her own reactions. She had enjoyed the tremendous sense of sexual release she had felt when giving him her first blowjob.

Chuck wondered at the injustice of life’s conditions. The balance was weighted in the wrong direction. He said, “I feel cheated by the circumstances that make sex outside of marriage, more exciting and wonderful. Neither, of my wives, ever responded like you.”

Carol was glad to be able to talk to her new lover with such unabashed openness. She agreed, “I know what you mean. My husband never made love like you. In fact, I never felt excited like that before, myself. Maybe that's what's wrong with marrying young.”

Chuck felt relieved. She didn't seem to be emotionally involved with him. Her attitude was like his. She was detached and objective. They were discussing their situation, logically, and in an unemotional manner.

He replied, “I think you’ve hit on it, Carol. When we’re younger, we don’t know enough to get full benefit from marriage. Very soon, we lapse into routines and do things out of habit. Only when you get experience can you appreciate sex.” He remembered that old saying, and said, “Isn’t it a shame, Youth is wasted on the young.”

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Carol laughed at his humor, “It’s true. Life’s balance seems to be weighted in favor of the more mature,” she reflected. Carol was beginning to understand. She felt years wiser than she had before. She felt she could handle any man she might get involved with, better, now. This interlude had given her a whole new perspective about men.

Chuck interrupted her thoughts with, “By the way, do you know how to take care of yourself, so you don’t get in trouble from this? You know what I mean?” he asked, feeling foolish that he hadn’t thought of her fertility, before this.

“Don’t worry,” she responded. “I had my tubes tied after my first. My husband didn’t want another child.”

He smiled, “I guess that’s a help in enjoying sex, now. You can relax and enjoy it,” Chuck felt vindicated in his judgment of this new associate. She was not going to get hung up emotionally. She had determined, her own best interests were aligned with his. He kissed her tenderly and walked her to the car. Their talk was all business as he drove her back to the restaurant to get her car.

From that day forward, Carol became a growing force in sales for the Robbins Company. No one could question her dedication to the job.

CHAPTER FIVE

Carol welcomed personal supervision on “Final Inspections” from either Chuck or Adele. Each was eager to work closely with Carol. Her outstanding sales performance made both, husband and wife, appreciative of her talents.

It was difficult for Carol to believe that ten years had passed, since her start with the Robbins. The frequency of her sexual interludes with Chuck had decreased as he approached sixty years of age but his needs for her expertise at oral sex hadn't diminished that much. She had found a social life for herself that included dates with more youthful sex partners. She wondered at her own mental processes. Here she was, forty three and she didn't feel or think any different than she had ten years earlier. If anything, she was more confident of her own capabilities when it came to men.

If she could appeal to an older, married man, with an attractive wife like Adele, she felt she could attract a likely candidate such as Rich. His age difference, and his single marriage of long term, gave her further assurance that he would find her a desirable catch and make a commitment. Her looks and shape had been an important element in her career. She was a young thirty-three when she started with the Robbins. For the last five years, she spent time, weekly, at aerobics, and watched what she ate. She knew her body was older but was convinced that her trim shape, slender hips, and firm breasts would put many, thirty year old women to shame.

Now, much of their lives at the office had fallen into a comfortable routine. Chuck and Adele were still a great management team. Carol was their top producer. The owners felt justified in giving her extra attention and more of their time.

Neither Adele nor Chuck knew, they both liked to work with Carol, for the same reason.

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That day, the Friday after the first date with Rich, Carol began to formulate a plan to achieve her objective. She was confident she could get a relationship going with Rich. Her career training in sales, and her walk-thru experience, made this an instinctive reaction.

It was the Saturday after the movie date with Rich. He hadn't called and Carol remembered his saying, he would see her at Valentines. Carol felt certain that Rich would be at Valentines tonight and called her friend, Janet Sands, to ask if she and her husband would like to go to Valentines. On the phone, she explained that she had met a man there and wanted Janet's opinion about him. She had known Janet for years as they were neighbors and had been friendly, even before Janet had married Tom. They had discussed men, on many occasions when they had been dating, separately. Tom was Janet's second husband and she had been very interested in seeing Carol get re-married.

She asked Janet for help in evaluating Rich, as Carol hadn't been dating much, recently, and could use a third party's more objective viewpoint. Anyway, that small lie is what she told Janet.

Janet sounded pleased at Carol's trust in her judgment. Janet assured her that she could get Tom, to go along with the strategy they outlined on the phone. Sure enough, when they walked into Valentines, about ten-thirty, she spied Richard standing at his customary spot at the corner of the bar. The crowd made it easy for the three to walk past him, unobserved, to claim the last table in the area, to the right of the bandstand. They were silting at a table at the far rear wall. The room was well filled with seated couples, watching the dancers. To the left of the dance floor entrance, through the portal which led to the bar, Carol could catch a glimpse of Richard's back. She could only see him, occasionally, through the shifting crowd of men and women standing at the railing of the dance floor. She was sure he would see the three of them, soon.

After they ordered their drinks from the waitress, they sat there for three or four minutes. Carol whispered to Janet and Tom, “Here he comes. Let me do the talking, okay?”

“Hi Carol, I didn’t see you come in,” Richard said. “How are you?”

“Just great, Rich. Why don’t you join us? This is Janet and her husband, Tom.” She nodded to her friends.

Since neither, of the two moved to shake hands and sat their wordlessly, Richard smiled, “Nice to meet you, both.” He turned to Carol saying, “I was hoping to see you here, Carol,” as he sat down in the fourth chair at the table. They were seated so Janet and Tom had their backs to the dance floor. Carol was seated with her back to the wall and Rich was on her left.

Speaking to Tom and Janet, Rich nodded his head towards the bandstand and said, “This is a good band. I think they play the most danceable music in Orange County.”

Neither of the two turned to look at the dance floor. They were silent for a time, as if weighing what he had said. Richard thought that was a bit strange.

Things were to get stranger.

Finally, Janet smiled, “We haven’t heard them, before, and they do sound good.” Tom said nothing but smiled his agreement. The band started playing “*I’ll Get By*” and Rich said, “A lot of the pieces they play are like that, but they do play swing and rock and roll, too.”

Carol answered, “Janet and Tom met here a couple of years ago. They’ve been married over a year, now. They haven’t been back for some time.” Janet and Tom said nothing but smiled happily. Janet put her arm around Tom’s shoulder. Tom was silent but smiled at Janet.

“I was telling them how you and I met here and they suggested coming back for old time’s sake,” Carol volunteered. Janet and Tom said nothing, but smiled at Rich some more.

Rich was trying to figure out what was going on.

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When Carol asked Janet if she liked the music, Janet said to Tom, “This is good. Let’s dance to this one, Honey.” Tom got up without a word and followed Janet to the dance floor.

“I’ve got something I wanted to tell you, Rich,” Carol said slowly, looking into his face, intently. “I’ve been dating a man, off an on, for a while now. He’s asked me to make a commitment to a relationship.”

Rich was astounded that she felt it was necessary to explain that to him. All he could think to say was, “What did you tell him?” he asked with real interest.

Carol smiled at Richard and replied, “I told him I would have to think about that for a couple of days.”

Richard was silent.

He studied Carol’s attractive face and was puzzled about why he was being told this. It reminded him of a high school situation where you were trying to break up with your “steady” without creating hard feelings. Not knowing what to say, he said the first thing that popped into his head, “Why do you have to think about it for so long? Aren’t you sure of your feelings for him?”

He looked into her eyes with a gentle smile that upset her.

“I’ve decided to tell him yes, tomorrow..... I wanted to let you know,” she added, as if an after-thought. To her astonishment, Richard leaned over and kissed her on the left cheek. “I wish you, all the best, Carol. I know you’ll be happy.”

He got up and left the table. Her final glimpse was his back squeezing through the crowd towards the bar. Carol was stunned. This wasn’t the reaction she had planned on, from him.

On leaving the table, Rich’s mind was racing. He couldn’t understand Carol’s attitude. ‘Why would she come and tell me she was interested in another man?’ He wondered about her motives. ‘Did she expect him to plead with her to change her mind? My God, he had only slept with her once. What was she doing, trying to hurt him, to wreak some sort of revenge on him for not being sexually aggressive on their two dates?’

He remembered a couple of women that he had dated a few weeks ago. They were in their late forties and he had asked them to dance. Having gotten up enough courage from their acceptance and friendliness, he had made a date for dinner and a movie. In both cases, he found the dates were like a replay of his first high school dates. The women were standoffish and not very warm. Both sat against the car door on the way to the movie. One had done the same thing on the way home. The other did hold hands in the movie and had engaged in adolescent-type necking in the theatre parking lot, but grabbed his hands when he tried to get “familiar.”

When he saw them afterwards at Valentines, they seemed upset that he hadn't called. They were friendly but seemed to expect some kind of “Woo and Wheedle” affair. Rich thought about it and decided that the older ones wanted to play the “Courtship Game,” just like they did in high school. The younger ones, like Carol, were more aggressive and up-front. She had been like some of the thirty-year olds, he had observed. The younger ones were not afraid to make physical contact or to talk about their interests, regarding a relationship. Carol, now, seemed to be a mixture of two different generations.

He wondered, ‘If that’s why a lot of older men went for the women under forty. The younger ones seemed to have a different attitude. They seemed more liberated and had fewer sexual hang-ups.’ Tasha seemed to be a good combination. She was the right age and had that youthful, direct attitude. Maybe, Tasha had learned that from her younger, second husband.

When Janet and Tom came back from their dance, Carol explained that she and Richard had a tiff and she had asked him to leave. She didn't feel like saying much more. “Well, he'll be back, Carol. I could see he was really attracted to you. You're a catch for him at his age, now. He is attractive, with his silver hair, and height but you're probably a dozen years younger. He'd be lucky to catch you,” Janet said with real sincerity.

Carol smiled at her friend's confidence in her but didn't respond.

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Richard made his way back to the bar where he had been talking with Chuck about PC's. His drink was still in place and he squeezed in next to Chuck and reclaimed his spot.

"Now, that's some dish, Rich. You were talking to the best lookin' broad in the whole place." Chuck smiled, "Why did you leave?"

"I just met her couple of weeks ago, but she just said she is getting serious with a guy whom she had dated, prior to that. I wished her luck."

"You don't miss a thing, Chuck, even with the crowd in the way, do you," he laughed.

"I spotted her when they came in. Your back was to the dance floor and I saw her as she passed behind you. She's a knockout," Chuck added wistfully.

"Well, why not ask her to dance? She's no danger to your bachelor status, from what she told me," Richard laughed.

"I'm not good at approaching women, that way. She might refuse to dance. I'd have to walk all the way back through the crowd with her, 'No Thanks', on my face," Chuck said.

There was something in his voice which Richard knew was a vestige of experience. "Chuck, when you get older, like me, you'll find that's part of the fun. Every younger guy expects older guys to be turned down by younger women."

"I've noticed that after a woman dances with me, even if she's been sitting there all night, guys, by the droves, will ask her to dance after she dances with me. They must feel, if she'll dance with someone my age, she'll dance with anyone." Richard laughed heartily.

"Come on," Chuck replied, "Your tall and distinguished. They'll all dance with you. I'm only five-seven. They like tall guys."

"You, come on, Chuck. Most women are five-five or so. You ever see how most women are taller in heels than their dates. That's negative thinking. It just isn't true. Look around.....look

at the dance floor. There are more guys your height than mine. They're all dancing a lot, with women taller."

Chuck looked through the crowd at the dance floor. "Your friend's dancing with someone my height. I'm too late, Dammit anyhow."

Richard saw Carol dancing slow with a man her own age. He decided that they probably had more in common. He thought of Tasha and wondered if she would really call him, Tuesday.

Chuck had been asking Richard about PC's and operating them with differing kinds of software, when he had excused himself to talk to Carol. When he came back to the bar, Richard asked Chuck, if he used a PC at work. He said he did but explained, his company, Beckman, was going to order a Unix based system.

"I've not been too impressed with Unix," Richard replied. "There is not much third party software you can run on it. IBM compatibles are the best. There are hundreds of applications on the market and you can get all of the multi-tasking and multi-user features by putting things like Desqview, Windows, and Networks, together. I've used Double Dos and Desqview, the most. Everything runs with them. Dos programs will always dominate the PC world, I think. Get something that works with all that capability," Rich ended.

"Do you use bulletin boards with your PC? They have lots of good programs, free," Chuck responded. "I'm getting a modem."

"Yeah, I've loaded BBS Software on a client's PC network. It's a fantastic mail system and you can call in on modems, if you're not on the network. You have to watch out for security, though. There are crazy people who spend days writing programs which screw up your system," Richard explained.

"Yeah, I've heard them called viruses. How do they work?" Chuck asked.

"I've only run into one but there are a couple of hundred around. I read from 1984, to now, in just three or four years, they have mushroomed. You usually can't do anything to stop them, until it's too late. Right now, you have to be able to find it, if you can,

quick, before it does too much damage. They usually are tied to the Command Com file. You know, the one first loaded when you turn on your PC. You can compare the date and size of your file to see if it's the same as on your Dos disk. If the PC's file is larger than the one on the Dos Floppy, it's a virus. You have to copy over it with the good one."

"You have to make sure your disk is write-protected, though. Good disks can be infected by bad disks. If your PC starts acting weird, that's the best indication that you may have a virus. Someday, they'll be really widespread. They have programs that check Command.Com, to make sure it's the original size, coming on the market. But those Nuts'll probably figure out a way to get around those. If weird people want to damage others, for no reason, and even without knowing what damage their doing, we're all in trouble," Richard said, shaking his head.

"It's like the perfect crime. Without a motive from which to track, you haven't much of a chance to catch the criminal."

"I see what you mean," Chuck replied. "I think the worst thing you can do is publicize the existence of the virus. Those weirdos must get off on publicity alone, even though they're not named."

"You're right. It's too wild to understand. Publicity about their terrible offspring must be their only reward."

Chuck was watching the dancers and turned back to say, "That friend of yours is sure getting asked to dance a lot. That's the third guy that she's danced with. I might try myself. What do you think?"

"Don't hold back, on my account. You met Tasha last night. I'm sure that she's more my type. Go ask her to dance. Her name is Carol Conner. She's in Real Estate."

"I'll wait until a fast one. They usually don't turn you down. The slow ones are different. I had one good lookin' gal who danced fast with me, turn me down on a slow one. She said she promised her boyfriend not to dance slow. Can you beat that?" Chuck laughed. "I didn't know I was wasting my time until the slow dance."

“I learn more about this ‘Singles’ Scene’ every time I come here,” Richard laughed. “I’ll remember that. That’s good information.”

“You come next Saturday and I’ll introduce you to two friends who have been doing this scene for several years. They live together now, and only come on Saturdays,” Chuck offered.

“Do you know Jack Anders?” Richard replied in surprise. “He told me, he was going to have me meet Inga and Al. I met him last week.”

Sure, he works at Beckman, too. We have a group of people who have met here, over the years. We do Vegas, Catalina, and Tahoe, sometimes. Most are unattached, but Inga and Al live together in Brea Hills and have get-togethers, now and then. We play cards every Friday but they’re out of town this weekend. I wouldn’t have come last night, otherwise.”

“That sounds interesting,” Rich replied, “I need to learn from other singles. I was out of action all of my life, being married so long. I don’t want to make all the mistakes myself. I’d rather learn from other’s experiences,” Richard laughed. “I’m too old to waste time in ‘Stumble, Fumble and Fall’.”

Chuck laughed, “I know what you mean. This is a different world than I expected, even after my divorce eleven years ago. The women are a lot more liberated and different than most married people know.”

The crowd had gotten too dense to see the bar now. It was after eleven. Saturday’s pairing off of the singles was not as prevalent. More couples came to dance and the weekend coupling of singles seemed to be arranged, mostly on Fridays.

Carol came back to the table after another dance and said to Janet, “It’s been over an hour, Janet. When you go to the ladies’ room, will you see if he’s still here?”

Janet dutifully made her way through the crowd to the rest room. When she came back to the table, she told Carol, “He’s standing at the corner of the bar talking and laughing with some younger

guy. You probably will hear from him next week. He's no fool. He won't let you get away."

Carol was beginning to think otherwise.

Janet and Tom asked Carol, if she would like to leave and she thought it a good idea. Going out, squeezing through the crowd, Carol glanced to where Rich was standing, but he didn't look up. Tonight's experience gave Carol a lot to think about. She didn't doubt her own qualifications for a minute. 'Rich must not be interested in committing to any relationship,' she reasoned. She would have to make other plans.

Rich saw Carol and her friends leave and felt a lot better that she had given him an out. He didn't want to waste time playing games. He was sure she was definitely "a player". He felt relieved. Tasha seemed straight-forward and much more direct. 'She might be "The One",' he thought to himself.

Chuck had found someone to dance with and left Rich with his own thoughts. For several weeks, Richard had been putting together a "profile" of the woman he wanted to find. She would be over forty-five; not fat; with no young children at home; affectionate; interested in sex; and wouldn't play games.

Rich was always bothered by the attitude society had about the way women deserve something for sleeping with men; married or not, too many thought of it as a woman's "favors". That aggravated him. It should be a two way street. Both should be equal in sexual matters, if women expect real equality. Talk to the majority, though, and they want to control the sexual engagements. It's been that way since time began. Women want equal rights everywhere except in the bed. The divorce laws are proof of that. His own situation was proof. His wife had walked out—divorced—him and the laws demanded that he pay spousal support for as long as she didn't feel like working.

It really galled him that his attorney had said: "Well, it's your own fault. You let her stay home for thirty-three years. Do you expect her to work, now?" 'As if he had expected me to force her to work,' Rich thought to himself, aggravated. Many times,

when his business had gotten slow, had she scornfully told him, “You’re the one with all the education. What’s the matter, can’t you support ALL of us?”

Looking back, he realized that she had never shown real togetherness or affection. ‘I was always the one who had to initiate sex,’ he realized. He added to his mental picture of the woman he was looking for: Loving; interested in sex; and willing to make her own demands known.

Another idea entered his mind. He smiled to himself, ‘That would be something. Maybe, I should add: Likes Oral Sex.’ Yeah, why not? My mental picture will keep me from wasting my time on obvious misfits. Yeah, I like that picture,’ he thought to himself.

Dwelling on his outline of what a likely women should be, Richard failed to notice Chuck return with a woman under tow.

“This is Stella,” Rich. Can we squeeze in for a drink? We’ve been dancing up a storm.”

“Hi, Stella. Nice to meet you,” Richard smiled at a woman, who was only a few years younger than himself. She appeared, “half in the bag.”

The dancing and, whatever, they had been doing on the dance floor had her flushed and breathing rapidly. ‘She must have been drinking for a while, before Chuck asked her to dance,’ Rich surmised.

“That’s a lot of work, dancing fast with a crowd like that up there. Squeeze in here, I’ll stand behind,” Rich replied, moving back from the bar to make room.

Chuck ordered for them both and Rich was hemmed in with the people standing near the access way to the dance floor and the seating area. Shortly afterwards, Chuck excused himself saying, “I’ve gotta’ make a pit stop.”

Two drinks were quickly consumed by Stella. Rich noticed she got more talkative. Chuck was gone, for the good part of a half

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hour, leaving Rich with Chuck's new find. Rich soon learned her life story. He was worried that Chuck wouldn't come back.

Stella was getting smashed. When Rich turned to look at the dance floor, he was chin to forehead with a young woman. It was Rolanda. "Hi, there, Rolanda. I didn't see you in this crowd. How's it going?" he smiled.

She was holding a half empty wine glass and giggled, "I don't know, really. In this crowd I think I've lost touch with my feet"

Richard laughed with her and put his arm around her, pulling her to the small spot he had behind his friends. "Let me be your blocker," he smiled. "This is a friend of mine. Meet Stella. This is Rolanda. Stella and a friend were just grabbing some Fresh, after dancing up a storm," Rich explained. "He had to make a pit stop."

"Nice to meet you. I nearly got trampled with people coming and going to the bar and the dance floor, both," Rolanda explained.

"This is a high traffic area," Rich laughed. "One step away from the bar and you don't know whether you're coming or going. You meet a lot of people, though."

"I like that," Rolanda replied. "There's no use coming here, if you don't get someone to dance with."

Richard was watching Stella, out of the side of his eye. Stella was looking at Rolanda like she was a specimen under glass. Richard hoped Stella wouldn't turn green.

Rolanda was about the same height but must have weighed thirty to forty pounds less. Her youthful shape was accentuated by a print dress that would have made a buxom woman look fat. Rolanda looked so fresh Stella must have been turning a few thoughts over in her own mind. "You must not've any trouble getting guys to dance," she volunteered. "Wha'ssa matter?" Richard broke in, "Rolanda, I have a sure-fire formula for getting the younger guys to ask you to dance." Rolanda turned to Richard, "What do you mean?"

“If you’ll dance a slow one with me, I guarantee when you stand here, again, guys will come over to ask you to dance. It never fails.” Richard smiled at her. “They think if you’ll dance a slow one with someone my age, you won’t turn anybody down. I’m old enough to be your father.”

The later the night got, the more frequent was the band’s play of slow dance tunes. The band seemed to know the floor would be crowded with couples, as it neared time to go home.

“Come on, there’s a slow one now,” Rich added as the band started playing, “*Always*.”

Richard liked the feel of her young body in his arms. Rolanda danced close and well. He forced his thinking to memories of teaching his daughters to dance, when they were younger.

It helped him keep his mind off Rolanda’s firm embrace and round body, which would easily give him the wrong ideas.

After they returned to the bar, Richard’s prophesy proved itself. A young man about Rolanda’s age came up, tapped Richard on the shoulder to say, “Excuse me, Sir. I would like to ask the young lady to dance. Is it all right?”

Rich laughed with justified delight, “By all means.” He moved to his left, so Rolanda could respond. “Thank you,” she smiled as her eyes went from Rich to the other. They moved away towards the dance floor. Rich was sure the thanks was for him but the young man smiled with pleasure at her response.

Stella was pleased as punch. “You really know your way around here, don’t you, Richard,” she chuckled. “That was too smooth. You must be a regular, huh?”

Chuck finally came back, having missed Rolanda. He got in on the tail of the conversation.

Rich was saying, “Not really, Stella. I’m a newcomer. I’m just a quick learner. I watch people most of the time to learn about this ‘Singles’ Scene.’ It’s all fascinating to me,” he laughed.

Chuck laughed with him and broke in, “You come next Saturday, to meet Inga and Al. We have an informal group that has a ball,”

he smiled with pleasure. “You, too, Stella. We usually meet here two or three times a month,” he smiled.

Rich made a mental note of that. Chuck certainly seemed positive that it would be fun. He also decided to go to the Swing Club to see more of Ann and Linda. Since Tasha was busy tomorrow, it wouldn’t hurt to keep all lines of communication open, he figured.

Sunday, Rich came to realize that the Swing Dance might not be a place to meet good prospects for dates. He reasoned that women probably went there just to dance, not to meet men. He figured that was probably why Ann and Linda went to Valentines. Not just to dance but to meet more, available men. After thinking about it some more, he decided to stay home and work on a client’s computer operating system that had a problem.

The PC Manager for the client was a casual contact, Rich had made at Valentines. He had gotten into a conversation with Wilson Wong, one Friday, at Valentines, when he was standing next to him at the bar, watching the dancers. Wilson had overheard him talking with Jack Anders about PC’s.

Later, that same night, Wilson had struck up a conversation with Rich and PC’s were brought up by Wilson. It was much like his meeting with Chuck Warden. It was common to ask about your acquaintance’s job. Rich had asked Wilson where he worked and was told he was with a water bottling company. Wilson was the DP Manager and wanted to automate some of the sales accounting functions that the sales-delivery drivers were doing with paper and pencil. Wilson had overheard Rich talking with Jack about a soft drink direct delivery system he was working on for Coca-Cola. He asked Rich to expand on his talk with Jack, as he was interested in Rich’s experiences with direct-delivery software development.

Wilson told Rich about his firm’s need for a Sales Tracking System. Their current paper system, maintained by each delivery driver, on route cards for their customers, allowed no sales or forecasting analyses. Furthermore, each driver had to

total sales manually and extend the sales invoices, for the accounting clerks to check, manually, before the company mailed statements to the customer. They were the third largest, bottled water distributor in Southern California, Sierra Springs Bottlers.

Rich's detailed explanation of the previous experience he had in sales accounting and order tracking software development convinced Wilson. He felt that the combination of PC technology and custom software could radically improve Sierra's operations. This had led to an interview about the project and Rich's presentation of a proposal for a customized sales tracking application for the company.

Rich had visited the Company at the headquarters in Anaheim, where the bottled water distribution firm maintained a staff of more than three hundred. They managed delivery routes and retail packaging distribution for nine regional plants in the South Western States. Rich was amazed to learn their network included over four hundred delivery routes.

Their facility was a four story, modern building conveniently located near the 57 and 91 freeways' interchange. During the second visit, Wilson had shown him a problem they were experiencing with three new PC's. The three IBM 80286 Clones' setup and initialization had been Wilson's responsibility, rather than the vendor's, a break from previous practice.

Wilson told Rich, software programs he had installed, did strange things on the three, newer PC's. In the spreadsheet programs on each PC, numbers would be changed, in a random pattern of cells on the spreadsheets, after the work was saved. Wilson could find no reasons for it. This only happened on the three newer PC's. The same spreadsheet programs on the older PC's didn't have this problem. There didn't seem to be any consistent pattern for the changes, Wilson said. The numbers would come out transposed or changed entirely, at random.

Rich took a look at the three PC's and noticed that the operating system was the latest version of Microsoft's MS-DOS. He asked and found that the older PC's were using an earlier version. Rich

had loaded a file utility that was in use on the PC's and ran a system check. He noticed that the program showed less than 640 Kbytes of Ram memory available to Dos. However, when the machines booted up, the Ram Memory showed the expected 640 Kilobytes.

This was strange, Rich knew. Five Kbytes of memory was being lost after the machines booted. He realized that the extra memory, being used by some unknown memory resident program, could indicate a hidden routine that caused the trouble.

When Rich saw what the operating system was doing, losing five K Ram for unknown reasons, he advised Wilson to isolate the three PC's in that one department. He told him to keep all diskettes out of the three machines that were affected. Using the floppy drives could transfer the problem to other machines. Rich wasn't sure but it looked like they had a virus.

The problem, Rich got started on this Sunday, would prove to be a virtual puzzle, for the first few days. Then, it would turn into a personal quest, lasting for several months.

'Had he stumbled onto a conspiracy, that used the MS-DOS Operating System, as an innocent, unsuspecting, carrier of a virus, a virtual PC Class, "Typhoid Mary"?'

CHAPTER SIX

Sunday afternoon, Carol was at the office in Buena Park, as was her usual routine. Sundays were one of the best days in the week for talking to prospects that had read Adele's ads in Wednesday's Pennysaver, the weekly direct-mailer, and in the Sunday Orange County Register, the local newspaper.

Shortly after lunch, the phone rang. It was Jackie Oldham, an old school chum from Norwalk High, who had been married for twenty-four years to her high school sweetheart. Jackie's marriage had gone on the rocks, shortly after her husband, Fred, had retired from the Air Force, after twenty years.

They'd been divorced for four years now, but Carol thought that her friend was emotionally unbalanced by the double divorce—from the Air Force and then from her husband. Jackie had loved the Air Force life and her husband. His retirement was, to Jackie, a divorce from a life-style she had treasured. Along with the breakup of her marriage, it seemed to be too much for Jackie to handle. She had married Fred when she was eighteen. He was then already a sergeant and Jackie came into her maturity as a military wife. She enjoyed the Air Station life more than she was willing to admit. That separation and Fred's leaving her two years later, with three children, for a younger woman, was a double loss which Carol believed was the cause of Jackie's bizarre behavior.

Jackie had been a year behind Carol in school. She had always looked to her as the big sister that an only child, like Jackie, had wished for. Every time they got together, Jackie would regale her with stories of her conquests in the bar scene, which had become a regular pattern in her life. Either that, or the old tales of what "that bastard", Fred, had done to "ruin their lives".

Inevitably, it would involve emotional accounts of how happy they had been raising their children, now grown, to adulthood, while "they" were in the Air Force.

Carol promised to meet Jackie at Angelo's in Fullerton for dinner at six. Carol called her daughter, Kim, and explained to her that

Jackie, whom Kim knew and liked very much, needed to talk. Kim said she wouldn't mind having a microwave dinner alone. She was used to Carol coming home late on Sundays. Kim had learned that was a frequent requirement in Real Estate.

Carol got to Angelo's about ten minutes to six. She walked into the entrance, heading for the bar, Jackie's usual rendezvous. Angelo's was the only other nice restaurant, besides Valentines, Carol had found that catered to the mature crowd. The right half of the building was the bar and dance hall. They had an orchestra that played Big Band music six nights a week. It was a class act, as the band all wore tuxedos. The bar was directly behind the bandstand which faced a good size dance floor. A large area was on three walls, with lots of tables and chairs.

The music didn't start until nine but there were, already, a dozen people at the bar. Jackie was seated at the far corner, facing the entrance waved at Carol as she entered.

"I've made reservations for two at six-fifteen. What'll you have, Carol?" Jackie asked, smiling as if it was a real effort.

"A Bloody Mary, thanks. How have you been, Jackie? It's been a few weeks since we got together last," Carol smiled back. She could tell Jackie had been here a while. The ashtray was full and she was half-way through a bourbon and water which Carol knew was not her first.

"Yeah, I've been having a ball. I met a captain whose folks live in Sunny Hills. He's twenty-eight and stationed at March Field. We've been seeing each other, off and on, for three weeks. You know how I go for uniforms," Jackie explained, taking a good swallow from her drink.

Carol felt a sense of deja-vu. She had listened to every account of Jackie's liaisons with military types. She would pick up anything in uniform when she was sober. When in her cups, she would pick up anything in pants.

Carol felt sorry for her. She was a cute woman, with a still young body which showed her interest in taking care of

herself, especially after three kids. Her youngest boy was in the Navy. The other son and her daughter were both married. Her son was living up north. Her daughter, the oldest, lived in La Habra.

‘Being a couple of years younger than Carol, Jackie, at forty-one, was still attractive enough to find someone to marry,’ Carol thought to herself, ‘What a waste.’

“How ‘bout you, Carol? What's new?” Jackie asked, taking another long swallow as she waited for the latest from Carol.

“I’ve met an older guy who has me puzzled,” Carol said. “I can’t figure him out. He was terrific in bed, our first date, but seemed to hold back when we dated two times after that.”

“Maybe he can’t get it up but once with anyone,” Jackie said seriously. “I’ve met more guys like that. They can’t get it up when their sober.”

“I don’t think it’s that,” Carol smiled. “He got off twice in one night and he was sober.”

“If he is holding out on you, with your looks, he’s playing,” Jackie ventured. “He’ll be all over you, if you give him some of his own medicine. My guy is young and must have a problem, too. He doesn’t want to fuck me. He uses his big toe on me when I’m going down on him. He’s so cute, I get off, anyway.”

“Did you go down on him?” Jackie asked, knowing about Carol’s affair with Chuck, her boss. “It was our first date,” Carol said, impatiently. “I was saving that for later, when he showed some interest in a relationship. I didn’t want to give him the wrong idea about me.”

“Well, you can be sure he’ll come back, if you give him a good blowjob. They, all, get hooked on that,” Jackie smiled, knowingly.

“That’s why hookers get so much trade from married men. They give the head jobs that a lot of wives won’t,” she added. “Jimmy, my captain, goes wild over my blow-jobs, even if he

has some hang-up on screwing me. He always has to have a rubber or he won't fuck," Jackie smiled, with pride. "I think he's saving himself. He's never been married."

"Are you finally thinking of settling down, again?" Carol asked.

"Ha! If I ever do, it'll be with a career man," Jackie smiled wistfully. "I don't know, if this one's the type, though. We've only been going out for three weeks, now."

Jackie finished her drink and they went in to eat dinner. The food was delicious and they made small talk about Jackie's kids and Carol's job. Jackie seemed to be reluctant to start a discussion about the reason she had called. Carol knew the pattern. A few more drinks and Jackie would pour out her soul.

After dinner, as usual, Jackie dragged her back to the bar. One more drink and she began to get serious.

"I called because I wanted to talk to you about that bastard, Fred. I can't believe what that son-of-a-bitch's did." Jackie stopped for a few seconds. She then explained that Fred had called their daughter, Kelly, and broke the news that he had gotten re-married. Suddenly, she started to sob.

Carol was shocked. Usually, Jackie mentioned Fred with bitterness and venom....not remorse.

"He, uh, uh," Jackie gasped, between sobs. "Um, Uh. He's g...gah....got married...aw...uh.. I.. I.. c.c.c.can't b..b.believe it." she moaned, leaning into Carol's shoulder.

Carol was overwhelmed. She put her arms around Jackie and tried to think. 'What a surprise!' She wasn't prepared for this, at all. She remained silent, comforting her friend. Carol didn't know what to say. She had expected the standard ritual: Jackie would start cussing her Ex; get juiced up; and start talking about her latest sexual escapades.

Usually Jackie would begin bad-mouthing her Ex and then chortle about how she had destroyed the self-esteem of her latest sex partner. Carol knew, Jackie didn't consciously know that

each one-night-stand was her ex-husband, Fred. It was only a year ago, that Carol realized it herself.

Jackie had asked Carol to “come over to talk” at her apartment in Anaheim. Jackie had been drinking and was planning to go to Angelo’s to meet a “Friend.” Carol learned the friend hadn’t been selected yet, but went along with her friend’s need to talk. Jackie had explained how she was wreaking devastation on these civilian men. She’d get drunk and select a candidate who, also, was “three sheets to the wind”. They’d come to her place and she would get them excited with her skills at oral sex. Then “fuck them ‘til we both dropped off the edge,” as Jackie had boasted.

The coup d'grace came later. Jackie would sober up, before dawn, wake up and start screaming. She would rouse up her befogged and bewildered lover. Then with, great satisfaction, toss him, and his clothes, out of her apartment—in that order.

Jackie had been encouraged by Carol’s amused response to her accounts of these “passion plays” and took her into her bedroom. Carol couldn’t believe her eyes as Jackie showed her the notches she was carving into her bedstead. More than two feet of railing, above the headboard, was cut into notches. Carol got an instant feeling of concern. Jackie’s behavior and joy was too weird for Carol to understand. However, months later Carol realized that Jackie was getting even with her ex-husband. It bothered Carol because she knew that Fred neither knew nor cared what Jackie was doing.

Now, Jackie was completely destroyed by her hated Ex’s getting married. Carol shook herself out of her retrospect, “Honey, I know how you must feel after such a long marriage,” trying to understand her friend’s reactions.

“Ho...ho..how c..c..could h..h..he d..d..do that to m..m..me?” Jackie sobbed.

Carol couldn’t respond. She felt too bad, herself. She was thinking, ‘How would she feel if that had happened to her?’ Even after a married life of, well less, than half of Jackie’s, she

was devastated to learn that her husband could leave her. Carol imagined her feelings, if she suddenly heard that he had remarried. ‘How would she react?’ She felt her stomach lurch. ‘My God,’ she thought, ‘I can’t believe he could find anyone who could do for him like I did.’

Suddenly, Carol felt a tremendous emotional sense of empathy for Jackie. ‘We’re just alike, after all,’ Carol realized. ‘We, women, deep, down inside, are all alike. Our men ruin us as potential wives, as caring, stable women, when they walk out on us. What power, they have. And they say that we have the power over them. What a joke! No wonder Jackie's acting so vengeful and bitter,’ she suddenly appreciated.

“Jackie, honey, look at it this way. He’ll probably do the same thing to her. He’s not going to find anyone that was a good as you. It won’t last. Count on it,” Carol said, with energy. She believed it and hoped she could convince her friend.

“Ya..Ya...Ya think so?” Jackie pulled away, slowly and looked into Carol’s eyes. What she saw there seemed to convince her.

“I’d bet my condo on it. You know what that means to me,” Carol chuckled. “Fred's going to remember how much you love him and will always be comparing what he’s got with you,” she said with sincerity. “A wise friend told me. ‘They never forget the mother of their children.’ Rest assured, he’ll be thinking of you, and your love, every time they have a spat.”

Jackie calmed down and they soon were smiling and talking like old times. Several drinks later, when Carol said she had to get home to Kim, Jackie was smiling and back in her groove. As Carol took her leave, Jackie was talking to a bald-headed civilian who had sat down on the other side. Carol smiled to herself, shaking her head in wonder, ‘There's going to be another notch on Jackie’s headboard, tomorrow.’

Carol was deep in thought as she drove home.

She kept thinking about her plan that had gone awry, last Saturday. She wondered if she had misjudged the situation with Rich. The more she thought about it, the more she became

convinced she had, perhaps, miss-read his situation. ‘His divorce was only a few months final. Had she acted too hastily? Had she been too much influenced by her sales training about managing the sales?’ With a flash, of woman's intuition, Carol felt she had tried to “close the sale” too early. She laughed at herself. ‘Rich probably panicked at making a commitment too early. Especially, after so long a marriage and so little time single.’ She chortled to herself, ‘I’ll give him a few weeks on the “Singles’ Scene” and then bump into him again at Valentines.’

She believed a man, Rich’s age, would soon tire of the “bar scene”. Especially, when he saw the women going for the many men younger than Rich. Carol was not over-confident about her appeal to men. She knew who and what she was. She’d had many men single her out for conquest. She had observed the competition. She was aware of the facts. Very few women at Valentines had her looks and figure. She was, also, a successful career woman that any man, in his right mind, would want as a partner.

When she reached home, she yelled up to Kim who answered and asked about Jackie. She assured her that Jackie was the same Jackie they both knew and loved. This gave her an opportunity to think about her friend’s situation and behavior. She remembered how proper Jackie had been during her marriage.

Carol recalled that religion had played an important part in her friend’s life, while she was raising her family. Carol paused to consider the remarkable change that had taken place in Jackie since her husband had left, both, the Air Force and her, in such a short span of time. ‘What were the forces that wrought such a turn-about in her friend’s life? Fred, her husband, was all the family she had after the kids were on their own. Was this an example of an inability to handle a drastic change in life style? No. Look at her own situation. She had taken charge of her life.’ ‘But wait, she had thrown herself into making a living. Jackie worked but got support from Fred. Was this, the difference?’

Carol knew she had no choice but to close that door on her marriage and make her own way. Was Jackie's getting support from her husband a tie that binds? She shook her head. 'Could that have affected Jackie's behavior, so?' She decided to make herself some coffee and to sit at the kitchen table. She wanted to think about this for a while. She might be able to learn from her friend's situation.

Carol had learned, early on, in her Real Estate sales training, to hold "Post-mortems". Those self-critiques where you reviewed lost sales, after the fact. She was quick to realize the benefits to her commissions that thinking through all aspects of previous failures she had suffered. She made more money using this invaluable learning tool. She put on the coffee and sat at the table, remembering the many clients she had known over the past ten years. Carol recalled the various single people she knew. Her Real Estate job had given her the chance to meet many people selling their homes, after a major change in their lives. She made it a practice to stay in touch with clients.

It was a widely known fact that, in Southern California, people changed homes about every three and a half years. She had a wide circle of contacts she kept up. Some were divorced, others widows. She realized that the few widowers she had known over the last few years had re-married after varying periods. They had no trouble re-assuming the life-style to which they were accustomed.

Most of the widows were still single. She decided to file that realization away for further review. A practice she had learned during a seminar on "Organizing Your Time", which she had attended, more than once.

The other divorced people she knew, seemed to fall into two, main categories: Active Adjusters and Passive Adjusters. Actives took charge of their situation, as she had done. The others seemed to go with the flow and sat back waiting to see what came along.

Jackie seemed to be like the second group, she thought. 'Did that explain the dramatic change in her friend's attitude about sex?'

Carol wondered, suddenly. She got up and poured out a cup of coffee, thinking about her friend. A thought flashed into her mind. ‘For that matter, Carol,’ she said to herself, ‘What about my “new” attitude? My divorce has sure changed me. Look at my arrangement with Chuck and Adele at the office?’ She realized, ‘Anyone who new the full story, would think I was a bigger weirdo than Jackie.’ She suddenly recalled how she had felt so uncomfortable when Adele had asked to accompany her on a walk-thru of one of her new listings. She was sure her sexual interludes with Chuck, on such listing reviews, were unknown to anyone. Adele’s friendliness and consideration at the office was proof of that, she knew.

She had Adele follow her to a new listing she had secured from a previous client. They had met at the house. She had gotten the lock box key and was waiting inside when Adele pulled up in front. The clients had already moved to a larger home. They were anxious to sell this house in Anaheim Hills, as the market had gone up, so they would make over forty thousand dollars profit.

Adele was extremely pleasant and affectionate as she told Carol how great it was to have a sales person get the listing on this newer, four-bedroom home.

Four years ago, in 1983, listings were much harder to acquire. People were not moving out of their homes as much as a few years earlier. The listing they visited was one of many Carol was to secure through her own efforts. She had walked, with Adele, arm and arm, looking through the empty rooms. The entire house was carpeted in a deep pile rug and the spaciousness was awesome. Adele had asked how she had secured the listing and she had explained her practice of making friends with the wife and keeping in touch, using Christmas Cards.

Adele responded, “You’re really a bright, vivacious woman. You know that, of course, don’t you, Carol?”

“Thank you, Adele. I consider that a real compliment coming from someone I admire like I do, you,” Carol replied with sincerity.

“How does someone as attractive and sexy looking as you, stay single, so long, Carol? I know you don’t go out often, and you don’t have a boyfriend. How do you keep from climbing the walls? Or do you have a vibrator?” Adele asked with a laugh.

Carol had looked at her and smiled. She could see Adele's eyes weren't smiling, just her mouth. “I just keep busy in the Business and spend the rest of my time with my daughter,” she had replied, feeling a bit uneasy.

“That’s a shame, Honey,” Adele had responded. “Don’t you miss the hugs and cuddling you can get from someone who cares for you? Don’t you miss the wonderful pleasure of sex?”

Carol could see, from the corner of her eye that Adele was looking at her strangely. Without thinking, she responded, “When I think about it, I call... uh, collect my thoughts and make it go out of my mind and do something else.”

She had nearly said she would call “someone.” ‘Damn me I’m talking to his wife,’ she had berated herself with several moments of mental whippings. Adele had moved closer to her and put her arms around her waist, pressing her ample bosom against Carol’s back.

Carol froze. She had thought to herself, ‘My God, what now? This is Chuck’s wife, here.’

Adele then laid her head on Carol’s shoulder and whispered, “I’m like you. I miss the cuddling and affection from someone I care a lot for. Chuck’s too much all business most of the time.”

Carol got hold of herself. She stood perfectly still as Adele started nuzzling her neck. Her mind began to race, thinking of what Adele was looking for. She had felt a tingling in her thighs as Adele’s lips moved up to her earlobe. She began to tingle all over when Adele had put her tongue into her ear. She sighed audibly and Adele moved her hands up to enclose Carol's breasts. Adele made a sucking sound with her lips and the words, ‘Oh what the hell...’ had jumped into Carol's mind from somewhere deep inside. They sank, together to the floor. As

they twisted together, Adele had kissed her with such heat that she could feel her nipples harden to Adele's fondling caress.

That had been the first time she had felt the magic of a vibrator. Adele had brought two battery vibrators and showed Carol the wonderful skill of a woman who knew how and where to use it.

Now, looking back, Carol was amazed how a man and a woman, like Chuck and Adele, could work, live, and sleep together and yet be so distant from each other's needs.

She got up to get another cup of coffee, remembering.

Adele was a little over fifty, four years ago. She probably had lost her attractiveness to Chuck as her plumpness was then becoming dross fat. Now, both of them needed her.

Carol smiled at the nature of their "arrangements." Two or three times a month, one or the other would ask her to go on an "inspection."

She knew her job was secure for as long as she wanted. She was making them both money to boot. Carol smiled to herself, 'My income has really been helped by my change in attitude about sex.' Another thought struck a responsive chord somewhere in her mind. 'A change in attitude about sex was something most divorced people experience,' she suddenly realized.

'Look at Jackie. A proper, religious mother of three becomes a tart when she divorces. How strange! Is it the divorce, or the time of life?' she wondered. Her mind jumped from person to person in her recent past.

'The older the person was, the more uninhibited sexually,' she recalled. 'If they had hang-ups, the sexual reluctance seem to disappear with age. Men like Chuck and Rich seemed to be more relaxed and casual. They seemed to enjoy it more than the younger men. It must be,' Carol mused, 'that younger guys still link sex to marriage and children.'

'My God!' She nearly jumped out of her skin. 'That's got to be it. The older guys have had their families and responsibilities

which were brought about through sex. They don't have the mental hang-ups that the younger men feel,' she concluded.

Carol felt like she had a light come on in her head. A curtain was raised on the "Singles' Scene" and her situation. She could see more clearly, now. She was surprised. She had received an insight, through deliberate thought about others. Not self-examination, but a knowledge learned by remembering other people and their behavior. What a high she felt at that moment.

Just then the phone rang. It was Kelly, Jackie's oldest daughter. She was calling from the hospital. She had come home early from work and stopped by her mother's place. She had wanted to talk to her mother about her father's unexpected re-marriage. She found the door open and going inside found her mother on the bed, with an empty bottle of sleeping pills. "The doctor says, she'll be all right in a few days. They don't want to let her go home until they're sure she won't try it again," Kelly reported.

Carol said she was coming right there and for Kelly to wait for her. She wanted to be there when her friend woke up. Driving to the hospital, she thought of Jackie. Of how different people react to the changes that are forced onto them by the shattering experience of divorce. 'Men seem to bounce back faster than do women,' Carol reflected. 'They use their jobs or their appeal to other desperate women....Sex... to create new situations they are comfortable with. They adapt rapidly to fill their needs. But, the same is true of women who have experienced these things. Jackie uses her body to fill needs that she isn't even aware of, when she's sober. Let me see. What others, I know, have done the same?' she whispered to herself.

'Christ, almighty,' she nearly exploded, 'I do! Look at me and my bosses. I've totally changed from when I was married. I go to Valentines and don't think a thing about waltzing to bed, trying to find someone to share my life. I must be blind that I didn't see this before.'

Carol decided that most people don't even know why they are so hung up about sex. 'It has to be the time of life of the person,' she reasoned. 'The young kids are too ignorant of the major

obligations that can result from sex. The “Twenties” and “Thirties” think of the obligations and are intimidated by them. The older people have lived through them and are in no fear of undergoing those experiences again. Today with the pill and abortion readily available, more mature people can use things they didn’t have when they were young, to avoid the familiar problems of those younger.’

She smiled to herself, ‘They know that no sane person, over forty, wants to re-live the times and mental burdens of family and children. They look to sex for pleasure and have no hang-ups.’

Carol was amazed at herself. Somewhat awed by the result of her brainstorming, with herself, she started feeling better in spite of her friend's problems.

‘I wonder if Jackie will stand still for talking about this when she’s feeling better?’ Carol reflected. ‘Tomorrow, I’ll use this re-evaluation to organize a plan to attract Rich or someone like him,’ she thought as she pulled into the hospital parking lot.

CHAPTER SEVEN

Wednesday, Rich was at Valentines at nine. Tasha had called Tuesday evening, to his pleasant surprise, to confirm their meeting between nine and half past. As he took his usual place at the corner, the male bartender came over saying, “Hi, I’m Victor. Are you Rich? Dotty says you take a tall vodka and tonic, right?”

“You’re a good crew, here,” Rich smiled, as he shook the bartender’s outstretched hand. “That’s right, on both counts. Nice to meet you.”

His drink appeared, as if by magic and he put his dollar on the far ledge. “Thanks, Victor. I’m getting to be a ‘regular,’ I guess,” he smiled.

Victor patted the bar top and smiled back, “Thanks, Rich.”

From that time on, whenever the bartenders saw him come in, his V & T would be there when he took his “station.”

The band started playing a few minutes later and Rich noticed only two couples started to dance. Dotty was right. Week nights were the times to come to dance. Men outnumbered the women about three to one. He was glad that he had a date. He wondered if Tasha was as good as her implied promise. ‘Would she really show up?’ he asked himself. ‘This single life is looking better, all the time,’ he smiled to himself.

After two drinks, about a twenty-five after nine, he motioned to Victor, who came right over.

“Another V & T, Rich?” he asked.

“I’m expecting a friend who drinks Cutty and water. I have to go to the head, so would you get mine and hers? I’ll be back in a minute,” Rich replied.

When Rich came back through the bar’s entrance, he saw Tasha talking to Victor. He hesitated as he saw a younger man walk up and ask Tasha to dance. He watched from across the room as she smiled at the requester and declined. Rich was pleased and as he

walked around the bar, Tasha saw him coming. She walked a few steps to meet him with a warm embrace and a wide kiss of more than welcome.

“You’re so thoughtful,” she whispered into his ear, “...having the bartender watch out for me. With my drink ready and everything. I’m going to love being with you,” she added.

Rich felt the double meaning of her words, “being with you”, stir his loins. He pressed against her, saying, “I’m not used to meeting women in bars. I hoped you wouldn’t get picked off, before I got back.”

Tasha giggled, “You’re hard to forget. And it’s getting harder by the minute.”

Rich laughed appreciatively, “Let’s go sit down with our drinks, before I make a spectacle of myself.”

After claiming a table next to the dance floor, Rich asked, “Are you always so straight-forward? I really like that.”

“We’re both too old to waste time, like young lovers do,” Tasha replied, with a smile. “I’d given up on meeting someone like you. These places are filled with jerks. I know a good thing when I find it.” She put her arms around him and fondled his left ear lobe. “You turn me on,” she whispered into his other ear. Her breath was warm and her embrace was very erotic, as she nuzzled his neck.

Rich was being swept off his feet by this outgoing woman. He began to get aroused, further.

“If you keep this up, I’m liable to go off in my uniform,” he chuckled.

Tasha laughed unselfconsciously, “You’re pretty up-front, yourself. Do you want to dance here or at your place? It’s really too loud here to talk.”

“Let’s sit here a minute, ‘til I’m more relaxed,” Rich laughed. “I don’t want to walk out now. I didn’t bring a hat to hold in front of me.”

Tasha giggled, “You’re really a silver tongued-devil. You’re too fast for me.”

Rich smiled but didn’t respond. He was reading things into everything she said. He wondered why she was so aggressive. He thought, ‘I better watch out. This is too good to be true.’ After a minute, he asked, “What did you mean, the other night, when you mentioned a bad experience, made you cautious?”

Tasha hesitated. “I was going with a guy I thought was a ‘class act.’ He turned out to be one of those dominant types, you hear about. He gave me a bad time. I couldn’t break it off,” she replied, studying Rich's reactions to her words.

“How long did you know him,” he asked, soberly.

“I asked him to dance, here at Valentines, and we started dating. We went together for eight months,” she said slowly and thoughtfully. “That was a year ago. I haven’t gone out with anyone, since.”

“It affected you that much?” he asked.

“I had to go to a shrink, for several months. The relationship was so bad. He used sex as a weapon on me. He knew I liked what he did for me. Like that song says, “He was a man with slow hands.”

“I must be ignorant,” Rich replied. “I don’t follow you.”

She was silent for several seconds, worrying about his reaction. She decided she better find out, now, if Rich was a prude, or not.

“The shrink, a woman, convinced me that it was the vibrator I was hooked on, not him,” she said, somewhat hesitantly. “He batted me around and threatened to show my family a video he took of us making love, if I didn’t watch out. He’d withhold his lovemaking for the slightest thing I did, he didn’t like. I had a hard time getting away from him. He was my last chance at love, I thought at the time. I was very lonely for a couple of years before that, after my last marriage.”

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“I can appreciate that,” Rich replied. “I was really reluctant to even ask someone I didn’t know, to dance. It’s got to be much rougher for a woman.”

Tasha continued, “When you’re over fifty, you either ask, or get hustled by the younger guys. Men have had the advantage all along. They don’t ask anyone they don’t want to dance with. We refuse one guy, even if he’s a jerk, and everyone else is afraid to ask. The guys, your age, always ask the younger women. I noticed you don’t, how come?” Tasha asked.

Rich smiled, “Like I said, I would rather ask someone who might have more experience, than I. You’re a good looking woman. No wonder you were married three times.”

“That doesn’t bother you does it?” she asked.

“Not at all. It does make me concerned, though,” Rich laughed. “I’ve always believed women are much, more clever than men, when it comes to a relationship. I don’t think any man would leave a clever woman; unless the woman wants to let him go. Marriage or love affair, the woman can keep it going as long as she wants. When she quits wanting to, it’s all over.” Rich smiled at her surprised look. “I’ve never heard a man say anything like that, before,” Tasha smiled appreciatively. “You really think that?”

“I’ve had a long time to observe a lot of people,” Rich smiled. “I’ve always watched couples who don’t seem to go together. Usually one is a real jerk. If it’s the woman, she always seems to be a jerk, when the man’s not around. The woman will handle the jerk, she’s got, like no one else can,” he laughed.

Tasha laughed with him. “I never thought of it that way. I know some couples just like that,” she admitted, shaking her head. “You’re different from anyone I ever met. Can we leave now or are you still indisposed?”

“Our talk has made me very relaxed. I don’t need my hat, now,” he laughed.

As they walked out, Rich noticed the stained glass door at the entrance. He wondered why he hadn't, before now. There was a small image of two red hearts with a gold arrow through them in the center. He hoped it was a sign of good portent.

"I'm parked over there," Tasha smiled. "I'll follow you." She pulled Rich into her arms, adding, "Don't drive off and leave me, now."

Her kiss belied her words. No one would ever let someone who could kiss with such hot promise, out of his sight. When their embrace lasted to a point where Rich's blood started to thump in his ears, he pulled back saying, "Baby, I'm going to lock bumpers and pull you home."

Tasha giggled, "You won't be sorry."

The drive home was more relaxed than the first, with Carol. Rich felt more sure of himself. Rich had planned to put on a Neil Diamond record and fix her a drink. He had gotten a bottle of Cutty Sark, anticipating a short session of petting and small talk. He was looking for some closeness and cuddling foreplay. He found out otherwise.

Rich was waiting as she pulled up and parked. He opened the car door and he helped her out. She surged into his arms. They were locked in a passionate clutch until Tasha whispered, "Let's go to bed. I want to please you."

'My God,' Rich thought to himself, 'Am I dreaming or is this the image of the woman, I've been visualizing, all these months?'

They walked, locked together, towards the stairwell. Rich spoke to her softly, "Don't expect to much. Your take home pay is probably more than mine, after the tribute I pay my ex-wife."

His concern was unfounded. When they walked in the door, she glanced around after he switched on the light, saying, "I love this. This is a man's lair, for sure. You're what I've been hoping to meet for years, a man who lives like a man, not like his wife used to."

Rich helped her out of her jacket. He removed his and turned to ask her about the record he would play.

Again, she pressed into his arms. Her embrace was more demanding, this time, Tasha repeated, her wants more urgently, "Let's go to bed, I want to make love."

'My God,' Rich thought to himself. 'Am I dreaming or is this the woman of my dreams?'

She enfolded his neck with her arms and gave him her open mouth and tongue with such heat he started backing down the hallway, towards the bedroom, without hesitation. He lowered her to the bed. She was still exploring his throat with her darting tongue. As he turned to the side to avoid falling on her, she started pulling his coat from his shoulders. He reached around her waist and undid the buttons on her blouse.

It seemed only seconds and they had writhed out of their clothes, lying together, side by side on the bed. She whispered into his ear, "You know, penetration really doesn't do anything for a woman."

Her lancing tongue, flicking in and out of his left ear, brought understanding, along with the searing flame that he felt in his loins. Rich started kissing her breasts and caressed her between the legs with gentle, loving strokes of his slender fingers. Slowly, his kisses descended her firm torso to join the strokes with fondling lips. He nuzzled her inner thighs as she lay back and writhed in pleasure. He moved his torrid tongue up her right thigh.

"Oh, that's it. Higher, higher, there, right there. Oh..Oh.. faster, faster, .more, Oh.more," she murmured. "Oh...that's.....fantastic,there..there,do it faster....Oh, it's been so long."

She grabbed his head and pressed his mouth to her muff so his tongue could more firmly stroke her throbbing valley and its erect tenant. After a few minutes, she pulled him up to her breasts, saying, "I'm netting numb there, Honey. Do that to

these.” She pressed his face between her firm breasts with their erect nipples.

“With pleasure, Luv,” Rich murmured. “I can’t believe how young your body is. You’ve got the best boobs I’ve seen in years,” he chuckled.

“They ought to be,” Tasha giggled. “They cost me three grand and a lot of pain.”

Rich laughed, “I wondered how a mother of four could be like this. They’re marvelous,” he said as he enclosed each nipple with the tips of his fingers, stroking up and down, gently. Tasha reached down to stroke his manhood, standing at attention, impatiently awaiting its turn. “You’ve got a glorious dick,” she murmured. “Let me kiss it.” She pushed him over and started kissing his chest. She moved her searching lips down his firm stomach, licking the light colored column of hair that led to his rounded stele. She ran her tongue up his erect column and licked her darting tongue around the firm collar of the tip. Rich moaned with pleasure as she engulfed the end with her hot mouth, moving up and down in time with her right hand stroking his length. She moved faster, suckling him with sounds that drove him frantic.

“Oh, that’s it. Oh... Baby, that’s it. Faster, now.. .Oh.. I’ve never felt like this before. Oh, that’s wonderful. I don’t want to end this. Keep doing that. There, there, there it comes.”

Tasha kept moving at the rapid pace until she could feel his engorged rod, pulse with that unmistakable rhythm. She moved more slowly, engulfing him with her throat; Pressing her mouth all the way down, to the base of his shaft. She kept it up until she felt his body quiver and relax. She looked into his eyes. He had been watching her wonderful technique. She lifted her head, grasping his probe in her two hands, “Did I please you?” she smiled into his eyes, questioning the known.

“Baby, that’s something I’ll never forget, no matter what. You are the realization of a dream,” Rich smiled lovingly. Tasha smiled and then looked down to her hands and their captive.

“My God,” she gasped. “I can barely get one hand around it. You’re still hard as a rock. How big are you?”

“You are so exciting,” he replied. “I’d love to fuck you and get you off like you did me.”

Tasha arose and straddled his loins. She guided his erection into her body. She murmured, “Oh, it’s so big. Let me do it.” Pushing her hands down to his hips, she kept him from lifting his swollen column into her as urgently as he might want. She moved slowly from side to side and guided it into her warm abyss.

He lay back, entranced by her wriggling endeavors to enjoy his body, as he had enjoyed her demanding mouth.

She began to move her torso more and more. Her breathing became faster, now. He watched her face in the half light coming from the living room. Her eyes were closed and her face looked as if she were being transported to another plane. Tasha began to moan in time with her writhing hips. The combination of her...the sounds, her movements brought Rich to a peak of desire that was irresistible. He began to attempt to restrain himself. He didn’t want this to end. She began to wriggle up and down faster and faster. She let out a small wail and he exploded into her body with his all. She gasped and collapsed onto his chest. Her firm breasts pressing against his abdomen. They were utterly enthralled with each other.

Several minutes went by and then Rich asked, “Did I please you, Luv?”

Tasha murmured, “I’ve never gotten off like that, before. You must be the biggest cock I’ve ever ridden,” she giggled. “I want to measure you when I get you to my house sometime.”

Rich was silent. He had a hard time with himself and her obviously more, extensive sexual experience. He didn’t say anything for several minutes. He began to chide himself, in his mind. ‘She’d been married three times. She’s over fifty. Did I think she was a virgin, like my wife had been?’ He felt like a fool.

They rolled to their sides and continued to lie entwined and engulfed in the wonder of their pleasure in each other. Neither spoke for several minutes. Rich wondered at his own attitude. He had been sure he had a wonderful sex life, during his marriage. How naive young people are, when they fall in love so young. He had never had another woman before his wife. How could he have been so sure that she was his life-mate?

Now, at fifty-three, he found that more than one woman could join with him and enjoy sex to the full. He wondered if his wife had ever done so. He couldn't remember her ever having looked as ecstatic as had Carol or Tasha. No one could have looked more carried away, than Tasha had just been. He thought that many people must be missing the real truth about relationships.

'What a cruel joke life plays on most of us,' he marveled. 'True love, like I had enjoyed with my wife, made sex wonderful. Now, I know loving-sex can be even more wonderful, if there are no hang-ups, gimme's, or fears of pregnancy. What a terrific discovery.'

Tasha was amazed at her own reactions. She had been with lots of men. Not one had stayed up after one of her blowjobs. Their dicks had collapsed limp, like deflated balloons. A couple of the younger ones had stayed hard for several minutes but couldn't get off twice. She was fascinated by Rich. He was older than the others, except her first husband, who had been five years older. But their married sex was a limp imitation of this.

The second husband was a motorcycle club'ber and had initiated her into oral sex. When he found out how much she liked sex, he had used it against her, making her do exotic and pornographic things for him and his friends, before he would gratify her needs. He had been killed after seven months of exciting and uninhibited marital sex. The third was a marriage of convenience and mutual need---misguided and mistaken mutual need. He thought she would sell her house to pay off his ex-wife's claims on his estate. She had thought he was independently wealthy. He had lived on a large estate in Anaheim Hills.

Tasha was thinking to herself, 'How can I ever get this guy to Number Four? Do I want to be married, again? I know how to get men to want my body. Can I get this one to want me, for me? He seems too sharp to fool. He might not want me. I better go slow.' After several minutes, Tasha whispered, "You asleep?"

Rich chuckled, "No I was thinking about you. You're a fantastic lover. Are you for real?"

"I was doing the same. I think that's eerie. I was wondering the same about you," Tasha said earnestly. "Are you for real?"

"We're both over fifty. Do you think we can fool each other, at our age?" Rich asked as he fondled her breasts. "I'll admit these two fooled me." They laughed together, this time.

Tasha responded, "That's why I told you before you started sucking them. I was afraid you might taste silicone," she giggled.

Rich laughed delightedly, "I love your sense of humor. We're going to get along well. As long as you stay as up-front as your boobs."

She rolled to her side and grabbed his face pulling it to hers for a long and wide kiss. Pulling him down to put his mouth at her breasts, she said, "They'll always be up-front for you. They love your mouth."

Rich started kissing them gently, first one, then the other. He could feel the soft nipples start to rise against his fondling tongue. As they came erect, her reactions kindled the embers in his loins. Soon her heat had his sentinel standing, as if to find the source of the simmering lust.

Feeling that demanding hardness against her legs, Tasha exclaimed, "You're incredible. I'm going to finish you off, once and for all."

She squirmed around to lay with her knees a' straddle his head, murmuring, as if to herself, "I really like going sixty-nine. It really turns me on." She took his formidable member in both hands. She started fondling the tip of his dick with her lips.

He put his hands between her legs and spread her feminine folds to reveal her pleasure spot. His tongue kept time with the up and down movement of her head as he stroked her clitoris with his tongue. They were lost in the wonder of each other. Time seemed to stand still. Their mutual needs demanded a shared climax.

Tasha moaned as she reared back, pressing against his questing mouth. She shrieked with pleasure, "There, there, there it is."

Her throbbing thighs excited Rich as she renewed her loving suckling sounds and oral moves on his penis. She pushed her mouth all the way down to his base and fondled him under his scrotum with her fingers. He felt the mushroom cloud of ecstasy as she took his length into her welcoming throat. He could feel his pulsations echoed in the rhythmic drumming of her enfolding womanhood on his lips. This time he was transported to that pleasure palace where she waited with her glorious throne of desire. She engulfed his being with her passionate embrace. They were one.

As she wriggled around to lie atop his body, Rich embraced Tasha, as if he could never let her go. Several minutes passed as they lay together.

Tasha whispered, "Let's get under the covers. I don't go to work until one, tomorrow."

Rich glance at the clock. It was only eleven-thirty. He couldn't believe so much pleasure could be crammed into less than one hour.

Rich woke at seven-thirty. He looked at Tasha curled up and sound asleep at his side. A tremendous feeling came over him. He was startled at his reactions. 'I better watch myself,' he thought, wonderingly, 'Am I falling in love or is this lust?' He decided to go with the flow and see where it took them. He reminded himself, 'Time will make it better, if it's good, or make it worse if it's bad.'

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Tasha awakened as he was staring at her. She smiled as she saw him. ‘You are real! I was sure I had dreamt you up,’ she giggled.

Rich leaned over and kissed her saying, ‘You’re an enchantress. I woke up thinking the same thing.’

She returned his kiss and then gently pushed him away, saying, ‘I better watch out for you, or I’ll never leave this bed. I’ve been on a diet when it comes to sex. I don’t want to gorge myself. Even though, I’m tempted. What time is it?’

Pointing to the clock behind her, he replied, ‘It’s seven-thirty. Want some coffee?’

‘That would be divine. Will you make it or shall I?’ she replied.

‘For a sexual athlete like you, I’ll bring it to you here, in bed,’ he smiled as he got out of bed. ‘First, I want to look at you naked, in the light,’ he laughed as he pulled the covers up to reveal her golden wedge and rounded curves.

‘Christ, but you’ve a body of a woman ten years younger. How do you do it? And you are a natural red head,’ he laughed.

Tasha lay there and enjoyed his obvious pleasure at her display.

‘You better go get the coffee,’ she smiled, showing mock alarm as she pointed to his arousal indicator, which was firming up. ‘Take that away or I’ll never get home,’ she giggled as he started to get back in bed.

Reluctantly, Rich went to the closet and got his beach robe. He threw his spare bathrobe on the bed. ‘Coffee coming up in ten minutes,’ he laughed as he headed for the kitchen. After coffee, Tasha suggested that Rich come to her house for breakfast. She explained that her two grown kids would be off to work at eight and they would have the morning to themselves. Rich was quick to agree as his only appointment that day was at three.

Rich followed, to her home, off Fairmont, in Yorba Linda Estates. He was impressed with the location, on a hill which

gave a view of the Santa Ana River and the Anaheim Hills, across the valley.

Entering the house, Rich saw a sunken living room with white plush carpet that had a pile that looked three inches deep. There was a large bay window framed in off-white drapes with golden threaded designs of fleur-de-lis. Near the window was a baby grand piano. The couch in the corner opposite the window was curved around the two walls. A TV console and a stereo were situated across the room from the couch. To Rich, the room looked like a professional had designed it.

He told Tasha, “You have a beautiful home here. Have you been here long?”

“Thanks, Honey,” she smiled, “I sold the house, my first left me, when it had tripled in value. It was in Avocado Estates and the acre and house really shot up in value. That was ten years ago. This was one of the first homes in this tract of custom homes. My payments are only eight hundred a month,” she smiled.

“My God,” Rich exclaimed. “I pay six hundred for my two bedroom apartment. You’re a shrewd buyer. This is worth more than a quarter of a ‘mil’ now.”

“I know. My third husband had it appraised and on the market before I realized, he only married me for my house. And I thought he was well off. He lived on an estate in the Anaheim Hills Ranches. He owed his wife over a hundred grand and expected me to stand still for his maneuver. He was single again two months later. I fixed his wagon,” she smiled with satisfaction.

“See. I told you, women were more clever than men,” Rich laughed.

Tasha, laughing, asked, “What do you like better bacon or ham with your eggs? And how do you like them?”

Rich chose bacon and eggs-over-easy. He followed her into the kitchen, where she cooked then both a solid breakfast. Rich enjoyed the small talk about Tasha’s two kids. The twenty eight year old was just divorced four months ago. The twenty-four

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year old girl worked for Western Airlines at Orange County Airport.

After breakfast, Rich helped clean up the dishes, as he learned Tasha was the pianist in the family, having started lessons when eight years old. Her Russian parents sacrificed a lot to send their only child to weekly lessons. She was a very devoted daughter, he was to learn.

Tasha suggested he sit in the living room while she had her shower. He had showered at his apartment, after coffee. He learned that she took three times as long, however. He was standing at the stereo, looking at her albums when she came up behind him, so quietly, it startled him. He could smell the perfumed soap she used as she put her arms around his waist and gave him a firm hug.

“You smell like a fresh blossom,” he chuckled as he twisted to wrap his arms around her. They kissed for a long time.

“You know what I’ve been thinking?” he asked.

“I can guess. You’re a devil,” she smiled.

“No, I was hoping you’d play something for me. I always wished I had taken piano lessons. My older brother was the only one my parents could afford to send,” Rich explained. “Will you?”

She stepped back and studied his face. “I haven’t played for anyone in years,” she explained shyly. “If it will please you, I’ll try.”

Rich was amazed at how young Tasha looked standing there in her bathrobe and slippers. Her golden red hair was pulled back in a pony tail and she was striking with her pale lipstick and subtle eye make-up. She looked like a freshly scrubbed younger sister of the woman he had met at Valentines. “It would please me very much. Play what ever you want. I’ll sit on the couch over there and be quiet,” Rich replied.

He sat down as Tasha pulled out the bench and raised the lid of the piano. He was startled by the way the sunlight coming through the bay window made her appear. The bathrobe became translucent and her hair became iridescent as the light caught her movements. She appeared to be wearing a golden helmet.

She began playing DeBussey's, *Claire de Lune*. Slowly at first, then she seemed to gain confidence and her timing accentuated the striking rhapsody.

Rich sat on the couch and was fascinated by the magical, melodious, portrait Tasha made against the light. She was a sight he would never forget, he was sure. She finished the piece and turned to look at Rich. He was silent. Too awe-struck to speak.

"Well, I told you I was rusty. Did you like it?" she asked softly, as she rose and came towards him.

He got up from the couch and met her, smiling silently. He put his arms around her and his mouth found her welcoming lips. He reached around and over her shoulder to inside her robe. He caressed her naked breast, stroking the nipple which hardened immediately. He slid his lips around her cheek and whispered in her ear, "That really turned me on. I've never had such a reaction to music. You're too wonderful to resist."

He hadn't realized he had become instantaneously erect. It was pushing into her lower stomach, demandingly. Tasha began stroking his manhood and with her other hand slid his zipper down. She pulled him down to the carpet and slid her hands to free his erection from his clothes. She gasped as she saw his instrument.

She blurted out, without a thought, "You're gorgeous. In the light, it's enormous. I couldn't see it clear last night, only feel its length, not its size," she gasped. "I'm going to eat it, all."

Rich blew away into a world of supreme ecstasy. Her loving lips drew his soul into a state of rhapsody more wonderful than the music she had just rendered. Her fondling and caressing mouth was an instrument of pleasure to his vibrating tuning rod. Rich

blasted one great chord which Tasha seemed to get as much pleasure from as he. A moment later, she got up, saying, "Don't move. I'll be right back." Rich was puzzled but a minute later she came back with a fabric tape measure. "Hold still. I want to see your size," she giggled. She placed the tape-end on his lower abdomen at the base of his erection. "My God," she said, slowly, "It's nearly as big as Lenny's." She started to laugh with pleasure, saying, "No wonder you got me off so fast. It's gigantic."

Rich was put off. He was silent for a few seconds then he asked, "Do you make a practice of measuring men's cocks? Who's Lenny?"

Seeing his obvious distemper, Tasha thought fast, "Now don't get touchy, Honey. Remember I was married three times. You knew I was experienced." She giggled as she explained, "Lenny is our pet burro. You'd make him envious."

Rich chuckled and eased off on the trigger. "Yeah, Baby, you're in a class by yourself. I've never had such head. I wouldn't even dream I could get off so many times in one day. Where did you learn that?"

Tasha smiled coyly, "You just get me carried away. I'll do anything to please you. I said that before, didn't I?"

"You've got me scared, Baby. I think I'm falling in love with you. I promised myself, I'd never do that again," Rich said, shaking his head.

Tasha laughed with pleasure. "I don't want anything from you but your bod'," she giggled. "Let's leave it at that and enjoy each other."

Rich was astounded. She was either the most, clever woman he had ever met or she was a genie. He decided to try to learn more by listening and hoped he wouldn't succumb to her magic.

When Rich left Tasha's, he felt a sense of relief that she had more family duties for the weekend. Tasha had tried to convince him to go to her parents' for Sunday dinner, a weekly ritual, for

this only child, He declined, saying he had to go to his son's house for his grand-daughter's third birthday. Actually, Rich had wanted to get some time away from this sexy siren. He worried about his feelings, for her, which had to be sorted out. Also, he had told Ann and Linda, he would see them at Valentines, tonight.

He felt a bit guilty about that and got aggravated at himself. He, also wanted to meet the "Inga and Al" group Saturday. To absolve himself, he asked Tasha to go to dinner and a movie, Friday. She said she had to work but would like him to come over to meet her kids, later Friday. He had agreed to see her and asked, "Will they be home on a Friday night?"

Tasha had replied, "We can watch TV or something, until they get home." Her smile and direct look into his eyes made Rich read a double meaning into the word, "something". He returned her smile and said, "I would enjoy meeting your kids and I'm always ready for 'something', where you're concerned."

Tasha's goodbye kiss told Rich he had read her right. He was looking forward to Friday, for another reason as well. Her kids were something he wanted to check out. He felt he could learn a lot about Tasha, by meeting her children. He had agreed to see her about ten-thirty.

CHAPTER EIGHT

On the way home from Tasha's, Rich was deep in thought. He was trying to convince himself, that Tasha was a better candidate than Carol. He felt, sure, Carol was doing the right thing, even if, she might have made a sudden turn-about in her decision to "commit to another...."

He decided to think about something else. 'Carol was too young, for me, anyhow; that was strike one. Having a teen-ager, at home, was strike two. Carol's coolness on our dates and her actions, at Valentines last Saturday, made that strike three and out, as far I'm concerned,' he told himself.

He forced his mind back to his trouble on the computer problem he had worked on, for every spare minute, this past week. Rich had interviewed the client's PC Manager, Wilson Wong, about the sequence of events, leading up to the strange performance of the three PC's, which were being used by Sierra's Accounting and Purchasing Department.

All their current software programs would run fine, but anything written in Basic would generate a Syntax Error, when execution was attempted. These same Basic programs ran fine on other PC's in the company.

The client, Sierra Springs Water, had been adding PC's to their operations for the past six months. They had a total of fifty three PC's and had retained Rich to design a delivery and route accounting system that could be used by their fleet of delivery trucks. The last three PC's they had ordered were furnished with a later version of Microsoft's MS-DOS than that used by the other departments. These three were the last IBM PC-AT's to be ordered from their supplier, Compumart, an IBM dealer.

Any future purchases of PC's were to be assigned to another vendor, PC's-Plus, now that prices were so much lower on IBM Clones. Rich wasn't sure if the new version of MS-DOS was a factor in the malfunction of the PC's, or not. He was to learn, later, that it had nothing at all to do with the problem. The virus could affect either IBM's PC-DOS or Microsoft's MS-DOS—

any version. Rich had asked that a list, an actual sequence of events, showing in what order the software was loaded, and by whom, be compiled for the three PC's. He told them, he also needed a directory listing of software on each PC and the dates of installation. He asked that they print out a file listing for each directory and subdirectory in each PC, as a source document. He wanted the listing in the long form, showing file dates of creation.

Wilson, the PC Manager, had assured Rich that the machines' hard drives were formatted and loaded with software by himself, personally. The new version of MS-DOS was only used in the Accounting and Purchasing functions, so the machines were delivered with hard disks, unformatted. Rich made a list of the DOS files from each machine, onto a low density disk, labeled, "Corrupted".

This was important, as the files could be corrupted by the virus, when copied to this disk. He would use this on his XT Clone which was to be the "lab specimen" at home. Putting a subdirectory for each machine on another floppy, he copied the boot files for each machine to its own directory. His file-directory manager software could copy hidden system files.

There were only three standard software packages on the machines; A spreadsheet, a word processor, and a file manager. Those three existed on all other PC's in the firm.

The new PC's had the three standard pieces of software, along with an accounting package, and a project management application.

In addition to the corrupted DOS software, Wilson had loaned him the original DOS Diskette, used to load the three new PC's. This was to be his starting point. The other software programs would be searched, if the Operating System files were okay.

Rich reached home as he completed this mental synopsis. The previous few days had been a very intriguing experience. He had formulated in his mind, a procedure which he would use as soon as got in his door.

He immediately started to work on backing up his AT Clone so he could load the new MS-DOS Diskette. He installed the new system, or boot files, by using the FDisk routine. He found that his AT was not infected by the DOS System Disk. This told him the new MS-DOS was not the carrier—unless his AT machine got infected later. A virus time bomb could do that.

He reminded himself not to use any low density disks from his XT-Clone, on his AT, write-protected or not. He loaded his luggable XT Clone from the diskette he had labeled, “Corrupted”.

Earlier, he had backed up and low-level-formatted its ten megabyte hard drive, completely clearing the disk. He did a DOS Format to load only the system files. While the ten megabyte hard drive was formatting, he turned in for the night. He would copy the Command.Com file, from the corrupted disk, in the morning.

The next morning, after first copying the Command File, Rich checked the file sizes, on both machines. It was, here, that he found that the XT Clone showed only 635 KBytes of Ram Memory, available.

Checking the AT Clone, he found he had 640 KBytes. They should have been the same. Both had 640K of Ram Memory installed. Checking to see the size of the operating system files, he used the directory listing, in the long form, showing dates and file sizes.

Rich used a write-protected diskette with his ZIP Directory Manager, a shareware program from a Bulletin Board, or BBS. It was written by a programmer in Claremont, California, and showed all files, even hidden ones.

Rich had learned, from several technical journals that the Command.Com file was, usually, the program, that most known viruses targeted. However, he found that Command.Com was the same size on both machines, according to the listings, by both the DOS DIR Command and by Zip. The other two, operating system files, MSDOS.SYS and IQ.SYS, were also the

same size, as listed on the ZIP directory screen which showed the hidden system, or SYS, files.

Next, Rich tried a write-protected copy of a program that showed memory usage, file sizes, and load addresses. This was a very useful program he had downloaded, months earlier, as freeware from a Bulletin Board System (BBS) using his telephone and modem. Comparing the identical files on the two PC's, Rich found that the IO.SYS file on the XT Clone was taking up more load addresses, even though it was, supposedly, the same size, as shown in the directory listing in the AT machine's IO.SYS file.

He was astounded. Whoever produced this virus, had figured out a method for fooling the file size metering routines of Microsoft's MS-DOS. He sat down, stunned, thinking about what this meant. The programmer who had created this virus had been ingenious. All the Virus Protection (VP) Programs, available, checked file sizes to monitor SYS files before they were copied.

If a diskette, had a SYS file whose size was different: from that already on the machine, the VP program's warning message would be printed on the screen, before the file could be copied. This virus could not be detected by such Virus Protection (VP) Programs.

Rich spent the balance of the day, checking to see how the virus affected programs he loaded from write-protected diskettes.

He did remember to call Tasha, in the early afternoon.

Rich, also, found the virus had a contagious effect on non-bootable diskettes. Those without boot files still got infected by the corrupted file on his hard drive, when a file was copied to, or from, the diskette. The virus was transferred to the boot sector of the diskette, regardless of the fact, that there was no IO.SYS file in that sector. He found the corrupting virus took five K Bytes, of load addresses, all by itself.

That afternoon, Rich called Wilson Wong at Sierra Springs and told him of his discoveries. Wilson was flabbergasted. He promised that no one would use the floppy drive in any of the

three contaminated machines. He had wrapped the cases with duct tape to cover the floppy drives to insure the quarantine would be effective. Rich agreed to meet next Thursday to review his report and to get the Event History that Wilson was putting together for the three machines.

Linda and Ann were already at the same seats, near the far corner of the bar, when Rich entered Valentines, Thursday at nine. Victor saw him coming and placed his drink on the bar a few seconds after he reached the corner and said hello to the two women. He left his dollar on the inside ledge and got the “thank you pat”, on the bar top from Victor in return. “You’re getting the royal treatment here already, Rich,” Ann remarked. “You didn’t even have to order. Who are you, anyway?”

Rich laughed, “I know Victor from last night. He has a good memory for customers, I guess.”

The look that flashed across Ann’s face surprised him. For an instant, she had looked shocked. He didn’t know why, but she probably thought he might be a nightly drinker, he guessed. He said, in order to placate her, “I had a dance date here last night and I met Victor, then.”

Ann didn’t respond. Linda glanced at her and replied. “If you really do like to dance, that much, why don’t you come to our Swing Club, Sunday? You must really enjoy dancing. We have some great, big band records,”

“I’m going to do that. Dancing is sort of a hobby with me, now. I probably will see you there, this Sunday,” he smiled.

Rich danced with both women, several times that evening. He noticed that Ann was friendly but somewhat cool. They danced slow a couple of times and he made a mental note of Ann’s propriety. ‘Dancing with her is like dancing with your sister,’ he remarked to himself.

Linda, too, was different from the first night he had danced with her. Now, she talked all the time, as they danced. He didn’t

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have any trouble staying relaxed. There was nothing in her behavior like the cuddling embraces that aroused him during their previous slow dances. Rich smiled to himself, ‘Two cool ladies; maybe they’re really twins.’

They excused themselves at ten-thirty, saying they had an early day at the hospital. He said he might see them Sunday, although he knew he wouldn’t.

Linda got on Ann’s case as she drove them home, “You acted kind’a cool to Rich tonight. I felt you got a bit uptight when he said he was there last night. Did you think he was a hermit?”

“I don’t know. I just thought our date was something new to him, the way he talked about being married so long, and everything. It was a shock to hear he was there last night,” Ann said slowly, still thinking about it.

Linda replied, “You’ll have to loosen up, Honey. You’re not going to get a man interested just by talking. If you don’t like to fuck, you better be a good actress,” she laughed. “Rich can get talk for twenty cents on the telephone.”

“I just don’t have that free-wheeling feeling you have about sex, I guess. Why do you suppose, that is?” Ann asked seriously.

“Well, I don’t know. I don’t want anything from the guys I fuck but a good time,” Linda responded, “maybe you’re looking at it different.”

Ann didn’t respond. She was deep in thought. Finally, she replied, “Maybe, that’s it. I want more than just sex. I want a relationship, at least.”

Linda smiled and replied, “Maybe that’s it, then, Honey. I think men want a fucking relationship. Not a talking relationship.”

Ann looked at her friend. Linda was a few years older and took good care of herself. Harry’s money gave her a different outlook. She didn’t want a man in her life for long. Ann believed that was what gave her the casual attitude about sex. She knew she was different. She wondered, ‘Could her relaxed and carefree attitude be, what made her attractive to men?’ She

responded, “I’m not sure what I want. Things are so different than the way I was raised up. I believe women have to hold a man off, if they want to keep him interested. Sex can be too boring, otherwise.”

Linda laughed, “Sweetheart, it’s only boring, if you let it get that way. I believe holding a guy off is the same as turning him off. You’ve got to make him enjoy your company. The best way I know is to enjoy what he’s got.”

Ann laughed with her friend, “I’m going to think about that,” she agreed.

Linda was on a roll. She chuckled, “Forget that old wives’ tale about getting to a man through his stomach. You have to get him through his dick.”

They were still laughing when they reached Ann’s house.

Rich went home about a half hour after his dance dates left. Driving home, he was thinking about Tasha and tomorrow night. He wondered about the differences in women. He was puzzled about Ann’s different attitude tonight. She had more warmth and appeal, the first night they met. He was sure she had pressed against his hard-on, then, on purpose.

‘What a contrast from Tasha,’ he smiled, to himself. ‘Those two get cooler, the second time you see them. Tasha’s second time, she bursts into flame,’ he smiled remembering.

He was looking forward to seeing her again. As he went to bed, he reminded himself, ‘Remember, give this time. You’re on unfamiliar ground with a woman like Tasha. Go slow.’

Friday evening, he stayed home watching television, until ten-fifteen. He showered and dressed more casually. He had always worn a coat and tie to Valentines. He decided to skip the tie and put on one of his cardigan sweaters. As he got up to leave, he laughed to himself, ‘This is really something. My first, late date, at fifty-three. Usually, I’d be thinking about sacking out, about now. It’s hard to believe.’

When Rich pulled up to Tasha's home, only ten minutes away from his apartment, she was just pulling into the driveway. They met at the front walkway and she launched herself into his arms. Her kiss was so hot Rich could feel moisture on his brow and something else simmering in his pants. They walked arm and arm to her door. She lifted the doormat and opened the door with the key there. After turning on the lights, the stereo, and putting out some glasses, Tasha turned saying, "Honey, why don't you fix us a drink and I'll get comfortable."

Rich was cautious. "What time do the kids get home?" He didn't want to start anything and be interrupted by one of them walking in, unexpectedly. Tasha came back into the kitchen, smiling with that sexy look in her eyes, "Oh, Ken is gone to Catalina and won't be home 'til Sunday. Lana's staying with a girlfriend in Arrowhead. But I didn't know until this afternoon."

She came over putting her left arm around his neck and moved her open mouth around his searching tongue. Her right hand found his bulge, she kissed him saying, "You know how kids are. We'll have the house to ourselves, isn't that great?"

She started moving her hand slowly, up and down. When he was fully erect, she smiled into his eyes, saying, "Save that while I change. I'll just be a minute."

Rich had their drinks ready when Tasha came back from the bedroom. She was wearing a black teddy. Rich was stunned at how sexy she looked. He put the drinks he was bringing toward her, on the kitchen counter. He stared at her curves and roundness. Her firm body and fair skin were enhanced by the black lace. He had never been with a woman wearing anything like that. Immediately, the image of Rita Hayworth's kneeling pose, in that famous negligee pinup, flashed into his mind. He thought, 'My God, even Rita didn't have breasts like this. I could have set the drinks there.' "Baby, you're a knockout in that. You've got some real bounty there," he smiled and added, "Turn around, so I can see all of you."

“You like it, really? I was kind’a afraid you might think I was too fast,” she smiled, shyly, as she wheeled around, slowly, under his gaze.

“That’s the understatement of all time. You’re going a lot slower than my blood flow. It’s making a humming sound in my ears.”

Tasha laughed and picked up her scotch and water, saying, “Let’s go into the living room. I want to see if you saved something for me.”

Rich's mind was racing, so full of thoughts about this erotic situation. ‘Where had she been all his life? How could this be real? She’s the most sensual, erotic woman of my wildest dreams. I’d be nuts, not to go for the gusto. Go with the flow. Let her carry the ball. Relax and enjoy,’ he reasoned.

When they sat on the couch, Rich took her in his arms and began nuzzling her breasts which were exposed so the nipples just edged out of the supporting fabric of the teddy. He licked them and felt them harden as Tasha started stroking the bulge in his pants. She wasted no time in undoing the zipper that held his swelling, one-eyed dragon, en-caged. She slid to the floor, kneeling between his spread legs. She used both hands to help his straining coil escape, holding it between her two welcoming palms. She gently, moved her two hands, held together, up and down, as if beseeching the hardened length to abandon itself to her tender care.

Rich moaned as the sensations of pleasure started to curl around his loins. He put his hands to her shoulders and loosened the straps of teddy so her bounty hung free. He used both hands to fondle her rosy, pert nipples with his warm, gentle fingers. A few moments passed then Tasha released a sigh and moved his hands away. In one erotic movement, she enclosed his elongated wand between her two gorgeous breasts.

Rich shivered from a sensation he had never, in his life, imagined. She was moving her breasts, up and down on his en-captured shaft, while using her tongue on the tip, on each down stroke.

“Baby, don’t ever stop. That’s too much to ever let go,” he sighed, smiling into her eyes as she raised her head. It seemed she wanted to gauge his pleasure as she watched his face intently. She smiled and said, “Ready or not here I come.”

She put her head down and engulfed his upright length with her mouth. He could feel the wonder of her darting tongue as she moved on him. She moved her head from side to side and up and down, moving her tongue around the tip, all the while. Rich leaned his head back onto the cushions of the couch. He avoided looking at her wonderful ministrations, trying to get his mind under control. He knew he was about to explode. He tried to think of something else. The feelings he had in his groin were incredible. He couldn’t forestall the heavenly, ecstatic, rush that surged through his loins. He groaned with pleasure as she drew his payload from his cache. She suckled him to the point where he didn’t think he could stand it. He shuddered with the extreme response her questing mouth had sought.

After a few moments, Tasha raised her head. “My, I think I’ve received my protein injection for the month. That’s was wonderful.”

Richard raised his head, and looked at her with awe. “Baby, you are one in a million. That was gigantic, titanic. I’m going down for the count.”

Tasha looked so pleased Rich could feel desire, whirling its hot breath in his stomach. ‘Is this for real? Does she really enjoy pleasuring me?’ he wondered. “Baby, you really turn me on. Let me undress you here on the rug. I want to do you as you’ve done me.”

She laughed with delight and was out of her teddy before Rich could step out of his pants. He got his sweater, shirt and tee shirt off, over his head, as she was stretching out on the carpet. Somehow, she stretched her arm overhead and, to Rich, looked like a mature version of the Marilyn Monroe calendar. He pulled off his shoes and in two strides was standing over her.

“Good God” she blurted, “you’re still so hard, you look awesome. How do you do it?”

“Baby, a boulder would get excited at what I’m looking at. You’re the most incredibly, exciting woman, I ever imagined. I’ve never been turned on the way you do me. I’m going to turn you every way but loose,” he laughed as he knelt to spread her legs. He started kissing her thighs. He moistened his fingers with his tongue and began stroking her golden crescent. He leaned forward slowly, moving his fondling lips to the inside of her velvety thighs. She moved her treasure to him, arching her back to welcome his searching tongue. Gently separating the silken bob, he held her folds open with his hand and ran his tongue up and down her cleft.

“Baby, I’m going to do you like you did me,” he murmured.

Tasha gasped her reply, “Oh..Oh, suck me, baby, suck it for me. Suck my pleasure noodle. Oooooooo, that’s it, Uuum. I’m yours now, all yours.”

Rich could feel her relaxing as she lowered her squirming rear. He stroked her love nipple as he gently moved his swollen organ into her golden muff. She moaned with delight as he moved the tip in and out, gradually inserting more and more.

“You’re so big, Oh Oh. Give me all of it,” she demanded, delightfully, with renewed vigor. “I want you, all.”

Rich had never met anyone who could keep up with his needs. He kept moving against her, awaiting the signs that she was nearing a climax. She wriggled her bottom, arching her back against him, for several minutes. Rich knew he could stay up all night he was so aroused by this erotic bolt of gleaming, golden lightning.

Tasha seemed to grow frantic. Her breathing got faster and her movements on his battering ram were approaching frenzy. He leaned forward and grabbed her right nipple with his firm lips, stroking her gently, but firmly, with his tongue as he did her pleasure point, with his left hand.

She gave a small shriek as she lurched against his loins. He knew she was complete, now. He remained enclosed inside her and twisted to lie beside her---moving her relaxed body onto his---her breasts on his lower chest.

Nothing was said for several minutes. Rich heard the strains of a favorite melody coming from the barely audible stereo. It was the lyric, “See the pyramids, along the Nile. See the sunlight on a tropic isle.....You belong to me.”

Rich was sure he was falling for this golden-haired temptress. ‘Maybe that song means something..... A Signa Good Omen?’ he wondered. His computer trained mind, clicked in with, ‘Sprinkle on, some of that seasoning, called Time.’ He was planning to devote more time to this Wonder, named, Tasha. He resolved to see more of her and get to know her better.

Tasha was over-awed with this continuing sexual appetite, she found in herself. She couldn’t remember doing so much head on anyone. She was astounded at the pleasure she got from Rich’s reactions to her oral manipulations. During her last affair, she found she preferred the vibrator to her former lover’s sexual demands for blow-jobs. He would vibrate her while she went down on him. Regular sex became a boring interlude after that. She usually would last and last. He would get off and she never did. She had never climaxed with him, only with the vibrator. Paul, the abuser, loved to have her do coke with him and then they would have glorious climaxes. She found, without the “snow”, regular sex was no fun with him. She didn’t realize that the rush she got from cocaine was dulling the response she got from intercourse. Without the stimulation from the drug, they both were unable to reach the level of stimulation needed for a climax.

Paul needed longer and longer blow-jobs to get off without coke. Only his adept use of the vibrator, when they were “shy of coke”, got her to the erogenous level she had gotten used to. She feared that she would fall back into this pattern of needing more than simple intercourse with Rich. He was more than she had hoped

for, though. He really got her worked up to a high. She wondered, if it was just his incredible sexual energy.

‘Hopefully,’ she thought, ‘He’ll stay like this. No one could make me feel like he does, with his mouth on my clit.’ She felt Rich move against her. “You awake, Honey?”

“I love the way you cuddle and hug me after such a loving,” he murmured. “My ex-wife wouldn’t want to be touched, after sex. You’re wonderful. I can’t get enough of you.”

“Do you feel like another drink?” Tasha asked. “I’ve worked up quite a thirst.”

Rich glanced over to his unfinished drink. Tasha leaned over to the table and polished hers off with a long swig. “That would be nice. I’m dry too. I’ll finish mine right now,” he replied.

Tasha got up and he watched her glide into the kitchen in her bare feet. Her sensuous movements accented her naked form, as the light coming from the kitchen reflected her alluring curves.

Her mind was dwelling on Rich’s exciting delivery of the male necessity, her life had lacked for the past several months. She wondered about her intuitive decision to get Ken and Lana, her kids, out of the house for the weekend. They had been very receptive about leaving. Tasha had been house-bound for such a long time, after Paul, they had become concerned.

She put the glasses on the counter and poured Rich’s glass half full of ice and vodka, before adding the tonic. She got a lime she had retrieved from the backyard tree, from the refrigerator. She cut it in half and squeezed the first half into the drink, tossing it in the trash. The other half she put into his drink. She hoped he would get too laid back to leave. ‘It might take two of these,’ she thought to herself.

She fixed herself a half -jigger of scotch into a full glass of ice and water. She wanted to keep her senses sharp for what she had planned for the rest of the night. She would make sure he didn’t want to leave.

She carried the drinks into the adjoining room. She walked slowly, holding her tummy in, with her back very straight. She knew this posture made her breasts stand out. As she approached Rich she could see his eyes fixed on her bosom and slowly move down her roundness, to her golden prize.

“Have you ever slept in a water bed?” she asked, gazing into his eyes with longing. “Have you ever spent the night cuddling and petting and then woke up to a morning of great sex?”

Rich hesitated. He couldn't believe the instantaneous rush of excitement the idea conjured up. He had never stayed the night with a woman, other than his wife. Morning sex was something very seldom in his experience. The kids made that an extreme rarity. “No, but I wouldn't want your kids to find me sleeping here. That would be getting off on the wrong foot, wouldn't it? When are they due?”

“Don't worry, Honey. They won't be back 'til late.”

She knelt beside him, handed him his drink and was enticingly close. Her nudity and unashamed attitude seemed so nonchalant and right. Somehow, it seemed unintended as she moved so sensuously, placing her golden muff inches from his face. She looked at his languishing manhood. “I'll drag you to bed if you don't watch out,” Tasha threatened, laughing softly.

Rich took a long drink and, lips still wet from the glass, pushed his mouth into her tempting treasure chest. His tongue flicked over her nirvana nipple, rapidly and insistently. She reached over and put her hand around his rising firmness.

“Oh, Oh, lets go into the bedroom,” she gasped. “I want to lay down while you do that so I can really enjoy you.”

“I'm yours. Lead on, my love. I never argue with a lady that has a strangle-hold on my dick,” he laughed.

They turned off the stereo and lights and went to bed. It was a night and morning, Rich would never, ever, forget. He had never slept on such a warm, pulsing cradle. Tasha went down on him as soon as they hit the bed. The sensation of the water bed was

an amplification of every sensual movement. He would move his hips down and the bed would respond with a rolling hump up into her warm, questing mouth. Tasha rolled over and twisted to keep her head at his swollen joint, as she placed her golden muff at his lips. She pulled him on top of her, head to toe. He was caressing her erect nodule with his lips and tongue as she suckled him lovingly. The bed seemed to understand and added its own pulsation to their every movement. Rich couldn't believe the sensations, as the bed participated in their pleasure quest. It enhanced their loving foreplay. A move in one direction would bring a rolling response in the opposite. Her hips would move down and the bed would bring them back. Effort was not only amplified, it was reciprocated. The downward thrusts would be answered by an exciting, lurching upward push that enthralled him into her hips. The energy needed to bring on the incredible sensations of lovemaking was reduced by half. Time for sexual pleasure was extended. They enjoyed petting and stroking interminably. Their enjoyment of the loving, oral techniques, created sensations that the bed's pulsing rhythms help to prolonged.

They didn't want it to end. The emotional high they received from each others' lips was magnified by their, each, feeling the pleasure given. They finally fell asleep enwrapped in each others' arms. Tasha fell asleep cuddling Rich who was on his back with her head on his chest. They dozed off engulfed in the wonder of the other's warm embrace. Rich was awakened by a caressing stroke on his slumbering dragon. It was soon awake, staring at Tasha's inviting mouth, with its swelling, uncoiled, length. She was petting the head's one eye, with her darting, red tongue.

'Such an exquisite, exciting way to wake up,' he thought as he enfolded her sunny hips with his arms. He buried his face in her welcoming, warm, golden, pleasure basin.

The morning was greeted with their mutually ecstatic climaxes.

Rich looked around her bedroom. Last night, he only had eyes for her. There was a large bookcase crammed with books on the

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opposite wall. He was surprised he hadn't expected a worldly woman like Tasha to be a reader. "Wow, Babe, have you read all those books?"

Tasha smiled, "I read a lot. I especially like Stephen King. Have you read *'It'*?" He's the best, I think."

"Yeah, but that's the only one of his, I have read," Rich admitted. "I read mostly westerns and mysteries like Louis Lamour and Robert Ludlum."

Rich looked at the books, again. "There must be a hundred books there," he guessed.

"I've not met a woman who reads a lot. How long did it take you to read all these?"

"Oh, probably thirty months, there 'bouts," she smiled. "You know what they say about going to bed with a good book. I've been doing that most, the last several months?"

Rich smiled, "I hope to interrupt your reading by occupying your free time, myself."

Tasha responded with a laugh of pleasure. "I won't miss it, if you're what I'm going to bed with."

He replied with a long kiss to her lips, a still pink rose of pleasure, he had so enjoyed. The next hour was spent cuddling and stroking her sensuous curves. They were in a wonderful world of pleasure, enjoying the fondling of each other's wonders. Rich completed the morning's welcome when he slipped between Tasha's legs and buried his face in her golden triangle. The ecstatic climax, his tender attentions brought, several minutes, later, was a vibrant tingling in her loins that centered in her moist swale and coursed through her whole body, right down to her toes. Rich's fondling and stroking, with his tongue, brought her to the pinnacle of pleasure. She slid down the mountain into his arms as he moved next to her. His warm embrace cast a spell as he caressed and cuddled her. She felt enchanted for a wonderfully long interval, as time stood still.

Later, in the shower, he lathered her fulsome curves and embraced her soapy form, from behind, gently, caressing her breasts with his long fingers. He scrubbed her soap lathered back with the stubble of his chin until she trembled with the pleasure it gave her. She felt as if a stiff brush was slowly coursing up and down the spine, gently scrubbing until she was tingling all over. Tasha grabbed the soap and twisted against him, finding his mouth with her searching lips. She suckled his tongue as she had done his shaft. She soaped him all over, slowly fondling his globes until his manhood was probing her belly. When he had rinsed, she gave him another loving oral treatment.

They quit the shower and towed each other to a fresh tenderness of stimulating fondness. They had a wonderful breakfast and table talk that gave Rich a better perspective on Tasha. She told him her last divorce was “abetted” by Les Bernbaum, a top Family Law, attorney, in Santa Ana. He had told her how to do everything herself. He had handled her first divorce, several years, before and as Tasha remarked, “...was a good friend.”

Rich became silent for a few minutes thinking about that. He had some experience with attorneys and was surprised that one would help her get a do-it-yourself divorce. He decided to think more about it, some other time. Tasha noticed his silence and came around the table to sit on his lap. She hugged him fiercely and started licking his ear, then his neck. A few minutes of this foreplay and she murmured into his ear, “I think I’m sitting on rock. That can’t be what I think it is, can it?”

“It must be my lie detector,” Rich laughed, “It doesn’t lay still or lay about, when a sexpot like you is on my lap.”

A minute later, Tasha was on her knees, administering a treatment that lasted for a half hour. Rich was astounded that she could get him off three times in one morning. However, he made no objection. Tasha’s skills were such that Rich was sure, this one was better than any of the others. She was an expert at doing head.. Before long he asked Tasha, again, what she was

doing tonight. She explained she had promised her married son to come to dinner. It was family custom that she couldn't, or wouldn't, postpone.

"Are you going to Valentines tonight?" she asked in return. "I wouldn't want you to fall for someone else. But I don't expect you to sit home."

She put her arms around his neck and leaned back, looking into his soul with her luminous green eyes.

"I promised to meet a guy who will introduce me to a group who do social things," he smiled. "I couldn't hope to find anyone else to compare with you. You're one in ten million, from what I've seen in my life."

"I don't want to intrude on your family affairs. I have my own and don't expect you to get involved in mine," Rich smiled. "Let's give it time, until we have time to ourselves, for a while. We can ease into the family complications, one at a time." Rich continued, "I would like to meet your kids first. If that's all right with you?"

"I agree," Tasha replied. "We can create our own life. You don't have to join mine, and I won't have to join yours. That can come later," she smiled.

When Rich, finally, tore himself away, to go home, Saturday was half gone. He wondered if he could get the drive to make it to Valentines to meet the "Inga and Al" group, later. After a few hours of sleep, he got a hamburger at Carl's and decided he would go to Valentines. He thought to himself, 'I'm going to have to get a cast for my dick. I think it's met its match in Tasha.'

He showered again, alone this time. He decided, with a smile to himself, 'I don't need to hunt, anymore, so I'll leave my hunting jacket, home.' He put on a white shirt, without tie, and put on his black slacks and a black sweater.

CHAPTER NINE

Rich got to Valentines a few minutes before nine. As he sat in his car in the parking lot, he recalled the last three weeks. It was difficult for him to believe, he had been making the “Singles’ Scene” for more than three months. The last three weeks seemed to be a completely different life than those previous three months.

He wondered about that. His ability, to analyze computer problems, had been honed over twenty years of varied business situations. His analytical approach to new situations, of all types, had become an ingrained habit. It compelled him to look at events he encountered, “...from ten thousand feet.”

This phrase was a trigger he used to force himself, to stand away and look at everything from a distance. By getting his personal or subjective value judgments out of the way, he had found, early on, that his perceptions often changed. His outlook was re-oriented. His mind was forced to use a more logical pattern of thinking. His thinking became more objective and less emotional,

He pondered on what had changed during the last three months to make his experiences, in this strange, new, world, take such a dramatic shift. He remembered his many nights of going home alone, to his cold, empty apartment. He realized his recent adventures had been something he had hoped and wished for. He tried to analyze what had happened to make such a startling change occur. He thought about unusual events that had occurred at Valentines that had an impact on his thinking. He had observed the activities of the individuals that frequented the dances on week nights. There was a difference in their behavior when those same individuals came to Valentines on the weekend. Friday and Saturday, the people behaved differently. The crowds and noise levels were definitely a factor. People couldn't talk as well as on the week nights. He thought, ‘That must be why the sound level of the music is more blaring, Friday and Saturday. The crowd noise must have been considered when

the band played on weekend nights; so the band turned up the volume.’

He recalled some of the people he occasionally encountered on week nights. A small number would be there on Fridays and Saturdays. The larger crowd of new faces on the weekend seemed to loosen up those who did attend during the week.

He got out of his car, still deep in thought about the past several weeks. He remembered one individual, who had become a regular participant, on both weekends and week nights. This was a very short man who, Rich had guessed, was in his sixties. He was no taller than five foot six and always was nattily dressed in business suit and tie. Rich had asked Dotty, the bartender, and learned he was called, “Little Tom.” He was a former jockey who had done well as an owner and trainer of thoroughbreds. He lived in Temecula on a large estate. His name was Tom Carsimone.

Little Tom was slender and his hair was always well groomed. He was bald, except for a halo around the ears and back. His clothes were set off by a diamond tie tack and his right pinky sported a diamond solitaire ring.

Rich noticed that on the weekend, Little Tom was very forward with the ladies. He would select a woman who was in her middle thirties and start a conversation. After a few minutes of intimate talk, in most instances, they would dance a few dances and, very soon after, leave by the rear exit. Occasionally, Little Tom would show up on Saturdays with a woman, who was stylishly dressed and so tall Tom's face would be pressed into her bosom when they danced.

In the previous three months, this had happened five or six times. Each time, it had been a different girl and each was well under forty. But, all were close to six feet tall in their heels.

As Rich walked around to the front of the building he recalled how this fascinated him. Just a week ago, Rich talked to Dotty, as he had assumed Tom was the owner of the place. Dotty, the bartender had told him that Tom had been a patron of Valentines

for several years. She mentioned that Tom's success with the ladies was based on his willingness to spend money freely. Rich, later, had asked Jack Anders about Little Tom's success with the ladies. Jack had remarked, "The women seem to be one-night-stands. I've never seen them here without Tom. He's never with the same one, twice. I think, he's either got a ten inch dick or pays handsomely for blow-jobs."

Rich had laughed and wondered if he would ever learn Tom's secret.

The success Little Tom, a man a lot older than himself, had with women, made Rich question his own behavior. He had decided his own reluctance to approach strange women was his main problem. Rich had figured if Tom could handle the risk of rejection, it was time he learn how, himself

By the time he reached the front door of Valentines, a picture flashed into his mind of how he felt when he first approached that door. He had been reluctant to face this new environment. He had stood around, near a railing, or against the wall, watching and staying out of the social currents ebbing around this place. That was the difference. He had been a spectator and, now, had changed into a participant. He had read a pamphlet about "how to change your thinking to change your life." It had worked for him! Tonight, he felt comfortable and sure of himself.

His thinking had been shifted and resulted in a different attitude. His change in attitude had forced a change in behavior. He was out in the social flow, now. He was taking the initiative and meeting people that he had, previously, watched from a distance. Suddenly, a thought jumped into his mind. 'That must be why I look for women who will come here alone. They have the same attitude. They have the guts to get out into the water by themselves. They have the same feelings, I do.' Smiling to himself, he walked into the social arena, feeling like a different person. He was comfortable with himself and it showed. As he passed through the lobby, Rich noticed a large poster, on an easel, advertising the Valentine's Day celebration for the

following Saturday. He stopped and read the details and thought he'd ask Chuck about it.

He saw Chuck standing with a couple, at the far end of the bar. The woman was slender and dark-haired, about five-seven. The man with her had a slim build and was about two inches taller. They smiled as he approached. Chuck didn't see him as he was facing the other direction.

Dotty was on tonight and had seen him coming. She had his drink ready when he got to the corner of the bar. "Thanks, Dotty," Rich told her handing her a five.

Rich's, "Keep the change," was received by Dotty with a large smile and, "Thanks, Rich."

The band started playing as Rich neared the threesome. He noticed that the woman was wearing dark blue slacks and a white Mohair sweater. Her slender shape was enhanced by the erect posture of her stance. She held a glass of white wine. The man was wearing a soft wool sweater, light blue, with no shirt. He had his arm around his date and was drinking, what looked like, whiskey on the rocks. Chuck stepped over and made the introductions to Inga and Al. He used first names only, which seemed customary at Valentines. They were very cordial and friendly. Inga was the first to speak, "We've been coming here for a couple of years and never got the bartenders to do that. It must really be the Millions' Magic, huh," she smiled.

Chuck laughed and said, "They wouldn't believe me when I told them your name, Rich."

Al was very serious when he said, "What's your real last name, Rich?"

Chuck laughed with pleasure. Rich pulled out a credit card and handed it to Al. Inga leaned over the bar with Al to look at the card in the dim light from the overhang. They were silent and looked at the card and then at each other.

Al handed it back and smiled, "It's got to be business name, huh?"

Chuck started laughing, again. “Show him your driver’s license, Rich. I wouldn’t have believed you, either, if you didn’t show me.”

Finally, Al and Inga were convinced when they read Rich’s driver’s license. The three engaged in small talk about Valentines and how many people they’ve met, here, over the last couple of years. Rich listened, taking mental notes.

Inga, up close, appeared to be in her early fifties, or very late forties. She had several deep smile lines around her mouth and small, squint lines around her eyes.

Al was slim and appeared to be several years younger than Inga. Their slender shapes matched. Their lack of fat would reduce age wrinkles, Rich believed.

Years earlier, he had decided that was why people like the actor, Paul Newman, looked so young. Newman stayed slim and active. With his money, he could afford the time it took, to stay in shape. That was the main reason, Rich ate very seldom. He had changed his attitude about food. He felt it was too easy to become a “food abuser.” Rich had decided, a few years before, to lose interest in food and had taken up riding a ten speed bike, eight to ten miles, every week. He had gotten down from two hundred pounds to one seventy-five, in the last couple of years. That was twenty pounds less than his football-playing weight in college.

He felt that Inga and Al must not eat very often, either. Their slenderness was something that Rich found reassuring about their company. Maybe, they thought alike about other things, as well. Al lighted a cigarette as he spoke to Rich.

Rich had to say, “What? I was not paying attention, Al. What was that? The music is so loud I have a hard time hearing you.” Al leaned over and asked, “You coming here for Valentine’s Day?”

Rich remembered the posters he had seen in the lobby. Next Saturday, was a special night. They would have a free buffet and a different band.

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Rich responded, “Is it a big deal? Saturday nights are always so crowded, like this, anyway.”

Inga had been listening and declared, “It’s probably the biggest night of the year. They have two dollar drinks and a band that plays a lot of love songs. Everybody gets very romantic.”

Al laughed, “If you go home alone, Valentine’s Day, you weren’t at Valentines.”

“I’ll make a point of being here. I’ve been going home alone too much,” Rich laughed.

“If a good-looking guy like you goes home alone from Valentines, on Valentine’s Day, it’s your own damn fault,” Inga replied, laughing meaningfully.

Rich smiled at Inga’s compliment and implicit confidence in the Valentine magic. Rich signaled Dotty for another drink, as Al asked Inga to dance. Rich ordered a round of drinks for his new friends, feeling it was like a “welcome tuition”, in this new graduate school of “Singles’ Sciences.”

The place was filling up fast and he and Chuck made sure they had taken enough space to save room for the dancers. Rich noticed that Al and Inga were good swing dancers. As he watched, he wondered at his own naive attitude. Had his success with Carol and Tasha been a fluke? Maybe he had just “gotten lucky”.

Chuck interrupted his thoughts when Dotty brought the drinks, “Say, Rich, you shouldn’t do that. We always buy our own drinks.”

Rich told him, “Look, Chuck, I’m learning so much from you, all, about the Single’s Life, it’s my pleasure.”

Chuck shook his head. When Al and Inga came back from their dance, Rich had to overcome their objections, to his largess, by re-stating the obvious fact that he had gained a lot of new experience, from listening to their comments. They were reluctant to accept and insisted on buying him a couple of drinks. They wouldn’t take, no, for an answer. Rich soon had three

drinks lined up in front of him. He didn't have to order again the rest of the evening. He put a five dollar bill on the ledge for Dotty.

Al said to him, "Do you like to play cards. Rich? We, three, get together every Friday, at our place and play cards, Gin and Pinochle," Al smiled.

"I used to play cards a lot, when I was in the Marine Corps but haven't played in a while," Rich replied.

"You were in the Corps, too? I was in 'Nam. How about you?" Al asked.

"I was in the Corps, in the early Fifties.....Korea and Japan. We played a lot of cards, then."

Inga broke in, "Why don't you join us, some Friday? We've been playing, regular, for some time, now."

"Thanks, I'll try to make it, sometime. I, usually, try to have a date on Fridays, though. I was married so long, I have a lot of catching up to do," Rich smiled. "My divorce was final on my thirty-third anniversary."

"Wow!" Inga laughed. "I guess we won't see you on Fridays for quite a while." Al joined in laughing at her joke.

"How do you like the Singles' Life?" Al asked. "This is the best place in the County to get your ashes hauled."

They all laughed.

"I've been finding that out," Rich laughed. "The last two Friday's have been unreal."

The pause that statement caused was broken by Al saying, "It sounds like you've been doing all right. I don't want to pry but I guess you've found some new female friends. Huh, Rich?"

Without waiting for an answer, Al continued, "We met here over two years ago." Al spoke up, "Couple of our married friends did, too. We've been together, ever since. It's the best thing that ever happened to me," he smiled, as he leaned over to kiss Inga on the lips.

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She put her arms around Al's neck and returned his kiss with a prolonged and passionate embrace.

The band started playing, the tune from Casablanca, "*As Time Goes By*."

"Let's dance, to this, Honey," Inga said, pulling away and leading him to the dance floor.

Rich moved in to save their places at the bar and said to Chuck, "They seem to be very happy. I knew a few couples that were married just two years and weren't like that."

"Yeah, they really hit it off. I've known Inga for over five years. She used to work at Beckman. She was doing the club scene, two or three times a week, before Al. He moved in with Inga, nearly two years ago. They've really settled down together. It's nice."

The dance floor was crowded and Rich watched the dancers. Al and Inga looked good together. They danced close and were good dancers. As Rich, was watching them, he noticed that the crowd was growing larger. It was nearly as crowded as on Friday. People were having a hard time, moving to and from the dance floor. He observed a tall, blond woman, who looked about thirty, coming towards the waitress station. Every man's head turned as she made her way through the crowd. She was a several inches taller than most of the crowd. As she approached, she was peering at the men's faces as if she needed glasses. The light wasn't too good and she would stop and gaze at each man, as if looking to make sure, before going on.

Rich nudged Chuck, who was leaning over his drink on the bar looking towards the entrance.

"Look at this Amazon, Chuck," he whispered, as she was two or three bodies away. Chuck took one look and turned back towards the bar. He hunched his shoulders, as if to make himself smaller. "That's Katrin," he whispered, "I don't want her to see me. We used to go together."

The woman leaned around one of the people in the way and said, to Rich, with a voice that didn't go with her large size, "Sir, can I squeeze in there?" She didn't wait for an answer but pushed her way through the crowd. Rich had no choice but to move aside and relinquish the space he was saving, for Al and Inga.

Katrin tapped Chuck on the shoulder, saying, "Hi, Honey, I didn't see you, it's so crowded. But when I see Al and Inga dancing, I thought you here."

Chuck turned to her smiling, "Hi, KC, I was going to call you tomorrow."

The band started playing "*What the World Needs, Now*" and Katrin grabbed Chuck's hand and said, "Let's dance and go see Inga." As they turned to leave, she told Rich, "Don't leave anyone take our spot, Sir." Her smile was both commanding and sweet. Chuck meekly followed her through the crowd to the dance floor. He didn't have much choice, Rich figured, as he craned his neck to watch.

KC was nearly a head taller than Chuck.

Rich observed she was wearing flat heeled shoes and towered over everyone. She was very attractive, though. Her body was, perfectly in proportion, to her height. She wore black slacks and a smoke green sweater that clung to her form. The slacks complimented her shape and her sweater was not tight but her ample breasts could not be displayed better. Her flat stomach and the contours of her hips were well matched. Rich noticed several of the men, around the room, watching KC's every move, as she and Chuck danced.

From a distance, she looked like any other good looking young female, of normal size. Dancing with Chuck, however, she made him look smaller than his five foot, eight. She looked normal and Chuck seemed the one with the size problem. Rich guessed that was the reason for Chuck's disinterest. Later, he was to learn that Chuck didn't want Al and Inga to know his feelings for KC were not mutual.

KC's stature was probably the prime reason for Chuck's negative attitude. He felt awkward about his shorter stature. But, in fact, Rich thought, everyone on the dance floor, looked smaller next to KC. It was easy to focus on her, alone. She was an extremely good-looking woman. Remembering Chuck's previous concerns about his height the night Carol was here, Rich could understand his attitude about KC but wondered if he was also blind.

When the dance ended, the four returned to the bar and squeezed in to the places Rich had been holding. He stepped back, so the two women could be at the bar. The three men stood close behind. There was no choice because of the pressing crowd.

Inga introduced Rich to Katrin. Rich could see, aided by the low level light of the overhang that she had to be in her middle thirties. Inga explained that she and Katrin came from the same province in Germany. They had both left "the Old Country", with their parents, when in their early teens. Her parents had left soon after the "Big War", KC's several years later.

Though, more than ten years apart in age, their common backgrounds made them very close friends. Both women would, now and then, drop back into a stilted, Germanic version of English, when they talked rapidly. Katrin remarked their families had first met at the Phoenix Club, a German social guild, in the City of Orange. Later, when Katrin and Chuck were dancing, Inga told Rich, "KC's my closest and dearest friend. Her husband left her about six years ago. We pal'd around all the time, after she recovered from her divorce. That was 'BA', though. Before Al", she smiled.

Al was listening and said, "She's like one of the family. We have a bunch of friends, we've met here, that get together at our house, on holidays. Everybody brings something and I cook a couple of turkeys or ham. Last Christmas, we had thirty people over. It was a ball."

Rich grinned, "You cook, Al? I'm impressed. For that many people, you've taken on quite a task."

"Nah, I love it. That's why Inga loves me. Right, Babe?"

Inga laughed, smiling her agreement, “He likes being the chef. I stay out of the kitchen. That’s Al’s kingdom.” She continued, “We’re having a dinner, Easter, Rich. Why don’t you plan on joining us.. Bring a date,” she added, as if an after-thought.

Inga was trying to resist the instinctive match-making tendencies she had developed, ever since she had asked Al to live with her. She felt everyone should get rid of those middle-aged hang-ups, which had given her such a bad time, for years after her divorce.

Al agreed, “Yeah, Rich, try to make it. We’d really like you to.”

“That’s sure, nice of you, two. If one of my married kids doesn’t ask me, I’ll let you know. Thanks,” Rich replied, with real pleasure.

Earlier, Inga had been wondering about Rich as she danced with Al. She regretted not looking at his birth date when they had his driver’s license. She thought how different he was. Most of the men she knew were a dozen years younger. As the organizer of “The Gang’s” socials, her mind started a woman’s natural appraisal of Rich as a possible match for one of her woman friends.

“How many kids, you have, Rich?” Inga asked. “I have a girl at home and a son in college.”

“I’ve got seven. Three’re married. I’m a grandfather of four,” he smiled.”

“Gott, what you do with all those kids?” Inga gasped.

Rich smiled, “Well, they only come one at a time. I always wanted a big family.”

Inga looked at him curiously. She wondered how a guy who seemed so stable, would react to the Singles’ Scene, she had struggled with, for nearly ten years. She looked at Rich, as she would have judged him, when she was actively looking for a man, to share her life. She had just turned forty-eight, five years ago, and had decided to get out and find someone. She was tired of sleeping alone. Her kids were both over eighteen and socially active. Her daughter, Janet, had a good job with Standard Oil.

Donald, her son, was starting college, at University of Pacific, on a baseball scholarship. Fifty, wasn't too far away, she had realized, with near panic.

After nearly two years, several one night stands, and much disappointment, she realized time was running out. Then, she met Al, who had been divorced a short time, after a married life of twelve years. He was eight years younger and she found that he needed her strength of purpose. Al refused to pay the court ordered spousal support. He'd leave his job whenever his ex-wife found him and garnished his wages.

His wife had been ten years younger. She left with their baby boy, moved in with her boyfriend and wouldn't talk to Al from then on. Al wouldn't do anything but send child support payments, if he was working. He had been drifting through jobs when he met Inga. He was what she was looking for, someone that needed her.

Inga had been evaluating the impressions she had about Rich. The same process, she had used with Al, when they met. 'Rich seemed so different,' she had thought. 'He was probably looking for some young thing just like most other older men, though'. Most men, she had met, of his age, were trying to regain their youth, or build their ego, by snaring a young wife.

Now, though, Inga began to get a different viewpoint about Rich. She was sure Al would always need her, but you never knew about men, she thought to herself. She decided to find out more about Rich and his suitability for one of her friends. She turned to Rich and asked, "Do you mind saying your age, Rich?"

He laughed, "Not at all. I'm fifty three, soon to be fifty four."

Al said, "You had me fooled, Rich. I thought maybe you colored your hair, like that. It looks too perfect."

Rich laughed, "Do people who come here do things like that?"

Inga responded, "You won't believe what they do. One guy comes in here a couple of times a month, in costumes. One time, he's a gorilla. The next time, he's a rabbit."

Rich looked at Al, then at Inga, “You’ve got to be kidding,”

Al replied, “No kidding. No one knows what he looks like, or if he comes here in civilian clothes. His getups really go over with some of the women. He really has a great time coming on to them. He’s a riot.”

Rich could see they were serious. He was quiet for a minute before he replied, “That’s really bizarre. I guess it takes all kinds. Myself, if it was my daughter, I’d be concerned about that guy’s mental state. I wouldn’t want my daughter to be alone with such a weirdo.”

Inga looked at Rich as if seeing him for the first time, She asked, “Do you really think so? We thought it was funny. We didn’t look at it from a parent’s point of view.”

“I guess raising five daughters to adulthood slants my viewpoint. I’m your ‘ole-style’ daddy looking at guys with a wary eye. I can’t shake the habit,” Rich smiled.

This startled Inga. She began to look at Rich in a different light. She stared at him and said, “You are like the “Old Country” fathers, I remember. I think that’s nice. Now’a days, we sometimes don’t look behind things, like we should. Don’t you think, Honey?” turning to Al who was listening closely.

“You’re right, Babe. We’ve got to get Rich into our group.” Looking at Rich, Al smiled, “You’d add some class to our gang. We could all use more class. Right, Babe?” Inga smiled, “We hope you will join us for Easter, at our house. We can enjoy your company. It might be interesting for you, since you’ve been out of circulation so long.”

Rich was beginning to like these two, warm people. They seemed sincere, yet interested in having a good time. He wanted to meet more of the “gang”. He thought it would be a good learning experience. Rich inquired of Inga, “What’s the situation with KC and Chuck?”

“Oh, Katrin and Chuck, they been going off and on for months, now. Chuck doesn’t want to settle down. Katrin falls hard for him and won’t take no for an answer. Chuck cares for her but

will not hurt her feelings. Too much feeling for her, I think,” Inga said with obvious regard.

Inga spoke rapidly, slipping into that stilted style, because she wondered, if Rich was interested in her younger friend’s availability, after all.

Al continued, “You got to hand it to Chuck. He won’t take a tumble for anyone, but KC. He doesn’t date anyone, else. He won’t turn her off, but he won’t do anything to encourage her, either.”

Rich wondered about their conclusions about Chuck. He had seen him here, at Valentines, when they were absent. He had seemed to be on the make with that woman, Stella. Rich replied, “That’s a tough situation. How does he resist her? She’s a very attractive lady.”

Inga replied, hurriedly, wondering about Rich’s intentions, “She doesn’t know anyone else is alive, but Chuck. She expects he will change. She doesn’t hold anything back from him. He’s going to be, soon, needing her too much, she believes, I think.”

Rich guessed Chuck would not want to offend Inga and kept his true attitude to himself. Chuck seemed to enjoy being in their “gang”. ‘After all,’ Rich thought to himself, ‘KC’s some package.’

“I understand,” Rich smiled. “She’s confident her feelings for him will be contagious. I hope she isn’t disappointed.”

Al replied, “KC’s been single for over five years. She’d been dumped by her husband after twelve years and couldn’t get over him. She still talks about her husband too much. Chuck’s, really, the first, she’s gotten interested in. We hope it works out.”

Rich had been glancing over the crowd to see Chuck and KC dance. The way Chuck held her and KC’s loving response, made him think that Chuck couldn’t keep holding her off, for long. He’d either succumb to her bounteous charms or have to hurt her terribly. It was tragic that such women would have to have their

hearts broken before seeing the light. Rich knew some people who would refuse to recognize a lost cause, especially in affairs of the heart, even if they were bleeding to death.

CHAPTER TEN

The music the band played changed to a faster beat and Rich watched Chuck and Katrin dance fast. Rich observed that every man in the place was leering at KC's sensuous moves to the beat of the music.

Without realizing it, consciously, he found himself looking over the crowd to see if Carol was there. 'She and Katrin would run neck and neck for the blue ribbon, in any beauty contest,' he thought to himself. He started at the sudden idea. 'She wasn't anything like Tasha. Why think about Carol?' he wondered. He decided to play it cool, tonight. After their love making, last night and this morning, he knew Tasha seemed to be just what he was looking for. He decided to call her, tomorrow, Sunday.

The evening went by swiftly, with the conversations and small talk. They, all, were standing at the bar when Dotty came up with a drink for KC. She was drinking a Tom Collins and was surprised when Dotty placed another, in front of her.

"This is for you, from Tom, over there," Dotty motioned to the far end of the bar.

Standing there, smiling at them, was Little Tom. His shoulders were just, barely, clearing the top of the bar. He raised his glass in a salute. The light from the overhang glinted off the diamond solitaire, pinky ring.

KC turned to Chuck who waved at Tom and smiled. "Who is this, from, Honey?" she asked Chuck.

He replied, "Oh, it's just Little Tom. He loves to buy drinks for good-looking ladies, Hon. He's harmless."

When Inga and Katrin went to the ladies' room, they stopped and talked with Tom. Inga was warmly welcomed with a big hug from Tom.

Rich glanced at Al, whom he could see, was not smiling at Tom. The women stood talking for several minutes after Rich saw Inga

introduce KC to Tom. KC quickly stuck out her hand, as if to fend off a hug, to shake Tom's. A short time later, they left for the lobby and the restroom. Al seemed impatient, saying, "That guy is not harmless. He has a way with women, I don't like."

Chuck responded, "Come on Al, Inga has known him for a long time. She says, "He's okay. He just likes to show off for the women, with his money."

Rich made a mental note of Al's attitude. It seemed more intent, than such a casual gesture, as sending over a drink, would warrant. Rich hoped, he would have a chance to talk to Inga, about Little Tom. He realized, it had to be when Al was not around, though. Maybe, he could learn something.

Chuck ordered another drink. He seemed real loose. He suggested Rich ask Katrin to dance. He said it in a voice which, to Rich, sounded like a mix of regrets and wishes. Rich smiled and declined. "She's too young for me, but thanks," he smiled.

Before leaving for the restroom, Katrin had been draped around Chuck's shoulders, as if they were oblivious to everything. Rich felt it would be a bad idea, getting her to dance. She, in her mind, was taken. He hadn't known KC long enough to be sure she wouldn't take it as a come-on.

In the ladies' room, it was so crowded Inga and Katrin couldn't talk freely. Katrin did get to ask Inga, if she knew Rich's age. She smiled at the reply. Katrin grabbed Inga by the arm as they left the restroom. "Inga, who iss that man, Rich, anyhow?" she whispered.

Inga was taken aback at the sound of such interest in her friend's voice. She hesitated, wondering, at her friend's sudden concern. She couldn't believe that Katrin was so curious about Rich. He was nearly twenty years older than KC.

Katrin, not noticing the pause she gave her friend, continued, "What you think 'bout him for Mama? She's only fifty six." This time Inga stood, completely, dumbstruck. Katrin's father had been over sixty when he died, three years ago. Her mother had married him when eighteen and Katrin was their only child.

Mama lived with Katrin. KC's two boys were with Joe, her Ex, who was very successful in land development.

Hundreds of seconds passed, as they stood in the lobby. Inga couldn't reply. She was so astounded. She had looked at Rich as a possible candidate for some one of her friends. She had always thought of Katrin as a contemporary. 'I feel, I'm her age,' she thought to herself. 'She must look at me, like she looks at her mother. Gott in Himmel,' Inga wondered, 'If that's what KC thinks about Rich, does she lump me in with her mother's age group, too?' Finally, she collected her thoughts, "That's something to keep in mind," she replied with a small smile.

While the women were gone, Rich glimpsed Rolanda squeezing her way through the crowd. Her small figure seemed to be buffeted by the human tide that ebbed and flowed with the music.

KC's lissome form had seemed to make its own wake, through that human pool.

Rolanda was wearing light green slacks and a black pullover that didn't do justice to her young body. She was dressed in a very subdued fashion, compared to the older women.

Women, Rich's age, built like Rolanda, would be merchandising their attributes. Rich thought of Stella and how loaded with booze she was the other night. She had a shape much like Rolanda's, but heavier, so she didn't do anything to emphasize it. Of course, she was heavier, but, he reminded himself, she was nearly twenty years older. On the other hand, Rich thought, that could have been of small consequence, if Stella had wished it so. It seemed to be a common contrast in attitude, between young and not so young. Rolanda dressed to play down the points men looked for. The not so young, if they have figures like her, flaunt them.

'It's strange,' Rich reasoned, 'They both are interested in attracting men, but their methods are so totally opposite.'

Rich was smiling as Rolanda squeezed through the last reef of the crowd. She came up and took hold of his upper arm with

both hands, as if to keep from being swept away by the people moving to and from the dance floor.

“Hi, Rich,” Rolanda smiled. Chuck and Al stood slightly apart and turned at her voice. They stared but didn’t say anything.

“Hi, Kiddo, how are you doing? I saw you fighting your way through the masses,” Rich smiled. “I haven’t seen you dancing.”

“That’s why I found you. No one’s asked me. You want to work the magic, again?” she laughed. Rich laughed with her and the band seemed to cooperate. It started playing “*Moon River*.” Rich supposed that Rolanda’s small stature made her difficult to be seen through the swarm. Her head just barely came up to his chest. She would only be noticed, in this mass, if you were standing next to her. No wonder she hadn’t been dancing.

“Let’s try this one, Rolanda. I’ll cast my spell on you.”

Chuck and Al stood there with their mouths agape, as Rich and Rolanda pushed through the crowd, hand in hand, to the dance floor. They were staring at the May-December couple dancing close, when Inga and KC got back from the ladies’ room.

Inga and KC asked about Rich’s absence as they rejoined their men. Al smiled and said, “You should have seen the young thing that swept Rich away.”

Chuck smiled, still in awe, “She can’t be over thirty and she seemed to know about a magic spell or something. I didn’t get it but look at them.”

All four were silent as they peered through the crowd of heads between them and the dance floor. Rich and the young doll were dancing close and whispering to each other. Chuck had missed Rolanda, last week when Rich had danced with her under similar circumstances. He had been making a pit stop. Stella hadn’t mentioned her to Chuck. Rolanda was not someone Stella would mention to any man she was interested in. Chuck was looking at the two dancing, wondering if Rich would make it with that young girl. He was totally convinced, Rich would surely score

with her, the way she had come on to him. He thought, 'It's a sure thing, look at the way they're dancing.'

Katrin was staring at Rich with a new slant to her view of him. 'Why would anyone who was attractive to girls that young, be interested in Mama?' she thought to herself.

Al's pleasure at seeing Rich and Rolanda together was both selfish and generous. 'That makes it certain, he'll not come on to Inga, when he can get dishes like that,' he thought, 'You got to hand it to him, he looks good dancing with the younger ones. He's the type a smart young chick would go for.'

Inga was evaluating the situation, also. 'What did that young girl see, in Rich that she had missed? Did that young woman find him, that attractive? I've got to think, again, about his seeming, so stable.'

Rich was tickled by the looks that he saw on the faces of Al and Chuck. As they danced, he glimpsed Inga and Katrin's faces as they, too, watched him with this young girl. He started worrying about the reactions, he might be causing.

"My friends were stunned by your approach, Rolanda. They don't know about my warming up your young swains, here, by dancing with you," Rich laughed into her ear, softly.

"I wanted to see if it was just a coincidence, the last time we danced. That guy that asked you, 'Please, Sir,' to dance with me, was very nice but isn't here, tonight, I guess. Do you think it will work, again?"

"Sure, Kiddo," Rich smiled, "You can toss me aside like an old shoe, well used, when another younger one does,"

Rolanda leaned back, looking into Rich's eyes, questioningly. "For a minute, there, I thought you were serious," she laughed.

Rich smiled into her eyes, "Maybe I am, but don't ever quit asking me to dance, okay?"

When the dance ended, the band started a rock and roll tune. Rich and Rolanda didn't even get back to the bar before a young man came up and asked Rich, "Sir, may I dance with the lady?"

Rolanda raised up on her toes and kissed Rich's cheek, "Thanks for the dance, Merlin," she laughed as she stepped away.

When Rich rejoined the foursome at the bar, Al and Chuck were all smiles. "Okay, Rich. What's the story?" Al laughed.

Chuck joined in, "What's this magic, you have Rich?"

The women were watching him closely. He smiled at their faces and wondered what was going through their minds. He imagined they were sure he was after the young "hard bodies." He was interested in keeping the two women's goodwill. He decided, they were the movers and shakers, in this new social group, he wanted to join. For that reason, he felt it necessary to placate them with a small "story" explaining Rolanda's asking him to dance. "That's a school friend of my oldest daughter. I've known her since she was twelve," Rich said, not wanting to go into a long explanation. He wanted to reassure them that he was not a lecherous, older man, looking to seduce a girl. The men's faces showed mixtures of disappointment and wishfulness.

Inga looked both accepting and relieved. The look on KC's face reminded him of someone who was pleased and justified in her opinions. Rich guessed he could have made the story, more flattering, or more ego satisfying, but wanted to maintain good rapport with these four. They resumed the small talk when Rich noticed a woman edging towards them through the mob. It was Stella and she had seen Chuck. She moved through the crowd, drink in hand, taking long swigs from the glass, as she moved toward them.

Rich thought fast and turned to the group, nudging Chuck with his elbow, unseen by the others, saying, "Chuck, I see an old friend. Why don't you and KC dance? I'll see if she wants to."

Rich moved towards Stella and met her in the crowd near the far side of the aisle. "Hi, Stella. How's it going?" Stella stared at him for a minute, hesitating. Her eyes seemed glassy and she looked unsure of him.

“I’m Rich, remember? We met last weekend, you and me and Chuck, remember?” His insistent tone seemed to break through the fog.

“Oh, yeah. Where’s Chuckie-Baby?” she murmured, with a giggle. Rich was stumped. He didn’t know what Stella had in mind but thought fast. “He’s got a date, here, tonight. I was hoping you’d show up. He asked me to watch out for you.”

Stella looked at, and, through him, smiling crookedly, “Yeah, I remember you. You and that young girl danced and I lost a bet to you. You wants’ collect, tonight, Honey?”

Rich grabbed her arm and started steering her away from his friends. She was a good looking woman but drank too much. Another time, and he might be tempted. She was the right age, somewhere between forty-five and fifty, he thought. He made it into the lobby with Stella, willingly in his grasp. Rich asked if she would like to take a cab home. She was agreeable and he told her he’d take her there.

After getting her address, which was just up the road in Anaheim Hills, he walked her to the cab, giving the driver a twenty. He told him in a low voice, “This should cover your trouble for getting her into her house.” Stella didn’t seem to notice, as Rich went back towards the entrance. Her head was flopped back on the seat and her eyes were closed.

‘She’s so smashed, she’ll probably think the cab driver is me,’ he smiled, as he went back into the lobby. ‘I’m glad the cabby looked so honest. The twenty should be all he wants for the trouble.’

When Rich got back to his place at the bar, Al and Inga looked at him, expectantly. He smiled apologetically, saying, “One of my first dates. She was so lit, I sent her home to sober up. I can’t handle women that drink so much. They conk out.”

Al, who had been drinking very steadily, turned to Inga, “That’s the way you are, too, huh, Baby. You take me home, when I’m smashed, huh.” He laughed to Rich, “We’re going to get along, real good, huh, Rich.”

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Inga looked into Rich's eyes, as if trying to assay his thoughts. He smiled back, into her eyes, and said, "It's nice when people get to understand each other like you and Al, do. You, two, are lucky people."

Inga didn't respond. She smiled as if trying to read something into Rich's speech.

Chuck was looking around the area when he and KC came back from their dance. He looked at Rich, questioningly. Rich explained, he had sent "my friend" home in a cab.

Chuck looked pleased and smiled, "Rich, you and I are going to be great friends. You're really a creative thinker."

The two couples danced a lot and the rest of the evening passed swiftly. Inga wouldn't let Al drink much, and when Chuck and KC were dancing, Inga launched into an explanation of KC's family situation, to Rich. She didn't mention Mama. When Chuck and KC came back, from their fourth or fifth dance, Inga suggested, "Rich, come with us to Keno's. We, always, have some early breakfast, before we go home."

Rich looked at his watch. 'Where had the night gone?' It was twelve-thirty. He hadn't danced but once. Between chatting with his new acquaintances, and thinking of Tasha, he hadn't wanted to make the effort to meet anyone else.

The five of them agreed to meet at Keno's. It was only a short distance away. After arriving to the all night coffee shop, they waited until they could get a booth together. The place was busier than Rich expected at that hour. He noticed several couples he had seen dancing at Valentines. He wondered if this was another common practice on the Singles' Scene.

Meet them at Valentines. Then come here and get better acquainted or comfortable with each other.

And then, ... so to bed.

They waited for about ten minutes before getting a booth for five. The women sat in between Chuck and Al. Rich was on the outside, next to Al, facing the entrance. While they were

scanning the menus, Al nudged Rich slightly and nodded his head towards the entrance. “There’s a ‘couple’ you won’t see dancing at Valentines.” He chuckled, as he raised his eyes towards two men, who were waiting to be seated.

Inga said, in a very, tow voice, “Don’t be that way, Al. They’re nice. I asked the taller one to dance once and he was a perfect gentleman,that was BA, before Al.”

“Yeah, they don’t go for women. They stand around looking for some younger guy they can hustle,” Al sneered, in a low voice.

Rich looked at the two men again and remarked, “You could never tell, from looking at them. They look normal.” Katrin whispered across the table to Rich, “They are...gay. We see them operate. They look for some divorced guy, complaining about what his ex-wife did to him, and they try to move in to the kill.”

The serious look on Katrin’s face made them all laugh. “It’s true,” she said, not smiling. “They’re competition to all women. Just like hookers.” She looked unsettled by the laughter.

Rich trying to ease Katrin’s discomfort, said, “I had some unpleasant encounters, when I used to hitch-hike to high school in LA. More than once, a fag would pick me up and I’d have to threaten him with violence, to make him stop the car and let me out.”

Chuck said, “We have some at work. They don’t seem to bother anyone but everyone knows their gay.”

The waitress came and they quickly checked the menu to place their orders. Rich waited until they, all, had ordered and then asked for coffee only. He didn’t like to eat anything before going to bed.

As they waited to order, the four talked about their “gang” having fun going to Tahoe, Vegas, and Catalina. They would rent adjoining suites and party on the occasion of one of their friend’s birthdays. To Rich, it reminded him of some of the joint socials he had enjoyed in college. The fraternity would get

together at various locales with a sorority to party. It sounded like something he would really like.

When their orders came, Al took one bite from his sausage and called the waitress over. He complained about the sausage not being cooked, the way he liked it. The waitress offered to get him another order and he accepted.

“I don’t know why any guy, who cooks for a living can’t get food right,” Al grimaced. “I hate raw sausage.”

Rich, without thinking, said, “When I was in college, I worked in a restaurant, washing dishes. A scholarship job. I learned never to send anything back to the kitchen.”

Inga was surprised. “You just eat whatever you’re served?”

“No, I leave it. I saw what the cooks do to returns. Once, a guy sent back his eggs and the cook hocked a big clam into them. When I saw him spit on it, I nearly crapped. Another time, he got a steak back, too rare, and he unzipped his pants and ‘tenderized it’ with his joint.”

The women and Chuck roared with laughter. Al had a stricken look on his face. When the meal came back, with the waitress’ sincere apology, the others were eating and talking. They didn’t notice Al’s discomfort, except for Rich. He had seen Al, staring at his plate, as if it was a public hazard. Rich felt terrible that Al looked at his sausages with such suspicion. Al barely touched the eggs. The sausages just lay there totally undisturbed. He devoured the toast and jelly.

The talk turned to the foursome’s interest in Rich’s new lifestyle, as a divorced man. Chuck had told them, all, again, of Rich’s long marriage and the wife’s getting tired of being married. Inga was interested because she had been married for twenty years and divorced over ten. Her husband had left for another woman, who had three young children. She was curious about Rich and his wife’s reasons for the divorce. They were astonished that she had not worked outside the house, during those thirty years. Rich explained that was her choice. He had wanted her to work, when the kids were, finally, all in school. He didn’t mention the

thousand a month he was paying for spousal support, which, the law forced him to pay forever, because she stayed home the entire marriage.

Rich told, again, about everyone being mystified by her decision to leave. Inga brought up the, now familiar, topic of her changing her mind. Rich explained his refusal to consider the possibility because of his ex-wife's manipulation of his children.

Katrin asked, "Do you believe she is happy, Rich? After so long married, I don't think so. How long, you been divorced, you say?"

"Going on four months final but over a year and half separated," he replied. "Well, you bet, she'll want to come back, anyway," KC replied. "Won't you take her back?"

"I've thought a lot about it and realized that the love, we had in the marriage, was probably changing all the time. You know. You're in love and go on accepting it, but gradually, over time, you both become different people. Now, it's gone, forever."

Katrin warmed up to the matter, saying, "You say, after thirty years, you don't love her? How can it be?"

Rich answered, "If you think about it. Marriage changes people from what they were, when they wed. We went together, since I was sixteen and she was fifteen. We married, when I was twenty. The love slowly becomes a mixture of the love, for the first person you both were, to a love for the person you are now. Gradually, the love changes to loving the person, more for what they were, not as they are. She's the mother of your children. Loving her for that may replace a share of loving her, for herself."

Chuck replied, as if startled, "I know what you mean. My wife got so wrapped up in the kids and their lives, I felt like an outsider with her. Soon you're growing apart and changing from her lover, to her husband, to the father of her kids. The marriage changes you, both, into different people." Inga was surprised. "That is something I never realized about you, men. You, all, get different, when kids come along. I noticed the change in my

husband after a few years. He began to complain about, our not having the same closeness we had in the marriage earlier.”

Katrin nodded her agreement. “You..., We, all, change over time. Iss no reason to walk out on each other.”

Rich replied, “A woman I met at Valentines said something to me about that. She said, ‘.....when people lived only an average of forty-five years, marriage for life was natural. Now, we live so long, it’s not so strange, so few people celebrate their fortieth anniversary’. She thought it may take two or three marriages to reach the fortieth, for our generation. I think that’s a shrewd observation.”

Al smiled, “Maybe, that’s what's wrong. We shouldn't live so long.”

They laughed and Inga said to Rich, “How in the world did you manage seven kids? When were you ever alone with your wife?”

Rich smiled, “They only come one at a time, so you get into a routine that works or you quit having them. We finally figured out, what was causing them to come into our lives.”

They laughed with Rich and he continued, “We had a routine, we fell into, I guess. We’d never have sex in the morning. Only on Saturday night, late, when the kids were exhausted. It’s a pattern a lot of people, I know, fall into.”

The others agreed that married sex soon became such a routine for them. There seemed to be nothing, you could do about that, they, all, agreed.

Chuck remarked, “I’m nearly forty-seven, now, but recall how our sex life changed, so much, after the kids. It’s easy to resent their intrusion into your wedded bliss when they come a year after the ceremony.”

Rich was silent a moment and took another sip of coffee before he went on. He happened to look up and see Carol, with a man who looked older than himself, being seated across the

restaurant. He knew she didn't see them as the two sat down, facing away. They were cuddling and talking, intimately.

Rich wondered at the feelings that rose up in pit of his stomach. He thought to himself, 'Damn, she's a good looking woman.' He wrenched himself back to their conversation. He hoped he hadn't shown anything in his facial expressions. However, Chuck said, "Hey, Rich, you look, a thousand miles away."

Rich was glad Chuck didn't turn around and see Carol, there.

"Well," Chuck said, "Every couple I've known, handles it a different way."

Inga was thinking about her current situation. Al was one who seemed to need sex, very seldom. He was very frank, in stating, that sex, on Wednesdays and Saturdays, was plenty for him. As a result, Inga watched what Al drank on Saturdays, so he wouldn't pass out when they went to bed. He wanted sex on Wednesdays, only if they were in bed before eleven.

She guessed, twice, a week was about average, for lots of couples. She asked Rich, "You were able to go a whole week? How did your wife like that?"

"She was all for it. I wanted more, but only occasionally did I get more, if I was a good boy," Rich smirked. "In our case, I'd stifle my urges and learned to lie in wait, like some patient, but hungry, jungle beast, waiting for the bedroom door to close and be locked. Then, all hell would break loose.....but we'd not make a sound," Rich laughed. They, all, laughed with him. After a short silence, Chuck said, "Rich, explain what you meant about, remembering a different person, than the one you're married to."

"Sure, Chuck," Rich responded. "Have you ever noticed how someone you remember fondly, for a long time, appears in your mind, as he or she looked at your first meeting? I mean you visualize your love as she used to be. I've known married men who always think of their wives as they were in high school. I know I did. You don't see them as they really are. Your love is made up of portions. You, both, love what the other was, when

your life together was new. Your love's made up of portions of—Now, and—Then.”

“As time goes by, the total love may grow. The ‘Now Portion’ may be overshadowed by the ‘Then Portion’. You are in love, more, with, What-Used-To-Be, Then, than with what you both have become, Now.”

The four were silent, as if lost in their own thoughts.

Rich continued, “Then, something happens and you look at her and see her as she has become. You realize most of your love belongs to the person who used to be.”

Inga replied, “Do you think that’s why men leave for a younger woman? They’re looking for, What-Used-To-Be?”

Rich replied, “That’s only a ‘could be,’ I think. Each guy’s different. I don’t think any one theory, fits all situations.”

Katrin replied, “I think that iss the way a man thinks. We don’t look at love, the same way.”

“I think that’s an interesting viewpoint,” Chuck commented. “I would have to think about it, though, to see how many people it might apply to.”

Al answered, “The only thing, I believe, is that people look for what they didn’t find in their first relationship.” “It usually happens, early in life, that you get certain expectations about marriage. If you find it’s not what you thought, you search for that somewhere else.”

Rich smiled at Al, “I agree that’s probably the most common situation. When the situation changes from what you expected it to be, you make a change. Men and women, both do that.”

Inga laughed, “Yeah, I expect our situation, here, to change. I'm exhausted by all this deep talk. Let’s hit the road.”

They, all, laughed and agreed. Rich motioned to the waitress who was looking for places to seat other people. She came right over. Al told the waitress, when she came to retrieve the dishes,

he had lost his appetite. She offered to take the meal, off the check.

Rich grabbed the check, saying, "It's my treat, guys. I should have kept my mouth shut."

They chuckled and Al objected, "No, Rich. That's too much, let us treat you, tonight. We just met."

After a short game of "snatch 'n grab", Rich convinced Al that he really did want to treat his new friends. Rich, really, was pleased to be in their company and fended off Al's efforts to claim the tab. As they were leaving the coffee shop, Al and the women preceded Rich, as he stopped at the cashier with the check. Chuck was following a few paces behind him.

Rich saw Chuck's face register some surprise as he caught sight of Carol and her friend. He glanced at Rich and stepped over to say, in his ear, "Now, I know why you were in a trance, a while back. In this light, she's even more of a knockout. That must be her boyfriend."

Rich felt that same feeling come back, but, now, it felt like a grab at the heart. Rich was silent, as he paid the bill, and followed the four to the parking lot. Before they split up, they, all, agreed it was a lot of fun and "...would see y'all, Valentine's Day."

Al didn't say much, as they split up, but on the way home, he told Inga, who was driving, "I've decided to think twice about eating someone else's cooking."

Inga smiled at him, reached over and patted his shoulder. "No one cooks as good as you do, Hon'."

On the way home to Brea only about six miles from Keno's, Inga kept the conversation going. She didn't want Al to fall asleep. He was like a zombie, when he woke up from a short nap, after drinking. "What do you think of Rich, Honey? Do you think he'll want to be in our gang?" Inga asked, nudging Al's shoulder to stop his nodding head.

"Huh? Oh, yeah, he was a sharp guy, tonight. He and Chuck seemed to hit it off. They think like we do," he replied with a

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yawn. “What do you think of him? I think he’s got a good sense of humor.”

“Yeah, he’s funny, the way he comes up with things,” Inga agreed. She continued, “He’s a sharp man, I think. Chuck says he is in computers. He sounds like he does a lot of thinking. He must be good at it. He makes his living helping people with their PC’s, Inga replied, adding, “You’ve been wanting to buy one. Maybe he would help us, pick one out.”

Al was thinking about the breakfast sausages. He could see why it seemed so funny to the others, now. He smiled, “Yeah, we ought to go to the Club on Saturdays, more regular. We had a lot of laughs, tonight, Babe. What do you think? Can we go next Saturday? I like to watch the action. You remember our first Valentine’s Day, there??

“How could I forget it,” Inga replied. “I thought you were going to get in a fight with Little Tom, over me. You were so sweet.”

Inga found it impossible to keep Al awake after that.

CHAPTER ELEVEN

Thursday, Rich met Wilson Wong, the Sierra Springs DP Manager, at their headquarters in Anaheim.

Wilson introduced Rich to their VP and General Manager, Bill Meyers, who was concerned about the effect this strange new virus would have on his fifty other PC's. Rich assured him that as long as the three infected PC's were kept quarantined, the virus would not spread.

Bill was concerned about the need for them in their accounting process. He didn't want the three new PC's to be out of service very long. As a result, Rich was asked to forego additional work on the proposed sales tracking project, until this problem could be totally eliminated.

As a result, Rich was given a verbal contract to work exclusively on this new task. They shook hands on the stated terms. Rich would receive three thousand dollars to assist Wilson in tracking down the source of the infection.

They agreed, if it took longer than two weeks, they would discuss a more permanent arrangement. Then, Bill left Wilson and Rich to plan their course of action.

The V. P. wanted to be advised weekly on their progress.

Wilson and Rich started to review the software listings and the sequence of events that Wilson had compiled.

After a couple of hours, spent reviewing the file listing the creation dates and file sizes for all programs, it was determined that the standard software on the three infected machines was different from the other PC's in the company. Two other PC's, in their finance office, had the same accounting programs, the sizes of which were not identical, either.

All programs with an EXE extension, in the listed file descriptions, of the three newest PC's, were five kilobytes larger. The exception was in the new project management (PM) software on the three infected PC's. This program had not been used, as yet, and the programs were the same size on all three

machines. Each machine had been loaded from one copy that had been purchased from a mail order house.

Rich asked to see the software manuals and original disks for that PM application. Rich reviewed files sizes on the new program disks and they were the same as those on the three corrupted PC's. After looking at the PM Software Users' Manual, Rich pointed out that copying the programs to three machines was a violation of the licensing agreement that the software developer had stipulated on the product.

Wilson immediately had his purchasing department order two more copies of the PM software. Rich requested that Wilson provide another PC for Rich to use, full time, to compare files while he worked on the three infected PC's. Again, Wilson was authorized to purchase a similar PC from the same vendor, the three other PC's came from.

Rich planned to use one of the, newly ordered, project management software copies as a comparison with the copies on the three infected PC's.

Rich agreed to spend his time, while they waited for the two, new PM copies, trying to correct two of the three infected PC's. One PC would be left infected to be used as a basis for comparison, with the new software. Rich advised Wilson that he would contact a new Virus Detection Organization in San Raphael, California that offered a virus protection package that listed all known viruses and their characteristics. Wilson had him get on the phone, and order the package, that same day.

The rest of the day, Rich spent planning a procedure to save the data files on the two infected PC's, hopefully, without picking up the virus, in the backup process. He realized the .EXE files were infected and could not be saved. Rich planned to study and compare the three directory listings from the infected PC's when he got home. All three had the same software loaded with standard applications of software he had on his own PC-AT.

He planned on checking file sizes on his clean PC, against each of the three infected PC's.

Information, from the Virus Protection Company in San Raphael, came a few days later. The packet of information listed known viruses. There were over a hundred and fifty, on the list. None, listed, attacked the IO.SYS file. Most attached to the Command.Com file and were easily detected by current protection programs. Some were identified as “time bombs”. These, after the PC was started up, dozens or even hundreds of times, would activate late-blooming viruses and even print messages on the monitor, announcing their presence.

The new information gave Rich a different perspective on the Virus Problem. Somehow, this company in Northern California had information showing the spread of these viruses. Many came from Taiwan and mainland China. They were in Europe and all over the U.S. The data showed dates when first discovered and a trail across the trade routes of the world. Most were spread, inadvertently, by use of telephones and modems to transfer computer files.

Rich suspected that this “time bomb” feature that activated the virus after the PC was turned on and off, over several weeks, or even months, was what he was facing. It would be virtually impossible to back track this new virus, if it was that type. It didn’t change file dates. It would be difficult to tell which program hosted the virus or which was the original carrier. It would mean monitoring a machine constantly, to see when the virus activated, if you knew you had the host on your hard drive. That was a big “IF.”

For the next several days, Rich worked constantly, with time out for Tasha, of course, to cleanup the two infected PC’s and to track down the carrier of the virus.

After getting the new PC that Wilson dedicated to Rich’s use, Rich got the two new PC’s free from the virus. He was successful in saving all the data files from the infected PC’s, using a fast, backup software package that used a non-Dos format. He found that the Dos format routine would not eliminate the virus from the hard drive, even with a new system file transfer. He had to low-level format the hard drive and turn

off the machine, immediately, after the formatting. The virus stayed in Ram Memory, and would revive when a Sys file transfer was made, otherwise.

It took three format attempts on the first PC, before Rich figured out the correct sequence for formatting the hard drive.

The third PC, he used as a “lab specimen” to compare with programs he loaded on the clean PC. He compared all programs with .Exe and .Com extensions. Various .Exe files on the three PC’s had the virus attached to them. They were five thousand (K) bytes larger.

However, the person who created the virus had been clever enough to make the original dates on the programs stay the same. That way, it was impossible to track the time-frame of the changes in the files’ sizes. Rich could see that the infected programs were five K bytes, larger, but the modification dates were the same as the original, uninfected or clean programs’ creation dates.

He couldn’t tell when the virus grabbed onto the files and corrupted them.

When the two project management (PM) software packs, Wilson ordered from the mail order house arrived, Rich checked the file sizes against the programs on the one, remaining, corrupted PC.

All the .Exe programs from the infected PC’s were larger than the originals. The file creation dates were the also same, as well. That meant the original PM software disks were also corrupted.

Rich sat down and explained the situation to Wilson Wong. Wilson was unable to determine, with any certainty, if the three machines had been used to run the PM software. Rich explained that if someone had executed that program on the machines that were corrupted, the virus would have attached to the project management software at that time.

However, Rich was unable to determine where the virus was resident, or where it came from, with any assurance.

He explained that it was possible the virus was activated by the illegal copying of the project management software.

“That’s just a suspicion, Wilson,” Rich explained, “I couldn’t prove that without going through the PM software’s source code.”

Wilson asked, “I don’t follow you, Rich. What do you mean? Did that one program corrupt my other programs? I could sue that software company for a lot of money, if that was true.”

“Let’s look at the scenario, here, Wilson. Why do you think anyone, with enough programming talent to create such an ingenious virus, would do it? It’s just like a detective story. The only crime you can’t solve is one without a motive. What motive would such a talented programmer have to do so much work and not even know the results?”

Rich was verbalizing his private thoughts, mulled over for the hundreds of hours he had spent on the virus.

Wilson replied, “They want to cause trouble if you copy their program. That’s got to be it. Why else, there’s no profit in it, even then.”

“That’s my point. The only way you can get to the bottom of this is to spend months taking their software apart, line by line, if you had the source code. Then what do you do? Maybe, the only thing that activates the virus is illegal copying. You have to admit you violated their copyrights, then what?”

“I see what you mean. But is this the source of the virus, or not?” Wilson asked.

“That’s the sixty-four thousand dollar question. How do we prove it is the source, even if we are ninety-five percent certain?” Rich asked, “Is it worth the trouble? It is going to be very difficult to determine, with legal certainty, which program was the original carrier. It would require a systematic loading of software, under controlled conditions, before you could prove which program actually started the infection. Any program could be infected by any other program, and become a carrier. It was like which came first, the sick rat or the infected flea.”

Rich demonstrated that an infected program, when executed on any PC, would attach the virus to the IO.SYS file in the boot section of Ram Memory of that PC. Once in Ram memory, it attached to every .Exe program that was executed. From there it would spread to the boot file on the hard drive, to load into Ram Memory, each time the PC was turned on. From there, the virus would attach to any diskette used in the floppy drive.

Any program executed would pick up the virus, whether the program was on the hard drive or on an unprotected diskette. Write-protecting the diskette, used in the floppy drive, was the only way you could keep the virus from spreading. That meant you couldn't copy anything to the diskette, if it was write-protected.

A report of Rich's efforts and a corrupted disk were forwarded to the consulting firm in San Raphael. They operated a clearing house for information about viruses, from all over the world, and could find if the new virus appeared elsewhere. That firm also had machine language programmers that could extract enough data about the new virus to create a detection routine. However, the lead time was unknown. It could take months.

The interesting thing, as Rich thought about it later, was that the Virus Detection Company in San Raphael didn't make any effort to contact Rich about where the virus may have originated. They neglected to ask the obvious questions about what programs had been used when the virus was first discovered.

To Rich, this seemed unusual. He had expected them to be interested enough to track down the original carrier. They, obviously, were only interested in the more profitable activity of developing a detector for the virus. They made money by selling programs that would be used by victims of the infection. This made Rich question any interest in following up on the investigation to find the source of the corrupting program. He knew it was a virtually impossible and, really, a very costly endeavor.

Rich was asked to stay on the project after Wilson reported to his VP. Rich agreed to a monthly retainer of three thousand dollars

to be on call for any problems that might arise. They agreed that his work on the sales tracking program would be as originally agreed but with an extension of eighteen months for completion of the prototype application.

Rich was launched into a new consulting venue that would become an interesting and profitable sideline to his application software development business. He realized that whoever had created the virus had indirectly added to his consulting business. He decided to wait and see if there were further instances of its infecting PC's, anywhere else, before executing a time consuming plan, he had thought out. Since he had made contact with Wilson Wong at Valentines, Rich decided to call the new virus, the "Valentine Virus."

It would lead him into a vital and expanding industry, Water Treatment and Distribution.

Rich was soon to discover that like Water Delivery, Water Treatment was something very few people knew much about, but everyone takes for granted. The delivery of drinking water, by container, or by aqueduct, was a gigantic undertaking in a desert climate, like Southern California. It was this critical industry that this new virus would infect and spread into, rapidly.

Of course, Rich couldn't foresee the ramifications of such a software virus epidemic. It would take him months of part-time, systematic detective work, before he could even gain any hard evidence as to the carrier of the virus. It would wreak havoc on the burgeoning use of PC's in the analyses of water samplings, taken to detect contaminants. Quality sampling was a mandatory task in the Water Industry, which was just becoming oriented to personal computers. Off and on, for several months, Rich would be called to provide help in isolating the Valentine Virus.

Tuesday, Rich was at Keno's in the lobby, waiting for Tasha. He had gotten there a little before six.

She had said she would meet him between six and a quarter after.

As he waited, he was remembering his feelings, when he had seen Carol with her boyfriend, here, at Keno's, the previous Saturday night. Now, he got mad at himself, for reacting like that. He had always made an effort to keep his mind in control of his emotions. He was surprised at his involuntary, gut reactions to seeing Carol with someone else. Rich decided it must be his "old-fashioned" cultural programming. Carol was his first sexual and emotional involvement since his marriage went on the rocks. Even-though, he had logically concluded, she was too young and did not meet his profile of the woman he wanted, he had, somehow, made some subconscious attachment to her.

He chided himself. Tasha seemed to match the list of qualities in his Profile. He had spent a great deal of time, first thinking out the things he would look for, in a woman, and then, writing down the characteristics of the woman he wanted. Rich firmly believed this logical image of his "Ideal Woman" would keep him from wasting time on the wrong type of female.

Rich was convinced that if he used this mental picture of what kind of woman he wanted, she would be drawn into his life. It was just a matter of time. However, he was ready to shift his list of priorities, as far as the rank of importance. Her looks were far down on the list.

Tasha's good looks were more than he had expected from one so sexually aggressive. If his profile match was a complete knockout like Tasha, so much the better. So far, he felt Tasha was everything, he had hoped to find in a woman.

Finally, Rich decided his feelings about Carol were a combination of his surprise at seeing her and her rejection of him. He convinced himself that it was for the best. Tasha was both, older, and more experienced than Carol. He had never been with such a terrific, sex partner.

Tasha was five minutes late. She walked into Keno's lobby, at twenty after. She gave Rich such an uninhibited greeting—an erotic embrace and wide kiss—he forgot all about Carol.

Tasha was a striking woman. Tonight, she was wearing a blue dress with a cleavage, showing about two inches of the slit between her artfully, hand-crafted breasts. Her necklace was a flat, gold-linked strand, which circled her fair neck and subdued the several, tan freckles, sprinkled around it. The dress was a form fitting sheath that enhanced her narrow waist and trim hips.

Rich knew from experience, she was without a girdle. The dress revealed she wore no bra, either. The outline of her nipples could, on close inspection, be seen straining against the soft, smooth fabric. ‘What a dish,’ he thought. Rich could feel a stirring in his trousers and looked away to reset his mind and ease the excitement he started. He smiled as they exchanged compliments on the other’s appearance.

Holding on to each other like high school kids, they went, arm and arm, into the cocktail lounge to have dinner.

The room was equal to the coffee shop in size, with candlelit tables, covered with red tablecloths that reached to the floor. It was a spacious, half-circle, without windows. The booths, along the curved wall, were upholstered in dark red leather. The bar was to the right of the entrance, with a half dozen tables, set back, a few feet from the dozen, or so, bar stools. There were only two men at the bar.

The waitress greeted them and led them to a booth on the back wall. There was only one other couple seated at the far end of the room.

Tuesday was a slow night for dinner, Rich surmised.

They ordered two Cadillac Margaritas, while they decided on their dinner selections. Tasha asked Rich, “I’m not too hungry. What are you having?”

Rich replied, “I haven’t eaten since my breakfast toast and coffee. I think I’ll have the New York Steak Dinner. Do you feel like a steak?”

“I might need you to help finish it, but I’ll have the same, no potato, just rice. I’ll skip the dinner salad, too,” she smiled.

Rich ordered for them, both, when the waitress brought their drinks.

The bar area was separated from the dining section, by a low slump-stone wall. The wall was topped by an intricately carved, dark, mahogany screen, reaching to the ceiling. There were four, unoccupied, booths, along the gentle curve of the room partition, opposite them. The dining area was lighted with subdued lights in a soffet, at the ceiling, that followed the curving back wall.

The setting was cozy and exclusive, with the candles, on the tables, and the low light level from the rear wall. The high-backed booths made each table, a very, private cove of intimacy. Even with its carved openings, the wooden partition, opposite them, made it impossible to see the dining area from the bar. Rich made small talk, asking Tasha about her day at The Broadway.

She made some positive comments about the computerized credit system in use, there. She, deftly, turned the discussion to Rich's area of interest. Tasha mentioned her impressions of the speed and responsiveness of the TRW credit services, they used, asking him how they could do credit reporting, so fast, for so many people, from all over the country.

After a few minutes explaining the communications capabilities of computers, Rich got her back to his area of real interest. "But, tell me, Tasha," Rich smiled, "how has someone like you stayed single, for even, a few months? You're an extraordinary lover and very attractive."

Tasha hesitated for a moment, or two. She took time, to get a cigarette from her purse and light up. "You bring that out in me, I guess. You're a real sexy guy, you know," she smiled, pleased by the appreciative look in his eyes. She continued, "Like I said, before, I was involved in a couple of bad relationships, after my second marriage. I was free for several years and liked it. My second wedding was only a few months after my divorce. When he died, I was not sure I would, ever, marry, again. I felt jinxed, kind of," she said, with a sad smile.

Rich was silent thinking, ‘How could I find out more about her divorce, in a tactful way?’

He asked, “I was wondering how your kids and your parents reacted to your getting married, again. If the few months between leaving the first, and marrying again, caused them to think that was why you got your divorce?”

Tasha shook her head, looking disturbed, as she thought back, “You know that was something. My parents were on his side during the breakup. I felt all alone. We had been having problems for years, but they were against me. It was hard on me and my kids. My oldest boy still seems to resent me, sometimes.”

She smiled, continuing, “They knew I didn’t meet Don, my second, until six months after my divorce. Getting married a couple of months, later, still seemed to make it worse, though. They, all, thought, we would get back together, but I knew it was over, for good.”

Rich smiled, sympathetically, “I know what you mean. The kids never give up. They want to recapture a dream that was never real in the first place.”

“After Don was killed,” Tasha went on, “My parents did a real turn-about. They called and visited me everyday. I think they were still hoping for us to get back together. But I was even more sure I never would marry again. It was seven years before my third marriage.”

Rich smiled, taking hold of Tasha with his arms, cuddling her and talking into her ear, “You must have enjoyed the single life, to go that long. Just for my own curiosity, how many times were you asked to marry, during that time?”

Tasha leaned her head back, smiling into his eyes, “How do you know that? Why do you say that? I haven’t thought about it.”

Rich pulled her close and kissed her inviting lips. They opened wide, her intake of breath, seeking his warm, moist tongue. They were interrupted by the waitress, with their dinner. She was well under thirty and smiled at them, as she placed their

meals before them, saying, “It’s nice to see romance is still burning. How long have you, two, been married?”

Not wanting to dispel the illusion, Rich replied, “Oh, probably since you were in the third grade.”

Tasha giggled, adding for effect, “We still make love three or four times a week.” The waitress gasped, leaning closer to look at their faces. Reassured, by their maturity—believing people, this age, don’t joke about things, like that—she smiled, enviously, “I wish I could find someone like that. You, both, are going to live a long time.” Rich laughed, “Kiddo, we already have.”

They, all, laughed and the waitress walked away smiling, as if, her own future prospects were more promising.

Rich put his left arm around Tasha, pulling her into his side, so he could finish the interrupted kiss. He pressed into her firm body in a close embrace. Her breasts squeezed against his chest, their clinching, nearly upsetting the table.

He whispered, “You’re a devil. That girl nearly fainted. Can you do it three or four times, a week, really? I’m sure I can.”

Tasha put her hand, under the table, on his growing firmness, saying, “After dinner and a couple of more drinks, you’ll find out.”

She asked, “Did you see that movie, ‘*Shampoo*’, with Warren Beatty? I thought that scene at the restaurant, where she went under the table was wild. I’ve always wanted to do that,” she smiled sexily.

Rich, sputtered, “You haven’t got the guts, Baby. I don’t believe you.” He remembered the blowjob scene, in the film.

Tasha took the last of her drink, in one long gulp, saying “Get me another Margarita and after dinner, I’ll take care of the dessert. These floor length tablecloths gave me the idea.”

Rich laughed, “You’re really something, Tasha. I’ll have another, too.” He signaled to their waitress, who was taking care

of the bar, as well as the dining room. After ordering their drinks, Rich fell on his charcoal broiled steak. It was nearly an inch and a half thick and done the way he liked; rare and juicy.

They talked, between bites, as they both enjoyed their steaks. When the waitress brought their drinks, asking how everything was, Rich said, “Excellent...and for dessert we’ll have two Irish Creams on the rocks, when we’re finished eating.”

After the waitress left, Rich took advantage of the pause in their table-talk to ask Tasha, “In that seven year period, when you were single, you must have met a lot of guys. What was the most bizarre experience you had, when you were dating?”

Tasha had been taking a long drink and paused, momentarily, as if to measure his reasons for the question. Her mischievous smile seemed to reply, “Okay, You asked for it.” She spoke slowly, as if remembering. “One time, a guy I had been going with for several months, had me meet him out at a hotel in San Bernardino. He was in pet sales, wholesale; and this out-of-town buyer had a suite there. After we three went to dinner, this jerk suggested I go in the bedroom with the buyer. Can you beat that?”

Tasha shook her head and added, “The asshole didn’t even offer me money to do it. He thought I would do it for free.”

Rich was silent and thinking about the last statement, “...do it for free.”

Tasha seemed warmed up and set her glass on the table,

She put her hand on Rich’s thigh, at his joint. She spoke in a low tone, “One night I was at Renaldo’s Mexican Place in East Anaheim, a few years ago. Back then it was a local hangout. They had a band and neighborhood people from Yorba Linda went there.” Pausing to take a drink with her free hand, Tasha started rubbing Rich’s bulge slowly and expertly. She continued, speaking softly into his ear, “I was into drinking really heavy, then. Well, two guys were sitting at the bar next to me and both started coming onto me. I was pretty horny so I went home with both.” She stopped talking as Rich’s manhood had come to a

straining attention as she stroked him through his trousers. “You seem to like that story. I can feel your excitement,” she laughed softly. She waited for his reaction. He was silent, so she explained, “I had never done two guys at once, and wanted to try it. Haven’t you ever wondered what two women, at once, would be like?”

Rich looked at her, smiling, “Baby, two women like you would probably kill me.” She squeezed his erection, leaning over to kiss him. He put his left arm around her waist, cupping her left breast in his hand, and kissed her long and hard.

Tasha, finally, pulled away and whispered, “Let’s finish our dinner. I want you to enjoy dessert with me.”

They continued eating and both seemed lost in their own thoughts. Neither seemed to want to break the spell with further talk. They ate in silence, for different reasons.

Rich, finished before Tasha, said, “That was one of the best steaks I’ve had in a long time. How was yours?”

“I’m going to need a doggy bag,” Tasha smiled. “Tell the waitress, I’m in the Ladies’ Room.”

Rich watched as Tasha wiped her mouth with her napkin, folded it neatly, putting it next to her plate. He thought she was going to the rest room. Without a sound, she slid down, under the table, and was between his legs. Rich was startled. He thought she was just talking, not serious. He looked around and no one was even facing their way. He felt his zipper being pulled down and warm fingers were caressing, touching him. They pulled his erect penis clear of his shorts and trousers. He gasped as her mouth moved over the head of his swollen limb. Her lips were slipping back and forth, as her tongue did, wonderfully, stimulating curls around his man-head.

Rich looked entranced, when he saw the waitress approaching with their after-dinner drinks. He whispered to Tasha, “Here comes the waitress.”

She started moving her mouth faster. The wet sounds seemed so loud, Rich put his left hand under the table and held Tasha's head still as the waitress came near. Rich leaned forward to put his one elbow, on the table, saying, louder than necessary, "You're on the ball, Kiddo. My partner's making a pit stop. Thanks, for remembering the Irish Cream."

The waitress smiled, "You look like you enjoyed your dinner. Your wife's a beautiful lady. You make a good-looking couple." She set the drinks down and turned away, saying, "Enjoy."

Rich let go of Tasha's head and did that, and more.

CHAPTER TWELVE

Tasha worked her magic on him and he got off a gigantic, burst as she moved around on him, drawing his all from his hot, pulsing dick.

Finally, she stopped and squirmed back into her seat, handing him her napkin, with a sexy look, saying, “This will help. They won’t notice it’s gone, if you keep it in your pants, as a muffler, on that charming cobra.”

Rich couldn’t believe how blase and relaxed Tasha was. She took a long drink from her Irish and smiled wickedly at him. Rich was too sated to speak. He noticed the waitress checking on them, from time to time. She would look around the partition between them and the bar, occasionally.

The wall and partition, itself, extended the width of the room, ending at a fountain at the aisle, near the entrance. The other end of the wall, terminated a few feet, from the curving back wall, leaving, just enough, room for the waitress' pass-through, to the booth section.

Rich looked at his watch. It was only seven-fifteen. He asked Tasha, “Would you like to go to a movie?”

She responded, “Let’s rent a porno and go to your place. Your dick is too nice to forget. I want some loving, too.”

Rich was pleasantly surprised by her suggestion. He replied, “Baby, I’m going to turn you, every way, but loose.” Tasha giggled, “I’ll hold you to that....and to ‘it’.”

Laughing, they finished their drinks and Rich signaled the waitress for the check. She came right over and asked, “Did you, two, like your steaks?”

Tasha smiled at her, saying, “The steaks were great. I enjoyed the dessert the most, though.”

Rich laughed at the quizzical look on the waitress' face. “She means the ‘Irish Cream’. It was a nice touch to finish the meal, with.”

Tasha seemed determined to confuse the issue. She smiled, “The dessert was nice and long. It was wonderful in my mouth.”

Rich grabbed Tasha’s thigh beneath the table. He put his hand up Tasha’s dress and slipped his hand under her pants, finding her warm, moist split. She gasped, as he said, “We always have an after dinner drink for dessert,” to the waitress.

Tasha regained her composure and said, “Now we’ll go home and have some real dessert.” Her sexy smile made the waitress understand her implicit meaning. The girl smiled, turning a red blush that could be seen, even in the dim light. “You, two, are too much. You come back and see us.”

On the way to Rich’s apartment, with Tasha following him in her car, they stopped to pick up a video. Tasha was adamant as to which one to choose. She insisted on a John Holmes film. Rich let her have her way. ‘She probably knows more about porno, too,’ he thought, to himself. When they approached the check-out, the girl, there, smiled at them as they gave her the film from the Adults Only section.

Tasha took advantage of the fact that they were the only ones near the counter. “Honey, do you know if this one’s any good?” she asked the teen-ager.

The girl looked at the jacket of the cassette and, with a very serious face, responded, “I don’t know personally but it’s been checked out a lot. I never watch these types of films.”

Tasha smiled, wickedly, saying, “Honey, you ought to watch, at least one, before you get much older. I wish these were available when I was your age.” She smiled at Rich, for the girls benefit, and continued, “If I had, I wouldn’t be on my fifth marriage.” Rich laughed at the shocked look on the girl’s face.

Deciding to get in on the joke, he smiled at the clerk, saying, “She was married four times before I met her last year. These films have changed our life.” The clerk was speechless. She hurriedly got their choice from the racks and without looking up, sacked the cassette and signed them out.

Rich thought to himself, 'I'd sure like to know what this kid is thinking about us, older folks, now.' He could imagine her telling this story to her young friends.

On the way to his apartment, Rich was laughing with Tasha about their ploy at the video store. "What do you think, that kid's thinking, now, about people our age? Her parents are surely much younger, than we are."

Tasha giggled, "She might have had one of those, life-changing experiences, tonight. We'll go in there, together, next time, to see how she acts."

When they got to the apartment, Tasha insisted on fixing a scotch and water for them, both. She made herself at home, finding the ice and glasses while Rich made a pit stop. Tasha waited for him, standing, in the center of the room, with the two drinks in her hands.

When Rich came back she handed him his drink saying, "I'm about to wet my pants. I'll be right back."

Rich smiled, thinking, 'Our bio-rhythms are in sync, anyway. That's one thing, people our age, have in common.'

He placed the VHS cassette in his VCR and turned it on, along with the TV. Tasha came back and sank down on the sofa, taking a long drink from her scotch and water.

As Rich picked up the remote and joined her, Tasha said, "Just a minute, I want to change before you start the flick." She took her purse and went into the bedroom.

Rich was puzzled. He couldn't wait to see what she was changing into. In a couple of minutes, Tasha returned wearing a red teddy and her high heels. The teddy's revealing support of her breasts displayed her beautifully hand-crafted orbs. The nipples were just starting to emerge above the red lace trim.

Rich, leering at Tasha in a manner he knew she would appreciate, said, "The way you look in that, the people on TV will probably stop and be watching us."

Tasha laughed in delight, saying, “Do you really like it? I wasn’t sure if you would think it’s too cheap looking.”

Rich laughed and sprang up to embrace her eagerly, saying, “I’ve never had a woman wear anything so sexy, for me. It’ll be the first time I’ve ever made love to a woman wearing one of those.” She returned his welcoming kiss with a wide mouth that drew his tongue fully into her. His hands were gripping her buttocks, pulling her against the mounted firmness of his desire.

Tasha whispered in his ear, “Let’s save it for the movie. I want to see how you like my selection.”

He replied, “Whatever, you say, Luv. I want to make sure you’re as much in the mood as I am.”

They moved, still entwined, to the sofa, where Rich picked up the remote control from the coffee table. He made sure he was sitting to Tasha’s right so she would be able to see the screen, if he leaned towards her. The TV was to Rich’s right, front.

He could use the remote control with his right hand and keep his left around Tasha’s waist. The sound was low, so they could hear, but not too loud for anyone passing in the outside hallway of the building.

Rich hit play and started the movie. Tasha said, “Wait, Hon. Why don’t you go get undressed and put on your robe? We ought to both be comfortable.”

Rich was down the hall, half undressed, before he reached the bedroom and closet. He was back, wearing his seersucker bathrobe, and nothing else, before the movie’s titles had half-finished. He joined Tasha on the couch and they started watching the porno.

The first scene was of a beauty shop where a woman was sitting in a chair, as if to get her hair done.

As the attendant—Tasha whispered, “That’s John Holmes.”—started giving the woman, “what for”, Tasha put her hand inside Rich’s robe and began fondling his erection. She tickled and stroked him gently. She took Rich’s right hand and placed it

between her legs, leaning back and spreading them apart. The teddy was so narrow down there Rich had no trouble, reaching her warm muff, by moving the teddy's under-sling, out of the way.

He pulled his hand away, to his lips, and wet his fingers, liberally, with his tongue. He started stroking her as she was stroking him; gently and softly, moving in time, with her hand on him.

The video scene panned in, to show the actor's tool penetrating the woman. The screen was filled with his plunging organ in her gyrating opening.

Tasha gasped, "Look at that. He's a giant."

She moved her free hand to throw back Rich's robe, baring his hips as she cupped his balls with the one hand, and she fondled him with the other. Rich found her cleft and started moving his fingers, in time, with her hand, up and down, on her pleasure nub. Tasha let out a moan and, in a flash, was up from the couch, stepping out of her teddy. She put her hands on Rich's shoulders pushing him down on the couch. She straddled his chest with her knees, facing his hips. She held his swollen timber with one hand and stroked his tip with her hot tongue.

Wriggling her body so her golden carpet was within reach of Rich's mouth, she whispered, "I'll match your every move, tongue for tongue."

Rich was too engrossed to answer. He was fondling Tasha's joy spot with his lips and tongue. The pleasure, she was giving him with her oral manipulation of his dick, was returned by his searching mouth on her firming nib. Several minutes passed this way, he giving, as well, as he was getting. He kept his mind on her reactions.

Suddenly, Tasha tilted back her head, as if to concentrate on his deft, light, licking of her moist filament. Rich saw it, coming erect, a slight protuberance between two mounds of delicately smooth, pinkness. He thought of the name they had used, when

he was in the Marines, to describe the clitoris, the “little man in the canoe”.

Rich tried to get him to stand up in the boat. He moved his tongue faster and more firmly. Tasha shuddered and let out a load moan.

“Oooooo.....yeah, Oh yeah.....take it.....take it.....uh,uh,uh....there it is. Ooooooo....myyyyyy...you're fantastic,” she sank down on him.

Rich wished he could look at the TV. He imagined the people on TV were watching them, but he couldn't tell, his head was clamped between Tasha's twitching thighs. For a minute or two later, she lay on top of him, her breasts pressing down on his erection. It seemed longer than that to Rich, as Tasha seemed totally spent. She laid still, her thighs, straddling his head.

Minutes later, she rolled on her side and took his erect length into her mouth, suckling him slowly and running her hand around his balls, fondling and suckling, at the same time. Rich had nothing to occupy his mind but the wonderful variety of sensations that her oral skills and gentle handling gave him. He couldn't stand the delightful curdling that began in his loins and moved down his thighs.

Only four or five minutes and he was at the brink. He erupted in a gigantic burst of pleasure that, he was sure, was the best climax, he had ever enjoyed. Rich's moans and sudden release seemed to excite Tasha, more. She drew everything from him, with her demanding mouth, engulfing his entire length. Her excitement was so rampant, his length slid past her epiglottis and down her throat. She ran her tongue around his stem as she moved his full length into her warm, moist, oral passage.

“My God, Baby,” he gasped, “I can't believe you. You are the most exciting woman, I could, ever, have dreamed up.”

She moved on him and placed her legs around his head, snuggling him against her warm bundle of golden fuzz. “No one's ever been able to get me off like you,” she whispered, nuzzling him on his inner thigh. “Did you like that, really?”

“Luv, I’ve got to see you more often. I want to monopolize you,” he smiled.

Tasha was silent for a short while. “Would you ever consider us getting married? I know it’s too soon, now, for you, but I think you’re the man for me.”

Rich was thinking fast. He hoped it was as fast as she was moving. The movie was totally forgotten as both Tasha and Rich were so absorbed in each other. Rich sat up, turned off the porno, and moved so he was talking, softly, face-to-face, with his sexy dream girl. “I want us to spend more time together, to make sure I’m not too old to learn to adjust to another woman. I was married so long I might not be what you’re used to, either.” He went on, “I want to get to know you better, and to meet your family. If we could go off and live alone, just we, two, I would not be too concerned. I know that your family is important to you. I’m the same way.”

“Why don’t you come to dinner with me, Sunday?” she asked. My parents would like to meet you. I’ve told them some, about you.”

“Why not let me take all four of us, out to eat? That way, it’s more neutral ground and we can move more gradually. A dinner, at their place, is more a family type of get-together, that can come later,” Rich explained.

“That’s a great idea. My parents never let me take them to dinner. We can go out Sunday and take them to The Hofbrau in LA. They love that place. OK?” Tasha smiled.

“Sure, Luv, I like it, too. I love German food. What are you doing this Saturday? Have you ever gone to Valentines for the Valentine’s Day party?” Rich replied.

Tasha was silent. She wasn’t sure she wanted him to go back there. The place was too well known to other single women. She was perplexed. She didn’t want to seem too possessive, too soon.

“Not really. Do you like that atmosphere, that much? It’s really a place single’s go to meet other unattached people,” she said with some misgivings lurking in her words.

Rich didn't hesitate. “If we’re attached, now, I agree completely. I met a couple, last Saturday, who are very friendly. They go there to meet a group of people who get together socially, and do things and go places, together, that’s all. They were very nice and invited me to their home for Easter dinner.”

Tasha was thinking fast, herself. “I want to spend all of the free time I have, with you by ourselves for a while. We’ll have time to meet your friends, later. Okay?”

Rich smiled, “You’re right, Babe. I want to do things with you and go places by ourselves. Your family will be enough people to share you with.”

Tasha giggled and suggested that they go to a movie on Friday. Rich agreed and suggested that on Valentine’s Day they could go to dinner and go dancing somewhere else. Tasha felt relieved. She didn't want to compete with those younger women at Valentines. She, also, felt good that he had agreed with her and said, “Let’s go to bed. I have a late day at the Store, tomorrow. I want to cook breakfast for you, here, before I leave to change for work.”

From that evening on, Tasha and Rich became a twosome and spent all of their free time together. It was to be quite an experience for Rich. His limited experience with women, due to his early marriage, would be counter-balanced by a plethora of new and different events with Tasha.

Several weeks after Rich cleaned up the three PC’s with the Valentine Virus at Sierra Water, he received a call from Wilson Wong. Bill Meyers, the General Manager of Sierra Bottling, wanted to meet with Wilson and Rich. Rich got to Sierra that afternoon. In the meeting with Bill and Wilson, Rich gave a supplemental verbal review of what he had found and how

difficult it was to isolate the original, infected program. He admitted he couldn't isolate the one piece of software which could, definitely, be the culprit. Bill thanked Rich for the update and said, "I got a call from a lab that does water sampling for us and for several smaller water districts in Southern California. They have the same random errors on their spreadsheets. Do you think it could be the Valentine bug?"

Rich was astounded. He asked, "Are they saying that they might have gotten it from you?"

"Not at all," Bill said, very firmly. "We advised some of our customers what to watch for and this lab, which we haven't used for a couple of months, called us to ask about our problem. Wilson assures me no floppies ever left our A - P Department."

Wilson added, "This is an independent lab we only use when our regular lab is unable to respond in time."

Bill continued, "We know this will hold up your work on the Tracking Project but we've gotten along without that 'til now, so a few more months, won't kill us. Can you go see them tomorrow?"

Rich agreed and got the contact information from Bill. He smiled at Rich and said, "I've let them know you cost fifteen hundred a week and they'll gladly pay it, if you can clean up their five machines, in a couple of weeks. How's that Rich? Oh yeah, we'll keep you on the three thousand a month retainer, to be on call for us, too."

Rich's smile added to his, "Thanks, Bill, I think I better hire you as my agent."

Bill laughed; pleased at Rich's innuendo, replying, "Don't mention it. I'll be talked about, in the Industry, as the guy who first discovered the Valentine Water Bug. I already have received several inquiries from all over the State."

"News travels fast in this business. Lab samples are the life blood in Water Distribution. Bottlers don't have the EPA breathing down our necks, like the treatment plants do.

Hopefully, they won't, as long as they have their hands full with Water and Waste Water Districts and we keep our water pure."

Rich, in a few minutes, got a good overview of the situation in the Water Industry, from Bill. The government had jurisdiction over water distribution by public agencies which treated water sold to the public.

The Federal Environmental Protection Agency, or EPA, also, regulated Waste Water, or Sewage, Treatment Facilities to monitor the quality of reclaimed water that was returned to the ground water basins, or aquifers, of Southern California.

A small portion of all groundwater is this reclaimed water, which is re-used by some Orange County treatment plants, which pump it from the ground and re-process it for human consumption. Nearly fifty percent of the water used in Orange County was from groundwater aquifers, or wells, the rest was purchased from the Metropolitan Water District.

In a little more than an hour, Bill gave Rich a thorough understanding of the Hydrological Cycle that starts with Rain, Collection, Treatment, Distribution, Reclamation, Percolation, Re-Collection, Re-treatment, and Re-Distribution.

Rich learned that this Water Re-cycling Program has been in use in California, for more than fifty years. Rich also learned that nearly all the groundwater in wells in Southern California came from rain, run-off, AND reclaimed water. The proportion of reclaimed water was very low in our groundwater supply, Bill emphasized. That was why Sierra used only virgin waters from rain that collected in first-stage collection lakes in the Sierra Nevada Mountains.

Much of Southern California's groundwater came from the Feather River, through the California Aqueduct which, now, supplied nearly sixty percent of the drinking water to the region. Certain water agencies bought millions of acre feet, approximately three hundred and twenty-six thousand gallons per acre foot, and pumped it into the groundwater supply aquifers.

Bill pointed out that the Metropolitan Water District, MWD, the largest water distribution system in the world, was made up of most of the public, County and City, Water Districts in Southern California.

For more than forty years, the MWD has provided most of the drinking water in this area. That water is still pumped several hundred miles, and up, nearly two miles high, from both Inyo County in the North and from the Colorado River in the East. Gigantic pipelines crest the mountains between Mono Lake in Inyo County and between LA and the Colorado River. The River water has its terminus at Lake Matthews, in Riverside County. Then the California Aqueduct, with its Feather River Water, opened in 1971. The MWD controls all the water imported for Southern California.

The meeting ended with Bill Meyers, the V. P, of Sierra Bottlers, personally calling Environmental Testing Laboratories, (ETL), in Los Angeles, and setting a meeting with the Lab Director, Chris English, for Rich.

Rich agreed to meet with him at ten in the morning,

Taking Tasha to their first regular movie was the start of a new lifestyle for Rich. The amount of time he spent with Tasha began to take all of his non-business hours. He met her children, and parents, and became a regular visitor at her family affairs. He was very quickly, somewhat to his dismay, accepted as her next husband-to-be.

He found it unnecessary to don his “hunting clothes”, or to go to Valentines. He was at Tasha’s parents’ home for Easter and didn’t see anyone from Valentines for five or six weeks. Tasha and he went to Angelo’s to dance to the big band sounds, whenever they went dancing at all.

They became more home-oriented than Rich had expected and he slipped back into the patterns of domesticity that he had accepted while married. The exception was that he had more sex, than at any time in his life. Tasha was the consummate

blowjob artist. She consumed all of Rich's sex drive. He was never deprived of her attentions. The first few weeks, Rich had noted that they had sex three and four times a week. Then, Rich noticed that Tasha's interest in sex seemed to taper off. Every now and then, Tasha would have her friend, Sharon, whom he had met that first night at Valentines, stay with her for a weekend. Rich didn't mind, he liked to work on his virus project, every spare moment.

One thing that struck Rich as unusual, however, was the fact that Tasha seemed to become much less interested in making love with Rich, after her weekends with Sharon. Also, he was somewhat surprised to learn that Sharon and Tasha shared the same bed for the weekend. That, coupled with Sharon's attitude towards him, when he took them to dinner on Friday nights before "their" weekend, gave him second thoughts.

Like other events that became a pattern, during this period, Tasha seemed to enjoy his taking Sharon and her to dinner to start "their" weekend together. He noticed that Sharon didn't seem to enjoy his company. Sharon would always be friendly, but her biting sarcasm of Rich, became less funny to him, as it became so routine. He gave as good as he got but he began to think twice about Sharon's attitude. Her attempts to make it seem a friendly teasing of his "male chauvinism" began to wear thin. Tasha's attitude was one of interest in their "friendly" put downs of each other. She would watch them, not saying a word, as if they were equally amusing to her.

The period was also one of more frequent innuendoes, by Tasha, as to when they might get married. At first, Rich reminded her of their discussions about giving it at least a year. Then he realized that she really was pressing him to set a date. She would get in a joking mood when he said that time was all he needed. Rich said he had to be sure of more than just Tasha. She was admittedly planning on Rich's joining her family. Tasha, herself, was getting impatient. She had been sure that Rich would succumb to her attentions. She had felt that his long marriage must have been due to his easy going nature. She couldn't

understand his reluctance to agree to marry her. He never, really, promised to.

He often said she was the best sex partner he had ever had. She couldn't understand his reasons for demanding more time. They spent all their free time together. She did everything, she knew how, to please him.

One Saturday night, after they had gone to Angelo's and were spending the night at his apartment, the phone rang at about three A.M. It was Tasha's son, Ken, calling from the Brea Police Station. After a couple of minutes, talking to him, Tasha got up and stated she had to go pick him up.

Rich said, "Christ, Baby, he's nearly thirty—old enough to take care of himself. What happened?"

"He needs a ride home. His buddy was arrested for drunk driving."

Rich started, surprised. He blurted out, "Why doesn't he drive his friend's car home, then?"

Tasha said, with a surprising hardness to her tone, "Don't talk to me like that. You got your blow job. My son needs a ride home."

Rich was taken aback. He said nothing as Tasha finished dressing and left. Rich was thinking so much he couldn't get back to sleep. Rich remembered her tone of voice. She sounded really tough. Not at all as he would have expected.

'What the hell was that all about? You got your blowjob....!' He remembered her words, exactly. Her tone of voice had an implied resentment he had never felt in her sex play. Rich started getting pissed off. He gave her as good as he got. He always went down on her first. Now, he realized they had slipped into a pattern. Tasha didn't enjoy intercourse. Lately, she didn't get off that way. Even his oral attentions, at times, seemed to take longer and longer, to get her off. 'Now she tells me, resentfully, "You got your blowjob".' Rich was wondering what happened to her, seeming delight, in doing head to him.

Sunday, he called Tasha about noon. She seemed the same on the phone, friendly and warm. She didn't mention the night before, nor did Rich. She said that she had to take her parents to her oldest son's house for dinner so Rich asked her if she would like to go to movie, afterwards. Tasha said they were having dinner at four, as usual, and she would call him when she got home. She said she would call about seven.

Rich worked on his virus project all afternoon. About six-thirty, he showered and dressed for the show. He went back to work on his computer. It was after nine when the phone rang. Tasha said she got held up at her son's, but would be ready in a half hour.

Rich asked her why she didn't call, when she knew she was going to be late. Tasha got in a huff and said she was too busy. Rich said it was too late to go to a movie, now. Tasha got angrier and said, "Don't call me, I'll call you." She hung up without another word.

Rich was steamed. He began to review his thoughts about the previous night. It had been something more major than just his asking, why her son needed a ride home from the police station. He was puzzled by Tasha's resentful outburst about "his blowjob." He decided to let her cool down and see how she acted, if she did call him. He would take her at her words, "Don't call me..."

The rest of the week went by with Rich dwelling on her "Don't call me..." statement. He began remembering her gradual shift into the expectant "bride-to-be" attitude. Her certainty that she would get him to the altar, on her time-table, had begun to grate on him. That, plus the fact her expressions of love seemed to be limited to the bedroom, or after he had taken her to her family get-togethers, had made indelible impressions on him.

The Sharon situation was also something that bothered Rich. He was fairly certain they didn't sleep together, just as friends. Rich had a gut feeling they were lovers.

By Friday, Rich hadn't heard from Tasha. He had planned to see if she would call him, as she said, last Sunday. He felt that if she

really cared for him, she would cool off and call. He wouldn't have cared, if she didn't agree as to who was at fault. No one had ever stood him up before, especially after promising to call. Tasha had always called, when she said she would. He wondered, 'why the change'?

Tasha didn't call Saturday, either. By then, Rich got, really, coldly, analytical and logical about Tasha's changing attitude. He reasoned that her failure to call was one of those female "games". He believed she got mad Saturday about his outburst about her almost, thirty year old son. She had set up the situation about the movie, the next day, to teach him a lesson. He knew there was no reasonable excuse for her not calling about being late. That, to him, was proof she had done it on purpose.

Rich said to himself, 'She must be over-confident since I told her she was the best sex partner, I ever had. She must think that makes, "anything goes", the rule.' He mused, 'She must have forgotten how much I detest women that play games in relationships.' The more he thought about her inconsiderate failure to call, to let him know she would be late, coupled with these other situations, the more determined Rich was that Tasha was far outside his mental profile of what he was looking for in a woman.

He wouldn't sit and wait for Tasha to call. After all, he had stayed home waiting for her to phone, all last night, Friday. That was it. He decided to go to Valentines.

Rich got to Valentines about eight-thirty. The past several weeks, he hadn't been there, even once. It seemed the same. He saw several of the regulars at the bar. He moved around the bar and made his way to the corner spot he had frequented. Dotty saw him and came up saying, "Hi, stranger. We thought you got married. Is it the same, V&T?"

Rich smiled, "Yeah, Dotty. Thanks. You've got a good memory." When Dotty brought his drink, she continued, "Al and Inga asked me about you. I said you hadn't been in. You been out of town?"

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Rich gave her a five and she waited, as if insisting on an answer. He replied, “No, I’ve been tied down some, with a woman I met here, in fact. We had a misunderstanding, so I decided to quit sitting around and see if my luck might change.”

He smiled and asked, “Do you think Al and Inga will be in, tonight?”

Dotty smiled back, “Probably, they’ve been here every Saturday, for quite a while.” She turned away to the cash register and brought back his change. Placing the usual tip on the ledge, Rich said, “It’s nice that Al and Inga were asking about me. It makes me feel more welcome, here. Their interest is more than I’d expected.”

Dotty smiled and said, “They’re like dependable family friends. I’ve known them for over three years, even before they got together. They both came here for months before Al got up the nerve to get serious.”

Rich felt a bang on his shoulder and, turning, saw Chuck with KC on his arm.

“Where you been hiding, Rich? We thought you got picked off by the redhead,” Chuck laughed, half serious.

Even KC was outgoing and friendly, “Easter, we miss you for dinner. We want you to go to Tahoe with us,” she smiled, giving Rich a big hug.

Rich was overwhelmed by their cordial greeting. He’d only had a short time with them and they acted like he’d known them for years.

“I did get involved with the redhead, Chuck,” Rich smiled; “You must be psychic. We had a tiff last weekend and I’m letting her cool off.” KC asked, “Why you don’t bring her, here, for us to meet her? We, all, go to Tahoe, together.” KC seemed much put off at Rich’s obvious oversight.

Chuck put in, “Al and Inga are going to be glad to see you. We haven’t had so many laughs, like the night at Keno’s. They ask about you, all the time.”

Rich was feeling as if he had made a grotesque social blunder by not returning to Valentines before the Easter dinner. They had obviously been very sincere about his joining them that weekend.

As they were chatting, the usual crowd, for a Saturday, was filling the place.

A few minutes later, KC, from her vantage point above the crowd, saw Al and Inga making their way towards them. The un-inhibited KC let out a whoop, “Halloooo, Inga. Rich iss here.”

Every head turned to look as KC patted Rich on the shoulder, as if to prove he was flesh and blood. Rich felt like sinking into the floor. Inga came pushing through the crowd and threw her arms around Rich, as if she thought he might disappear. ‘My God,’ Rich thought, ‘this is unreal.’

Inga gave him a big hug and kissed him on the cheek. He turned his head, to avoid her lips. He remembered the way Al had looked, when Inga had given Little Joe that hug, months ago.

Rich laughed and shook Al’s outstretched hand, saying, “You guys make me feel like a family member. I didn’t expect such a welcome. I’m glad to see you, all, again.”

They started asking him where he’d been and he repeated what he had told Chuck. Inga seemed intrigued and asked a lot of questions. Rich noticed she didn’t ask Tasha’s name. Her interest seemed to center on his level of commitment to “his redhead”, as they called her, following Chuck’s lead. Rich finally admitted that he felt “the redhead” was not what he was looking for, as she played “games”. Something he had an aversion to, in any relationship, he said, again. The band came in, and started to play, as they were talking. To Rich’s surprise, KC asked him to dance. The piece, the band was playing, was a good swing version of “*Sentimental Journey*” and so he said to Chuck, “You don’t mind?”

Chuck laughed, “We’re all friends, Rich. Have fun.”

As they were dancing, KC seemed insistent that Rich go to Tahoe with them in two weeks. She kept asking if he would

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bring the redhead, as if it was all decided he was going. He smiled saying that he would go alone, now that he'd found out "the redhead's" real attitude. Rich was surprised at KC's graceful turns and her ability to follow him. He noticed a lot of people watching them. The men seemed to undress KC with their eyes. He'd seen that same look when Chuck danced with KC. Her sensuous moves were not so pronounced, like in the rock and roll moves she had done, but she was so tall, she easily became the center of attention.

The dance ended and they returned through the crowd laughing and talking about how much fun Tahoe would be with Rich's joining them.

CHAPTER THIRTEEN

When they rejoined the others, Chuck said, “Rich, you and KC make a great dance couple. That’s the best Swing Dancing, we’ve seen in quite a while.”

Rich smiled, “Thanks, Chuck. KC makes me look good, she’s so light on her feet.”

KC put her arms around Chuck and said, “See, you thought he wouldn’t dance. We talk about Tahoe.” She turned to Rich, saying, “I think Rich go. Right, Rich?”

Rich smiled and said, “I’ll have to get a date. I don’t want to be a fifth wheel.”

Inga laughed, “We have a house that KC’s boss loans out for a week at a time, to employees in the summer. You’ve got to go. We’ll have a ball.”

A few minutes later, Inga waved at a woman, who was coming through the crowd. She looked about thirty-five or forty. She was very slender and about five-ten, in her heels. She was a dark blonde with an erect posture that made her appear taller. Her beige dress was a form fitting sheath that accentuated her slenderness and clung to her hips with a provocative accent. She came squeezing through the crowd and started talking to Inga and Al.

Rich stepped back to make room as Chuck and KC were next to Al and Inga at the bar. He was standing about six or seven feet away, with his back to the wall, opposite the group. He couldn't hear them, over the band, and noticed the newcomer glance over his way. She was in close conversation with Inga and Al.

As Rich was watching them talk, the band started playing, “*Born in the USA*.” He felt someone move next to him and a voice said, “You’re a good dancer. You want to dance to this one?”

Turning he was chest to breast with a blonde he had never seen before. She didn’t seem to be bothered that her breasts were pressed against Rich’s chest. He looked into her direct gaze and

smiled, “Only if you’ll dance slow, afterward. I want to hold you this close without the crowd pressing against us.”

She laughed and taking his hand, they made their way to the dance floor. Inga and her friend stopped talking and turned to watch as Al had whispered to them both. Inga whispered to her friend, “See what I mean. He’s the type a lot of older women go for. That blonde’s got to be ten years older than you, Marline.” Marline was silently appraising the two dancers. She whispered to Inga, “He’s distinguished looking with that silver hair. How do you know he’s available?” Inga proceeded to relate all she knew about Rich, to her friend Marline. They had known each other for several years and had dated the same men, a few times, before Al.

The music ended and Rich held the blonde’s hand keeping her on the dance floor. The short lull in the noise gave Rich the chance to ask, “What’s your name? I’m Richard.”

She smiled and said, “I’m Susan. Hello, again,”

Rich smiled and said, “Thanks for asking me. Maybe the band will play a slow dance. Let’s wait a minute, to see, okay?”

Susan smiled, “I don’t plan on going anywhere.”

She had that direct, eyeball-to-eyeball look, like the other mature women, that he’d met.

Susan was petite and had a gorgeous figure. The obvious firmness of her slender shape, spoke of time well-spent, on herself. She was wearing a light wool business suit and heels, which enhanced her slenderness. The expensive cut of the suit told Rich that Susan might be a business woman.

Rich guessed she was in her late forties or early fifties. He decided to see.

“I think you might be too young for me, but you’re a good looking woman, so I’ll take the chance, and make a play for you,” he smiled.

‘It works every time,’ Rich thought; as she replied, “I’ll be fifty-eight my next birthday. How old are you, anyway? You look about forty five.”

Rich laughed, “You know how to flatter a guy, don’t you. I’ll be fifty-four, my next birthday.”

The band started playing “*And Take a Message to Michael*”, so Rich took Susan into his arms and said, “Let’s just dance the beat.”

She was a terrific follow, to his lead. They moved about the floor, locked together, swaying with the music. As they danced, Rich, said into her ear, “How come I haven’t seen you here before?”

“I don’t know,” Susan replied, “I’ve been coming here for about four weeks, off and on. I haven’t seen you here, either.”

Rich was delighted, she didn’t pretend about being an “infrequent patron, just dropping in by chance” like so many other women he’d talked with.

“I’ve been tied down the last few weeks,” Rich smiled, “I’m just getting back in the swing.”

The music stopped and Susan stepped back, saying, “Thanks for the dance, Richard.”

Rich replied, “I thank you, for asking me. It’s my turn to ask you the next slow one, okay?”

Susan set Rich back on his heels with her reply, “Oh, thanks anyway, but I’m looking for the younger guys. They don’t dance like you, so I thought I’d ask before I get set up with one, tonight. Thanks, anyway.”

With that she turned and made her way from the dance floor. It was a few seconds before Rich realized he was standing there with his mouth open. He made his way back through the crowd and Inga motioned to him to meet her friend, Marline. Apparently Inga had been filling her in on his situation, he thought. That was fine with Rich.

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Marline was a good looking woman. Not glamorous, but there was something sensual about the way she filled that slim sheath she was wearing. She was so slender, Rich guessed, she must weigh less than one-ten. He wondered about her age.

When Inga made the introductions, Marline was smiling as if she knew something that pleased her. Rich was surprised. ‘This woman let’s her feelings hangout, there’s no pretense here,’ he thought.

When he got close to Marline, he looked into her eyes and saw she was older than he first thought. Either that or she had a hard life. Her eyes told him she was not as young as he had judged from a distance. They had multiple, small creases around them and she looked into his eyes with an unwavering look that told him she had seen a few things. He noticed her eyes were a gray-green and had a slight oriental slant to them. She was more exotic looking than she was beautiful. Rich was taken aback as she moved against him and put her arms around his waist, saying, “We thought you weren’t coming back. That blonde looked like the end of you, the way you were dancing.”

Rich laughed, “My luck is changing, I guess. I saw you and Inga were friends and the lady preferred younger guys. I never knew a woman to be so direct about that before.” He smiled appreciatively at Marline, and added, “Things always work out for the best. I can see that’s true, again. I wanted to ask you to dance.”

She smiled, again, fixing that direct look into his eyes, and replied, “Let’s do it. I won’t let you get away, from me, like she did.”

They went to the dance floor as the band began playing a good beat version of “*Maybe I’m Wrong*.”

Rich thought the lyrics, the keyboard man did, “...I’ve been waiting for a girl like you, ta’come into my life.....”, might be a good omen.

Rich was fascinated by the moves Marline made to the music. They danced “no-touch” and she moved her body, in time with

the music, sinuously, smiling into Rich's eyes, all the while. From time to time, she raised her arms above her head and writhed with the music, slipping down into a crouch, her dress stretched above her knees, as she sensually moved her hips, from side to side, in a slow switch, twisting provocatively, on her toes. Slowly she would rise up from her bent pose, moving very sexily. Her firm breasts and slowly twisting hips, strained against the beige material of her taut dress, as if the pressure would soon rend the cloth.

Rich was entranced with her rhythmic moves and the erotic gaze she fixed on his eyes. 'My God,' he thought, 'She knows how to work a spell. I'm about to go off in my uniform.'

When the music ended, Marline moved against him and put her arms around his waist, pushing against his firming manhood. To Rich's relief, she held him on the dance floor. Pulling against him, she laid her head on Rich's chest, and whispered, "I want to dance slow. Let's wait for a slow dance."

Rich moved back, against the railing, on the right of the dance floor. He was in no condition to walk off the floor, now. He had a large bulge showing in his pants. They embraced, holding on to each other. They stood there for two dances before the band played a slow rendition of "*Canadian Sunset*." They just started to dance when Inga and Al, with Chuck and KC, joined them on the dance floor. The other two couples would dance next to them and say things like, "You guys cut that out. You're turning everyone on."

KC leaned over to whisper to Marline, "That blonde's coming over to cut in, Marline." KC let out a hoot of laughter as Marline turned to look, quickly, at both entrances.

Rich didn't hear what KC said and was surprised at the result. Marline grasped him with greater force and pressed her hard breasts into his chest. He could feel his sexual antenna come to upright attention. The pressure of Marline's thigh against Rich's rigid rod was too obvious. The look in her eye, when she leaned her head back, to smile at him, told him she had felt his arousal. She moved to push against him with the part of her body, his

erect homing device sought. Marline began to nuzzle Rich on his neck, as the musk added magic to the sensations, she created. The pulsing rhythm enhanced the spell of her sensuality.

The music ended and the three couples made their way back to the bar. The space they had at the corner of the bar was taken by three women who had gravitated to the only opening left by the pressing crowd. As they moved to the space where their drinks remained, awaiting their return, KC tapped one of the women saying, "Hon, this is our spot, thank you." The three looked up at KC and at the three couples and quickly picked up their drinks and vacated their places.

Rich smiled, at KC, saying, "I've had trouble telling that to women, before. They think a guy should give way. You handled that real well, KC."

Chuck laughed, grabbing KC around the waist. "I guess they know better than to give my goddess a bad time. She'd turn them into frogs."

They, all, laughed and Inga said to her friends, "Let's go to the Ladies', girls." As they departed, she added, "You three hunks keep out of trouble, okay?"

After the women left, Chuck asked Rich, "Do you always work that fast, Rich? I've never seen Marline come-on to anyone like she's you."

Al laughed, saying, "You guys looked like you were going to fuck, right on the dance floor."

Rich, laughed with them, and replied, "I really get turned on by her dancing. She is, really, sexy. Tell me about her. What's her situation?"

Al laughed, turning to Chuck, and said, "You can bet Marline's getting an earful on Rich about now. Go ahead and tell him, Chuck"

Chuck told Rich that Marline had been single for over ten years and was the mother of three teenage girls. She got quite a bit of money from her ex-husband and was not interested in re-

marrying. She was too involved with her daughters, to do anything which might upset them. She never had men friends over and made sure that the girl's father was the only man in their lives.

Marline liked to have a good time and had a few men friends. Al and Chuck, both, agreed that her friendships were always on Marline's terms. Al added that Inga had told him, Marline had problems with at least two guys, in a row, that had gotten too possessive. As a result, Marline hadn't wanted to get involved with anyone, since. Chuck concluded the review of Marline's qualifications, saying, "She's a great gal. You just have to go with the flow and don't get hung up on her. She doesn't want anyone who makes demands on the time she wants to spend with her kids."

Rich laughed, "That sounds like my ideal woman. As long as she doesn't make the same demands on me, she doesn't want made on her, we should get along fine."

In the powder room, which for once was empty, Inga and KC were expanding on their understanding of Rich's situation. KC and Inga were relating some of the conversation they had with Rich at Keno's. The length of his marriage intrigued Marline. She asked, "Does he want to settle down, again, or is he having too good a time being single?"

Inga replied, "I think he's paying his Ex a lot of support and is not going to get married again, for some time. He said, once, that marriage is for the children and if you don't plan on children, marriage is no use,"

KC knew about Marline's attitude about keeping her boyfriends out of her family life, and said, "I think Rich has too many children to want to be involved with someone else's. He might be just what you look for, Marline. You have friendly fucks and no problems." The three women laughed at KC's concise description of what Marline had missed in her previous relationships.

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Marline replied, “Yeah, it would be nice to sleep with someone who isn’t going to make demands on you. I wasn’t sure about a guy his age, until I felt his prick against my legs when we were dancing. It felt like a stone handle.”

Inga laughed, “With seven kids, you can bet he knows how to screw.”

The three men were talking about the fun they would have in Tahoe, when the women came back from the rest room.

Inga said, “Let’s get out of this crowd. Anyone for Keno’s?”

They laughed as if the question was Inga’s mind reading act. When they reached the exit, Inga took charge and said, “Rich why don’t you take Marline in your car? We’ll meet you there.”

Marline was hanging onto Rich’s arm and smiled into his eyes, “As long as you let me get home before too late.”

When Rich walked her to his car, she had slipped her arm around his waist and was snuggling into him. He opened the car door, on her side, and she slid into the car, leaning over to unlock his door. When he got in, Marline welcomed him with a big hug and a wide, moist kiss. It took all of Rich’s resolve to stop their necking, and start after the other two couples. They were the last to get to Keno’s.

At Keno’s, the others were waiting with the hostess, ready to be seated. Rich and Marline had entered arm and arm, like long time lovers. Inga smiled, knowingly, and said, “We thought you, two, might have gone home, Marline.”

Marline laughed and replied, “No, we have to get some food to build up our strength, first.”

Rich made a note, of her words. He smiled and added, “I haven’t heard such a promising statement, in a long time.”

They, all, laughed and followed the waitress to the far end of the coffee shop. Their booth was against the window, facing the entrance, the only one large enough for six. Inga and Al were in the middle and Chuck slid in next to Al with KC on the outside.

Marline sat next to Inga and Rich was on the outside, opposite KC. The coffee shop didn't have the normal "after-Valentines" crowd. It was only ten forty-five. The nearby booths, which only held four, were empty.

After the waitress brought their menus, Marline asked Inga, "What date are you, all, going to Tahoe?" Marline glanced from Inga to KC to Rich. Her look was very inviting.

Inga replied, "We're trying to talk Rich into going. You both want to go on the nineteenth of June, for six days?"

Rich smiled, "I think that would be great fun, from what Al and Chuck have told me."

Marline put her hand under the table and held on to Rich's thigh, as he turned to her. All eyes turned to Marline. She paused as Rich felt her fingers caressing his inner thigh. "I would have to make some arrangements. I need to see if my mom will watch the kids." She paused as if in thought. "They'll be out of school and it should be okay. I'll call you, Inga, after I call mom, tomorrow."

Al said, "Okay, that's it. We'll all plan on going."

KC was enthusiastic. She replied, "We will be positive and plan on it, Marline. Okay?"

Marline looked at Rich, as if waiting for him to say something. He put his hand on her thigh and fondled her, like she was doing, him, and said, "I think we ought to have a ball. I can't think of anyone I'd rather be with in Tahoe."

Chuck spoke up, saying, "You know we've asked Marline to go before, and she never would. Do you think, it's fate or something that we, all, are going?"

KC laughed, "I think Rich have brought good luck to us. We never have so many, ready to go, so early. It's only three weeks, yet."

Al agreed, "Yeah, we usually aren't sure who all's going until the day before. We drive up on Friday and come back the next

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Friday. Chuck and KC'll go with us and you and Marline can follow, if you want."

Rich asked Marline "Is that good with you? Will your mom take the kids for that long?"

Marline seemed positive, "Mom's always wanted to have the kids for a week. I never go anywhere. She'll be pleased I'm finally doing something for myself. She thinks I'm too much a clinging vine, where my kids are concerned."

Rich moved his hand up her thigh, this time on her bare flesh. He looked into her eyes, smiling, and said, "I kind of go for clinging vines, myself."

Chuck guffawed, "Wooo weee..., you're in for it, Marline. Rich's got your number, now."

They, all, laughed and Rich was speechless as Marline slid her hand onto his swelling erection. She was stroking it with her fingertips, no movement showing in her upper arm, above table level.

Inga asked, "Why don't you tell them about the house we stay in KC? She then continued, "KC's boss has a five bedroom three bath home, in the Tahoe Marina Estates. He loans it out to customers and to certain employees."

KC chipped in, "We stay there for the past three years, now. We gamble and go dancing. Each one does his own thing. One couple cook and clean up, one night, for dinner. The rest of the time we eat out. It works out good."

Marline seemed to get more interested. "We can cook one dinner for everybody? Whatever we want? That sounds like fun. I get tired of cooking just for the kids. It'll be fun to plan a dinner for six."

Inga smiled, "Al has all the experience. If you don't watch out, he'll try to talk you out of your night's turn, so he can do it."

"I think it'll be fun. Don't you Rich?" Marline asked.

The waitress came up to take their orders, and Rich said, “I seem to remember mentioning my college training in food service, the last time we were here. I am a great dishwasher.” The others looked at Al, reading the menu, and started to howl with laughter, when Rich said, “Why don’t you try the sausage, Al?”

After they, all, had ordered, following another interlude of laughter, when Al ordered an omelet, Marline asked Rich about his long marriage. She said, “It must be a lot different being on your own, with no one to worry about, after such a big family. How do like it?”

Rich responded, “I like it but when I look ahead, I think about ten years from now. I don’t want to be going to bed alone every night.”

Al chortled, “Hell, I don’t want to be doing that now.”

They, all, laughed, and Chuck asked, “Do you really think about that far ahead, Rich?”

“Yeah, I think I don’t want to be living alone for very long. I don’t know about you guys, but I spent so long in the family situation, I decided it’s my turn now. I want to have my own life and do the things I missed, while raising my family.” The group was silent, as if thinking about what was said. Rich continued, “I just went through a situation, which very frankly, I didn’t mind at all, until I realized, I was being drawn into someone else’s family life. It was almost second nature to accept it, until I wised up.”

The others looked at Marline, as if to say, he’s yours, now, you lead the chorus. She asked, “What gave you the spark to get wise, Rich?”

“I just realized, that I had been conditioned to that groove and it was something I had enough of,” he said, with a serious, expression on his face.

Chuck seemed to agree, “I think when you make up your mind to go on, alone in life, a different mind-set, takes over. It’s tough enough to adjust to the kids coming along and changing your married life. Trying to adjust to someone else’s family is asking

too much. I think that's why women with kids, usually don't get married, again."

Marline seemed to take this as a personal challenge. She said to Chuck, "How many women, who have raised a family, want to subject them to the stress of a new father-image? I'm not alone; I'm sure, in deciding it's better to stay single. Lots of divorced mothers must feel the same."

Inga came to her aid, although she didn't seem to need it. "I think once your kids have grown up to know their father, it's better to keep out of re-marriage. They will always think you're trying to replace their father."

Rich agreed, "I think that's the biggest trouble with most divorced people. They don't understand the major impact; the separation has on the kids. Mine were all grown up but it's still splitting up the family."

Marline replied, "I think like Rich on that. I felt my girls were torn apart by our divorce. They seemed unable to handle the idea of how they could love their father when he stopped loving me. They were confused by feelings of disloyalty to me and love for their father, who is very close to them."

Remembering what he had been told by Chuck and Al, Rich asked, "How do you handle it, Marline?"

"I look at it in stages. They're still coming out of puberty when young girls need the stability of a good father relationship. They don't need me confusing them by letting them know I might love some other man. When they're older, that will be easier for them to handle."

Marline ended with, "Teenagers grow up fast now. In a few years, they'll accept my being interested in a man, not like their father."

Rich replied, "I'm impressed. You're a very unselfish person and very aware of your kid's attitudes."

Chuck spoke up. "That reminds me of a joke I heard the other day. In a small town, upstate, a widow who is 87 goes to her

doctor, with her friend, a widower, who is 90. They tell the doctor they want a pre-marital check up. The doctor asks, “My, my, why have you two waited so long to get married, again? You both have been companions for over some thirty odd years?” They answer, “Doc, we had to wait until our kids died.”

Everyone choked with laughter. Inga was the first to recover and said, to Marline, “You better not let your girls see you with Rich. Everyone thinks he looks like the Great White Father.” Rich joined in the laughter.

Only, Marline seemed a bit upset. She replied, “I know, someone might think I’m being dishonest, but I feel I can keep my love life separate from my family life. They don’t have to know what I’m doing, when I’m out of the house.”

Rich threw his arms around Marline and pulled her to his front, nearly upsetting the table settings, to kiss her, saying, “You’re just what I’ve been looking for.”

Chuck, with exquisite timing, broke the silence of the group, saying, “I now pronounce you, Lovers for Life.”

Even Marline was laughing with everyone else. The timing of Chuck’s quip and Rich’s response seemed to take the heavy intent from their interchange. The waitress brought their food and they started eating and talking between bites. Chuck asked Al, if his omelet was better than his last Keno’s breakfast.

Al mumbled, between mouthfuls, “Nobody can wreck an omelet.”

Marline picked up on the lightness in everyone’s mind by asking, “Why is it you, guys, all get carried away with yourself, after you have sex with a woman?”

Al started to speak with his mouth full and stopped as Chuck jumped in to reply. He responded, “I don’t know what you mean, “...carried away with yourself....” Marline, the sex does the carrying.” Inga broke into the laughter, saying, “I know what Marline’s talking about. We’re all adults here. Let’s level with each other, about this.”

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Al said, with a wide grin, “You come down to my level, Hon. I want to talk about sex, with you. Shall we go out in the car?”

Inga poked Al in the ribs with her elbow, and answered, “I’m serious. Marline’s made a good point, here. Let’s see what we, all, think about that.”

“Okay. Okay.” Al protested and slid into a protective crouch to shield his ribs.

Rich laughed at Inga and Al and replied, “I used to think it was always the woman who expected something after sex. I guess I’ve been out of action too long. You mean, you women think the men feel that, you should change your behavior, after sex?”

Marline answered, “The men, I’ve started a relationship with, always got very possessive about it and wanted to monopolize my time. The first time, I took the blame, because I hadn’t explained my situation with the kids. I thought it was just a lack of communication. The second time, I had made my position clear, but it still happened. This other guy wouldn’t let me alone, either. He pestered me all the time.”

Chuck smiled, and replied, “Gee, Marline what do you do to these poor guys?” That started everyone laughing again.

After giggling for a few, unrestrained seconds, KC replied, “You stop the kidding, Chuck. Let Marline explain.” She put her arms around Chuck, to soften her protest.

Marline continued, “It’s all right, KC. That was funny. It’s just that I must be doing something wrong. Guys always seem to think sex gives them more rights. They want to start running your life.”

Rich said, very seriously, “I sure am learning something new, here. I always felt that women took that attitude. I guess it depends on the person.”

Inga replied, “The difference is that some people think that you should be able to have sex, without making a commitment. We call it having “friendly sex.” I know what Marline’s talking about. Both people need to feel the same about what sex means

in their relationship. The feelings have to be the same about it or you have problems.”

Rich replied, “I agree. It’s like the mutual feelings involved. You can be fond of someone and have sex. You can feel a certain amount of affection without wanting to commit for life. I always thought, only women felt that having sex was reserved for the one they wanted to commit to. But I’ve learned, recently, that not all sex, no matter how great, necessarily means a life commitment. In fact, I think that’s the reason we have so many divorces. Liking each other, for sex, won’t last long after you’re married. You better like each other as friends or the marriage is doomed.” Rich observed.. Is that what you mean, Marline.” Rich asked.

“Exactly, people our age have a different attitude about sex. We’ve been married and have been in love and fallen out of love. The feelings you have about sex change a lot once you’ve been married, I think.”

Chuck answered, “You know, I remember that I felt different about sex, at different times during my marriage. As we grew apart, the sex seemed the same but my feelings sure weren’t.”

“That’s what I mean,” Marline agreed. “You can want sex for different reasons. Sometimes you just want the contact and closeness, with no strings attached.”

KC smiled, with a look of wonder, and said, “I think people get all mixed up. They can’t tell lust from love.”

Rich chuckled, and replied, “That’s a beaut’, KC. I pass the Group Philosopher Hat, Inga awarded me the last time we were here.”

Marline laughed as much as everyone else, and replied, “There’s a lot of wisdom in what you said, KC. I think that about covers it.”

Rich put his arm around Marline, and said, just loud enough for her to hear, “I’m not sure which I feel, but we can have a ball together, if you let me tend to my computer business and I let you tend to your family business.”

Marline started giggling, and looking at the quizzical faces of the others, explained, “Rich wants to get me alone to find out which it is, Lust or Love.”

After the laughter, Chuck replied, “Let us know how you tell them apart, will you?”

Inga chuckling, replied, “That is the best question. How do you tell them apart?”

Al broke them, all, up with his biting, “Who cares?”

After the laughing and giggling died down, Inga speared Al with her elbow and criticized his flippant attitude. He protested, “Aw, Hon, you know I was just kidding around. I agree the main problem is that we take one for the other. If you can’t go on down the road, being happy with your partner’s company, you aren’t really in love, like we are.” Leaning over, Al gave Inga a big hug and kiss. KC and Marline grinned and started talking at the same time. Marline stopped and said, “You go on, KC. What were you going to say?”

KC hesitated and replied, “I wanted to ask, how you tell when it is time to move in together or to get married? Before, when you’re young, the time seems to be planned for you. First, the engagement and then, ‘bang’, everything just follows its own timetable, to the ceremony.”

Inga smiled and answered, “That’s what’s good about experience. You seem to take things more casual. You want to share time with someone, not just your bed. Like Rich said earlier. You, step by step, learn more about someone, when you’re living together. The people, who live together, soon know, if they want to go on through life, after the lust wears off.”

“Yeah,” Chuck replied, “that’s why so many marriages end in divorce, I think. One day, you realize, you’re different people than when you married. When you’re young, you don’t know enough to see what you’ve gotten into. Or, you wake up one day and realize that you never, really, had looked far enough ahead.”

Marline agreed, “That’s right. You find you’re different people than when you first married, during the rush of emotions, and what other people expect of you. Later, years or, even, months, you look at your partner and realize you don’t want to grow old together. It proves the words of the author, Lillian Hellman. She wrote, ‘People change but forget to tell each other.’”

Rich smiled, “I said the same thing, some time back. You find you’re not the same person you were when you were young. You grow apart. Life is too short, it seems, when you’re young. Then, later, it seems one or the other wants to find more, because life, together, seems too long if you aren’t really best friends. ”

“I think, that’s why the ‘empty-nest syndrome’ is so common. Once the kids don’t need you, anymore, you look at your partner and think, ‘My God, we’ve lost the common bond that made the marriage important’—the kids don’t need me anymore.”

Chuck replied, “I think some people, like me and my wife, found that out, earlier, even before the kids grew up. Like you said about your wife, Rich. You think she found the kids the most important thing in her life. I wasn’t that important to my wife, either.”

KC asked, “Do you think, it’s that, or does the man look for something he isn’t finding at home? I thought we were very happy and then my husband leaves me for a younger woman, who has more kids. I don’t figure you men out, yet.”

Inga smiled, “Men are not easy to figure out, under the best circumstances, KC. I think every man is different, but still, basically, the same.”

Rich smiled, “That’s what makes the horse race. Everyone sees the same horse in different ways. Only time on the track tells the true quality. Time is the catalyst that doesn’t change the horse’s innate qualities but changes the players’ attitudes about the horse.”

Al observed, in a surprisingly logical way, “Yeah. I bet on a loser, I was sure was a winner. No one can ever be sure, ‘til you watch how she does on the track, called Life.”

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Marline replied, "That's a good comparison, Al. You can't make a bad bet, come out good, either. You just have to go on and try get over the loss."

Inga laughed, "You guys are sounding like good horse players. Maybe we ought to get back to the favorite subject. How do we tell friendly sex from loving sex? You guys tell us."

Al spoke up, "I think it's how you rank it in your life. If being with someone and loving her is most important. Sex isn't that important."

Chuck replied, "I think you have to look at the friend. If she becomes your best friend then the sex becomes the best, too."

"Yeah," Rich agreed, "I want the women to tell us. Which is better, friendly sex or sex so great, you're emotions take off and you want to spend all your time with that person?"

KC replied, "How do you know that's not just lust or possessive sex. Maybe you don't want to let her get away. That causes some problems like those men who kill their ex-wives and ex-girlfriends."

Marline agreed, "Yeah, KC, you're right. We're back at square one, Lust or Love?"

Inga agreed, "I think that's true. One person goes bonkers and the other says she thought it was just friendly sex. You can't win."

Rich asked, "That reminds me of a question I've thought about, a lot. Do you think a man and woman can be close friends, and not have sex, together? Or be real friends, and have sex with each other and with others, at the same time?"

Chuck replied, "Wait, that's two questions. Either one could take all night."

Having finished their food, they waited for the waitress to bring the check. Al motioned to her and she came right over, asking, if they wanted more coffee. She put the check down and Al grabbed it. Rich protested that they should all chip in. He gave

Al a twenty and said, “That’s for Marline’s and mine, and the tip.”

Al said, “I suggest we get out of here and hold those questions for another time. I’ve been talking so much, I could use a drink. Why don’t we go into the lounge and debate those, there.”

Rich looked at his watch and replied, “My God, it’s nearly twelve.”

Chuck said, “Let’s take a vote.”

Inga replied, “I think we ought to think about Rich’s question, a while, and save it for next week. Let’s hit the road.”

The other women agreed and they walked out to the parking lot. They waited for Al who had collected the money to cover the check.

When he came out, he insisted Rich take five dollars as his part of the change. Rich knew better than to argue.

CHAPTER FOURTEEN

When Rich and Marline said goodbye to the others, Inga smiled at Rich and Marline, saying, “Remember now, Rich. We women think friendly sex is the way to start. Get Marline home at a reasonable hour,”

Marline laughed, “Okay, Inga we’re old enough to know better. That’s enough out of you.”

They waved and walked to Rich’s car. He opened the door for Marline and Rich hit the electric door button on her side, and she slid over to welcome him with a big hug as he got in his side.

“After all that talk, about friendly sex,” she smiled, “I know you’ll not get the wrong idea but I’ve been fasting for several months. Let’s go to your place.”

On the way to his apartment, Rich and Marline talked about Tahoe. Marline wanted to find out how much he liked to gamble. Rich said he hadn’t done any gambling for a couple of years. He admitted he hated to lose and could take it or leave it. She said she had only been to Vegas once and only played the machines. The slots and the poker machines, but the poker machines were better because you did have some control. Choosing what to hold and how much to bet were better than the pure chance of the jackpot machines, she felt.

Rich was surprised that she thought like he did. He admitted he had never played craps and liked blackjack for the same reason. You could decide to hit or stand. Using intuition, he felt, gave you a better chance at winning. He spent the rest of the few minutes to his apartment, explaining that his place was just a bachelor pad, and for her not to expect too much. Marline moved closer to him and put her hand on his upper thigh. “Have you got a sturdy bed? It’s been so long for me, I’ll probably break it down.”

Rich chuckled, saying, “I’ll take that chance. I plan on giving you a few bounces, myself.”

Volume I

When they got to the apartment, Marline was first out of the car and met Rich with a warm embrace and kiss that was lingering and passionate. They walked up the stairs, arms wrapped around each other.

On entering, Rich turned on the swag lamp in the corner and turned on the stereo. He turned to ask, "Would you like a glass of wine?" Marline didn't even look around or comment on the room. Her answer was to take a few steps forward and to press her sensuous, firm body into his arms. Her kiss was hot, wide and got Rich aroused so obviously, Marline pulled one arm from around Rich's neck and put her hand on his protrusion.

"I think we better go into the other room," she murmured in his ear, "I want to see that. It's been on mind ever since we were dancing,"

As they started down the hall to the bedroom, she was unbuttoning Rich's shirt and he reached around to her back to undo the buttons at the top of her dress. They were soon standing next to the bed pulling each others clothing off. A minute later, they were both nude and lying on the bed, hugging and kissing in a frenzy.

"Wait a minute, do you have any candles?" she asked as they lay there with their bodies melting together.

Rich pulled back, surprised, "What? Candles? Yeah, there are some in the kitchen."

"Let me get them. Where are they? I want more light to see you when we fuck," she giggled.

"Just a minute I'll get them," Rich said excitedly. "Just lay here so I can see you when I get back. Don't get under the covers. Promise?"

"Hurry back," she giggled. "If you take to long I might start playing with myself. I'll be waiting."

Rich got the two candles from the kitchen table and lit them before picking them up, one in each hand. He made sure the door was locked as he went back to the bedroom. When he

reached the hall, he hit the light switch with his elbow, turning the light off. Marline was lying on the bed, her two arms, akimbo, behind her head. The candlelight cast shadows on her lithesome form. Her pose was so erotic, her ankles crossed and the light playing on her slender legs and firm thighs, Rich paused to appreciate the view.

“My God,” he said, in a low, soft tone, “You’re built like a teenager. What size dress do you wear?”

Giggling, Marline said, “I’ve always been skinny. I can trade clothes with my fourteen year old. My sixteen year old is a size larger.”

Rich replied, “Christ, maybe you’re too young for me. I’m over fifty.”

Marline laughed and pointing to his erection, giggled, “That’s not going to waste. It’s what makes us equals. Besides, I’m going to be forty-eight, next August. Put down the candles and come here.”

Rich set the candles on the dresser and knelt on the bed, enjoying the scene, as she reached out both hands to him. Curling and uncurling his fingers, as if to draw her to him, he knelt on the bed and leaned down to kiss her wide, moist lips. She pulled him to her and started running her hands over his back and shoulders, as he leaned on his elbows to keep from falling on her. He murmured to her, as she met his gaze with a sexy look, “I’m going to kiss you all over, you’re so luscious, you teenager, you.”

She wriggled with pleasure as he suckled her breasts, first one then the other. He ran his hand over them, gently rubbing her nipples, as he moved his lips down her flat stomach. She let out a low moan as he slid his hands to part her legs and buried his face in her tawny muff. Rich slid down to lean against her hips as he put an elbow on either side of her trim form. His pleasure at her true blonde pad was vented by wide and sweeping movements of his tongue up and down, searching for her pleasure spot. His body shadowed her pelt, from the candlelight,

behind him on the dresser. He couldn't be sure he found it until she let out a moan and started arching her back to meet his questing tongue. He wiggled his probing tongue faster and faster until she gave a violent thrust of her hips and released a gigantic sigh. Her hands found his head and pulled him away from her throbbing thighs. She pushed his mouth onto her left breast as he fondled the other nipple with gently, stroking fingers, in concert with his pleasing tongue.

“Oh, My....Oh.. MY,” she gasped, “that’s wonderful. I’m getting all turned on, again, so soon. I can’t believe it. It’s been so long.” She gasped, “Where is it? I want it in my mouth. Put in my mouth.”

Her urgent sounding request excited Rich as he rose to please her. He moved upon her inert form, straddling her sides with his bent legs to place his penis at her mouth. The candlelight revealed her eyes grow wide as she saw him at her chin.

“My God,” she murmured, “You are for real. That’s gorgeous and gigantic. Uhmnnnnn.”

She encircled his swollen stem with her left hand and ran her tongue around and under his man head. Moments later, she was moving in and out and suckling him slowly, with long strong pulls of her mouth. Rich moved in and out with his hips, pushing his length in and out of her grasping mouth. Two or three of those thrusts and she pressed her other hand against his stomach and he moved onto his back, off her arching body. She rolled over, his stem still in her mouth and she moved her head, rapidly, up and down the length of his penis. Cupping her right hand around his length, she moved it up and down to her mouth, as she suckled him at the tip, with noises that stimulated his excitement. She sounded as if she were humming and cooing to him. The curdling sensations in his loins were running up his body, as she reached under his scrotum with her left hand and lightly stroked him to a pulsing eruption.

Rich was in ecstasy as she continued to move her mouth up and down over the end of his throbbing joint, taking everything he

had in him. He had to take hold of her head to pull her away and down next to him on the bed.

She murmured, “Oh, MY. That was something. I’ve got my protein for the month.”

Rich chuckled, “Any time you need a protein injection, you know where to come.”

Marline giggled and placed her hand on Rich’s still erect penis, “I’m not going to let that go to waste,” as she roiled onto him, straddling his loins. She guided his hard stem into her pleasure chamber and moved up and down with her sinuous thighs. Her firm buttocks bounced up and down on Rich’s hips. Her excitement grew into a frenzy of wriggling thrusts against his heaving trunk. She made musical sounds like the cooing of two doves, as she got closer and closer to her climax. The loudness of her final wail shocked and excited Rich into meeting her final thrusts with his own arching pushes. He couldn’t believe the sensations that curled through his loins as he climaxed, again, a thrilling reflection of her own.

With a loud moan, Marline collapsed on Rich’s chest and murmured, “I can feel the throbs of your dick, as you come in me. You’re wonderful. Nothing compares with this feeling. No wonder you had seven kids. I’m glad I got my tubes tied.”

Rich embraced her and pulled her to his chest, as he ran one hand up and down her shoulders, back and buttocks, stroking her slowly and gently. They lay, completely sated. Rich said, “Let’s get under the covers. I want to cuddle you.”

“Honey, I have to get home, before long,” she said softly. “If I get under the covers, I’ll never go home. Is that clock right?”

Rich looked and saw his clock radio showed it was twelve-fifteen. “Christ, that was the most exciting quarter hour I’ve ever had. Did you really get off twice,” he asked her.

“Me? What about you? You must have been on an all protein diet for months to go like that. How do you do it? I’ll never wonder if you can do it, after this.”

“When did you question my ability to fuck?” Rich laughed.

“On the dance floor. I thought maybe it was too good to be true. Lots of guys get it up dancing, but can’t, when it means something,” she giggled.

“Come on,” he protested. “You can get anyone up the way you dance. You’re twice as exciting naked. In fact, I think I’m getting hard, again, talking about it like this.”

Marline looked at his languishing lizard, “Oh. My. Oh MY,” she uttered, amazed, as she started stroking him, moving her fingers up and down his rising length.

Rich muttered, “You’re unbelievable. Stand up on the bed, will you? I want to see you in the light.”

The music which he had turned on in the living-room could be heard coming down the hall. Rich recognized “*The Lady in Red*” playing on the stereo. Marline stood up and began to make those sensual moves he saw on the dance floor, in time with the music. Her eyes fixed his, with that same sexy look. She wriggled her hips and crouched as she had on the dance floor, this time totally naked. The candlelight played up her slender hips and the shadows couldn’t hide her tawny wedge as she spread her legs to squat, as she moved up and down to the beat of the music. Her face was lit by the candlelight. Rich could see her eyes fixed on his face, as the light in them, seemed to gain from her excitement. As she dropped down, she’d stroked his penis with her slender fingers, her fingertips tickling it awake. Soon it was transformed from a sleeping salamander to a cobra, ready to strike. She fixed her eyes on Rich and keeping his gaze locked to hers, sank to her knees and enfolded his man head into her moist mouth. Her movements, up and down, stayed in time with the music and she moved up and down on him, making suckling noises that got his ardor to a peak of tingling excitement.

As she moved up and down, on his erection, she stroked his balls with her left hand. She ran her cupped, right hand, up and down his shaft, with her mouth, moving in time, sucking him faster and faster. Rich couldn’t believe the sensations he was getting. Her

naked body reflected the candlelight from her breasts and thighs as she stared into his eyes. She started humming and cooing and his excitement peaked. She suckled him faster and faster, making rhythmic sounds in her throat, in time with her movements. His third climax felt just like the first. He couldn't believe her reactions to his coming. She felt him throbbing into her mouth and moved up and down with her lips caressing him slowly and firmly. Seconds later, Marline was squatting down, slipping his pulsing tube into her moist cove. She moaned in pleasure as she moved down to push against his trunk. With feet, flat on the bed, on either side of his hips, she squatted and rose, up and down, on his exciting and stiff rod. She moved so expertly he stayed aroused. He watched her manipulate his stem, side to side, with her hands, making it do her bidding. So expertly, did she handle it, in just minutes, she let out several moans and then, a loud groaning sigh. She had matched him, climax for climax.

Moments later, she rolled over on her side and grabbed his shoulders to pull him into her arms. She seemed unable, or unwilling to speak. Rich kissed her tenderly and said, "I can see why you get pestered by your lovers."

She roused at his words, "Remember, this is friendly sex. Don't disappoint me. I want more of you than anyone I've ever met, but I want to stay just friends, okay?"

Rich chuckled, "Baby, I'm at your disposal. I promise not to call you at home. You call me, okay? Or we can meet at Valentines. How's that?"

Rich nearly yelled in surprise when she said, "You don't want to call me?"

"I thought that pissed you off, when guys called you at home. Your daughters would soon get wise and all... Right?" he said with some impatience sounding in his voice.

"I was just wondering....that's fine. I prefer doing the phoning when their not around, and all. You know what I mean. Don't get upset. I'm just enraptured with you, you know," she replied.

“Baby, I could, get to be a pest, if you hadn’t made that so clear at Keno’s,” Rich chuckled, cuddling her and kissing her soundly.

“I’ve really got to be going,” she whispered in his ear. “My car’s at Valentines.”

“Oh, Yeah! I forgot about that. Let’s get dressed,” Rich blurted out.

They talked as they dressed. Marline asked him about his PC in the living room and Rich explained his line of work. He asked if she worked outside the house. Marline told him about her ten years at the Orange County Register, where she was an editorial assistant.

Rich said he had wondered about her obvious education. She said her ex-husband was an attorney. She had met him in college, at UCLA.

On the way to Valentines to get her car, Rich promised, he would not become a pest or call her, but he would like to follow her home to make sure she was okay. Marline was pleased and said it would be fine, if he wanted to see her home. He promised to turn around, as soon as she got into her house. Rich gave her his business card with his home phone, as they pulled up next to her car in the Valentines parking lot.

He followed her new looking Camaro to a custom home, up in Anaheim Hills that made Tasha’s large house look small by comparison. Rich guessed the house was worth nearly a half million at nineteen-eighty-seven prices. He waved as Marline opened her front door and he doused his headlights to pull a U-turn, in the cul-de-sac her house faced. He remembered to turn on his lights at the stop sign and drove home thinking how strange this new life was. Marline seemed more like what he was looking for, as she wanted time before she started a serious relationship. However, Rich didn’t really know what to expect from her. She seemed to waiver about his calling her. He got back home and went to bed remembering her three climaxes. That really made sex with her more enjoyable than with Tasha. He didn’t know about Marline, but that was a first for him.

Rich was right. He didn't know about Marline.

When Rich got on the Orange freeway, heading for East Los Angeles, to the meeting at the Environmental Testing Laboratories (ETL), it was just 9:00 AM. Being a Thursday, the traffic was about average for that day of the week. All three lanes of the 57 freeway, north, were going about thirty-five. Cars were virtually bumper to bumper.

The drive took him north to the Pomona Freeway, and into the turgid traffic moving into the megalopolis, Los Angeles, the City of Angels. He had a lot of time to review the research he had done last night. On the way home from the meeting at Sierra Bottlers, he had detoured to go by the Orange County Reference Library in Stanton, a city just west of Disneyland.

Rich spent more than four hours, studying the Federal and State Regulations on Water Treatment, both Drinking Water and Waste Water. Title 22 in the California Regulations, set Maximum Contaminant Levels, (MCL's), for both treatment operations. He learned that all water treatment facilities were required to sample their incoming—influent—water and to monitor treatment by sampling the effluent, or outgoing, water. The resultant samples had to be analyzed in the laboratory to assure the water supply was below the MCL on all elements, organic and inorganic. He was amazed at the quantity of information that had to be collected and analyzed in the day to day processes. He realized that the Personal Computer would be a vital cog in the entire process. Rich wondered how Water Treatment Plants could afford the time delays, inherent, in sending water samples to an outside lab for analyses. He could see how the problems of lost or changed numbers, due to the Valentine Virus, could really create intolerable delays and corrupt this vital process. Rich drove into the parking lot of ETL, a modern, three stories building in East LA, near the Los Angeles State University campus. He was ushered into the spacious office of the Lab Director, Chris English, after a few minutes waiting in the lobby.

Rich was surprised at the youthful appearance of the Lab Director of such an important operation. He was well under forty and looked like an active surfer, with “beach” blonde hair and a good tan. Rich saw, on the wall behind his desk, that Chris had a BA and an MA in Chemistry from USC. He was urged to call this affable Director, “Chris”, after meeting him and listening to the recap of the conversation that Sierra Bottlers’ Bill Meyers had with Chris’ boss, General Manager, Benton Andersen.

Chris explained that they had found discrepancies in the report data, they had been generating for various water districts. The first errors were detected three weeks earlier. These errors meant that all Analyses Reports had to be manually checked against the lab technicians’ original work sheets in order to verify accuracy. This verification took about twenty-four man-hours longer and was causing critical delays.

Chris stated they had four PC’s in the lab and they, all, seemed to do the same thing. The same spreadsheet program, in each PC, would alter data on a random basis. There was no pattern and they had tried reloading the spreadsheet from the original disks but the problem persisted.

After a review of the situation, he had found at Sierra Bottlers, a rehash of what Bill Meyers had told Chris, they went for a tour of the lab operations. Rich found that the four Lab PC’s were on a network, connected to the Lab Director’s PC and to three PC’s in the billing section of the Accounting Department. Chris explained that their lab data collection system was a custom, in-house, development. The spreadsheet files prepared in the lab were stored on the network file server in Accounting.

Each lab PC had its own spreadsheet program and saved the completed customer report data on the file server. Rich learned that Chris’ PC didn’t seem to have the same problems as those in the Lab. Chris’ spreadsheet seemed to function correctly. Rich reasoned, that meant the network must not be picking up the virus, if that’s what it was.

Chris returned to his office, leaving Rich to check each of the lab PC's. In a little less than fifteen minutes, Rich went through the four PC's with his write-protected System Check Program diskette. He found all four PC's showed only six hundred and thirty-five kilobytes of basic System Ram. They had the same virus he had discovered at Sierra Bottlers.

Rich sat down with Chris and explained what he had found on the lab PC's. Chris had a typed up agreement which detailed the Statement of Work, for Rich and stipulated a minimum of two weeks at fifteen hundred dollars a week. Rich was able to convince Chris that he should implement the same audit and quarantine system they were using at Sierra Bottlers. Rich was impressed with the coaching job Bill Meyers had done on ETL. They were ready and waiting for his assistance.

Chris phoned his boss, Benton Andersen, and scheduled a meeting for that afternoon, to discuss a retainer for Rich to attempt to track the source of the virus, in addition to the two week task. Rich told Chris why he called it the Valentine Virus, explaining that it was too new to have been identified by existing Virus Protection programs.

Chris agreed that Rich could use the PC, here in the Director's office, to work on the disinfecting project. Chris remarked that it was strange that an industry involved with disinfecting water would be targeted with a virus that caused them to disinfect PC's.

In the time before lunch, which Chris said was his treat at the Quiet Cannon at the Montebello Country Club, Rich learned about the scope of the water sampling and analysis operations at ETL. They handled chemical analyses for a varied clientele, but water districts were their biggest volume of samples. They had more non-water customers, but water samples were a bigger, per unit volume, and more regular.

Chris emphasized that the quick turn-around of results was extremely critical. Water districts adjusted their sedimentation, filtration, and disinfection processes, using ETL's reports on the water districts' influent, (in-coming water) and effluent,

(outgoing or treated water). He stressed that the added delay, due to the virus was costing them dearly. They were not only losing money but, also, losing the customers' confidence.

The phone rang while they were talking. Chris spoke for a minute and hanging up, said, "This is a real coincidence, Rich. The EPA is here. I want you to meet their Regional Director, Dr. Mogollon." He pronounced it, Moh-GOY-on.

The door opened and a petite brunette with a striking figure entered the office. She was obviously of Mexican descent and very attractive. She wore a dark business suit and was very shapely. To Rich, she looked in her late forties. The light in the office was bright but her sepia complexion made it difficult to tell her age. Her skin was smooth and unlined around the eyes, which were so dark you couldn't tell the pupils from the irises.

'She would turn every man's head, at Valentines,' Rich thought to himself.

Chris walked around his desk and met her before she got half way into the room. He was obviously taken with her and her position with the EPA. Rich wasn't able to take a shot at which impressed Chris, more, her looks, or her power in the Water Industry.

Chris held onto her hand as he introduced Rich saying the "Computer Consultant who will fix our PC problem."

She retrieved her hand from Chris and extended it to Rich. Her grip was firm and her direct gaze into Rich's eyes pleased him. She smiled so her whole face lit up. A sharp contrast to the serious face she wore into the room. Her voice was soft and rhythmical as she said, "What a stroke to find you here. We were to discuss the computers continued use in our customers' reporting requirements." She sat down and looking at Chris, got right down to business.

"What can you tell me about 'our' problem?" she said to Chris.

Chris replied, "We've just hired Richard Millions, here, to take care of that for us. He assures us it won't take more than a

couple of days.” He turned to Rich, as if looking for support for his assured response.

Rich responded, “I’m positive we can have the PC’s back to normal in that time. However, it will take longer to determine where the problem came from. We can eliminate it for good, but we should make an effort to detect its source, Dr. Mogollon.”

“Please call me, Terry,” she smiled, “...short for Teresa.”

“Thank you. I’m called Rich. If you will?” he smiled into her eyes.

The expected happened. Rich was used to it, by now.

She replied, “Really? Rich Millions? I won’t forget that,” she laughed with a low sound that was almost a silken giggle. She asked, “Can we exchange business cards?” She pulled a tooled leather card-case from her bag and extended one to Rich. He took it and pulled his wallet out and returned his.

She looked at his card and said, “It really is Millions. How nice.” She continued, as if to cover her obvious disbelief, “I see you live in Yorba Linda, in Orange County. How nice. That is a pleasant community.”

Rich smiled but said nothing, hoping Chris would take the ball. He was enjoying looking into Terry’s dark pools of light that were outlined by long, dark lashes.

Chris replied, “Sierra Bottlers recommended Rich. He’s doing work for them.”

Rich spoke up so his client would not be revealed as having a virus. “Yes, I’m doing a Sales Tracking Project and have experience with this problem. They recommended me to ETL.”

The EPA version of Dr. Mogollon came back, “Oh, just what is the problem, then?”

Rich looked at Chris as if to say, ‘It’s in your court, now.’

Chris replied, “We seem to have picked up a computer virus in our Lab PC’s. Rich has the distinction of first discovering it on a

PC in Orange County. It's a new strain which he calls the Valentine Virus."

The EPA Director looked shocked. "Are you sure?" she said to Rich. "Is it liable to spread? I don't know about electronic types of vires."

Rich was impressed at her use of the correct plural form of the word, virus. Everyone, he knew, said, "Viruses".

Rich replied, with a smile, "Your doctorate shows with your using the correct plural of virus. You're the first I've heard say it correctly,"

The Terry version laughed, pleased. "I guess in the computer world, they coin new words all the time. I still use biological terminology. That was my major and my PHD."

Chris replied, "I've always said, "Viruses", myself. I guess it's as they say, "When in Rome, do as the Romans..."

"You're right, Chris. That's what everyone I know says. But to answer your question, Doctor. Computer vires are very common, now. There are over a hundred and fifty known strains. This one is not widely known. Current Virus Protection Software can't trap this one. It will spread fast, as it attaches to a System File that all IBM-type PC's use."

"How will you eliminate it, then?" she asked very serious in her concern.

"It's a system problem that can be eliminated. I've done it before. I'll admit the first one was a time-consuming task, but now, it can be purged from any infected PC in a matter of hours. Keeping it from spreading requires keeping all diskettes, used by the corrupted machines, write-protected, "Quarantined". Unprotected diskettes will pick it up and transfer it to any PC."

Rich went on and described the really difficult problem of tracking down the carrier. Both Chris and Terry paid close attention. When he was finished, Doctor Mogollon said, "We have to be sure every water company is advised of this. We need

an Advisory Letter sent to all Water Treatment Agencies, immediately.”

Rich waited for Chris’ reply. This was his industry.

Chris looked at Rich and asked, “How can we do that Rich? How do we tell them to watch for it, if current Virus Protectors won’t catch it?”

Rich explained that his System Checker would signal the presence of the virus, if it was loaded immediately after starting any PC. Then the removal process could be implemented after putting the infected PC in quarantine.

Discussion on creating the Advisory Letter and its transmission on EPA authority took up the rest of the time to lunch. The three agreed to go to lunch, after Dr. Mogollon’s objections about the propriety of going to lunch with an ETL official were overcome by Rich’s insistence that it be his treat.

Chris requested that Dr. Mogollon sit in on the meeting with Benton Andersen after lunch. They would discuss their mutual interest in getting Benton to authorize Chris’s work with the EPA on the Advisory Letter.

The lunch and subsequent meeting with the three Water Industry figures would lead to a sponsorship for Rich’s efforts to track down the Valentine Virus. This puzzling effort would prove to be a fascinating introduction into the bureaucratic intricacies of the National Water Industry for Rich Millions.

*****END of SEXWEAPONS ONE*****

POSTSCRIPT

In Book Two:

"SEX WEAPONS & TAHOE TORNADOES,"

The group from Orange County meets in South Lake Tahoe for a week of gambling and gamboling. The women talk to the men about their sexual fantasies. It's the men's idea that the women put on a bikini fashion show, which ends up with wine and mixed couples in the hot tub, as the featured parts of this Tahoe Bacchanal.