

Horn 2: Nightwalker

Jonathan Wright

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Prologue

"Who would you share me with?" Sarah asked.

The evening breeze blew cooler than during the day, but the water in the little sandy tide pool at Herndon Beach had warmed to the temperature of a bath.

The sun had dropped to the edge of the Pacific, boiling red-orange on the horizon. A spectacular sight that people paid millions in order to boast of seeing every day from their back terrace, but like a faux diamond compared to the man who lay nude beside her.

She admired Joe Horn's body in the failing light. Taller than average, with shoulders that made her stomach flutter. She marked the hard-edged muscle and the pale white scars that told the tale of his life. Even in repose he seemed to be in motion, ready to move with impossible liquid speed. Just looking at him could make her breathe heavier.

"You keep asking that question," he said. "Makes me think you're getting bored." He seemed to fade away from her for a moment, as though looking inward. She waited, tense with dread.

He came back. "Sorry. Checking the perimeter."

She let her breath out. "Are we okay?"

He nodded, stroking her body with one hand. Horn had a sixth sense, developed over many, many years of dealing with things that belonged in people's nightmares but all too frequently appeared in the real world.

They lay, half in and half out of the water that surged gently around them. She purred as he moved his hand over the curves of her hip and waist, daring to look straight into his eyes. Not from fear of being presumptuous, submissive as she might

be; because of their depth and the things they had seen. "I know you think about other women, Joe."

"Past indiscretions. Is this a test?"

She smiled. "You know better than that. Okay, I'll go first." She licked her lips. "I'd love to see you fuck another woman. The thought of watching you dominate a couple of haughty bitches I know is making me hot right now."

"You've said that before, too. I'd fuck a woman I never met if you asked me to." He said nothing for a moment. "I'd give you to anyone you like."

She raised an eyebrow that Joe had told her placed Liz Taylor a distant second in elegance. "Anyone?"

He smiled. "Anyone. I know a few things about women, and a lot about you. You have the truest bullshit meter I've ever seen. If you liked the guy, I'd give you to him."

"Really?" she asked, moving closer. Her skin tingled from the cool air and the salty tang of the water. "Now I'm really getting hot."

He gently pushed her over on her back and laced his fingers in her hair. "I know a guy you'd like. He's different than me. Better looking." He grinned at his self-deprecation. "And taller. Bigger muscles, bigger cock. We've shared women in the past. You haven't met him yet. He'll want you on sight, but he's a Dom, and a strong one. He'll make you crawl. I'll give you to him if you like."

Sarah bared her teeth in a savage grin of anticipation. "Oh, Joe, would you?"

He ran his free hand up and down the length of her body. She reached over her head and grasped the wrist of the hand that tangled her hair, closed her eyes and arched her body off the sand. "Oh! You bastard, you know what that does to me!"

"He's pretty scary," said Horn, pretending to ignore her. But his cock stood up proud and stiff.

She moaned with pleasure. "I like scary men."

He chuckled. "He moves like a cat, and has eyes that see through you, right into your soul. He knows when you lie, and lies make him angry. If you make him angry, he will punish you."

She moaned, feeling Joe's fingers trace patterns around her cunt. "He -- sounds -- sinister." She moaned again. "Can I fantasize about him while you fuck me?"

"I insist. Yes, he's downright sinister. He can be cruel. Uncaring. And especially domineering."

Sarah undulated uncontrollably. "Yes! Give me to him! Please!"

Horn chuckled. "He'd eat you up, spit you out, and leave you begging for more."

Sarah moaned as Horn's fingers delved into her cunt, stroking her clit. "Please, Joe! Tell me you'll give me to him!" She gasped, bucking her hips as Horn found that special rhythm that drove her wild. She felt shockwaves of pleasure pulse through her.

Horn moved on top of her, never loosening his grip on her hair. Sarah arched her body to give him her breasts. She knew he loved them, loved sucking them, loved biting her nipples. She'd always thought they were just too big until she met Horn. He made her feel like a sex goddess.

She whimpered because whimpering made her feel weak and helpless and she loved to feel that way with Horn. She spread her legs and moaned, "Take me!"

Horn eased his cock into her cunt with frustrating slowness. "I love controlling you like this," he whispered.

She whimpered again, just to do it. "I bet you think I love being your little sex toy."

"I know you love it," he said, slipping his cock a little further into her cunt.

She moaned as he raked her exposed neck with his teeth.

"Say it," he teased.

She moaned again, playing the game they both loved.

"Say it," he insisted, withdrawing his cock an inch. His breathing, the heat of his body, the tension in his muscles, all told Sarah he could hardly control his lust.

She could have used that to gain an advantage over him, but she didn't want to. "I love being your sex toy."

He thrust hard into her. The water washed around them, caressing her, lifting her slightly. Wrapping her legs around Horn, she moaned deep in her throat. "Oh, God, Joe, I love your cock!"

She thrust hard against him as he bent to her breasts, sucking them one after the other. Her nipples stood up hard and long. He stroked them with his teeth, making her cry out each time until she came, breathless, gasping his name.

Being Joe Horn, he controlled his pleasure until he could no longer stand it, allowing himself a brief, meteoric moment of ecstasy in the arms of this perfect woman.

Then the radar went out again. Questing, searching for the little blip that meant one of his special friends had dropped in to pay a call.

Horn lived for Sarah's love. But he lived his life on the edge. And the edge could be sharp indeed.

Chapter One

In the dank alley, Joe Horn stood quietly, listening with his ears and his inner sense. Nothing moved in the still summer air except the feeble, twitching hand of the man at his feet. A small pile of slimy debris lay to one side, recently dead. It collapsed in on itself, bubbling and hissing, dissolving in a stench of rotting gas. Horn ignored it, wiping his knife on a scrap of cloth that he tossed aside. The knife slipped into the sheath strapped to his forearm as he squatted beside the body of the man.

The twitching had ceased. No surprise. A flitting shadow with a razor tail had sliced open the man's throat like a tomato. Horn's knife flashed, but Luther had died before he could say more than "Homer --"

Horn turned back the sleeve of Luther's tattered shirt, revealing the Screaming Eagle tattoo. Briefly, his mind went back thirty-five years, to a steaming jungle and a brutal fight.

Horn gently closed Luther's staring eyes then took the dead hand in his own one last time. "No more bad dreams, Luther."

At the entrance to the alley, Sarah Fenton watched the silent, bloody tableau. Her jaw slowly unclenched, but her heart continued to race. It had happened so fast...

Sweat beaded her forehead. She glanced around, from habit. The back streets of North Park remained quiet at two in the morning.

She crouched beside the body, across from Horn. "Joe --"

Horn looked up. In the darkness she could not see his face, but she felt his pain.

"I think we need to get out of here." *The feeling of... something... moving closer...*

Horn looked down at the body. He sighed, releasing a tiny piece of the sorrow. He rose slowly, uncoiling his deceptively lean frame as if he felt old and stiff.

As if. I've never seen anyone move so fast...

Horn's face showed little age but a lot of living. The humming intensity in his eyes betrayed his will to live and made his focus laser-like. Sarah expected he could stare down Satan. *He owns me with his eyes...*

No one walked the Other Side and came away untouched. It had affected Horn over time, making him appear younger than his years. Since meeting him, Sarah had noticed small changes in herself. As now. The feeling of impending danger, more than a reaction to what had happened.

She'd been three steps behind, watching Horn's back. Had seen him enter the alley, and turned the corner in time to hear Luther's brief exclamation and glimpse a hurricane of motion. It ended before she could move.

He's got to be fifty-five or sixty, but he looks a worn thirty-five, if that. He walks like a cat. A shadow. I've seen karate masters who move like an elephant compared to Joe. But then their lives don't depend on stealth every minute of every day.

She looked down at Luther McWilliams and gently touched his face. The ugly ravages of drugs and booze and a life on the streets seemed to fade. An image came to her, of a younger man with wide, caring eyes. Eyes that grew sad, then hollow with pain as they watched others die. Eyes that had tried and tried to escape, to go home...

She bowed her head as a single, shuddering sob wracked her body. A tear fell on Luther's face.

After a minute she rose, putting the pain behind her. *Rest in peace, Luther.*

"Let's go," Horn said. As they left he pulled out his cell and called 911, simply reporting a body found in the alley, then hanging up. Joe stayed away from the authorities, but she knew why he called this time. The cops would get Luther's body to the morgue, from whence it would go to a pauper's grave, except that somewhere along the way the money would appear for a decent burial in a military cemetery, and someone would be there, standing in the shadows, to say good-bye.

They walked down 30th to University, cutting through a deserted parking lot behind a restaurant as a siren wailed in the distance.

Belatedly, the way it usually happened, Sarah felt the tingling, the feeling of being alive, after feeling the presence of death. *Luther's dead and I'm alive and I feel totally, selfishly glad.* Carnal hunger rose in her. She felt the tension in Horn alter as he became aware of her heightened arousal.

Their apartment -- hers, but Horn had been living with her since shortly after they met -- was a mile away. She bit her lip in frustration and not a little shame. Her body screamed for simple, life affirming sex. *It's a common reaction to witnessing death. Made more immediate by the living, breathing incarnation of my fantasies walking beside me.* Sarah knew she couldn't wait. "Joe..."

They stood on the corner of University and Florida, in the center of a business district. University lay quiet and empty, green traffic signals staring like alien eyes. He turned to her. "You want me to fuck you."

She stepped back. His forthrightness could still take her by surprise. But now her libido went into overdrive. "Yes."

"It will be dangerous," he said. "This is not exactly a safe place."

"I -- I don't care," she said, feeling a spike of fear mixed with terrible sexual hunger. Her nipples stiffened. "I don't care. I want you -- your cock." Her head felt fuzzy and her lips parted. She felt the heat in Horn as well. His appetite for sex astonished her.

"Strip."

She bit back a frightened response. *On a public street corner?* But as Horn leaned against a lamppost, watching her, her hands acted impulsively, pulling off her clothes.

She felt her heart beat faster as she stripped, revealing her body bit by bit, until she stood nude before him, praying a car or a nocturnal pedestrian didn't appear on the deserted street.

Horn looked her up and down for a long minute, during which time Sarah became more and more aroused. He turned and started down Florida. "Leave your clothes."

He led her into an alley, just like the one where Luther had died. She felt the eerie quality of it immediately. Fear rose in her throat and with it her state of sexual arousal. She quailed at the thought of picking up a shard of glass in her bare feet, but after three steps, the alley suddenly sprouted something soft underfoot.

Grass? She felt a subtle change. They had entered the Shadowland.

"Anything might happen," he whispered, sending shivers through her.

"Joe -- please --" She hugged herself. The warm air caressed her as if the night had sensuous fingers. "I can't wait," she breathed. "Please fuck me."

"You do beg nicely. I'll remember that."

Sarah looked around in awe, as the walls of the buildings faded and gave way to... trees. Closely spaced, thick-trunked, with branches meeting overhead. Moonlight leavened the gloom, lending an eerie glow to the scene.

The air felt heavy and wet. Darkness seeped out of the shadows. Sarah glanced back. Roiling smoke obscured the path behind them. Something moved within the dark billowing mass.

Horn glanced behind then said, "This way." He led her left, between two trees, and then right, onto what seemed to be a new path.

Sarah heard movement behind them. "Joe?"

"I hear it. Keep moving."

Ahead of them, a light beckoned.

The path dead ended at a high stone wall with a stout wooden gate, five or six feet wide and ten feet tall, illuminated by the small light set into the wall above it. Horn examined the door.

Sarah looked back again. A shape moved on the path. Something about it hinted at fluid, sensual movement. She felt the pull of a powerful sexual compulsion, mixed with a taste of terror.

A wraith-like figure emerged from the darkness, beckoning with pale, soulless eyes that shone from indistinct features. The eyes drew her toward the slender, almost

skeletal arms. *Ecstasy awaits in my searing embrace*, said the eyes. *Terrible, unimaginable ecstasy.*

Sarah's body trembled with eagerness. Her cunt twitched as the image of a huge, throbbing cock grew in her mind.

You want this. You must have it. It will pierce you, kill you, and in dying you will know the ultimate pleasure. You want it, you want it...

"-- want it," she breathed. "I want it."

Vaguely she heard something behind her. The creak of a door? Horn's voice? Twenty feet away, the wraith resolved itself again, becoming a lean, naked humanoid figure with a hugely erect cock. The eyes remained pale, unblinking, devoid of life. *Kneel before me. Present yourself as a slave.*

She sank to her knees, cupping her breasts. Her breathing grew heavier and faster. Her cunt throbbed with wanting the huge cock. She moaned.

A tendril of something protoplasmic, invisible yet tangible, extended from it. The faint, questing wisp separated as it touched her, simultaneously slipping into her cunt and her anus and encircling her distended nipples.

She arched her body toward the wraith, closing her eyes, gasping as a wrenching orgasm took her, blinding her to sight and sound and all feeling except the deadly, terrible hunger for *more*.

Horn's hand tangled in her hair, dragging her gasping to her feet, stumbling through the gate. The heavy wooden door slammed shut behind them. Something hit the fence hard enough to shake it, rattling the gate and sending tremors through the ground.

Sarah felt stone under her where she lay on the ground. She trembled, moaning, as she looked up at Horn. Her brain felt packed with cotton. "What --"

"It will hold," he said, glancing at the gate. "A death fantasy. For something like that to track you, you had to be emanating enough sexuality for any ten women." He smiled.

Sarah thought that smiling was not exactly called for under the circumstances, but she couldn't think straight in any case. "It -- made me want..."

"Everyone has a death fantasy," Horn said. "Most don't get to meet it. To do so is usually lethal."

Sarah looked at the wall. "Can it come over?"

Horn shook his head. "No. Because we're not there. We're here." He shrugged. "That's the way it works in the Shadowland."

Sarah slowly sat up and looked around. They had entered a small courtyard paved in old stone. A broad branched tree dominated the center, along with a bubbling fountain. What appeared to be a genteel old apartment building rose up on three sides. The apartments all featured balconies that looked down on the courtyard.

"Horn," boomed a majestic voice from somewhere above them. Sarah jumped, looking around frantically.

Horn looked up. "Yes. I brought a woman."

"There is a vacancy."

Sarah saw a light go on over a lower balcony.

Horn shook his head. "Not this time." He turned to Sarah. "Say what you want."

The thrall of what had just occurred still lay upon her like chains. She half sat, half lay on the pavement. "I want you to fuck me," she said in a clear voice. Saying it aloud just made her want him more. *Will the other one, the owner of the voice, watch?*

"Does she know the rules?"

"No," said Horn. "I will stand for her."

Sarah started to ask *what rules?*

Horn answered as if she had spoken aloud. "You will be on display. Others will see you."

Sarah's heart triple thumped in her throat. *Oh my God. My fantasy!*

The voice intoned, "Very well."

She saw low lights go on all around the courtyard. French doors opened and indistinct forms emerged from the apartments. In ones and twos they took seats on their balconies. She squinted but could not identify individuals.

"They prefer a veil of anonymity." Raising his voice, Horn said, "I'll take her on the water rock." A collective murmur of assent emitted from the gathering.

He looked at Sarah. "Up."

Sarah rose and followed Horn to the fountain. The circular stone enclosure rose knee high. Intricate and elegant carvings decorated the outer edge. On one side rose an undulating mass of solid rock, almost like a small hill. Water sprouted from the peak, washing down the near vertical slope in a broad sheet that seemed to have worn it smooth.

Horn motioned toward the mass of rock.

Sarah stepped into the water, finding it warm and soothing. She sighed, then turned and leaned back against the rock. As her body touched it, she realized that its indentations fit her perfectly, supporting her comfortably at a slight angle from the vertical. She settled back. The water emerged from a point just below the nape of her neck, washing over her in a quiet stream, stroking her skin like smooth, liquid hands. Reaching back overhead, she found a small outcropping that fit her grip.

Murmurs drifted down from above.

"...goodness, what a beautiful girl..."

"...oh, man, this will be *so* good..."

"...put your hand there, darling, oh, yes..."

"...I could just watch her lay there all night..."

"...now *that* is art..."

She lay against the water rock, luxuriating in the warm, soft, wet sensations, as Horn disrobed. Watching him, she started to squirm. She understood that the water rock presented her to both Horn and the watchers at a perfectly sensuous angle, her body slightly arched over its surface, her legs spread, her head lying back, throat exposed.

She wanted Horn's cock in her. Now. She undulated her body, licking her lips. Within her a voice seemed to bubble up from the center of her sex. *Come to me, Horn. Fuck me.* A small whimper escaped into the warm night.

Horn stood nude in the water, watching her.

"Come to me, Horn," she whispered. "Fuck me."

His cock rose.

She knew Horn as a man of supreme control. He got hard when he chose.

She bared her teeth in satisfaction. "I want you, Horn," she said in a loud, clear voice. "I want your cock. Come to me. Then come inside me. Fuck me, Horn."

Horn watched her. His cock throbbed. She knew the little signs, the tightening of his jaw, the way his hands curled. She writhed like a belly dancer, moaning with pleasure as the water slid over her body. She felt the beginnings of a self-induced orgasm simmer within her. "Take me, Horn. Fuck me with your hungry cock!" Her voice sounded otherworldly, remote from herself, as hollow as if it came from the bottom of a well.

Horn's jaw tightened as his hands reached for her.

"That's it, Horn, come to me. Take me! Surrender to your hunger! Surrender to me!"

His hard, demanding hands trailed fire over her smooth skin. She closed her eyes and moaned, "Master!"

No! You must maintain control! Control!

His feigned insensitivity drove her wild. She felt his breath against her neck, then his lips then his teeth scraping her sensitive skin. His cock pressed against her cunt. She spread her legs wider, moaning, "Please! Fuck me!"

No! Make him beg! Make him beg!

"Nice try," Horn said in a barely controlled voice. "But she's mine. I own her."

"Yes. Take me. Please!" Sarah gasped.

Sarah made urgent, high-pitched sounds in her throat while Horn continued to play her body. "Submit to me," Horn breathed in her ear.

Vaguely, Sarah understood that he spoke to someone else. *I've already submitted! Jesus, fuck me! Let me feel your cock thrusting into my cunt!*

"Submit to me, and then you will feel my cock."

"Yes!"

No.

No.

N--

"Submit," he whispered. "Submit. You want to. You're mine to use. Submit and feel the ecstasy."

Horn took each large, firm breast in his mouth, sucking hard, running his tongue over the nipples. His hands stroked her feverishly.

Must have his cock -- must --

No -- no --

"You are my slave." Horn stared hard at Sarah as she moaned and writhed in his grip. "My slave!"

He thrust his fingers into her cunt. His words pulsed with power and a searing hunger that Sarah recognized as his almost uncontrollable desire to satisfy himself with her. The combination made her come, thrusting her hips and gasping in an ever higher voice.

Tremors of pleasure shook her body. She arched her body away from the water rock, crying out, "Your slave!"

Slave! Yes! Yes, I am your slave! Oh, please give me your cock! Please!

Horn grasped Sarah's ass in both hands and slid his cock into her throbbing cunt. As he did so, a frightening gasp burst from him. He pounded Sarah against the water rock. His voice descended into animal grunts of pleasure.

Sarah shrieked with pleasure.

The inner voice shrieked as well, a pure, carnal wail of uncontrolled release. Sarah's voice rose an octave as Horn growled in her ear, "Give it all to me! Now!"

Sarah cried out again, her body wracked with continuous orgasms, her mind lost in a haze of surrender and ecstasy beyond understanding.

Too much... too much pleasure... too much!

Sarah wrapped her legs around Horn's lean waist, digging her heels into the small of his back. "More!" she gasped. "More!"

Too much! More! No, stop! Oh, Horn, I can't stand it! More!

Tears ran from Horn's eyes. "Give it to me!" he demanded.

Yes! Yes. Yes... yes... oh... oh... give me more... please... more...

The inner voice faded.

Horn hissed through gritted teeth, vainly attempting to maintain control.

Sarah opened her eyes, realizing what had happened. "Come inside me, my love. Please! She's gone now. I'm free."

Horn expelled his breath in a tortured gasp, and thrust into her so hard he lifted her a foot higher on the water rock.

"Your slave!" Sarah cried out. As she slid slowly back down the water rock, settling into Horn's arms, she became aware of cheering.

Cheering?

She rolled her head to one side and opened her eyes. The watchers stood and cheered, clapped and whistled. She even heard scattered shouts of "Bravo!"

Horn's breath rasped ragged in her ear. "You -- okay?"

"Oh, my God, Joe, the way you came inside me --" Sarah moaned. "What happened? I've never --"

"An exorcism."

Sarah gasped. "What? You mean she -- Sally -- possessed me?"

Horn nodded. "Sort of. I think she got you back there, as the wraith in your death fantasy."

Sarah shook her head. "I -- I can't think with your cock still inside me..."

He let her down into the water.

She stood on shaky legs, arms wrapped around Horn's torso.

The crowd had dispersed. Gone back inside. Whatever. Sarah brushed back her wet hair. She noticed that Horn seemed shaky as well. "What's the matter?"

He leaned against the rock, and dunked his head in the water. He shook the water out of his eyes and looked at her. "I've never had to fight for control like that before."

Sarah sat on the edge of the pool.

Horn stepped onto the pavement and retrieved his clothes. As he dressed, he said, "Sally was in you. Possessing you. She came on hard, wanting to make me submit. It's more than ego with her. If I had surrendered to her, she would have won the game."

Sarah's hand rose to her mouth. Horn had once explained the game. She and Horn had even played it. She lost, always, and reveled in losing, considering what she gained. But with Sally, losing meant something other than sweet surrender.

Horn said, "With her alone I always had control. But coming through you... I almost couldn't help myself. I wanted you so badly, I was almost willing to die to fuck you."

Sarah felt shame as her cunt throbbed with hunger at his words. "I don't understand."

Horn stared hard at her. "You'd make a great succubus." He held out his hand.

She smiled as she took it and stepped from the pool. "What about my clothes?"

"I beg to differ."

Sarah whirled. Horn stood calmly, watching the woman who stood in the shadows of the tree.

Sally emerged from the shadows, standing tall, lithe, voluptuous and nude. Raven black hair tumbled to her waist. Her skin shone like an alabaster moon. Staring at her impossibly voluptuous body, Sarah felt small and inadequate.

Beside her, with a perfect deadpan face, Horn muttered, "Boob job."

In spite of her dawning fear -- or perhaps because of it -- Sarah burst out laughing.

Sally cast a sharp look at her. "I suppose you have to be able to laugh, looking no better than you do." She looked at Horn. "Honestly, Horn, you certainly could have done better than her."

Horn smiled. Sarah had seen that smile, and momentarily felt pity for Sally. "No," he said quietly, "I could not have done better. Not in a thousand years."

The truth of his words flattened Sally's verbal attack as if it were week-old soda. She pretended to ignore his comment. "I have business with you."

From above and around them, the voice spoke. "You have come here uninvited. You must pay the toll."

Sally whirled in a fine display of feminine pique. Sarah noted that her eyes actually flared. "Balls! You know who I am!"

The ground began to rumble beneath their feet. Sally's eyes got wider, but Sarah thought that perhaps she was feigning anger. She looked profoundly uncomfortable.

"Toll!"

Sally bit her lip, as though trying to hold something back. The night sky took on a strange, blood red hue.

"Toll!"

Sarah felt Horn's hand on her arm. "Get ready to run for the gate."

"All right!" screamed Sally. "All right!"

The ground ceased trembling, and the blood faded from the sky. "Toll," said the voice, sounding perhaps a bit contrite.

Sally set her jaw. "I came already." She looked sideways at Horn and Sarah. "Really."

"Doesn't count." Sounding somewhat smug this time.

Sarah thought steam would start shooting from Sally's ears.

Sally let out her breath. She stepped into the pool, lay back against the water rock. As Sarah had done, she reached over her head and grasped the outcropping. Something moved in the rock, and Sarah saw it extend itself to encircle Sally's wrists.

"I choose," Sally snapped.

"No," said the voice, quiet and sinister.

A single light went on, at the top of the building. Then it went out. A minute later, a figure emerged from the building into the courtyard.

Sarah sank back against Horn.

A nude man, as tall as Horn but easily twice his weight, shuffled toward the fountain. He carried himself like a football player, all swagger and muscle. His skin glistened in the pale light, completely hairless from head to foot. His cock hung like a piece of limp pipe, in repose easily a foot long. His huge hands opened and closed mechanically, repeatedly, as though anticipating crushing something. His hard, cruel face was layered in planes, a rock carved haphazardly from a quarry.

Without preamble he stepped into the pool and sloshed to where Sally hung, helpless. Sally's eyes seemed dead.

"If she doesn't come, she stays here."

Sarah turned her head to look up at Horn. "What does that mean?"

"Nothing, and everything. The longer she stays, the harder it is to leave. She can interact with the other tenants. Fuck 'em. Play bridge. Whatever. Until The Man decides it's time for her to go. Or not."

"The Man?"

"That voice. Everybody calls him The Man." Horn shrugged. "He has enormous power here. His word is law. We have an understanding, because I did something for him once. And all you have to do is come."

Sarah turned to face him. "You said you'd stand for me. You mean, if I hadn't come, you'd have taken my place here?"

He nodded.

She started to say something. Like *how stupid is that?* But she understood Horn better than most. *This is the man who used to play The Game with Sally.* And in retrospect, she had to admit that the thought of playing *this* game made her feel... the way she'd felt when the wraith had touched her. "What happens? Does anyone ever leave?"

Horn nodded toward the pool. Sarah turned to watch. "If Sally comes, she is free to go. If Karak controls himself and doesn't come, he's free. That's all. That's the 'toll'."

"Who is that guy?" asked Sarah, shuddering a little. *He looks like an animal. A beast. Ugly, distorted. But so powerful. He could crush me like porcelain. What would it feel like to be held in thrall by such a powerful, fearsome man?* "How long has he been here?"

"His name is Karak, once a chief of the Morai, a prehistoric tribe in northern Europe. He's been here for five thousand years."

Karak's cock became engorged and erect. Seeing it stiffen, Sarah stifled a gasp. It had to be eighteen inches long and nearly as thick as her wrist. The thought of having that inside her filled her with fear. She could only imagine what Sally felt. If anything.

Karak's strategy became obvious. He simply grabbed Sally by the hips and began to penetrate her with his cock. He had to take his time, and in the process, Sarah noted that Sally began to writhe and moan.

Horn continued. "He means to give her no time to seduce him. He doesn't care if she comes or not."

Sarah watched, fascinated. "How long do they have?"

Horn shrugged.

Sarah felt something emanate from Sally. Sarah understood it immediately. The same thing that had happened in the alley. A sexual signal like pheromones, but a thousand times stronger. She sensed rather than saw how it encircled Karak's cock and his balls, and sent a tendril up his anus.

Karak sensed it, too, and his eyes showed a mixture of fear and unimaginable pleasure. Sally writhed in Karak's grip. She wrapped her legs around him, stroking his back with her heels. Sarah licked her lips in spite of herself. *I should do that with Joe. If I could only think clearly enough.*

She heard Sally whisper something seductively to Karak. She didn't catch the words, but she knew a taunt when she heard one.

Karak showed more fear than pleasure then, and his pleasure had to be immense. Sarah felt the sexual compulsion from here. Standing within Horn's embrace Sarah grasped his hands and guided them to her breasts. "Squeeze them. Hard!"

Horn obliged. Sarah felt his erection against her ass. She stroked her clit, moaning as she watched. Karak had not come, and Sarah understood why. He would be done, then, unable to perform for a time, and if Sally had not yet come she would be caught here, possibly forever. And so Sally controlled him. So easily!

Karak howled in frustration as he held onto Sally's hips and thrust uncontrollably. Somehow his immense cock sank into her cunt up to his balls.

Sarah sank back against Horn, rolling her hips as she feverishly stroked her clit. His hands squeezed her breasts and rolled her nipples. Her voice broke in little cries.

Sally threw her head back and cried out. Then she cried out again, and Sarah heard the laughter and triumph in her voice. Then she realized that Karak had disappeared. She thought she heard a voice, perhaps in her mind, screaming. The screaming faded in the night.

She sagged in Horn's arms, trembling.

The rock released Sally, who splashed indignantly out of the pool and once again approached Horn and Sarah. "Let's get out of here. Now. I hate this place."

Sarah noted she seemed a little out of breath, as though reasserting her self-control had not been so easy. Sally spoke to Horn, ignoring Sarah, who felt like pushing in her perfect face, but at the same time felt like melting into the ground.

"We were just leaving," said Horn, nonchalantly stepping between Sarah and Sally. "Unfortunately, you're not invited. I can't handle two succubi."

Sarah didn't exactly hide behind his broad shoulders, but she felt more comfortable standing there.

Sally actually spat. "She's not a succubus!"

"If she isn't, she ought to be. She's way better than you. Now get lost."

"No! We have to talk! I know about Luther. I know why he was killed."

Horn seemed passably interested. "Okay, why?"

Sarah looked around. "Joe --"

Horn turned. Sarah felt him tense. Fighting tense.

Shadows emerged from the shadows. Amorphous beings with too many appendages. The knife appeared in Horn's hand. "Get ready to run. I'll make a path. Go through the gate. Find the Bogeyman."

Sarah had learned when to take orders and follow directions. She'd sort out the meaning later. But one thing she couldn't help. "Joe, don't leave me!"

"I won't, sweetheart. I'll find you. Or you'll find me. I promise. But whatever you do, find the Bogeyman."

Horn led Sarah forward, toward the shadows. Sarah quailed, but understood that they might break through if they rushed them now.

The shadows moved, closing in. Something shot out. Horn moved, letting it go by, cutting the air. The tentacle fell flopping.

A form moved past them. Sarah gasped, seeing a sleek, panther-like creature, half human, half animal. It launched itself at one of the shadowy figures. They clashed, and the howl of animal savagery that erupted actually made the hair on Sarah's neck stand up.

Horn shoved her right at the fray. He twisted and cut again, and *whuffed* as something hit him.

Sarah sprinted in the direction Horn had shoved her, and saw an opening had been created. The panther-beast slashed with its claws and howled with bloodthirsty satisfaction as it dismembered a second attacker.

Sarah sprang through the gap and then saw another opening, in the wall of the courtyard. She hesitated.

Go.

Sarah recognized the voice of The Man. Without waiting to question its motives, she ran through the opening, into darkness...

...and stumbled to her knees in her living room. She leapt up, whirling to confront whatever might follow.

She saw nothing. Her living room appeared to be just as it had been when she last saw it. *Right after Joe fucked me on the floor...*

She felt like someone had shot her in the gut. "Joe!" she screamed at the night.

This time the night did not answer.

Chapter Two

"Horn! This way!"

Horn whirled and cut. One foot lashed out, caving in something resembling a head. He ran toward Sally's voice, coming from the shadows of the tree.

A tentacle grabbed his foot, tripping him. It held on, and he landed flat. He rolled on his back as another tentacle hit the ground where he had been. He stabbed upward, cutting the body. The creature made a sound that hurt Horn's head, but it let him go.

Sally had reverted to her usual form. She stood under the trees. A maelstrom erupted around her. Standing in the center of the howling wind, she extended her hand. In the gloom, Horn saw a slight smile on her face.

He grasped her hand and fell into a void.

* * *

Shivering in the ungodly December chill of San Diego, Sarah scrambled down a steep hill into one of the innumerable brush choked gullies of Balboa Park, praying she would find the Bogeyman. The park's carefully manicured lawn, broad limbed trees and imposing museums and theatres, well lit and comfortably alive, had no connection with this place. The scattered streetlights and path lighting did not reach here, where shapes and silent movement and gleaming red eyes hid in the folds of darkness.

She reached the bottom of the gully. The waning moon cast a faint light, accentuating the deep isolation she felt. Sarah clenched her teeth at little sounds as she glanced around nervously. Joe had opened her eyes to many things, including the death that waits in dark places. She no longer slept well, or long.

Darkness surrounded her now. The brush, bone dry and brittle from five seasons of drought, crackled and crunched as she passed. The short, stunted trees that clung to

the steep hillside held deep shadows that seemed to pulse with sentience. The faint, chill breeze that wandered through the gully murmured softly, "You should not be here..."

Sarah certainly agreed, but circumstances dictated otherwise. She patted the inside pocket of her jacket, reassuring herself that the letter was still there.

She'd spat on her father's grave because she thought she hated him for leaving her in her youth. Then she'd declined the chance to claim his meager effects, including an unopened letter addressed to her.

Years later, Joe had given her that letter, which in turn had been given to him by -- Sarah didn't care to think about it. But she vowed it would never leave her possession again.

She heard the sound of footfalls, neither heavy nor light, but eerily quiet. She looked around warily, but saw nothing. Fear clawed at her stomach. She had no weapons, save her hands and feet. These had served her quite well in the past, but lately she had begun to have second thoughts.

She whirled, sucking in her breath and clenching her jaw as a shape materialized from the deeper shadow of a cluster group of prickly brush not twenty feet away.

She prepared to run. Few things scared her, but the list was getting longer, thanks to Joe Horn. The shape moved toward her, growing taller and wider, moving rhythmically, quietly, seeming to drift over the grass like the shadow of a cloud...

The shadow gave way to the dim light of the half moon, resolving into the form of a man. He wore an oversized coat that billowed out behind him, like Dracula's cape, as he halted before her.

"Are you the Bogeyman?" If the answer isn't yes, say goodbye to your balls.

"Yo, honeychile," he said in a deep, liquid voice. "You need somethin'?"

Sarah shivered at the sound of his voice, but kept herself coiled, ready to strike and run. "Joe Horn said to find you."

The Bogeyman said nothing. His stillness compared with Joe, who gave the impression of power by simply not moving.

"Who are you?"

"Sarah Fe --"

"Fenton. I know that," he said sharply, cutting her off. "I also know you have killed people for the government. Horn has nothing to do with such people. How do you know him?"

Sarah blushed. "I -- I'm his... friend."

She sensed rather than saw his grin. "Maybe you'd like to expand on that."

She blushed deeper. "What business is it of yours?"

"I am Joe Horn's friend. Who are you to him?" His voice sounded like a dirge.

Sarah leaned forward, almost shouting. "Who the hell are you to give me the third degree? I want to find Joe Horn. Either you know how to do that or you don't. If you don't, then *get fucking lost!*"

She yelped as he grabbed her by the front of her jacket and yanked her a foot off the ground. She lashed out with one foot, catching him in the ribs. He *whoofed* in pain, but didn't let go as any ordinary human would have done. He whirled her around and dragged her close, still holding her off the ground. She tried an elbow to the face, but he twisted away.

"Listen, girl, you're in my territory now, and if you want to walk out of here with all your fucking pieces, you will be nicer than you have been." He tossed her aside like a sack of flour. She stumbled and fell, rolled to her feet and waited for him to attack.

He stood silent. "Let's start over. Horn is my friend. Who is he to you?"

Sarah breathed heavily for a minute. "You seem to know everything already. My name, my background, which is surely something that no one outside of a very small number of people would ever know. Why ask?"

"I want to hear you say it. If you say it, I will know if you're telling the truth."

She paused. "Okay. I'm his lover."

"You're not telling me everything, but you are speaking the truth."

"Oh, thank you so much," she said, relaxing a little. "Horn said I should find you."

"When?"

"Just before he shoved me through a hole in reality." *That ought to give him something to think about.*

"Three nights ago, in the courtyard of The Man?"

She blinked, stunned. "Y-yes." The memory clawed at her gut.

The Bogeyman nodded. He turned and began walking down the gully. "I heard. So, you know where he was going?"

She hurried to catch up, looking around at the deep shadows. "No. We were pretty busy."

The Bogeyman snorted. Sarah assumed it to be an expression of humor. In the pale light of the moon his black skin, deep set eyes and bald scalp gave him the appearance of an African shaman. His appearance gave no clue to his age. He could have been thirty or eighty.

"How'd you find me?"

She shrugged. "A guy named Boze, dumpster diving behind the Spaghetti Factory."

The Bogeyman chuckled, conveying sad humor. "Ah yes, good ole Boze. He come on to you?"

Sarah reddened at the memory. "Uh, yeah..."

The Bogeyman laughed. "Boze is okay, but he smells worse than the garbage he eats. I put him in a rehab house every other month or so. He always leaves." He shrugged. "Some folks, you got to take 'em the way they are."

She tried not to think of what might have happened to Joe. She'd put her feelings away in the place where she kept all of her trembling sensitivities, because she had become so used to being trashed, flattened and tossed away, that she did not want to face even the tiniest possibility that, in fact, Joe had left her, like every other man in her life had left her. "Joe and a woman -- maybe she's not a woman -- named Sally --"

"Oh, shit," said the Bogeyman. "Jesus fucking shit. Sally's part of this?"

Sarah kept looking around. She had the feeling of being watched by something malevolent. "Yes. She --" Sarah bit her lip. The memory of what Sally had done, and almost done, confused and scared her.

"Sally's bad news, Sarah. She's not truly human. And she thinks mainly about her next meal. She and Joe go way back. I'd heard that was old news..." He turned and looked down at her as he walked. "...cause of you. And I guess I see why. So, you got any idea where they were headed?"

Sarah shook her head. "No." She stopped. "Wait."

The Bogeyman halted and looked back.

Sarah stared at nothing. "Luther --"

The Bogeyman turned around to face her. "You do get around, sweet thing."

Sarah ignored him. "Homer..."

The Bogeyman cocked his head. "Luther say somethin' about that?"

Sarah nodded, then looked up at him. "Joe and I couldn't figure it out." She shrugged. "I still can't. But Sally said she knew about Luther, and knew why he had been killed. And it probably had something to do with Homer." She shrugged again.

In the center of the park, the big clock over the Museum of Man chimed three, a slow, sinister dirge that drifted down to them like a faint, sonorous warning.

The Bogeyman glanced over Sarah's head. His face remained calm, but Sarah felt new tension from him. She turned to look behind her, into the shadowed cleft of the gully.

The shadows there seemed to deepen, to coalesce.

The Bogeyman stood silent and still for two heartbeats. The air did not move, but his coat did, as though it had a life of its own. "We'd better get out of here."

Something moved in the shadows, displacing gravel and crunching twigs.

He set off down the floor of the gully, which rapidly widened into a ravine and then a small canyon. His long legs carried him at a pace that required her to half run to keep up.

"What the hell is going on?" She caught herself. She had learned to see things differently. Ever since Joe had opened her eyes, she understood that the shadows held secrets, and the difference between Here and There could be as delicate as a sigh, as deadly as a quick and noiseless lunge. She had an idea what the hell was going on, and it scared her.

Behind them, Sarah heard something.

Footsteps? No. A slithering? Perhaps...

The Bogeyman glanced back. His breath hissed through clenched teeth. "Hurry."

Thick brush blocked their way. Sarah glanced back, seeing nothing, but hearing more movement. *Maybe just illegal aliens. There are hundreds of them hiding in these canyons.*

To the left, branches moved and rustled on the wall of the canyon, twenty feet above them. To their right, something moved closer, making the thick brush wave as it passed.

The Bogeyman muttered something under his breath. Just like Moses on the shores of the Red Sea, the brush parted. He took a step into the dark opening.

Sarah hesitated.

The Bogeyman turned. "C'mon!"

The air, already chilled here in the bottom of a canyon, became colder still, like the breath of a ghoul on her neck. Without looking behind her, Sarah bolted into the unreal passage, close on the Bogeyman's heels. She felt something touch her cheek, a gossamer thread that brushed her more lightly than a feather. A chill beyond ice lanced through her, freezing her in her tracks. She stumbled and fell.

A dark form loomed over her. She gasped and tried to scramble away, but her body would not yield to her terror. She tried to scream, but managed only a strangled whimper.

The form reached for her with appendages that only resembled arms.

Flame roared in the narrow confines of the brushy tunnel. Sarah heard the Bogeyman gag and spit then felt his iron grip on the collar of her jacket. He hauled her

through the passageway like a sack of wheat. They tumbled into the open ground beyond.

Sarah lay on the ground, shivering and groaning.

The Bogeyman leaned over her. "Are you okay?"

His breath smelled of... gasoline. She wrinkled her nose and slowly sat up. She waved a hand in front of her face. "Wha --"

She sensed rather than saw his smile. "Carnival trick, that's all." He swigged something that smelled powerfully antiseptic, swished and spit.

She staggered to her feet, looking around in confusion. "Where -- where's the fire?"

The Bogeyman took a swig from a small bottle, swished the liquid in his mouth and spat to one side. He wiped his mouth on the arm of his jacket. "Down there, somewhere," he gestured vaguely toward the distance.

Sarah blinked. "That dry brush..."

"It's probably out by now," he muttered.

They stood on the sidewalk just before the Laurel Street bridge. Behind her arched the stone buildings of the Museum of Man, the Natural History Museum, and the Museum of Art. Strong, quiet trees loomed overhead, spreading their branches as if in benediction.

The Bogeyman started off again. Sarah hung close to him as they crossed over Rt 163, the park quiet and empty fifty feet below. They had been down there seconds ago. What had happened?

They crossed Sixth, normally a broad, well lit thoroughfare, where the odd car and occasional bus could be seen at almost any time, even three in the morning on a Monday.

Not now. The eerie yellow wash of the low sodium streetlights, and the complete absence of any other form of life, gave her the creeps. She wanted to ask the Bogeyman where everyone had gone, but aside from fear of disturbing the sinister silence, she already knew.

Like birds in a forest, they've become quietly invisible, because something really bad is out here. She looked up at the Bogeyman's face, and the set of his jaw gave truth to her fears. "What is it?" she asked.

He waved a huge hand, saying nothing, directing all of his attention at the shadows.

Just like Joe...

She cut off that line of thought, and quietly fumed at being dismissed like a dippy little girl. But she remembered the reason Joe treated her like that. He had to concentrate on keeping them alive.

Okay, Master Bogeyman, I'll give you that one. For Joe.

He stopped at the entrance to a little driveway that ran between two seven-story apartment buildings and she almost ran into him. His hand went up again, for silence.

A single light, at the far corner of one building, spread a lonely pool of illumination. In between, the light was dim.

Sarah's breath came in clouds. The shadows between them and the oasis of light seemed to coalesce. She blinked. The space between the entrance to this alley and the light at the other end had become dark with seething shadows.

Sarah looked around. Two steps away, the sidewalk disappeared into fog. She could not see Sixth Street, not even the streetlights.

Uh oh...

Running, she knew, was not an option.

"Looks like we've been outflanked. I think we need to find another way." The Bogeyman's voice cut through her like cold steel. Sarah expected him to leap into motion, but he remained still.

In the chilling darkness of the alley, something moved with a wet sound. It could have been a lizard, or a rat, or a cat. But Sarah knew otherwise.

The Bogeyman whispered, "Don't move." He whirled, with powerful, balletic grace. His voluminous coat flared out, spreading like grotesque wings, covering them both in deeper shadow.

A shape, distorted, amorphous, and hideously ugly, lunged out of the shadows. Sarah got only the briefest glimpse of the thing, but the primal baby inside saw more than enough, and she screamed.

She became disoriented as the Bogeyman's coat shut out the last vestige of light. She felt herself spinning with him.

The Bogeyman grunted in pain, his body careening off her, sending her reeling. She could see nothing at all, and the ground seemed to vanish under her feet. She fell...

... and hit the ground hard, scraping her hands on the rough gravel. Then the Bogeyman fell on top of her, covering her with his coat. They both *whoofed* in pain.

She felt suffocated by his weight and struggled frantically to free herself. The Bogeyman lifted himself off her, helping her to her feet. Without thinking, she slapped away his hand. "What the hell is going on!" Fear always made her angry. *Okay, a lot of things make me angry.*

He ignored her. She opened her mouth to give him an earful then stopped. They stood at the entrance to an alley, but not where they had been a moment ago. Sarah spun around, trying to get her bearings.

The Bogeyman seemed to relax a little. "Come on."

She spun on him. "What just happened?"

He ignored her again, and she grabbed his arm in a fierce grip. It didn't slow him at all, but as he dragged her along like a terrier hanging onto his pants, her tension communicated the message. He stopped and looked down at her. "We're on Fourth Street, at the other end of the alley." He gestured with his head back the way they had come. "Believe it or don't believe it. Let's go."

She looked back, then around again. The street could have been the one they had left behind a minute before. But she saw a street sign at an intersection a hundred feet away. Her sharp eyes picked out the name under the streetlight.

Fourth Street.

The Bogeyman set off again. She noticed that he carried himself stiffly. "You're hurt."

He ignored her, and before she got mad again, she understood another point of kinship between this man and Joe. Neither bothered to respond to rhetorical questions.

She ran to catch up to him, touching his arm, not grabbing it this time. "Stop! Please! What happened?"

He slowed but did not stop. "I got hit. Nothing serious. Not even any blood, which is a good thing. In addition to black, I'll be blue in the morning." He grinned.

She narrowed her eyes at his rapier wit. "You two could be brothers."

His face grew somber. "We are."

Chapter Three

Western Indiana, July 9th, 9:43 PM

Came the night, oily darkness oozing between the cracks of the day, spreading across the sky and permeating the air. Horn sidled into it like an alley cat into a lion's den, bold but wary. He checked behind him every now and then, but did not see the stalker.

This day had been a long, sweaty haul from outside Franklin, where he had spent the night in the ruins of a barn, waiting out a steady downpour. Twenty-seven miles of hard, steaming two-lane blacktop that was old Route Forty-Four, through Shelbyville and Rays Crossing.

He crossed Conns Creek, stepping off the concrete overpass to follow the east bank of the slow moving stream. The land lay open and fecund, damp and green, dotted with solitary houses and dense groves of trees. He'd spent the last five nights squatting in the shadow of an abandoned house, a noisy overpass, an empty lot.

He spent one night at a bus stop. At three in the morning a bus had come by, rumbling to a halt, and its doors opened. No one debarked. Horn couldn't see the driver. The bus had no lights inside. He'd held his knife ready, but nothing had happened. Then he said, softly and slowly, "No, thanks. I'm not going that way yet."

The doors closed silently and the bus rumbled off, disappearing into the distance before it should have. He knew then that he had passed over into the Shadowland.

The stream disappeared into one of the groves. Trees closed in around him as he strode a faint, narrow path. Shadows flirted. He grew more tense. Gradually, his tension eased, as he sensed none of the ones he feared.

There were others of course, dancing in the shadows. Practice had taught him that shadows have eyes and teeth but not all of them are deadly. The trick was to know the difference.

After a mile and a half he found a place to rest in a small glade beyond a field where a dozen head of cattle stirred restlessly at his passage.

He never slept. Resting meant sitting for a while, perhaps lying on forgiving grass in the shade of a broad leafed tree. Never sleep. Not even with Sarah.

He stripped and washed in the stream, careless of whatever hidden pollutants had been dumped there over the years. It looked and smelled clean enough. Sluicing the cool water over his worn body was the closest he ever got to a massage.

Before Sarah, that is.

Silently, Horn cursed Sally to a hell he knew existed. Not only had she stolen him away from Sarah, she hadn't even accompanied him.

Might be just as well.

He washed his clothes, dressing while they were still wet. Body heat and time would take care of drying, and he had both.

He also had a water bottle, Dinty Moore, and a spoon in one pocket of his worn Army surplus field jacket. The creeping night retained a lot of the day's sultry heat, but his wet clothes provided air-conditioned comfort.

He wondered if he had lost his stalker. This far off the road, he doubted anyone would find him, but he never assumed anything.

The stalker had kept pace, all day, and for all the time he'd been out here. Horn could put down fifty miles a day. So either this person, like him, never slept, and additionally had legs of steel, or else -- more likely -- he or she was really an it.

Not cool, but entirely understandable.

The more he thought about it, the more it bothered him. A real man would probably double back and surprise his pursuer and resolve the issue then and there.

Yeah, and a real man would last about ten minutes pulling stunts like that.

He squatted by the stream and scraped cold, salty stew from the can. Watched a water spider dance across the water's surface as the shadow of night inexorably washed over the scene. The spider skated out into the middle of the stream. Just as he lost sight of it, Horn heard a plop.

He felt the little tingle that told him it hadn't been a fish.

He sighed and rose, stretching out the kinks. *Man, enough of this and I could get paranoid.*

Years ago, that little sound would have sent him running like a rabbit through the trees. But his senses had become fine-tuned to the nuances of death. Something had been out there, just under the surface. But if it found a water spider to its liking, it probably had no use for Joe Horn.

He moved away from the stream anyway. Finding a comfortable spot next to a thick-boled tree, he lowered himself into the sitting-squat he had learned from Vietnamese farmers about a century or an eon ago. It required the calves and Achilles tendons to be as loose as rubber. He never slept, but over time he had learned to rest that way for hours, and then rise and walk -- or run -- as if he had been sitting in a chair.

He relaxed into the night, becoming neither lethargic nor inattentive to the world around him. He never slept, but he dreamed, in his way. As always, the dreams concerned Sarah. Pastiches of their time together. The memory of her laugh. The scent of her hair. Her sleek, soft skin, somehow at odds with her trim, muscular body.

Feeling her lean back into his embrace, sighing as the tension went out of her. The total love and trust in her deep green eyes. Underlying it all, the demonic passion she hid within her, like lava in a volcano.

There must be a way to stop running.

...it will never end, Horn, until I have you in the warm, wet folds of my hungry mouth...

He found himself in the middle of the woods, surrounded by trees. His chest heaved as he gasped for breath. His legs felt like rubber. Scratches from slapping branches burned his face. *Hey, lucky I didn't put an eye out...*

False humor, to settle his nerves. He began to tremble, even as the cold voice of logic told him that his ability to experience the aftereffects of a severe adrenaline rush meant that he had, once again, survived. But, of course, logic meant nothing to Muck-Drippy thing.

He couldn't tell if he'd come a hundred yards or a mile and a half. He never knew how far or how fast he ran, when the Beast took over. He didn't always run, but mostly that's what he did.

Inside, the Beast breathed with him, scanned the pitch darkness in time to the movement of his eyes, and readied itself for an expression of pure frenzied killing lust. The Beast had become him and he had become the Beast, and pity anything that startled him right now.

But aside from his bare hands, he realized he had no weapon.

He'd left the jacket lying on the ground beside the tree. It wasn't worth a buck and a half, but inside it were several things he valued rather highly...

Hahahahahahaha...

Softly, like a flutter of stale air in a dank alley, came the little titter, in his mind. A voice he knew but could not identify, and would never, ever forget. His special friend, Muck-Drippy thing.

He fought the urge to run, screaming this time, as though the power of his voice would shatter the night and anything in it that wanted to eat him. Instead, he fought for calm, and achieved it after a fashion.

"Eat shit, motherfucker," he murmured. He need only do that, murmur, because it really didn't matter if he spoke. But it felt better to hear the defiance from his own lips.

Joooeeyyy...

He fainted right and then sprinted left. Something long and heavy went through the space he had just occupied, flattening a small tree. Splinters flew by his head as he ran back toward the stream.

Complete darkness enshrouded the trees, and he navigated at reckless speed by concentrating his inner power, his ki, and using it like radar. He had no explanation for why it worked, but he flew through the darkness, covering the distance in seconds, somehow managing to avoid bashing his brains out against a tree trunk.

Barely slowing, he scooped up the jacket. He took three steps toward the stream and leapt into space. He hit on the far bank, at least twenty feet away, after nearly thirty miles of walking and a long sprint. Not bad for a creaky old guy.

He ran out into the open field and stopped. The nearly full moon shed a surreal pall on the gently rolling grass. He discerned three or four large bovine lumps, smelled the pungent aroma of sweat and manure.

He bent double, hands on his knees, groaning from the pain of oxygen deprivation. His muscles quivered. He could not have run another ten feet.

Across the stream, in the still, deep shadows of the woods, he sensed movement. He waited, bent over, staring open mouthed like a pure idiot, gasping like a dying fish.

One shaking hand dipped into the pocket of his jacket, emerging with a can of soda that had been converted to a hopeful weapon with the capacity to visit significant pain on his friend across the way. "Are you ready, shitbird?"

The trees and their dark eyes gave him back an empty stare. For whatever reason, Muck-Drippy thing had gone.

The trembles hit him again. He sat down, resting his forehead on his knees, wondering for about the millionth time how he could keep on. "You don't even know where you're going!"

Yes you do. You're walking east, ultimately because of a brief conversation with one of the whacked out disenfranchised dudes who populate the underworld of the homeless. You are thus removed in time and place but not in memory from the grimy alley between two apartment houses -- and the dark, flitting thing that left a bloody mess all over the oily gravel, just before you gutted it with your knife.

And so you decided that Luther McWilliams, late of the California Correctional System, and before that the VA psych ward, and way before that, in a time that qualifies as a distant,

misty memory, a man of desperate, fearful courage who stood by your side on the impossibly steep and muddy place called Hamburger Hill and faced death a dozen times in three hours because that's what his country wanted him to do, may have uttered profound truth in his last seconds, similar in impenetrable obtuseness to the idiot-savant mumblings of others who have at one time or another been touched by an awareness of things that regular folks would rather not even imagine exist.

And of course, there's Sally.

Reluctantly, he had to admit that Sally had probably been right. At least in the matter of the rift. *If she is then we have, as they used to say in 'Nam, a personal problem.*

The alternatives included doing nothing at all, which held a certain appeal. *I'd sure as hell rather be back in sunny San Diego, making love with my sweetheart, the one person in the world who knows who I am and who might possibly rescue me from what has become a rather excellent example of personal hell.*

He really had no hope that his life would ever change, but he continued to act as though it would. The eternal optimism of the screwed up mind.

Horn understood compulsions. Not just the self-imposed, internally-fucked-up kind of compulsions, but the somewhat more ethereal, externally produced kind, that Sophocles and a thousand other spewers of melodrama had posited.

Horn hoped, without considering it a serious possibility, that Luther had been out of his mind on meth or something like that, but the utter timeliness of Luther's passing resonated with a keen sense of late show irony. If Luther had been a mob stooly, he'd have caught a gutful of machine gun bullets. Different style, same impetus.

Finally sensing that life had once again re-emerged from its burrow, he lay back in the tall grass, watching the slow, wheeling dance of the stars.

A meteor speared across the sky, trailing fiery sparks. Way too close. He tensed, waiting for the sound of ripping cloth. Nothing. After another minute, he let out an exasperated breath.

"Right, Horn. We're in the Borderland. My land."

She rose out of the stream like a Naiad, dripping water from her perfect body. Her red eyes gleamed in the dim light. Water rivulets ran between her heavy breasts.

In the Borderland, Sally ruled. At least among those who did not know how to deal with her.

She stalked through the long grass like a lioness on the prowl. Her overpowering sensuality aroused and frightened him. Ordinary men died quickly in her arms, screaming their ecstasy. When Horn had first met her, he thought her another near-victim of one of the ugly denizens of his existence.

Sally had nearly been meat. Horn had been lucky and fast, mostly lucky. Sally had been impressed. Instead of taking him and killing him slowly as she had done to countless others, she gave him a chance. Run, or submit to her seductive skills. Successfully resist, and he could have her. Otherwise...

Not knowing her as well as he did now, and full of a fiery sexual hunger fed by the realization that he had survived another encounter with death, he agreed to play the Game. The encounter still burned in his memory. *Sarah has her fantasies, I have mine.*

Sally kept her word and let him go. Horn ran across her at other times, and each time she challenged him to play the Game, and each time he won.

Eventually, he began to seek her out, enjoying -- if that was the word -- the unspeakable erotic thrill of fucking a minor demon, where a single slip in his concentration meant death, ugly and prolonged. It took him longer to figure out why he walked the tightrope of eternity. Knowing the answer -- that sometimes he needed to walk with death, in order to keep from being subsumed in its grisly banality -- only made it more intensely pleasurable.

Until he met Sarah.

He stood, struggling to maintain control. It had never been easy, which added to the spice. One thing gave him an advantage over the other mere hunks that Sally occasionally consumed. Sally might rule the Borderland, but certain entities had easy access, like Muck-Drippy thing. That kept Horn on his toes, and gave him a powerful clarity of mind.

“What the hell happened? Did you have something to do with the jellyfish?”

Sally shook her head, smiling. Sally had a hundred different smiles. Most of them did not convey humor. “Something is happening, Horn. You’ve always been marked, by the one you call Muck-Drippy thing. Now others want you as well. I saved you, just in case that isn’t obvious, by bringing you here. And in doing so I diverted the chase from the woman you seem to prefer over me. But if I leave you now, they will come for you. You need me.”

“Altruism isn’t one of your strong points, Sal.”

She sighed. “There is something that threatens me as much as you.”

“That’s more like it. So, how’s hunting?” he asked, just to be talking. It helped him concentrate on something besides her body.

Her eyes narrowed. She could be as petulant as a spoiled teenager. “Because of you I haven’t had a good killing in months.”

“Maybe you’re growing a conscience.”

She made a derisive sound. “I’m old and bored. You’re the only thing I desire.” Her eyes grew softer, actually shimmering.

Horn managed a sardonic smile. Sally had a number of spectacularly unattractive characteristics, but lying did not happen to be one of them. As a demon, however minor, she could not lie. But she could skate the edge of untruth with laser precision. “To fuck? Or slowly disembowel?”

Her skin became milk chocolate. Red eyes changed to golden brown. Her hair changed from long and silky to thickly curled. She grew a couple of inches, in height, and in the girth of her already impressive anterior display.

She cupped her breasts, smiling. “You like black girls, Horn?” Her voice sounded like liquid gold.

“I like *human* girls, Sally.”

She squeezed her breasts and licked her lips. “This body is yours to command.”

She knew her impersonal idiom excited him. Her motives always originated from the practical, guided by a single-minded focus. “You’d make a good Republican,”

he said. "So what's going on? Why am I suddenly on everybody's menu?" He glanced around, trying to get a feel for this place.

She dropped her hands. Her breasts did not noticeably sag. "I don't know. It has to do with the rift. I assume they think you want to stop it. Close it."

"What rift?"

"You remember, Horn. From the time when you first found the pathway into darkness and began your journey to me."

His jaw clenched. He remembered, too well. "Then they're way ahead of me. I didn't know anything about it until you..."

But he *had* known. Many, many years ago, he had opened it. *Some things get suppressed...* "And how would I do that? Close it, I mean?"

Sally acted as if she hadn't noticed his slip. "I don't know. But apparently you have a way, even if you aren't aware of it. And of course they -- the ugly ones -- want to keep you from doing that."

Horn thought about that. "Anything else?"

"Not that I can tell you."

"Then maybe you should leave."

She sat at his feet, looking up submissively. In this case a complete sham. Convincing, though. "Why? You sought me often, before..."

"Before I met someone who got me off my self-destructive kick."

"You need me, Horn."

"You the one who's been following me?"

Sally offered him a little smile, more subtle than Mona Lisa. "You want to find out?"

He narrowed his eyes as he looked down at her. Her capabilities far exceeded his, both in finding things and killing them. Motivation evened them out. Sally did nothing that was not self-serving. Horn at least occasionally practiced limited altruism. Her physical appeal could cloud his judgment. Horn well understood the price of her aid. "Not badly enough to sell my soul."

Sally made a sour face. "Oh, please, Horn. I don't eat souls. Just blood." She shrugged. "Well, life force, if you want to be picky about it." She made a dismissive gesture. "But not you, Horn." She smiled again, with a fragile edge. "I don't want to play that game anymore. I promise."

Horn blinked. If Sally promised something, it was a done deal. "What's your point?"

"We'll deal. You give me what I want, and I -- give you -- what you want." She turned her head away, as if embarrassed by her sudden apparent generosity. "Simple as that."

"And the currency?" As if he didn't know.

She looked at him with startling directness. "Make love to me. Once for any deal we make."

Horn had heard of what she could do to a man -- or a woman -- she wanted. As far as he knew, no human could resist her if she turned on -- whatever she did. He had always assumed she had exempted him from this because of their prior relationship, if one could call it that. Maybe she really had become bored. "At what point does the choice become mine?"

Her face settled into the perfect enigma of contemplation and reserve. "Afraid?"

Horn snorted. "Of course not. Death by ecstasy is so preferable to living in boredom. Look, I believe you. The rift is real. I ought to know." He paused. "I created it." He had trouble saying it, even to Sally. "I did it in 'Nam. Never mind how. Call it a moment of fear and anger. I never understood until years later. My need is pretty basic. Show me where it is."

This time her smile reflected a soft radiance that looked almost human, and made her entirely kissable. He restrained himself with some effort.

"Demons are bound by certain rules," she said. "Being enigmatic is one of them."

"So, you're going to play games after all," said Horn.

She shook her head. "I will tell you what I can, as the rules allow. And I will even tell you before you either accept or reject it as adequate. If you reject it, then I will leave, and you will be on your own. Otherwise..." She smiled again with happy anticipation.

"Okay," sighed Horn.

She pointed back the way Horn had come. "Continue on the road you have already traveled. In less than a day, you will find that which you seek."

Mrs. Horn had raised no fool. Horn understood that "that which you seek" might mean something other than what he thought he sought. He also knew Sally had spoken, and no more would he get from her. "Yeah. I like black girls."

Her naked hunger showed in her eyes. She licked her lips. "One thing," she said in a husky voice. "We agreed that you would make love to me. Not just fuck me. Make love."

Horn mentally kicked himself. As usual Sally had saved something to gain an edge.

She arched her back a little. The perfect globes of her breasts swelled, a wholly unnecessary enhancement. He remembered that she took on the form her victim most desired at the moment. *You're crude, Horn. Honest, but crude.*

"Maybe so," he admitted, as he got hard. "But I still need some equipment." He stood.

The ground next to Sally erupted in a small shower of dirt, as a thick pole began to grow from it. He had never determined if this sort of thing happened because he willed it, or because he wanted Sally to will it, or...

That way lies madness, Horn.

Without looking at it, Sally reached overhead to grasp it and let it pull her to her feet. It stopped when her arms had been stretched overhead. Leather straps appeared and encircled her wrists.

She smiled, this time with warm welcome. Her eyes half-closed as her voice dripped honey. "C'mon, Horn. Take me."

He stepped out of his clothes, watching her as she began to squirm and writhe against the pole.

"Take me, Horn," she whispered. Her voice became more feverish. "Take me!"

When he stood nude before her, she began to make impossibly liquid, erotic motions with her body. "I belong to you, Horn, only you. Sink your wonderful, hot cock into me."

Her immense sexual power took his breath away. Under his hands her body felt firm, yet pliant. Excitement traveled through his fingers as he stroked her, gently at first, then with greater urgency.

They had danced this dance many times before. He felt a kinship with Sally second only to Sarah, and a small part of him warmed to her, beyond the lustful necessity of the situation. He let himself enjoy the power of control over a woman, watching Sally become more and more aroused, feeling the tingle and rush of sexual energy that he got as she closed her eyes and moaned his name.

He touched her only with his hands, one clutching her hair and twisting her head cruelly back, making her arch her body outward, while the other crudely manipulated her nipples and her cunt. "I don't care about your needs, Sal. Your pleasure is nothing to me. I just like to run my hands over a woman's body like this, feeling her yield to me."

She humped her hips against his hand as it strayed between her legs. A moan of pleasure escaped her lips.

"The interesting thing is that you love it anyway, don't you, Sal?"

She whimpered as he took his hand away. He bent his head to one nipple and then the other, taking each between his teeth, biting hard. She jumped each time, and yelped.

He returned to her cunt, stroking gently, teasing, then biting her nipples again. Her body moved helplessly as he stroked her clit. His lips stroked her neck. She stretched her head back further, moaning. He released her hair, running his hands up

and down her body, kissing her neck and her breasts, still not touching her with his cock.

He knelt between her legs. She raised them until she held them straight out, like muscular spears. He gripped her ass and sank his tongue into the folds of her cunt. Sally gasped, trembled and moaned. Horn felt her cunt twitch as he played with her clit, sucking it and rasping his tongue across it. He probed deeper, as if his tongue were a finger.

"I'm coming!" she cried, thrusting her hips hard. "See, Horn!" she gasped. "See what I can give you! I can be anything for you, Horn!" She lost her voice in a little cry.

Horn stood and Sally settled easily onto his outthrust cock. Her wet fire sent shivers through him. He gritted his teeth, savagely attempting to maintain control. Pulling her to him, he bent his head to her breasts and felt her nipples grow impossibly in his mouth.

Her legs clamped around his waist. She moaned loudly as she pumped her hips against him. "Give it to me! Give it to me!"

He wanted to come, to end this, but he couldn't. *She's doing this. The bitch. She's holding me, keeping me from coming.*

"Yes, Horn, I want more of you," she whispered feverishly. "More!"

Had she read his mind? He didn't care. He felt her come again. Tears streaked her face as she gasped with pleasure.

She can't lie, but she can dissemble.

Holding her up, Horn continued thrusting, needing this as much as she did. He felt her cunt spasm again, as she came for perhaps the fifth or sixth time. "Why are you crying?"

"Don't ask." Her back arched, pushing her breasts into his mouth. "Suck them more. Please. You make me come when you do that."

He obliged, and she moaned, writhing like a snake, and a short time later Horn felt her cunt tighten around his cock, as promised.

She can't lie.

"Free yourself," Horn ordered.

She settled into his arms, draping hers around his neck. He lowered them both to the ground. Lying in the cradle of her hips, he kissed her deeply.

Her lips met his with astonishing softness. She whimpered again. He felt her come. She gasped in his ear, "Horn, I love you! I love you!" as she came a final time.

She can't lie.

In his mind, Horn knew he had violated something, but all he could think of was the soft sexual urgency of impaling this woman with his cock. Finally, his orgasm exploded within her, making him moan with unbridled pleasure, and wrenching from her a gasp with surprised passion.

They lay together for a while, not speaking. He started to roll off her, but she held him close, trembling.

"This is -- this is --" She closed her eyes. "Strange."

Horn felt himself getting hard again. "Time's up, Sal."

She suddenly grinned, and the old Sally sprang into place. "Ah, Horn, I have had you the way I wanted. Explain that to your merely human woman." She extricated herself from under him in one sinuous motion that left him sprawling naked in the dirt.

Standing over him, she continued to smile. "Or perhaps I'll tell her myself." Then she disappeared.

Chapter Four

Sarah and the Bogeyman walked in silence up Fourth Street, cutting across to a small park that covered a corner of one block. The trees and bushes and play equipment all took on sinister hues in the subdued light from the street. The shadows seemed deeper, and the air became absolutely still.

The Bogeyman halted at a swing set, next to a large sandbox.

"You moved us through -- space?"

"Yeah."

She shook her head. "What was that thing?"

He grimaced, shaking his head. "Women. All the time they gotta know why."

She chose to ignore his Neanderthal grace. "So, what else can you do?"

He smiled at her, and she almost blushed.

She looked around. "Now what?" *His nonchalance must be catching. Five minutes ago we came within a hair of a grisly end. I should be shaking.*

"We wait. Maybe ten minutes. Maybe a lifetime."

She made a sour face. "Cut the crap, Karnak."

He grinned again. This time it came from somewhere deep inside, where the truth lies. The force of it turned her knees to water. She had to look away. "What did you mean, you and Joe are brothers?"

He tilted his head, regarding her with the same, careful stare that had turned her stomach to Jell-O before. But this time he did not seem threatening, or even evasive. He leaned against the swing set. "We were in 'Nam together." He paused. Sarah could see the wheels of decision turning inside his skull.

Slowly, he drew back one sleeve.

In the stark, yellow light, she saw a tattoo. An eagle, beak agape, talons extended. "Some of us had a version of this." He let the sleeve fall back. "It's kind of like a club patch. You see a guy with it, you don't need to ask no questions. He's your brother. Guaranteed."

"You mean, like a secret society?" she asked, sounding a little skeptical, she knew.

He grimaced, nodding. "But different. Simpler. It just means you were on Hamburger Hill."

"Joe doesn't have one of those," she pointed out.

The Bogeyman shrugged. "But he was there. He and I, together, in a little gully choked with brush, dark as night from the triple layer jungle canopy overhead. The rain was comin' down so hard that it went right through the canopy and we couldn't see ten feet. It was so loud we had to shout to hear ourselves. And before we knew it, three guys were gone. Like that."

Sarah frowned. "Flash flood --" She caught herself, understanding.

The Bogeyman nodded again. "The official Army reports say seventy-two GIs were killed on that mountain, but it was really seventy-five." He paused, resurrecting and digesting the memory of something that made his face look decades older. "We -- survived." He shrugged.

"And so you're... brothers..." Sarah's voice trailed off.

"Kind of hard to explain." He seemed genuinely uncomfortable. A big macho guy talking about sensitive stuff. He started the metronome thing, the way Joe did, twisting his head this way and that, looking around, listening behind, probably using some kind of sixth sense as well.

"Never mind," she said softly. "I think I get it now."

He looked at her again, and his eyes went through her the way Joe's eyes went through her. This whole macho-guys-remembering-the-war thing sometimes got on her nerves, but she knew it had real meaning to them.

She had a talent, honed with a lifetime of hard personal experience, to know when a man -- any man -- lied to her, in word or action or even thought. At the Agency, they loved her for this, and hated her as well, because at the Agency lies were like currency, and she could spot a counterfeit in a second. So they kept her in the field when she could have been fucking running the place, because they feared her.

Joe didn't fear her. Neither did the Bogeyman.

"War is hell," she said. "It really is. And hell breeds things like the one that nearly killed us in the alley, back there. And the one that nearly got you and Joe, that time in Vietnam."

He stared at her as if waiting for her to continue.

Fear spread within her as words came bubbling up from a deep, dark place within her, words she knew she had never uttered or even thought, because they were the words of someone else. "You can't know what it was like unless you were there, unless you saw a -- man -- bleeding his guts out in the mud, crying for his mother. You can't know..."

She started crying as she realized beyond any doubt she'd somehow channeled something Joe had said, thought, and felt. Long, powerful arms enfolded her, as the Bogeyman held her close to his broad, muscular chest. Just held her. She cried softly for a while. Without moving, she said, "I'm sorry. I don't know what happened."

The Bogeyman said nothing for a minute. Then he spoke softly. "But you understand."

"Why do people call you the Bogeyman?"

After a pause, he said, "They think I can do weird stuff."

Sarah pulled away, suddenly uncomfortable. Her body screamed for his embrace... "Can you?"

He seemed suddenly awkward, but also more relaxed. He smiled and shrugged. She found herself relaxing as well, and for a minute neither of them said anything, sharing the silence like two friends would share a beer.

"My name is Ralph."

Sarah offered a tentative smile. "If it's okay, I'd like to call you Raphael. I like it better than Ralph."

He smiled slightly. "It's okay."

Sarah looked around, realizing that she had begun to pick up the habit already. "Why are we waiting?"

"We aren't. It's time." He straightened and looked toward a dark corner of the little park.

Sarah followed his gaze, but saw nothing. "What --"

"Sometimes you got to wait for things to move into place. Like now."

Raphael set off, and Sarah once again had to almost run to keep up. "Where are we going?"

"To Joe."

* * *

They strode into the trees, and darkness enveloped them. Sarah shrank closer to Raphael, taking his arm the way she would have done with Joe. "This isn't a good place..."

"No," said Raphael in a taut voice. "But this is the only way to get to Joe, because the stupid motherfucker didn't leave a trail."

Sarah raised an eyebrow. "I expect the stupid motherfucker didn't have much time."

Ralph grinned without humor. "I like you, woman. You got fire, in addition to great tits."

Sarah stumbled, but held on to his arm. The trees seemed to go on forever, as though they had entered a great forest. *This is only a tiny grove, hardly a dozen trees, what the hell...*

"How can you follow him? I mean, I assume we're not going to hop a Greyhound."

Without warning, he picked her up and threw her. She yelped in fear and flailed the air, until she crashed to the ground fifteen feet away. She hit hard, grunting, and instinctively rolled to her feet.

In the total gloom she could see almost nothing, and terror tore at her. She heard sounds of a fierce and terrible struggle.

“Run!” came Raphael’s strained voice, laced with pain.

An amorphous blob lurched fitfully among the trees. It resolved itself into two forms, one human and the other... not.

It had jointless arms, a malformed head, and either three legs or two legs and a tail...

For a moment, a tiny instant, she hesitated.

From nowhere came the impetus in her mind. *Action without thought*. She screamed like a banshee as she threw herself onto its back.

She felt like she’d tackled a telephone pole. The thing made no sound but it reached back with one rubber arm and flailed at her. Its skin was leather over steel, and the smell...

The arm hit her like a steel pipe and she nearly lost her grip. She tried to claw at its face, then screamed as the “head” disappeared, and her hands were sucked into the hole where it had been.

She yanked her hands free and fell to the ground trembling with fear. As she scrambled away on her back, the thing turned and reached for her with tentacles that dripped slime. One of them wrapped around her ankle, and dragged her toward the maw that had opened in its upper torso. She glimpsed ragged teeth.

She heard a guttural voice, speaking a foreign tongue with a fierce cadence, a short, brutal recitation that lasted only seconds.

Two more arms wrapped around her body, trapping her like a moth in a cocoon, dragging her toward the waiting mouth.

Raphael shouted in a terrifying voice of rage and power.

The thing released Sarah. As she scrambled to her feet, it burst into flames. The hiss and pop of charred flesh filled the air with an awful stench, as it literally melted into the mossy ground.

Raphael grabbed her hand. "We gotta leave. Local authorities don't care for unlicensed displays of supernatural power."

They ran. Sarah reeled from the exhaustion of pain and fear, but she kept gamely onward. "Do you -- even -- know -- where we're -- going?" she gasped.

"Oh, sure!" he huffed. "I know this place like the back of my hand!"

When she began to doubt that her legs would carry her another ten feet, Sarah saw dim light ahead. They came out of the forest into a broad field, under a nearly full moon. Sarah kept on for a hundred yards, and then she stopped and slowly collapsed to the ground. The musky smell of summer grass filled her head, and she heard the innocuous chirp of crickets. She considered all of this from a perspective of near-total numbness, as she lay staring up at the starry sky.

Raphael loomed over her. She heard his breathing, slower now, but deep, as he dragged in great lungfuls of sweet summer air. He shed his coat, and she saw that he wore dark pants and a sleeveless shirt that accentuated his broad shoulders and thick arms.

"Are we safe?"

He nodded, lowering himself to sit beside her.

"You didn't answer my question."

"We're safe."

"I meant, how you can follow Joe."

He shrugged. "Wish I knew. What I do, what he does, don't come with a manual. We just do it." He looked at her. "How long you known him?"

"A year. Less. He helped me find something I thought I'd lost."

Raphael grinned. "Now you're sounding like one of us macho tough guys, all mysterious and dramatic." He nodded, still smiling. "But I hear ya'."

Sarah sat up, feeling unaccountably refreshed. Looking down at herself in the dim moonlight, she made a face as she carefully picked at something slimy on her jacket. "Yuck. Ghoul goo. I need a shower."

Raphael erupted in laughter, rolling on the grass. "Ghoul goo! Oh, man!" He sat up, chuckling. "Yeah, you been around Horn way too long."

Sarah looked at him speculatively. "You're really very close, aren't you?"

"You mean, like brothers?"

Sarah nodded. "But not just because of Hamburger Hill."

He shrugged again. "Yeah."

She sensed his discomfort. *Maybe they're lovers. Or maybe he wishes they were.* That would be kind of tough on the old macho image. "So, can I get a bath around here?" Sarah twisted where she sat. The field stretched out all around, strangely borderless. She saw no lights. In the distance, the low line of a wooded area offered the only recourse from the bland darkness. "Just where are we, anyway?"

Raphael leaned back, linking his hands behind his head. "No clue. Not anywhere normal, if you see what I mean. I only know that this is sort of in between Here and There. We call it the Borderland. It's generally a safe place to rest."

Sarah grew cold at the word "generally," but then decided if Raphael didn't mind, neither did she.

A change in the light made her frown. "Is that the sun?" She pointed toward a thin line of rust that began to expand across the horizon.

With his eyes closed, Raphael murmured, "Maybe. We're in a kind of time warp, I think. Never have figured it out. Notice the temperature? Not freezing like it was before. You walk into shadow, not only do you sometimes not come out where you expect, you usually don't come out when, either."

The implications of this did little for her sense of calm. She rose, and immediately noted a stream not fifty feet away. "Is that safe?"

Raphael nodded without speaking.

Sarah snorted and strode off.

The stream seemed more like a small river, with scattered trees along both shores and crystal water moving smoothly over a sandy bottom, curving slightly here to form a small pool. It looked safe.

"It's safe."

She jumped about a foot. Raphael stood behind her.

She looked at the water. "Look, we've just been through a corner of hell, and I feel like I know you a little --" *And you're handsome and sexually compelling in a way that makes me feel the way I feel with Joe. And you're Joe's friend. More than that. His brother.* She looked at him. "So, I need to know something."

He looked at her, with the same total acceptance that Joe would have shown. He didn't expect anything. He didn't prejudge. He simply waited to hear what she had to say.

"I know Joe pretty well. He doesn't -- he isn't the jealous type. I -- well, you probably know what kind of relationship we have."

Raphael nodded. "He's a Dom, as I am. And you're his sub. Am I right?"

She nodded, not looking at him. "I've asked him, more than once, to do... a threesome. Any way he liked, of course," she added hastily. "I can share. If that's the right way to say it."

"It might be more accurate to say that you feel confident of Joe's love."

Sarah nodded again, looking at Raphael and smiling. "Oh, yes."

She looked back at the water. "Anyway, what I'm saying is that I don't really care what people think of me, except Joe, and maybe you, so if I come off sounding like a slut or something, well, too bad, but I'm going to take off my clothes and wash myself in this stream, and if you want to watch, you can." Her heart beat faster.

Raphael had the grace not to smile smugly. "I accept your offer."

She shucked her jacket. More slowly than she needed, she peeled out of her sweater, and then her top. The balmy air felt luxurious on her naked skin. She glanced at Raphael, who leaned against a tree at the water's edge, arms crossed, exactly as Joe would have done.

Stepping out of her running shoes, she slid her jeans down over her hips, which she worried might be getting too wide. *Shit, I'm sounding like a teenager.*

Like the girl who used to be afraid to try on clothes, go to the beach, act sexy, because ugly girls look foolish when they do things like that.

She'd taken control of her life, and the simple change in her attitude seemed to make her into an instant boy magnet. The problem with that had been that she liked it so much...

She slipped off her panties and stood up straight, smiling into the rising sun. She knew she looked good. Very sexy in fact. She looked at Raphael from the corner of one eye, hardly daring to hope...

His eyes burned with the intensity she had learned to expect from Joe, when he saw her nude. Raphael's face betrayed nothing, but the stillness in it conveyed laser focus and searing hunger.

Sarah shivered, openly, feeling weak and delicious at once. "Maybe --" She cleared her throat. "Maybe you'd like to scrub my back."

The water felt slightly tepid to her inquisitive toe. She lowered herself into it, sighing. It came up to a point slightly below her sternum. She sank further, immersing her shoulders. "Ahh," she whispered.

She turned and stood up, dripping water from her upper torso.

Raphael took off his clothes. His shoulders and chest displayed massive muscle. His belly looked like a washboard. Between his powerful thighs hung a perfectly luscious cock, and it had begun to grow.

He stepped into the water with her. She turned and looked coyly over one shoulder.

He stooped and dipped his arms into the water.

Sarah yipped as rough sand abraded her skin. She tried to get away but Raphael laughed and grabbed her hair. He pulled her close and continued scrubbing her mercilessly. "We got no soap, girl, so we gotta use what we got."

She yipped again and squirmed in his grasp, cursing as he scrubbed her shoulders and back and ass. "Ooh! Ow! Aiee! That hurts!"

His huge hand roamed the sleek contours with purpose. Sarah felt herself becoming aroused. Her movements became more languid. Raphael moved his hand on her more slowly. He twisted her around to face him. His face became stern. "Finish washing yourself."

He leaned back against the sandy bank as she caught her breath. His muscular body reclined half in, half out of the water. His heavy-lidded look made him seem like a lion basking in the sun.

She scooped water and splashed it on herself, scrubbing away the last of the grime. "How do I look?"

He smiled. "How do you think you look?"

She stood up straight. "I -- I'm --" She looked down at herself. She remembered what Joe had once told her. *You're as beautiful as you feel.*

"I'm beautiful," she said.

"Show me."

She walked toward him through the water, slowly, undulating her body in the way she knew men liked.

Raphael seemed more feral than ever. His face became almost sinister as a slight smile curved his lips. She slid her hands down between her legs again and massaged her cunt. "I'm sexy, too. And I know you want me, Raphael."

"It's good that you understand," he said. His cock rose, lengthening to impressive proportions.

Sarah slid down into the water before him. Carefully, she reached for his cock. Slowly, she began to stroke it. She loved the hard, ribbed feel of it, the quaking tension of power waiting to be released. In her. She stroked it harder, faster, not meaning to, but feeling hot and wanting Raphael between her legs.

"Come here."

She moved up over him.

"Cup your breasts. Stroke my cock with them."

Straddling one muscular leg, she moved her hands to her breasts, bending low to trap his cock. She squeezed it between them, massaging it between her full, firm globes. Her nipples grew stiff, standing out between her fingers. She rubbed her cunt on Raphael's leg, slowly at first, then faster, in time with her breathing. She lost focus. She moaned as her eyelids drooped and her mouth fell open.

Raphael's hands slipped under hers, covering her breasts. She sighed, bracing her hands on his lean hips.

He pushed her up to her feet, rising with her. Then he shifted his grip to her nipples. She gasped, grasping his powerful wrists and arching her body toward him. He stepped backward up the slope of the bank, pulling on her nipples. She followed eagerly, breasts thrust out, moaning. "Oh, Raphael, oh, God, Raphael."

He rolled her nipples between his fingers. She whimpered like she did with Joe. She didn't realize he'd turned her around until she felt the bark of the tree at her back.

"Lean back. Put your hands at your side." He leaned down and retrieved his belt, then wrapped it around her waist, imprisoning her arms as well, cinching the belt tight.

She raised her head to look at him, and felt the power of his eyes. She felt a stab of fear as she realized she had no idea what he might do.

"Yes," he said in a low rumble. "I can do anything I like to you. But then, you asked for that."

"I -- I -- when did I..." She felt confused. Her nipples throbbed. She wanted him to punish them again. "Please. Lead me around like you just did. I -- really like that..."

"You begged Joe to give you to me."

Her eyes widened. "What -- you -- you're the one?"

He grinned, but with no humor. "Yes. I know about that. I've known all along. And now I have you. And I will do as I please."

She gasped when he touched her. "I fantasized about you when Joe fucked me..."

His hands moved over her, following the path of her excitement. Knowing her, he used that knowledge to control her, making her gasp and move to his touch. "I am your Master, can you tell? My touch commands you."

Sinister she had thought at the time. Beyond that. Way beyond. Lethal, compelling, controlling. She laid her head back against the tree. "Make me come," she breathed. "Make me come."

"In my time," he responded. "I enjoy torturing women, you see. You will be my slave when we are done."

She could well believe that. He grasped her nipples again and forced her to follow him to a low, flat rock. She lay down on it, with her legs hanging over the edge. He moved between them, letting his cock pulse against her cunt. Slowly, he leaned over her, until the bulk of his muscular body filled her vision. She hooked her heels around his hips as he stared into her eyes.

"What do you want?" His voice allowed no dissembling.

"Your cock," she said.

"What else?"

"To crawl for you."

"What else?"

"To be your slave."

He slid his cock into her. The hard length of it drove deep into her cunt. He slowly withdrew, then slid in again.

She closed her eyes, opened her mouth and moaned. Her arms tensed at her sides, held tight by the thick belt. She felt helpless, weak, desirable, and taken. Raphael's cock penetrated her slowly again, and she felt every inch of it.

She thrust her hips hard. "Please! Aren't my tits nice? Don't you want to play with them? Please!"

Raphael chuckled deep in his throat, and Sarah shivered at the sound of his voice. "Joe was right. You're the sexiest little witch I've ever met. Taking you is like a dream come true. I'm going to owe Joe big time when we find him."

Sarah tried to speak, but his cock and his voice claimed her so thoroughly that she could only make little “Oh!” sounds of surrender.

Raphael’s arms quivered as he thrust harder into her, increasing his tempo. He closed his eyes and gritted his teeth. Sarah arched her body up at him. Her heels dug into his back. “You can’t help it,” he grunted. “You’re too sexy to believe.”

Sarah came. “Yes! I love you! I love you!”

When Raphael cried out, pumping his cock hard into her, she came again.

Chapter Five

"I don't know why I said that."

"Might be because you meant it."

"Oh, sure. You just made me come, screaming, and then I say something and you want to hold me to it."

"I saw your love. You have more than enough for both of us."

"You saw it?"

Raphael shifted uncomfortably. The sun had risen high. They lay together under the tree beside the stream. The balmy summer air felt good on Sarah's skin. "Yes. Not easy to explain. Just the truth. That's what I see, sometimes. Most times."

"You must be lonely."

He shrugged. "Yeah. Kinda. It's one reason people call me the Bogeyman. They don't like to see me coming any more than they like truth."

"What now?"

He shrugged. "Rest. We're safe enough here, but we have to get moving soon."

She dozed in Raphael's arms, but then felt restless, and rose quietly. Raphael slept on. Their lovemaking had been hard and sweaty. She stepped into the stream, careful to make no noise. The cool water felt divine, washing away the aches of the day.

The sun moved past its zenith, casting short, stark shadows on the silent field. No sounds. No wind, no birds, nothing scurrying in the grass or plopping in the water...

-- Plop --

Correction. She slowly turned, seeing nothing. But the warmth seeped out of the day. She stood, looking toward Raphael, who appeared to be sleeping.

"Still nude, dear?"

Sarah yelped and gasped, backing toward the bank.

Sally stood within three feet of her, waist deep, as naked as the last time Sarah had seen her.

Sarah raised her arms to cover herself and instantly felt foolish.

Sally smiled. "You just can't stay in your clothes," she said with a sneer. "Well, I understand. I feel the same way." She moved closer.

Sarah stumbled back, looking for Raphael and not finding him. The light seemed to be fading as well. Terror clawed at her throat.

"This is my land," Sally said by way of explanation.

"What do you want?" Sarah had backed up to the bank, standing in thigh deep water.

Joe had told Sarah about Sally.

"History," he'd said.

"But you'd still fuck her if you had a chance," she'd countered.

He'd smiled. "Not if I promise not to."

She'd never made him promise, because...

She never knew why. But in the end, it really hadn't mattered. He'd mentioned Sally a few times. His tone had been unreadable. But he left no doubt Sally was dangerous.

"We need to talk." Sally's hungry eyes feasted on Sarah's exposed, dripping body, making Sarah feel exactly the way she felt when a man ogled her. Exposed, sexy and vulnerable.

She fought down the feeling with an inner snarl. Recovered somewhat, Sarah once again marveled at the pure lusty beauty of the woman.

If that's what you are. In fact, she seemed different somehow, although the last time Sarah had seen her she had not been paying a lot of attention.

Sally's breasts, bordering on huge, shrank like pricked balloons. She became thinner, leaner. Androgynous.

"Horn is mine," Sally said, and her voice lowered an octave, in between male and female. Her torso became smooth, sleek and sexless. Sarah had seen a lot of strange things since she met Joe. Even before then, though now the strangeness made perverse sense. So she didn't flinch at Sally's creepy transformation. But it still scared the shit out of her. She inched back, preparing to -- *Run? Where?*

Sally stepped closer, rising out of the water, revealing what Sarah had been expecting. Between her legs hung a perfectly formed cock.

"What are you?" Sarah whispered.

Sally smiled. "Horn's destiny. I'm female, dear. All woman, inside and out. But I flatter myself that I'm not afraid to try something different now and then. Call it kink."

The cock stirred, doing exactly what Sarah had learned practically all cocks did when in her nude presence, for which she normally reserved a fair amount of pride. She stared at it with a mixture of fear and fascination. "Why are you here?"

"Horn is mine. I have recently had him, and proclaimed my love for him as he came inside me."

Sarah froze, but surprised herself by smiling. "Listen. If that's your criterion for claiming ownership, get in line."

Sally tilted her/his head. "I read you clearly. You aren't jealous." This seemed to perplex her/him.

Sarah wondered how she could communicate to this woman something as basic as her unconditional love for Joe Horn. "I care about the things that matter, Sally. Joe never does anything frivolously." She smiled again. "He really doesn't have the time. If he decided to fuck you --"

"He made love to me!" Sally insisted.

Sarah smiled again. "Then you understand what it means to be truly dominated."

Sally's eyes narrowed. "I could kill you with a glance. But Horn would never forgive that." Her look softened. "I want to know what he sees in you. Let me make love to you."

Sarah almost quailed at the thought. Almost. "I -- uh -- I --"

The cock, now long, thick and rigid, quivered slightly, dripping water. "Please?"

"Why should I want to do that? We -- uh -- don't really know each other..." *I'm nuts, standing nude in a stream, having a calm conversation with a demon-spawn.*

Sally's hair had become as short and golden as her eyes. Her skin glowed with a deep tan. The movement of her sleek, supple body mimicked the water around them. Sarah had never seen anything so sensually enticing.

Sally smiled. "Perhaps for the opportunity to indulge in the apex of your sexual identity."

"My sexual identity?" Sarah almost snorted in derision. "You mean you think I'm..."

"Bisexual, dear," said Sally. "You're transparent. My peculiar talent is that I take the form that my prey most desires at that moment. I would never have taken this form were you not strongly bisexual. This form represents your deepest, darkest fantasies, a complete melding of everything that arouses you, including, you will note, my voice."

Her prey. The cold hand of fear spread fingers across her heart. Sarah wanted to say something sarcastic, but the words caught in her throat.

That voice. So soft, with an undercurrent of steel. Sarah knew when to run. She turned --

"Stop."

The sensual command went into Sarah like a knife into butter. Sarah halted. Sally's voice felt like warm honey on her skin.

"You see? You secretly -- or not so secretly -- desire me. Hmmm?"

Sarah shivered as she felt Sally's warm, strong fingers on her back. She knew she should fight, or run, or scream for help, but then the fingers traced a trail down her spine to her ass, and she just had to wait for their soft, not-quite-feminine touch.

"S-so y-you -- mean me -- no h-harm --" The fingers traced sinuous patterns on her ass.

Sally stroked her body, gently, firmly, in a way that Sarah could not understand, because it felt like a massage, but it felt so sensual, so erotic. Sarah slowly arched her back, tilting back her head to stare at the sky.

Ignoring Sarah's plaintive question, the sultry voice said, "Does Horn do this to you? Hmm? Does he touch you so that you feel your hunger like an ache?"

Sarah closed her eyes as the golden voice washed over her. She began to undulate, slowly, to the rhythm of the knowing hands that stroked her body. They told her to move just that way, she realized. She felt Sally's warm breath in her ear, the heat of Sally's body, but not its touch.

"You are lovely, sensuous, and sexy," breathed the golden voice. "You move like a dancer."

Entranced, Sarah shivered again as Sally's lips lightly caressed the side of her neck. Sally's hands continued stroking Sarah's body, her back, waist and hips, stroking her ass, never leaving her, moving over her in a way that spoke of sensual wisdom beyond anything Sarah could imagine.

Sarah stood still, back arched, eyes open, arms akimbo, like a mannequin, as pleasure hummed through her body.

"Your nipples are standing up, my love," noted the golden voice.

Sarah suddenly ached to have them touched, sucked, twisted and bitten.

Sally moved closer.

"Guide my hands to your breasts, Sarah," commanded the golden voice.

Sarah's hands slowly enfolded Sally's, sliding them up her torso to her breasts. Their hands, together, molded and caressed them. The hands squeezed and teased her nipples. Sarah closed her eyes, moaning.

"Horn does this, hmm?" said the hot, liquid voice. "Horn teases and arouses you like this, but he's too crudely male to understand how to do it best."

Sarah felt weak.

The hands slid slowly down her body, brushing lightly over her cunt. Sarah swallowed a little cry, but did not move. She dared not move, or the pleasure might go away, and she wanted the pleasure to go on and on...

The body that belonged to the voice touched her all along her back, as the strong, slender fingers plied her cunt. The impossibly strong arms held her own arms locked to her sides, so that she could do nothing. Nothing. The cock felt hard and heavy between her legs.

Sarah moaned again, as the voice said, "Excellent, Sarah. You respond just as you should."

Sally chuckled. The words dribbled over Sarah like hot oil.

"Bend over, sweet girl."

Sarah dug her hands into the grassy bank. Sally's hands glided over her skin, momentarily cradling Sarah's pendulous breasts. Her nipples strained against the enfolding hands. She felt Sally's cock touch her lightly between her legs. Sarah undulated her body against it, quivering with taut arousal.

"How much do you want my cock, Sarah?"

"Please," moaned Sarah. "I'll do anything you want. Please fuck me."

The light had gone, leaving darkness like a warm blanket.

"Prostrate yourself, wench." Sally sounded impatient. Her hands roamed Sarah's body with feverish intent.

Sarah felt tension in Sally, a faint shudder of... hunger. Fear rose in her. But she did as she had been commanded, and lowered her torso further, keeping her ass high in the air, legs spread. Her breasts flattened against the soft grass. The earthy smell of it filled her head.

Sally's cock lengthened, seeking Sarah's cunt. Sarah moaned in sweet ecstasy as the long, thick shaft slowly penetrated her.

"How do you like my cock, sweet girl?"

"Oh --" Words failed Sarah as she pumped her hips eagerly. "Oh -- Oh --"

"How do you like it?" purred the golden voice. Sally lengthened her body over and around Sarah, laying her sinuous torso over Sarah's lean back, sliding her hands underneath Sarah's breasts and enveloping them. Sally whispered, "Do you like it enough to call me Mistress? Do you?"

Sarah shut her eyes against the need to scream. "Oh -- yes -- Mistress -- yes!" she gasped, curling her fingers into the dirt as she arched her body to press her breasts more firmly into Sally's hands. "Take me, Mistress!"

"You are already mine." Sally's feral voice lost none of its silkiness, but it sounded more electric, tense and urgent. "Mine!"

Sarah writhed to the rhythm of Sally's body. They moved together as one. "When you come, I will own you, will I not?" gasped Sally, losing her voice in a little cry.

Sarah felt Sally come inside her. Sally thrust hard, pushing Sarah forward onto her knees. Sally thrust harder still, moaning with intense pleasure.

Sudden images flooded Sarah's mind. Incredible thoughts of hungry passion and lost love. Images of Joe, frighteningly intense, filled with longing and desire. Images of herself, covered in blood, then the blood drained away, leaving her nude and submissively aroused. Fiery, towering passion that momentarily bridged a terrible, yawning chasm of pain.

You-are-Horn-is-you-love-me-please-love-me-Horn-I-want-you-want-your-woman-love-me-love-me...

Frightened and filled with awe, Sarah came with a shuddering cry, thrusting back against Sally hard enough to lift them both off the ground. "Yes!" she gasped. "Yes! We are one!"

Sarah relaxed onto the ground, sighing. Sally's breath felt hot and harsh in her ear. "I want you like this all night," whispered Sally. "As my slave. All night."

"Yes, Mistress. Master. Whatever," gasped Sarah, trying to catch her breath. "And in the morning -- will you -- suck me dry -- and leave my body for carrion to eat?"

Sally chuckled warmly. "Perhaps. In the meantime, you may call me Master." Her hands wandered over Sarah's body.

Sarah rested her head on the grass and said, "Mmmmm." Anything for that voice. Anything.

"You agree that I own you?" asked Sally. One hand reached around and rolled one of Sarah's rigidly erect nipples tightly between her fingers. Sarah squirmed, biting her lip, then moaned.

"Well?"

"Yes, Master," said Sarah. It was easy to say it. So easy. "If you agree to help me find Joe."

Sally froze.

Sarah smiled and enclosed Sally's hand with her own, moving it to her breast. "Keep doing that. Please. Yes, I will be your slave. If you help me find Joe," she repeated. "I felt you come inside me. And I felt you inside me. In my mind. I know who you are."

Sally became still. "And who am I?" Her voice sounded non-committal, but it sent a chill through Sarah.

"I don't know, exactly, except that you love Joe."

Sarah squirmed around onto her back, pulling Sally down on her. She spread her legs, and Sally's cock hardened. "I will love you tonight," said Sarah. "I will be your slave tonight. If you help me."

Sally's breathing quickened noticeably. Perhaps she had never been good at dissembling with her true emotions. "Yes," she said. She seemed to go away in her mind, just for a moment.

Sarah stiffened in fear and yelped in discomfort as the ground beneath her changed from soft grass to hard, granular stone. Her stomach turned inside out as she felt her orientation whip around. She found herself standing, her arms stretched out and up, held tight by leather straps to a pair of heavy wood posts. Torchlight cast dim, flickering light.

She stood in the center of a shadowy stone chamber. Sally stood before her. "Welcome, slave. This is my home."

Sarah glanced around. Circular and domed, the chamber had the appearance of incomprehensible age. Sarah saw no apparent entry. To one side she saw a low couch. The heat felt tropical, almost oppressive, but instead of being uncomfortable it felt almost relaxing, like a sauna. She loved saunas. "Where is this place?"

"Nowhere," said Sally.

Sarah's arms and shoulders ached. Her whole body ached from the savage passion of their coupling. She forgot it all in an instant, as Sally entwined Sarah in her arms and kissed her.

A kiss from a succubus is more than a kiss. It is a transformation.

Sarah tensed her body, feeling a rush of heat go through her the way it had before, when Sally had first seduced her. *I can never get enough of her. Never.*

Sally's lips devoured Sarah, making her feel possessed and energized all at once. Sarah strained her body against Sally, moaning.

Sally stroked between Sarah's legs, teasing her cunt, making Sarah squirm and moan. She bent and sucked Sarah's nipples, one after the other and back again. Sarah gritted her teeth in pleasure as she felt herself lose control of her responses. She couldn't think, she could only feel, and move, as Sally commanded. She gasped as she came, humping Sally's manipulating fingers.

Sally slowly knelt before Sarah. She pushed Sarah's legs apart, running her hands between them and up to cup her ass. Sally's tongue played gently along Sarah's inner thighs.

Sarah's mind spun. She threw her head from side to side as Sally played with her cunt, sending shivers up her spine, shredding her will with pleasure beyond pleasure.

I feel so bad, so good. I can't stand it, I have to stop, give me more, more, more...

She sighed and moaned as Sally's tongue played her clit like an instrument. She moaned as Sally's tongue penetrated her cunt and her teeth lightly scraped Sarah's clit.

...slave, slave, slave...

"Master! Master!" Sarah cried as she came again, a soaring, piercing orgasm that stripped her of everything except her desire. "Master!" she cried again as the pleasure continued to lance through her. "Master!" she whispered as she sagged in her bonds, streaming sweat, trembling with exhaustion, glowing with a more powerful feeling of sensual satisfaction than she had ever imagined she could know.

Strong hands released her. Sally carried her like a child and laid her on the couch. She felt amazingly tired, but unwilling to sleep. Sally stood over her. Her inhuman cock stood erect, bobbing lightly as it throbbed. "I spilled my seed watching you come. It was a unique experience."

Sally's eyes seemed deeper than before. More open. Sarah opened her mouth to speak, but realized she had nothing to say. She reached for Sally.

The width of the couch could easily accommodate them both. Sally stretched out next to Sarah. Silently, Sarah enfolded Sally in her arms. She pulled Sally on top of her, spreading her own legs and thrusting her hips up to capture Sally's cock. It slid into her in one smooth movement. Sarah moaned. Rocking her hips in a slow, gentle motion, she wrapped her legs around Sally's. "Take me, Master," she whispered. "Take me."

Sally buried her head against Sarah's neck as she pumped her cock into Sarah with passionate force.

Sarah felt something more than sexual hunger even as she moaned, "Master, Master, Master," over and over. Sarah clutched Sally tighter as she came, moaning and whimpering with pleasure. "Ah, Master!"

Sally sighed and then moaned, and in moments she came, pumping hard.

Sarah closed her eyes momentarily, feeling Sally's sperm shoot into her. "More!" she gasped. Sally's tears wet Sarah's face, startling her. *What is this?*

Sally rolled off her and stood up, turning her back. "You agreed to be my slave for the night."

Sarah began to feel real fear as she realized what she had done.

"Here, the night never ends," said Sally, looking at Sarah as though she had read her mind.

Sarah sat up. "You tricked me."

Sally shrugged. "It's who I am."

Sarah looked at her feet. "Does this mean that you intend to keep me here forever?"

Another shrug. "I don't think that far ahead."

The cold fear of her fate spread in her gut like liquid ice. "What does that mean?"

Sally looked away. "I'll probably tire of you in a short time."

"And then?"

Sally stared at her with lifeless eyes. "Then I will get rid of you."

Sarah knelt on the couch. "I have to find Joe. If you love him as much as I know you do, you'll help me."

"And have him spurn me for you?" Sally instantly returned to her usual feminine shape. "I think not!"

"Let her go." A form appeared in the room. Ralph coalesced from shadow.

Sally looked stunned. "How did you -- Get out! Leave, or I will --"

"Bore me to death?" Raphael laughed. "Let her go."

Sally looked at him as though she thought him crazy. "Impossible even if I wished it. We have a bargain. I cannot unmake a bargain."

"You know my power."

Sally's face betrayed real fear. She glanced at Sarah. "Slave. Here."

Sarah walked to Sally and knelt by her feet. She looked up at Raphael. "I agreed to be her slave for the night, if she would help me find Joe."

"But no doubt you discovered she tricked you."

Sarah said nothing.

Raphael looked at Sally. "Let her go."

Sally shook her head. "She is mine."

"Not if it is not her will."

Sally smiled. "But of course it is."

Raphael's eyes narrowed. "I know your real name."

Sally trembled. "You -- I do not think you, of all beings, would use it."

"Try me."

As they stared at each other, Sarah watched the slow revelation of the absolute steel in Raphael, much like seeing tempered steel slowly withdrawn from a scabbard.

They stared at each other for a full minute. Neither moved.

Sally finally turned to Sarah. "You may go, child. If that is your wish."

"Will you help me find Joe?"

Sally shook her head.

Sarah remained kneeling. "If you return me to a place where time flows normally, where a minute is a minute and an hour is an hour, I will remain your slave for eight hours. You must promise to release me at the end of that time, even if I do not wish to be released, and you must show me how I can find Joe, and it must be a good faith effort, not something that is impossible for me to do."

Sally stared down at Sarah for a moment. She shook her head again. "I'd tire of you before then. It's not worth the trouble. I'll claim Horn in my own way." She looked at Raphael. "Take her. Perhaps she will be of more use to you than she was to me."

Raphael beckoned to Sarah, who rose and took his hand. She looked back at Sally. Then she followed Raphael into shadow.

* * *

They walked out of the shadowy forest. Before them lay the stream where Sally had appeared. Sarah blushed at the memory then smiled. The morning sun warmed her skin. She glanced at Raphael, who stared straight ahead as they walked back to where Sarah had left her clothes.

They waded across the stream. Sarah bent to pick up her clothes then stopped as she glimpsed Raphael looking at her. She knelt in the grass.

His eyes locked on hers. "You agreed to be her slave?"

Sarah nodded. "I'm sure you understand why."

Raphael said nothing, but kept looking at her.

Sarah remained kneeling, accepting his gaze. *It's his due, and I have nothing to hide.* The feeling came as a surprising relief. *I can be this way if I like. I do not have to be embarrassed or ashamed.* Slowly, she raised her hands to her breasts. "You like them, don't you." She made it a statement.

Raphael continued to stare.

She ran her hands over her breasts, squeezing them gently, pinching her nipples, sending little jolts of pleasure through her body. "Do you want to take me?"

Raphael nodded.

Sarah swallowed nervously and licked her lips. "Would you like to use me? Fuck me until I scream? Make me feel helpless?" She slid her hands down between her thighs.

"Is that a request?"

Sarah slowly nodded, feeling intensely aroused.

Raphael stripped. She stumbled on weak legs as he grabbed her wrist and yanked her to her feet. He pulled her hair back so that she stared up at the sky, his cock bouncing against her cunt.

She closed her eyes. "Please, fuck me now."

He turned and dragged her toward the stream. "I went to a lot of trouble to find you, and very nearly violated my sacred code on your behalf." He stopped at the water's edge, where a small tree grew out over the water. He twisted off a long supple branch and quickly stripped it to a long, slender whip. He turned on her, fiery anger in his eyes. "On your hands and knees."

Sarah's heart leapt and her breath caught in her throat. She dropped to the grass.

Raphael swung the whip. It cracked against her ass. Tears sprang from Sarah's eyes and she gasped in pain. The whip cracked again, and she yelped.

Raphael's huge, hard hand splayed across her back, lying like an anvil on her, keeping her in her place.

"What are you?" he rumbled.

Whack.

"Your slave, Master," Sarah gasped.

The whip became a fiery tongue, licking her ass, sending heat shooting through her body. Every strike made her jerk spasmodically, arching her back.

"Ah!" she cried. "Oh, God."

"Say it again," commanded Raphael.

"Your slave!" she cried. The pain enveloped her loins, pulsing in her cunt like hot fingers. She moaned as the whip struck her, and again as the pain pulsed through her, stroking her libido.

"I don't think you mean it."

The whip wrapped its lacy finger across her ass. The pain curled up and around her hips, entering her cunt, stroking her clit. She screamed, "Yes, Master! I'm your slave!" as her orgasm claimed her with thunderous hands and laid open her soul. She prostrated herself in the grass, her ass high in the air, and gasped, "Take me, Master. Take your slave! Please!"

Raphael dropped the whip and fell to the grass behind her. He grasped her slender waist and drove his hungry cock into her cunt from behind.

Sarah thrust her hips back against him as his cock parted the lips of her cunt. A wail of pure lust escaped her throat. She met him thrust for thrust, expelling her breath in lusty gasps each time, crying, "More! More!" in a voice that rose higher and higher, until it finally broke in an almost soundless scream.

She lay face down in the grass, gasping for breath.

Without uncoupling, Raphael twisted her over on her back. She lay back and he leaned over her, supporting himself on his outstretched arms. Slowly, he began to thrust into her again.

She lay beneath him, looking up into his serene black face, feeling his massive cock slowly plunge into her again and again. She caressed her breasts, squeezing and cupping them. "Oh, Master, I want to be a succubus, so I can please you like you please me."

Raphael closed his eyes and bared his teeth. "Keep talking, slave."

"Master, I love your cock and the way you control me with it. I feel like a helpless sex slave and I love it, I love it." She ended on a high, squealing note as she came, thrusting her hips against him.

"I love you, Sarah!" Raphael cried as he came, pumping hard.

* * *

Sarah stirred. She lay on top of Raphael. He watched her with one eye. The little tree provided welcome shade against the late morning sun.

"What now?" she asked.

"We need to rest."

"Haven't we been doing that?"

Raphael grimaced. "You are a succubus, all right." He closed the eye.

Sarah smiled and laid her head on his muscular chest. She tried to compare him with Joe and realized there was nothing to compare. She loved them both for the same reason -- because they each scratched so well the sizeable itch she had for submission -- and because each had a different way of simply loving her, unconditionally. Their hearts sang two different songs and she understood them both. "Raphael?"

"Hmmm?"

"Will we find Joe?"

"Mmm-hhmm." Massive shoulders moved somewhat in the manner of a shrug.

"What will you tell him?" After a minute, she thought he must be asleep. She sighed and closed her eyes.

"I'll tell him you're the best fuck I ever had and ask him how much I owe him for the use of his slave."

She snorted with laughter. Eventually, she cried.

His arms came around her and held her close. "We'll find him, Sarah. We will."

Epilogue

The July sun beat down with searing weight. Horn, sweaty and tired, walked a long straight piece of road that seemed to lead nowhere. He watched the shadows, feeling the lightest touch of fear, wondering where the one who had been stalking him had gone. Not knowing made him nervous.

He wondered, too, about Sarah, and if she had found Ralph. *Hope so. She's going to need him, in more ways than one.* She probably had. He had walked through shadow yesterday, a cool stretch of dimness on a sidewalk in a little town. For an instant he felt her presence, like a brief shout in a quiet room, powerfully sensual and passionate. *She's coming,* had been his thought.

The stalker had not shown himself. Itself. Whatever. But Horn knew it had to be back there, somewhere, moving inexorably along his shadowed path.

He looked back along the empty road. No movement. But he sensed something there, just out of sight.

It might be nothing...

To Be Continued...

Jonathan Wright

By day, Jonathan Wright disguises himself as an ordinary middle-aged insurance underwriter. He lives on the East Coast with his wife and daughter, both of whom believe him to be supremely cool, though slightly deranged.

In pursuit of his career as a horror/romance/comedy writer, JW strives to expand his experiences, in order to relate them to his readers with authenticity. Skulking through everyday life is not enough for JW, no, he pushes the envelope (and everyone's buttons). He calls this "research."

Their dog, Rex, thinks this is all great fun. The two cats, who have unique and appropriate names, but do not answer to them, and are therefore both known simply as "Cat," could care less. His wife generally forgives him, as long as he remembers to take out the trash.