

Loose Id

★
James Dean
and the
**MOONLIGHT
MADNESS SALE**

Beatrice Brooks

Praise for the writing of Beatrice Brooks

James Dean and the Moonlight Madness Sale

Damn, but this story plucked at my heartstrings! It drew me into it and wouldn't let up. And the ending, left teasingly open, has a bitter-sweetness that gives a warm glow of satisfaction. Nicely defined characters, beautifully written with conviction and courage to portray the occasional harshness of life, as well as the highs. A must read!

A. J. Matthews, author of *The Ninth Wave* (Loose Id)

Beatrice Brooks has written an unusual and well-written story with an ending that will surprise and delight the reader. *James Dean & The Moonlight Madness Sale* is about love that endures even when love hurts...and proves to be worth the wait.

Treva Harte, author of *The Deviants* (Loose Id)

Honest and moving, *James Dean* is a modern-day fairytale that will bring an ache to your heart. Lucy is a heroine to whom many of us can relate, and I cried when I reached the end of this short, but intense, erotic romance.

Jill Noelle, author of *Mine* (Loose Id)

Poignant tale that shows the lengths people take to be accepted and loved, not realising they can be loved for who they are inside. Made me cry, but smile at the end.

Sheri Gilmore, author of "Candy for Her Soul", *Hard Candy* (coming soon from Loose Id)

Dangerously different, sensual, and compelling.

Daria Karpova, author of *Loose Diamonds* (Loose Id)

This is hands-down the best book I've read this year. The reality of this story is like a dip in freezing water, but the pay-off is FANTASTIC. *James Dean* is a wonderful, unexpected treatment of life and love that will draw me back time and again -- the first e-book I have ever read that has moved me to swear I will never delete it from my hard-drive!

Rachel Bo, author of *Strength in Numbers 2: Danger in Discovery* (Loose Id)

JAMES DEAN
AND THE
MOONLIGHT MADNESS
SALE

Beatrice Brooks

LooseId
www.loose-id.com

Warning

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This book is rated:

 SCORCHING

For substantial explicit sexual content, graphic language, and material that some readers may find offensive.

James Dean and the Moonlight Madness Sale

Beatrice Brooks

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Editor: Erin Mullarkey
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Dedication

This book is for Erin Mullarkey.

*"And blest for ever is she who relied
Upon Erin's honour and Erin's pride."*

At the Apartment

The blonde woman's cobra tattoo writhed sinuously as she thrashed about on the bed. Rumpled sheets didn't hide her ample breasts, nor her trimmed tuft of dark pubic hair.

A naked man hovered above her. His ears, nostrils, and bottom lip were pierced. Well-hung, his body boasted more tattoos than a wall of gangland graffiti. He possessed a shaven head. A gold ring graced his left nipple. And, as the blonde woman watched, he cleaned his fingernails with the sharp blade of a hunting knife.

Momentarily, her eyes widened. With fear? Anticipation? Desire?

Her expression changed. Her blue-shadowed lids drooped until she looked like Debbie Boone singing "You Light Up My Life." As she parted her legs, she looked bored. Then, as if she knew she looked bored, she grinned like a freaking Cheshire cat.

The man carefully placed his knife on the pillow, blade turned away from the woman's fanned-out hair. Then he climbed onto the bed and thrust his head between her slack thighs.

The woman's breasts would have jiggled, had she not cupped them tightly with her hands. Her index fingers lightly stroked her nipples. Her mouth formed an O.

Her fingers pressed her nipples harder, as if she were bearing down upon the frets of a guitar. The man raised his head, then his torso. On his knees, he wended his way up the

woman's legs. Grasping her wrists, he guided her hands between her thighs. As she parted the outer lips of her sex, he sank his length into her.

She arched her neck. She moaned. Her upper body swayed from side to side in a mesmerizing rhythm of continuity. Her tattooed snake writhed convulsively.

Another man entered the bedroom. Heavy gold armlets squeezed his biceps. Bare-chested, he wore a gladiator's "diaper" -- a piece of cloth wound round his waist and passed between his legs. His head was shaven, too, and he could have doubled for the drop-dead-gorgeous black giant in the movie *Spartacus*.

The pierced, tattooed man withdrew from the blonde and found the floor with his bare feet. As the blonde lay motionless, her legs still parted in an upside-down V, the pierced man reached across her face and grabbed his knife.

With the lithe grace of a panther, the black giant evaded the knife's thrust. He pressed his thumb against his attacker's wrist-pulse, forcing him to drop the knife. It fell to the floor. So did the attacker.

As the stunned tattooed man lay on the floor, his pierced face and nipple hidden from view, the giant shed his loincloth and turned the blonde over. Somewhat roughly, he sculpted her body until she was positioned on her knees. His foreplay took less than three seconds.

After several thrusts, he withdrew and flipped the blonde onto her back, like a turtle.

The pierced, tattooed man leapt to his feet, looking none the worse for wear. Once again, he climbed onto the bed. This time, he straddled the blonde's shoulders.

As the black giant plunged his face between her thighs, the blonde began to thrash about and moan. But her squirming and moaning stopped abruptly when the tattooed man, cradling the back of her head with his hands, began to ram himself down her throat.

A nurse slithered through the doorway. She wore a short, too-tight, white uniform that molded her breasts and butt. Her long, licorice-black Cher-hair framed Cleopatra eyes and

lips that looked as if an overenthusiastic cosmetic surgeon had injected first collagen, then cherry Jell-O. Decades earlier, her lips would have been cloned in wax and sold at candy counters.

Both men left the bed and stood like statues, as useless as two pieces of display furniture.

The blonde, still on top of the bed, opened her arms wide. The nurse with the waxy balloon lips sauntered toward her and --

Lucy hit the PAUSE button.

She wasn't into women fucking, even though she knew that her all-too-infrequent bed partners were.

Come to think of it, when was the last time she'd had a bed partner?

"Noah was getting ready to ferry his ark," she murmured.

Or, more likely, it was when the TV reporters were predicting that Al Gore had won the 2000 presidential election, even though Florida hadn't checked in yet. That afternoon, election day afternoon, Lucy had literally bumped into an attractive bald man after casting her vote inside the elementary school's gym, her polling precinct. The bald man taught at the school. Gym teacher? English teacher? Math? Did it matter?

He bought two bottles of red wine on the way to her apartment. The bottles had caps rather than corks. One hell of a cheap lay, she had thought. On the other hand, she knew for a fact that teachers didn't earn much money. If she had bumped into a lawyer, she'd have insisted on a cork.

Parched, almost dehydrated, she had slugged down the contents from the first bottle.

Woozy, she had sought the couch, landed on the floor.

With the TV blaring in the background, the bald teacher had undressed her, poured red wine from the second bottle over her breasts and clitoris, then lapped the wine like a

thirsty dog. But all Lucy could remember, clearly, was the sensation of his head between her legs. It had felt like a somewhat squishy, microwaved bowling ball.

With a sigh, she erased the memory and looked at the TV. Should she fast-forward or rewind? She clicked the remote. Slithering backwards, the waxy-lipped nurse exited the bedroom. The pierced, tattooed man removed his engorged cock from the blonde's mouth.

Lucy hit PAUSE.

She thrust her hand between her legs. She touched a finger to her clit. Her nipples pebbled. She arched her neck. Her finger dug an imaginary furrow. She stared at the tattooed man's cock. Her finger dug faster, deeper. She began to pant. And moan. And spasm ...

After rewinding the rest of the tape, then hitting EJECT and sliding the tape into its black box, Lucy placed the box on her kitchen table and opened her refrigerator.

Someday, she'd be surprised and delighted by the array of goodies inside her fridge, but today wasn't that day. The leftover spaghetti looked like red worms, the leftover pizza like something the cat had dragged in, and the limp, leftover McDonald's super-sized fries ... well, she didn't even want to *go* there.

She eyed the phone. Should she order this week's pizza special? A large with everything, plus a second pizza, just cheese, medium, at half price ... *no!* She was on a diet and, anyway, she'd sworn to economize. Once upon a long time ago, she'd have "tipped" the delivery boy with a quickie against the wall or on top of the kitchen table, but nowadays the delivery kids all looked as if they drove with learners' permits. Totally ... unappetizing.

Lucy cut up the leftover pizza, added it to the leftover spaghetti, sliced a stick of butter, shook half a box of grated parmesan cheese over the pizza, spaghetti, and butter, then stuck the improvised casserole inside her microwave. As she waited for the timer's ding, she turned on the radio. A Golden Oldies station. The Beatles' "Eleanor Rigby." *All the lonely people.*

Her gaze touched upon the empty litter box she'd placed directly beneath the microwave cart. Inside the blue plastic container was a food dish with the decal of a cat's face and the word MEOW. Inside the food dish sat a practically new catnip mouse.

An almost unbearable ache stabbed at Lucy's heart. Swallowing a sob, she shifted her gaze to the framed photo that perched on the counter, next to the breadbox.

Steven. Her first and only love. Sheathed by the same cheap frame, underneath Steven's handsome face, was a movie magazine photo of a youthful Robert Redford. Her big joke, ha-ha.

Steven had drifted in and out of her life like the feathery lure on the end of a fly-fishing pole. But she hadn't seen him in -- *oh, my God* -- twenty years!

Still, she'd never forgotten him. Never would. Even if she hadn't kept his photo in sight, his image was ingrained on her mind. The image of his face. His body. His butt. His dick.

Last she'd heard, he'd been accused of stock fraud. Arrested. Tried and convicted. Sent to a minimum-security prison. She had written one sexually explicit letter. Maybe it hadn't passed the prison censors, because he never responded. She really should have tried again, but time slipped by, one year, two years, three years ... *all the lonely people*.

She snatched up her purse and the X-rated tape. The video store would be crowded at this time of the day, so she'd drop off the tape *outside* the store, push it through the slot, and wasn't that an iniquitous allusion? Très Freudian.

On her way to the front door, Lucy slanted a glance at her indoor rock garden.

She had no plants, just rocks, but over the years she'd collected a few pieces of animal statuary -- a rabbit, a fox, and a panda -- and she'd named them all.

"Goodbye, Br'er Rabbit," she said. "Goodbye, Br'er Fox. Goodbye, Br'er Panda."

Later, At the Mall

Lucy dovetails her two-door rattletrap into a skinny space between a Cadillac and a Chevy pickup, forming a mechanical *ménage à trois*.

She can't believe she's found a parking space so close to the mall's entrance. True, the pickup encroaches on the white line in the slot next to hers, but a slender person could step out from the driver's seat and ...

Lucy isn't slender. Somehow, she manages to slither through the narrow opening. As she snakes her way between vehicles, she touches her car's hood, feels the warmth, half-believes she can still feel the pulsating of the engine. Like a man's heartbeat in the aftermath of passion. Lucy shakes her head. She's had a lot of thoughts like that, lately.

"Hey, miss, would you mind?" A woman extends a Polaroid camera. Cub Scouts surround her like blue jays at a birdseed feeder.

Lucy takes a picture of the woman and her fidgeting Cubs. The sun has given way to a full moon, but the camera has a flash. As she hands the camera back, she drops her purse. Before she can collect its scattered contents, the leader of the pack snaps Lucy's picture, the camera develops it, and the woman presses the photo against Lucy's palm. Favor returned, if not exactly welcome.

Lucy doesn't want to look, but she does. It's too dark to see honey-hued eyes and hair the color of overripe strawberries, but she can see something else. If she lost a hundred and fifty pounds and dyed her hair, she'd bear a striking resemblance to Natalie Wood. Lucy wonders why no one else can see that. Why no one else can sense the passion -- the outright horniness, to be perfectly honest -- that lurks beneath her fleshy façade.

The scout leader has been unkind enough to include Lucy's body, clothed in a red-and-white, vertically-striped over-blouse and a navy-blue skirt embroidered with stars. Swinging from her neck is a heart-shaped locket with a tiny garnet. A long time ago, she vowed she'd never take it off. And she's kept that promise.

In her whole life, she's never gone back on her word. She's broken dishes and glassware, a ceramic poodle and a window, and once, stupidly, her foot, but she's never broken a promise.

Lucy waits until the leader of the pack and her roaring cubs are out of sight. Then she rips the photo in half, then fourths, then eighths, and casts the shreds to a capricious breeze. She doesn't need a photo to jog her memory, to remind her that she needs to lose some weight. In any case, she has her own deterrent. A couple of refrigerator magnets have trapped a picture of Babe. Only problem is, the Academy-Award-nominated piggy looks so cute ...

With a sigh, Lucy retrieves a newspaper ad from her red, imitation-leather purse. She takes a few steps forward until she stands under a gunmetal lightpole whose round, overhead bulb is shaded by moths. The moths seem to be in a holding pattern, but Lucy knows that sooner or later, they'll crash and burn. She looks down at the ad. Bold, block letters spell out JULY FOURTH MOONLIGHT MADNESS SALE!!! The letters are surrounded by grinning moons and sizzling firecrackers and discount coupons.

Lucy desperately needs new clothes. School will start in a few short weeks, perish the thought. But she can't perish the thought, especially since her sparse teacher's wardrobe cannot be stretched for another year -- "stretched" being the operative word. Except for

tonight's blouse and skirt, everything she owns is too tight, and it's cheaper to buy a couple of new outfits than to perpetually feed her apartment complex's greedy, gluttonous washer and dryer.

Granted, the washer and dryer are inanimate. Granted, greed and hunger are not normally associated with inanimate objects. Lucy, however, often has the feeling that inanimate objects aren't as inanimate as they appear. And it's not an overactive imagination, because people accuse her of having no imagination at all.

Pragmatic Lucy, she thinks, stuffing the ad back inside her purse and heading toward the mall's entrance. Except, if she's so damn pragmatic, why did she lose her life savings in a dot-com scam? *Lonely Lucy* is more to the point. After a long illness, her mom had passed away. Even worse, her yellow-orange cat, Butterscotch, had been put to sleep, a dumb euphemism for "killed by lethal injection." Her brother, Rocky, a resident of Texas and not a bad sort when you got to know him (assuming you didn't piss him off), had been put to sleep by lethal injection.

Lucy's second sigh captures an imminent sob. She enters the mall and checks her Goofy watch, squinting to read the goofy numbers. It's eight p.m., but inside the mall there is no day or night and time is endless.

The mall has a high, domed ceiling, and Lucy wonders if the full moon is smiling down on shoppers. *The moon doesn't give a shit*, she thinks, tempted to smile at her most current inanimate-object fantasy.

She promenades past a travel agency, then backtracks in order to admire the colorful posters of places she has never been, nor is ever likely to visit. She focuses upon a poster of an African safari. A defiant lion stares back at her, directly into her eyes. Reflexively, her hand rises to her throat pulse and she fingers her garnet-studded necklace.

Across from the travel agency is a restaurant. From her vantage point, Lucy can see a dimly lit lounge. A poster on an easel touts frou-frou drinks, and the giant margarita illustration reminds her of the afternoon she met Robert Redford ...

At the Pool - 1980

Radios blared “Stand by Me” and “The Rose” and “Don’t Fall in Love With a Dreamer.” The best movie of the year was, in Lucy’s opinion, *Coal Miner’s Daughter*. If it didn’t win an Academy Award, Sissy Spacek would, or else there was no justice in the world. And Timothy Hutton -- what a hunk! -- was sure to win an Oscar for *Ordinary People*.

Lucy had seen both movies. She liked them both, but gave *Ordinary People* the edge when it came to awards. Because Mary Tyler Moore played a bitch, and Mary Tyler Moore had starred in her own TV show, and everybody knew who she was, and nobody expected her to play a bitch. Also, *Ordinary People* was directed by Robert Redford, and even though he wasn’t in the movie, he was “candy for the eyes,” in Lucy’s opinion. What she wouldn’t give to be stuck in an elevator with Mr. Robert Redford.

The strident blasts from three nearby radios were giving her a headache. Or maybe it was the sun, unprotected by clouds, bouncing off the deep indigo-blue of the enormous, Olympic-size swimming pool.

As she gazed somewhat bleary-eyed at all the well-oiled, well-toned, itsy-bitsy-bikini-clad bodies, her heart sank and, for the life of her, she couldn’t imagine what had possessed her to accept her friend Jean Anne’s invitation.

Maybe because, at age sixteen, she had never dangled her feet in a private pool, much less set foot inside an exclusive country club. Maybe because the temperature hovered around 100 degrees and the humidity was somewhere in the nineties. And maybe, just maybe, because her brother, Rocky, had sneeringly said, "I dare you, Lucy! I *double* dare you!"

Her one-piece, size-fourteen bathing suit stuck out like a sore thumb, and she felt like a fish out of water. Funny how mirrors could reassure you one moment, then mock you as soon as you turned your back on them. She had thought she looked pretty, or at least pretty good, until a snooty friend of Jean Anne's said, "Where'd you find that suit, Susie? At a garage sale?"

Lucy had merely replied, "My name is Lucy, not Susie." Then she had blunted her self-consciousness with a couple of slushy margaritas -- no one checked her ID, thank goodness -- but the buzz had worn off. All that remained was an incredible thirst.

Jean Anne stood next to the diving board, surrounded by a gaggle of admirers -- both male and female. Lucy sometimes had the feeling that the blonde cheerleader befriended her because, compared to Lucy, Jean Anne appeared even more slender, more clear-complexioned, more ... perfect. "Never look a gift horse in the mouth," Lucy's mother had said this morning at breakfast. Then, as always, she'd turned her attention to Lucy's nineteen-year-old brother, Rocky, who'd been adopted five years ago, when Lucy was ten and a half. The spittin' image of Sylvester Stallone, Rocky was Mom's pride and joy. She had always wanted a son, and even though Rocky *wasn't her flesh and blood*, she fawned over him, practically groveled at his feet. Did he have enough to eat? she had asked this morning - she asked him that at every meal. Did he want another piece of buttered toast? Was the bacon crisp enough? Should she brew some fresh coffee? Did he need gas money? How was last night's date? Wink, nudge.

Last night's date didn't pan out, Lucy had answered silently.

Rocky had come to her bedroom late last night, stoned out of his gourd. He said his date was a cockteaser and he needed relief, and Lucy was happy to oblige. Most of the time, she gave him a blow job. Occasionally, she massaged his penis with her hands until he squirted into a tissue. More often than not, after she finished, he'd pet her and tell her she was pretty. Rocky could be very nice, but he could also be meaner than a snake. Sometimes he could be nice *and* mean, like when a gang of Mafioso girls decided to make Lucy their new target. They stole her lunch money and smacked her around. Rocky saw her bruises, and the next day, he told the Mafioso girls to leave his "little sister" alone, or else they'd be spending the Christmas holidays in the hospital, staring at Santa cutouts and shit through the intensive care wind--

"You're going to turn red as a lobster if you stay in the sun much longer," said one of the poolside waiters, and Lucy jumped at the sound of his voice.

Shading her eyes with her hand, she raised her head and shoulders and looked up at him from her chaise lounge. He wore black Bermuda shorts and a white golf shirt with the club's logo on the pocket, and he carried a small, round, empty tray.

"Maybe you should go inside for a while," he suggested.

"And maybe you should mind your own business," she snapped.

"Sorry. It's just that redheads tend to burn something fierce, and you have the most beautiful red hair." With a shrug, he turned to leave, and Lucy saw his taut, round butt.

"Wait," she said. "Thanks for the compliment, my hair and all. Please don't go away. I ... I was thinking of ordering another margarita." Vaguely, she gestured toward her empty glass with its unsqueezed slice of lime. "I really shouldn't, but I'm so thirsty. Parched."

"My shift's just about over," he said. "I could get Thomas for you" -- he gestured toward another waiter -- "but you really should go inside."

"I'm not a member," she confessed. "I'm a guest. Where, exactly, would I go?"

His expression changed from bored to interested. "You're not a club member?"

“No. Why?”

“The staff isn’t allowed to socialize with club members. I’m here because someone named Ira messed around and got himself fired. I started a couple of days ago. That’s why I didn’t know you didn’t belong.”

She winced at his last three words, but merely said, “Are you allowed to mess around with guests?”

He winked. “My employee handbook doesn’t say anything about *not* messing around with guests.”

“I’m sure it’s implied.”

“If a rule isn’t written down, it doesn’t exist.”

“Bullshit. All you mean is that you can use an unwritten rule as a defense, should you get caught. ‘It wasn’t in the handbook. I’m not guilty.’ That’s like robbing a store and saying there was nothing on the door that said you *couldn’t* rob the store.”

“Ah, but there’s a written rule. Thou shalt not steal. There’s no written rule that says thou shalt not fuck a guest.”

“How did ‘messing around’ get to be fucking?”

“Are you a virgin?”

“What does that have to do with --”

“Are you?”

“Yes.” She thought of Rocky and his blow job requests. “No.”

“Which is it? Yes or no?”

“I’ve messed around,” she said.

“Ah,” he said again. “Do you like oral sex?”

“I’m not sure what that is,” she said, sidestepping his question.

He laughed. “How old are you?”

“Eighteen,” she fibbed, “and I don’t think we should be talking like this.”

“Like what?”

“You know. Fucking. Stuff like that.”

“Okay, we won’t talk about it. Would you like to go inside with me?” He pointed toward a nearby one-story building that just missed being a shack by a couple coats of shiny white paint. “There’s a bar and a lounge and a TV,” he said. “They’re showing the Wimbledon finals. You like tennis?”

“I like Bjorn Borg. You look like him, a little.”

“Yeah. My hair. The club says it’s too long and I have to cut it, but I’m stalling --”

“It’s more than your hair. It’s your ... body. You play tennis.” It wasn’t a question. “You know who else you look like? Robert Redford. With long hair.”

“And you look like Natalie Wood. With red hair. Do you want to go inside with me?”

“Okay.” Rising from the chaise, she saw that he was very, very tall, six-five maybe.

He placed his tray on the ground and began to take off his clothes.

“What are you doing?” she cried.

“My shift is now officially over,” he replied, stripping to his bathing suit.

The skimpy, stretchy material reminded Lucy of an Olympic swimmer’s suit. As she trailed him to the rim of the pool, he jackknifed into the water, then came up spouting like a whale. Reaching out, he grasped her ankles, tugged gently, and she belly-flopped into the pool, landing on top of him. She had just enough time to gulp some air before they both sank to the bottom. He had just enough time to cup her buttocks and press her against his erection before they surged to the surface. She swam to the steps and climbed out. He hoisted himself up the side of the pool like a graceful spider. Then he retrieved his clothes and her white beach towel.

Lucy shivered. She wasn’t the least bit cold, but she felt goose-bumpy just the same. Terribly excited, enormously flattered, and incredibly nervous, she was also dubious and

suspicious. Why on earth would this Robert Redford look-alike hit on her? She knew that pool members tipped waiters, but if he thought she had money, he was in for a rude awakening.

Wait a sec. He couldn't possibly think she was rich. Hadn't Jean Anne's snobby friend said that Lucy's bathing suit looked like a garage sale special? On the other hand, maybe this guy couldn't tell the difference between a name-brand suit and a thrift shop hand-me-down.

As he draped the towel over her shoulders, his hands casually explored her breasts, and Lucy felt a thrill course through her body. He was so tall, his shoulders so broad, that he hid her from the poolside gazers. His fingers became bolder, rolling her nipples and massaging them through the material of her suit. Experimentally, she rubbed her butt against the front of his bathing suit and felt the hard baton of his arousal. Since she couldn't see his face, she wondered if *she* had triggered his arousal. Or was he fantasizing, picturing a *Playboy* Playmate-of-the-month clone? After all, Lucy thought, he couldn't "fuck a club member," and she was ... convenient.

Once they were inside the building, he assumed an indifferent façade. Was he protecting her reputation? Or his job? She desperately wanted him to touch her again, and she knew that the new moisture accumulating between her thighs wasn't chlorinated.

He led her to a door, opened it, and guided her inside. "This is the staff break room," he said. "Make yourself comfortable. I'll be right back."

Her knees felt weak and she wanted to sit, but her suit was wet. Folding her towel into a padded square, placing it under her bottom, she sat on the edge of a somewhat dilapidated sofa and looked around. Near the sofa was an equally dilapidated, stuffed armchair whose springs had sprung. The walls were painted a nondescript beige. Someone had taken a crack at graffiti and someone else had tried to paint over it, but Lucy could still make out the words.

MELISSA SUCKS, someone had written, and underneath that, in a different handwriting, was the word COCK. Idly, Lucy wondered if Ira, the recently-fired poolside waiter, had “messed around” with Melissa.

A card table graced the room’s corner. On top of the table were soda cans and two decks of cards and some paperback books.

Curious, Lucy rose from the sofa, walked over to the table, and glanced down at the books -- an eclectic collection. Harold Robbins and Stephen King and Ayn Rand’s *Atlas Shrugged* and *Lord of the Rings* and a couple of Harlequin romances by Victoria Gordon.

Rocky had once said that a person could get mononucleosis by drinking from somebody else’s soda can, but Lucy didn’t care. Thirst clawed at her throat. She shook the cans, one at a time. Empty. Damn!

She heard a kick at the door and was tempted to say “who’s there,” but what difference did it make? Being in this room was, in a sense, trespassing, and if she was told to leave, so be it. She’d simply apologize, then buy something cold to drink and ... She opened the door.

The full-to-bursting bulge in her six-foot-five waiter’s skimpy bathing suit drew Lucy’s gaze like a magnet. Flustered, she tried to look someplace else -- anyplace else. As he walked inside, she saw that he carried a couple of tall, frosty glasses. Handing her one, he shut and locked the door.

“What if somebody wants to take a break?” she asked.

He shrugged and withdrew a straw from the waistband of his suit. Stripping the paper, he handed her the straw. “Drink up,” he said.

Salt rimmed the glass. Holding the straw like a drum majorette, Lucy licked at the salt, then took a huge gulp. Tears sprang to her eyes. “What the heck is this?” she gasped.

“My version of a margarita on the rocks. Mostly vodka, some tequila, a splash of 7-Up and a splash of lime juice. I call it a ‘Gilligan’s Island Ice Tea,’ also known as a ‘Marianne On The Rocks.’”

“Why Marianne? Why didn’t you name it after Ginger, the movie star?”

“I like Marianne better. She was smarter. And stronger.”

“So’s your drink.” Blinking to erase her tears, Lucy looked up at his face and asked one of the stupidest questions she’d ever asked in her whole life. She realized how stupid she sounded, even before she finished asking. “Do you play basketball?”

His Robert Redford lips quirked. “Yes,” he said, stretching to his full height of six-five, maybe six-six on his toes. “How’d you know?”

“Don’t make fun of me.”

“Sorry. I’m attending college on a basketball scholarship, but I hate the game. Players are, for the most part, mean-spirited ... in a competitive sense ... and there’s too much physical contact. I prefer tennis. It’s ... clean.”

“What’s your major?”

“Liberal arts right now, but I’ll probably major in business. I like to play the stock market, not that I have money to invest. You’ll probably laugh, but I use Monopoly money. Every morning I choose my stocks and --”

“Why would I laugh? I think that’s very clever. How much have you made?”

“A bundle. Too bad it’s all play money. Look, honey, if your drink is too strong, I can --”

“No. It’s fine. Honest. A little weak, actually,” she improvised. If he knew she had never tasted hard liquor before today, he’d think she was a baby. He might even take her back to the pool and choose someone else ... someone older ... someone prettier.

Thrusting the straw into the glass, she sipped and swallowed, sipped and swallowed, and almost immediately, the vodka/tequila exploded inside her belly, her breasts, her groin.

She felt lightheaded. Out of focus. Like a marionette with a couple of cut strings ... one of the puppets in *The Sound of Music*, maybe. The girl marionette singing, “Oh da *lay* dee, oh da *lay* dee, ohdalaydee-ohdalaydee-ohdaloo.”

And damn it, she was still thirsty. As if he'd read her mind, her handsome waiter placed her empty glass on a small table and transferred her straw to the second glass.

"Are you sure you can handle this?" he asked.

He sounded worried, and she desperately wanted to reassure him. What did Rocky say when Mom lovingly chided him for chugging a full six-pack of beer?

"I've built up a *tolerance*," she said, accepting the glass. "But what about you?" she asked, hoping she didn't sound as tipsy as she felt. "Don't you want your Gilligan's Island?"

"I'm fine, honey. I downed a couple shots of tequila when I was in the bar."

"How's good ol' Bjorn doin'?"

"He won."

"Yay for him. Hey ... has anybody ever told you that you look like Robert Redford?"

"Shhhh." He placed his finger across his lips and winked. "I *am* Robert Redford. In my next movie, I play an exclusive country club waiter and college student, so I wanted to research the role." He grinned. "You're the first person to see through my disguise."

"Really? But it's so obvious! I'll keep your secret, cross my heart and hope to die," she said, crossing her heart and noting, idly, that her nipples were ripe ... erect.

How lucky can you get? she mused. She wasn't inside an elevator with Robert Redford. She was in a broken room ... a *break* room ... with Robert Redford!

She hadn't realized, from his movies, that he was so tall.

But even in real life, off the screen, he possessed that adorable shock of tawny, blonde-streaked hair and those blue-blue eyes, bluer than the bunting on an American flag.

She finished the second drink in nothing flat. "It tastes like limeade," she said.

"It's kickapoo joy juice," he told her. "You ever heard of kickapoo joy juice?"

"Yeah. L'il Abner. Comics."

"You like comics?"

“Love ’em,” she said, thrilled that they had something in common.

“Which strip is your favorite?”

“*Peanuts*,” she said, wishing she had some peanuts to temper the waves sloshing around in her tummy. It occurred to her that she hadn’t eaten anything since breakfast. “Oh, shit.”

“What’s the matter?” Robert Redford asked.

“Gotta pee. Bad.”

“There’s a bathroom over there.” He pointed. “It’s for the employees, so it’s not so hot. But it’s got a toilet. Here, give me your glass.”

She hadn’t lied. She needed to pee. But she also wanted to throw up. Once inside the bathroom, she belched twice, then swallowed, and her stomach settled. *Thank you, God!*

But now she had another problem. Her bathing suit. She had pulled it down to pee and she couldn’t get it back up again. No matter how hard she wriggled and tugged, tugged and wiggled, the wet material clung to her lower body, her butt and belly.

Frustrated, tempted to bawl like a baby, Lucy felt strong arms encircle her waist.

She leaned back against Robert Redford’s chest and, once again, felt his arousal. He was so tall, her head rested just below his nipples. She didn’t know what to say. She didn’t want him to leave, didn’t want him to stay, and -- damn it! -- she was still thirsty.

“Could I have another Gilligan’s Island, please?”

“I don’t think so, honey,” he said. “I don’t want you to get sick or pass out on me.”

“Em. Bare. Ass,” she said.

“What?”

“Bare ass.”

“You want me to take off your suit?”

“No ... no.” With the greatest effort of her young life, she said, “Embarrassed.”

“Why are you embarrassed? I’ve seen breasts before. Yours are quite pretty, you know. Your nipples remind me of jellybeans. Luscious pink jellybeans.”

“Really?”

“Really.” He cupped her breasts, lifted them, and squeezed them gently as he rained hot kisses down the length of her neck. Then, shifting his body slightly, he encircled her waist and maneuvered her outside the bathroom, over to the sofa. “Would you like to lie down?” he asked.

“Yeah, better,” she said with a giggle.

“Let’s take the rest of your suit off, first. Okay?”

As he stepped in front of her, she stiffened her fingers, crossed one hand over the other, covered her groin in a classic modest-female pose, and said, “Em bare assed.”

“There’s nothing to be embarrassed about,” he said, his lips twitching.

If he laughed at her, he was history. If he laughed, she’d wrap the towel around her chest and leave.

He didn’t laugh.

Gently, reverently, like a sculptor molding a clay statue, his hands pressed her flesh as he drew her suit down, over her belly and butt, her knees, her ankles, her feet. By the time he reached her feet, he was on his knees.

Cupping her buttocks, he pressed his face against the still-damp curls between her legs. His tongue snaked out. Frightened, she tried to step backwards, but there was no place to go. Like a concertina, she folded at her knees and sank onto the sofa.

Unfazed, he pried her legs apart. At the same time, he said, “What’s your name, honey?”

“Lucy.”

“Have you ever done this before, Lucy?”

“You already asked me that. At the pool.”

“And you said yes and no. Are you a virgin?”

“My brother ... well, he’s not really my brother ... he’s adopted and his name is Rocky. My mom couldn’t have any more kids after me, but she wanted a boy and she didn’t want a newborn, so she and my dad adopted Rocky. His real name is Archibald, but my mom said Archibald sounded like someone who’d lose his hair too soon, so she changed his name to Rocky ... for Rocky Graziano ... the boxer? My mom’s favorite movie was *Somebody Up There Likes Me*. Paul Newman played Rocky Graziano. Mom had a ‘thing’ for Paul Newman, but she named Rocky Rocky, rather than Paul, don’t ask me why. My father liked Kenny Rogers, so he named me Lucille. My mom called me ‘the Accident.’ When I was little, she’d introduce me as the Accident. For the longest time, I thought my name was Accident ...”

Lucy paused. Why was she babbling away? Because Robert Redford looked interested, that’s why. Interested and ... compassionate.

Damn! She didn’t want *anyone* feeling sorry for her, not even a drop-dead gorgeous actor with the most sincere, not to mention bluest, eyes she’d ever seen.

“Anyway, Rocky ...” She couldn’t think of the words, so she made a C with her thumb and fingers, then pumped her hand up and down.

“A hand job? You gave Rocky a hand job?”

“Uh-huh.”

“Anything else?”

She decided not to mention the cock-sucking, which, to be perfectly honest, was what had made her think she wasn’t a virgin. She shook her head.

“I won’t be too rough, I promise,” Robert Redford said. Still on his knees, bending forward from the waist, he stroked the waterlogged, tangled curls away from her forehead. He caressed her cheeks, then traced her lips with his finger.

Cradling her chin with his hands, his lips found her lips. As she parted her lips, she felt the tip of his tongue reach into her mouth a little, then withdraw, then reach in again more insistently. She tried to capture his tongue, wanted to swallow his tongue, but he abandoned her lips to lick the inside of her legs.

Fear gone, she could feel her internal muscles tightening. Using her hands and arms as anchors, she leaned back and slid forward, to the very edge of the sofa. Her body arched and she offered herself to Robert Redford -- wanting him and needing him more than she'd ever wanted or needed *anything* before. Then he was tasting her juices, stretching his tongue inside her while he rubbed the nub below her mound with his thumb.

She wanted to cry. She wanted to laugh. She wanted to explode. "More," she managed.

"Of course," he said with a chuckle. "But first ..." He shook out her towel. "Press your feet against my chest, Lucy, and hoist yourself up."

As she did as he ordered, he slid the towel underneath her behind. She hadn't really exerted herself, pressing against his magnificent chest with her feet, but her legs felt like Jell-O and her head whirled. "Drunk ... margarita," she slurred.

"You *drank* the margarita," he corrected, "and it's all gone." As he pulled off his bathing suit, she saw his engorged organ. "But if you're still thirsty ..." he hinted.

"No ... no ... *me* drunk," she managed.

Gently, his touch as soft as butterfly wings, Robert Redford ran his hand up the inside of her legs. "Do you want to stop, Lucy? Do you want to go back to the pool and sleep it off? I'll set up one of the umbrellas so you won't burn."

Did she want to stop? Did she truly want to stop? "No," she said. "No, thank you."

For a split second, Robert Redford hesitated. Then, slowly, he contoured her vagina with his tongue. After a few leisurely licks, he traced a path up her body until he came to rest between her breasts. He feasted hungrily on her nipples, her jellybean nipples, as he reached down with his hand to the pulsating dampness between her thighs.

"More," she moaned, wishing he'd tongue-paint her vagina again.

She heard music in the background, through the closed door. Someone had turned on a radio -- or maybe a jukebox -- and Elvis was singing.

Don't be cruel, Elvis sang.

Gently, Robert Redford plunged his finger into her. Harvesting some of her moisture, he smoothed it over his penis. Then, very carefully, he placed the tip of his cock against the wet entrance to her passage. He entered, withdrew, entered, withdrew, pushing a little harder each time -- just as he'd done when he'd kissed her. And just like his kisses, she wanted more. She arched and pushed to take more of him into her. Her hands clasped his buttocks as she pulled him deeper and deeper and --

Oh, God, more. She needed more.

Instead, he withdrew and pressed his palm against her mouth. "Spit," he said, and she spat.

Baby, Elvis sang.

She watched Robert Redford rub her spit over his cock, just before he plunged into her again.

You're the one I'm thinking of, Elvis sang.

This time, she opened her thighs as wide as they'd go. Then she wrapped her legs around Robert Redford as tightly as she could. She ached to feel the whole length of him inside her.

Still on his knees, he rose up a bit and clasped her waist as he thrust in a frenzy -- *oh, thank you, God* -- and she shuddered in response.

He led her down a garden path of spasms, up a hill of spasms, through a river of spasms. She felt as if she watched a slide show, somebody's vacation slides -- an ocean wave here, *click*, a mountain peak there, *click*, a ski lift here, *click*, a ski slope there, *click*, a rainbow

over there, *click* -- and every time the slide projector clicked, she experienced another violent spasm.

Soon, as if she'd deposited her spasms in a bank and had just withdrawn each and every one of them, they all joined together in one stupendous, monumental orgasm.

But he wasn't finished! Once again, he nuzzled the damp curls between her legs.

His mouth fastened on her protruding bud and he sucked greedily.

"Oh ... oh ... oh ... oh ... oh," was all she could say -- a one-word vocabulary.

The Elvis music had filtered through the door, every word understandable, and she didn't want people in the lounge to hear her. She tried to hold her breath. She bit her bottom lip so hard she thought she might end up with permanent tooth marks, like what's-her-face in *Little House On The Prairie*.

She remembered something Rocky had once said. "If you learn nothing else, Lucy," he'd said, "learn two things about your tongue. When to hold it and how to use it."

She thought about a quote she'd read in a book and never forgotten: "Some people suffer in silence louder than others."

Then there was the bit about silence being golden and ... oh, to hell with it!

Screaming "moremoremore" at the top of her lungs, Lucy tried to get both closer to, and away from, the pain-pleasure of Robert Redford's insatiable sucks.

Finally, replete and exhausted by her incessant tremors, she said, "Please ... no more."

He stopped sucking.

Quickly, he collected her juices again. Even more quickly, he lubricated his cock. But this time, he sank his entire length inside her. He gave a long, drawn-out groan, and Lucy experienced a new wetness, and she was vainly pleased with her ability to bring about that wetness.

After he'd finished, he kissed her and hugged her and petted her and told her she was beautiful. Not just pretty. Beautiful.

He sounded genuinely concerned when he asked if he'd hurt her.

She said no.

Which, strangely enough, was the truth.

With shaky legs, Lucy stood up. Looking down at the towel, she saw that she'd bled and that her blood had formed a heart shape -- fuzzy around the edges, but unmistakably a heart. She wondered how many times that had happened to someone who'd lost her virginity. Probably, she thought, as many times as Mary Tyler Moore had played a bitch in a movie.

Robert Redford helped her put her bathing suit back on.

"Thank you, Robert," she said.

"You're welcome," he said, "and the name's Steven."

"Steven," she repeated, tasting the name. "I think I love you, Steven. I promise I'll always love you, Steven. And ..." She hung her head. "I fibbed, too."

"You did?" His Robert Redford lips twitched.

"Yes," she said, as she grasped his hand and guided it underneath her suit's elastic and pressed his palm against the still-pulsating dampness between her legs. "I'm only sixteen."

At the Mall

As Lucy meanders past racks of clothes and tables of items stationed outside store entrances, she thinks: *Garage Sale City!*

Disappointment slices through her. She wants the ambiance of an outdoor bazaar and knows she won't find it here. *I'm not a mall person*, she muses, even though she has been taught, practically from birth, that girls love to shop, and "Let's go to the mall" was the one-word mantra of her high school peers.

An image comes to mind. An overweight teen standing in front of her bedroom mirror and practicing her favorite model's pose, holding that pose for hours and hours, hardly daring to breathe, waiting -- motionless -- to be discovered and loved.

Steven had discovered her. And loved her. Well, he'd made love *to* her, which was practically the same thing. But after that exciting, wonderful, *hot* summer of 1980, he had returned to college and she had gone back to high school and --

Lucy catches her reflection in a shop window. She stops and poses. She tries, without much success, to hold her stomach in. The shop is a men's clothing store and mannequins dominate the window display. But these mannequins aren't the usual mannequins. There's a John Wayne mannequin. And Clark Gable, wearing a black *Gone With the Wind* suit. And

William Holden, looking as if he just stepped out of *Picnic*. And a young Robert Mitchum. And James Dean, his to-die-for eyes smoldering, radiating pure, unbridled passion.

Lucy may have no imagination to speak of, but she could almost swear that James Dean returns her avid gaze. He looks empathetic, as if he knows that beneath her gratuitous flab beats the heart of a *fille de joie*. She holds his gaze, lets herself drift into a fantasy of marching into the store, climbing into the window, and -- as one of her all-too-infrequent sex partners might have put it -- tripping him and beating him to the floor.

Reluctantly, she turns away. Across the corridor, facing the menswear shop, a clothes rack flaunts a hand-printed sign: PINK TAGGED ITEMS 60% OFF.

Maybe she can find an outfit here, Lucy thinks, until she notices the sign above the store. PERFECT PETITES. Shit! Perfect Petites is a national chain, with sizes from zero to nine, although how anybody could wear a size zero ...

With a disappointed shrug, Lucy walks farther down the corridor. Her gaze is drawn to a shoe store's window display. Lucy loves shoes. Although she has never taken ballet lessons, she knows she has the feet of a dancer. Slender. High arches. Perfect toes. She has often thought she could be the model -- or the poster girl -- for a podiatrist. From the ankles down, of course.

As she stares through the glass at a parade of discounted, high-heeled sandals, 30% off, Lucy realizes that shoe styles haven't changed all that much over the years. Except for their price tags. Shoes cost a hell of a lot more today than they did in 1982 ...

At the Prom - 1982

A pair of pointy-toed, pink-dyed shoes stood like sentinels at the bedroom door. *Open this door*, the shoes seemed to say, *and we'll impale you on our three-inch spiked heels*.

"Could I have this dance ... for the rest of my life?"

Lucy sang along with the radio as she tried to decide how to wear her hair. The long red strands cascaded down her back in a curly cloud. She thought she looked better with her hair hanging loose, but her mother said girls pinned their hair up for special occasions like weddings, church socials, photo sessions, and, most especially, proms.

Fear clawed at Lucy's throat and, all of a sudden, she wished she could skip her senior prom. On her small end table, next to the bed, was a library book -- a brand new John Updike, *Rabbit Is Rich*. She loved to curl up with a good book, and she hadn't read the latest *Rabbit*.

Even better, if she took a bus to the movies, she could see *An Officer and a Gentleman*, starring the drop-dead gorgeous Richard Gere.

Or the Dollar Theater was showing *On Golden Pond*, starring Katherine Hepburn and Henry Fonda, both of whom had won Oscars last March for their performances, even though

Henry Fonda was too sick to accept his, so daughter Jane had done the honors and made a beautiful speech and, oh, how the tears had rolled down Lucy's face.

Or ... she could stay home and watch *Hill Street Blues*, her favorite TV show.

Was she nuts?

Impulsively, she'd sent a letter to Steven, asking him to be her prom date. She'd seen him off and on for two years; hell, they'd even celebrated her eighteenth birthday together. But when he didn't respond to her invitation, she cried nonstop for hours, until -- *blockhead!* -- she realized he couldn't possibly have received her letter until yesterday, or at the very earliest, the day before. Afraid of rejection, she had waited until the last minute.

Yesterday afternoon, he had phoned. He said he'd just finished his final exams, he would be leaving for home tomorrow at daybreak, and he'd be honored to escort her to her prom.

That was the word he used. *Honored*.

She understood that he'd be "honored" to undress her afterwards, but to her mind, that was a bonus. She craved him with a yearning that was so intense, she'd often feel herself moistening her panties when she merely pictured his blue-blue eyes, his Robert Redford lips, his broad chest, his lean waist and hips, his muscular legs, and his taut butt. Then she'd have to try and hide the resultant spasms from her mother and Rocky. She couldn't/wouldn't watch a Robert Redford movie, either, at least not when her mom and Rocky were in close proximity. One look at Redford's handsome face, so reminiscent of her first encounter with Steven, and she'd come in wave after wave after wave after --

A few weeks ago, Jean Anne had invited her to a pajama party. A local channel had been televising a Robert Redford marathon: *Brubaker* and *The Candidate* and *The Electric Horseman*.

Jean Anne injected a watermelon with Everclear and before long, everyone had a nice buzz. Lucy, clothed in an old Mickey Mouse nightshirt, made it through Brubaker, but as

soon as The Candidate started, she started coming. Her whole body shuddered as she experienced climax after climax.

Jean Anne's older brother strolled into the family room. His eyes widened and he grinned a sly grin. He had been whistling. Lips still puckered, he walked over to the couch and pulled his pants down. His puckered lips morphed into a hissing pant as he lifted Lucy's nightshirt and rested the tip of his cock against her pussy. She thought No, please, no, but could only manage a weak squeak. Jean Anne's brother said, "She on the pill?" and Jean Anne said, "Shit, I don't know."

"I am," said a girl named Ronnie, spitting out the seeds from another slice of doctored watermelon. Dropping the rind, she staggered toward Jean Anne's bedroom. At the same time, she shed her pajamas, cupped her breasts, tweaked her nipples, and sang "Tie Me Kangaroo Down, Sport."

Jean Anne's brother yanked up his pants, followed Ronnie, lowered his pants, and took her against the wall. Trying to drown out Ronnie's squeals of delight and the rhythmic applause of the other girls, Lucy plugged her ears with her fingers and staggered toward the bathroom. Where she'd better not linger. Ronnie, a shy girl with the worst case of acne in the history of the world, had been very drunk, and soon she'd be hugging the toilet bowl. Especially if Jean Anne's brother insisted on fellatio.

Speaking of bathrooms ... Lucy brought her thoughts back to the present as she walked into what her persnickety mom called "The Powder Room." Rummaging through the cabinet below the sink, Lucy retrieved a shoebox. Inside the box were a few makeup items -- mascara, eye shadow, lipstick -- and her hair ornaments; everything from an orange velveteen headband to black, rubber-tipped bobby pins.

She pulled out her favorite barrette, with its fake-jeweled butterfly. Then she twisted her flyaway hair into a French twist and secured it with the barrette.

There! If she squinted, she looked like a red-haired Natalie Wood as Gypsy Rose Lee. From the neck up, of course.

Let me entertain you, Steven. I will do a few tricks, some old and then some new tricks...

After shading her eyelids with mauve eye shadow and caking her lashes with mascara, Lucy returned to her bedroom. She'd add lipstick when she was fully dressed, she decided. Otherwise, with her luck, she'd end up blotting her lips on the bodice of her pink prom dress.

Her mom wouldn't spring for a new dress, because Rocky needed some major car repairs, so Lucy had hit the thrift stores. Actually, she felt good about that. She'd only spent fifteen bucks, but it would all go to charity and the gown looked as good as new. Well, almost. There was a blotch on the bodice, but a fake-diamond butterfly pin hid the stain nicely. She had found the sparkly piece of costume jewelry at a flea market, and the butterfly on the pin kind of matched the butterfly on her barrette. The pink dress had obviously been a bridesmaid's gown, because the thrift shop carried three duplicates, four all together, and the size sixteen fit Lucy perfectly. Well, almost. The bodice was too tight, the hemline a tad too short. However, the miles and miles of pink tulle detracted from any flaws. The gown was, in fact, the prettiest garment she had ever owned.

To her surprise, her mom had bought her a new pair of shoes, then paid to have them dyed to match the dress. Lucy felt *very* good about that. Maybe this was the start of a genuine mother-daughter relationship. She had heard Mom bragging to a friend. A college boy, Mom had said, a basketball star, no less, was escorting her daughter to --

The phone rang and Lucy flinched. She had once read about London during the Black Plague ... about how someone rang a bell and shouted, "Bring out your dead!"

That's what the ring of the phone sounded like.

Sure enough, it was Steven. He had started out late but not too late, he said. Then he had stopped for gas, then lunch. Now he was stuck behind a major accident; a pileup that involved at least a dozen cars. Luckily, the man in the lane next to him had a car phone. Traffic was at a standstill, Steven said, bumper-to-bumper. But once it started moving again, he figured it would take two, maybe three hours to get home. He'd still try and make the dance, he said, but Lucy shouldn't count on it. He was very, very sorry. If he didn't see her tonight, tomorrow they'd do something special together. Something *very* special.

Steven spoke through the blare of car horns. To Lucy, the incessant honking sounded like angry geese. If she squeezed her eyes shut, she could smell smoking car engines and gas fumes.

As she replaced the receiver gently, ever so gently, in its cradle, she told her mother what had happened.

Her mom snorted. "And you believed him?"

"Of course I believed him," Lucy said. "Why would he lie?"

Her mother glared at her, then turned to Rocky. "There's a tux in my closet," she said. "Your father bought it for our wedding and I decided it was much too nice for his funeral. Put it on and take Lucy to the prom."

"You've *got* to be kidding," Rocky practically spat. "No way!"

"May I remind you that your car is at the shop?" Mom raised one eyebrow.

"That's blackmail!"

"You're damn straight it is."

"Aw, Ma, what's the big deal?"

"The big deal is that I told my friends Lucy would be at the prom." She was shouting now. "The big deal is that I paid for a new pair of shoes!"

"Okay, okay, Ma, don't get your panties in a twist. I'll take her there and walk her inside, but I won't dance with her."

“As long as you drive her there and home, I don’t give a fig what you do.”

Lucy watched Rocky stomp toward her mother’s bedroom.

Mom never asked me what I wanted, she thought. Not that it matters. I could tell the fake palm in the vestibule or the cuckoo clock in the dining room that I don’t want to go to the prom, for all the difference it would make.

The phone rang. *Please let it be Steven, Lucy prayed. Please let him say he found a shortcut and if he drives like a bat out of hell, he’ll only be a few minutes late.*

Lucy watched her mother light a cigarette before she answered the phone. Her lips moved around the lipstick-stained, white cigarette filter as she said, “Yes, darling, I understand. No, no, it’s not a hassle. I’d put Lucy on the phone but she’s getting dressed. Oh, I’ll bet you look *stunning*. On sale for less than two hundred dollars? Lucy’s gown was on sale, too. We dyed her shoes to match *her* gown, too. Fifteen minutes sounds about right. Yes, I’ll tell Lucy you’ll be in front of the house, at the curb. Please say hello to your mom for me and tell her I’d be happy to chair her book club. Or her garden club. Or anything else she’d like me to chair.”

As she hung up the phone, Mom shouted, “Rocky! Pick up Jean Anne and her date ...” Mom raised an eyebrow.

“Richard,” Lucy muttered. “They call him Dick.”

“Rocky, pick up Jean Anne and her date, Richard, on your way to the prom. Richard’s car isn’t running. Seems to be a lot of that going around, lately.”

“Okay, Ma, no problem,” Rocky shouted back.

No problem was right, Lucy thought. Rocky had a *thing* for Jean Anne. He had once said she looked “juicy,” like “Olivia Newton John with tits.”

Twenty-five minutes later, as Jean Anne and Dick slid across the back seat of Mom’s ancient Chevy, Rocky said, “Hey, sorry we’re late. I swear, this damn heap won’t go over ten miles an hour.”

He and Dick talked about sports cars and traded dirty jokes while Jean Anne pursed her lips and rolled her eyes. At one point, Jean Anne leaned forward until her face was so close to Lucy's ear that Lucy could smell perfume, pancake makeup, rouge, lipstick, and Clearasil.

"What happened to Steven?" Jean Anne whispered.

"There was an accident on the Interstate and he's stuck behind a twelve-car pileup," Lucy replied. "He's meeting me at the dance," she added with a shrug of her bare shoulders.

If he can make it, and he probably can't, she thought.

The school gym was crudely decorated with condoms as well as balloons, and the prom committee had hired a live band.

"You're on your own," Rocky said, then disappeared into the crowd.

Lucy didn't mind. She was used to being on her own. Recently, she had begun writing books in her head. She planned to attend community college and take education courses, but one day she'd write a thick, sexy novel and become rich and famous ... like Rosemary Rogers or Danielle Steele.

A few boys asked her to dance -- ogling her too-tight bodice as they box-stepped her around the floor -- but mostly Lucy sat in the second row of the bleachers and mentally composed her book. As her imagination took wing, she transformed the gym into a hotel ballroom, the fruit punch into a waterfall of champagne, the cookies and peanuts into colorful pink-and-white petit fours and chocolate-covered almonds, the ham-and-cheese sandwiches into wheels of Brie, the awkward high school kids into professional ballroom dancers.

Her imagination wasn't fine-tuned enough to turn the condoms into -- oh, say, peacock feathers -- so she deleted them from her picturesque scenario.

That left the band. Maybe a small orchestra with someone like Doris Day singing "Once I had a secret love." Or even better, Kenny Rogers singing "You're my *lay-dee*."

Secret love or lady, Lucy didn't care to stand, much less dance. For one thing, her feet were killing her. She had chosen the spiked heels because Steven was six-five and she wanted to cuddle between his chin and shoulder while he piloted her across the dance floor. Too late, she realized she should have worn the shoes around the house until they were broken in. Her dress was killing her, too. The tight bodice made it hard to breathe and her breasts were painfully squashed together and --

"Want to dance?"

Lucy blinked like a rabbit, then focused on Jean Anne's date. Naturally, Jean Anne had chosen one of the most popular boys in school -- the football team's quarterback and president of the senior class. However, in Lucy's opinion, Dick was an asshole. She knew for a fact that he kept a tally of the girls he'd laid, and his metal locker door boasted nineteen pocketknife scratches.

"Well ... do you want to dance or don't you?"

Lucy slid her feet into her shoes, stood, stretched, and said, "Where's Jean Anne?"

Dick shrugged his broad shoulders. "The girls' bathroom is my guess," he said, helping Lucy descend from the bleachers. "She took off in that direction with a couple of girlfriends ... to hold her hair."

"Hold her hair?"

"She looked like she had to puke."

"Oh, my gosh! Is she sick?"

He laughed. "She's drunk as a skunk. Your brother spiked the punch and she's been downing shots ever since we got here. Want some?"

"Punch? No, thanks."

"How 'bout some fresh air?" he asked, staring at her too-tight bodice.

Lucy knew what "fresh air" meant. Even while she perched on the rough, rigid, splintery bleacher bench, even while she wrote her book in her head, she'd seen couples

practically ooze out of the gym. Some returned, hair mussed, lipstick mussed, clothes mussed. Others barely made it to the wide double-doors before they were falling all over themselves, anxious to shed their tuxes and tulle -- like caterpillars in reverse.

Her mind raced as, in her head, she tallied “fresh air” advantages.

One, she had never “messed around” with anyone except Steven.

Two, Dick had nineteen locker-scratches -- which meant he knew what he was doing, right?

Three, she needed more “research” for her sexy novel.

And if she didn’t feel like going all the way, she was fairly certain she could satisfy Dick with a hand-job. Or, in a pinch, a blow-job.

“Fresh air sounds good,” she said.

Outside the building, raggedy-edged shadows exaggerated the evolving orgies, and a few kids were puking up a storm. Her brother had spiked the punch, but Lucy wondered how many other guys had spiked it, too. A cacophony of sincere moans and sick groans sounded like a weird soundtrack for the opening credits of a James Bond movie.

In one dimly lit corner of the school’s “scenic” courtyard, a girl was getting butt-fucked. Not just any girl, either. The homecoming queen. Who, in Lucy’s opinion, was so snooty she’d make the Queen of England curtsy to *her*. Every time Lucy saw her HQ classmate, she pictured high tea -- china teapot, fragile teacups, plump sugar bowl, scones with cream and lemon curd. Funny to see the HQ on all fours, her bare rump tilted like a malfunctioning arcade game, and Lucy wished she had a camera. With a flash.

Taking Lucy by the hand, Dick led her through the parking lot, toward her mom’s car. She knew what would happen once they got there -- the same thing that was happening in half of the other parked cars. Oh, God, what if she didn’t like Dick’s ... technique?

Well, she reasoned, she weighed almost as much as he did. If she didn’t like it, didn’t like him, she’d simply push him away and take a bus home.

She smiled as she envisioned the last scene in *The Graduate*. Katherine Ross and Dustin Hoffman -- Elaine and Benjamin -- sitting in a bus, Elaine in her white wedding gown...

Lucy in her pink prom dress!

A few car radios were playing -- everything from Eddie Rabbitt's "I Love a Rainy Night" to Juice Newton's "Queen of Hearts" -- but mostly Lucy heard the echoes of grunts and whimpers. Windows were open in a futile effort to escape the sultry, nighttime heat.

Despite the smokescreen from countless cigarettes, the sky looked cleansed, luminous. Stars shone brightly enough to reveal constellations, and the quarter-moon smiled sideways.

"Hurry," Dick urged. Then, "Oh, shit!"

"What's the matter?"

He pointed at her mother's Chevy. The windows were all rolled down. Rocky sprawled on the back seat. His tux waistband was unfastened, his fly unzipped, and his hand moved up and down like a bicycle pump. As Lucy watched, his expression turned to one of anticipatory pleasure.

Next to him sat Jean Anne, if you could call it sitting. Her bodice gaped open and her skirt was bunched up about her waist. Her pantyhose had been draped over the back of the front seat, like taupe snakes that had shed their skins, and her black panty girdle was down about her ankles.

Shoulders hunched, head bent, she puked through her veil of hair, into her panty girdle.

As Lucy watched, mesmerized, Jean Anne's perfect, perky, platinum pageboy soon became encrusted with boozy phlegm and bits of undigested vegetables.

Rocky began to breathe in short gasps.

Jean Anne raised her head and took a couple of deep, raspy breaths. Very briefly her gaze met Lucy's, just before she lowered her head and vomited into her panty girdle again.

I really will have to take a bus home, Lucy thought.

Wrinkling her nose, turning away in disgust, she said, "Let's go back to the dance."

"No!" Dick snarled.

He reached out, encircled her wrist with a callused hand, and pulled her toward a chain-link fence. Behind the fence was a wooded area that, during school hours, was off limits. But Lucy knew, as did the whole school, that kids used "The Woods" to smoke their pot and, in a few diehard cases, snort nose candy.

Someone with wire-cutters had left a jagged gap in the fence.

"Dick, wait," Lucy cried, snagging her gown on the serrated metal. To her dismay, the fence bit off a goodly portion of her pink tulle overskirt. "Dick, please, I want to go back to the gym. I'm not in the mood for 'fresh air' anymore."

"My date's whoring around with your brother," Dick said between clenched teeth, "so it's only fair that I fuck his date."

"I'm not his date, you moronic bozo. If you've got a problem with Rocky --"

"Shut up, you fat cow!"

As Dick pushed her up against a solid tree trunk, Lucy lost all hope of overpowering him, all hope of escape. Football season had ended five months ago, but he still retained some of the strength he'd amassed by working out with the team. Especially in his ape-like shoulders and arms.

"Rocky will kill you for this," she said as Dick grasped her too-tight bodice and easily tore it along its seam, down to her waist.

"Not when I offer to back up his story that it was you who smelled up your mom's car," Dick replied with a sneer. "I don't think your mom would like the idea of Rocky spiking the punch and getting Jean Anne drunk enough to puke her guts out. It might just spoil your mom's chances to chair the book club or garden club. Jean Anne was laughing about that, after she hung up the --"

"You bastard!"

“Who you calling a bastard, you cock-sucking whore? I heard all about you and Jean Anne’s brother.”

“That wasn’t me, you fuckwit. That was --”

“Are you calling me a liar, bitch?” He slapped her across one side of her face, then backhanded her across the other.

Through the ringing in her ears, she heard a new, very angry voice say, “Leave her alone, you dickhead, or I’ll break your arms as well as your face.”

Steven!

As Dick took a couple of steps away from the tree, he said, “Who the fuck are you?”

“Lucy’s boyfriend,” Steven said.

Despite the dull clamor that continued to scramble her brains, she cataloged the word “boyfriend” rather than “date,” and a warm glow spread throughout her body.

Dick cringed, and Lucy didn’t blame him. He might be a stocky quarterback -- *and president of the senior class, don’t forget president of the senior class* -- but he was no match for a six-five, muscle-bound -- *and pissed off, don’t forget pissed off* -- basketball star.

He was no match for the basketball star’s 165-pound “girlfriend,” either. Lashing out with her fist, Lucy had the satisfaction of knowing that Dick would never breathe normally through his left nostril again.

She thought Steven might be mad in a “me man, you woman, me fight, you cheer from the sidelines” kind of way, but he laughed and said, “Good for you, tiger.”

Dick managed to haul himself to his feet. Blood streamed from his nose as he raced toward the fence.

“Are you all right, Lucy?” Steven opened his arms wide.

He wore a charcoal gray suit and a white shirt, no tie, and she almost laughed when she saw his boat-sized basketball sneakers.

“Uh-huh,” she managed, burrowing against the front of his shirt. He stroked her back and she gave a contented little sigh, just before she said, “What are you doing here?”

“We had a date for the prom,” he replied, his voice soft.

“Last I heard, you were stuck behind a bazillion fender-benders.”

“Once the cops had cleared the highway, I sped like a bat out of hell, straight to your house. I figured the least I could do was take you out for dinner. I had barely raised my hand to knock --”

“When my mom opened the door. She likes to watch the street, don’t ask me why. Maybe she expects my father to rise from his grave and walk toward the house, like one of those *Night of the Living Dead* actors.”

“Your mother gave me explicit directions to the school parking lot and made me repeat them twice. She told me exactly what you’d be wearing. She has a good eye for detail.”

“Yeah.” Lucy looked up at Steven’s face. “Woe to the man stupid enough to rob my mom. If he wore a ski mask, she’d tell the cops what color his eyes were and how many eyelashes he had. She’d also describe the color of his teeth and what his breath smelled like. If he smoked, she’d know the name of his favorite brand.”

Steven responded with his Robert Redford grin. “I parked and was about to go into the gym,” he continued, “when I spied your friend Jean Anne, looking sick as a dog --”

“The last time I saw her, she was sitting on the back seat of my mom’s car and barfing into her panty girdle.”

“Last I saw, she was projectile vomiting all over somebody’s tux.”

“Oh, my God! My father’s tux.”

“I thought your father was dead.”

“He is. Rocky wore my dad’s tux to ‘escort’ me to the dance, but my mom has kept it for years. Well preserved, you might say. She, uh, treasures it.”

“Not anymore. Trust me, honey, no dry cleaner will be able to remove those stains. I don’t know what your friend Jean Anne ate for dinner --”

“All she ever eats is raw broccoli, celery, and tomatoes. And watermelon.”

“Before she began spewing, she screamed something about seeing your face at the car window, along with somebody’s dick.”

“The car window was rolled down,” Lucy said dryly. “And Dick is the name of the fuckwit who tried to rape me.”

“She also yelled something about you stealing her date.”

“Really! She must have still been totally bombed, otherwise she’d never admit it.”

“Another girl said she saw you head for the woods. Then I caught a glimpse of this.” Steven reached into his pocket and retrieved a swatch of pink tulle. “I had a gut feeling ...” He shrugged. “Are you sure you’re okay?”

“I’ll probably have a swollen face when I wake up tomorrow morning, but right now I feel great. All I want to do is stretch out on the back seat of your car and --”

“No.”

“No?”

“We’ll save that for tomorrow. Right now I want to dance with you.”

She tilted her head. “You promised my mom you’d be seen with me, right?”

“Yes, but that’s not why I want to dance with you. I want to hold you close, very close. You always smell so good, Lucy. Not fake. Real. You have your own unique body mist. It’s a soapy scent, a bubble-bath aura. Any girl can drench herself with perfume, that’s easy, but to smell like new-mown grass and flowers and ... have you ever buried your face in a kitten’s fur?”

“Yes. No. I don’t know,” she said, basking in his praise and wondering how, exactly, a kitten smelled.

With its nose, she thought, suppressing the urge to giggle. Delayed reaction, she supposed, even though Steven had de-laid Dick.

“Every time I picture your beautiful face and body,” Steven continued, “during classes, studying for exams, and especially when I fall sleep, I hear Frank Sinatra’s ‘Fly Me To The Moon.’ That must mean something, don’t you think? So, to make a long story short, I want to dance with you. I want to kiss you behind the ears and sniff your hair and --”

“My hair! Oh, God!” She reached up to pat the tangled strands, a bird’s nest of twiggy ringlets and frizzy wisps. Not to mention a broken butterfly barrette. For some dumb reason, the ruined barrette finally released the flood gates, and Lucy began to cry.

Steven pressed her tear-stained face against his shirt again. “Shhhh,” he said. “It’s okay. Don’t cry. I’m here now. And just for the record, I like your hair better when it’s down.”

“We can’t dance,” she sobbed into his shirt buttons. “My dress is torn. And if you say you have a sewing kit in your pocket,” she added with a sniffle, “I’ll send you back to my mother.”

“Is that what you’re crying about? A little thing like a ripped prom dress?”

“It’s not ripped, Steven. It’s shredded beyond repair.”

Holding her away from him at arm’s length, he stared into her tear-drenched eyes, just before his gaze traveled down to her exposed bosom.

“Hmmm,” he said, “I see what you mean. Well, hell, Lucy-girl, I don’t want other guys eyeballing your beautiful breasts, so we’ll have to do something about that. Do you ever plan to wear this dress again?”

She shuddered. “No.”

Unfastening her butterfly pin, he thrust it into his breast pocket.

He took off her pink gown and tossed it behind some foliage, leaving her clad in panties, garter belt, sheer stockings, and a white half-slip.

Next, he shrugged off his suit jacket and poked her arms through its sleeves.

Fishing the butterfly pin from the jacket's pocket, he attached it to a lapel.

Then he buttoned the jacket, which fell to the top of her knees, just below her half-slip.

Taking a couple of steps backwards, he stroked his chin. "Yes," he breathed. "You look delicious, even with your eyes all bruised from crying."

"I look like Dopey Dwarf." She extended her arms.

"That's easily solved, honey. All we have to do is roll up the sleeves. And the silk lining makes your outfit more ... formal. Yes, you'll do nicely. I'm one hell of a lucky guy."

Looking down, she saw that her cleavage rose from the vee of his lapels -- elegant rather than slutty. The jacket nipped her waist a tad and hid her chunky hips.

Then she saw her shoes, her damnfool, freaking pink shoes.

Steven followed her gaze. Trying to read her mind, he said, "You don't like pink with charcoal gray?"

"No. It's not that." Tears blurred her eyes once again. "I wore three-inch heels so I could look at something other than your belt buckle, and my feet are killing me."

To her surprise, he scooped her up into his arms. "No problem, Dopey Dwarf," he said, his voice tender.

"You plan to carry me all the way back to the parking lot? And the gym?"

"I might let you strut into the gym, honey. You look spectacular and you should make an entrance. But, basically, yes. If you sling your arm around my shoulder, behind my neck, your weight shifts and you're much easier to carry. That's what professional dancers do."

She flung her arm around his shoulder and snuggled her head against his neck, beneath his unshaven chin. Obviously, he hadn't taken the time to shave before he pursued her. Silently, she repeated the thought: *pursued her*. She liked his unshaven face. It gave him a rakish look and she had a feeling that "look" would become very popular within a few years.

Steven carried her through the parking lot. He stopped, briefly, to retrieve a red rosebud wrist corsage from his car. Then he carried her through the courtyard, but put her down when they reached the corridor that led to the double-doors of the gym. They strolled past the showcases that housed the school's athletic trophies, and Lucy kept catching glimpses of herself in the glass. At first she couldn't believe it. She looked ... *spiffy* was the first word that came to mind. As if she'd chosen to wear something daringly different to the Academy Awards. She could see herself traveling the length of the red carpet, could hear herself saying, "My outfit is by Steven, *couturier* to the stars. He designs clothes for Cher, you know."

They entered the gym, and by the time Lucy had made it halfway 'round the dance floor, she had three invites to three post-prom parties. Even Ronnie, whom Lucy had heard was the nineteenth scratch on Dick's locker ... even Ronnie said Lucy looked "way cool." Ronnie's pimples had cleared up, which gave credence to the old wives' tale about sex and acne.

The band segued into "Good Night Ladies," traditionally the last song of the dance.

Steven swept Lucy into his arms.

Good night, ladies ...

As they glided across the floor, he said, "Do you want to go to one of the parties, honey?"

Good night, ladies ...

"No, thanks," she replied. "I have other plans."

Good night, lay-dees ...

"Do your plans include me?" he asked, his voice a soft tease.

"Oh, yes," she said, her panties already dampening at the thought.

The band continued playing and the lead singer continued singing, even though he looked bored to death, as if he'd much rather be singing Bob Dylan's "Lay Lady Lay."

At the Mall

“Can I help you?”

The shrill voice startles Lucy. Immersed in her memories, she’s inadvertently wandered back to the 60%-off rack situated in front of the Perfect Petites clothing store. A salesgirl in a very short, black jersey dress slumps against an entrance column, her purple lipstick a slash in her milk-white face, the crotch of her underpants visible. Her expression implies that she knows her crotch is visible but couldn’t care less. Her name tag reads DEBBIE.

“Can I help you?” she repeats.

“I used to wear skirts like this in college,” Lucy says, pointing to a plaid, pleated skirt with fringe.

“Right,” Debbie says, and Lucy hears: *So what?*

She answers the so-what. “I teach high school now, and I need an outfit, maybe even two outfits, for --”

“You’ve got to be kidding.”

“Excuse me?”

“Look, lady ...” Debbie pauses to yawn and Lucy sees a tongue ring. “The department store is that way.” Debbie points. “The food court’s even closer.” Her voice is scornful, keen as a well-honed, razor-sharp knife.

Lucy ignores the implication. “I don’t have a coupon for the department store,” she says, “but I do for your store.”

“We have nothing that’ll fit you.”

“That’s a crock. I see necklaces and scarves and --”

“I meant clothes. You said you needed a new outfit.”

“This’ll do nicely.” Grabbing a wrap-around skirt, Lucy marches into the store. She glares at the second salesgirl -- *don’t you dare say anything, bitch!* -- and enters a dressing room no larger than a closet, perfect for a size zero.

The dressing room has a full-length mirror, impossible to ignore, and one armless chair.

An unbidden remembrance comes to mind.

Steven, pulling her with him as he sits in a chair exactly like this one, the hard bulge in his pants jutting between her thighs ...

His hands warm and possessive on her breasts, massaging them in time to the surging rhythm of his hips ...

The delightful ache between her legs ...

Her lower body crushed against his unyielding protrusion ...

Her head on his shoulder, his inflexible jaw against her cheek ...

The faint fragrance of his aroused masculinity ...

With a shake of her head, Lucy brings herself back to the present. Bumping her elbows against the fake wood paneling, she wraps the skirt around her hips. Its waistband gapes like a drape stuck in the middle of its rod.

When she exits the dressing room, she sees Debbie slouched against a glass display case.

I bet I've been laid by more men than you, Lucy thinks.

"Show me what you have in scarves," she says.

At the Movies - 1985

Lucy had chosen her most flattering ensemble to wear. Rocky would have said she was “all duded up.” Wanting to show off her slim ... make that *slimmer* body, she wore a red tank top, tucked into a white wrap-around skirt.

As she tightened then retied the scarf at her waist, the strip mall’s hidden loudspeakers crooned “Sweet Dreams Are Made of This.”

The scarf, dusky rose in color, was silky soft and a birthday present from Steven. After giving her the scarf and listening to her squeal of delight, Steven had run the luxurious material across her exposed breasts before loosely knotting it around her neck. She had been so ready to come, had, in point of fact, begun to experience the spasms that would lead to her first climax, but he said, “Not yet, honey. How about climbing on top of me?”

Clothed in nothing more than the delicate scarf, she had complied.

Squeezing her eyes shut, Lucy wallowed in the memory.

As Steven wriggled his hand between his lower belly and her already-damp pussy, she felt the ends of her birthday scarf tease her nipples. Then Steven furrowed her labia with his index finger, as if searching for a moist, edible delight. He found her bud -- what he teasingly

called her "button." With a wicked grin, he allowed her to writhe a bit, then a bit more, until she began to sing her litany, an almost unintelligible chant.

"OhPleaseSteven, ohGodSteven, I'mComingSteven ..."

Quivering like an aspen in the wind, on the verge of orgasm, she felt him remove his finger. It traveled lower, then back to her button, then lower, until -- finally! -- he pressed her button firmly, as if ringing a doorbell. Biting her lower lip, she leaned backwards until her head nearly touched his knees.

"Ah," he said, "you like that."

She didn't bother to reply. He knew she did. But it would be even more satisfying to feel his pure, molten, fleshy tissue sink into her.

As if she were doing sit-ups, she managed to lift her upper body. Then she raised her bottom up. Easing herself onto his pulsating head, she pushed down until she felt his cock sink into her moist entrance. Slowly savoring the rapture, she absorbed the entire length of him, and as her vagina wrapped tightly around his cock, she felt as if some great creature was expanding inside her, unwrapping her in a way she'd never experienced before, not even during her sensual initiation at the pool club. She gave a feral moan, barely conscious of anything but his throbbing cock and the wondrous gratification it brought her.

Head thrown back, her cloud of tangled red hair brushed to-and-fro against her shoulders, her neck, the dusky-rose scarf, and ...

With a start, Lucy shook herself free of the memory and opened her eyes.

Staring at her hazy reflection in the jewelry store's window, she wondered for the umpteenth time why Steven had asked her to meet him here. Could he be contemplating the purchase of an engagement ring? Sexual encounters aside, there was no doubt in her mind that he loved her. Or that she loved him with all her heart. They were so good together, like peanut butter and jelly, bagels and cream cheese, Paul Newman and Joanne Woodward. Steven called her every night and they'd talk about anything -- no subject was too

outrageous or too trivial -- and sometimes they'd have phone sex. Steven's sexy voice would guide her hands and fingers until she was wet with her own juices. Then it would be her turn and, more often than not, her gasps of gratification would harmonize with his heavy breathing, until their two voices blended into one hymn of deliverance.

However, she hadn't set eyes on Steven in three months -- three months and five days, but who's counting? During that time, she had joined Weight Winners, a diet club, and lost thirty-five pounds.

She heard a whistle, a wolf whistle.

Across from the jewelry store was a movie theater. Three teenage boys slouched against the wall, not far from the boxed-and-glassed-in posters for *Rocky IV* and *The Color Purple*.

Gee, I wonder which movie they plan to see, Lucy thought with a smile.

One of the boys whistled again. "Hey, c'mere and sit on my face," he yelled.

Lucy looked around before she realized he meant her.

"Yeah, you," he said.

She blushed at the thought. And the compliment.

An old lady said, "Disgusting!"

Lucy tried not to laugh. At the same time, she watched Steven round the corner.

He saw her and grinned. As his gaze traveled to the scarf she'd wound round her waist, he saluted her. His tawny hair had been razor-cut by a professional stylist and was very short, but that only emphasized his aesthetic cheekbones, his Robert Redford lips, and his cobalt-blue eyes. He wore a black t-shirt under a dark gray sports jacket; faded Levi's accentuated his flat stomach and lean hips.

He was so drop-dead gorgeous, Lucy felt her heart skip a beat.

As he drew closer, he stared at her new, svelte figure. "What happened to my Dopey Dwarf?" he asked, his voice tender.

"I think she underwent a sex change operation and she's now Happy Dwarf."

"I've got news for you, honey. Dopey Dwarf and Happy Dwarf are both guy dwarfs, although enquiring minds want to know" -- he lowered his voice -- "about Bashful Dwarf."

"Bashful Dwarf ... gay? Surely you jest."

"Shhhh, it's a secret. He isn't out of the closet yet. However, if Snow White dyed her hair red, you could pose for a Disney sequel."

"Thank you, kind sir, but by now Snow White's hair is ... snow white. She hooked up with Prince Charming in 1947. Assuming she was twenty-one, that makes her ... fifty-nine."

"Maybe she was only sixteen when she fucked Charming." Steven grinned again, and Lucy felt her cheeks bake as she recalled a *hot* day inside an exclusive pool club's break room.

Circling her waist, Steven escorted her into the jewelry store. Without hesitation, he led her over to a glass counter and gave the clerk his name. The clerk hunkered down and reached beneath the counter. Rising, he handed Steven a small white box.

"Happy anniversary," Steven said, wrapping Lucy's fingers around the box.

"Anniversary? Oh, my gosh, it's the anniversary of the day we first met. How could you possibly remember that?"

"Easy. It's also the anniversary of the day Bjorn Borg won Wimbledon."

"Oh, you." She gave him a joyous, goofy grin as she poked him in the ribs with her elbow.

Then she opened the box.

Nestled in white cotton was a heart-shaped necklace with a small, perfect garnet.

"Read the inscription," Steven urged.

She fished the necklace from the box and turned it over. On the back of the heart, engraved in teensy letters, it said:

To Lucy

Who flies me to the Moon

Love, Steven

"Thank you, it's lovely," she whispered, very close to happy tears. Then, louder, "I'll wear it forever, Steven. I *promise* I'll never take it off."

"First you have to put it on," he said with a laugh. "Here, let me."

She shivered with delight as his warm fingers attached the clasp. She loved his hands.

"Now," he said, "for your second anniversary present." He gave her a courtly bow. "Please follow me."

She trailed him out of the store and almost slammed into his back when he stopped in front of a movie poster -- *Out of Africa*, starring Meryl Streep.

And ... Robert Redford!

"This just opened today," Steven said with an evil grin, "but the reviews have been good."

"Oooh, you're bad," she told him. "I read somewhere that they offered the female lead to Audrey Hepburn. Too bad she turned it down. I can lose five pounds just by watching her strut across the screen."

"You don't have to lose any more weight, honey. You look fine."

Steven bought their tickets. Then she hit the restroom while he waited in line at the candy counter.

When she emerged from the restroom, she saw the boy who, earlier, had whistled. He and his two companions were in front of the double-doors that led to *Rocky IV*. Upon spying her, the whistler did a Michael Jackson with his crotch and arched his eyebrows.

She shook her head no, blew him a kiss, and joined Steven, who carried a small box of popcorn. They walked through the doors that led to *Out of Africa*. As he seated her in the last row, he said, "This okay?"

She wondered why they didn't sit closer to the screen, but she merely nodded.

After "coming attractions" for *The Color Purple* and *Back to the Future*, the movie began. Steven didn't eat any of the popcorn, nor did he offer her any.

Meryl Streep, as Karen Blixen, was reading from A.E. Housman's "To an Athlete Dying Young," when Steven suddenly jerked his hand.

"Damn," he said in a stage whisper, "I spilled the popcorn."

On his knees, he made a show of scooping the popcorn up, into its box.

"Steven, leave it on the floor," Lucy said. "You're missing the movie." Then she couldn't say anything else because his head was between her thighs, underneath her skirt, and now she understood why he had suggested she leave her panties at home.

Slouched in her seat, she spread her legs as far as they'd go. She felt his tongue first, a nanosecond before his lips closed around her clit. Lions roared -- imported from California, she'd heard, since Africa wouldn't allow *their* lions to be filmed -- and while Redford's blue-blue eyes and lazy smile filled the screen, Steven sucked her to a climax.

Prim and proper and upright in her seat again, she watched him rise, sit down, and lean back against his seat, as if nothing extraordinary had just taken place.

"That was your third anniversary present," he murmured.

"But we've known each other five years," she teased, fingering her beautiful necklace.

Even in the hazy darkness of the theatre, she could see Steven grin. Dropping to his knees again, he whispered, "Three down, two to go."

After the movie, he took her out for coffee and dessert, only she didn't order dessert, because she wanted to lose at least ten more pounds.

Three months later, seated in the same coffee shop, she nibbled a house salad, no dressing, and read *Lonesome Dove*, a new book by Larry McMurtry. In her purse was a letter from Steven. She hadn't opened it at home because, for some dumb reason, she felt the same way she'd felt on prom night, just before Steven phoned and said he was stuck behind a dozen fender benders.

She chided herself for being fanciful. With a shake of her head, she carefully placed her book and fork next to her half-full salad bowl. Then she retrieved the envelope from her purse, slit open its flap with her butter knife, and drew out a single piece of paper.

Steven wrote that he'd "messed around" with another woman, the daughter of his boss, during a get-acquainted party at his brokerage firm. It hadn't meant anything, they had both been smashed, but the woman was pregnant and she swore it was his child. He had offered to pay for whatever she decided to do, but she wanted marriage -- nothing more, nothing less. His own parents had divorced when he was five, he wrote, and he didn't want his son or daughter to feel the same sense of loss. A kid needed a father. He was the worst kind of bastard, he said, and he was telling Lucy all this because she deserved a man who was worthy of her.

Fuck you, Steven, she thought, and almost laughed at her turn of phrase.

Then she summoned a waiter.

"Take this rabbit food away," Lucy told him, pointing to her half-empty salad bowl. In a voice that didn't quaver, waver, or betray any kind of emotion, she added, "I'd like a double cheeseburger with extra fries, please. For dessert, I'll have a slice of chocolate *layer* cake."

At the Mall

Lucy's Goofy watch says ten o'clock. Soon the mall will close, but Lucy doesn't want to leave. Despite the nasty incident at Perfect Petites, the mall seems magical now. She has stroked the sensual silk of harem pants, rubbed a cashmere sweater against her cheek, fondled velveteen teddy bears, even visited a caged cat who reminds her of Butterscotch before the slits of his eyes crusted and became dimmed by age. Best of all, she has returned to the men's store window and exchanged sultry stares with the James Dean mannequin. She's always loved the ill-fated actor. In the good old days, when the world was young, she and Rocky would stick a tape in the VCR and watch *Rebel Without a Cause*. Rocky would recite "Jim's" dialogue while, in her head, she saw herself as Natalie Wood.

Off guard, pinched by memories, Lucy feels drained. She really should drive straight home, except Memorial Park isn't all that far from the mall, and the Fourth of July concert should be ending soon, and maybe, just maybe, she can catch the fireworks display. The park sounds much better than her hollow apartment.

First, she'd better pee. She can't imagine anything worse than the park's Port-a-Potty, which, in her opinion, is nothing more than a human litter box.

Halfway down a dimly lit hallway is the ladies' room. Graffiti mars its stalls and there's no toilet paper, but "pragmatic" Lucy always carries a packet of tissues in her purse. Washing her hands, she ignores the mirror above the sinks. Against the wall, next to an empty paper towel dispenser, is a chair. It looks uncomfortable, but Lucy's feet hurt, and she sits down to rest her feet ... to rest her eyes ...

She awakens with a start. A certainty in her gut tells her that something is horribly wrong. In the brutal glow from the fluorescent light above the mirror, her watch reads 12:00. *Oh! My! God!* Snatching up her pink plastic Perfect Petites bag, she runs to the door and tugs it open.

Eerie silence greets her. She tells herself not to panic. Might as well tell herself to sit in the corner and *not* think about a white bear.

She presses her hand against her chest to stop what she knows must be a heart attack. Oh, God, she doesn't want to be found tomorrow morning, dead as a doornail, clothed like an American flag. Her heartbeat slows. She's panicking for no good reason. Surely there's an exit, unlocked. If there isn't, she has money in her purse and she can call ... shit! Where the hell is her purse?

Re-entering the ladies' room, she checks the stalls, then the chair and under the sinks, even the trash can, filled with crumpled brown paper towels and tampon wrappers. She doesn't care about the six or seven dollars inside her wallet, or the credit card that's near-as-dammit maxed out, but she'll have to get a new driver's license and ... shit, shit, shit! The keys to her apartment! Her car keys! The fucking store coupons!

Lucy begins to laugh. She's worried about discount coupons when she's locked inside an empty mall?

Outside the restroom again, she says, "Hello?" Even to her own ears, it sounds like the squeak of a frightened mouse.

Why is she standing in a dimly lit hallway when she can stand under the domed ceiling and scream her head off? Malls hired security guards, didn't they? Sure they did, especially in movies, where the guards were always bumbling idiots and ... *dogs!*

What if this mall had guard dogs? Dobermans who would tear her throat out and ... she hears whistling. Oh, thank God!

A man stops at the entrance to the hallway and, still whistling, beckons. The tune he whistles sounds familiar, as well it should. It's "Lucy In The Sky With Diamonds," her favorite song. And the man is ... the man looks like ...

James Dean.

"Her" James Dean. The same James Dean who graced the men's shop window. Only now he's wearing blue jeans and a white t-shirt, rather than slacks and sweater.

As Lucy nears his puckered lips, she can see that the crotch of his jeans is well defined. Either he has an erection or he put a pair of rolled-up socks in his pants.

He stops whistling and says, "Hi, darlin'. I was hoping you'd stay."

His voice is warm, syrupy, and he called her darling. She has never been called darling before, not even by the men who screwed her, not even by Steven, who always called her "honey."

Hell, if this James Dean look-alike was Jack the Ripper -- and for all she knew, he *could* be a serial killer -- she'd still walk, mesmerized, toward that bulge in his jeans.

And she does.

When she gets close enough, she fondles the bulge. Just reaches out, bold as brass, and caresses it. Slowly. Thoroughly. Fondly. As long as she's dreaming -- and she *must* be dreaming -- she might as well indulge herself.

With a lazy smile, he throws his head back. Incredibly, under her fingers, the bulge grows larger until it fills her hand. She has the image of a nozzle filling a gas tank, and she wants to play gas tank. In her head she hears the theme from *The Twilight Zone*, and a

Serling voice, a *sterling* Serling voice, says, "Travel not through a dimension of sight and sound, but of mind."

Works for me, she thinks. *Thanks, Rod. If you arranged this tête-à-tête, I'll be eternally grateful.*

"I'm Lucy," she says, dropping her hand to her side. "What's your name?"

"You know my name."

Of course she does. Just as she knows that, against all logic, he's standing there. In front of her. She wants to pinch herself. Instead, she reaches out and strokes his forearm. Then his face. His flesh is warm. Vibrant. And alive.

Just to test him, perhaps to test herself, she says, "Do you like to be called James? Or Jim?"

"Jim," he says with a smile. "Follow me, Lucy."

As she trails him past Perfect Petites and the pet shop with the orange Butterscotch cat, her mouth feels dry. If honest, she has to admit she's scared out of her wits. But she also has to admit she's ... hungry. Not hungry for food. Hungry for Jim.

He stops so abruptly, she almost plows into him. She follows his gaze and sees the barest outline of a door, cut into the wall. There's no knob, but he presses his hands against the wall and the door opens.

She hangs back, undecided, until he circles her shoulders with his arm. She can feel his tense muscles as he leads her down a corridor. Here, the shops are still open. Through the plate-glass window of a furniture store, she can see a sign that reads MOONLIGHT MADNESS SALE – ORTHOPEDIC MATTRESSES 50% OFF. Several nude people test mattresses. One man's head is hidden between a woman's legs, but most couples are in the missionary position. Lucy isn't impressed; despite her indulgence with X-rated videos, she doesn't think much of sex as a group activity.

Next to the furniture store is a Radio Shack, and Lucy catches a glimpse of a salesclerk who looks like Albert Einstein.

An old-fashioned diner throbs with activity. Its jukebox blares "Little White Cloud That Cried," and people dance slowly, sensuously. Everyone is nude and several couples are fucking like rabbits, atop booths draped with red-and-white-checkered tablecloths.

A huge book display blocks the Barnes & Noble interior, along with a poster that touts a 3:00 a.m. booksigning with authors Agatha Christie and Sylvia Plath.

Before Lucy can assimilate what she has just seen, she hears a familiar sound, a blast from the past. She peers through the plate-glass window of a music store. A nude Elvis strums his guitar and gyrates his pelvis and sings "Love Me Tender." His face trembles with 1956 love-me-tender baby fat. People are rooting themselves stupid, egged on by his soulful voice. A few women stare at his gyrating hips and masturbate.

Lucy shakes her head in disbelief. Unless she's truly stepped into some sort of libidinous twilight zone, she's hallucinating. Or else she's still asleep, dreaming.

"Are you ready, Lucy?" Jim stops in front of a boutique that looks as if it could be air-lifted to Rodeo Drive.

Ready for what? she thinks. But she nods and follows him inside.

Oh! My! God! She has never seen so many beautiful clothes. In fact, one could select any of a dozen gowns and wear it to the Academy Awards. No fornicating shoppers populate this store, thank goodness. Next to the check-out counter stands a salesclerk who looks like Versace, and Lucy brings to mind the newspaper photos that followed the famous designer's death.

If she knows nothing else, Lucy knows that designer fashions are flaunted by pencil-thin runway models and bought by anorexic celebrities. So why would Jim bring her here? A cruel joke?

"Walk around the store, darlin'," he says, "and see if anything catches your fancy."

She opens her mouth to object, to tell him there's no discernable plus-size rack, but he's already joined the Versace look-alike. As she watches, Jim points to her and "Versace" circles his thumb and finger in the classic "okay" sign.

On his way back to her, Jim spies something that catches *his* fancy. He smiles his James Dean smile; a smile that's shy and provocative at the same time. Carefully, he extracts a dress from its rack. He loops a quilted hanger over his finger and holds up the dress for her inspection.

It's too short and too small, but Lucy aches to touch the shimmery silver fabric. If she owned a dress like that, she'd hang it on her wall like a piece of art work.

"What do you think?" Jim asks, reaching her side.

"It's beautiful," she says, not sure whether to laugh or cry. "But my purse was stolen and I have no money and, in any case, I couldn't afford it."

"Barter."

"Excuse me?"

"Exchange one commodity for another, Lucy. You've been approved." He gestures toward the Versace clone.

"But I've got nothing to barter with, except for my Goofy watch and this cheap scarf," she says, holding up her pink plastic bag.

Jim stares at her neck.

"Oh, no!" She shakes her head. "No way! Someone I loved very, very much gave me this necklace. Trade my locket for a dress that won't even fit? I don't think so."

"Sometimes you have to make sacrifices, Lucy. Live in the present rather than the past."

"I'm not living," she whispers. "I'm barely existing."

"Well, that's my point."

"I don't know how much my necklace is worth," she says in a last-ditch effort, but it's clear, even to her own ears, that she's weakening.

Jim smiles. "It's worth a lot -- to you. And if you throw in the watch and scarf, the store will accept the exchange."

"You're not planning to add more money, are you?"

He smiles again. Then he hands her the dress and pulls out the linings of his pockets. "Not even a penny to make a wish at a wishing well," he says. "If you could make a wish, Lucy, what would you wish for?"

Images flash through her mind, especially the image of herself as a teen, posing in front of her bedroom mirror. She knows exactly what she'd wish for.

"I guess I'd wish for this beautiful dress," she fibs, unwilling to share her childhood fantasy with the man who has, more often than not, been a subject of her adult fantasies.

Fingering the locket, she whispers, "I promised somebody I'd never take this off, and I've kept that promise for twenty years."

"No problem, Lucy. You don't have to break your promise. *I'll* take it off."

Jim tilts her chin and gives her a kiss that leaves her gasping for breath. Then he unclasps her necklace, pries the watch from her wrist and the pink plastic bag from her hand, and walks over to the counter.

"Done," he says when he returns. "The dress now belongs to you."

"What am I supposed to do with it?"

"Whatever you want to do with it."

"I'd like to wear it, but it won't fit."

"It'll fit, if you want it to."

"Are you being deliberately obtuse?"

"No. Are you?"

She shrugs. "I give up. I'll hang it on the wall in my apartment, where I can see it every day and ... why are you shaking your head?"

"You should be seen *in* it."

"Yeah, right. And we'll soon have peace in the Middle East."

"Have it your way, darlin'. What say we pick up the dress on our way back? Are you ready for the next store?"

"Yes. But I've got nothing left to barter."

"Let's just call it a rest stop," he says, ruffling her hair. "A surprise ... you'll like it."

He leads her farther down the corridor. Halting in front of a shop whose windows are painted black, he sheds his t-shirt.

"Blindfold," he says, holding up the tee. "If that's okay with you."

"I guess so. Sure. Why not?" She stands motionless while he knots the tee at the back of her head. Soon her eyes are effectively blinded by white cotton.

Jim guides her inside. She feels a drop in temperature. She smells grass and damp leaves and earth and rain, as if Tarzan had developed a new room deodorant called "Jungle."

"What kind of store is this?" she asks, still blindfolded.

"A toy store ... sort of," Jim says, unknotting the tee.

Lucy can't believe her eyes. It's as if the Discovery Channel merged with the Disney Channel. Stuffed animals, life-sized, stand in various postures. Giraffes. Monkeys. Elephants. Lions and tigers. Ostriches. *Noah would have a field day*, she thinks.

She remembers the lions in *Out of Africa*. She hears the sensuous splash of a waterfall and wants to stand under it.

"Go ahead," Jim says, reading her mind. With nimble fingers, he undresses her, but she's not fazed. If this is a dream, and it must be a dream, she *wants* to stand naked in this glorious, make-believe rain forest. Naked -- and not alone.

"I think I'll wait until later," she says. "To stand under the waterfall, I mean."

Walking forward, she rubs her breasts against Jim's bare chest. Momentarily, she thinks maybe she's been too bold, but he says, "That's my girl," and leads her by the hand to a secluded glade where a green satin sheet has been spread.

Sinking to her knees, Lucy watches him take off his jeans. He doesn't wear underwear. She remembers her initial hunger, the desire to eat him rather than food, and she reaches for his cock. But he shakes his head and says, "You first."

She isn't sure what he means by that. Should she masturbate? Still kneeling, she dips her hand between her legs and --

"Lie back." Hunkering down, Jim grasps a portion of the sheet and runs the heavy satin across her breasts. She sees him in the mirrored tiles that canopy the ceiling, but she can't see herself. As she begins to moan, he places an ostrich-feather duster in her hand. "Use this on yourself, Lucy. Tickle your fancy."

Once again, she obeys. The feathers are soft, playful, erotic, while the silk against her nipples ... oh ... oh ... She wants to come, is ready to come, but Jim says, "Not yet, Lucy."

He begins to kiss her all over, first on the lips, then moving down her body. He touches her armpits very lightly. She had no idea she's so sensitive there.

And ... something is happening. She can feel it ... actually *feel* herself losing weight. How could that be possible?

No longer stroking her nipples with the satin sheet, Jim tugs at them with his lips until she's nearly crazed with desire.

"Not yet, Lucy," he says.

Again, she has the feeling she's shedding pounds. She hears a sound like a metronome.

Tick. Tick. Tick. Tick.

Her pulse? Her raging passion?

Jim kisses her belly and her inner thighs. He doesn't touch her throbbing pussy. Instead, he continues down her legs, kissing and licking, until he gets to her feet and toes. He begins to suck her toes.

Tick ...

As he runs his tongue up her legs again, he says, "Not yet, Lucy."

Tick. Tick ...

He kisses her around her vagina, now very moist.

Tick. Tick. Tick ...

He kisses her clitoris and puts his tongue inside her pussy as far as it will go.

Tick. Tick. Tick. Tick ...

"Not yet, Lucy!" A demand ... and it needs to be. She is sooooo ready.

She shudders, then shudders again as her spasms build. But before she can climax, he positions himself between her thighs, his hands on both sides. Using his hands as a lever, he lifts and lowers his body. His belly lightly brushes against her belly, and Lucy realizes that her belly has shrunk. Oh! My! God! For the first time in her life, she has jutting hipbones!

Tick ...

Raising himself higher, Jim thrusts into her. At the same time, he says, "Not yet, Lucy."

He thrusts for a few seconds, then withdraws. On his lips, a Cheshire-cat grin.

Tick. Tick ...

Lucy hears herself begging him to enter her again, but he caresses her instead.

Tick. Tick. Tick ...

Then, without warning, he thrusts back into her.

"Now, Lucy!" he shouts, and she climaxes. Again and again and again. To hell with Memorial Park -- the fireworks have come to her!

And then ... time stops. The metronome stops. Breath stops. Everything ... stops.

Except for the soft rush of the waterfall, the room is silent.

When she regains her breath, she breaks that silence, reluctantly.

"Is it my turn, Jim? What do you want me to do? Please tell me. Show me."

And he does. And does. And ...

* * * * *

Through the mall's domed ceiling, moonlight turns to dawn, then early-morning sunshine.

"Thank God for air-conditioning," Debbie says, unlocking the security gate that grids Perfect Petites. "I'm sweating like a pig."

A second girl's nametag reads: PAM. As she enters the shop, she says, "Jeeze, Deb, look at that new mannequin! Where the hell did *she* come from?"

"I don't know, but she's gorgeous. I wish I looked like that."

"My grandmother says to be careful what you wish for during a full moon."

"The full moon was last night. Help me carry this rack."

The girls carry the 60%-off clothing rack outside, then admire the new mannequin.

Her eyes are honey-hued, and her hair swirls like the tail on a fox. In her hands she holds an orange stuffed cat that looks as if it's purring, and she wears a short silver dress, a shimmering garment of moonbeams.

"Except for the red hair, she looks like Natalie Wood." Debbie heaves a deep sigh. "I wish I could wear a dress like that, but it wouldn't fit me."

"Me, either. I wonder why the window designer picked it. I mean, well, maybe once in a blue moon we'll get a customer who'll fit into a size zero, but -- "

"C'mon, Pam, we've got work to do before the mall opens."

* * * * *

Through the lunar month, the shimmer of the moonbeam dress wanes slowly, then waxes again as the full moon approaches. Nobody notices except the flame-haired mannequin and -- perhaps -- the James Dean counterpart across the way.

Debbie has been fired. Trying to lose enough weight to fit into Lucy's dress, she fainted once too often, couldn't be revived, and was carted away by paramedics. Lucy remembers the stir caused by Debbie's faint, the only excitement she's encountered in her dull existence. She knows she wished for this model's pose and that she bartered sex for slenderness, but she preserves her sanity by dreaming about her next date with Jim. She still finds it hard to believe that they were together, that they ... and that they'll be able to do it again ... this very night!

She can see him in the window directly across from her, bathing her in his James Dean smile, touching her, warming her, making her loneliness bearable with daydreams and night dreams. A customer bought his sweater and he now wears a denim shirt, open to the waist.

If she could shiver, she'd shiver.

In less than an hour, the mall will close. In less than an hour, she can strip, take off the silver dress she's worn for a month, and --

Lucy's view of Jim is disrupted when a girl stares through the plate-glass of the Perfect Petites window. She can't be more than twenty-five, but her excessive weight makes her look older. Her face is bloated, as if someone glued a paper doll's face to a flesh-colored balloon. She wears a brightly patterned muumuu, and her blue-violet eyes stare at Lucy with a wistful desire that almost breaks Lucy's heart.

Been there, done that, Lucy thinks.

Dark roots stain the girl's blonde hair. If she let her hair go back to its natural color, she'd bear a striking resemblance to a young Elizabeth Taylor. As the girl makes an about-

face, Lucy can see that someone has pinned a piece of paper to the back of the girl's muumuu. It reads: FREE WILLIE.

Oh, how cruel! Lucy's heart breaks again.

The girl wipes away a forlorn tear, then crosses the corridor and stares into the men's store window. She runs her hands over her body in an unconscious -- or perhaps conscious -- effort to appear provocative.

Lucy watches, her mannequin eyes unable not to stare, as the James Dean smile turns on like a light bulb, sees that flicker in those James Dean eyes. She knows the look ... she's *seen* the look. A month ago, she saw it. And she knows what it means.

Clutching her purse, a purse that Lucy knows will soon be stolen, the young, overweight girl lumbers down the corridor, then turns in to the hallway that leads to the ladies' room.

Lucy forces her glance from that perfidious James Dean smile, looks to the store clock behind her dream-making, dream-breaking, full-moon lothario. Watches the clock tick down to nine-forty-seven. Soon, the mall will close.

If she could cry, she'd cry. If her lips could open, they'd open. If her mannequin's mouth could scream, she'd scream. And scream. And ...

Another face stares up at her. A man's face. He's tall. He has a receding hairline and his thinning strands are gray. He sports an unhealthy pallor. His nose was probably once aquiline, but now it's hooked. He wears bifocals. His shoulders slouch and his chest is concave, until it forms a belly that looks like a half-deflated beach ball. Lucy can't see his ass, but she'd be willing to bet his trousers sag.

"I knew someone once," he says, "who looked like you."

Lucy can't believe he's talking to her, a store mannequin, and she strains to hear his next words.

He laughs ruefully. "She weighed a bit more, of course, and she always thought she was too heavy, but -- oh, my God -- she was beautiful. Trust me, Ms. Mannequin, when I say that my Lucy had the most beautiful eyes. And her breasts ... well, I can't even begin to describe her breasts." He smiles a Robert Redford *The Way We Were* smile, and his smile makes him look ten years younger.

If Lucy had breath, it would catch in her throat.

The man huffs on the store's plate-glass window. Then, with his index finger he makes a heart. Inside the heart he prints S + L.

"I carved that on a tree," he says, "but I never showed it to her. If I had, we would have made love under that tree."

Beneath her immobile mannequin's bosom, Lucy's heart speeds up.

"I bought her a locket," the man continues, "and engraved it with a line from our favorite song ... well, my favorite song."

Fly me to the Moon!

"'Fly me to the Moon,' the Sinatra version. Lucy always liked the Beatles. 'Lucy in the sky with Diamonds' was her favorite song. We broke up because I stupidly slept with another woman. She was the daughter of my boss, and she swore she was pregnant. She wasn't, but by the time I found out, it was too late. I tried to contact Lucy. I spoke to her brother, Rocky. He said Lucy was happy and had moved on. She was dating someone else, he said, and if I ever tried to see her again, I'd be 'spending the Christmas holidays in the hospital, staring at Santa cutouts and shit through the intensive care window.' Quote, unquote. I wasn't afraid of Rocky. But if Lucy was happy, I had no right ..."

The man pauses, shakes his head. "So I tried to make my marriage work, honest to God, I did. Do you want to hear the most ironic thing of all? My wife didn't *want* children. She hated them with a passion. Finally, I asked for a divorce. I thought it might cost me my job,

and I was spot-on. But it also cost me my freedom, *my fucking freedom*, the most precious commodity on earth!”

He takes a few calming breaths. “My father-in-law managed to get me into deep shit with the Trades Commission. I’m still not sure, exactly, how he pulled it off. I swear I was innocent, but that didn’t seem to matter ...” The man pauses again, shakes his head again, adds a sigh. “My parents are dead and I don’t have any family left -- no nephews, no nieces, no cousins. I’ve spent the last few years in prison. I thought I’d be so happy to get out, but I’ve lost contact with everyone I’ve ever known, and I’m lonely, so lonely. Hell, I don’t know why I’m telling you this. Except I would have told her, Lucy, and she would have understood.”

If Lucy could squint, she’d squint. Desperate, she pictures the man as he might have looked in his youth.

She envisions broad shoulders, a flat belly, and lean hips, enhanced by a stretchy bathing suit. She envisions a magnificent chest straining the seams of a white shirt, and a taut ass molded by charcoal-gray slacks, and big feet stuffed into a pair of basketball sneakers. She envisions the man wearing a black t-shirt, tucked into a pair of faded, butt-tight jeans. And she wonders if she’s dreaming, if it’s really, truly possible --

Steven, go to the men’s room! Stay there until after the mall closes! Close your eyes and snooze until midnight. Somebody will steal your wallet and your keys, all your personal belongings, except your watch.

The man looks at his watch.

Steven, turn right at the corner and find the men’s room!

He mumbles under his breath.

Steven, wait for me!

He lumbers down the corridor, heading toward the mall’s moonlit dome.

If he turns left at the next corner, he’ll hit an exit door.

If he turns right at the next corner, the men's room is down the hallway.

If he turns right at the next corner, Lucy will step out of the window -- *her* prison -- on the stroke of midnight.

If he turns right at the next corner, she'll meet him outside the men's room and guide him to the secret entrance that leads to another mall, a magic mall. If he joins her in the magic mall, she'll escort him to the enchanted toy store.

She must remember to tell him to make a wish. She's fairly certain she knows what he'll wish for, but if he doesn't, she's no worse off than she was before.

Lucy will make a new wish, too. She's sick and tired of playing an anorexic mannequin. To hell with a size zero. There's a new store further down the row. She's seen shoppers pass by her window, visit the store, then come back past her window. They carry shopping bags, and Lucy knows, for a fact, that the store sells plus-size clothing for women. They also sell big 'n' tall menswear. If the man of her dreams, the only man she's ever loved, turns right at the next corner, she'll tell him the real meaning behind "moonlight madness sale." And she'll tell him about her new wish and ...

The man stops at the corner and glances over his shoulder.

He can't see her anymore, but ...

Steven, turn right! Steven, wait for me!

He looks down at his watch, looks to the left, then turns right.

 THE END 

Beatrice Brooks

Beatrice Brooks is the pseudonym for a multi-published author who says she likes romantic candlelight dinners, long walks on the beach, classic movies, and hot-air balloon rides...“as long as the balloon never leaves the ground.” Beatrice has submitted every single one of her books to Oprah. None have ever been chosen.

* * * * *

Read on for a tantalizing glimpse of

Truth or Bare

by Sally Apple

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Truth or Bare

The house was quiet when Mel awoke. He pulled on his clothes, thanking his lucky stars he felt as well as he did. He'd battled that nasty flu bug and won. Yeah!

Barefoot, he padded down the hall into the living room. Where was Laura? Maybe out in the backyard or off running errands. Disappointment slowed his pace. He needed to find her and prove to himself that he could match her uncomplicated affection and simple friendship. He might suffer from having a dirty mind, but he could control himself. He had to.

The low mumble of conversation from a distant part of the house led him to a door on the far side of the living room, a door through which he had not yet ventured. Perhaps this was her office, and she was talking on the phone. He hesitated to intrude, and had almost turned away when he distinctly heard a man's voice. There were two people beyond that door!

Curiosity drove him to press his ear against the wood panel, but he couldn't distinguish words. A tingling of apprehension reminded him of the last time he had faced a closed door leading to a horrifying scene right out of his worst nightmare.

Would Laura forgive him for “accidentally” busting in on her? If she had a lover, he wanted to know that now.

His hand closed around the antique brass doorknob. He turned it quietly, dreading what he might see when it swung open.

I'm getting paranoid.

Well-oiled hinges kept his presence a secret for the first few seconds. He moved into the open doorway. His breath caught in his throat as the scene seared itself on his retinas -- a sight his brain desperately wanted to deny.

Laura was sitting in her office chair, watching closely as a well-built stud jerked off in front of her. Mel could scarcely believe his eyes! The man was standing right there with his cock in his hand, his sweat pants bunched at his feet, and so absorbed in his activity, he didn't realize Mel was watching.

Suddenly the man stiffened. "God, oh, God! Fuck!" Semen spurted and splashed on the floor. Some of it hit Laura's legs and dripped down her shins.

"Omigod!" Mel's voice was a strangled whisper.

"Mel!" Laura's startled exclamation caused her companion's head to swing toward the door. The man's expression became thunderous, as though he wouldn't mind twisting Mel into a pretzel. The combined gazes of Laura and her paramour drilled him like hot pokers.

The familiar sensation of being odd man out made him want to cuss a blue streak and punch someone's lights out.

Laura apparently had no problem keeping her composure. "Mel, would you please close the door? Wait for me in the patio, if you don't mind. I'll be out in a minute."

With tremendous self-restraint, he backed out and closed the door. Adrenaline pumped through his bloodstream like acid. More than anything else in the world, he wanted to kick the door down and leap on the half-naked man and pummel him into a bloody pile of bones and meat. It took every ounce of control he could summon to move away from the door like a robot, one step at a time.

As he exited through the back door of the house, his mind tried to break through the barrier of denial and grapple with the stark truth. He sank down on one of the lounge chairs, unaware of his surroundings, all his attention turned inward.

It was crazy! What he'd just seen was almost a re-run of what he'd encountered at Mimi's apartment in Colorado. What kind of a joke was God playing, putting him through this again?

* * * * *

The patio with its high brick walls collected the long rays of the late afternoon sun, growing warmer than the open yard surrounding it. In the top of the walnut tree, a squirrel hopped about dislodging the large pods and causing them to fall and bounce on the concrete like giant hailstones.

Laura closed the sliding glass door behind her and dragged a lounge chair over next to Mel's. She hesitated to break the silence. How would she explain the scene he'd stumbled into? He didn't look up, but kept his gaze bent downward, studying his bare toes. His tousled hair hung over his brow, shielding his eyes from her. An endearing cowlick stuck up on top.

She cleared her throat. "Mel, what you saw was not what it looked like."

He grunted in response, but whether it meant he believed her or not, she couldn't tell.

"You know I'm the resident physician at Willamette U. I also provide a service as a consultant to the athletes who are training for the Olympic team."

He mumbled something that sounded a lot like, "Quite a service."

Doggedly resolved to have her say, she pressed on. "I'm also a laboratory researcher. I'm working on a couple of projects. One of those, which I call the Olympic Project, involves the study of ways to improve the stamina and endurance of athletes. I'm writing a thesis based on disproving the myth that athletes don't perform as well in sports after having sex. Preliminary studies are showing the opposite could be true."

He didn't answer, so she went on. "Before applying for a grant to study this phenomenon further, I have to collect pertinent data. So far, I've had to research it on my own time, using my own resources, but I can't afford to continue this much longer. I'm in the process of submitting an application for a grant. If the funding goes through, I'll be set."

She allowed a few moments of silence to pass, waiting for an acknowledgement. When it didn't seem forthcoming, she heaved a sigh of frustration. "Mel, don't you understand what I'm telling you?"

"I'll tell you what I understand." He lifted his head, but didn't glance at her. Something in the walnut tree seemed more interesting. "I saw you playing with yourself while that Neanderthal doused you with cum juice. If that's scientific research, then I've been in the wrong business all these years. What do you think my chances are of getting funding for flashing my professors and jerking off in their laps? Could I get a Ph.D. that way?"

"Oh, stop it, Mel!" She took a deep breath, struggling with a mixture of guilt, embarrassment and sorrow over having disappointed him. "I know it looked bad. I got a little carried away."

"Do you think?"

"It just happened. I'm not going to blame anyone but myself. Still, I hope you'll keep an objective mind --"

"Objective mind!" Abruptly, he sat up and glared at her. "It looked like he was your lover and you were into some kind of kinky sex."

Her gaze didn't waver from his. "It wasn't that, Mel, believe me. He made me stay there and watch -- said he couldn't get off unless I did. I need the data from those kids to back up my statistics. They're meaningless without it. I'm not saying I'll do *anything* to get it, but today I admit I came damn close. I hope you'll overlook my indiscretion. It won't happen again."

He stared into her eyes as if looking for proof of her honesty. She stared right back at him. She had little to hide and wanted him to realize that.

After a moment, he gave her a weak smile. "Okay. I'll overlook it this time. I have to warn you, though: I may not be able to erase that picture from my mind if I live a thousand years." Grinning wider, he tossed the hair out of his eyes. "Now tell me more about this Olympic Project."

Relief drained the tension from her muscles, and she relaxed. "Since the early Greeks invented competition in sports, legend has it athletes should avoid sex. If the legend is true,

abstinence should give men superior strength and ability. I don't believe it does, so I'm conducting a scientific study to find out whether male athletes actually perform better after sex. I take my work very seriously, Mel, testing and measuring my subjects' vital statistics before and after their ejaculations and after strenuous exercise. I keep stringent records. The head coach at the university is behind me all the way, even to the point of collecting blood samples from the team in the locker room after a game. He thinks the answer I come up with may make a real difference in the performance of the athletes in a variety of sports and competitions.”

“Sounds pretty interesting.” Mel gave her a crooked grin. “What do I have to do to get signed up so I can jack off in your lap?”

She laughed and slapped him on the shoulder. “You're never going to let me live that down, are you?”

“Not in this lifetime. It's too good to let you off easy.”

She blinked, feeling a hint of alarm. “Are you thinking of blackmail?”

“I might be.”

* * * * *

As Mel sat in the sunlit patio spooning cool delicious custard into his mouth, he couldn't stop smiling. He felt as cheerful following his talk with Laura as he had felt depressed before it. His embarrassment stemming from the previous night when he'd shot his wad into Laura's hand had evaporated. He was totally exonerated now. All because he'd witnessed her masturbating through her skirt and sitting still for a jock's cum bath. He guessed he wasn't the only weirdo in this world.

One thing for sure -- she wasn't as innocent as he'd thought. Under that professional veneer, she was a firecracker waiting for a match!

Sally Apple

He'd been kidding when he'd threatened to blackmail her. He knew he could never resort to such foul measures to get his way. Still, the fantasy appealed to him. Not that she would stand for that kind of pressure. But if she did, what would he ask of her? The possibilities brought a bigger grin to his face.

So much for a simple, uncomplicated friendship .

One thing for sure, his new understanding of her casual attitude about sex gave him full permission to pursue her, seduce her and charm the pants off her. All he needed was a clever strategy.

* * * * *

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