

BURN

A NOVEL BY

Paul Slatter

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Book One:

Burn

Chapter One

Padam Bahadur hoisted the blond-haired man's body onto the small boat, covered it in fuel, lit two small fuses, placed his foot on its side, and kicked it hard into the creek's calm water.

Stepping back, he stood in silence, watching the small boat drift slowly through the reflections of the distant city lights streaming across the black water.

The air was warm and still as he walked along the seawall toward the girl's apartment, thinking now about the boat that rested somewhere out there on the creek. He reached her apartment block, stopped a moment and stared at the windows that rose up from the water's edge. Then he hit the button for number four-five-four and waited. Seconds later, she answered, her voice soft and sweet.

He smelled her perfume as she opened the door and watched her long brown hair dance across her back as he followed her along the corridor toward the main room. She was young and sexy and wore a simple black dress and heels as if she'd been about to go out.

Turning to him, she smiled and asked in a Baltic accent Padam couldn't place, "Would you like a drink?"

Shaking his head in answer, he sat down and looked around. She had a nice home—expensive, all white and glass with a million-dollar view that spread out across the water.

She looked at him and asked, "So how has your evening been?"

"Good, thank you," he said deliberately.

It had been very good so far. The blond man had not been a problem. In fact, he'd been much easier than Padam had expected.

"So what would you like to do?" the girl smiled and asked, her voice silky, even smoother in real life.

For a moment, Padam just stared and said nothing, then he said, "I want to look at you. Stand by the window and look out for a moment."

The girl turned and walked slowly to the window, her right hand trailing by her side, gently stroking the furniture as she passed. She looked at him, smiled, then faced the window. Looking out over the lights outside and slowly arching her back, she asked, "What are you going to do to me?"

Gently swaying her behind, she slipped her dress off, one shoulder at a time, until it slid down and pooled on the floor. He stared at her, not saying a word. Her breasts were large and firm, her ass like a peach. Turning her head, she looked at him.

Padam continued to stare for a moment, thinking. Slowly, he drew in a deep breath. As his eyes began to close in resignation to something that had to be done, he said, "I'm going to fuck you."

Considering this, the girl smiled, and her voice, almost a whisper, answered, "Lucky me." She turned back toward the window. In the distance, the boat was now afire, burning brightly in

the darkness and casting a shimmering golden glow across the cold, shadowy water. Without looking back, she said, “There’s a boat on fire out on the water.”

Padam stared at her for a moment as she stood there naked before him. He watched the burning boat on the creek below without a care. The girl no longer swayed but stood still, her naked back long and shapely, her perfect ass framed by delicate little knickers, her beautiful legs long and toned. Then he told her what he’d done.

“It is a funeral pyre.”

Confused, the girl looked back at him, not quite understanding.

As Padam walked toward her, he said it again. “It’s a funeral pyre—your blond boyfriend’s burning out there in that boat.”

The girl looked away from the water and back toward Padam to hear the last words he’d bother to say to her that evening.

“I told you I was going to fuck you.”

Chapter Two

Daltrey stood at the edge of the bank, looking down at the burned boat as the sun began to break in the morning sky. There was an ambulance crew there. They'd done their work. The fire crew had done their work as well. Six cops stood around who'd so far done nothing except for the one who was wet. She knew if she told the other five to get off their asses and pan out, they could at least find where the boat had come from in a matter of an hour, but what was the point...they all hated her.

Daltrey looked around, aware she was being stared at. The rush of blood from her stomach hit her chest, and unable to hold it in, she called over to two cops sitting sidesaddle on their bikes. "Whoever did this fucked off a long time ago," she said, "so if you're waiting for him to come back, he isn't."

The cops looked at her strangely, this chick with a badge who should still be in school. One answered back, "What?"

"The guy in the boat's dead—he's not leaving."

In their eyes, they were here securing the crime scene—she'd been around long enough to know that.

"Now that the sun's up, why don't you walk along the shoreline and see if you can figure out where the boat came from," she said.

The cops looked at her, then along the seawall that ran for miles. In almost all their eyes, she could see the words *go fuck yourself* manifesting, but then one of them, whom she figured she hadn't seen in at least a year, took a deep breath, piped up, pointed back into town, and said, "I've got something I need to chase up."

So that's why you've been hanging around here for an hour doing fuck all, Daltrey thought as she stared at him, knowing she could make him do what she said, or any of them for that matter if she wanted to. But what was the point? Dead wood was dead wood. And besides, there could be a message chalked on the path reading, 'Small boat with dead guy left from here,' and they'd still miss it. So instead, she just said, "Yeah, I understand. It's hard to walk when you've got gout."

Fuck them, she thought. Most had hit on her in one way or another when she first joined the force. They thought she was cute and dumb and wanted to help her on her way, would hate to see her fail. They would say, "Oh, you're so cute" or "You have lovely hair, skin, and lips." And now? They hated her mouth and the cruel words it spat out, words that flowed so freely from between those lovely lips they'd told her she had, those lovely lips they'd tried to kiss and stick their dicks into. Now it snapped back harsh and emasculating words, words that came without fear and hit home, words that cut them down like an unseen Gurkha warrior soldier wielding a razor-sharp sword.

Daltrey walked to the boat and looked at the charred remains of the body for the second time. The young kid who had used his initiative and swam out and pulled it in stood there, now dressed, with his hair wet. Daltrey looked at him. He was strong and fit with light in his eyes.

"What's your name?"

“Williams.”

“Where was he when you found him?”

Williams pointed out into the creek, the tide now turning. In the distance, she could see another boat close by, its stern pulling out to sea from the anchor.

She turned back to Williams and asked, “Where was the tide when you got here?”

Williams didn’t have a clue. He stared at the water, and answered, “It was dark.”

Daltrey looked back to the body, now charred beyond recognition. She pulled out a pencil, and lifted a charred cream-colored man’s shoe from the ashes.

She drove along through the city that was just waking with the shoe in a plastic bag next to her on the passenger seat. As she pulled up to the traffic lights, she looked at it again, lifting it and examining its white pattern and leather soles closely. One shoe was a long shot, but what she already knew from the shoe itself—and from what forensics would tell her by the end of the day—it belonged to a male, late twenties or early thirties, and six foot plus.

The shoe store opened at eight, and by nine, she knew she had a size eleven Mauri “slow mover” in light blue—not cream—retailing at around a thousand bucks a pair and sold in only three shops on Vancouver’s lower mainland. By midday, she had the names of six men who had bought a pair of size elevens in the last year and had spoken to five of them, the last being a Swedish gentleman by the name of Mazzi Hegan.

It was just coming up to twelve thirty, a little over six hours since she’d pulled the shoe from the charred rowboat, and Daltrey was getting hungry. She pulled up outside Mazzi Hegan’s apartment complex and walked up to the door. It was a nice place, plush, with marble columns and a fancy lobby. The building manager looked at her ID and reluctantly let her into Hegan’s apartment on the twentieth floor.

Daltrey moved through the big and airy apartment. A large dark blue sofa ran along the wall. Above it were stylish pictures on an off-white wall—pictures that meant something to someone. Watching her closely, the apartment complex manager spoke up.

“Doesn’t look like he’s here.”

Fuck me state the obvious, you dopey bitch, Daltrey thought as she turned around and looked at the woman who was getting on but still trying to hold it together.

She carried on, ignoring her. She walked into Mazzi Hegan’s bedroom, opening the sliding closet without permission then asking after, “Do you mind if I look?”

The apartment manager took a deep breath. This pushy cop with an attitude was getting on her nerves now. How would she feel if someone had been snooping around her place without permission, and what if Mazzi was to come back right now and catch them? She knew how prissy he could be, with his fancy blond hair, so she said, “Maybe we shouldn’t be here. I can call you if I see him later.”

Daltrey pulled the charred shoe from her bag and said, “Well, if he’s wearing the other one of these, you’ll be seeing a ghost.”

Bright sun lit up the center of Main Street as Daltrey headed south toward the center of town. A wardrobe full of silk suits and alligator skin shoes gave her the impression that Hegan could very well be the man who had burned to death on the boat. It was now 3:30, and she still hadn't eaten. She pulled her car up alongside a deli and got out. After ordering an orange juice with a salad bagel, she sat down at a table by the window and watched the world pass her by. Across the road, a young kid in his twenties sat with his knees up and a 'need money for food' sign written on a piece of cardboard resting against his shins. Daltrey stared at him for a moment, then looked up at a sign positioned right above his head that read 'Help Wanted.'

Fucking idiot, she thought and mouthed it to him slowly as the kid looked back at her through the window, trying to make out her words. Looking back down at her bagel, she thought back to the charred body in the boat. She'd seen worse and crazier things, but wouldn't most people think to jump into the water if they were on fire? She looked back outside to the street kid with his cap out, begging for handouts, the lazy prick. He didn't look sick or mentally ill, and from what she could see, he had good shoes on his feet, though perhaps not the stylish and slick blue Mauri slow movers that her new friend Mazzi Hegan had worn to go boating.

Taking a bite of the bagel, she stared at the kid, who was still holding his cap out and looking up at the passersby like a little puppy. Eventually catching sight of Daltrey again, the kid stared back, his eyes almost tearful. Seemingly starving, homeless, desperate, and in need of love, he held out his cap to her for help. Daltrey looked back, and holding the kid's stare for a moment, she finished chewing and then mouthed back silently, her lips so slow and precise that even Stevie Wonder could get the gist, *Get – a – fucking – job!*

The kid stared at her, still not getting what she was saying.

Fuck me, Daltrey thought. She tried again, this time pointing toward the sign above his head. *Go...Get...A...Fucking...Job!*

Getting it, the kid looked behind him, then back to Daltrey as a stranger passing by dropped some cash into his hat.

It was around four thirty when Daltrey got back into her cubicle in the second-floor office of the Vancouver Police Department on Hastings and Main Street. Sitting at the desk, she turned on her computer and punched in Mazzi Hegan on the keyboard. Top off the line was a website for Slave Media Advertising Agency. She hit the link and opened up a glossy site.

Reach the Top with Slave

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"Wow, don't you guys look fabulous," Daltrey muttered quietly as she scrolled down through the photos of commercial ads shot beautifully and fronted by models with huge attitude. At the bottom was a shot of two men standing in front of a red Ferrari, and underneath was the statement:

Impossible is Nothing

Slave—Creative Directors, Sebastian String & Mazzi Hegan

Daltrey leaned in and looked closer at the two hotshots who claimed to have so much talent. The guy on the left was older with a sweet, soft face. On the right was a tall, good-looking blond man in his thirties wearing a blue suit and brown crocodile skin shoes not unlike the burned one sitting on her desk.

She stared at the photo for a moment, thinking, as a smiling Mazzi Hegan stared back at her. She asked out loud to no one but herself, “What did you do last night, Mr. Slick, to get yourself barbecued on a rowboat?”

She printed the photo and then entered the police database. Seconds later, Mazzi Hegan’s photo appeared alongside his date of birth, address, and social insurance number. She scrolled down further. He appeared to be a good citizen with only two speeding convictions and one ticket for parking badly. That was it. *Fuck all*, she thought. She hit another button, refined the search, and again nothing.

Picking up the phone, she dialed the number for the Slave website and asked to speak to Mr. Hegan. As she expected, he wasn’t in. “When will he be in, please?” The receptionist was unsure. “Of course you are, my love,” Daltrey said as she hung up and stared at the picture of Mazzi Hegan beaming back at her from the computer screen.

It was him. She knew it. The penthouse apartment just off Cambie, close to the creek, expensive furniture, a Ferrari in the garage. Daltrey stared back at the photo, and something inside her told her the shoe was Hegan’s, and rarely was she wrong.

Chapter Three

Playing with the electronic infrared door key he'd just made in the basement where he lived in his mum's house, Dan Treedle stood waiting in front of the sandwich shop at the corner of Georgia and Richards. He quickly stuffed the last few inches of a foot-long salmon salad sandwich with extra gherkins into his mouth as he watched Daltrey pull up and open the door for him to jump in.

She was almost unrecognizable now, he thought, with her hair pulled back tight to the back of her head in a ponytail for work. Nothing like she'd looked when he'd met her at a party three months back. She'd been dancing in the living room with this woman who looked like a guy, drunk, her hair down and flowing as she flipped it around like a cheerleader at a hockey game. She'd been flipping it then, and again when she'd agreed to meet him a few days later, when he'd pounded oysters until he threw up.

Sitting down, he leaned across the center console, moving in for a kiss.

Daltrey said, "You been eating fish?"

"Just a sandwich."

Good, Daltrey thought as she put the car into gear and pulled out into traffic. She now had an out if he asked her to go for lunch.

Dan continued, "If you're hungry, though, I know a great café."

Daltrey looked at him and smiled, saying, "Don't worry, I'm good. You've already eaten. But thanks."

Once she had the infrared system needed to bypass the security system to Mazzi Hegan's apartment complex Dan had promised her, and if it worked, there was little chance she'd ever have to see him and his food-stained mouth again—unless the system broke.

She looked into her rearview mirror and then to Dan and asked, "You got it?"

Dan reached into his pocket and pulled out an open circuit board attached by a switch to a nine-volt battery and said, "It's a bit thrown together, but it should work fine. Hit the switch, and it'll send out frequencies to open any of the doors and work the elevators in most of the new apartment blocks in town."

Daltrey smiled, it was just what she was after—and the sole reason she'd agreed to the oyster date in the first place after dancing all night with that crazy girl and then this guy after he joined in and then listening to him bang on for an hour in the kitchen as she and her friend cooled off. Daltrey remembered standing there, feeling the panties inside her jeans wet from the sweat rolling down her back, listening to him rattling off bullshit about how his mother was a dancer and how he had in-depth knowledge of modern day infrared security systems and could build custom electronic keys that could easily beat any new security system in the city.

She looked at him as she drove and grabbed his knee. "Thanks," she said.

There was something about this guy, she thought. Young, a good physique, kind of good-looking—but at the same time an absolute moron. Holding up the key with her right hand, she stared at the makeshift contraption and said disbelievingly, "This really works?"

Dan nodded. "Go ahead and try it. Try it anywhere!"

Picking an apartment building at the side of the road with no concierge, she pulled up, got out, and tried the door. Locked. She hit the button to Dan's device, waited a few seconds, pushed the door, and it opened. *My god, the guy's a genius*, she thought as she closed the door and walked back to the car.

As she got behind the wheel, he asked, "So who lives in this apartment you need access to?"

Daltrey looked to the road and pulled away. "Lived, I think."

Dan looked at her, confused. "Someone moved out?"

Daltrey shook her head, then stopped and thought about it. "Yeah, kind of. Being dead'll do that. Well, maybe dead."

Dan stared out the window, then turned to look at Daltrey as the sun hit her from the side, lighting up her straightened brown hair that was normally wavy. She was still hot even if she was dressed like a guy. He asked her, "He or she?"

Without looking, Daltrey answered, "We found a guy burned to death on a rowboat this morning."

"Where?"

"Out on False Creek." Daltrey looked at him and frowned. "That's why I'm taking a sneak look at his stuff while he's still warm."

Dan smiled. He'd eaten a shitload of croissants that morning some guy in tight trousers had brought over for his mum, and he'd burned the third round cramming them into the toaster, so he had a rough idea of what the guy must have looked like. He asked, "You found him?"

"No, we got a call early this morning."

"I thought you police types had procedures?"

Daltrey looked at him and raised her eyebrows. She pulled her car up alongside Mazzi Hegan's apartment block and looked Dan straight in the eye.

"You going to tell on me, Dan?"

They walked to the apartment complex door as Daltrey pulled out her new makeshift electronic device. She hit the button, and seconds later the door was unlocked.

Walking inside, they stared at the marble columns as they entered the elevator. Dan took the device from Daltrey's hand and hit the button again, bypassing the security system, and then handed it back to her.

Daltrey watched as the doors closed and the elevator began to rise, leaving the ornate marble columns behind. She held up the small device, looking closely at the cheap wiring circuit.

"You're a genius!" she exclaimed.

Dan smiled. He liked this, hanging out with a cop who dressed like a guy but let her hair down on the weekends.

Her eyes were transfixed on the flashing brilliant red numbers as the elevator counted its way up to the twentieth floor. “Do you think I could keep this?”

“It depends on whether or not you let me take a look inside.”

The elevator stopped, and they walked along the corridor to Mazzi Hegan’s front door. Pulling a set of keys from her pocket, Daltrey lifted them up and tried one after the other in the lock. The fifth one worked, and she stepped inside.

“Was your last boyfriend a locksmith?” Dan asked.

As it happened, he was. Sandy was his name, and he was a master locksmith. He lived just outside town, and she’d met him at a bar one night when she’d been horny and out looking for an old friend. Their relationship had fizzled out a couple of days after she became bored with him and his constantly hard penis and had her hands on a set of master keys that could open almost any door.

Now she had it all, Daltrey thought as she put the keys back into her pocket and felt them resting heavily against her new electronic door-opening device.

They walked into the living room and looked out the window to the view of the city with the water below.

“I like it!” Dan said as he wandered around the place and looked inside the fridge. “Nice pad!”

Daltrey walked away from him as she began to carefully open drawers. Without looking back, she said, “Goes with the Ferrari in the garage.”

She continued to look gently through things as Dan turned and called back, “Really? What type?”

She didn’t know and didn’t care. She’d only looked at it briefly after the manager had politely asked her if she’d like to see if Hegan’s car was there in an attempt to get her out of the place. Without looking up, she answered, “A red one.”

Dan stopped and stared at the place, letting out a long breath. He couldn’t believe it. He’d never seen a home like this. It was a million miles away from his mother’s basement. He walked around, fiddling with everything he could, then stopped at a picture of Mazzi Hegan and lifted it up.

“So this is the dead guy?”

Daltrey looked over and said. “You shouldn’t touch stuff.”

Dan put down the picture and wiped it with his sleeve and asked, “Do you think he set himself on fire by accident?”

Daltrey looked at him. He brought up a good point—she still didn’t know what had happened. In fact, she didn’t have a clue. “That’s why I’m here,” she answered.

Dan couldn’t give a shit either way. He walked back to look out of the window.

“If it was an accident, I’d say he’d have jumped into the water,” Daltrey said.

“Maybe he couldn’t swim,” Dan snapped back without hesitation. He turned around to see Daltrey opening another drawer and looking inside. From afar, he could see nothing of

value—old tickets, scissors, a screwdriver. He walked over, and with a huge dumb grin on his face, he said, “You know, it’s a shame for an apartment like this to go to waste.”

Daltrey closed the drawer she was looking through and opened the next. In it, a roll of tape, some gum, a spare set of keys. “What are you talking about now?” she asked.

Dan stood next to her now, looking down, his crotch now almost ten inches from her face. “Well, you know, we could put it to some use.”

Daltrey closed the drawer and stood, looking Dan straight in the eye. “In what way?”

Dan smiled and shrugged, saying, “You know, hang out.”

“You mean, like you hang out of me?” Daltrey said as she shook her head and walked away toward the kitchen. *So in his mind, it’s okay to stuff his face with fish and then think he can get it on*, she thought. But she had what she wanted now. Suffering through the oysters the last time they’d been out, with him puking and all, was enough. Luckily, she hadn’t had to sleep with the moron with his fishy breath to clinch the deal. Without looking back, she said aloud, “I didn’t invite you along for us to party, Dan, if that’s what you were thinking. I’ve got work to do.”

Dan shrugged again and walked over to a cabinet where he looked at a few loose pictures of Mazzi Hegan on a yacht with another guy and a tall girl who looked like a model. He lifted the picture closer to get a better look at the girl’s ass, then called across to Daltrey.

“You should see if there’s a blue yacht moored in the creek. If there is, I bet it’s without its dinghy.”

Daltrey looked at him. “Why do you say that?”

Dan walked away into the apartment’s master bedroom and called out, “Because there’s a picture of him on one on the dressers.”

Daltrey stood and walked to the dresser and picked up the photo. As stupid as he seemed, Dan wasn’t all that stupid. She turned toward the master bedroom and said, “Keep your hands off of things in there.”

Dan stared at the king-size bed with its large pillows and purple silk sheets. He looked at the ceiling covered in crazy artwork of strange black-shaded lines and shapes. Walking away, he stepped into the en suite, its huge shower no doubt built for two. Reaching in, he turned on the power jets and watched, mesmerized, as the shower’s pump-action jets blasted out steaming hot water from all angles.

Opening the door to the walk-in wardrobe, Dan stared at the silk suits, shirts, and ties, crocodile skin shoes, and silk socks—all lined up and perfectly labeled. He picked up a suit jacket and tried it on, looking at himself in the mirror. He saw himself again in another mirror and then, turning, caught a glimpse of himself again at another angle. It was fantastic. He looked styling. Everywhere he looked, he could see himself—back, front, side, low angle, high angle. He hadn’t seen anything like it since he’d watched Bruce Lee slashed with a multi-bladed knife at the end of *Enter the Dragon*, and after he’d broken the basement window when his shoe flew off.

And then he saw it. A small drawer made of dark mahogany, varnished like glass. It had a plaque embossed with gold letters that spelled out the word - *SPECIAL*.

It was nearly six o'clock when Daltrey found the yacht from the photo settled in among nearly a hundred other boats just below the bridge, all moored alongside Granville Island at the mouth to the creek. Sixty feet long, sleek, finished in a light blue trim, and designed to cut through water as easily as a tailor's scissors slipped through expensive linen.

The fact that Dan had stripped and put on Mazzi Hegan's clothes, then tried it with her sexually as he had, still irked her. It was either that or the fact that she was hungry. Probably both, Daltrey thought as she climbed on board the sleek yacht with the missing dinghy. She reached the boat's door and gave it a shove. It was solid, and the lock, like the small door, was pitted from the elements.

Pulling out her set of master keys, she opened the lock and began to climb down the small ladder. The boat, which had been unused for a while, smelled more musty than damp. She walked slowly through the center of the vessel. According to the newspaper left on the countertop, no one had been around for at least a month, and from the notes on the calendar on the wall, it appeared they wouldn't be back for another two. Looking up, she opened a couple of cupboards and peeked inside. They were full of coffee and cookies, maps and booze.

She walked slowly through to the cabin at the rear. Opening the door, she saw a small bed, its pillows just peeking out from the brown woolen blankets all neatly lined up and shipshape, readied no doubt for the next voyage. Walking out again, she stopped and pulled out a map of the San Juan Islands from an upended pocket shelf. She sat down at the small kitchen table and opened it. Daltrey stared at the map and a crumpled tidal chart that had been tucked inside. She knew the area well. She ran her slender fingers through her hair.

A year back, a guy with really hairy legs had whisked her off in a forty-foot schooner around the very same islands for a long weekend. It had been fun—fun in the sense of freedom. The freedom of the sea, the wind in her hair, the surf blowing up, bubbling white froth along the wooden deck. The tiny harbors and secluded coves...it was a time of magic if you were with the right crowd or the right someone. But the right someone wasn't him, and as the days went on, and the clock began to tick slower as one hour felt like two, then three, the guy with the chunky and hairy legs had wanted sex. And the magic had begun to drift away.

Daltrey sat back and looked around and thought about how at first she'd wanted him, but when he was naked in his socks trying to stick his dick in her, she hadn't. And how she'd lied and told him she was sore down there, and had paid for a float plane to come pick her up and take her home.

Standing up, she looked around. The yacht was lovely—really lovely in fact—but as lovely as it was, it wasn't *Mazzi Hegan* lovely. It didn't have that flair she'd seen at his apartment. His yacht would be fancier, carry more of the swirl and swagger that came with a guy who'd go out and buy a pair of fancy thousand-dollar shoes. And with this sudden awareness that she was in the wrong place and that she was trespassing, the sinking feeling welled within. Daltrey headed for the galley's small door that led to the deck, with every step feeling the discomfort deep within that comes to someone who knows right from wrong saying to herself

out loud, “Last time, Daltrey—last time.” But deep down she knew what she was asking of herself was impossible.

Chapter Four

Dan stood in the steaming hot shower, its razor-sharp jets striking his shoulders. He squirted another dollop of aloe vera herbal shampoo on his head and rubbed it into his hair. He'd read somewhere that its prolonged use promoted hair growth, and since Mazzi Hegan wouldn't be worrying about his hair anymore, he felt it was a shame to let it go to waste. He rinsed the shampoo and turned off the water, grabbed the softest towel he'd ever felt in his life off a nearby towel bar, and stepped out onto the luxurious bathroom floor, feeling the warmth of the underfloor heating radiate into his toes.

Things were looking good, and they were about to get better. Sure, his relationship with Daltrey was over before it had begun, but fuck it. If she was freaked out just because he had been lying on the bed in a pair of Mazzi Hegan's silver underpants he'd found in the "special" drawer, that was her problem. She needed to be sexier anyway, walking about like a guy the way she did at work when she could so easily let her hair down and be sexy.

Looking at his skinny, naked frame in the mirror, he reached out and grabbed a white bathrobe with the initials *MH* embroidered on the collar.

"Tonight, Danny boy, you're going to get yourself some prime uptown pussy."

Dressed like a million dollars in Mazzi's clothes, Dan picked up Hegan's keys to the Ferrari. He pulled the car out of the parking garage and steamed it down Cambie Street toward town. It was a dream come true. How many years had he dreamt of pulling up at Mickey D's in a red Ferrari, and now, there in the distance, the Golden Arches were calling.

He dropped a gear, overtook a loser in a Ford, and pulled up sharp at the light. Across the road, a bus stop full of people were waiting. Dan stared at them, the small group there watching him as he gave the engine a thunderous roar. *You getting the bus, yeah?* he thought. *The loser cruiser. Well, that's right, I'm not—because I've got a fucking Ferrari!*

The light changed, and Dan quickly slapped the car into first and ripped away, passing a guy his age in a Hyundai. "Yeah, fuck you as well," he said out loud.

Seconds later, he swept across the road and past the Golden Arches into the McDonald's parking lot, pulling the Ferrari up longways right outside the huge plate-glass window on the side. He stepped out and stared at himself in the reflection. He looked good—a white shirt under one of Mazzi Hegan's cream silk suits, Gator shoes, a Rolex, and the Ferrari behind him. The suit was a bit big for him, but what the hell, that's how they wore them these days.

He slammed the car door, hit the button—beep beep boop—and walked through the door, stopping at the counter right in front of the girl he'd had his eye on for weeks. The name tag clipped just above her right breast read *Melissa*.

"Hi, Melissa."

Melissa stared at him for a moment, then at the car, and with a smile, she said, "How can I help you?"

Dan just stood, savoring the moment and the girl with the blond hair, standing right there in front of him in her nice striped uniform. He slowly pulled out one of Mazzi Hegan's crocodile

skin wallets and checked the huge wad of one hundred dollar bills he'd found in the man's underwear drawer. He was going big tonight.

"I'd like three Big Macs and fries, please."

"Drink?"

Dan nodded and smiled.

"To go?"

Dan laughed and said, "I don't like to eat in the Ferrari."

Melissa looked back at him, this guy in the suit that didn't fit, showing off his money. Then she said, "Why, is it your dad's car?"

Dan laughed again. How ridiculous. "No, I'm in electronics, design, and development actually."

Pretending to be interested for a moment, Melissa nodded approvingly then walked away, grabbed his food, and came back. She said, "I'm surprised you came here. We don't get many Ferraris in our parking lot."

Dan looked at her, her eyes big and blue, and said, "Really? If you want, when you're finished, I'll take you for a spin."

Daltrey threw down her keys, unclipped her gun, and flopped down on the sofa. It had been a long day, and the early call hadn't helped. Mazzi Hegan's burned body in the boat was playing on her mind. She'd tried to be a hero and beat the system, have the mystery wrapped up one way or the other before anyone was reported missing or the people from dental records and DNA analysis got in touch.

She leaned back in the long chair and closed her eyes, knowing a glass of wine would go down well right now, but the half-open bottle of chardonnay in the fridge was too far away. Letting out a deep breath, she relaxed and thought it all through. They'd awakened her at four in the morning with a phone call. She'd been there at four twenty along with a squad car who'd taken the initial call, which had come in at three ten when the fire on the boat had been first reported. The fire crew were there first, joined quickly by another ambulance crew that had been helping with a separate incident a few blocks away.

Leaning over, she picked up the phone and called the internal number for the ambulance service. After a five-minute wait, the answer she was after came back quick and simple—the call for the other emergency had come in at almost the same time as the calls from the residences overlooking the creek reporting a fire in a boat out on the water, except for one call reporting that a girl was lying injured in her apartment on the west-facing fourth floor. The fire brigade had found the apartment and upon entering had found a girl with a severe back injury lying unconscious by the window.

Daltrey walked quickly along the hospital corridor. She reached the nurses' station of the ward to which the girl had been admitted and stood waiting. Her phone call to the ambulance service and the information that the same girl had remained silent since she'd arrived had aroused enough suspicion to get her back up off the couch. Why would someone who had been seriously injured not be crying out for their mother or someone near or dear? It didn't make sense.

The ward station nurse looked up. It was late, and Daltrey could see the woman was tired and had had enough. But fuck her, so was she.

"There's a young woman who was brought in this morning at around four?" Daltrey asked.

"Are you a relative?"

Daltrey shook her head and pulled out her ID.

The nurse sighed. Looking back to her desk, she said, "She was in surgery for most of the morning, and now she's resting."

"I'd like to speak to her."

After a moment, the nurse stood and walked out from behind the station, the words "Join the club, dearie" in her mind. The administration had been on her back all day, being passive-aggressive about "hospital procedures." And to top it off, her back was aching again. Normally, she would have just said, "Sorry, but the patient is in need of rest right now. Would you like to leave your number, and I'll have someone call you in a few days?" Then she'd smile and say "thank you" at exactly the same time she said "fuck you" in her mind.

It was what she liked to do.

But she needed the name of the girl as much as anyone, so if this pushy cop woman could get somewhere, then so be it. Besides, no one else had come forth saying they'd lost a beauty queen with perfect teeth, and the thought of another call from the office downstairs was too much.

She walked down the hallway, wondering why policewomen weren't feminine anymore the way Cagney and Lacey used to be. She passed three orderlies who needed to get a move on and headed toward a room at the end of the corridor. Pausing at the third from the last, she looked back at Daltrey and said, "I'll see if she's asleep."

Daltrey watched the nurse as she entered the room. She stepped forward. Reaching down, she took the girl's arm and gently shook it. The girl's pretty face was devoid of injury, and only the drip in her arm and the wires connected to her hand gave any sign there was anything wrong at all. The nurse spoke, her voice now one of an angel. "Hello, love. We've someone here who might be able to help you."

Daltrey watched the nurse, her tone now completely different from the woman she'd just encountered outside as she placed her fingers softly upon the girl's brow and began to stroke gently across her forehead. The patient was obviously not asleep, but was refusing to acknowledge their presence.

The nurse tried again. "Lovey, please, can we have a quick word?"

Daltrey stared at the girl as she lay there pretending not to hear, her eyes flickering back and forth behind her eyelids as the nurse's words rolled from her lips as soft as velvet.

Nothing.

The nurse stepped outside, and they walked back toward the nurses' station. Daltrey was confused. The girl looked so perfect and untouched lying there in the hospital bed. Turning to the nurse, she said, "She doesn't look as if she's been in an accident."

The nurse shook her head and looked to the floor for a moment, thinking. Then she said, "Don't be deceived. She may look beautiful, but if she ever gets married, she won't be walking down the aisle."

On first impression, most girls' opinion of Dan was that he was pretty stupid. Very few though ever hung around long enough to confirm this.

Unfortunately, an expensive car, an ill-fitting silk suit, and a pair of super-slick crocodile skin shoes had affected Melissa's better judgement, and she now sat in the front seat of Mazzi Hegan's red Ferrari, feeling the purr of the engine beneath her backside and wondering how many times she'd seen this goofy guy grinning at her from the other side of the counter each time he'd been in to buy a burger. Letting the power of the sports car pull her back into the calf leather seat, she gazed in admiration at Dan as he shifted gears, hit the accelerator, and watched as the cars disappeared behind him, fading into nothingness in his rearview mirror.

Melissa looked good at his side, Dan thought as he raced toward the next traffic jam, then used the car's formula one brakes to stop just in time and then wait for the rest of the world—in their shit cars—to catch up. Yes, Melissa, the sexy girl who always gave him those extra fries, was sitting there next to him now.

She was in the front seat of his Ferrari, her blouse slightly open, enough for him to sneak a look at her lacy bra. Leaning forward, she pushed the power button on the car's stereo, blasting Donna Summer out of the speakers cleverly hidden within the dashboard.

Looking at him, smiling, she asked, "You like Donna Summer?"

Dan shrugged. He didn't even know who she was, but agreed anyway as he put the sports car into gear and began to pull forward, "Yes, I love her. She's fantastic."

"Wow," Melissa replied, excited. "I can't believe it—I love Donna Summer, too. Let's go dancing."

Dan slowed the car. This was an interesting turn of events, and one he hadn't planned for. In his mind, they'd just cruise around in the Ferrari all evening until either one of them—inevitably him—got hungry again. Then they'd hit Mickey D's, snag a couple of triple-decker burgers and some fries, then meander all cool-like through the marble lobby and hit the elevator up to Mazzi Hegan's fancy pad to see what might happen. But dancing, Dan thought, dancing could be fun, dancing could be interesting.

Without a second thought, he said, "Sounds great."

Daltrey drove back downtown and pulled up outside the girl's apartment. She walked down to the seawall and looked up at the building. Fourth floor up and looking west, the ambulance guys had told her. Very nice. She walked to the building's front door, pulled out Dan's thrown-together electronic device, and hit the button. Seconds later, the door opened. Fuck, this was good.

The lobby was plush, designed with polished wood and red velvet. Daltrey hit the button and entered the elevator. She pointed Dan's device at the control panel, disabling the system's security, and hit the button for the fourth floor. The first key she tried from her ex-boyfriend's set of master keys opened the door to the girl's apartment. This was incredible—now she could snoop around anywhere.

Daltrey turned on the lights and walked into the living room. There was no sign of a struggle, no blood on the floor, just a chair that had been moved to one side for the gurney. She walked to the window and looked out. The lights from the buildings on the other side of the creek streamed back at her across the black water. The boat would have been out there ablaze, impossible to miss in the darkness. She headed to the kitchen, opened the fridge, and looked inside. The milk was fresh, and there was beer, wine, and champagne. The kitchen cupboards were sparsely filled as well—coffee cups, beer and wine glasses, barely any food.

Daltrey closed the cupboard doors and walked to the bedroom. She opened the door and looked around. There were clothes lying neatly over the backs of chairs, perfume bottles, small trinkets adorning the surface of the dressers—but no photographs or memories of mother, father, siblings, boyfriends, nieces, nephews, or anything else you'd expect in a pretty girl's room. She walked in further and carefully opened one of the top drawers. Nothing out of the ordinary. Bras and knickers. Vests and clothes in the other drawers. Sitting on the bed, Daltrey opened the drawer to the nightstand. Condoms and lube. Leaning down, she opened the bigger cupboard below—more condoms, various dildos, soft rope, and a blindfold.

She walked over to the mirror-paneled wardrobe and slid the door open. On one side was a long line of designer dresses and clothes. She slid the door shut and opened the other side. Inside hung a variety of sexually explicit outfits. Reaching in, she pulled out a black latex catsuit, took a step back, and held it up to herself in the mirror.

“You sassy girl, you!”

She placed the catsuit back on the hanger, pulled out a red corset reminiscent of the Wild West and did the same. Placing it back in the closet, Daltrey slid her hand along the shelf at the top, felt the edge of a large envelope, and pulled it down. Sitting back down on the bed, she opened the envelope and dropped out a half dozen naked photos of the girl and a man in his fifties, instantly recognizable due to his own self-promotion. She opened the envelope further, looked inside, and turned it upside down, shaking a small handwritten letter out and watching it land in the center of the photos. She picked it up and opened it.

Natasha,

Every day I dream of you. Our secret is the reason I smile, the reason I live, the reason I cry.

Love,
Patrick

Daltrey picked up a photo and stared hard at an image of the girl holding a huge dildo and working it into the man's ass.

"My god, Patrick, with the size of that thing, it's no wonder you cry!" she said.

She slipped the photos and the letter back into the envelope and stood up. So the girl in the hospital with the broken back calling herself Natasha was a whore. There was little doubt about that. And Patrick De'Sendro, one of Vancouver's top realtors who spent a small fortune on advertising his name and face throughout the city, was in love with her and, it seemed, loved what she did for him also, Daltrey thought as she rode the elevator back down to the street, carrying the envelope, the girl's laptop, and her phone.

The whole apartment, devoid of basic home essentials, was a charade obviously designed for one thing only—short-term, high-end fucking. And the girl Natasha—if that was her real name—lived someplace else. Daltrey walked through the lobby and out into the cool night air, thinking. A high-class hooker who was injured in her apartment at the same time a man was burned to death in a rowboat on the creek in full view outside the apartment window. Connected? *No doubt about it*, she thought as she reached her car and opened the door, placing the girl's laptop and phone on the passenger seat.

A two-hundred-dollar sweetener discreetly handed to the guys at the door ensured prime parking for the Ferrari and instant access to the Bam Bam club for the guy in the big silk suit and his girl.

Dan laid down forty bucks for two more cocktails and dropped the same again to the waitress for her trouble. He was full of it and loving every minute. In Dan's eyes, he doubted Mazzi Hegan—R.I.P.—had ever had so much fun with his money.

Feeling like a queen, Melissa raised her glass and leaned back into the VIP booth. "Cheers," she said.

Dan smiled and joined her toast, the sleeve to his jacket riding back and fitting his arm for the first time that evening.

"You really live life to the fullest, don't you, Dan?" said Melissa.

Dan laughed and, tilting his head to one side, answered back with the air of a guy who had money to burn. "You'd better believe it!"

It was true—he did. Only two days ago, he was living it up down at Subway Sandwich. Dan looked around and relaxed, listening to the music he didn't really like. This was it, he thought. This was fucking it! The high life. Fuck, he'd end up buying this place and a few others like it. He'd change the music and sit here like a real king. Then Daltrey would know what she'd missed out on. She'd come into his club one night wearing those tight jeans she had on the other

day and her boots, see him sitting there at his table with his champagne and a few hot chicks, and she'd say, "Hi Dan, don't you look good?"

And he'd say, "I'm sorry, have we met?"

Play it cool, just like that. Then she'd want him, not use him the way she had tried to. If she was lucky, he'd even let her suck his dick.

Dan stared out at the lights and the girls dancing around in the weird way they did. Daltrey had been easy to fool at first, being a cop. She'd seemed interested in his electronic research and the development bullshit on their first date, and he'd have been in had he not puked up those oysters like he had.

He continued staring at the dance floor as a girl with a short skirt began to shake her bootie. Watching her every move, shifting in his seat as the lights from the disco ball and the strobes blinded him. Her thin and sinewy legs moving as they twisted, and shook, reminding him of a chicken and making him hungry again. He could do with a plate of barbecue wings, he thought. He looked around through the crowd for his waitress, trying to locate her, his head and body shifting from side to side in time to the music.

Melissa smiled as she watched him move, eventually catching his eye, she said, "You look like you're wanting to dance, Dan."

Dan leaned back in his seat and nodded. She was right. Dancing would be perfect. After he'd eaten, though. He'd take her out there on the floor, shake her up, rock it hard, and show old chicken legs out there how to move properly. He had to after all—he was still wearing Mazzi Hegan's silver underpants, and they were beginning to itch.

Chapter Five

Dennis Willis sat at the kitchen table of his basement apartment and thought of his wife as he read the headline on the front page of the *Vancouver Sun* for the third time: *Unidentified man found burned to death on False Creek*. He wondered again if it could have been him.

It hadn't been long since he had thought of his wife, maybe an hour at least, but it had been a while since he'd thought about most other things. Once upon a time, he'd been on his way, and now the realization had set in at the ripe age of fifty that he was going nowhere, and he'd possibly never get going again.

Many times in the darkness of the basement, he'd wracked his brains as to how she'd been able to possess him. Was it her hair, her lips, her eyes? Who knew... What had it been that had attracted him so strongly? Day after day, she'd called to him as he'd stared at her face. Her there among so many others, seducing him, drawing him in, and making him love her without speaking or even knowing he was there.

His heart had pounded when he saw her for the first time. Shorter than expected, but still so very beautiful. He'd smiled as she walked toward him, smelled her hair and soft skin when she held him, felt the tender touch of her lips when they'd kissed and the churning of guilt within, knowing that deep down he'd cheated himself in the game of love.

He had taken her to his home, which back then had been his own—and she had cried with happiness at its size and grandeur. She had taken him to his bed and kissed his cheeks, his eyes, his lips, her loving soothing his fears. She had known him before they met, seen him in her long wonderful dreams. She knew his hair, his eyes, his smile. Age was no issue, for souls have no age. Why else would she have waited for him when she, so beautiful, could have had so many? And as the months passed, and his guilt evaporated into the truth of her words and one's own destiny, marriage came. Life couldn't have been better.

And then her brother arrived.

She had said he loved her and missed her, that she had been selfish, and it was wrong. "What harm could he do?" she had said. Nothing could challenge what was special, what was right, what was meant to be.

There was no eye contact when he met him for the first time. All that mattered to this man, this brother, was the girl. Dennis watched as he held her hand, stroked her long, wavy hair, and walked around Dennis's home as if it was his own. He was older, thickset, and incredibly strong, and Dennis could do little when he raped her, and even less when her brother raped him.

Illya Brakva's thirtieth birthday just happened to coincide with the day of his release from Vladamir Central Prison, which lay one hundred and eighty kilometers to the east of Moscow. Before the clock had struck midnight, he'd managed to kill a dog and break his father's fingers.

Why his parents would make him so angry during the celebratory meal for his birthday and prison release, he would never understand. Refusing to give out the address of the man in

Canada his sister had married could, in his mind, only be described as ridiculous. After all, this guy was now family, and family was family. Blood was blood.

The two incidents—the one with the dog and the one with his father’s fingers—were in no way connected. The dog's demise being the unlucky result of a hatred that had manifested itself in Illya’s mind day by day throughout his prison term. The dispute was simple—money smuggled in and paid out for an easier ride through the Russian penal system had earned him only a damaged wrist courtesy of a pair of government-issue jack boots and a door that would not close properly. Come the end of Illya’s term, death could be the only retribution for the head guard who had not delivered on promises made.

But as the doors closed behind him, and fresh air washed over him, the sight of the clear blue sky and the thought of his sister living happily without him alone in a far-off land quickly kindled the furnace of hatred to a simmering flame. The dog had taken the brunt of Illya’s wrath.

The guard’s house sat in the middle of a long street, away from the gray concrete communist-built slums constructed to house the masses. A place where stray dogs and lost people roamed. The house, its wooden-slatted sides painted green, tucked among many, had been given to him as a simple gift from the powers that be for following the party line throughout the long years of communist rule—years in which he’d felt privileged and elite enough to have a home. But now, beaten down and worn thin from living among the filth of humanity, he saw himself for who and what he really was.

The guard opened the door and stared at the man he’d never seen before. He was a convict, yes. He’d lived with them long enough to know their kind, their eyes, their stance. This one had the eyes, and although he couldn’t see the tattoos, he was sure muted jailhouse art covered the man’s body, the images all linked together, hidden just under the shirt.

Illya stared at the man, and spoke first, his face neither angry nor bitter. “Remember me?”

The guard shook his head and tightened his grip on the small gun he held behind the door. “Should I?”

“You stole my money.”

The guard stared back at him, wondering who he was, how he had found his address, and what favors, monetary or otherwise, he’d given to get it. Then he said, “Prisons are full of thieves. You can’t say it was me.”

And Illya answered, “But you are the man who held my wrist in between the door and the frame while your friend tried to kick it closed. I swore to you both that I’d burn you.”

Then the guard remembered the man who had made a fuss about his money, telling them they would both burn the first chance he got. He remembered the guy who’d worked on the wing with him kicking the door over and over while he held the man’s wrist. And he remembered, years later after retirement, hearing the news about how the other guard—the one who’d kicked the door—had been found burned alive in the kitchen. He also remembered how he’d tried for an hour to remember the name of the man who now stood before him.

Then he used the words he’d said to others many times before. “If you’ve come here for trouble, I suggest you leave and be done with whatever grudges you harbor. Now you are free, and the consequences of your actions today will either end your life now, or worse, see you back where you’ve just come from. Let sleeping dogs lie.”

Illya watched the older man standing in his sweater, threadbare at the elbows. He stared into his beady eyes, the guard now old, but still tough with his hand behind the door holding a weapon, playing it cool as the other guard had when Illya cornered him in the filthy prison kitchen, acting relaxed but waiting like a snake ready to strike—as this man would do so very soon. And when he did, he'd be quick, Illya thought, as are all animals who know they're about to die. That was certain. How many men, Illya thought, had this man ripped off or injured as he had Illya? How many others had stood here before him, angry and betrayed, and heard the same song?

He said quietly to the man, “Your dog’s sleeping, but he won’t be waking up. You’ll find it burned to death in your backyard—it could have been you had I wanted it to, even with what you are hiding behind your door. Go take a look, when you find him there dead and I want you to know it should have been you.”

The guard waited as the convict turned and began to leave. When he reached the road, he stopped, turned, and called back, “My sister saved your life.”

The guard stared into the morning light, watching Illya disappear in the distance. Closing the door, he stuck his pistol back in his belt and walked through his house gifted to him for living with filth. He wondered what this man fresh out of jail was talking about when he said his sister had saved him and he'd killed his dog. He shook his head and walked into the kitchen. He didn't even have a dog. In fact, he hated dogs, especially his neighbor's dog that he'd sworn to kill the next time he found it in his yard. Strangely enough, Illya had saved him the bother.

As stupid as he was, there were two things that could never be taken away from Dan. The first was his incredible understanding of electronics. The second, his ability to dance with a pure and natural rhythm unknown to nearly all the white guys in the Western world. When those two things were joined, one could behold something that was nothing short of a miracle in itself.

He'd inherited his ability to dance from a mother who was, throughout his early days, a lonely single mum. She had whipped the nights away, spinning and twisting, waltzing and jiving around the house with Dan either watching or riding on the top of her toes. It was early training for a young boy that made for a good night out for any girl who stuck around long enough to discover Dan's natural born talent. And Melissa was no exception. In her experience, most guys fit into two categories—those who could barely dance and those who couldn't. Dan, on the other hand, was an exception to the rule. She'd watched him bumping and grinding his way around the dance floor, pissing off the guys as he rotated his groin in perfect time with the beat while still managing to eat his chicken wings. He moved animatedly across the floor, his shoulders lifting up and down, his arms and hands reaching out in exaggerated movements as he grabbed his food to the beat of the music, eating as he danced, his teeth stripping the flesh from the wing. He wowed the crowd with his fluid motion, slowly stripping off Mazzi Hegan's expensive clothes and slinging them across the floor as he dropped to his knees with his arms in the air, sweat dripping from his brow and chest and running in a constant stream all the way down to his groin.

Dan looked at Melissa as he pulled the Ferrari up outside Mazzi Hegan's apartment block. He had her now, it was certain. He could tell by the way her breathing changed each time he'd

thrown a piece of chicken to her across the dance floor and smooched up on her, purposely letting the sweat from his brow drip down into her cleavage.

He walked around the car, opening Melissa's door the same way he'd seen some guy do it in a movie once. He was on his way...he knew it. Reaching down, he grasped Melissa's hand and pulled her gently from the car to him. He placed his other hand around her back, twisted his head away and gave a silent belch, and then leaned in and kissed her hard on the lips.

Melissa held Dan tightly around the neck, kissing him back with a fury. She could feel the energy emanating from this man. He was elemental, like no one she had ever met before. He had this incredible gusto and passion for life. It was almost as though he knew that his world was about to end.

Melissa pulled her head back and stared into Dan's bloodshot eyes. It had been a long time since she'd had a night out like this, and she was horny. Her lips tingled from the kissing, and she could taste the pickle from the Big Mac he'd eaten on their way back from the club.

They took the elevator up to the apartment, quickly found their way to the bedroom, flopped down onto the huge silk-covered king-size bed, and began to giggle. Trying to take control, Dan climbed on top of her and slipped his hand up her shirt, feeling her breasts. He quickly unbuttoned her blouse and simultaneously whipped off the now dirty silk shirt and trousers he'd found earlier, freshly pressed and waiting for him in the mirror-lined wardrobe, and lay back down next to Melissa wearing only Mazzi Hegan's silver underpants.

He leaned back over and began to bite at Melissa's breasts, slobbering and drooling all over them as she began to moan louder and louder. Grabbing Dan's hand, she pulled it downward and up the inside of her skirt. He could feel the wetness that was building from within and began to rub her from the outside of her panties, not quite knowing what to do now after all the hard work he'd done to get there.

Then Melissa opened her eyes and stared up at the ceiling. She gasped as she pushed his hand away from her and said, "Is this your bedroom?"

Dan nodded and, his mouth half full of nipple, answered, "Yes."

Confused, she asked again, "It's really yours?"

Dan said yes again, and Melissa sat up.

"Oh my god—are you gay?"

Dan stopped what he was doing and looked up at Melissa. "What?"

"You're gay!"

Dan sat back and kneeled before her on the bed, his silver underpants glistening in the bedside light.

"Why do you say that?"

Melissa quickly sat up and began to button up her blouse. She gently pushed Dan away from her legs and slowly eased herself off the bed. In seconds, she was down the corridor and out the front door. Gone.

Standing there in the room in his shiny silver underpants, Dan stared at himself in the mirror. "Gay? Me? Fucking gay? Jesus."

What the fuck just happened? he asked himself. Sitting himself down again, he leaned back, stretching himself out on the bed, his arms splayed out up on top of the enormous silk pillows. He stared at the door. He couldn't believe it. He hadn't gotten this far with a chick since he'd met that blind girl in the park and her guide dog had gotten angry.

Slowly, he leaned his head back and rested his neck. He was hungry again now and was thinking about finishing off the green veggie shredded-wheat-type thing he'd left in the fridge. Looking up, he saw what Melissa had seen, and only visible from the bed. Above him, the elaborately drawn ceiling artwork, its black lines and shapes, all came together to create a picture of two naked men having sex.

Dan lay there, staring up at the drawing. He'd never seen such a thing, a portrait full of muscle, sweat, and hair. Then with a bang, the apartment door reopened. Dan smiled. Yes, Melissa was back. She'd come to her senses and was back for more. Quickly, he adjusted his silver underpants and straightened himself up. Leaning back again against the silk pillows, he listened as she walked back down the corridor toward him. He called out to her.

"Come get me, baby!"

Only it wasn't Melissa. It was Mazzi Hegan.

End of sample chapters

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