

Cage Girl

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Cage Girl

Chapter 1.

A girl came into the Burger King and leaned against the counter, shouting something to someone in back. She moved nicely; blond hair, straight with bangs. Not fake blond like you saw a lot back then, honey blond. She had a jacket, wore jeans. That's all I could see until she sat in the corner booth with a drink in a tall cup. I could see her face and it was friendly.

I have a theory about open and closed faces. Most models in magazines have closed faces and a lot of people when they don't care who's looking at them do too. They could care less if you lived or not and they don't seem happy with their lives. Both faces can smile but for open faces it's different. Usually the lips are slightly parted so there's a glint of light against a tooth. The jaw isn't clenched. So I'm thinking the girl has an open face.

My grandson was just looking at me. A bit of a smile showing. His name is Bobby, his father's Junior, and I'm Andy. Bobby was in high school.

"She in any of your classes?" I was still looking at her.

"Who? Her?"

"Yeah, the girl over there."

"She's a sophomore."

"A year ahead of you." I turned to Bobby and he was looking at her.

"I think so." He turned back to me and said, "She's a whore."

Junior was the one handling the birds and bees stuff and obviously he hadn't told Bobby everything.

"A whore? What do you mean by that?"

"She fucks anyone."

"So you two . . ."

"Not me. Other guys, though."

"So not just anyone, right?"

"I guess so. Nobody likes her."

"You ever talk to her?"

"No."

"So how do you know this stuff?"

"Everyone says so."

"So she fucks anyone but everyone doesn't like her. Sounds hypocritical to me, son." I shifted my gaze from him back to her. "She looks like a nice girl." I turned to Bobby. "Maybe we should go over and say hi."

"No way, Andy."

In our family everyone goes by their first name. There's no mom or dad, grandfather or grandmother, or their variants. There's no grandmother in our case,

anyway. Cindy passed away when Junior was twelve, maybe one reason he came out the way he did.

The girl was watching us, not staring, just a friendly interest in the only other people in the dining room.

When Junior and Amy split, there'd been a lot of acrimony, plus she raked him over the coals. He lost the house, the car, his job and quite a lot of the prestige he'd built up in our small town. He moved in with me three years ago and stayed. I gave him a Pinto and heaven knows what he did with his days when he was supposed to be working for me. Bobby lived with his mom. He spent a couple of evenings after school with me. I had a BMW in the shop we worked on together, or we went fishing or saw a movie. It all depended on his career aspirations. At his age they changed daily.

I looked at my watch, eight ten. In the booth in the corner the girl leaned against the window wall, had her feet up on the bench seat. She might have been reading, I couldn't tell.

"So what's her name?"

"Whose name?" Bobby hadn't been watching me, didn't know what I was talking about. I'm prone to these skips in conversation.

"That girl's." I looked over at her, returned to him.

"Liz." Bobby sounded exasperated.

"Okay. Done?"

"Sure."

I stood, gathering the papers onto the tray. "Let's go then."

Andy led the way to the car. It's a sixty-nine Barracuda, black with red top. We were in the car and I saw two men go into the Burger King. They went straight back to the corner booth and stood. I could see her sit up, but not her face. A moment later she got up and left with them.

I checked my watch. Eight twenty-four. I started the car and as we pulled out of the parking spot I said to Bobby, "I think you should talk to her."

"To who?"

"Liz."

"No way."

Myself, I felt like Liz was a girl I'd like to know.

Chapter 2.

Every night after that I made a point to stop by the Burger King. Sometimes it was eight, sometimes later, after I took Bobby home.

I'd get a milk shake and if it was around eight, I would see her come in, get her drink and go to the corner booth. If it was later she might be there, she might not.

She always took the corner booth, noticed me but didn't acknowledge me. I read the paper or a magazine.

Some nights it was right after eight, others it was more like ten, when a man, sometimes a pair, came in the Burger King and went straight back to the corner booth. Sometimes they stood and talked to her, sometimes they sat. After a minute or two she and they left.

Sunday night maybe ten days after I started coming in, it was just after eight. A guy entered and when they left she set her drink on my table. "If you want it," she said.

I looked up but they were already past me. Milk shake, too. Vanilla, like mine. I finished both, not expecting her to come back, and she didn't.

I wondered where she had been before and where she went to next. Most of the time the men were different, not high school kids, older, in their 30s and 40s. There was once when I thought it might have been someone I'd seen before who came to get her, but it was impossible to be sure. A lot of guys, purposely or not, look pretty generic.

Two weeks passed after I first saw her and I took my drink to join her.

"Okay to visit?" I asked.

"Sure." She laid her book on the table, swung her feet off the bench seat.

"My grandson says your name is Liz."

"Your grandson is right. Should I know him?"

"He's not in your class."

"Oh. You don't look that old."

"I don't feel that old, either, but I'm guessing I'm about four times your age."

"Sixty-four?"

"Sixty-three. My name's Andy, by the way."

"Hi, Andy."

"Hi, Liz." I could see them coming in, three this time. "Looks like your friends are here."

She smiled, put the book in her purse, looked up at them.

"We saw . . ." one started.

"Sure," she said, standing. "See you later, Andy."

"Maybe tomorrow."

"Maybe."

She got in the back seat with two of the men and the third drove.

After that if she was there we sat and talked until the others came to pick her up. We talked about the weather; stayed away from politics which was okay by me; books; cars, she wanted one; and other stuff. I think she was amused. Maybe she thought I was shy or didn't know the magic words, or was married or something. We never talked about her men friends, where'd she'd been or where she was going.

Three, maybe four weeks, it was colder and a front had passed leaving three inches of snow. The roads had been plowed but not the parking lot and we sat for over an hour talking.

I said, "I don't think anyone is going to come tonight."

"Probably not." Her book had been in her purse since we started talking.

"So I was wondering if you wanted to go for a drive. I can take you home."

She studied my face for a minute, smiled, and said, "Sure. I'd like that, Andy."

"Liz, you're saying sure to almost just what I said. I'd like to talk to you for a minute or two, out of here, more private. Think a moment because maybe one of your men friends might stop by."

She blinked, didn't lose her smile. "Sure, Andy."

Okay, here's the hard part for me. Women figured I was like other guys and I wasn't. I knew that but they didn't, yet, and finding a way to break the news wasn't easy. Every time with a new woman was just like the first ever, except they were the virgins.

"My van is parked in back." I stood.

She joined me and we dumped our trash before going out the back door, through the hallway, past the restrooms.

The van's a white 1982 Tradesman, no side windows, small windows in the back doors. The magnetic signs for the shop were inside. This was personal use.

"No, here," I said, opening the back doors. She came up beside me, could see inside the van by the street light.

"So," I said. "If you're going to ride in my van you ride in there, but first you take your clothes off." I'd turned and was watching her face.

She was staring at the cage bolted to the van's floor. Three-eighths inch round steel bars, half inch by one inch frame, welded and painted black. She couldn't tell the color but she could definitely see the cage.

"I won't lock the cage door this time. You don't like it, that's okay. You can leave anytime. That's the almost part I mentioned."

"Some almost. So you're letting me choose if I want to be raped and killed, that it?" She'd taken a half step back. "This is the . . ."

"Craziest way to propose to a girl. I know it." I took a step away from her.

"You're sixteen and I'm not going to touch you unless you're my wife."

"So where does that fit in?"

"Maybe we can talk about that once you're in the cage. The van can sit here if you want. I'll get the engine running and the heater is good."

"Andy, you're a fruitcake."

"That's putting it mildly. How about a quick yes or no. If it's no I'll escort you back inside and buy you another milk shake. No problem. I know you like vanilla."

"I like vanilla." Her voice dropped as she spoke. "Shit." She took off her coat and handed it to me. "If you decide to kill me . . . No." She looked up at me. "I don't care anymore." She unbuttoned her blouse and handed it to me.

"If you're worried, I don't think anybody can really see."

"I'm not worried about that. It's freezing out here, Andy."

"I'll get the van started once you're in the cage."

She sat on the sill of the rear doors and removed her shoes and socks. I held them as she quickly pushed down her pants and panties in one motion. I helped her get them off her feet and she swung her legs around and into the van.

"Thanks for the carpeting."

"You're welcome. Your bra, too."

"I forgot." She crawled around the cage to the front where the cage's door stood open. She knelt, removed the bra and tossed it back to me.

She crawled into the cage and pulled the door shut after her. The latch clicked shut.

"Shit," she said.

"It's not locked." I shut the back doors and got in the front. After putting her clothes on the passenger seat I started the engine. There was an auxiliary heater which I turned on.

"You should start feeling the heat in a couple of minutes."

"Am I an idiot or what? I can't believe I'm doing this."

"I was going to drive around."

"Do whatever you want. I don't think I have much say."

"How is it?"

"Cold."

"No, I mean how does it feel in the cage?"

"Give me a few minutes to sort this out."

"Do you want me to drop you off at home?"

"No, I don't think so. Ummm. What if I have to go to the bathroom?"

"I'll stop and you can run outside."

She started laughing.

I let myself relax a little. "You have a nice laugh."

"Is Andy your real name?"

"Andy Carmichel. I own Andy's Acme Auto Repair. Car repair and restoration."

"You're telling me this because in a couple of hours I'll be dead."

"Do you think I'd go about it this way if I wanted to kill you?"

"Rape me first. I'm frozen, Andy."

"I didn't want to wait until spring, Liz."

"Where are we headed?"

"Toward the Kroger by the highway. You want to go anywhere?"

"You want a blowjob? I like it up the ass."

"That's a nice offer, Liz, but not this time. How's it feeling now?"

"Andy, I'm in this contraption and you want to talk but all I can see is the back of your head."

"So it's a little strange."

"Let's call it interesting, Andy. What are we going to talk about that we couldn't talk about in the warm Burger King?"

"Anything you want. We can talk about anything you want. I hadn't planned things too far ahead, not knowing how you'd react."

"That makes sense. Andy, you're not interested in sex?"

"If you were a couple of years older there'd be no problem. You being sixteen is a horse of a different color. I have a cage like this in the basement at home."

"Is that where we're going?"

"No. That was just a general statement, like saying the sky is blue."

"Andy, you're weird."

"Warmer?"

"A little. I think I want you to drop me off soon."

"At the high school?"

"You're really going to do it?"

"Sure. I said I would, didn't I?"

"Okay. And I get my clothes back, right?"

"Sure. But you have to dress outside of the van."

"Outside of the van. I'm sure there's a reason, right?"

"Because that's what I want."

"Then that's what I'll do. Want to keep my panties as a souvenir?"

"That's not my thing, Liz."

"For some strange reason I didn't think it was. You'll be back at Burger King tomorrow night as usual? With your crazy cagemobile?"

"We'll be there, Liz. I understand you might be busy. I'd understand if I never see you again."

"You married?"

"Widower."

"And not many girlfriends, I bet."

"Now and again, but no."

"That sounds a little sad."

"I'm fairly monogamous. I meant my proposal, Liz. You'd need to know more about me first. I'm happy with what I've learned about you."

"Let's not get hasty."

"We're at the high school."

"And I really have to dress out of the van?"

"That's right. When you're ready, I'll go around and open the doors. Your clothes are warm."

"I'm ready." She reached for the latch and fumbled for a minute before it flipped up and open.

I was at the back with both doors open.

"We're facing the street."

"I know." I grinned at her.

She put on the pants, socks and shoes first, then stood and put on the blouse and jacket. She held up the panties. "Sure?"

"I'm sure."

She stuffed the panties and bra into her pocket. "I think you'd better leave now, Andy."

"Thanks, Liz."

"That's it?"

I turned back to her.

"I think you're going to rape and kill me, maybe do worse, and you say thanks and walk away."

"You're really pretty, Liz, and fun to be with."

She slapped me, grabbed me, and kissed me, before stepping back.

"Maybe I'll see you tomorrow."

"Maybe."

I walked to the driver's door. She stepped around and said, "You wanted to know. It was interesting."

I smiled, said, "I'm glad," and got in the van. As I pulled away she was still standing in the parking lot, watching me.

Chapter 3.

The next evening I was late getting to Burger King. Bobby was learning the intricacies of disc brakes and because of his interest I didn't want to quit early. I have no great desire for him to go the same route I did, though it's an honorable profession. He's fifteen and has a long way to go before deciding what he wants to do with his life.

Liz was sixteen but seemed a lot more grown up. Maybe it was her history or maybe it's true that girls mature faster. I expected her to act like an adult and planned to treat her that way.

She wasn't in her booth and probably had left already but I waited anyway for a long hour.

I was early on Wednesday night and still no Liz and again the same on Thursday night. I'd wait out a full week but knew she'd decided it was best to be places I wasn't. I could well understand that and respected it. That doesn't mean I didn't feel a loss. She was fun to be with and there'd been the promise of more.

If all I'd wanted was a fuck . . . but that's not my nature. I knew it and now she knew it.

Friday at the shop was like any Friday. The guys were thinking about the weekend and had just half a mind on what they were doing. They weren't fuckups, were the best mechanics in the area. Little Andy, though you wouldn't know it to look at him, had trained as a jet engine mechanic. He, and the others, knew how to do a job right.

But being Friday they were messing up in little ways. A rag had been left on the driver's seat of the Buick Mark had just finished. Little Andy spent fifteen minutes looking for a tool he had in his back pocket. Leroy, our counter person and sole black employee, was sure to have missed a time entry on someone's work ticket and I'd be sure to hear about it next Friday when handing out paychecks. Leroy hated the job. I didn't want to do it and Junior had wandered off. If he weren't the boss' son he'd be fired. He'd appear again in a month or two, just like nothing had happened.

Junior hadn't gone anywhere. He just wasn't going to work right now. If he was like this when they were married I couldn't blame Amy for ditching him and taking him for everything she could. He wasn't good for alimony or child support. Child support came from me.

And I couldn't blame Leroy. He's a good problem solver and the new computer stuff didn't faze him. He hated the counter, just like I did, and he hated doing the work tickets and all the other paper work, just like I did.

What I was doing was sitting in my office and dozing. I'd spelled Leroy while he had lunch and had mine afterwards. The door was shut and a minute more and I'd

be napping.

There was a knock on the door.

"Okay," I said.

In walked Liz.

"You can shut it," I said. "Sit down."

This was a regular office, where customers could get the bad news and believe, because of the surroundings, that we knew what we were doing. No girly calendars on the wall, no desk covered with rusty junk, and no chewing tobacco drool on me or the mechanics.

I left my chair and sat in the chair beside her. "Want some coffee or a cola?"

"Mountain Dew?"

I got up and went to the door, smiled back at her. I shouted out, "Hey, Leroy, two Mountain Dews. And when you have a free minute go out and get some donuts for everyone." Leroy took my ten and I shut the door.

"I'm surprised," I said.

"You said this place was yours."

"So you checked."

"Kind of."

There was a knock and Leroy handed me two cold bottles.

She took hers and I returned to my seat. "Donuts eventually. Everybody here has their favorites. What's yours?"

"Glazed."

"That's good. You won't have to fight Little Andy over the crème filled ones." I took a sip. "I missed seeing you at Burger King."

"I haven't gone there."

"Because of me?"

She shrugged. "Your van here?"

"It's at home. I have my car here today."

She wasn't looking at me.

"When you're ready and if you want I can give you a tour. We have a BMW Bobby and I are working on and a '29 Huppmobile. Plus the usual newer stuff."

There was a knock. "Okay," I said.

"I have the donuts."

"Glazed, please." I could hear the guys taking a break and someone laughing.

Leroy brought in a box and set it on the desk, glancing at Liz. She smiled at him and he gave a nod. The door shut and it was quiet again.

"Feel free," I said taking a donut. That plus the Mountain Dew was way too much sugar, but what the hell.

"So what was that, Monday night?"

I settled back in my seat. "We live in a conformist society. Everybody's got to be the same, within their little social and class niches. Except for lesbians and gays, girls will be girls and guys will be guys. You're supposed to be predictable. I'm supposed to be predictable. Only we're not. I think I have an idea of who you are. Now you're beginning to have an idea of who I am. We really don't know a thing

about each other except we know that we're not like other people. Maybe we want to find out more about each other. I'd like to get a chance and the only limitation is your age in years, not what you know or who you are."

She turned to me. "And who do you think I am?"

I was going to have to tread softly here. "I *think*, I don't know, but I think you're at a spot where you're doing something which can be satisfying but is not giving a lot of satisfaction. Maybe if I knew you better I could be more precise." I was going to say more, but stopped there for just a moment. "Me? I could come down on you like a ton of bricks but don't want to hurt you."

"So we're just going to sit here and eat donuts and talk?"

"That's not so bad, Liz. I didn't think I'd ever see you again. I'm thrilled you came by."

Her laugh was just a puff of air.

"If you were three years older I'd be trying my best to have you jump through hoops. You said you like it up the ass. It would make me happy seeing the guys here oblige you. One after the other on the desk here." Somehow, saying this out loud to her I felt ridiculous.

"What about the cage?"

"The one in the van?"

She shook her head. "In your basement?" She said it like a question.

"There would be cage time, that what you want to hear? I'm afraid the sound of my voice bores me, Liz. I'd rather talk about cars. You're sixteen and I won't touch you. Nor will they." I waved the bottle toward the door.

"So why?"

"Monday night?"

She nodded.

"I wanted to open the door. You can shut it and walk away. You can shut it and we can still be friends. I'd like that. Or you can decide to walk on through. That was my hope."

She looked up to me, touched her breast. "I need to be touched."

"Walk on through and be touched, of course." I tapped my chest, "Here," and my temple, "and here. Both, Liz. If you decide to walk on through. Your cage will be the crucible where your mind and your body pass through a furnace. If we're careful, the softest touch or word will make any orgasm you've had in the past be like dust blown away by the wind. You'll *be* the hurricane, be the inferno."

Her eyes didn't blink.

"And I'll be your master and your pleasure will be my pleasure." I set my bottle on the desk. "I might have you drop out of school, work here. You'd handle paperwork and customers and Leroy could get back to doing the things he loves."

She gave that laugh again. "I don't want to quit school and become your office slave, Andy."

"What do you want to do then?"

"You aren't married?"

"My wife died thirty years ago this coming December."

"I'm sorry."

"She was a good person. She would have done a better job with Junior than I did."

"Junior's your son?"

"Andy Carmichel, Junior. He's not here today."

"Do you do this because you can't get it up?" She wasn't smiling.

"I don't have problems there, no. Maybe better than average."

"So why?"

"Why not go out on dates just like normal people? Because I'm not. That doesn't interest me. Sitting here with you does. We could have had sex weeks ago, right?"

She looked up and smiled, "Sure."

"But you wouldn't be sitting here now if we had, right?"

She shrugged, shook her head.

I stood. "I want to give you a guided tour."

"Okay." She put up her drink and untouched donut and stood.

Chapter 4.

During the tour Liz asked good questions, handled herself well. There were no awkward moments with the guys and she didn't seem surprised at all at Little Andy's three hundred pounds.

Back in the office I shut the door and motioned her to her chair. "The guys think I'm interviewing you. Leroy's begging for someone to work up front." I sat down beside her. "So, what do you want to do next?"

She was shy again and shrugged.

"Interested in learning more about each other? I know I'd like to know more about you."

"You mean just be friends?"

"Sure. I already told you I'm not going to touch you. Here's one, when's your birthday?"

"April twentieth."

"You'll be seventeen then, right?" I took my Mountain Dew from the desk. "Bobby said you're a sophomore."

"Junior."

"So you're almost out. What's happening next? College?"

She shrugged.

"I'm okay with you just doing high school but I think you're smart. Right? School's a breeze for you."

She took her drink, ate a bite from the donut. "So where's the cagemobile, again?"

"Back at home."

"What happens next? You have a girl in a cage. You drive around and talk. That's it?"

"You mean if you were nineteen and *wanted* to be in a cage, really wanted, what would I do next?"

She nodded, glanced at me, took another bite from her donut.

"Say she spent all night in it. I wake up in the morning and she's awake already, watching me. I open the cage door and she comes out, still on her hands and knees. What do you want to happen next?"

"Breakfast?" She smiled at me. "You make her eggs and grits. She sits at the table across from you while you read the paper."

I took a sip from the bottle. "Most often I fuck her throat. When I'm done she might go back into the cage or maybe she'll make breakfast. It all depends. I don't read the paper at the table, though."

She hadn't looked away while I talked, hadn't blinked.

I asked her, "Do you drive?"

She shook her head, looked away.

"We can get you your learner's permit. I can teach you or maybe your parents can. Maybe find you a car."

She stood. "Andy, how many people are you? Kindly old man. Pervert who doesn't like women much. I can't keep up sometimes."

"You can leave any time, Liz. Now, tomorrow, next year."

She stood by the door, looked at the donut in her hand and smiled, then up to me, who stood by my chair.

"When are you going to put me in a cage again?"

"You have to ask me, in the beginning at least. Until we're both sure. I don't know you yet. So, are you asking?"

She nodded; tears were in her eyes.

I handed her a clean hankie.

"Thanks. I'm sorry."

I looked at my watch, almost five. "How about dinner? Eat out somewhere or at my place. If you're sure, then we'll do it. For a short time. Not all night."

She nodded, looked away.

"What time are you usually back at night?"

"That doesn't matter. No one cares. I could be gone all weekend, all week. No one cares."

"I care. How about back at eleven?"

"Sure. Whatever."

"Decide where you want to eat and I'll tell the guys I'm leaving early. The shop closes at six."

We ended up taking a pizza to my house. Junior hadn't left things in too much of mess. She walked around looking at magazines and books, flipped through videos by the VCR. I'm sure they included some of Junior's porn favorites.

We didn't talk much during dinner. I had a cup of coffee and she had a coke which she didn't finish.

"When you're ready, let me know."

"I'm ready." She looked across the table to me.

"There's a bathroom next to the kitchen and another downstairs in the basement. Junior might show up any time but he doesn't go down in the basement. We'll be alone. Still okay?"

"Sure."

"Okay." I stood and handed my coffee cup and saucer to her. "Please hold these for a minute." She followed me into the kitchen, to a short hall. I took out my keys and unlocked the basement door. "Junior doesn't have a key."

Inside, I flicked on the light switch by the door and led the way onto a short landing. "I don't trust carpeted stairs. Railing's nice and secure." I shut the door and slid the bolt, locking it. "So," I said, taking the cup and saucer, and led the way down into the large main room.

Three furnishings stood out at first glance. A cage, larger than the one in the van, at one end, a bed in the middle with no covers or pillows, just a burgundy

sheet, and at this end, visible once we were down, was the St. Andrew's Cross leaning against the wall.

There were no windows. Doorways led to a bathroom with a shower, a spare bedroom, and a kitchen. The floors were finished oak, the walls were white plaster. The ceiling was dark red.

"So," I asked, "any questions?" She was staring at the cross.

"What's that?"

"A St. Andrew's cross. I use it for restraint. Either for bondage or for flogging." I watched her face.

She turned away from me.

"Sometimes it's propped against the wall, sometimes I set it on the floor." I went to the bed and pulled open a drawer in the frame. "Here's a flogger. Go ahead, take it."

She held it, gave a slight shake.

"No, raise it. And now drop it so the strands hit my hand."

She looked at me before dropping her arm.

"It doesn't hurt. At most a little sting. Want to feel it? Do it to your own hand."

She struck her hand harder than she'd struck mine. She looked up and nodded, handing the flogger back to me.

I led her into the bedroom, which looked perfectly normal with a double bed. "When I have friends over." Next I showed her the bathroom and then the kitchen. "I suggest you use the bathroom before we start."

"Just the cage, right?"

"Just the cage. Or I can take you home."

"The cage, I think." She went up to it.

"I won't lock it this time. The lights will be on and I'll mostly be in the other room. This is just for you. You can do anything you want." I checked my watch. "It's a little after seven now. Three hours, until ten. That's too long, just tell me." I flipped the cage door latch and opened it.

She was still standing by the cage when I came back. "An air horn." I set it next to the cage. "If you don't get an answer, use this to get help. Of course, you can leave any time you want. This is your panic button. People can hear it on the street."

She turned to me. "What next?"

"Take off your clothes in the bedroom. There's no clock in here so you won't know what time it is. Once you reenter this room until it's ten, you won't speak and I won't speak to you. Understand? That doesn't mean you have to be silent. No words and no communication. If you say anything, everything ends. You'll get dressed and I'll take you home. Understand?"

She nodded.

"I need you to say yes or no."

"Yes."

I stepped back. She looked at me, looked across the room at the cross as she went into the bedroom.

I sat on the bed in the main room and sipped my coffee. She undressed quickly, came out in a little over a minute. She looked to me sitting on the bed and went to the cage.

She climbed inside. I set the cup and saucer on the bed and got up to close the door.

This cage was slightly larger. She could stretch out, but couldn't stand. She knelt on the floor facing toward me as I sat again on the bed. She looked up and smiled, then turned away.

I left the room and set the coffee on the dresser. I found a good book in the bookcase and settled on the bedcovers, leaning against the headboard. This was going to be long for both of us. I set the alarm for ten and put the clock back on the other side table.

There was a portable TV in the closet but that wasn't appropriate right now. I had a much smaller cage, too. The TV sat at just the right height on top.

Chapter 5.

I checked on her at eight, sat on the bed and watched her. She heard me come in but didn't move, lay on her back, eyes shut.

At one level I wanted to keep this purely technical. First this then that. Be gentle while at the same time showing my ability to control.

She was so young. A tan still remained from last summer outlining her bikini. The palest areas on her torso focused attention to her breasts and pelvic region.

She was blond with dark eyebrows matched with equally dark pubic hair. Her breasts were large enough and firm enough so they swelled from her chest.

I realized she'd turned her head and was looking at me. I rose from the bed and walked to the cage, looking down at her. I slowly circled the cage not touching it. Her eyes followed me.

So many questions she hadn't answered yet or asked. I couldn't completely understand why she wanted to be here. Maybe she understood why she was here better than I thought.

She began to touch herself and I shook my head. I left the room and returned to my book. Maybe she thought she could provoke me. Or maybe she thought by doing certain things she could please me.

I checked on her again at nine. She was prowling the cage on her hands and knees. She looked at me once as she passed along the side closest to the bed.

Mostly her hair swung down across her face and she let it sway back and forth across her arms. Her breasts hung, each cone tipped with a pink nipple. I noticed a bruise on the inside of her right thigh, halfway to the knee.

I left when she backed against a bar, pushing her crotch into it. She remained silent.

I let the alarm go off at ten. I put the book back in the bookcase in its proper spot and left the bedroom, shutting off the light.

She lay against the cage, moving slowly, half on her side. She quickly glanced at me and returned to her rubbing along the floor and bars.

I wanted to touch her, hold her hair and still her. Stood watching for several minutes more before opening the cage door.

I said, "That's enough for tonight, Liz."

She shook her head, rising to her hands and knees. Her hair flicked across the back of her hands. "No," she whispered.

"You have to be at home by eleven."

"No."

I left her and got a coke from the refrigerator in the kitchen. I opened it, set it by the cage door, and sat on the bed.

She backed against a bar, turned to look at me, her hair wild, and rubbed her crotch against it. "No," she whispered.

I let her do this for a couple of minutes before checking my watch. "It's ten twenty-six. I want you out by ten thirty."

She stopped rubbing against the bar, looked at me, brushing hair from her face. She began to smile, rubbed harder.

I got up and went into the bedroom, turning on the light. I gathered her clothes and carried them into the main room, dumping them onto the bed. I turned out the lights in the kitchen and bedroom, put the flogger back in its drawer. I took the coke and dumped it in the toilet, leaving the bottle on the counter. I turned that light out and stood by the cage.

"One last time, Liz. Get dressed."

She shook her head. "No."

"On ten I shut the cage door, lock it, go upstairs, turn out the lights down here. At noon I'll come back down, I'll be angry then so I'll drag you out, drag you to the car and drop you and your clothes off at Kroger's. One. The meat aisle sounds about right. Two. We'll never talk again. Three. Never. Four. I won't see you, acknowledge you. Five. If you come by my home or my shop. Six. I'll call the police. Seven." I held up three fingers, lowered one.

She shook her head and I lowered the second.

"Nine," I said.

She darted out of the cage to her clothes.

"Don't ever do that again, Liz," I said.

She looked up as she pulled on her jeans.

"Get dressed."

I waited by the steps, checked my watch. Ten minutes till eleven.

She gathered her purse, buttoning her blouse with the other hand. She followed me upstairs and when I opened the basement door I could hear the TV on. Bad music and fake moans. Junior was home. Forty-two years old and he still watched that shit. The faker it was the more he liked it.

Liz glanced at me.

"My son is home. You don't have to talk to him. Your coat's in the dining room."

She put on her coat and I took her purse from the table.

"Wait. Breathe deeply. Count to ten. Relax."

She brushed her hair from her face.

"Breathe. Better now?"

She nodded without thinking.

"Two worlds," I said. "Downstairs, upstairs. In the cage, out of the cage. I'd hoped we'd have had a little decompression time. Talk some more. Maybe next time if we do this again."

She tried to smile, caught another hair by her eye and pulled it aside.

"Maybe Junior will be too engrossed to notice us." I was hoping it wasn't because he was busy beating off.

I led the way to the front door and Junior met us, no shirt on, his pants unbuttoned. He started to speak, saw Liz behind me and his eyes got big. He said her name.

"You already know each other. Good. We're going. I'll be back shortly."

She followed me out of the house to the car, almost tripping on the walk. I caught her arm, steadied her, released her arm. I guided her to her seat, I shut the door, got in the driver's seat.

"You two know each other?"

"Yes." It had a dead sound.

"We both know a lot of people. No problem."

"I want to . . ."

"Next time. High school or at your home?"

"My home, I guess."

"Anywhere you want."

"Andy, I . . ."

"Where am I taking you?"

She rattled off an address. About a quarter mile from the school. Not a bad neighborhood. Every town has those. Here there were posh houses, a nice old neighborhood, a lower class one not far away from it inhabited mostly, according to local reputation, by recent immigrants from Kentucky, other working class neighborhoods that were a little run down, and neighborhoods like where I lived, ranch style houses built in the sixties with brick fronts and mostly newer model cars in the driveways. Probably an equal number of wives with black eyes as anywhere.

I parked in front. "We're late," I said.

"I told you it doesn't matter. They don't care."

"It matters to me. I said eleven and I meant eleven. When I say stuff we'll both do our damndest to make it so. Understand?"

She nodded.

"No, wait. There's no time to talk. Okay? I should have ended your cage time at nine."

She shook her head. She whispered, "I want you to whip me."

"You think you want me to whip you. It's not going to happen soon. Making me angry won't make it happen at all. Understand?"

"Andy . . ."

"So if it's really true nobody cares, call me tomorrow, after noon, at this number." I wrote the house phone number on the back of my card. "We can go for a drive or talk."

"Okay."

I got out and opened her door. "Don't touch me. Just walk away and be a good girl."

She stood there looking at me.

"Liz, you have a beautiful body. I noticed, okay?"

She smiled, kissed the door frame and walked toward her house.

Jeez.

Chapter 6.

Liz didn't call Saturday or come by. I went out to the Burger King at eight in the evening hoping to see her and not to miss her call. Saturdays Burger King has more customers that time of night. People on dates and families lingered. Her booth was taken by three girls looking to be in their twenties, not awfully pretty. They exuded raw sensuality and showed lots of cleavage so I was surprised they were unaccompanied.

I wasn't surprised not to see Liz. When things crash and burn it's easy to wander the maze of self doubt and second guessing. She was so young and eager and I'd thrown her into the deep end. I wasn't surprised when there wasn't a message when I got back home.

Sunday dragged on and at eight I had to decide whether or not to go back to Burger King. I definitely wasn't going to her house and confront her. A slow drive past Burger King and I didn't see the familiar blond hair. I spent an hour driving in the country, bare of snow and seemingly lifeless under a full moon.

I decided then that on Monday I'd put an ad in the paper. It wasn't fair to Leroy and the rest of us to have to make do when Junior decided to not show up. He could live with me; he'd have shelter and food on the table. That's all I could manage anymore. He wanted to work he'd have to get his hands dirty and not fuck up.

It's funny how anger works. Poor stupid Junior, he was receiving the brunt because I was mad at myself.

On Monday I was late because I stopped at the newspaper to put in the ad. The guys all had keys. Sometimes they came in early or left late or worked part of a weekend. It wasn't required but their hours added up when they needed some extra money and the customers liked being pleasantly surprised at the speed their cars left the shop.

When I walked in, Leroy said, "She's in your office."

The door was open and Liz sat in the chair, looking down at the floor.

"I'm happy to see you," I said as I sat behind my desk.

She looked up and her face was bruised and eye red and swollen. "Hi, Andy."

"Do you drink coffee?" I stood and went toward the door.

She shook her head.

"Want anything?"

There was a brief delay and she shook her head.

I went to the coffee machine and got a cup. I shut the door behind me and sat next to her.

"Where do you want to start?"

"I need a place to stay. Shit." She started to cry, wiped her face catching her hair. "Shit."

"You have it. Who beat you?"

"Dad, my step dad."

"When?"

"Saturday. I'm sorry. I wanted to . . ."

"That's okay. Safe to get your stuff?"

"No." She wiped the unbruised cheek with the back of her hand. "I don't want to go back there."

"When was the last time you had something to eat?"

She shrugged. "Yesterday?"

"What about school?"

She shrugged.

"All you have is what you're wearing?"

She nodded, her fingers tracing the bottom edge of her jacket.

"Okay. In a minute we'll get you some breakfast and some clothes. I'll talk to the people at your school, tell them you're out for a week. We need a doctor's permit, we'll get one because that's next. I'll make an appointment for after lunch. I'll drop you off at my house after getting keys made. The spare room is yours as long as you want it. That door locks, the basement door locks, the front door locks. You'll be safe. And then I need to talk to your family."

She shook her head. "No. You can't."

"They need to know you're safe. I want to try to get your school stuff. Anything else important?"

"No. It's okay."

"How's your mom about all this?"

"She won't do anything. Can't. It's okay. They don't care."

"We'll see." I moved to my seat behind the desk and went through the rolodex. Dr. Alan's office fit us in at one. I knew there'd be a wait.

"You hurt much?"

"I'm okay."

"I have tylenol."

"Okay."

I tossed her two and got a cup of water. She took them without, was standing when I got back with the cup.

"Drink some anyway," I said.

She looked up at me and there was a smile this time. "Okay, boss."

I told Leroy I'd be gone all day and that I had put an ad in the paper for office help. Hopefully we'd have someone by the end of the week.

Behind the shop, Liz said, "Not the cagemobile?"

"Sweetheart, looking the way you do, if someone saw you in there, I don't think I'd survive the ride to the station."

She was still looking at me, no smile, no frown.

I opened the car door for her and she got in.

I noticed breakfast for her was just soft stuff and clothes shopping didn't involve trying things on. I ended up asking her if a garment was her size and, if she said yes, giving it to the woman waiting on us. Goodness knows what *she* thought. The woman could tell I had no fashion sense, but the odd thing was how listless Liz was. Not an ounce of excitement.

Liz stayed in the car when I went to the school's office. Once I gave them Liz's name I could tell they'd already written her off. They told me they needed a doctor's slip and I asked them how many copies just to be smart.

So we had lunch, more soft stuff for Liz but she was looking better, and then sat for an hour at Alan's office. I had a word with him before, letting him know what I wanted. A full checkup, tests for STDs and pregnancy, X-rays if needed, whatever he thought was necessary.

When he was done with the examination, the nurse called me in. Dr. Alan dryly stated a litany: badly bruised, face and body, torn anus, nothing broken. Test results would take a week. Liz sat there, staring at the floor.

"Do you know who did this?" Dr. Alan asked.

"That's for Liz to say."

She shook her head.

I looked to Doc Alan and shrugged. "I need you to sign something for the school so she'll be excused for missing this week."

As he wrote he said, "She seems to have a pretty good idea of the types of food to eat. Rest. I've given her two prescriptions. No sex until she heals." He said that looking at me.

"I think we have that taken care of. Anything else?"

"Whoever did this should be in jail."

"My feelings exactly."

"I want to see you," said to Liz, "next Monday."

I said, "We'll be here."

I wrote a check and made the appointment. Outside the doctor's I said, "So it wasn't one wallop, was it?"

She was silent.

"You doing okay?"

"Think you can wait a week?" She glanced at me, smiled before looking down.

"I waited sixty-three years for you, what's an extra week or two or three, heh?"

She slapped my arm.

We dropped off the prescriptions, got spare keys made and left the doctor's note at the school office.

It was close to four when we got to my home. I showed her what keys fit where and once she was in the basement went to get the bags of clothes from the car.

She was sitting on the bed, when I returned, in the main room, jacket off.

"There's food in the kitchen down here, mostly pop and snack stuff. I'll get some soup for tonight. Breakfast?"

"Juice. That's all."

"So the bedroom door locks. There's a radio, books."

“The cage?”

“Let’s go easy, okay. For a day or two. Then we’ll see.” She had that look she had Friday night. I turned on the light to the bedroom. “It’s not that bad.”

She started to cry. “I’m sorry.”

“Don’t worry about it. I’m happy you came to me.” I stood there looking at her. “Okay, I’ll be gone an hour or so. Kroger, the prescription, and I’ll stop at your house.”

“Please don’t. I’m okay. They don’t care.”

“They cared enough to beat you. I won’t tell them where you are.”

“Andy.” She touched my sleeve. “Don’t.”

“You’ll be okay.”

“Andy, my step dad has been fucking me since I was a kid. Junior might be there.”

I’d suspected the one, the other surprised me. “Junior and your dad. Who else?”

She shrugged, looked away.

“Okay. I’m not looking for a fight. Just Kroger and the prescription tonight. When you feel like talking we’ll talk.” I touched the unbruised cheek. “Junior’s not a problem. Your family’s not a problem. Okay? You’re safe here.”

She nodded, looked away.

Like she really trusted me. I locked the door to the basement, she had a key if she needed it, and left for my errands.

Anger is a crazy thing. Junior being involved in this was a blow. I hoped I didn’t see him. I suspected he’d stay away and I knew he’d figure out where Liz was.

Chapter 7.

When I came back she was in the cage, lying on her side, looking at me. She was naked and I could see bruises, not just on her face. She gave a tentative smile.

“Liz, you’re breaking my heart.” I sat on the bed, packages by my side.

“So maybe not two or three weeks. Maybe tonight?”

“We need a long talk first and that’s not happening today. You have pills to take and dinner to eat.”

“I’m not hungry.” She turned away from me.

“Well I am.” I got her pills out, went to the kitchen and got a saucer. “What do you want to drink?”

“Water?”

“I got some Mountain Dew.”

“Just water.”

I filled a glass, took it and the saucer with the pills to the cage. I opened the door and set them inside. “Down the hatch.”

I took the groceries to the kitchen. “Soup. You want sandwiches or anything with it?” I stood by the door. “Eat and you can spend the night in the cage.” I had a pad and she’d get a blanket.

She didn’t move.

“Or I can drag you out of there, force feed you and then tuck you into a real bed.” I was kicking myself for not thinking of getting a milk shake for her on the way home. “I’ll figure if you don’t eat you want to talk. You choose.”

She sat up and I could see a bite mark on her breast.

“Maybe I should take you to the hospital.” I sat on the bed.

She turned her whole body to face me. We stared at each other for a minute or two and she said, “I’ll just eat soup. No sandwich. I don’t want to talk.”

I wanted to ask how often this happened to her. “You can tell me when you’re ready. Take your pills, Liz.”

She made a show of it.

“Good girl. You’re eating on the bed here with me in fifteen minutes. Make yourself presentable.” I walked to the kitchen. “T-shirt and panties at a minimum. Your clothes are in the bedroom. They need to be put away.”

She growled and tried to shake the bars.

Panties and t-shirt was what she wore. She finished her soup and had seconds and a glass of water.

“I’m ready to go back.” She raised her eyes to mine.

“Wash your face first. Can you brush your teeth, they hurt? There’s toothpaste and a brush in the bathroom.”

"I'll see," she said, rising.

I got the pad and took the blanket from the bed.

She came out, saw the pad and blanket, turned to me.

"You're bruised enough. Don't argue. All ready? Then in you go."

I shut the door after her and put in the padlock but didn't close it. "This is the only key." I held it up and then laid it on the floor just outside the cage. "There's a problem, grab the key and hide it and snap the lock shut. No one can get in. I'm sleeping on the bed here. Lights on or off?"

"Off."

"I'm going to read for a while in the other room. You need anything, just holler. You can leave the cage any time you want."

"Thanks, Andy."

"Glad to do it." I turned out the lights. From the bedroom I almost said, Too bad you didn't want to join me in the bed in here. "Sweet dreams."

"I'll be okay in the morning."

"You can stay here or come with me to work tomorrow. Think about it."

"I give great blowjobs. Think about it, Andy."

She must be feeling better because she was starting to joke.

Tuesday morning she wanted to sleep in and I let her.

At the shop we dusted off our Gone Fishin' sign and hung it on the door. Mark, Boo, Little Andy, Leroy and I paid a visit to Liz's home. I think it was Little Andy and his baseball bat that convinced, and here I don't even know what to call him, Liz's step dad, that we should get her stuff, that he and his friends and my son should stay well away from her, me and the rest of us. The parting shot from me was a message to Junior that his stuff was in the dumpster behind the shop if he wanted it. I was through with him. New locks were going on the house.

I'm glad Cindy wasn't around to see all this. Of course the cage and other gear would have had her shaking her head at me.

Liz came to work Wednesday, stayed in the office with me, no doubt bored to tears, but she seemed happy reading a book. Wednesday night after dinner she began to talk, she in her cage, me on the bed. What I was getting from her, I'm not going to repeat everything she said, was that I was the first person who, in a long time, seemed more interested in her than in just having sex with her. At a certain point she learned it was better to let men fuck her, expect men to be able to fuck her, than say no, like she did Saturday.

There's a subtle difference. On one hand you have a woman who's genuinely cock hungry, can't get enough. Who craves objectification. On the other hand you have a woman who thinks she can't say no. Saying yes and not being able to say no are two different things.

I'm pretty much monogamous but I glory in having a woman who wants it, doesn't matter who or how or where or how many. In my heart I'd hoped Liz could be this woman but now I didn't think so. Not from the life she'd lived.

That was okay. I could be a grandfather just as well as anything. I certainly looked the part.

About four or five years ago there was a story in the papers about a thirteen year old girl who let a neighbor fuck her. Him and his friends and they made videos of them doing stuff to her. They were busted, I always wondered what had happened to her. It was around this time that Junior and Amy had their big break up and now I wondered if he hadn't been involved. I can understand Amy not being able to talk about it.

None of Junior's videos were homemade and as far as I knew no photos or videos were shot of Liz.

So she's talking, naked and bruised, in her cage in my basement and I'm trying not to see similarities between me and them. I'd set my eyes on her, wanted her, could imagine her being used by my friends. She could always say no. She'd have to be my wife first, a neat bit of legal fiction. I was four times older than her, something she'd always know and I forgot because inside me I don't look sixty-three. The fact that I was older didn't seem to matter in a big way. But maybe because Liz had probably not had a boyfriend her own age.

We were both worn out Wednesday night. I didn't find it easy to sleep, I couldn't say how she did. For her it was a matter of pride to sleep on the floor without a blanket or the pad. Tuesday morning they'd been outside the cage. Back in they went Tuesday night and were out Wednesday morning.

She had her limits with what I could make her do and I wished to God I hadn't forced her to leave the cage Friday night.

Right now the cage was a place of safety. There were no performances like she'd given a few days ago. At the same time Liz made sure I was aware of her physical presence, visually. Her verbal playfulness was returning, along with her laugh.

Thursday night I set up the small TV and the VCR. I wanted to watch *Casablanca* again. She watched with me, both lying on the bed, near but not too near each other, the TV set on top of the cage. I hadn't told her about the little cage for fear she'd want to be in it.

I don't think she'd ever seen *Casablanca* before, was attentive to the movie, not fidgeting. It was easy for me to feel like I was Rick, the American nightclub owner. Liz was Ilsa, of course, the lover. I was destined to lose and I wondered how she saw the story.

When it was over and the tape was rewinding she was thoughtful. Liz turned, the t-shirt hitched up her belly, and said, "You remind me of him. What's his name?"

"The petty crook, Peter Lorre?"

She stuck out her tongue. "No. The sad one. Was that Bogart? I'd heard of him."

"Rick? Yes, that's Bogart."

"Why'd she go with the other?"

"Because good love stories don't have happy endings."

"That's stupid."

"You ever been in love?"

She looked at me for a moment. "You mean like with a kid in school? Not really. I've wanted guys to like me. Maybe I was in love. It never lasts long."

"Give yourself a few years."

"I love milk shakes."

"Want to go get one?"

She rubbed her belly, lifting the shirt higher. Her breasts were well delineated. Hell, I'd seen her naked lots of times the past few days. Now, clothed, she was sexy.

"No. I want to stay here like this."

Out of the blue I asked, "You ever have orgasms?"

"Sure. Not a lot." She scratched her thigh.

"Just wondered. With guys or just by yourself?"

"Both." She rolled over and rose to her hands and knees. She got off the bed and took off her t-shirt. She set it on the bed and began to push off her panties. Halfway down her thighs, bent over, she turned to me. "So, Andy, when are you going to invite me to sleep with you?" She removed her panties, grinned at me, and carried them and her t-shirt into the bedroom.

She showed me her pills before taking them, went into the bathroom and shut the door.

I got the shackles with the short chain from a drawer under the bed, tested the key.

She came out and said, "So?" giving her hips a wriggle.

"You're not ready yet, sweetheart." I rose from the bed, holding the shackles.

She saw them and looked up to me.

"In your cage."

The pad and blanket were already there. She closely watched me as I shut the cage door.

"Stretch out."

She lay on her back. I fastened one shackle around a cage bar, the other around her ankle. I set the key next to that for the padlock.

"I have more, if it's necessary."

"Don't you like me?" She was pouting, rubbing her foot along the shackled leg.

"A bit of celibate rigor would do us both good."

"I give great blowjobs." She puckered her lips.

"I'm glad you're feeling better."

"Don't leave me." She wasn't joking now.

"We're joined at the hip, girl. I'm glad you liked the movie. It's one of my favorites."

"I want you to like me."

"I'm falling in love with you, kiddo. But screwing you now would make me no different than Junior or your step dad."

"You're not like them at all."

"You're sixteen and I'm sixty-three. I'm not that different."

"You're not like them at all, Andy."

“Please, Liz. Have a heart. Do you think this is easy for me?”

She sat up. “So, like I have to go to the bathroom.”

“You weren’t paying attention. Key’s by the other one.”

“Okay.” She lay back down. “Ummm. I’m horny.”

“Glad you noticed. That’s what the cage does. Expect to get hornier.” I turned out the light. “Good night, Liz.”

“Good night you old sourpuss.”

Chapter 8.

After Thursday night, we'd reached a plateau. Liz still flirted but pressed no further. The bruises turned green and her eye looked better.

On Friday she helped me interview the three applicants for the job. We had a calm weekend and she helped interview another two on Monday, with her doctor visit in between.

Liz's tests came back negative and she was healing well. She was off one pill, could take the other only when necessary for pain. She'd stopped taking that one days earlier.

I hired the girl she liked best, a redhead who was nineteen and had a good personality. Debby had a young baby she was raising alone. She had her high school diploma and parents able to baby sit when she was at work.

Debby got health insurance, a decent wage, a week of sick leave and a week's vacation the first year. She looked like she'd be able to work on her own by the end of the week.

Liz returned to school Tuesday. I dropped her off in the morning and picked her up in the afternoon. I'd gotten her coursework from her teachers and she easily caught up. Her story was a car accident which some might have believed.

So we were coasting along nicely. Old movies a couple of times a week, milk shakes at Burger King on Wednesday night. No trips in the van and she accepted that. She'd gone through the drawers under the bed in the basement's main room but just looked, hadn't asked questions.

I moved a small table down into the basement for her to do her school work on. We had a game where I shackled her ankle to the table leg.

Her normal attire outside the cage was panties and t-shirt, though I'd relaxed that rule a bit, so sometimes she wore just one or the other.

She was alone most of the time or with just me and that worried me, except I think she was less lonely now than she'd been. As far as I knew she had no friends her own age.

The test to our stability came with Derek and Mary Sue's visit starting Friday night. They were good friends and they often came for a weekend once a month or so. Sometimes we went together to parties, especially the bigger ones. Derek was a cop, a good one, and Mary Sue was a therapist for one of the social service agencies.

Sometimes, if Derek and Mary Sue's car needed an oil change or new brakes, they came down early on a Friday. The work was done and after the shop was closed, the guys, Derek and I fucked Mary Sue silly. She'd take us on two or three at a time, until we couldn't do it any more. At one party I saw her take on twenty-three guys. It was incredible to watch her with them. Pretty dark-haired girl, five

foot three, petite, she could do this eight hours or more, wear out a room full of men, take a moment to sit and talk with the shy guy who watched. No pressure on him. She was interested in any type of interaction.

I told Liz Friday morning. They'd be in the basement. She was to dress in whatever way she felt comfortable. She wasn't to tease or flirt with Derek. No one would touch her. They'd leave Sunday. I didn't tell Liz their professions. Things were going to be confusing enough for her Friday night.

When Liz and I got home after work and a quick burger, she was antsy trying to figure out what to wear. She actually tried a dress, then pants and a shirt, dressing and undressing in front of me while trying to decide, and flirt a little, to see what I'd say. I was more worried about her reaction when they came.

The door bell rang, Liz darted an anxious look at me, picked up the clothes and ran to the bedroom.

"You can stay there if you want. Shut the door and come out whenever."

"Andy, I'm not ready."

I was heading up the stairs.

We came down laughing and talking; Mary Sue had shed her clothes at the front door. Derek had a deep baritone base, like thunder soaked in whiskey.

Liz was in her cage, naked, curled up. Hiding.

"So this is Liz," Mary Sue said. She looked at me.

"Liz, this is Derek and Mary Sue."

Liz nodded, didn't look up.

"I'll go get our things," Derek said. He just said that to give us some space. They never brought anything much, just themselves.

I sat on the bed as Mary Sue circled the cage. "You're prettier than Andy said you were." She knelt by the bars. "Much prettier. When you get tired of him, I know someone who'd just love you." She winked at me, stood and sat on the bed next to me. "What is it about old men liking little girls?" She was stroking my leg. "How are you getting along?"

"Just fine."

"Does she cook, too?"

"Not really."

"Liz, you want to keep a man like Andy happy, it's through his stomach, no matter what he may think."

Derek came back down. "So, Andy. You wanted to show me something?"

Liz sat up. "Don't go." She saw Mary Sue naked on the bed, looked to Derek standing on the stairs, an honestly big man, skin black as coal. She looked at me.

"Honey," Mary Sue said, "I'm just like you. I have many fond memories of time spent in that cage. Getting fucked through the bars. Having to sit and watch as they do another girl on the bed here and wanting it so bad. Mr. Andy here is a demon, well worth the trip."

"Liz and I are practicing celibacy."

"But not with me, I hope."

"But not with you." I looked over at Liz. "Unless Liz objects."

Liz shook her head, knelt watching us.

"Derek and I have an errand. We'll be back in an hour." I got up and picked up the padlock key from the floor outside the cage. I snapped the lock shut, set the key inside the cage near her. "You're safe, sweetheart. In here or in the bedroom."

Mary Sue winked at me as I walked past. Derek and I left the house, used his car.

"Were they pimping her?"

"I think so. She never saw any money."

"Drugs?"

"She hasn't said. I thought it was best to let her talk about it in her own way. There's bits and snatches every now and again."

"Junior was involved?"

"Seems so. She said he was there. I know that he knows her."

"We'll see what we can find out."

Derek drove past Liz's home slowly. The windows were lit, two cars in the driveway, another on the street.

"Junior's Pinto," I said.

"Is there an alley?"

"Yes."

He turned the corner, turned down the alley, stopped the car behind the house.

"A lot of activity here?"

"I don't know."

"People coming and going all hours day and night?"

"I don't know."

"Don't try to find out. I don't want you anywhere near here. No problems at your place?"

"I changed the locks. We stay in the basement."

"I'll come out tomorrow in the daylight. Let's drive past again."

In front of the house Derek stopped just long enough to get license numbers and we parked a block away on that street and watched. The street was quiet, no one drove by.

Derek started the car. "And now for some grocery shopping. Mary Sue's given me a list a foot long. She doesn't think you eat well enough."

"Bland soft food is all Liz could manage for a week or so."

"Talk to the mother?"

"Not really. The guys and I got Liz's stuff; she didn't say much. The stepfather did the talking."

"Are they really married?"

"I assume so."

"Liz didn't want to press charges?"

"She won't even really talk about it. Just a little to me."

"So maybe just her, not drugs. Sisters?"

"She hasn't said."

Derek parked at Kroger's. "Sounds like Mary Sue is planning on cooking classes this weekend."

I smiled. Mary Sue's pert ass when she's only wearing an apron is pretty inviting.

"What were you planning?"

"What you two think best."

"Mary Sue's the thinker. Andy, I'll talk to the Chief here and do some nosing around but there's probably nothing we can get them on without Liz's help. Even then it's hard to say. A trial is hard on a girl in her situation. Any friends?"

"None that I know of."

"She has you, Andy."

"And the guys in the shop."

"Anybody working over the weekend?"

"They hadn't told me so. They've been running the place since this all happened."

"I'll check tomorrow when I'm out."

"I can go with you."

"You're staying home with Mary Sue and Liz. I'm going to talk to neighbors. I don't want you anywhere around there."

"You're the boss."

"Mary Sue wanted to know what you wanted to eat tomorrow night. Pot roast or spaghetti?"

"Spaghetti might be easier for Liz."

"That's right. She'll be cooking."

Chapter 9.

Derek and I carried two loads of groceries downstairs. Mary Sue was still sitting on the bed and Liz was in her cage. Neither spoke as we walked past both times. Once all the groceries were put away, Mary Sue said, "That was a bit over an hour, boys. Meet someone interesting?"

Derek kissed her. "As if."

Mary Sue turned to me. "You and I need to have a short talk." She rose and walked to the stairs. "Over here."

I glanced at Liz, who was watching me, and joined Mary Sue.

"If we're together she needs to see us. No sex with you this weekend. I promised her. Sorry."

I shrugged.

"Derek and I are going to play with the cross. She wants to watch and you can videotape us. But not join in. She now knows you're a great lover. No problems there. She's afraid she's going to lose you and if you two have sex she's sure you'll be finished with her. I'd put that off as long as you can. Build up as much trust as you are able. We'll talk later. She's resilient and she's smart. Tomorrow you and Bobby do stuff together and we'll work on dinner. She likes the idea of learning ways to please you."

I was watching Liz watching me as Mary Sue talked.

"Maybe she'll learn something watching Derek and me. She needs a good cuddle now and again. Assurance."

I turned to Mary Sue. "Do you have any idea how hard it's been sometimes?"

"Like right now, me wanting your sweet cock up my ass? I have an idea, Andy, which is why I'm not going to touch you." She grinned and walked past me to the cage.

Derek had his clothes off and Liz was watching him now. I got things out of the drawers and set them on the bed.

"You're chaining me to the bed tonight, Derek. Andy, you'll be sleeping in the spare room. Alone. Right, Liz?"

Liz turned from Derek to me and smiled.

Derek tossed his car keys to me. "The camera's in the trunk. Grab two cassettes."

When I came back, Mary Sue knelt in front of Derek, her hands cuffed behind her back. They didn't wait for me to get things going.

Derek grabbed a handful of her hair and pulled her face into his crotch. "That's it, girl." When he was hard he pushed her away and rubbed his dick across her face. She had a smile and her eyes were on his, waiting.

The lunge was deep, he pulled back, grabbed her head just above the neck, thrust deeply and pulled her onto him. It was a fast, steady rhythm. Derek wasn't overly endowed, he had eight inches or so in her with each stroke. I've seen Mary Sue try to take on guys who were huge and she just couldn't manage it. Not like this.

"You're going to hold it, girl, until I tell you to swallow."

I had the camera going and caught the blink of her eyes in acknowledgement as his body pistoned. The strokes slowed, were longer and deeper. Her face met his flat stomach as he ground her onto him and let up. She was somehow breathing every other stroke, quick gasps matching his.

He went deep and pulled back. She opened her mouth as he came, filling her over full, so cum spilled down her chin.

He let go of her and stepped back. "Good girl. Now hold it."

Her eyes never left his as he went over to the St. Andrew's Cross. He looked back to Mary Sue and walked to the bed, scruffing her hair as he passed.

Derek took his time binding Mary Sue to the cross, using rope, her hand cuffs removed and on the bed. She faced us, her back to the cross, wrists bound to the upper arms of the cross, ankles to the lower.

Derek posed, when he was done tying her, proud of his trophy. "Let's check," he said. "Andy, bring the camera close. Okay, girl, open your mouth. That's a good girl." He patted her cheek. "Hold it and don't swallow."

Mary Sue's eyes never left him. She blinked.

Derek stroked her body, paying attention to her breasts at first and then moving down to her bare pubic area. He stroked a single finger down, over, under and up her slit. Mary Sue turned slightly.

"I'm glad I tied you firmly, girl, because otherwise you'd fall flat on your face before I'm done with you. Close up, please, Andy. Bury the camera in her twat."

He spread her vulva lips and stroked around her clit not touching it. The first time he actually touched her clit her hips wiggled.

Derek straightened and said, "How many times, Andy, before she can swallow? Ten?"

I focused on Mary Sue's face. "Twelve, if she has any left."

"You heard the man. Each time, girl, you come you'll say thank you, master. You'll do that twelve times." He looked over at the cage. "Liz, you keep count. Sound off each time."

Mary Sue's eyes went from Derek's to mine. "That's good, Andy. Focus there."

I couldn't see what he was doing, only see how she twitched and squirmed. After several minutes her head fell backward and her eyes closed. She righted and opened her eyes.

"Thank you, master."

You could barely hear the slurred words. Cum dribbled down her chin.

"Any you spill on Andy's floor you'll lick clean. Got that, girl?"

She blinked her eyes, looked back to me.

"That's one, Liz. Say it."

Liz said, "One."

"You're another good girl."

Mary Sue twitched and wiggled her way through seven orgasms, each several minutes apart. She was hanging from her wrists, her body twisted as much as the cross would allow.

The next orgasms followed one another quickly, her body thrashing through each one.

"A bit sensitive. I should wait, shouldn't I?" He brought her off and she said, "Thank you, master."

Liz said, "Twelve."

"You're both good girls."

Derek lifted Mary Sue's face by her hair. "You can swallow. Good girl." He looked down to their feet. "But you spilled it all over the place. No ice cream for you."

"Thank you, master."

"Maybe after you clean the floor. Liz, does she get ice cream if she cleans the floor?"

I didn't want Liz in the video so I kept the camera on Mary Sue's face.

"Yes," Liz said.

Derek released Mary Sue's hair and her head flopped back down.

"Thank you, master."

"Music to our ears, isn't it, Andy? Let's sit down while she catches her breath. The camera can go off."

We sat facing Mary Sue. Derek turned to Liz. "Andy says you like vanilla shakes so we got vanilla ice cream. Hope that's what you want."

I turned to Liz. She knelt in the cage. There was a smile on her face and she nodded.

"You'll be serving in about fifteen minutes. Just warning you." Derek turned to Mary Sue. "Ready to come down?"

She nodded, still limp.

"Can you stand?"

She raised herself upright.

"Let's see those beautiful blue eyes."

She raised her face. It had a glow.

"Okay." Derek stood. "This hard work sure takes it out of a man."

As he untied Mary Sue, he talked over his shoulder to Liz. "She's done thirty, but that's when there was a group of us. Twelve is about my limit." He raised his finger and wiggled it. "Still, twelve is a decent start. We'll do better tomorrow. There's all day." He rose when Mary Sue's feet were loose. He said to Mary Sue, "How's my girl?"

She gave a blink.

"That's good. Once you're free, down on your knees and get busy. We'll need the camera for this, Andy."

He had one hand loose and turned to Liz. "How long will it take you to get ice cream ready?"

"Five minutes."

"I'll give you a five minute warning."

When Mary Sue was free she fell to her knees. I kept the camera low and Derek stepped back.

"Time to clean up your mess, girl."

She licked up the biggest spot first, then worked on the spatters.

"Five minutes, Liz."

We heard the cage door open.

When Mary Sue was done we turned to find four bowls on the bed.

"Let them sit together," Derek said. "They can compare notes."

We sat at the other end. "I'm guessing my wife's off limits. That's too bad. I could sure use your help." He said that loud enough for Liz to hear. "So, Andy, did Junior leave any of his porn behind?" He winked.

"We put everything in the dumpster behind the shop."

"Good man. Good ice cream, Liz."

Chapter 10.

After ice cream Friday night Derek chained Mary Sue to the bed and tortured (in big quotes) her clit with a small brush. Once she was fired up he fucked her. As a break afterwards he flogged her before turning her over and doing her ass. This time as a break he sat on the bed and talked to Liz and me about nothing in particular, which seemed to draw Liz out.

The end of the session had Mary Sue on her back, a cum gag in her mouth and a section of broom stick in her cunt. Derek masturbated over her, standing by the bed at her head. After finishing in her mouth he let her swallow his cum and told her how good she was.

After I put the camera away, and made sure Liz was comfortable in her cage, I turned out the light and went to the bedroom.

Saturday morning was more of the same, with Mary Sue at Derek's request giving a very graphic demonstration, with a narration (without any intentional humor), on how to masturbate with various objects. Her mouth had been filled with Derek's cum before starting the show.

Liz hardly blinked.

Mary Sue was then given a good fucking by Derek, but only after reaching the required number of orgasms. At noon, with cum drying on her chin, she and Liz made lunch for everyone.

That afternoon Derek and I went our separate ways. I spent the afternoon with Bobby at the shop, we being the only ones there. This was the first time I'd been with him for two weeks. I realized how much I missed my time with my grandson.

Derek intended to spend some time in Liz's home's neighborhood. He took the video camera to record comings and goings from the house. The time afterwards would be spent talking with neighbors.

The surveillance could be done without drawing overmuch attention to himself. Talking to the neighbors would get back to Liz's parents. They'd feel the pressure.

When I got home and downstairs I could hear Liz and Mary Sue laughing in the kitchen. I sat on the bed and just listened to the sound. Liz came out of the kitchen and gave a small jump.

"I didn't know you were here."

"Just a minute ago."

She held a dish towel in one hand and a pan in the other. She wore panties and looked different somehow.

"Who's here?" Mary Sue said.

Liz said over her shoulder, "Andy."

Mary Sue came out of the kitchen wearing the apron. "Did you know this girl isn't sorry at all you've not been able to fuck me this weekend? Not at all sorry. I

think she should be spanked.” Mary Sue gave me a wink and went back into the kitchen.

“What do you think, Liz?”

“You think you can *just* spank me?”

“It might be worth trying.”

Liz stuck her tongue out, turned and left. She returned without the towel or pan, holding a glass. She put it in my hand. “What you can do is go into the bathroom or bedroom, whatever, and do what you need to do to fill this glass. Mary Sue will drink it.” Liz tapped the glass. “But you don’t get to give it to her. You have to give the glass to me.”

“That’s positively Byzantine, Liz,” Mary Sue shouted from the kitchen. “Andy, I’d spank her if I were you. Bend her over your lap, pull down her undies, and give her a quick twenty-five. Right now, before Derek comes back. You know what it does to him if he sees a red ass.”

“Maybe you’re the one who should be spanked,” Liz said to Mary Sue. Liz turned to me. “You have my permission to do it to her, but nothing else. Understood?”

I held the glass up to the light. “No. I don’t think this is worth all the trouble.” I got up, handed the glass to Liz. “I’m going to watch TV.”

“Chicken.”

“Damn straight.”

Liz followed me into the bedroom a minute later. “I need to change my clothes.”

“That doesn’t surprise me at all.”

She tried three pairs of underwear, asking my opinion for each, before deciding on just a t-shirt. She was getting ready to do something else, maybe see if I’d changed my mind about the glass, when the doorbell rang.

I went upstairs and let Derek in. He shrugged, “There’s not much to say.”

We went downstairs and Mary Sue shouted from the kitchen, “Less than ten minutes.”

“Can Liz manage?”

“I think so. Sure.”

“Then come here, girl.”

She’d left the apron in the kitchen, knelt at his feet.

“I’ve been missing you.” He unzipped his pants, unbuttoned them and let them drop. “You know what to do.”

This time she did all the work, thrusting her head onto his cock, letting it enter her throat with a squelch sort of sound. Spit poured out of her mouth and down her chin, thick and foamy.

Derek asked me, “On her face?”

“Let her drink it. We want to watch her get spanked after dinner. Splash her then.”

“Great idea. Girl, you ready?”

She blinked.

“Show me how hot doing this makes you.”

She buried three fingers in her cunt and pulled and thrust as she fucked his cock with her mouth.

When Derek came he lunged and held her face to his stomach. His groan was matched by hers. Her head still tried to bob under his hands.

"Dinner's ready," Liz said.

Derek laughed. "Damn. Doing that sure makes me hungry. Sorry, Andy, you couldn't join at the other end."

Liz shouted from the kitchen, "You guys aren't going to make me feel guilty. Not one bit. I wasn't the one who came up with the celibacy bit. I think it's vastly overrated, but to quote Andy, we're going to do our damndest. So there."

"Did you really say that, Andy?" Derek laughed. "No wonder the hangdog look. Let's get eating."

Dinner was one of the best, partly because of the meal, partly because of the company. I think it was two hours after we started dinner that Mary Sue finally got her spanking and three hours after that when she and Derek were ready to go to sleep.

Derek kept up a running commentary on what he was about to do or was doing, partly for the camera, partly for Liz. He was explaining the rationale, the method, and the effects. He was able to turn activities like spanking or breast bondage into something seeming a good deal less threatening. Mary Sue was obviously enjoying herself. And the sight of him afterwards wrapped around her bound and spread-eagled body on the bed was sweet in an unexpected way.

Sunday Derek, while flogging Mary Sue on the St. Andrew's Cross, explained, both for the camera and for Liz, how for everything they did together it was important that either be able to say no for any reason. If Derek didn't want to flog or fuck, he should be able to say no. Or if he decided anytime while fucking Mary Sue, he wanted to stop, he could.

"Don't you dare, mister," Mary Sue said.

I'm sure Mary Sue had made the same point yesterday.

Before lunch on Sunday and after already fucking Mary Sue in the ass several times, she told him he had to stop and move elsewhere. It was hurting. Derek looked at me because this didn't happen often, and pulled out, saying he was ready to stop anyway. He brought her off one more time with his fingers.

After lunch Derek explained the gear in the drawers to Liz. She let him give her a short flogging.

While they were occupied, Mary Sue and I talked in the bedroom.

"She needs to be hugged, Andy. You're going to have to find a way to cuddle her."

"When I'm talking with Liz I'm already falling into that dangerous state where one moment there are words and the next there's something else. She doesn't pull back, she goes deeper."

"It's probably going to happen anyway, Andy. Better later than sooner. If you don't want it to happen, you need to get her out of here to someplace safe."

"I do want it to happen and I don't."

"It's not legal for you to have sex with her."

"I know that. But I don't think there's any other options to having her here."

"I might be able to find a place. Want me to look?"

"Yes and no. Call me if there's some place that's good and that's near here."

"She won't be able to see you."

"I know. I mean I guess I know that. My first concern two weeks ago was her safety and her health."

"Your first?" She smiled.

"She tell you about the cagemobile?"

Mary Sue smiled.

"I've been playing with fire."

"Do you think you're too old?"

"Right now, yes. When she does that stuff with her clothes, no."

"She's still surprised you haven't fucked me." Mary Sue touched my hand. "Our time is just about up. Surprised and pleased with you. Perhaps your restraint will encourage restraint on her part. She deserves a good long cuddle, Andy. I don't think age matters as much to her as you think."

Chapter 11.

After Derek and Mary Sue left Sunday afternoon, Liz handed me a shopping list, groceries for most of the week. She smiled and went back to her cage after shedding her shirt.

“Don’t you have homework to do?”

“It’s done. When you get back I’m making dinner tonight.”

Looking at her now it was hard to visualize what she’d gone through two weeks ago.

I stopped at Blockbuster and picked up a video before going to Kroger. Hitchcock’s *The 39 Steps* should be low key and a bit campy, too. Liz got a kick out of my love for the old black and white movies.

I took care of bills while she made hamburgers, naked except for the apron. If she was trying to drive me crazy, she was succeeding. I don’t know how many times she came to where I was working, for one innocent reason or another, to walk away with an enhanced sway.

She did well with the burgers. She couldn’t eat the potato chips, said she was full anyway. She went back to her cage while I cleaned up, and I think both of us were really happy, grinning a lot to each other. Having Derek and Mary Sue visit had been good for her.

Liz wore the regulatory t-shirt and panties on the bed while watching the movie, but the fabric of both seemed to be in constant motion as it was pulled, tugged or pushed.

There’s a handcuff sequence in the movie where the hero and the woman he constantly fought with were cuffed together and had to pretend they were a newly wedded couple on their honeymoon. Liz said, “Stop a minute.”

I found the remote and pushed the button as she rolled over and looked at me. “You have handcuffs, don’t you? Let’s use them.” She jumped up and had to go through two drawers before she found them. “Here.”

I gave her a wary look.

“Come on. Let’s do this. I want you to put one on me and then one on yourself.”

I’m not so sure . . .”

“Come on. This will be fun.” She held the cuffs out.

I cuffed her left hand to my right and she tried to pull me forward. “Let’s just watch the movie, Liz.”

“Sure.” She grabbed my cuffed hand with hers and pulled me forward so we lay side by side on the bed.

“Well, start her up again, Andy.”

I fumbled with the remote, got the film started.

“This is nice, isn’t it?” She looked over at me and smiled, released my hand.

The rest of the movie went by while I was in a haze of preoccupation. She no longer fiddled with her clothes because it didn't matter. I was aware of the heat of her given off by every single inch of her body.

When the film was over, I set the remote for rewind. "I need to use the bathroom."

"I guess I'm coming along, aren't I?" She winked at me.

"I want to show you something first."

I left her cuffed to the cage and put the TV and VCR up, left the video on the table to take back in the morning, before going to the bathroom. When I came out Liz was naked, still cuffed to the cage but with the cuff wrapped in her t-shirt. I couldn't see where she'd kicked her panties.

"That was mean," she said.

"If I had any sense, I'd leave you there."

"If you'd had any sense you'd never given me that ride in the cagemobile."

"What was I thinking?"

"Thanks, Andy, for everything."

"Thanks, Liz, for your preposterous beauty. Burgers, nice ass, and a smart mouth, what more could a man want?"

"Maybe what Mary Sue offered and you couldn't get?"

"I'm happy. Pull the shirt up so I can unlock you."

"You're going to have to wrestle me. Grrrrr."

I left her and brought back the pad and blanket for her cage. "You'll be comfy in here." I looked over at her. "That shirt better be off those cuffs."

"Grrrr. A virgin always defends her honor."

I went into the bedroom and took a spare sheet from the closet. Back in the main room I said, "It's not up."

"Grrrrr."

I rushed her, flinging the open sheet over her, wrapping it around her (deliciously) writhing body. I held her with one arm, got the sheet and t-shirt away from the cuff, and circling her with my arms, as she flung her body against mine, laughing, got the cuff off her wrist.

I wrapped her tight in the sheet, picked her up. She wiggled in my arms, flopping like a fish, as I lowered her into the cage doorway.

"I give up. I give up," she said. She pulled the sheet off her head, flipping her hair over her face. She tugged it away from her eyes. "You're wicked. You know that? You didn't need to smother me."

"The next time Mary Sue comes, I don't care what you say, I'm doing it. This is pure torture."

"Andy, you can have me any time you want. I never said no to you." She pulled the rest of the sheet off of her and crawled entirely into the cage. "I don't need that sheet."

I shut the door and folded the sheet. I looked down at her and she was backed against a bar, rubbing it. She ignored me when I turned out the lights. I watched

her in the glow from the bedroom light for a minute. I was going to sleep in here again. I shut the door.

I lay in bed thinking of that first week, either the time in the van or the first time here at home. She'd told me she needed to be touched. I'd maybe touched her mind but she had a body too, and I wanted to lose myself in the grace of that touch.

I thought that if she went away a part of me would die. I'd not been celibate since Cindy's death, not by a long shot, had fallen in and out of love, but this was different. Mary Sue's option of sending Liz somewhere was no longer possible it looked for either of us. I think Liz would bitterly fight any attempt to make her leave, no matter how much better it would be for her. People her own age. Counselors. Some place safe, far from here. Memory has a geographic component and being at school or in a town and seeing familiar landmarks and people must be hard for Liz, since everything was associated with her pain.

I drifted off finally and woke with a muzzy-headedness because I was halfway in a dream. I heard a noise and thought, Liz is taking the pad and blanket out of her cage. There was no light at all, even with my eyes open. I shut them, heard another noise and felt the bed shift.

"I'm joining you," Liz said.

I rolled toward the voice.

"Just calm down. I mean if you want to you can. Don't try to make me leave. Okay?"

I felt her move under the sheets, move up against me and roll onto her side. Her arm reached over me and I rolled to my side facing away from her. She snuggled closer and gave a gentle squeeze.

"Thanks, Andy."

"Night, Liz."

"Night."

I could smell her this close. I wondered how I smelled to her. Was I different? Could she smell the rot of age? I hated the feeling of loss I lived with. To fight it I had sought out Liz. Now she was the one trying to hold onto what I couldn't offer her, a life full of years and bounty. Maybe she didn't care now, but all I had for her was my mortality.

I woke several times in the night. Once she wasn't against my back and I turned and found her facing away. I moved to her, held her close to me and that's how the alarm woke us, my arm over her.

Chapter 12.

We were in the car getting ready for school and work and she said, "Look at what I have." She pulled the handcuffs out of her purse. "Neat, huh?" She clicked them on her wrists and laughed. "I'm your captive."

"Only in the car."

"I know that, Andy. Two worlds. You carefully explained it to me." She clicked the cuffs pulling her wrists apart. "I want you to flog me."

I started the car. "One time I wanted you, or someone like you, to say those magic words to me. I want you to flog me."

"Mary Sue says it makes her horny as all get out."

"Mary Sue's exceptional."

"Isn't she." Liz clicked the cuffs. "Maybe tonight's the night."

"Depends on what's for dinner."

"Macaroni and cheese. Out of a box. Mary Sue said keep things simple. She's sending me a cookbook."

We were two blocks from home, passing through an intersection. "Noodles and flogging. I don't think . . ."

I still can't remember much. There was a loud crash and everything shook and I remember hearing Liz scream. I woke up in the hospital. Mark was there.

"Where's Liz?"

"She was with you?"

I went a little crazy then and it took a few minutes to sort things out. The Barracuda had been broadsided by a car. I was the only one on the scene. Cops had gone to the shop, looking for Junior, I guess as my closest relative. Mark had come to the hospital. I got him to call Leroy so Leroy could call Derek. The number was on the rolodex on my desk.

As time passed I learned I'd been hit by a Pinto and then that the Pinto was Junior's and that there'd been some blood on the passenger side of my car. I'd hit my head on the driver's side window and bled like a stuck pig so they'd thought the blood was mine. The cops were still trying to get things sorted out.

I knew who had Liz and could too easily imagine what they'd do to her. Cops saw I had a head injury and they thought I sounded like a crazy man.

A call from Derek to the Chief had a car go to Liz's home. No one was at the house. Derek himself checked records, what he could access from where he was, and there was no step dad. Everything, car, house, was in Liz's mom's name. No record of a divorce or death, or of a remarriage in this state. All this he told me two days later when I was back in the shop.

I drove over to her home as soon as I got out of the hospital and it looked like no one was there. No one got the mail, the trash can was tipped over, out by the

curb. They'd taken Liz and gone.

I sat one evening in the spare bedroom, looking at Liz's clothes, the things she'd worn. I finally got up. I can't do this, I thought. I went upstairs, turned off the light, and never went back down. I took the cage out of the van and buried it under clutter in the garage.

A week after this I sat in the car in the Burger King parking lot and bawled while Bobby watched, frozen.

Chapter 13.

I guess everyone assumed things would settle down after Liz disappeared. I had to believe she was still alive, was more important to them alive. Who they could be was still uncertain. Junior and the man who Liz called step dad but maybe others, and the mother. I didn't know a thing and the police seemed to treat the whole mess as a mystery rather than a crime.

The Chief was kind but my impression was he was a bumbler who thought one less sixteen year old might make life better for the people who mattered.

Work at the shop went on though I was preoccupied. The new girl, Debby, was who we'd needed all along. Leroy was fixing cars, customers and the guys were happy, and Debby kept things bright and cheerful.

Amy and Bobby made an effort to keep me occupied but I don't think anyone realized what Liz meant to me.

Derek and Mary Sue did have an idea. Though I was on the phone with one or the other of them daily, we didn't get a chance to sit down together and talk for almost a month. Derek believed a crime had taken place, had been taking place for years, but he had no jurisdiction.

The weekend Derek and Mary Sue came down they were surprised I expected everyone to stay upstairs. They asked for the key to the basement because they wanted to bring up some gear.

Mary Sue came back up and sat with me in the living room. "Jesus, Andy, it's a tomb down there. Dishes on the table. Clothes on the floor. Spoiled food in the refrigerator. Did you just leave it and lock the door?"

I was thinking about when I got out of the hospital, going down there and seeing the unmade bed. I could still smell her.

"We'll clean up. How are you doing?"

I shrugged.

"We'll find her, Andy. She'll be okay."

On foot this small town would take a day or two to walk every road and alley. That says nothing of the houses, sheds and garages, businesses, whatever. The country was too big. The people who had Liz could be anywhere and they'd be moving. I had told Liz she was safe and I hadn't protected her.

Mary Sue patted my knee and went back downstairs.

I didn't join in the fun that weekend and everyone was subdued. I felt as if I'd poisoned the mood and was surprised at their generosity when they called the next day after returning home.

I did make an effort to be more outgoing but it was easier to sit at home with the huge video catalog from Chicago – foreign, art and old black and white movies. I could buy or rent by mail and that's how I spent a lot of evenings.

What saved me was I was never much of a drinker. A beer now and again and that remained true now. I started smoking and even that didn't last. I was too depressed to get addicted to cigarettes.

Winter turned to spring. Liz, somewhere, was celebrating her seventeenth birthday.

Mary Sue over the months talked a little about Liz. How Liz had tried to kill herself in desperation. How Mary Sue explained to Liz that I needed to be cuddled. That made me smile, Mary Sue doing her best to push us together. I told Mary Sue how Liz thought I was sad. Mary Sue just nodded, said, "Sadder now."

Mary Sue told me how happy Liz had been with me. I'm not sure that helped at all.

So in spite of everyone's good intentions and my own black cloud, I made clumsy attempts to climb out of my shell.

For some reason I fixated on Debby. There were several ties with Liz – Liz had liked her and Debby was too young like Liz.

I had a crush on her, stared at her, began to imagine us happy together. I'd be the father of her child, though I didn't know the name of the kid. I imagined her kindnesses as signs of reciprocal feelings. Before I made a total fool of myself Boo invited himself in my office and shut the door.

"Andy," he said, "you know that Little Andy likes Debby? Likes her a lot. Mark and Leroy and I were hoping you could figure out a way to nudge them a little closer. Play cupid. He's too shy to do anything by himself."

He left the office and I had a mission.

Debby was maybe as tall as five feet and maybe weighed a hundred pounds soaking wet. She had a decent figure. She wasn't a beauty but that didn't matter with her personality. She made people feel good.

Little Andy was built like a brick shit house. It was too easy to miss the fact that he was smart and considerate. He wasn't an easy talker but what he said was worth hearing.

I figured if Little Andy could relax enough to just talk to her that was half the battle. I had to do things so she'd see his qualities and not just his size.

I tried to get them talking together in work situations, telling her to ask Little Andy and telling him to ask Debby.

The shop had a picnic and she brought Susan, her child. Little Andy was great around kids, had no problem holding Susan, giving her a bottle. Leroy looked over at me and winked.

That week I called Debby to my office and we talked for a bit about shop stuff before what was important.

"Debby, how do you feel about Little Andy?"

She looked at me and I could see something click in place.

"He's a nice guy."

"Nice enough to date?"

She nodded.

"I can take care of Susan for you."

"You could?"

"Sure. I raised a son. Not very well, but a couple of hours with me shouldn't ruin her."

She just smiled.

"So I can let Little Andy know you won't say no?"

"Tell him I'd like it. I haven't been out since the day my daughter was born."

She was making it sound like she was in worse shape than me, which I didn't believe.

"Thanks," I said.

She left and I called Little Andy in.

"You and I are going out for lunch together in five minutes. No, put a smile on. This is good news."

Poor Little Andy was a wreck by the time we reached Arby's by the highway. We sat outside with our sandwiches.

"So, Andy," I said. "I've asked the other guys and they said no. I'm counting on you. You know Debby?"

He stopped eating and put down his sandwich.

"She hasn't been on a date since Susan was born."

He nodded, still chewing.

"I think she'd be happier if someone took her out. I'm her boss so that's out, right?"

He nodded.

"So, how about you?"

He stopped chewing.

"Dinner. A movie. Some adult conversation and a break from the kid and her parents. Could you do it?"

He nodded and resumed chewing.

"I know she likes you. Maybe you'll even start liking her." I was laying it on thick, but he didn't seem to mind. "But this is just a date. I don't want her pregnant, understand?"

He nodded, picked up his sandwich.

"Any ideas where you'd take her?"

Our town is small and in the country. There isn't much when it comes to fancy dining. Little Andy named it. I thought, She's going to like this.

"Okay. And the movie?"

He suggested one girls would like. I think this had been on his mind for a while.

"Think fifty would cover it?" I took out my wallet.

"You don't need to . . ."

"Andy, I'm asking you to do this. You shouldn't have to pay. Here."

He took the bill, folded it and put it in his shirt pocket. "Thanks, Andy."

"Thank you, Andy. You two bring the kid over to my house and have a good time."

The next night Little Andy carried Susan and a basket with her things. "You need to . . ."

"I can do this, Andy. You two have a good time."

When they came back after eleven they were in the middle of a conversation when I opened the door. They both stopped and turned to me.

"She's sleeping."

"Okay," Little Andy whispered. "You want to drive and I'll hold her?" This said to Debby. I think he won her heart at that moment.

She smiled at me as she walked into the house. They walked out, he carefully holding Susan.

"Bring her over any time. She's a darling."

"She is," Little Andy said to the sleeping child.

A month later Debby and Susan moved into Little Andy's house.

Chapter 14.

It took at least six months for my libido to begin to return and it came back slowly with ebbs and flows. I began noticing women, to take pleasure when I saw an attractive one. While I didn't go into the basement with Derek and Mary Sue, I did spend time with her more and more, alone and with Derek upstairs.

Because of Debby and Little Andy, Mary Sue no longer performed her antics at the shop after hours on a Friday they were in town. Instead, the rest of the guys were invited to drop by my house on those weekends. The guys never went into the basement, didn't know of its existence.

Mark began seeing a girl who liked to swing and sometimes he brought her over when Derek and Mary Sue were in town and the five (or more) of us had a grand time. Somehow Little Andy and Debby knew I was unavailable those weekends for babysitting Susan.

In spite of being able to luxuriate in Derek's Mary Sue or Mark's Alice, no one had Liz's writhing laughing form like that last night when I trapped her in the sheet. Nothing compared. I had fun but somehow it didn't feel like the real thing.

Derek and Mary Sue still took me to parties in state and out of state to places like Chicago. We once spent a weekend in New York City. While I was mostly a bystander, I wasn't always. Being a bystander wasn't bad, there was plenty of company and I did talk to people. I wasn't totally a lone wolf.

At home Bobby and I still worked on cars together, though he was starting to go out with girls and we had less time than before. His urgent need was learning to drive and getting a car.

I found him something safe and augmented his driver's ed class with lots of road time. Once he had his license and wheels Amy and I barely saw him.

In December, a year after Liz disappeared, Derek called and told me Junior had died in LA. He wasn't able to give many details and I let him handle the arrangements for the body. When they were next down we sprinkled Junior's ashes in the snow around Cindy's grave.

That was that. I had photo albums filled with photos of him when Cindy was alive and I looked through them one last time before packing them away. I couldn't believe the little kid had become the man he'd been.

In early spring, at a party with Derek and Mary Sue, I met Jane, or Jehane as she liked to spell it. This was at a group event, I guess you could call it that. Maybe thirty guys participating, fifteen naked women on their hands and knees in the center of the room, in a row with Mary Sue first, of course.

The challenge for the guys was to fuck all the women, no more than three strokes each. If it was longer than three strokes, you had to stay with that woman

until you finished. Mary Sue took all thirty and several stopped at her and enjoyed what she had to offer.

A couple of guys had video cameras going, set up on tripods. There were two referees. Each woman had a number painted on her back from one to fifteen. The crowd took an active interest at first, hazing the guys and counting strokes, but as the event dragged on people wandered off, leaving only the cameras, a few dedicated devotees, and those still waiting their turn. The women at the less busy end of the line were involved in a complex discussion about something. Women at the busy end of the line were verbally coaxing the men in their cunts with moans and cries or were resting until the next one.

When it was my turn I didn't know what I'd do. My heart really wasn't in this. I think I would have stayed with Mary Sue except she bumped me out and I had to go to the next one.

I did my three strokes and moved to the next. Each was different, something I already knew, but couldn't really appreciate until sampled this way. At number thirteen I stayed. She gripped me differently from all the others. If I'd gone on to fifteen without cumming, I'd have to start the row all over again. I had nothing to prove anymore.

Thirteen was a good fuck. I wasn't thinking about anything else and when I was done I heard her say:

"What's your name?"

"Andy."

"Maybe I'll see you later. My name's Jehane." I didn't hear the extra e and h in it.

"That would be nice."

I left her and I went to where I'd set my clothes.

Derek came up. "Mary Sue's going to think you don't like her." He was smiling.

"She has plenty of friends."

"What's her name?"

"Jane something."

"I don't know her."

"You should join in." I already knew what he was going to say.

"So many women here are crazy for black cock, I'm worn out."

"Where's the whips and chains contingent?"

"Try room two thirty-six."

I left as a woman was coming up to talk to him.

I sat in a corner of two thirty-six which was fairly crowded. After a while a woman joined me.

"I think you're Andy. I'm Jehane."

Maybe early fifties, nice looking.

"From downstairs. Number thirteen?" she said.

"I well remember number thirteen. Thanks for a good time."

"I was thinking we could go steady this weekend. Unless you want to spend your time with someone else."

"Steady is fine."

She smiled. "I feel like a teenager again. At a dance, finally getting up the nerve."

"I wouldn't think you'd have any problems."

"I'm not like the popular ones."

"I'm not looking for youth."

"So do you want to get to know each other better? Your room or mine?"

"Mine's fine. It's a single."

"So just us. That's fine." She took my hand. "Shall we?"

I led her to the elevator. "So, did many make it to you?"

"Eight? Twenty? I wasn't keeping count."

I was hoping she'd ask me something. I'm not much good at small talk.

"What's your room number, in case we get separated."

"Three twenty," I said.

"I'm three fifty-eight."

"Three fifty-eight. I'll remember."

"Just like being teenagers, isn't it?"

"I don't have to worry so much about getting to first base."

She laughed. "You press the button."

I did and she squeezed my hand.

We lived an hour apart so weekends and some week nights weren't impossible. Jehane taught special education, was dedicated. I never asked her what or who had brought her to the party. She never asked me. On weekends when Derek and Mary Sue were here she didn't join in the general frolic with the guys from the shop, or with Alice if she came by.

Things began falling apart on April twentieth, Liz's birthday. Liz would be eighteen, wherever she was. Maybe LA, but looking for her would be like looking for a needle in a haystack and no one knew if she was actually still there.

I canceled our date for that weekend and things just petered out, died a fairly painless death for Jehane, I hope.

Looking at myself in the mirror when I shaved I couldn't decide if I liked the guy I saw or not. I knew I had no choice about living with him, but it wasn't much fun.

I liked it when Derek and Mary Sue came by. They didn't care if I was an avid participant. I knew they were checking on me but I genuinely enjoyed their company and they seemed to enjoy mine.

Little Susan was becoming the bright spot in my life. I looked forward to her visits, worked so her time with me was worthwhile. I tried to have books to read to her and bought toys that had some educational value. Jehane had set me on the right track, the rest I had to do on my own when she was no longer around.

So that was my life. The shop, eating and sleeping. Susan was the glimmering moment. Derek's and Mary Sue's visits. Not a bad life by any means. I wished I were happier.

Chapter 15.

Debby's one of those women who much prefer the company of men. Spending time with other wives would drive her crazy. That's one of the reasons she fit in so well at the shop. So instead of spending time with the girls at the mall, Little Andy had dropped her and Susan off for a short visit while he finished up a job in the shop.

We'd come back inside after being out in the yard where I'd built a sandbox for Susan. The doorbell rang and Debby handed Susan to me as she went to answer the door. I heard voices and set Susan on the floor. Debby brought two people in behind her. The woman had short black hair, wore an open plaid shirt and short black miniskirt, torn stockings and black boots. The guy looked like just about every other guy in jeans and t-shirt except for maybe the cat whiskers on his face. They looked like tattoos.

"Hi, Andy." It was Liz's voice.

I was standing as Debby scooped up Susan.

"Andy just drove up." She said to the woman, "I look forward to seeing you. Say bye bye to uncle Andy." She waved Susan's hand at me and left.

"Liz?" I said.

"You don't recognize me?" She smiled and I could see two teeth were missing. "This is Simon."

The guy nodded.

I stood there looking at the two of them.

"I wasn't even sure you'd be alive." She came to me, took my arm. "You feel real. I told Simon if you were here you'd show him the basement. Everything's still there?"

"Nothings been changed." I didn't know what to say. "I was worried about you."

"Andy, back then you looked like you were dead." She let go of my arm and took Simon's hand. "Let's not talk about that, okay? I'm here."

"You want anything to drink?"

Simon said, "We're okay."

"Dinner maybe later?"

He looked at her and shook his head. She said to me, "Debby recognized me right away. She still works for you?"

"She and Little Andy finally married a couple of months ago. June wedding. She spoils the wretch rotten. Want to sit?"

Simon looked at her. "Sorry," she said. "This better be quick. Can we see the basement?"

"Sure."

I no longer had the key on my key ring. I went to the kitchen and they followed. The key was in the clutter drawer and it took me a minute to find it.

"Where's the cagemobile?"

"I sold it." I opened the basement door, flicked on the light.

"Andy, you didn't?"

"Everything's the same," I said.

"I can't imagine you without the cagemobile."

"Junior's dead."

"I heard."

"I'm sorry."

She was halfway down the steps, turned and looked up to me. "Why do you say that?"

"I don't know where half of what I'm saying is coming from, Liz. I didn't think I'd ever see you again."

"That's my cage," Liz said to Simon who was walking across the room to it. She went down the stairs and followed him.

I went down after them. I hadn't been here for almost two years. "Sorry about the dust."

Simon opened the cage door and bent to look in. Liz put her right hand on his back. "No one believed me."

I smiled, though I'd never thought to lose her this way, to a kid with cat whiskers.

Simon was sitting in the cage.

"Meow," she said and he smiled up at her. She turned to me. "How are Derek and Mary Sue?"

"Doing well. They'll be glad to hear you're okay."

Simon got out of the cage and stood.

"Isn't this neat? Just like I said." She turned to me. "Many girls down here after me?"

"None."

"You're not going to go Bogart on me, are you?"

It took me a moment to get the reference. I was Rick, of course.

"I haven't been entirely lonely."

"That's good. It was bad enough what I put you through when Mary Sue was here. Remember that?"

"I remember."

She said to Simon. "I kept throwing myself at him and he wouldn't bite. I was shameless. Running around this place without a stitch on. I was getting worried until Mary Sue set me straight." She looked to me. "You're a monster. Indescribable acts of perversity." She winked.

Simon gave her hand a tug and shot her a pointed look.

"Oh yes." She said to me, "I need a twenty if you have it."

I took out my billfold and took one out. "Just twenty?"

"Twenty's perfect." She let go of Simon's hand. "We're going upstairs for a minute and then I want to be in my cage." She said over her shoulder as Simon led the way, "I'll be right back."

I sat on the bed. She looked great. Had a few knocks, but great. It sounded like they'd be leaving in a few minutes and I didn't know what to say.

She came back down. "Simon's a great guy."

"Are those tattoos?"

"Yes, isn't that brave?" She started to shed clothes, talking. "So any girlfriends or something like that I need to know about?"

"Nothing right now."

"But with Mary Sue you've been getting some? I sure hope so." She tossed her boot on the floor and pulled off the panty hose and then the skirt. She turned to me, laid the shirt on the bed. "You have that lock? I want you to lock me in." She laid the tank top on her shirt. "I got a tattoo, see." She pointed to a bit of art by her pelvic bone on her right side. I'd never thought I'd get to see that sweet expanse of skin again. Cage Girl it had in script above an image of a naked girl in a cage. She grinned at me, patted the tattoo and walked to the cage, stroked the top edge. "Okay, where's the lock?"

I got up and looked in the drawers. She was in the cage, kneeling and smiling at me. I wasn't used yet to the missing teeth. "You need to lock me in. You never did that. You keep the key."

I snapped the lock closed.

"That means I can't get out unless you let me, right?"

"Right."

"We need to talk, don't we?"

I sat on the bed facing her.

"You know we're getting married, don't you?"

I nodded.

"You're not talking much."

"I'm overwhelmed."

"Remember that last night? In bed together?"

"I remember." I had tears in my eyes.

"I couldn't have made it without that. I want to thank you, Andy."

I looked away.

"You talked about me dropping out of high school and then you talked about me going to college. Because I'm smart. That's what you said. Remember?"

I nodded, turned back to her.

"I got my GED, took some tests and they accepted me at the university here with a scholarship. I start in a couple of weeks. That's okay, isn't it?"

"You don't have to ask. That's great. Just a second." I got up and went to the bathroom and blew my nose.

"I wasn't sure what I'd find when I got back here. I'd hoped, but God, Andy, you looked like you were dead. They'd planned on shooting you if they had to. That

stupid Junior and my dad. Brain dead.” She looked up at me. “I want to be able to do stuff down here, like Derek and Mary Sue.”

“Sure, no problem. You and your friends can come over any time.”

“Shit, Andy, what are you talking about?” She rose up on her heels. “Haven’t you heard a word I’ve said?”

“You’re marrying Simon, you’re going to school. I’m happy for you. You’re welcome over here any time.”

She started laughing. “Andy, you dope. I bet you’re not even thinking that means I can get some. Come over here.” She held out her hand.

I sat by the cage and took it.

“Andy, Simon’s gay. He was at the same place I was, where I got my GED. He’s meeting the other band members, the twenty was for gas. They have a gig in Columbus.”

I was holding her hand hard, looking into her eyes. “You said you’re getting married.”

“To you, you dope. I’m eighteen, getting close to one third your age. If you don’t want to get married, I don’t care, but I meant it about doing stuff down here.” She shook her hand free and moved further away. “I sure hope you didn’t lose that key. Did you?”

I held it up, was standing.

“Well, Andy, we have some catching up to do but you have to catch me first.”

I opened the lock, then shut it. I sat on the bed watching her. “What if I don’t want to catch you?”

“You do and you know it.”

“I think I left something on the stove upstairs.” I stood.

“You have me simmering, you monster. Come back here.”

I went upstairs and called Derek and Mary Sue. I could hear her laughing downstairs. I’m not sure I made much sense to them. Then I opened a beer and went downstairs. I was going to watch some TV.

For maybe five minutes.