



The Icon

Mardee Louise

PRYNNNE

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THE ICON

By Mardee Louise Prynne

It was one of those strange New York rains, the kind of rain that makes you wonder what season it really is. The street outside the office window shone slick under the street lamps with occasional rainbows left by oil and exhaust to punctuate the asphalt's blackness. The wind picked up its pace and blew sheets of rain down Lexington.

He sipped his bourbon and resumed his solitary task. It was almost a certainty that the samovar that was about to come onto the market was genuine. It was the right age; bore the mark of a Saint Petersburg workshop and the Romanov double-headed eagle showing just enough wear to confirm its age. He would phone the owner in the morning and arrange to see it. It was easy to find buyers for such objects but this was one he might want for himself.

The phone rang.

"Paul Lewyn?"

"Yes."

"You don't know me but I know of you. My name is Didi. I must see you as soon as possible. It's about Basrov."

"Yes?" I was trying hard to be non-committal and wondered how and from where she knew of me.

"He died peacefully in his sleep last night."

"I'm sorry to hear that. He was an old man. Still, that doesn't lessen the sense of loss. Are you a relative?"

"I'll explain when we meet. It's important we meet at once. I have to go back to my studio tomorrow."

"Studio? Are you a painter?"

"No, a dancer. Well, once upon a time I was. Just a teacher now. I have a school outside New Hope, in Pennsylvania. Please, this is urgent."

There was no compelling reason to meet this woman at such short notice. What she had to say could be said over the phone. There could be nothing pressing concerning the peaceful death of an old man whose time had come.

I didn't look forward to attending the funeral of the man who had in many ways been my mentor. What I had been looking forward to was my dinner and returning to my apartment. That was until this Didi person telephoned.

Last night had been extraordinarily successful; Lila and I had settled our differences and sealed the peace pact with love making. Ordinarily I devoted my attentions to one woman at a time but the current situation was not in the least ordinary. This woman's voice was fascinating enough for me to suggest we meet at a recently reopened restaurant on twenty-eighth between Lexington and Park.

"Give me twenty minutes. I'll be prompt."

"And how will I know you?"

"I'm a blonde who right now looks like a drowned rat."

"See you in twenty minutes."

"Wait," she cried into the phone as I began to hang up. "I thought the restaurants on that block were all Lebanese and that sort of thing. And why Chinese?"

"Different kind of place, not just Chinese food. They serve some other kinds of ethnic dishes as well, mostly Asian."

"I don't mean any offense but are you a Jew?"

"Yes, but why do you ask?"

"I'm told that Jews know the best Chinese restaurants in any city. My mother was a Jewess so by custom I'm one of the tribe. See, we have something in common already. We must discover what else we share in common. But already we have enough for friendship."

There was a hint of playfulness, of laughter in Didi's voice. But something about her voice left me unsettled. Did she, I wondered, have a distinctive accent? I reflected for a few seconds as Didi excused herself to get a pencil and notepad from her handbag in order to write down the name of the restaurant. What hit me was that she had not

the least trace of a foreign accent nor did she have even the slightest regional accent. Then it dawned on me; the preciseness of her diction, her lack of an accent, not even a regional accent of any kind was what so unsettling. Didi was almost certainly not a native English speaker. Her use of the term "Jewess" referring to a Jewish woman was archaic and unlikely to be used by anyone who was a native speaker of American English even back in the mid-fifties. It was perhaps insignificant but my curiosity had been piqued and my vanity wounded. I, who prided himself on being able to identify people's origins, would have to work hard to figure out from where this Didi person had originally come.

It wasn't just a matter of pride. Given my profession of locating and identifying looted art work, this was a survival skill in the post World War II, cold war era of the fifties. There were many reasons for losing one's accent, for eradicating behaviors peculiar to one's place of origin. Not all those reasons were nefarious but it was safe to assume they were until you were certain they were otherwise.

I sighed and wondered why I was so willing to waste the rest of a perfectly comfortable evening to satisfy my idle curiosity as to Didi's origins and whether she would be as fascinating in the flesh as her voice was intriguing over the phone. A shadow of mistrust, of suspicion clouded my thoughts while, at the same time, piquing this inexplicable curiosity about Didi.

This woman, whoever she is and wherever she's from knows this area or else how could she know that what kinds of restaurants are around here? This isn't a neighborhood that a European dancer would frequent. Why am I thinking she's European? For all I know, she could be from darkest Brooklyn. Something about her is not on the up and up. Well, here goes nothing.

I walked into the dimly lighted restaurant, shook the rain from my umbrella and put it in the umbrella stand. Lynn, the owner's daughter, a lovely Eurasian looking girl not much over eighteen years old, greeted me warmly. I studied her figure making no attempt to conceal my lust inspired admiration. The owner, a Russian speaking woman whose facial features and skin tone suggested her ancestral origins were somewhere in the steppes of Central Asia, offered good food at reasonable prices in a relaxed, friendly atmosphere. Well, friendly to a point. Yvonne said little about her life prior to coming to the States after the war. I respected the family's privacy and asked few questions. The exotic woman's fluency in both French and Russian led me to believe she was part of some émigré group that had fled to Paris after the Bolshevik Revolution. She was too young to have been born prior to 1917 so it was likely she was born in Paris and travelled under a French passport. I had neither reason nor interest in knowing more about her.

Lynn rose from her stool at the cash register and greeted me. "Hello, Paul. You know you've made me very jealous tonight."

"And how did I do that?"

"A very attractive woman came in saying you asked her to meet you here. I seated her in an out of the way booth."

"No need for jealousy. I've never seen her before. She wanted to speak with me. I doubt I'll ever see her again; not more than once or twice at most. Something to do with the death of an elderly man, a mutual friend."

Lynn's face froze for a second, her jaw set. Did she know I was referring to Basrov? She recovered her composure almost instantly.

Tucking a couple of menus under her arm, Lynn led me to the booth where she had seated Didi. The blonde, who was studiously refreshing her makeup in a compact mirror, took little notice of our approach until Lynn stopped at the booth. Didi rose to greet me, shook my hand while planting a kiss on each of my cheeks. She had doffed her wet trench coat which now hung from a coat hook at the end of the booth. A fashionable women's styled rain hat rested atop the coat pole.

"How elegantly old world," Lynn remarked on seeing Didi kiss me on each cheek. I wondered if Lynn was being deliberately sarcastic and why she would want to alienate the guest of regular customer and possibly lose that customer.

Didi was quick to respond. "Yes, it is old world elegance as you so quaintly put it. Now you can take our drink order." Her aggressive delivery was enough to make Lynn clench her teeth and flare her nostrils in an effort to contain her anger at the harsh reaction her bit of sarcasm had elicited in the this woman. Didi's sangfroid, her cold composure signaled that this was a woman to be reckoned with.

"I'll send over your waitress." Lynn turned on her heels and walked off.

I studied this surprisingly forceful woman. She was on the shorter side of average and, although not very busty, had a figure closer to that of the type fashionable in European dance companies than to what was then becoming the American ideal of a dancer; short and overly slender. Her narrow waist set off her full hips. She wore a tailored blouse over a casually fitted wrap skirt which gave her

the appearance of an athletic suburban housewife who was in the city on an unplanned visit. A pageboy hair cut was parted in the middle which exposed her roots all the way to her scalp. There was no hint that she was anything but a natural blonde.

I couldn't help noticing the enamel bracelet watch she wore on her left wrist. It was either a Faberge original or a very good copy. The rings she wore on both hands were of earlier origin; a least one was Russian, probably made in St. Petersburg. A gold chain disappeared under her blouse which was open at the neck. There might have been a Russian Orthodox cross or some Jewish ritual symbol attached to it. Why, I wondered, had Didi made it a point to let me know she was the daughter of a Jewess? Yet what motive could she possibly have for presenting herself as the offspring of a Jewish mother? There was no likely ulterior motive for saying that. Perhaps she was deliberately avoiding contact with the Russian émigré community or at least trying to distance herself from it. That might account for her bringing up the topic of her Jewish mother.

That led me to conclude I was putting too much thought into this strangely fascinating woman. It would accept her at face value for now. *But why am I thinking about 'now' when that implies something later? How likely am I to have any involvement with Didi after the next few days or at most a few weeks?*

Seated at the table, Didi extended her hand to shake my hand once more. "Paul you are to be congratulated in arousing such jealousy in a woman so recently out of childhood. As lovely and as worldly as she tries to present herself, she has all the sophistication of a petulant adolescent. Why does a man of your reputation bother to patronize a place where the staff is so familiar?"

“Convenient to my place of business and apartment. Good food reasonably priced and a chance to practice my Russian with her mother. But why do you think she’s jealous?”

“It’s obvious from the way that child looks at you and the way she sneered at me when she realized it was you for whom I was waiting.” Didi had switched from English to Russian and continued on in that language. “And if you need to practice your Russian, I’ll give you all the practice you want. And I will offer you practice not only in the language but in the very exotic ways of old Russia, Russia before the revolution.”

It seemed certain that the “very exotic ways of old Russia” was a thinly veiled allusion to the private orgy like evenings enjoyed by members of the pre-revolution elite. I was well aware that these practices and tastes had been exported to Paris and Berlin by the émigrés.

Didi opened her purse and withdrew a small note pad and a sliver pencil. She handed me a typewritten sheet listing information concerning Basrov’s funeral arrangements. She wrote a phone number at the bottom of the paper before passing it to me. Deliberately, it seemed, she let the silver pencil roll off the table.

“Be a dear and get that for me.” Didi switched back to English. As I leaned over to retrieve the pencil, she used her foot to move it under the table. That made it necessary for me to move to a half kneel in an attempt to retrieve the pencil. Didi uncrossed her legs and parted her inner thighs causing her skirt to hike up thus affording me a fleeting and unfettered but all too dark glimpse of the crotch of her ice blue panties. As I started to get back up, she recrossed her legs.

“Seeing things from a different perspective can be intriguing; don’t you agree?” Didi sounded deliberately provocative.

“Oh, yes, but not nearly as intriguing as you.”

I all but blushed at realizing what I just said. I knew almost nothing about Didi and yet I was being forward with her, perhaps too forward. She was attractive, worldly and surely, I guessed, fluent in more than one European language. Perhaps her uninhibited display of leg, stocking top, and panty was mere chance; perhaps intentional.

The waitress, a college student at one of the nearby schools, took our drink order. “A bourbon Manhattan for each of us,” stated Didi with some degree of authority and confidence. She then smiled confidently. “I am correct, no?”

“You are correct, yes. What else have you already figured out about me?” I couldn’t help smiling at the awkward sentence construction Didi had just used. Was she relaxed enough now to let her guard down to the point where she used this non-colloquial, very European word order?

“Not very much. But I have read the information about you that Basrov left for me to look over after his death.”

“This is beginning to sound very cloak and dagger.”

Her answer was an enigmatic smile.

Didi suddenly signaled the waitress and asked for the check. “This dump depresses me with its coarse, rude hostess who is nothing more than a mongrel as is that woman at the register. We can eat elsewhere. Have you any suggestions?” She paused briefly but not long enough for me to get out an answer. “Let’s go to your apartment. We can talk freely while I make us some omelets. First we’ll find a market where we can get some real bread. My car is parked down the street.”

As we walked to the front of the restaurant Yvonne looked at us and then glared at Lynn who averted her eyes in either embarrassment or fright. I found this brief scenario quite perturbing even as it was being played out. Why was Yvonne reacting so harshly to Lynn's momentary irritability? I suddenly felt disconcerted by the incident and its unintended aftermath. I was in no mood for Didi and her sense of superiority over Yvonne and Lynn who had made him feel appreciated and respected. The word "mongrel" which she used to describe Lynn and Yvonne was redolent of Nazi master race philosophy. What possible connection, legitimate or otherwise, could she have had to Basrov?

"Didi, I'm more than a little disturbed by what went on in the restaurant. I'm going to walk home."

"I understand. My comments about your friends were out of line. But the rain is getting heavier. At least let me drive you those few blocks, make it up to you for my rudeness, for having wasted your evening."

I acquiesced but felt compelled to add that these two women were not friends of mine. They were nothing more than acquaintances. The degree of closeness was of no consequence. I could not let racist remarks pass without comment. "Didi, I cannot accept anyone being called a mongrel. I hope you can understand that." That my voice took on a sharply aggressive edge was not lost on Didi.

Didi nodded, perhaps sheepishly, perhaps with indifference. Did she, I wondered, seem pleased or satisfied that I chided her for her use of a racist term so often found in Nazi propaganda? This woman was sharp, manipulative. I would have to be very cautious, very circumspect with her.

The car was impressive, a vintage Jaguar touring car with Pennsylvania license plates. Didi let it warm up so that the defroster could clear the windshield. As we waited, her hand moved across the seat and came to rest on mine. I wanted to hold her fingers, to kiss the palm as a prelude to kissing every part of her. She ran the back of her fingers over my face. It wasn't my style to let a woman, however attractive, however fascinating, cloud my judgment. I knew I had to make an effort to keep that from happening now.

It was hard for me to be sure how long we sat in silence. The pressure of Didi's hand on mine filled me with tension and romantic longing to know this woman better, even intimately. The tension came from concern that I would be manipulated by the enigmatic Didi. The romantic longing came from her unique beauty enhanced by her seemingly inexplicable background.

Didi took my hand in hers, pressed gently and then turned to face me.

"I hope I haven't lost any chance of friendship because of my awful description of your friends but that child tried me sorely." She put the car in gear and, to my surprise, drove directly to the brownstone that housed both my office and my apartment. It was clear that Didi had indeed studied whatever material Basrov had had. But why was she so interested in me?

She left the engine idling as she kissed me first on one cheek, then on the other. Her lips lingered almost touching my face, coming dangerously close to my mouth. The closeness was more sensual than if our lips were pressed each against the others.

Without moving her lips away from me, Didi spoke softly, pleadingly.

"Please let me have another chance; not just me but us.

Allow us have another chance. Perhaps not tonight but some other time."

She slipped her hand behind my head and drew my face to hers as her mouth opened expectantly. The kiss was long and deep as Didi grasped my hand guided it to her thighs, then between her thighs, and slowly to the vee where her suddenly clenched legs met. She sighed as she pushed me away from her, groped at my fly. I raised my hips as she lowered my trousers, brought her face to the head of my stiff cock.

I wasn't happy at the thought of getting intimately involved with Didi, at least not until I knew more about her. But what was happening at that moment was by no means driven by thought, only by instinct. Aroused by the unexpectedness of this awkward tryst and by the sense of danger at having sex, albeit simple oral sex, in public and the attendant risk of being seen, I exploded as Didi ran her fingers along my shaft and her tongue around the rim. I was both embarrassed and surprised; embarrassed at having cum so quickly like an inexperienced high school kid, and surprised that this strange blonde was lapping up every bit of cum that she had been unable to catch in her mouth.

Didi leaned across me and took a tissue from the glove compartment. She turned on the dome light for a second or two so I could clean myself. I was taken aback by Didi's face; there were tears running down her cheeks.

"Promise me we can try again to be friends."

"I promise," was all that Paul could say.

"Thank you. In return I promise it will go better next time." She kissed her finger tips and pressed them against Paul's lips, a prelude to a deep kiss, a kiss made more exotic by the taste of his own cum on Didi's tongue.

I turned to face her as he walked away from the car. Didi had rolled the window down and blew a kiss to him. There was enough light from the street lamp for me to see the tears that continued to roll down her cheeks. *Damn! Those tears are real but I don't get that that look in her eyes. Is she sad or frightened?*

Once inside the old brownstone building, I bypassed the office and walked up the two flights of stairs to my apartment. I unfolded the typed sheet Didi had given me and placed it on the end table in the living room before hanging my raincoat in the bathroom. Next task was to turn on the hi-fi and put on a recording of highlights from Puccini operas. The phone rang just as I settled into my favorite chair with the intention of reading whatever it was that Didi had typed out.

"Lila, I'm not trying to avoid you... I had to meet someone on a personal matter... Yes, it was a woman but I swear I never ever saw her before tonight. She phoned me to tell me that Basrov, I'm sure I've mentioned him to you... Well, he died...." I told Lila about meeting with Didi while avoiding certain details of what transpired, especially avoiding any physical description of Didi. You can be sure I wasn't fool enough to tell Lila of the very arousing effect Didi had on me.

I felt guilty. I should have known that Lila would call to follow through on what happened between us the night before. Lila was angry out of proportion over me not phoning her to let her know I was going out. It made me wonder if she was having second thoughts about our rapprochement which had been sealed, or so I thought, by a romantic dinner and a night of love making. Perhaps it was not *lovemaking* but only slow and wildly effective sex. Given my fascination with the mysterious and exotic Didi and the chance discovery that Lynn was interested

enough in me to feel jealousy, I decided there was no reason to grovel at the feet of the moody and bourgeois Lila.

I sighed and wondered if I wasn't about to burn my bridges with Lila. That consideration would have to wait until I could sort out whatever it was that Didi needed from me. Maybe Lila wasn't so important after all. I picked up the typed paper from Didi and began to read.

Didi implored my assistance in protecting both herself and Basrov's memory. Reading between the lines, I could see that Basrov had been an intermediary between possessors of Nazi loot and willing buyers; probably as far back as the thirties when comfortably well off soon to be victims needed ready cash to ransom themselves or family members from the Nazis. My guess was that after the war Basrov arranged safe passage to South America for SS men, helped them evade the severe justice that was their due. These services were likely paid for by valuable pieces of art at a rate far below their potential worth. The implication was that Didi and I would work together to locate Basrov's treasure troves, whether cash or artworks, and then we would try to return the art works to their rightful owners or, more likely, their heirs. Of course hefty finders' fees would be assumed. The second stage of her plan explained why she needed me to work with her.

Didi would be in immediate danger once she began the search. Unscrupulous collectors and dealers would pounce on her as soon as she knew where these treasures were stored or when they found out who her contacts were. And many of them were experienced in getting information from unwilling sources and then making final disposition of those sources. I wasn't sure about wanting to risk my life for this project. Then I thought more about Didi. Had she deliberately brought me off in her car in order to enthrall me, to lure me into committing to the "project" based on the vague promise of an affair?

I decided to call Didi first thing in the morning even before I called the owner of the samovar I was interested in. I felt the need to speak to her as soon as possible although there was no rational reason for this urge. The only reason I could think of for not telephoning her at once was that she could not possibly have gotten back to her studio so quickly.

I showered, got into bed, and read while WQXR (the NY Times classical music station in New York City which has since become public radio) played on the bedside radio. I listened to the rain strike the windowpane, to the occasional car moving along Lexington. I wondered how I could have been so naïve as to have been unaware that the Lynn had eyes for me. Not that I had any real interest in a girl so young although she wasn't so very much younger than me, not really, I rationalized.

Then I again thought about Didi. Was my fascination with her a way of avoiding commitment to Lila? Lila was beautiful, well spoken, but under it all, so vapid, so conventionally middle class.

Who am I kidding? So I've got an eye for art and decorative objects. Big Deal! Just happened to be in the right place when Basrov needed a flunky, a junior fall guy. Through him I learned the lay of the land and was able to pick up enough savvy to go out on my own. Come to think of it, I may have been the token Jew who made it easier for him to deal with refugees from the Holocaust and the ones who didn't get out until after the war. Never thought of it that way. Yeah, maybe I better stick with Lila or someone like her. Could be a good thing to tell Didi to get lost after the funeral. Say, when she called she said she would explain her relationship to Basrov when we meet. Come to think of it, Didi used words like 'urgent' yet nothing transpired when we did meet that suggested urgency. We met and she avoided any serious talk. Too focused on being annoyed at Lynn. Could have been a deliberate distraction to keep me from

asking questions. I better watch my back with that one. Be nice if Lynn really has eyes for me. Not that it would mean anything. Then again...

Paul was awakened by the sounds of the day beginning in the city. It was later than he thought. He was grateful that he had fallen back into a deep sleep after awakening from his dream. Had all of last night been a series of dreams? Did Didi exist? Paul wasn't sure whether he was hoping she was real or hoping she was simply a dream. She was fascinating; attractive and repulsive at the same time. Remembering her deplorable attitude toward Yvonne and Lynn reminded him that she was someone he should not want to be close to.

A glance at the kitchen clock told him that Lila would be leaving for work in a few minutes. He would have to call now if he were to have even a few minutes of phone privacy.

After setting up the percolator and putting it on the stove, Paul opened the front door of his apartment and took in the morning's New York Times and Herald Tribune (a now defunct broadsheet newspaper). He tossed the newspapers onto kitchen table and then seated himself on the living room couch. He dialed Lila's number but hung up after four rings. After all, she was probably on her way to work but that wasn't what made him hang up. Not really. His hand trembled as he picked up the typewritten sheet. Didi was not a dream, not a figment of his imagination.

After removing the business card that she had clipped to the top of the papers, he read the typed sheet; reread it as he sat listening to his heart pound. This was not what

he anticipated given Didi's urgency when she called. The funeral arrangements were unremarkable considering Basrov's personal history.

Still doesn't figure. Even if she didn't drive all the way from Pennsylvania just to try to see me, why would she clam up when we met? Wait a second. I'll bet it had something to do with Yvonne and Lynn. There's some connection between Yvonne and whatever Didi wanted to talk about. That would account for the looks Yvonne was giving Lynn and why Lynn looked so upset at that moment.

I picked up the phone and dialed the number on the business card Didi had clipped to the typed sheet. A young voice answered.

"Preo School of Dance. This is Freddie. How may I help you?"

"My name is Paul Lewyn. I need to speak to Didi."

"Mlle. Didi is unavailable. Can I take a message or have her return your call?"

"Is there a number where I can reach her?"

"I'm sorry; Mr. Lewyn, but I cannot disclose any other information."

"Please tell her I called. Oh, and tell her it's urgent"

"Of course I'll see to it Mlle. Didi gets your message, sir."

I hung up wondering whether Freddie was a boy or a girl. The voice was smooth, soothing but its cello like quality could belong to either sex.

I telephoned Lila and made a dinner date with her. She suggested Yvonne's which gave me a convenient ex-

cuse to give Lynn the once over so I could be more certain of her age. Next on the agenda: shave and shower.

The phone rang as I was toweling dry. I hurried into the bedroom and answered.

"Mr. Lewyn, this is Freddie from Mlle. Didi's office. I took the liberty of phoning Mlle. as soon as we finished speaking. She asked me to phone you and to give you these three numbers. First her home number..."

The second was for the ballet school which had, according to Freddie, a handful of residential students in addition to a large number of local students enrolled in classes at every age and skill level. Freddie, for whatever reason, was intent on providing more information than I really needed or even cared to know. The school number was also the number of a specialized private summer camp. Freddie, with a surprisingly playful undertone in his or her voice, added emphatically; "a very private and highly specialized summer camp." The third phone number was some sort of business number, the nature of which Freddie could not or would not explain.

"Freddie, you're a doll. I could kiss you." Damn! I don't even know if Freddie's a girl. Great impression I just made if Freddie's a he.

The giggle that comment elicited put an end to wondering as to which sex Freddie belonged. I convinced myself the giggle was definitely that of a girl in her early to mid-twenties. Wishful thinking? Maybe, maybe not.

After several futile attempts to reach Didi by phone, my call was at last answered. It wasn't Didi but a young woman who identified herself as an office aide and promised she would give Didi his message as soon as she called in.

I went downstairs to the office where I absentmindedly shuffled papers before acknowledging that all my

projects were going to be put on hold until whatever I was getting himself into was resolved. With the exception of having to forego buying the samovar that was so intriguing the previous evening, nothing was of any concern. It would be great to get away from the routine, however glamorous it was in most people's eyes. Influenced by Lila's needs, her values and her lifestyle, I had settled into a routine best described as *safe* but which could be defined as dull, unexciting. Lila was attractive, dressed well in tasteful and expensive fashions. Her slender, firm breasted body, appealed to me as did her uninhibited lovemaking.

Damn, I like her an awful lot but I don't know if I really love her. Sometimes I think I do but when I think about Didi, I wonder if I need safe or I need exciting.

The ringing of the phone jarred me out of my reverie. Didi's voice flustered me.

"Can you come to my home tonight?"

"Didi, I would like nothing better but I have business that must be taken care of before I do anything else. I promise to phone you tonight with a definite answer as to when I can join you. It may be quite late before I call."

"I'll stay up until I hear from you. Do you own a car?"

"Why do you ask?" I was back in guarded mode and Lila seemed a better choice every minute.

"If you don't drive or if you don't care to, I'll send Freddie to pick you up."

"That won't be necessary." *Although meeting Freddie is very appealing*, I added to myself.

Lila claimed to understand my need to follow through on whatever Didi had in mind but she didn't let it go at that.

"Paul, you mean so very much to me that I know I can give you the room you need to be what you need to be, do what you need to do. What I can't live with is you putting yourself in danger just to satisfy your curiosity. Promise me that you'll give up chasing all over creation to find these antiques you deal in. Promise me you'll give up these mad pursuits even if we don't marry."

I hemmed and hawed but Lila managed to extract a promise to give up what she called "these mad pursuits."

"Thank you, darling. Why not a last dinner at Yvonne's before you go off to this Didi creature? Something more posh might be in order but we both have a lot to take care of so an early night should work."

I met Lila as she finished her rotation at the hospital where she was a resident. (NYU Bellevue Medical Center) I was about to hail a cab when Lila slipped her arm through mine. "Let's walk. It's a nice night, kind of cool but I need to clear my head."

"Sure, love."

She leaned against me as we started walking." Paul, you never called me that before; 'love' I mean."

Once away from the noise and traffic of First Avenue, we kissed playfully at each traffic light. The open and spontaneous romantic playfulness was a quality I had never seen in Lila before. I was beginning to feel that maybe, just maybe Lila was the kind of woman I needed to be part of my life. To keep Lila I would have to regard Didi, her world and every single thing in it including

Freddie, as a last fling or, to be more exact, a last adventure.

Yvonne greeted us and showed us to a quiet corner of the restaurant. The woman took advantage of Lila's visit to the powder room to take me aside and apologize for "Lynn's outrageous behavior toward your guest last night."

"Thanks, Yvonne. And I must apologize for having brought her here. Please don't blame Lynn for the incident. Where is she? I really want to..."

Lila's return ended that conversation.

As we were escorted to our table, I scanned the room. Lynn was nowhere to be seen. Neither was there any sign her for the rest of the time we were there that night.

Our waitress, another college student from the neighborhood informed us there was only a limited menu available. When I questioned the waitress, Yvonne came over and explained that she would be moving the restaurant due to an increase in rental. "Now that we're starting to build up a clientele and show a nice profit, the landlord gets greedy. I'm even thinking of leaving New York."

Strange timing. Lynn disappears after pissing off Didi and now Yvonne is suddenly moving on. Got to be connected to Didi. I really don't give a shit. Fewer complications in my life once Yvonne closes the restaurant and takes whatever the hell else she does far away from here.

I reached across the table and took Lila's hand. "When this whole Basrov affair is done with, you and I are going to spend some time together. No distractions. Just us. Consider it a prelude..."

"I understand, Paul. There's no need to make a commitment or even imply there'll be one. Just go through

with this hunt with Didi or for Didi or whatever it is you'll be doing with her. Have an affair if that's what you need to do. If you come back willing to spend that time together, we'll both know it's right, that we have some chance of success together."

Lila paused to light a cigarette.

"Promise me one thing, though."

"Sure thing. I mean if it's something that I can come through on."

"Please don't be so awkward. It doesn't become you in the least."

I swallowed hard as we both realized Lila had taken control of the situation. This was new, different, something that should have been disconcerting but was just the opposite. It was a thrill to discover that Lila could be emotionally powerful, even domineering in a sense. She seemed to know what I was feeling as she inhaled the tobacco smoke, held it inside before exhaling. Her eyes brightened as a challenging smile showed at the corners of her lips.

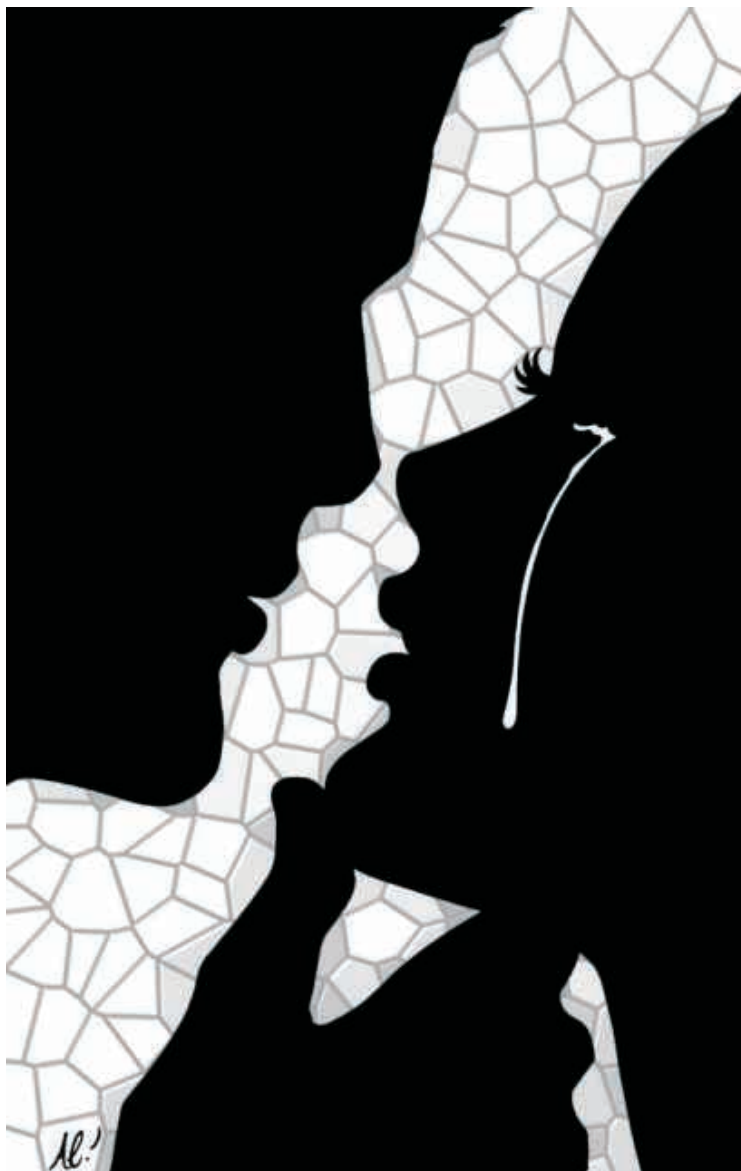
"There is just one simple thing I want you to do. Just keep me informed of where you are and if there are any unforeseen *events*. Leave messages with my answering service. This is **not** negotiable! Paul, darling, I need to know you're safe even if knowing that means knowing I'm losing you."

"Lila, I swear I'll keep in touch with you as frequently as I realistically can even though you're being overly melodramatic."

"Then there's no further discussion."

The rest of the meal was spent in small talk which was a way for me to avoid thanking Lila for her genuine concern for my safety.

What's with her now? I always figured she's tough, the kind that wouldn't give up anything without taking a stand. Now she's too willing to let me go. I don't get it. Maybe she figures if it looks like she'll just walk out of my life I'll appreciate her all the more and hang in.



She slipped her arm through mine as we began walking to her apartment. I unlocked the door for her using the key she had given me the morning after our first night of intimacy so many months ago. I hesitated as I pushed the door open holding the key in front of me half expecting her to ask for it back.

"I'm awfully tired, Paul, and you have a lot to do in the morning. Let's call it a night."

"As long as you're not thinking we should call it a day."

She put her arms around my neck and kissed me slowly, deeply.

"Does that taste like I want to call it a day between us?"

I put my finger tips under her chin and tilted her face toward mine. Her eyes glistened with a sheen of tears. We kissed lightly on the lips.

I fell into a deep sleep unmarred by dreams. I awoke, took in the newspapers, shaved and showered. The only call I made was to my secretary at her home and telling her I would be away for a few days and offering her the use of the apartment during that time. She was grateful for the chance to be out from under her mother's thumb for however long.

Leah had been working for me for the three years, ever since her graduation from a high school for girls from comfortably well off observant Jewish families. Her secretarial skills had improved and her skirt hemlines had risen during that time. Her family was aghast when she announced she was going to find work in a field related to

fine art. Their opinion changed when they learned of the extent of my work returning art treasures purloined by the Nazis to their rightful owners. It improved even more when, on having invited me to a Friday evening Sabbath dinner at their home, they saw I was able to chant all the blessings and hymns from memory. It was good they still didn't know that Leah was calling herself Leigh in the office and that she was taking modern dance lessons on her afternoons off.

I called the garage and asked them to have my car ready around mid-morning. There was little to be gained by leaving the city early and fighting heavy commuter traffic through the New Jersey suburbs. I arrived in New Brunswick around noon, stopped for a quick lunch, then took route 27 toward Princeton but turned off onto 518. The rural hilly vistas were a far cry from the industrial areas of the so-called Jersey meadows south of the George Washington Bridge.

I began to think of this trip as a vacation from so many everyday concerns. There would be no calls from those who had something to sell or from the dealers and galleries who would be pleased to cut me out of the trade if only they could discover my sources. I smiled knowing I was temporarily free from the tempestuous relationship with Lila. Reporting in to her by phone every few days would be enough to keep things on hold; and if it wasn't enough her there would, in time, be other women. I was hoping Leah would be okay staying at my place and keeping an eye on the business. Now that she had shed the dowdy clothing favored by women of her religiously observant community, I had come to appreciate how very attractive she was.

The car slowed down as I drove through Lambertville and crossed the Delaware River bridge leaving New Jersey and into New Hope, Pennsylvania. A sign post pointed tourists toward the Bucks County Playhouse where so many well known Broadway performers had gotten their start and where some still guest starred during the season. I followed the sign but, as per Didi's directions, turned off the main street just at the theater parking lot. The dance school was right in front of me.

I parked and walked through the open office door. A wall chart of the classes that would soon start showed an overwhelming majority of classes that were full. No doubt many pupils were from the well heeled and often artistic families in the Bucks County countryside.

Seeing no one around, I tapped on the door post.
"Hello!"

"Why ever are you knocking and bellowing when I'm right here?"

"Where is here?" was my response.

I was all but startled by the blonde who popped up from behind a row of cabinets. It was easy to tell she was petite as only her upper body, neck and head could be seen above the cabinets which were not much more than four feet high.

"Oh, dear! I do apologize for sounding familiar. You sounded like someone else."

"Sorry to disappoint you. I'm Paul Lewyn." At the mention of my name the petite girl, and girl she appeared to be, more businesslike and not at all flirtatious.

"Yes, Mlle Didi is expecting you. I'll telephone her to let her know you've arrived."

"And you are..."

"I'm Freddie. I'll phone Mademoiselle at once."

I was tempted to remind Freddie I was there on personal business and to save the pseudo-French impression for dance school clients. But there was something about Freddie that made me want to make a positive impression, to avoid coming on like a brash and hardnosed New Yorker.

Despite never having been a fan of petite, flat-chested women, I found myself appraising Freddie and giving her a very high rating. Considering my feelings for Lila and how fascinated I was by Didi, it seemed like looking for trouble to give in to being drawn to this diminutive beauty.

Freddie walked to a desk at the far end of the row of cabinets bypassing the desk near the entrance. There were phones on both desks so it was a safe move to assume that at least part of Freddie's phone call was not meant to be heard by me. This increased my overall wariness.

The bright spot was that it gave me a chance to study Freddie as she smiled, turned and walked to the far desk. The girl moved gracefully with the flatfooted turned out walk of so many serious dancers as well as girls who've started studying dance in their teens and hoped to give the impression that they were lifelong devotees of their art. For reasons I couldn't explain, I found myself hoping that Freddie didn't fall into the latter group, the affected pseudo-bohemian types that haunted the undergraduate and adult education courses at New York City's municipal colleges. This was a silly prejudice since the girls I was describing so negatively were seeking out the cultural advantages of New York in a sincere, honest attempt to make their lives more interesting. Leah, my secretary and office assistant was a positive example of this type. That made feel as though I was becoming an insufferable snob and resolved to do something about it on returning to New York.

Freddie was dressed in a white knit polo shirt with a grayish blue wrap skirt that seemed to drape itself over every curve of her hips and thighs. She wore no stockings, just a pair of flat Keds style sneakers. Her ankles were exquisitely slender and her calves, judging by what I could see of them, were sleek and well muscled. Her sandy blond hair was twisted into a French knot.

When she reached the desk, she pulled out the swivel chair, sat comfortably with her legs crossed and began to dial. Her wrap skirt fell open enough to reveal her thighs. After catching my eye, she casually covered herself by re-adjusting the skirt and then tucked it under her for security.

Didi must have answered the phone herself and after a moment's conversation with Freddie asked to speak with me.

"Yes, Didi, the directions were fine. I had no trouble finding the studio...No; there's no reason for Freddie to drive me to your place. If it's that hard to find Freddie can ride with me or I can follow her."

It was an impressive place overlooking the Delaware. There was what appeared to be main house and a sort of dormitory as well as a long, wide one story building. I followed Freddie's car to a parking area next to the main house's garage. I got out and approached Freddie who was having a repeat of the modesty problem as she got of her car.

"Oh, dear, I'm afraid you're going to think I'm sort of flirt or one of those girls who's always showing bits of herself but never coming through with anything more."

Then she smiled to greet whoever was standing behind me. I turned to see a girl not yet out of her teens. She wore a gray tennis shirt with an emblem that couldn't quite be read in the twilight. A blue skirt barely reached the top of her knees. White knee socks and saddle shoes gave her ensemble had the effect of a private school athletic uniform, an effect complemented by the girl's physical appearance.

"Jan, please show Mr. Lewyn to his guest suite."

The girl half curtsayed and offered to take my bag and brief case from the trunk, something which she had no trouble doing.

"Do you work here?" I asked by way of making small talk.

"Not at all. I'm a student here. You see Miss Didi has a, let's just say a finishing school where girls learn to be comfortable with their chosen roles before going out into the world."

"Sounds very exclusive and very expensive."

"Yes, it's very exclusive but Didi often takes girls on scholarship. She believes in helping us to a safe start. She never asks for repayment but most do give back to her one way or another. "

Very enigmatic but I let it go for the time being.

Freddie, Didi and I enjoyed a superbly prepared cold supper on a screened porch over looking the river. We were waited by two very attractive, well dressed girls who were presumably students at the finishing school. One was noticeably more awkward than the other in walking on the two inch high heels worn by each girl.

We sat on a screened in porch sipping Drambuie and coffee as we watched the moon rise over the New Jersey woods on the other side of the Delaware. The girls who had waited on us at dinner disappeared shortly after setting out the coffee. It would have been a setting for a romantic scene in a Cary Grant/Katherine Hepburn film were it not for there being three of us.

Didi lit a cigarette, looked up at the moon and began to speak.

“You recall the night we first met when I alluded to offering you a chance to practice the exotic customs of old Russia. It has been my good fortune as well as my burden to have learned much about those customs; perhaps even too much. It began in Berlin, then the most open city on earth. The tastes that kept those customs alive exist in every large, sophisticated city but were prevalent in pre-Nazi Berlin. There were and still are many men and woman who have needs that can only be met by women endowed with a penis. My mother, a dancer in the imperial ballet, after fleeing the Bolsheviks, survived by teaching androgynous boys how to move, how to dress, how to live as desirable women.

“Please, do not mistake what I am telling you. She was no madam of a bizarre brothel nor did she exploit her students. The training Mother provided enabled those extraordinary girls to control their own destinies as mistresses of the wealthy who longed for such lovers. Depression and suicide or being beaten to death by street thugs would have been their fate were it not for the schooling by Mother. I resurrected the school in Paris after the war and brought it here later on. I don’t recruit but interview and evaluate only girls referred by families on the advice of professionals; psychiatrists, psycho-analysts and such. In rare cases I will evaluate and may accept a girl who has been rejected by her family and has been re-

ferred by an agency. In a few rare cases understanding police officers, ones that I can trust, make the referrals.”

“A fascinating history but where does our friend Basrov fit in?”

“Our mutual acquaintance, he was never anyone’s friend, was a blackmailer from the first. Early on he would introduce members of the émigré community to my mother. Some would bring her boys who needed her training desperately. The first few months things went well but suddenly he demanded money to keep from exposing them to their families, to newspapers and finally to those keepers of public morality, the Nazis.

“He kept notebooks in which he may have documented all his, shall we say ‘observations.’ That swine also kept written accounts of the financial transactions. I beg of you to help me locate these before others do, others who will continue Basrov’s unconscionable business.”

I nodded realizing that Didi’s school prevented a lot of suicides. Lila, a resident physician in psychiatry, had told me stories that confirmed the need to provide such boy/girls (she had used the scientific term “transvestite” which was then rarely used) a chance to live the only way they were meant to live.

“I don’t doubt what you’re telling me is true. My concern is that there is something you’re not telling me.” Didi stiffened as I spoke. “If a scandal results from Basrov’s notebook being made public, it will be short lived. Even if the scandal destroyed your school, you could easily return to France or start over in England. Didi, there are things you aren’t telling me.”

Freddie, who was seated out of Didi’s line of sight nodded at me almost imperceptibly. An almost angelic look of satisfaction flashed across her pretty face. Didi shifted uncomfortably, recrossed her legs deliberately ex-

posing enough thigh to distract me from Freddie but not enough to change the subject.

"I'm certain that Basrov used a microfilm camera to photograph many of my files. The microfilms must be found. The contents would certainly cause embarrassment to more than a few very well placed, powerful individuals; individuals powerful and vindictive enough to keep me from starting another school either in France or the U.K.

"Paul, I swear it isn't simply a matter of earning enough for me to live well. Please think of the young boy/girls who might otherwise be doomed to..."

"That's more than a little grandiose on your part. However, your point is well taken."

It was apparent from her facial affect and body language that Didi was, at least for the moment, vulnerable. She was made even more seductive by the momentary weakness in her seemingly impregnable persona. Against my better judgment, I was inexorably attracted by this new aspect.

There had to be more to this than she was telling. Art objects, jewelry and similar treasures were likely involved. There might be a big payoff at the end of this unusual venture. It was time to state my terms.

"Didi, you and I both know we may come across some very expensive, even priceless pieces while tracking down the notebooks, the microfilms and whatever else you might decide we need to locate. How will we share the pieces and the proceeds?"

"You name your terms. We'll work that out in the morning and then let the lawyers draft a written agreement. And you can sample pleasures offered by some of my special students; the girls who would be courtesans.

That is if you dare to imagine what is, to so many, unthinkable.”

“I’ll work with you on this for as long as it takes but I need at least two or three days a week to look after my own business affairs.” *What still doesn’t fit is how you got to be so involved in Basrov’s funeral arrangements considering the enmity you say existed between you.*

Didi got to her feet, nodded toward Freddie, ostentatiously straightened the seams of her stockings and announced “I’m going to get ready for bed; perhaps sit up in my room and read.” She stood in front of me, pressed her lips to mine and flicked her tongue over my lips. “Pleasant dreams,” was all she said and then cast a supercilious glance at Freddie.

“She wants you in her bed,” Freddie remarked as soon as Didi’s footsteps disappeared up the stairs. “You’re probably wondering if I’m a graduate of Didi’s academy. Not at all. Wouldn’t have minded it though except for the assumption that almost all her graduates are marketed as courtesans.

“I’m just a local girl made good. Born, bred and educated on the Main Line. (The Philadelphia Main Line, often referred to as The Main Line, is a string of affluent suburbs outside Philadelphia. The name comes from its location along the main line of the now defunct Pennsylvania Railroad.)

“No one in my family is a member of the Friends’ Society. All the same, I was sent to Germantown Friends School from kindergarten on through the end of high school. Mother and Dad believed that, given what they referred to as my gentle ways, a Quaker school might be the safest environment for a child like me. After that I went on to graduate from Haverford.” Freddie’s synopsis of

her Quaker education hit me like a blow to my chest. Maybe I heard her wrong.

“Say, Freddie, isn’t Haverford a men’s college?” Even as I spoke I realized why Freddie had said she wouldn’t have minded being part of Didi’s academy.

“That’s quite right,” she answered. “I’m not even sure why I opened up to you about what I am,” she added as a matter of fact footnote. “Give me a minute to collect my thoughts. That was a lie saying I don’t know why I opened up to you. The truth is that I’m so very attracted to you and I don’t want any misunderstandings between us. I could easily fall in love with a man like you: no, not with a man like you. Just with you. It’s already happening.”

Inside the house a clock chimed the half-hour. It was ten-thirty. I wanted desperately to keep talking with Freddie but my call to Lila was more pressing. Freddie noticed I had something else on my mind.

“Paul, perhaps we can talk more openly when you’re not so distracted. Rest assured I’ll not take offense.”

“Freddie, I feel awful about breaking off this conversation but there’s a phone call I should have made an hour ago.”

“Let me show you to a phone where you can have privacy.” Then her voice dropped to a whisper. “At least as much privacy as you can be sure of in this house. Didi is careful to make certain no one is reporting her activities to anyone on the outside.”

“Nothing like that at all. I promised my girlfriend I would phone to let her know I arrived safely.”

The look of disappointment on Freddie’s face meant I had said the wrong thing. I managed a silly, ineffective apology for having said too much.

"No, Paul. It was I who said too much when I spoke of my feelings for you."

I followed Freddie into the house and to a room which was both sitting room and library. A collection of art objects was displayed on shelves between books. An icon, presumably of the Madonna dominated one wall. That it was close to the fireplace made me suspect it was not a genuine antique but of more recent origin. The face suggested the model, if any, was girl in her very early teens. Something about the face unsettled me; it was as if I knew the model.

"You can use this phone. That little button below the dial is a privacy switch. Press it before you dial and it locks out all extensions. You may not need it at this hour but it's your choice. I'll be waiting outside."

"Freddie, please stay."

She sat down quite primly, knees and calves together, toes pointing in.

"Yes," I said when Lila's service answered. "This is Paul Lewyn calling to let Dr. Brodsky know I've arrived safely and that I can be reached at..." I covered the mouthpiece with my hand and looked to Freddie for a suggestion. Freddie wrote number on a pad, tore off the top sheet and handed it to me. She then tore off the top two or three sheets and put them in a pocket of her skirt.

"Paul, for someone in your line of work you're just too naive, too trusting. I gave you my sister's home phone number in Philadelphia. Didi would be very perturbed if even one of her phone numbers got into the wrong hands. My sister's housekeeper will get any messages to you through me. This way will be safer and more reliable than getting calls here."

"You're telling me Didi's is so concerned with keeping what goes on here secret that she's unwilling to allow

anyone else here a sense of security or even privacy.” What I didn’t say to her was that this arrangement would give her a complete list of all my calls including the callers’ names and other details.

“I’m not saying anything. You can draw your own conclusions.” Freddie was speaking loudly now, as if she wanted any eavesdroppers to know she was not in any way disloyal to Didi. She then put her index finger over her lips in the classic shushing sign. I nodded.

Freddie stepped close, put her arms around me. We tumbled onto a couch landing in an awkward petting clinch. It turned out we were just in time to be discovered by one of the girls who waited on us at dinner. This provided a rationale for Freddie and me being alone in this treasure laden room.

“Mlle. Didi asked me to lockup for the night.”

“Thank you, Allie. Mr. Lewyn and I are going out for a drive and then, as you young ladies put it, we’ll park if the mood hits us.”

It was all Allie could do to keep from giggling out loud which confirmed my guess and my hope that parking meant pulling over in some secluded spot to pet. Allie turned to leave but glanced over her shoulder at us only to see Freddie giving me a quick kiss. “Have fun,” she added, which was the wrong thing to say.

“Allie,” Freddie spit out the boy/girl’s name as if it were a command. Allie stopped dead in her tracks as her shoulders rose and stiffened. “You can have an enviable future as soon as you understand that there are people in this world with who over familiarity can be foolish, even fatal. Nothing more will be said about this foolish mistake.”

“Thank you, Freddie. I really mean it.” Allie’s tone of voice and body language was more than just submissive;

she was cowed by Freddie and was surely relieved that “nothing more will be said.” I would have to ask Freddie about the system of discipline imposed by Didi.

As we left I glanced at the icon that had drawn my attention when I first entered that room. The panel was thicker than usual; perhaps a skillful attempt to conceal something under it. If that was the case, it was a much better attempt than most I had come across. That, I decided, would receive closer scrutiny at the next opportunity. Allie reappeared as if from nowhere and locked the room behind us.

Freddie paused to light a cigarette as soon as we were on the porch.

“Just to throw Allie off the scent. She could be an ally but right now she’s afraid that Didi will kick her out of the ‘academy’ as she calls it. Watch out for her because right now she would sell out her mother to get back in Didi’s good graces.”

Freddie sat balanced on the porch rail her back against a post, both feet resting on the rail. She was so lovely, so genuine I found it hard to believe that she wasn’t a genetic female. “Time to take a walk,” she said.

Her hand was soft and smooth in mine, her fingers long and graceful. It was difficult to accept that these were the hands of a young man.

“I know what you were thinking when you were looking at me just now when I was sitting on the porch rail. You think I’m playing some sort of game by saying that I’m not a real girl.” She stopped short, stepped in front of me and took my hand, moved it to the front of her skirt a little below her waist. She pressed her hand over mine lest I might have some inhibitions about feeling her groin even through her skirt. I could no longer doubt that she was genetically male. To my chagrin I was neither re-

volted nor did I lose interest in this marvelously enchanted and enchanting sprite.

“Go ahead and hit me if you have to. I won’t fight back even though I can. I deserve to be hit for baring my being to you on first meeting but you’ve convinced me that there really is love at first sight.”

I took her in my arms and held her tenderly and brought my lips close to hers. “Freddie, you’re not the only one here who is learning to believe in love at first sight.” We kissed lightly and then she stepped back, looked at me and leapt on me wrapping her arms around my neck and locking her legs around my waist. I slipped my hands under her to keep her from falling. Her skirt was now in disarray so that there was nothing between her tush and my hand but the silken sleekness of her panties which did nothing to slow down my rapidly rising erection.

“Take me home this instant, Paul. I want to make love to you before we both start thinking and lose whatever it is we’re feeling right now.”

“Why not right here?”

“Because, you big dope, I just know I’m going to cum over and over again and loud enough each time to wake up the whole house. Now let’s go.”

The wind was picking up as we got into Freddie’s car. Lightning flashed as the storm broke. As we turned onto Route 32, a tree near the end of Didi’s driveway toppled over. “Now we have no choice but to spend the night at my place,” exulted Freddie. “I’m warning you now; be prepared to defend your honor.”

Freddie’s place was an apartment somewhere between New Hope and Washington’s Crossing. It was once a two

story industrial building with the lower floor now used as garage space for the occupants and the second floor divided into four apartments. Freddie's apartment occupied the southwest corner commanding a river view from the living room/dining room combination and from the corner of the kitchen. Later that night I would learn the bedroom had the same view. The piano in the study was a rosewood Steinway baby grand which probably cost more than most homes. Although I couldn't see the titles, the music books on the stand of the piano said that this beautiful instrument was no mere ornament. There was also what amounted to an exercise room/ballet studio complete with a full wall mirror and barre.

The tour over, Freddie and I were seated in the study where she put on a recording of Richard Strauss pieces. "Make your self comfy while I get us some cognac." She returned with two snifters. After handing me one, she settled comfortably on the couch. Her wrap skirt parted to reveal her thighs and the vee of her panties where her thighs met. It was almost unbelievable to me that I was finding Freddie so irresistibly seductive despite knowing she was other than what she so convincingly appeared to be.

Freddie got to her feet and removed her skirt. "It's just getting in the way, bunching up...And you already know what I have. Paul, don't disappointment me. That's not a lot to ask until after you see me nude. My body isn't all that bad if you don't look at my dick."

Freddie knelt in front of me, unlaced my shoes and took them off along with my socks. As she rose to her feet she pulled out the hair pins that were holding her French twist in place and shook her hair loose. It fell to her shoulder blades. We were both standing as Freddie grasped the bottom of her polo shirt with her hands crossed in front of her, pulled it up over head and cast it aside. Her padded

brassiere was a pastel blue that matched her eyes. The slight but noticeable swell of soft flesh over the lacey edge of the cups gave Freddie an undeniable femininity that I found irresistible. Her fingers were nimbly undoing my shirt buttons. She pushed the shirt off my shoulders and guided it down my arms until it fell to the floor.

“Hmm, no undershirt,” she purred. “I like the Clark Gable type even if only in my fantasies.” Her fingers circled my nipples sending shivers of arousal through me. Turning her attention to my trousers, Freddie undid my belt and fly. She stepped back and looked at me appraisingly as I stood before nude except for the blue low rise briefs I had bought in England a few months before. (Colored briefs for men were unheard of in the U.S. at that time.) The briefs did little to conceal my hardening cock. The corners of Freddie’s mouth turned up in a hint of a smile; she approved.

She moved my hand to her bra cup, calling my attention to the built in padding that enhanced her slenderness and to the tiny brass safety pin where each bra strap was connected to her bra. Although I had never been drawn to small breasted women prior to meeting Freddie, my limited experience with such women told me that these brass safety pins, positioned as they were, could only mean that Freddie was wearing breast forms to augment the padded bra.

This petite but adept seductress reached behind her back to unhook her bra, then slowly let it slide from her chest. Her breasts, small as they were, were beautiful. The firm mounds of tissue were surmounted by pink areolas which framed perfectly proportioned nipples, nipples which I instantly wanted to caress, to kiss, to gently and playfully bite.

“Have I shown you my bedroom? If I don’t take you there soon, I’ll have to have you on the floor which may

be hard on the knees and butt especially considering the number of orgasms I need to share with you."

"Maybe we don't need a bed. Freddie, I have a feeling that once around with you will be..." I meant it as teasing and Freddie certainly realized that but she wasn't having any of it. She meant this to be memorable for both of us although having sex with a lover endowed with a dick would by itself be memorable, perhaps even unique.

Freddie stepped to the side, threw her arm across my upper chest and thrust her hip under mine. The judo throw left me sprawled on my back. It also left me more excited than I had already been.

This beautiful and formidable boy/girl straddled my chest and had her knees pressing into my shoulders in a schoolyard pin before I could even sit up. "Are you going to cooperate or do I have to get physical with you?" My answer was a broad smile accompanied by a bucking my body up and down in vain attempt to dislodge Freddie.

"You want to play rough, do you?" Her giggling was like music to me and meant she was enjoying this game as much as I was. "Looks like I do have to get physical." With that she reached back, took my balls in her hand and twisted.

"I give, I give!" was the only response as I could manage as we both broke into peals of laughter.

Freddie sprang to her feet with all the aplomb of a skilled gymnast or an acrobatic dancer, grabbed me by my ears and towed me toward the bedroom. I caught her around her waist and lifted her over my shoulder at which point she let go of my ears. "No, Paul, no!" she shrieked. "Don't drop me. Whatever you do, don't dare drop me."

"Just direct me to the bedroom, killer."

A few seconds later I deposited Freddie on the bed. She managed to pull me over onto her leaving both of us winded but not so breathless that we couldn't laugh in that moment before our mouths came together and our tongues began to probe deeply.



We were suddenly suspended in time and free of any considerations but what we were sharing at that moment. We tasted every inch of each other's bodies except the parts concealed by Freddie's panties. Each time I sought to remove them for her slender, firm body she wiggled away, forcefully pushing my hand from her. Each time her face showing a hint of fear mixed with pain.

"Promise you won't hate me," she said suddenly. Leaping to her feet as I sat up looking at her, she stood on the bed like a child at play. She turned slightly away as she pulled lowered her panties exposing the cleft between her nether cheeks and no more. Then, as she turned to face me directly, she lowered her panties and stepped out of them. Her circumcised cock was at full erection. The incongruity of this slender feminine body adorned by a fully functional cock took my breath away even as Freddie declaimed "See! See what you were going to make love to, to a freak! I'll bet you don't want me now."

She fell on her back as I tackled her around her knees. Bringing my face to hers I answered her challenge. "Freddie, I do want you now; not only now but for a long time to come, maybe as long as forever."

Her cockhead was in my mouth as I massaged the base of the shaft. I desperately needed to make her erupt in my mouth so I could taste every drop of her cum. Freddie moaned softly while lithely twisting and wiggling as she, without moving her cock out of reach of my mouth or my fingers, brought herself into an ideal position for sixty-nine.

I was oblivious to what she was doing until I felt her warm breath on my balls. Her finger tips caressed the skin between my ball sac and my bottom hole causing me to twitch and almost pull away from her. A sigh came from deep within me as her tongue slithered over the underside of my cock from base to rim. With a sensuality born

of instinct and not practice, my hand gently wound around her shaft as my tongue, tentatively at first, teased the rim of her cockhead before rhythmically swirling around it. Freddie's moans became steadier and louder as I kissed her inner thighs and then teased that area that only moments ago had been to me an undiscovered erogenous zone, a very erogenous zone indeed.

Freddie's breath grew louder and I moved my mouth from that special place between her legs to her cockhead. Her mouth now enveloped my entire shaft then moved up as if to reject. My tongue flicked the precum that was accumulating at the tip of her delicious dick. The thrill of my first taste of another male's cum brought me closer to undreamed of heights of ecstasy. Meanwhile Freddie's hands, her lips and her tongue were tantalizing me with sensations I had never experienced or imagined with any real girl.

A strange and wonderful conflict was overtaking me. I wanted to prolong this wondrous session for as long as possible yet at the same time needed to cum even as Freddie came. The realization that Freddie's screeches were growing louder and more prolonged, that she was desperately pumping her hips as I took her cock deeper into my mouth and throat meant that this wonderful conflict was about to be resolved. Her limbs began to thrash even as she took my shaft deeper into her mouth. I lost control as she grasped my balls seemingly oblivious to the fact she was digging her nails into the tender skin of my ball sac! An electric surge formed in my cock and spread through my groin to my fingers and my toes. Every part of my body was quivering as I erupted in the most intense orgasm I had yet experienced. In what seemed like a split second Freddie screamed as she pumped wave after wave of cum into my eager mouth, cum that I greedily swallowed.

As our mutual orgasm subsided I milked Freddie's softening prick trying to satisfy my newly acquired still unsatisfied hunger for my lover's cum. Freddie quivered and yelped under these post orgasm ministrations. I paused only to have Freddie order me to "Don't stop. I'm just so sensitive to any touch after I cum liked that, it's almost painful but so intense..."

My rare and wonderful inamorata wrapped herself around me as our mouths met in a kiss made all the more sumptuous by being flavored with the taste of our blended cum. Our finger tips gently, lovingly, almost innocently explored the other's body as we drifted off into a peaceful sleep.

The sun was bright as I awakened the next morning to see Freddie's back as she sat on the edge of the bed. She had donned a fresh pair of panties; pastel green cotton. The click of cigarette lighter and the ensuing smell of cigarette smoke told me something more about this ever surprising sprite; that she was a confirmed chain smoker. "Player's Navy Cut" was her brand of choice as I noticed when she rested the cigarette in an ash tray. A much better aroma than the French brand Gauloise so favored by Lila.

"Almost seven-thirty," she announced. "I'll phone The Academy and let them know we were locked out by that fallen tree. Say, we can save some water if we shower together. Then we'll have breakfast. There's a new toothbrush in the bathroom. Oh, and don't get the idea that I make a habit of inviting men to share my bed. You're the first person, man or otherwise, to spend the night with me. And yes; that does mean you're special to me."

As she chatted on Freddie slipped into an ice blue short kimono robe that barely covered her panties when she bent forward. She disappeared into the bathroom leaving the door jar. I heard the sound of pee hitting the

toilet and wondered if she was sitting or standing. Then, having anticipated my curiosity, she called from the bathroom, "For your information I always squat or sit. Never, ever do I stand. It's too unladylike. Now get yourself in here so we can shower. Oh, and you can use my leg razor. I almost never, ever need it. Why don't you shave while I call The Academy?"

I hadn't the heart to tell her that one gets a better shave after a shower because the hot water softens the whiskers. Her childlike enthusiasm and spontaneity were endearing her to me more and more by the second. A cloud came over me briefly as it dawned on me that leaving Freddie to return to the rational, coldly efficient and overly intellectualized Lila was going to be very painful for lots of reasons.

"The phone lines at The Academy are out on account of last night's storm. I'll call Philadelphia to find out if there are any messages for you. I'll put you on so the household staff will recognize your voice if you call in on your own." There was pause while she dialed long distance and asked to be put through to her sister's home. "Trouble, Paul. A Doctor Brodsky returned your call. I was told she sounded angry and demanded you call at once and explain why you didn't call earlier last night."

"Might as well get it over with," I said with an air of resignation. It wasn't simply a matter of succumbing to Lila's moody demands. The message had awakened me to the reality of my situation and the conflict I had created by falling in love with Freddie. This strange and fascinating boy/girl had created a place for herself in and around Buck's County and Philadelphia where she had family and friends to support her in her unusual life style. Given all that, it was highly improbable that she would ever leave the two areas where she had built a secure, safe and creative reality. The situation I was getting into with

Freddie, however idyllic it may have seemed last night, afforded me no opportunity to earn a living and certainly not in the field I so enjoyed and in which I had earned a reputation based on know how and ethical dealing. Perhaps this need, however inconvenient it may have seemed that morning, would save me from a long term relationship so unacceptable in the wider world in which I had to survive.

“You can use the phone in the study. I’ll start breakfast. Tomato juice, scrambled eggs, toast and coffee; how does that sound? Now make your call, and then we can shower together while the coffee perks.”

Lila had calmed down enough to apologize for her rudeness to whoever took the call last night. “Blame it on these ridiculously long rotations. But could you be so kind as to explain all this cloak and dagger secrecy?”

Neither Lila nor I were ready for a frank discussion of what I had stumbled onto at The Academy. My explanation was a not totally accurate tale of having to find the inventory of what Basrov owned and where the not inconsiderable treasure was stored. Once her need to know was satisfied, Lila described how she would welcome me back into her bed when I returned to New York. I dared not tell her that as she described the carnal delights she had in store, I was envisioning how enjoyable they would be, but Lila was not in my mental picture. Freddie had taken Lila’s place.

Freddie and I showered together an experience that was both erotic and efficient. This ever surprising boy/girl suggested I throw my day old underpants in her clothes hamper and try the plain cotton briefs she pulled from her drawer. “Don’t tell me you’re such a stick in the mud as to refuse clean undies. These are the same shade of blue

as what you had on, no trim, and no appliqué. The only difference is there's no fly front. Besides, no one will know but you and me and I promise not to tell if you don't. Oh, my gosh! The one man I've ever fallen in love with prefers to wear sweaty old undies."

"If you put it that way..." I was able to tell the front of the panties from the rear and got them on correctly.

Watching Freddie dress was as erotic as watching most real girls undress. She was so totally female, so gracefully alluring that I came to believe she was pure woman despite her penis.

Freddie poured us each a cup of coffee as she melted some butter in a skillet. She cracked the eggs, added milk and seasoning, then whisked the mixture in a copper bowl. Freddie chatted with me or, more accurately, at me while she juggled preparing breakfast.

"You must be wondering if Didi knows I'm not a real girl. She does not. When she came here all she wanted to do was open a dance studio. I was wondering what to do with my life, how to live it. Didi came into the restaurant where I was working as a bartender. Barmaid would be more like it. Like so many people, Didi assumed I was a girl. Of course I did nothing to correct that misimpression. Matter of fact I was dressing more and more femme and starting to wear makeup. You get the picture. Anyhow, she asked me if I knew any local girls with dance training. Told her I was trained in Philadelphia and New York. Could I double as an office girl was her next question. My audition for the job went fabulously. Didi, who sells herself as super-worldly, couldn't recognize what I really am even though I wore a tight leotard at the audition. The old fraud still hasn't figured it out. Of course, the main point in hiring me was to give her some credence with the locals who were her potential clients.

“The school did well almost from the start. Newcomers had the impression it was around forever. Didi then bought the property out on the river. Being privy to the business affairs of the dance school, I wondered the money came from, who backed her. It wasn’t long after that that I noticed some strange comings and goings. European types visiting at odd times. Small packages being exchanged for bundles of cash. Eventually protective cases, the kind used to ship paintings, appearing. Some of those crates stayed, others were reshipped quickly. One doesn’t have to be Sherlock Holmes to see the dance school had become a front of sorts: a front that explained Didi’s presence in the area along with the continental types who visited so frequently. I’ve been very careful to keep Didi from discovering that I know anything about her unusual commerce. You no doubt noticed how complaint I was with Didi’s fiction about how helpful her school is to the students. Sure, she teaches them to pass and live as attractive, fashionable young ladies, young ladies who have no choice but to accept their fate as fancy, expensive whores. The only reason to take that corny tale so seriously is the harm she does to those poor would be girls!”

The sound of the phone brought Freddie’s very interesting monologue to an end. It was Didi calling to let Freddie and me know the phone lines were open and the tree had been removed from the entrance to the driveway.

She asked Freddie to put me on.

“Paul, thank goodness you’re safe.” Didi’s voice dropped to a whisper. “I hope that little snake hasn’t poisoned you against me.”

After I hung up I summed my conversation with Didi. “Perhaps you had better stay way from work for a few days,” I suggested.

“No, Paul. That would tell her we’re both onto her game. It may be that giving two weeks notice I’m leaving is a better strategy.”

Freddie sat at the desk in the den drafting a letter of resignation which she then copied onto the personal informal stationary that every well bred young lady as well as young ladies who aspired to pass as well bred used in those long gone days. I used the time to phone Lila who was in a dangerously cheerful mood.

“Paul, now that I’m almost done with my residency I’ve decided to continue my education while working in a small practice here in New York.

I’ve been accepted into a psychoanalytic training institute. That and the practice will consume all my time and energy. Now don’t be upset. We can still see each other, just not as often. Of course marriage or living together will be out of the question for at least another four years. It just wouldn’t be fair to either of us.

“But, Paul, promise you’ll see other people. It may be hard at first...”

“No reason to be concerned. You’ll attract enough men to choose from. Find a lover, a husband who can offer you what you need. I think I can manage to find other girls who interest me. Sorry, Lila. But I have to hang up now. There are some business calls I have to make.”

I winked at Freddie as I hung up. That mean I didn’t have second thoughts about having told off Lila. Freddie blew me a kiss which removed all doubt the breakup with Lila was a good thing.

My next to call was to Leah.

“Paul. I’m so glad you called. Yvonne was here, the restaurant Yvonne. She insists on talking to only you

about the blonde you were with. Yvonne insisted that blonde is not who or what she appears to be.

“She shocked me by saying ‘In case you want to know from where I know her...’ and then rolled up her left sleeve and showed me the concentration camp number tattooed there.”

“I have an idea of where that may lead. Give me her number and I’ll try to speak to her before I leave here tomorrow.”

By now Freddie had finished her letter of resignation. I filled her in on what Yvonne claimed. “I wonder if this Yvonne person holds the key to what Didi is all about. I’m sorry, Paul. I’m overstepping the boundaries between us. Just because I have a silly school girl crush on you doesn’t mean I have any right to expect to be taken into your confidence. It’s not like I’ve earned your trust.”

“Don’t you think last night meant we...?”

“Paul, please don’t spoil it with words. Just leave it for what it was.”

“And what it may become at some other time in some other place.” I couldn’t help adding some ray of hope to our romantic and passionate tryst even though Freddie’s face was communicating remorse at having yielded to an impulse based on desire. It made me wonder how often she had yielded to those impulses.

Didi greeted me with a more than friendly kiss on the lips. She was taken aback when Freddie handed her the handwritten resignation letter.

"My letter of resignation, Didi. Perhaps we can talk after you've read it. My feelings about you and The Academy haven't changed but it is time for me to move on."

"I fully understand. A beautiful and independently wealthy young woman has no real prospects in this part of Bucks County. Paul, will you excuse me?"

The New Hope area is full of wealthy writers, directors, and performers. There are also quite a few weekend homes belonging to successful doctors and lawyers from New York and Philadelphia. Didi can't be unaware of that especially considering Freddie's family fits that category. She's either patronizing Freddie or she just loves to lie. Could be she's testing me to see if I'll correct her? I will but not this minute.

I studied the icon while Freddie started putting her personal possessions together. There was no doubt that this was a recent work, not even a copy of an original going by the face and some of the details. Yet there were specific parts, the hands for instance, done with the pigments and techniques used by monks who had produced such icons for centuries in the monasteries of Holy Russia (the area around Moscow). The artist who painted in this mélange of styles could easily produce a very accurate copy of any rare icon. As I stepped away from the painting, a feeling of unrest came over me. It was as if I had known the model but that was quite impossible.

The voices in the hall drew my attention from the icon. Didi and Freddie appeared in the doorway. They seemed to be no animosity between them although from what Freddie had told me about Didi's varied "business" interests, I thought I had better warn Freddie to be on her guard although she was sharp enough to figure that out without me.

"I see you were admiring my icon," Didi said with a note of pride. "When I say 'my icon,' I mean that it was

painted by me. It was so many years ago when I wondered how to survive those first post-war years."

"It must have been very difficult." I didn't want to interrupt her in case she might offer me some information. Neither did I ask how she was supplied with paints, pigments, wood panels and everything else needed to reproduce such artworks. Saying I doubted or questioned Didi's stories might put me in danger or she might tell me enough that I could be considered an accomplice in whatever she was into.

"Yes, it was difficult. I couldn't find work as a dancer. The only commodity I had was my body. A soldier friend bought me some pads and charcoal which allowed me to start doing portraits of soldiers to send to their wives. That's when Basrov found me but as the Romans used to say 'of the dead say nothing but good' so I will say nothing more of Basrov until I'm sure he is in the ground and forty days have passed."

I nodded and smiled blandly while noting the large number of inconsistencies and contradictions in the stories Didi told about herself.

"But come and let me show you the hidden secret of this icon."

Didi led the way to the painting and then asked me to take it down. She released one side of the ornate frame and slid the entire panel from it. The painting on the back of the icon was erotically beautiful. The same model was posed nude her with her thighs slightly parted, her labia only hinted at in the shadows between her thighs. It dawned on me why the girl model had seemed so familiar. She bore a subtle but undeniable resemblance to Lynn!

"Well, what do you think of this piece?" Didi's voice was flat as she spoke.

“Front or back?”

“Either or both.”

“The artist, and I believe you when you say it is your work, could easily paint a very accurate copy of almost any icon in history. My assumption is that this was meant to show the artist’s skills with different techniques, different styles. The back is an irreverent parody of an icon perhaps done for a client with an unusual sense of humor.” Didi smiled and nodded her head.

“Why didn’t you sign and date it?”

Her fair skin was livid with rage and then a hollow laugh as she brought her anger under control.

“Paul, I’m sorry for momentarily losing my temper...”

“Perhaps I should be the one to apologize. My question was more provocative than necessary.”

“You’re very good. To be honest with you...”

“That would be a refreshing change,” I challenged. “But while we’re on that subject, could you explain why Basrov’s obituary hasn’t been in the New York Times. One would think that given his history Basrov’s death would have rated at least some space.”

“His death is being kept a secret to prevent...”

“Didi, you’ve misled me for too long. We need some space between us for a few weeks. I still have to earn a living so it’s back to New York this afternoon. Call me when you’re ready talk sense and not nonsense.”

“Then let us say good-bye now for now. Consider this a sample of what I have in store for you to seal our alliance.”

I was about to thank Didi even as I refused her vague offer when I caught sight of Freddie standing in the doorway behind Didi. She shook her head as if urging me to

accept whatever it was Didi had in mind as a good-bye. Then she beckoned to someone to join her. It was Allie smartly dressed in white slacks, t-strap heels and a blue blouse worn out and belted with a sash. The small overnight bag she was carrying said she was about to leave The Academy permanently. Unless I wanted to ruin Allie's escape, I had no choice but to go along with Didi's farewell gambit.

Freddie was leaning against the front fender of my car as I approached. She dropped her cigarette to the ground, crushed it out with her toe and looked at me in disbelief.

"Either you're very determined or else I wore you out last night. Very few men can get away from Didi when she's determined to seduce them or at least let them know what she can offer."

"Oh, she piles it on but her skills are all mechanical and I need some romance to spice up sex; like you and I had last night. And no, you didn't wear me out. As a matter of fact you left me hungering for more of you."

"It's kind of you to say so, Paul. I can't begin to imagine that something between us could possibly grow or even survive so let's leave it at that; a great night of sex."

"Please do me a big favor on your way back to New York. Stop in Lambertville pick up something for me and drop it off in the city. The stop in Lambertville won't be but a minute and I promise you won't have to go out of your way once you're home."

My car was parked behind a row of commercial buildings as instructed by Freddie. A minute or two later Allie came out of the back door of a dressmaker's. I got out of the car to take the overnight bag from her.

“Thanks, Paul. Back in a jiffy with the rest.” As she turned, the full skirted shirtwaist dress flared to show the back of her knees. Despite the fashionable femininity of the dress she had changed to, I missed the allure of the arty slacks ensemble she had worn earlier that morning I opened the trunk as Allie returned with several boxes featuring the dressmaker’s logo. I closed the trunk and turned to see Allie standing at the passenger door as if waiting for me to open it. Then it dawned on me. It was Allie who I was to pick up and take to the city!

It was clear that Allie had learned her lessons well. Her back was to the seat as she sat down. Then, pressing her hand against the side of her skirt, she pivoted and raised her feet high enough to allow her to settle comfortably and ladylike in the front passenger seat. Anyone seeing her would take her for what she appeared to be: A beautiful young girl whose style and carriage spoke of class and old money.

Allie spoke up once we were clear of Lambertville. “Freddie asked me to give you this to read,” she said as she handed me a letter on Freddie’s informal note paper. “Freddie’s a hero to me and to a few others like me. You see Didi was about to have me sent off as the unwilling mistress to some South American bigwig. Think of it as indentured servitude in payment for what I got out of her training.

“None of us knew of this arrangement when we started out. Of course the girls with family support and money never had to find this out but the ‘talented naturals’ like me who have neither family or money are supposed to just go along with this. Not I.”

Wait a second! Now it makes sense. A hell of a lot of Nazis fled to South America and took on new identities! It was easy enough to do with all the European refugees. Throw the Czarist émigrés into the mix and there is money to be made. That’s it!

Didi and whoever her contact is trade these girls for looted art work. Yeah, Freddie is a real hero. I just hope she doesn't end up a dead hero.

Allie was a terrific traveling companion, a great conversationalist able to chat easily and knowledgeably on all sorts of topic from baseball to fashions to history and classical music. It wasn't Didi who saw to this aspect of her education. Freddie made sure she developed these qualifications so Allie could be at ease in the most sophisticated circles in any big city. *To what end? And what does Freddie get out of this?*

It was evening when we drove through the Holland Tunnel

and onto the streets of Manhattan. I offered to take her to her destination rather than leave her to the vagaries of finding a taxicab or, worse yet, making her way through the subway system laden with packages.

Allie gave me the address of an apartment building just off Irving Place, a block or two below Gramercy Park, an impressive area to be sure. "Freddie gave me a set of keys and said she would call the building manager as soon as she got back to her place on the river. Said she and her sisters use it when they come to New York to shop or go to the opera. Gosh, that family must be rolling in dough if they have so many places to live. Freddie promised I can use it until I get set up on my own."

This beautiful young trannie was overflowing with quiet confidence. She hadn't the slightest doubt that she would be earning enough to live well, very well indeed.

"I'll do some modeling and maybe work as a receptionist or a typist. Did you know I took typing and shorthand in high school? I got teased a lot for being the only boy who did. I was used to being teased for being a fairy.

Those jerks would probably cream in their jeans if they saw me now. Once I save up some money I can get a place of my own. Freddie promised if I do well and stay out of mischief, she'll get me into a good secretarial school and help with the tuition."

Freddie was going up even higher in my estimation. This privileged, self-confident trannie had chanced into a situation that enabled her to use her generous instincts and her not inconsiderable resources to rescue less fortunate girls from sexual slavery. Despite my feelings for her, I couldn't completely suppress the skeptic in me. Was there an ulterior motive?

Allie took my hand as she got out of the car. She looked up at me with a wry smile which said she knew I was eying her thighs as her skirt slipped above her knees. That made me feel more than a little awkward since she likely sensed the attraction between Freddie and me. It wouldn't have surprised if she knew about the intimacy that we had shared. Any concern I had vanished as Allie pursed her lips and winked.

I helped carry her overnight bag and dressmaker's boxes to the apartment. After checking that all the utilities were turned on, Allie asked me if I cared to stay for a bit.

"Thanks, but it's late and I have an appointment in the morning."

"Some other time then; when I settled in and comfy." There was a mischievous glint in her eye as she spoke in a breathy whisper. "I should be the one thanking you. Promise me that you'll let me thank you like a grownup for what you did for me today. And soon, please." Then she kissed me.

My head was reeling with desire for Allie as I walked out of the apartment. I knew then that the attraction Freddie exerted on me was no quirk, no one time fascina-

tion. I was responding to Allie with the same sudden intensity. Maybe I would take her up on her offer to thank me like a grownup. It would help me work out whether my preference was for real girls or girls with that something extra.

Leigh had not yet gone to bed when I let myself into the apartment.

She was sitting in the living room reading. As I said earlier, it hadn't taken Leigh, then still calling herself Leah, very long to shed her severely modest clothing of her very religious background in favor of the most chic and tasteful fashions of the era. I had often wondered if she had also adopted the elegantly sexy underpinnings of those very feminine fashions. What she was wearing as she greeted me was pretty good indicator she had done just that.

Her dark brown hair was pinned at the back of her head in a kind of upside down pony tail. She wore a white diaphanous peignoir over a snow white long line brassiere that gently nipped in her already small waist. A white silk panty was not so opaque as to totally obscure the outline of the garter straps attached the brassiere. Neither was the panty so tight as to fail to show both the shadow and the texture of her pubic hair through the virginal white nylon. Sheer smoky pearl stockings were pulled taut by the garter straps. Her ballet style flat heeled shoes had been slipped off and rested alongside the couch where she sat.

"Hi boss. Gee, I'm glad to see you back all hale and hardy. Looks like you and some lady had a really wild good-night kiss." Leah ran her finger tips over what had

to be a love-bite left on my neck by Allie. She then stood on tip toe, her lips pursed to kiss me on the cheek, or so I thought. She planted a warm moist kiss right on my lips and let it linger just long enough to say she just might respond if I put a move on her. Stepping back a foot or two, she put her hands on her waist and turned as if modeling her attire and her self. "Like my new look? And it's not just my look that's new; it's my whole outlook that's become modern."

My eyes fell on her cleavage and the soft swell of her breasts nestled in the cups of her bra. I breathed deeply I gazed at the curve of her pubic mound pressing so alluringly against her panty. In my mind I saw Freddie in her panties with a larger mound showing at the vee at the top of her thighs. I exhaled slowly, acknowledging that Leah, as beautifully put together as she was, wasn't arousing me nearly as much as Freddie or even the fully clad Allie had done.

"Tired, huh?" Leah's voice interrupted my strange reflections on what I need in a lover or mate. "Better get some rest. When I called Yvonne she said to tell you she'll be here alone and that she's sent Lynn to work up in Massachusetts where she'll be safe. I put a file folder with notes and phone messages on your night table.

"Oh, and one more thing...a personal favor. Can I stay in your spare room for a few more days; just until I get my own place?"

I nodded while trying to hide my satisfaction at having Leigh so close at hand in case I returned to my senses and wanted to take her up on the implied offer of an affair.

"Thanks ever so much," was her preppie reply to my nod. "I promise not to get in your way."

“Leigh, the other apartment in this building is being vacated at the end of the month. Let me pay your rent to start you out. Think of it as a bonus...”

She threw arms around my neck and kissed me. Her body was pressed against me just hard enough for me to sense the softness of her breasts against me. Just a fleeting touch of her tongue against mine but the effect it had on my penis was more than enough to let me know that I wasn't yet totally off real girls.

The smell of fresh coffee surprised me until I recalled that Leigh had spent the night in the spare room. Her appearance disappointed me in that she was fully dressed for work.

Leigh washed the breakfast things while I ate the scrambled eggs, home fries and toast she had put in front of me as I poured myself a cup of coffee. “Not only is she beautiful but she cooks well, too. You'll make a great wife for some guy.”

“That's what I'm afraid of. Working for you has changed my outlook. It wouldn't be wrong to say it spoiled me, Paul. There are so many women who marry but don't become baby making machines and after seeing what some of the women you associate with are doing, I can never go back to where I come from, not in any real sense. Leigh might have settled for the wife route but Leigh will be her own person.

“I should really thank you for having opened my eyes. Now let me get downstairs to the office. There's work to be done and you have to read my notes on Yvonne.”

Oh, shit! Thanks for reminding me. I never read Freddie's note. No time for that now. I have to go over Leah's notes before calling Yvonne.

Leigh's voice came over the intercom as I closed the file. Yvonne was on the phone and said she was leaving New York and absolutely had to see me. "Tell her I'll see her in half an hour."

There was no doubt the woman who came into my office was Yvonne although the difference in her appearance was astonishing. She looked at least ten years younger and would have fit right in the cocktail party circuit of cognoscenti (fashionable and sophisticated trendsetters of the arts). Except for a few accent pieces of jewelry, she had dropped her ethnic Russian style in favor of an expensive designer original dress. It was a sapphire blue one piece with a nipped in waist and a full skirt supported by a couple of layers of soft white petticoats. The scoop neck and cowl collar showed curve of her full but not overly large breasts. A pendant nestling at the top of her cleavage assured that those sensual contours would not go unnoticed. The long kidskin gloves which reached well above her wrists were accented by diamond bracelets. A large but not ostentatious solitaire graced her left index finger. Her legs were enhanced by lightly tinted stockings that matched her dress. Suede opera pumps completed what I could see of her ensemble. I wondered if her underthings were as well coordinated and as fashionably alluring as her outer clothing.

She took my hand between her own as I rose to greet her. She kissed me on both cheeks in continental fashion which was not unexpected. What was unexpected was the third kiss as her lips brushed over mine and lingered in a way that said this was not chance. She stepped back, looked into my eyes as the corners of her mouth curled up in the hint of a smile.

Yvonne sat in the comfortable Queen Anne chair used for guests and clients. I moved my desk chair to the side of my desk in order to better read her body language as well as to take advantage of any chance to study her wonderful legs. She raised her skirt a few inches as she wet her gloved finger tip and bent forward to smooth a non-existent run in her stocking. Her cowl neck collar gapped enough for me to see the fullness of her breasts as they nestled in the cups of her snow white lace edged bra.

Yvonne's Revelation

"Paul, you have been the closest to being a friend I can trust in decades. Please stop me at any point in this tale if you don't want to take on the burden of knowing my story, our story really; mine and Yvonne's.

"First you must know that Lynn is not my daughter. She's my son!"

I sat aghast as Yvonne related her personal history. Her Russian émigré family had fled to Paris from Berlin as soon as it became the Nazi party was on the rise. Her mother, a cabaret singer and entertainer had been the darling of the survivors of the Czar's court and came to be especially valued by the German industrialists who had backed Hitler but who wee bale to get us out before it was too late. It was her beauty and skill in the arts of Eros that financed her life in Berlin and which transferred so well to the Parisian demimonde. All this did not prevent them from being rounded up by the French police and sent to series of concentration camps.

Yvonne, then still in her teens, survived by becoming the unwilling mistress of a German officer. What the officer didn't know was that she already pregnant as the re-

sult of a romantic tryst just before the roundup. She wisely let him believe it was his child she was carrying. Rather than embarrass himself and his family, he sent her off to Auschwitz and arranged preferential treatment for her as a hospital aide. It was there that she gave birth to a beautiful baby boy. Her fears that the baby would be subjected to horrible experiments were not unfounded. The infant who would develop into Lynn, became the subject of a long term project in which various hormones were used to suppress any and all development of male characteristics and to stimulate female primary and secondary traits. Lynn's testicles were removed and an artificial vagina constructed. Her penis was left intact and remains functional. Yvonne assured me that Lynn was able to achieve orgasm utilizing either her vagina or her penis or both at the same time!

"You've been to Didi's establishment in Pennsylvania. I suspect you've seen the bizarre icon she's so proud of."

I nodded while wondering how that strange work of art related to her story. Yvonne wrapped her arm around her calf and pulled her knee to her chest showing the darker tops of her stocking against the white sea of her petticoats. "My apologies if I distracted you. A momentary need to stretch, that's all." She then continued her story.

"And you saw the concealed sacrilegious parody of an icon. I'm sure the model made you think of someone you were unable to place. Perhaps she reminded you of Lynn."

"You're on the right track, Yvonne. Only I'm not sure it was Lynn but more like someone who reminded me of her."

"It wasn't Lynn, but there is no reason the original model should not remind you of her. You see, it was I

who was forced to pose for that abomination. You agree that I was young, innocent looking, and virginal. I retained all those charms despite the horrors that were inflicted on me and that I had to witness.

“I’m not proud of what I had to do to survive or that after the liberation I became a madam catering to clients with very unusual tastes. It was my good fortune to learn to act as a conduit between sellers and buyers of art objects and jewelry of questionable origin.

“After you had become a regular at the restaurant I became interested in you as both a man and as an art expert. I was surprised to learn later that Basrov had been a mentor to you but he had done that job too well. He couldn’t pass off Didi’s forgeries while you were working with him. That’s well known in certain circles, circles in which you are regarded as the divine punishment visited on Basrov. Ironic, isn’t it?”

Yvonne went on to tell me how Didi exploited many of the girls whom she trained at the academy thus confirming what Freddie had already told me. There was only one surprise in Yvonne’s information about Didi. A woman had infiltrated Didi’s staff and was siphoning off Didi’s would be merchandise for her own end which was to establish a string of specialized brothels around the northeast. These so called brothels could range from a single girl in a small apartment to groups of three or four catering to a variety of tastes. This competitor was also successful in settling her working girls in enviable lifelong relationships at the close of their working days.

“By stealing girls from Didi’s academy, she has no need to spend time and money developing her own staff. Didi is aware of losing her girls but she’s not yet convinced that it’s an organized effort and certainly doesn’t suspect it’s someone in her organization. She’s shrewd

and will figure it all out in time. When that time comes, someone will suffer.



“Now that I am permanently shedding the guise of the plain and humble refugee, I must tell you that I was always drawn to you as a lover and more. But I know that you’ve already spent time at Didi’s establishment, her *academy* as she calls it, and that you have come to know some of her girls, come to know them in the Biblical sense of knowing. You were not perturbed by those experiences. A source within Didi’s staff has let me know that you were quite romantic with someone named Freddie. Once having experienced what a girl like Freddie can offer, it may be difficult, even impossible for you to satisfy or even want a natural woman. Make no mistake, I am a natural woman.”

I momentarily suspected that Yvonne’s revelation was at least in part contrived, especially her wild tale about Lynn’s male and female sex organs and being able to achieve orgasm through either set. It took only a few seconds for me to silently acknowledge that even more unimaginably bizarre medical experiments were conducted in places like Auschwitz. It suddenly struck me that Yvonne was only a few years older than I, and despite the horrors she endured, remained a strangely glamorous, attractive woman.

“I must leave now. We’ll be in touch.” She pursed her lips as she brought her gloved finger tips to her mouth. A flash of tongue as she blew me a good-bye kiss. I was left wondering with whom, if given the choice, I would prefer to spend a long weekend in sexual experimentation: Lynn or Yvonne? But would it have to be either or?

Freddie had taken me in one hundred per cent. No doubt what she offered the girls was a lot better than being shipped to South America or the Middle East as a

chattel to be disposed of once she ceased to amuse. One thing for sure, she wasn't the unselfish Good Samaritan type she had convinced me she was. She would be in for it if and when Didi figured out what was going on. Not even Freddie for all her deceit and treachery deserved that fate.

I wasn't sure for how long I just sat at my desk categorizing the strange assortment of women of both sexes that I had encountered in the days since I first agreed to meet Didi. Of course I had known some of them before but not as I knew them now. That I kept refocusing on Freddie was more than unnerving. Was she that good an actress as to be able to pretend so convincingly that she was enjoying sex with me? It might have been that she just enjoyed sex with men who had never experienced a girl with a dick. That was the only explanation that made sense. I was also convinced that she was serious about sabotaging Didi's so called academy. That made no sense at all. The Academy was the sole source of girls that Freddie placed in profitable positions while saving them from what I had begun to think of as Didi's export trade. If the Academy ceased to exist, Freddie would go out of business unless she had another source of talent.

I had to admit to myself that my thinking was getting fuzzy since I was starting to believe that Freddie genuinely cared for me and that something worth having might yet develop between us. Nope, she was too manipulative, too clever to be worth bothering with.

That phone call from Didi had set off this set of strange circumstances. The purpose of that call had been to discuss Basrov's death and funeral. This led to a proposal that Didi and I work together to locate the sources as well as the current locations of the art objects, jewelry, and antiques that remained concealed at the time of

Barov's death. It was time to find out when and where Basrov died if in fact he was dead.

Maybe it was time to give Lila Brodsky, MD a call. Bourgeois and safe were qualities that were worth having in a lover especially from the perspective of the events and personalities encountered over the last week.

"Leigh," I said to the intercom. "This is a weird one. I want you to go over to the Department of Health and search the death records for a Vasily Basrov. Just the last three weeks. Then head uptown to Henri Bendel, the lingerie department and buy yourself all that your heart desires but use your imagination. My treat."

"Are you trying to start something?"

"No, I'm not trying to start something."

"Why not? I was hoping you would. I might even think about responding."

"Seriously though, someone named Penny called. No message other than to tell you she called. It's so hard for me to believe there are really girls named Penny! That'll tell you how different my world was before working for you."

"You disappoint me, Leigh." Her face fell on hearing my comment. "By saying 'seriously' when you gave me Penny's message I guess you meant the part about 'responding' wasn't serious."

An embarrassed giggle, then she blushed and flounced out of the office.

My next call was to Lila who was unavailable. After leaving a message with Lila's answering service, I called Penny. She was a photographer down in the Village who

had done brochure type layouts of art objects, icons, paintings and jewelry that I was trying to sell when she was just starting out. She always said she owed me for giving her work photographing objects I had for sale because the fees I paid her kept her from having to go back to her home town. It was time for me to ask for some pay-back so I invited her out for dinner.

Penny suggested we meet at a place called the Jai Alai on Bank Street just off Greenwich Avenue. We sat at the bar presumably to discuss whether to have dinner there or to move on to some other place.

“Still into Rob Roys after all these years,” I said as the bartender took our order.

“I stick with a good thing when I find one; not like someone I could mention.” I cringed at her accusatory remark. Studying her legs and considering her creative success made me regret having broken off an affair with Penny several years earlier. I changed the subject thinking that once I sorted out the extraordinary circumstances that had taken over my business and personal life, Penny might be just what I need. It was time to layout the strictly business proposal I had in mind when I telephoned Penny.

“Paul, I haven’t done that kind of work in years. I do arty stuff and portraits for the wealthy, the well known and those that think they are but have the money to pay my fees.

“Why can’t I keep a straight face when I lie to you? The portrait and arty series are the bulk of my income and what I built my following on. Let’s put it politely and say I still do portfolio layouts that showcase the charms and techniques of certain kind of ladies. What you’re proposing could turn out to be a real gas.” (gas = late fifties slang used to indicate something better than just cool) A hand-

shake would have been enough to seal the pact but Penny added a slow moist kiss. Looking past Penny I couldn't help noticing the two women in the entrance way. They were on their way out from the main dining room. What was it about them that caught my eye? Lila was one of them and I could have sworn the other was Allie! There was no doubt that Lila had noticed me sitting at the bar. I waved to her.

Lila said something to her companion who left hurriedly. She approached me with a smile that was as genuine as a three dollar bill.

"Paul, it's so great to see you. Why didn't you let me know you're back?"

"Come on, Lila. I left a message with your service. What brings you to this part of town?"

"Just in the mood for good paella. Too bad I didn't get your message. We could have kept each other company. Who's your friend?"

Lila was lying and not doing a very good job of it. I introduced them to each other and, matching sarcasm for sarcasm, emphasized that Lila was an MD and a resident in psychiatry.

Lila's acerbic comment about "your friend" hadn't been lost on Penny or me. Penny kned my thigh and answered in her best Midwestern accent. "Gee, I thought you might have seen my work in Vogue and that piece they did on me in The Sunday Times Magazine but I guess you can't be bothered with such mundane things as dressing fashionably to bring out the best in you."

Outclassed in the nastiness department, Lila turned and left saying "If you think there's anything left to talk about, call me."

“Sorry if I messed you up.” Penny’s grin belied her words.

“You didn’t. But I will phone her to call her bluff...Say, when did you have a feature in Vogue?”

“Never,” Penny answered with an impish grin. “It was an advert. They may commission a spread in the next few months. The Times Magazine did mention me as one of the rising but too free spirits in photography. So I wasn’t fibbing; not really. It was just to test your friend Lila Brodsky. Take it from an old flame. Pal, you could do a lot worse.”

“Do you mean a lot worse than Lila or a lot worse than you?”

Her answer was to lean toward me and give me a moist kiss on the lips. The kiss lingered either too long to not long enough. A flick of her tongue and then she pulled away.

“Oh, by the way, Paul, what was it we came here to discuss?”

Leigh’s Report

I walked up to Fourteenth Street after an incredible grope in the vestibule of Penny’s brownstone. I used the phone booth in a cigar store to call the office. Leigh picked up the phone on the second ring.

“Hey, Boss. I found out that Vassily Basrov died two months ago and his body was picked up by a New Jersey undertaker for burial in some Russian Community in a place called Cassville.

“The priest I spoke to confirmed that the Vassily Basrov who was buried there was the one you knew. He said he knew him personally and disliked him for exploiting those who had already suffered more than any human being should. Nice friends you have.

“And thanks for the shopping spree.
“Oh, Dr. Brodsky called. She sounded weepy. Be a nice guy and give her a call when you get in.”

“I have to think about it. See you soon.” I hung up and walked leisurely home. I needed to be alone with my thoughts

I sat staring at the phone wondering when or even whether to call Lila. Indecisiveness was not one of my usual traits even though I sat drumming my fingers on the desktop. There had to be ways to stop obsessing over Lila so I tried to focus on the Didi’s connection to Basrov. Then it hit me. Basrov either stashed everything he wanted hidden from Didi with Freddie or else he had it buried with him in his casket!

I called Lila who, amid tears, apologized profusely for the scene in the Jai Alai. “I knew it would be hard for me to see you with another woman but it was worse than that. It was jealousy and rage that overwhelmed me, kept me from thinking rationally. Please forgive me. You know I want you to take me back but I’ll understand if you don’t.”

I avoided answering and promised to call her in a day or two to give us a cooling off period. Lila’s call was flattering but did nothing to satisfy my curiosity over whether or not the girl who had been with Lila was Allie and, if so, what had brought them together. Then I buzzed for Leigh.

“Call that priest in Cassville. Ask him if there was anything unusual about Basrov’s funeral arrangements.”

“Will do, Boss.”

About twenty minutes later Leigh came back into my office with a notepad. She stood in the doorway looking like the cat that had swallowed the canary. She might have been modeling for a Jonathan Logan ad in her green shirtwaist dress with just enough fullness in the skirt to make one wonder about what contours that demure frock concealed.

“The body had been taken from the church by a Pennsylvania undertaker. A stranger, a woman at the funeral came in her own car but appeared to have made of the arrangements with the Pennsylvania funeral home. Father Gregory couldn’t be sure but she sounded like the woman who had requested the masses and burial for Basrov. She spoke English fluently and with no accent but conversed easily, as he put it, in Russian. There was little he could say about her features as a large hat with a veil concealed her face. Her donations to the priest and the church were cash but she didn’t even ask for a receipt.

“Are you okay, Boss?”

“I’m fine, just a little taken aback to realize just how much Didi was keeping to herself.”

“She almost set you up as her fall-guy, is that it?”

I nodded.

My theory that the papers Didi was looking for was stashed in Basrov’s coffin was wrong since it looked like Didi had taken care of his funeral arrangements. It was more and more likely that the papers Didi so desperately wanted didn’t exist.

The next half hour was spent in solitary reflection. Seeing how treacherous she could be, there would be no deal

with Didi. Next under consideration was Freddie who, although poisonous, still held an attraction for me, an attraction I would have to resist. And how had Freddie managed to connect Allie with Lila so soon after the trannie had been delivered to New York?

Lila answered her phone on the fourth ring. I had awakened her from a sound sleep.

“How about a quiet dinner for two this evening? Upscale to make it special! Remember that great place in Brooklyn Heights?”

“Yes, of course I remember it better than you could guess. Great idea though, Paul. But could we make it tomorrow night? Not that I’m not thrilled that we might get back together but I’m setting up my new office and I have a new secretary, this kid just in from around Philadelphia. It’s her first real job as she describes it. She’s as cute as a button and very smooth. There’s something about her that I find appealing, like no one I’ve ever come across. And no, I’m not about to dump you.”

Looks like I was right when I thought that was Allie who was with her at the Jai Alai. Was Allie with Lila as her secretary, a high class call girl or something entirely different?

“Say, does this new secretary or whatever she is have a place to stay? There’s a vacant apartment across the street...”

“Thanks for thinking of it but right now she’s staying down on Irving Place. She might move to my new place if things keep going the way they are between...”

An awkward silence as Lila stopped in midsentence. My best guess was that there was special intimacy blossoming between Lila and Allie. Not being one to knock that kind of thing, I tried to sound supportive. “This new kid must be very special.”

"I guess you can say that." Then her voice choked up. "Paul, I have to hang up. We need to talk but it has to be face to face. I like your suggestion about meeting at the Candlelight in Brooklyn Heights. We had some nice dinners and nicer moments there when we were falling in love or thought we were." There was note of nostalgia in her voice; not sad but pained.

"I'll make a reservation for us, tomorrow at seven."

"We can meet there. My new office is in Brooklyn Heights. Could you make the reservation for three? If it's okay with you, Allie will join us after we have a chance to talk. I know you'll like Allie once you meet her."

"Oh, I know I will. We've already met. Nothing between us. Ask her to be sure."

It was almost certain that Lila and Allie were going to be friends, very special friends so close that it would be fair to say their relationship would be an intimate one.

Not a bad outcome considering one complication was about to be removed from my personal life.

Lila and I all but collided on Henry Street as we approached the Candlelight, the restaurant where Lila was going to say what couldn't be said over the phone. We both must have been pretty concerned over whatever it was she had to say because we were both more than half an hour early.

"If you're looking for Allie, she'll be along later; gives us a chance to...It'll all come out soon enough."

The hostess greeted Lila as Dr, Brodsky which meant she was a regular. We opted to sit at the end of the bar until Allie arrived.

Lila lit a cigarette as the bartender approached. She left the pack and her lighter on the bar, a sure sign she was going to chain smoke to relieve the tension of whatever was bothering her.

"I've been seeing patients in shared office space on Pineapple Street. Dining here gave me a chance to relax and think nice thoughts about us.

"You've been good to me and good for me." We were facing each other now as the bartender served our drinks. "But there was always something missing, Paul. Then I met a woman named Freddie through a nurse at the hospital. It was about the time I was taking my boards, getting ready to establish myself in private practice.

"There was something about Freddie that really attracted me but she kept avoiding any but the most casual social contact. She said she had an acquaintance who wanted to settle in New York and swore up and down that 'kid's a great steno and bookkeeper. A real looker but classy, too. If she doesn't turn to be a great receptionist and office manager...' I told Freddie that this sounded too good to be real.

"The long and the short of it is that Allie came to New York courtesy of a Mr. Paul Lewyn. You must know Allie's secret; that she's not really what she appears to be."

"Yes, I do. Freddie has the same secret and several more."

"What do you mean by that remark, Paul?"

"Finish your story and then I'll fill you in."

"Allie hugged me when I offered her the job. She kissed me on the lips and I responded. We got into some heavy petting and I reached under her skirt and found; well, you know. If Allie hadn't just become my employee

I might have gone further but I put the brakes on at once. I told her that physical intimacy was out of the question, not because of her being what she is but because I'm her employer. That was that."

"Was it? You're holding back on me."

"Oh, Paul, you know me too damned well. My first thought was for us, you, Allie and me to get into a ménage a trois relationship spending a few nights a week together. That was what I wanted to propose to you to-night but as I was leaving the office I noticed something in Allie's wastepaper basket that raised some real concerns. It's definitely related to this Freddie person. Tell me about her."

I filled Lila in on everything I knew about Freddie and all that went with it including Didi's academy and the strange connection Yvonne had to the forged icon.

"Now it's your turn, Lila. What was it that changed your outlook on Allie?"

"She's been typing session notes for me; original and two carbons. But I noticed that there were extra sheets of used carbon paper in each set in the trash. You don't have to be Nancy Drew or Sherlock Holmes to figure out she was typing an extra copy of each page. Then I found this in the outgoing mail basket."

She took an envelope from her handbag. The envelope was addressed to Freddie at a Philadelphia PO box. Lila opened the envelope which had copies of session notes along with identifying data. Allie was collecting confidential data for Freddie who was setting up Lila's patients to be blackmailed!

Maybe it was time to feed Freddie to Didi.

I reached for Lila's cigarette pack and stopped short as Allie walked through the door. She looked like a coed in

town to meet her parents. A tortoise shell headband held hair away from her face. Her rose pink dress, the skirt fluffed to fullness by crinoline petticoats, added to her innocent allure as did her bone colored heels and matching purse. White wrist length kidskin gloves were the final touch, the icing on the cake. She was convincingly all girl and one hundred per cent pure.

Allie's eyes lit up when she saw me. Gee, Paul. It's swell seeing you again." The she turned her attention to Lila, greeting her with a kiss on the cheek. She made it seem inadvertent that her lips brushed over Lila's as she sat on the nearest bar stool.

The bartender's next move was proof positive that Allie's veneer of youthful wholesomeness was effective. He mixed up a Shirley Temple, also called a Horse's Neck in those days, and served it to Allie. "For the young lady, on the house." This was done to avoid having to proof Allie to see if she was eighteen, the age to be served in New York back in the fifties.

Allie thanked the bartender with a coy half smile that would have gotten my full attention had I not known what a deceitful creature she was under it all. And I wasn't referring to what she had in her panties. To both me and now apparently to Lila as well, that was her one redeeming quality.

She pivoted on her bar stool to face Lila and me, crossed her legs at the ankles, and turned solemn.

"You two have been really nice to me and for no reason other than.... Everyone I've ever known since I can remember either treated me like dirt or used me. I've been angry and out to get back at the world not just for what I am but more for the way I've been treated because of it. I was ready to kill myself when I hooked up with Didi. She

gave me some dignity, taught me how to live like a real woman and not some halfway freak.

“Didi showed me some choices on how I might live. Then Freddie got to me and poisoned my mind against Didi. Please don’t look at me like that. I know Didi’s far from perfect, less than unselfish. Freddie came across all sweetness and light. That snake offered to get me away from Didi, set me up in a legitimate job in a big city, live like a woman and maybe even save enough money to have surgery to make me into real woman if I wanted it. You know, like that Christine who was in the papers a couple of years ago.

“I knew there would be a catch, payback somewhere down the road. Well, it wasn’t down the road. As soon as I started working for you, Lila, it hit the fan. I was typing extra carbons and mailing them to Freddie. Lila, I care too much about you to go on with this ruse, blackmailing and eventually ruining your patients. It would be destroying you and your career in the end.

“There, I’ve said it and it’s all out in the open. Now you’ll have to excuse me. I’ve wasted too much of your time.”

Lila put her hand on Allie’s wrist and grasped it firmly. “You’re not going anywhere until we agree on a plan to keep you safe. Just take a deep breath and then we’ll enjoy a quiet dinner.”

Allie twisted her wrist as she tried in vain to break the very effective grip that kept her from leaving. Lila waited until Allie relaxed at least for the time being and then released her grip on the trannie’s wrist. Allie smiled weakly as she rubbed circulation back into her hand.

“You care about me. Don’t you?” Allie reached into her handbag and pulled out a tissue and dabbed her

cheeks. "Well, what are we waiting for? Owning up to bad behavior always gives me an appetite."

As soon as our dinner order was taken Allie excused herself to visit the powder room. It was my chance to speak privately to Lila.

"Does she have a key to your office?"

"Yes. Why...Oh, I'm beginning to get it. She might have gone back to get the envelope she meant to mail herself, the one I found. When she saw it was gone she assumed I might be onto to her so she decided this was the only way to save her cute little butt."

"That's my theory, too. If Freddie gets to her, she may be as good as dead."

"If you think she deserves that fate, we can just let things run their course and let Freddie deal with her. Paul, maybe it's because I'm attracted to her but I think there's something about Allie that makes her worth saving..."

"Lila, that look in your eye says you're thinking wild thoughts."

She winked conspiratorially and glanced in the general direction of the powder room. Allie had been gone for a long time. Lila was about to check on Allie when the hostess approached us. "The young lady asked me to give you this. She said to tell you she no longer needs it."

"My office key," observed Lila. "Doesn't mean she didn't have it copied. I wouldn't put anything past her."

"What happened to the girl worth saving?"

"Don't remind me."

"Might as well have the dinner I promised you...Unless you think Allie might be going through your files right now."

"I've got all the file cabinet keys with me. And I doubt very much if that treacherous demon could pick or force those cabinets. Besides, almost everything's in my office at the hospital. Now let's order dinner."

My days were getting back to normal and my evenings were spent mostly with Lila although our on and off affair was tepid. I was certain she was thinking about Allie and the possibilities an affair with Allie might offer. The ménage a trois that Lila had talked about the night Allie abruptly took off was appealing to me more and more.

A week had gone by when I felt it was time to call Freddie. There was no answer at her New Hope place. Whoever answered the phone in Philadelphia assured me she was in New Hope. I asked for the number but was refused. That was it! Freddie had had or had added a second number for reasons of security. This was turning out to be a big waste of time and energy. There was little chance that Allie could do any further damage even if she had given Freddie information contained in Lila's files, it was unlikely she had gotten enough to use for blackmail. It was time to let it go.

The next day I got a call from Didi who asked me to come out to her place. She had some news about our "late mutual friend." Could I bring a friend, a lady friend, I asked. Her reply was an enthusiastic yes. "And bring that charming assistant of yours, too. We might need a stenographer."

It turned out Lila couldn't make it so it was just Leah and me who showed up at Didi's compound on the Delaware. It was Leigh's first trip that far from New York City.

The mountains of western New Jersey and the arty shops of Lambertville and New Hope left her staring openmouthed.

We enjoyed a leisurely dinner on the screened porch overlooking the river. Leigh, in her endearing combination of astuteness and naïveté figured out that the two girls who served us were too flawlessly femme to be other than “underneath everything they’re boys. Really, really luscious but still boys.”

Leigh kept referring back to what these lovely and highly desirable beings. Each time she sounded hungry, hungry for something that could only be satisfied by a transgirl!

“This has to be...I don’t what to call it. Paul, since I moved to Manhattan after I started working for you I’ve seen guys who live as girls before not nearly as convincing as these two. My panties are wet! Only one other person ever made that happen.” She gave me this funny look.

“Am I supposed to ask who that was?”

“Oh, and you think I’m naive. For a guy who’s really been around, you can be pretty slow on the uptake.” She tilted her head coquettishly and winked. I felt my face turn red and a rising in my cock even before she said “It’s you, boss” and kissed me.

Didi joined us a few minutes later. She updated me on what had been going on with the search for information regarding Basrov’s treasure trove.

“That bizarre set of icons that I painted in the camp is the key. Basrov had it after the war. He searched me out hoping I could forge copies of valuable antique icons for his trade. I agreed to do a few but only until I had enough money to come here and set myself up with a dance

school and eventually a school for travesties, transvestites you call them in America. Why? I taught such boys to dance until they moved as well as any woman, choreographed cabaret shows that featured them...until the Nazis came to power. I promised myself that if I ever had an opportunity to, I would create a safe haven in which boys like these could become as close to real women as humanly possible, even help them find a safe place in the world.

"Freddie was one I had hopes for, made her the manager of my dance school. Spoiled brat that she was, she became bored and jealous of the others. Used my name to sell them as sex slaves..."

I wondered who had lied more about this as I recalled Freddie had claimed to be rescuing these kids from Didi's nefarious designs. Considering Freddie had planted Allie as a spy in Lila's office in order further a blackmail scheme I would go along with Didi for the time being.

"What about the icon?"

"I have reason to believe that everything we need to know about Basrov's papers and the location of his merchandise, the stolen art works and jewelry is on microfilm in the icon's frame."

"How could that be when..."

"Oh. I neglected to tell you when I went off about why I started this academy. Basrov gave the icon to me two years ago! He had more than ample time to hide what he stole and swindled, make a microfilm record of it all, and finally leave it with me for safe keeping.

"I swore to you that we were in this together and I'm keeping my word because I need you to help dispose of what cannot be returned."

"The first time I was here you told me that you were concerned that Basrov had somehow copied your files

and would use the information to blackmail your graduates, their families, and their lovers."

"Yes and I am more certain of that than ever."

"How did Freddie come to your attention?"

"She was introduced to me by Basrov. Why do you ask?"

"For one thing Freddie fed me a pack of lies about how she came here. Are you aware she's been siphoning off some of your girls for her own purposes? One of them, Allie, was hired by my, let's just call her a psychiatrist friend. Allie immediately started supplying Freddie with confidential information from my friend's files."

"So you're suggesting that Freddie was a protégée of Basrov when it came to blackmailing? That miserable little bitch might even have gotten her hands on Basrov's notebooks!"

"And to think I let Basrov sweet talk me until I believed all of Freddie's claims."

"Don't be so harsh on yourself. She is, in fact, from a Main Line family and actually attended Haverford but left for unknown reasons."

"What about Allie?"

"She seems contrite but I'm not at all convinced."

"Now it's time to go over the information you have on Basrov's hidden wealth. Then we have to formulate plans to recover as much of it as we can lay our hands on."

Leigh, almost forgotten as she sat in the shadows watching the two trannies clear the dinner things, spoke up. "Do you need me right now? A walk would feel good about now."

"Go enjoy your walk. I'll see you at breakfast." Didi stood and kissed Leigh on the cheek. "Sleep well."

Didi and I were behind closed doors going over the not inconsiderable inventory of what she had been calling *merchandise*. If we located nothing else, this was a king's ransom. There were photographs of each item as well as details of where each was stored. The bulk of the treasure was in the receiving tomb of a cemetery in Brooklyn.

"Tomorrow we will dismantle the icon."

I looked over Didi's shoulder at the darkened garden. Her office was dimly lit so there was no glare to obscure the moonlit garden. Leah and one of the academy *girls* who had served at dinner were walking, chatting quietly as they moved closer and closer together. Then Leah stepped in front of the boy/girl and put her arms around the trannie's waist. The boy/girl squirmed as she started to push Leah's hands away. Leigh slipped her hand into the transgirl's hair and yanked her head back throwing her off balance. Their mouths met in an intense and prolonged kiss.

Bobbi, as the trannie was called, put her hand on Leigh's breast and with her free hand started to raise her own skirt. The sound of Didi replacing the papers in her desk drew my attention back to the business at hand.

Didi rose to her feet, moved to the front of her desk and sat on the corner. "Paul, I'm so weary, weary of being deceived and lied to, having no one to trust. Even Allie, a girl in whom I placed so much hope and trust...And yet I know how the mistreatment my students suffered make some of them so bitter, so vindictive. You probably wonder how I can be so sure I understand what drives them. But I know all too well.

"Once we finish our business together, I'll phase out the academy."

"I'm sure you'll think differently after you distance yourself from..."

“Perhaps.”

As she slid off the corner of the desk her flowing skirt rode immodestly high on her thighs. Only a quick movement of her hand kept her panties from view. Her sleek legs, her thighs retained the firm contours of a trained dancer. She leaned back, her elbows rested on the desk. Sitting erect, she pointed her leg straight up revealing her black nylon panties.

“I used to be so concerned that I would lose my figure, my tone. There was nothing to fear, not as long as I kept training.”

She paused, got to her feet and shook her skirt to her a less revealing level. Her arms were around my neck as I slipped my hands under her well girdled bottom and lifted her off the ground. The pressure of her legs as she wrapped them round my waist hinted at how powerful Didi might be.

Our tongues met as we explored each other’s mouth, searching desperately for those wonderfully sensitive spots that call forth a sigh or a deeper thrust. Girdles have always heightened foreplay for me and so caressing Didi’s contours through her restraining panty girdle drove me to greater intensity as I continued to cover her mouth with my own.

This very worldly and experienced woman began to giggle like a schoolgirl as pushed my face away. “Paul, Paul, you’re drowning me! I need air.”

She stood, turned her back to me and started to unzip her dress. Standing behind her, I helped ease her dress off her shoulders. She turned to face me as, still holding the dress, she bent forward and stepped out of it. As she leaned forward, her demi-cup bra gapped enough to assure me that her small, firm breasts could only belong to a natural woman. I stared briefly in amazement and ap-

proval of Didi's artful use of underthings to augment her superb beauty. There was neither the slightest bulge nor indentation where her bra, girdle and hose began and ended. It was as if she were the statue of a modern goddess, a goddess I longed to worship.

Transfixed, I stood motionless as she undid my belt and let my trousers fall to the floor. In moments all that remained of my clothing were my very brief blue cotton briefs and my now open shirt. Didi moved closer to me. A wry, almost scathing smile came over her imperious features as she ran her fingers over my chest. 'Mmm, I like a man who doesn't wear undershirts, so much more accessible.' With a feather light touch, her finger tips skimmed lightly over my nipples causing them and my cock to harden.

I understood that Didi was in control and that I would submit to whatever suited her. A submissive sigh escaped my lips as she sucked lightly on my nipple and then swirled her tongue around it sending shivers of fearful anticipation through me.

Pain shot through me as she clutched my balls tightly, paused as I adapted to the surprisingly pleasurable sensations brought on by the physical agony of Didi's strong grip. She released her hold long enough to slip her hand into my briefs, run her finger tips over that sensitive area between balls and hole, and then sink her nails into the tender skin of my ball sac.

Didi sat on the edge of the desk, put her hands on my shoulders and firmly guided me to my knees. Her hands were now on the sides of my head as she pressed my face against her inner thighs. "Gently, lick me gently."

I willingly obeyed, moving my lips from her dark stocking tops to the soft skin above. My longing to taste her even through the panty girdle must have been obvious to this subtly dominating woman as she grabbed my

hair and shoved my head away, then locked her legs around my neck. A sudden twist of her lower body sent me sprawling on my back.

Didi crossed her legs, slowly moved the upper leg in a pendulum like motion closer and closer to my face as I managed to sit at her feet. Taking her high heel clad foot in my hand; I licked the glossy patent leather and then took the heel in my mouth as if sucking a cock.

“Such perfect instincts! You’ll learn to pleasure me as I need and you will be loved as you never dreamed.” Didi’s voice carried a message of admiration blended with promise which intensified my already extreme hard-on. This enigmatic woman now stood straddling my feet like a goddess, a goddess who petite in stature while conveying colossal emotional and physical power. The crotch of her gleaming black panty girdle arrested my attention and made me wonder what was concealed within. Now her feet were on either side of my neck as she slowly bent her knees bringing her girdled derriere closer and closer to my face. Then, to my dismay, she once more rose to her full height in order to slowly, tantalizingly wrestle her girdle to her lower hips. It was surely a practiced movement, one which exposed her pubic hair to be easily seen but gave no clue as to what might be nestling below. An equally enticing and provocative view of her muscularly firm tush was created by the position of her panty girdle as it skimmed the very top of her thighs. Her smooth hind cheeks pressed close together challenging exploration, a challenge I suddenly longed to accept.

Didi turned so now she faced my feet, her deliciously tempting bottom looming above me. A deep knee bend brought the cleft of her nether cheeks close to my mouth but far enough above so that I knew it would be futile to bring my face toward it. My writhing amused her as she

laughingly assured me "Patience, patience is a virtue that can only be rewarded with my consent."

This remarkable woman, if woman she truly was, allowed her weight to move forward so that she rested on her knees. Bringing her face close to my hard cock allowed me to feel her warm breath stir my pubic hair. Her fingers ran gently along the underside my dick as her tongue dared out to take a drop of precum into her mouth. Her tongue thoroughly moistened my shaft as I anticipated her swallowing my dick. That was not to be, at least not that night. Didi sat straight now as she ordered me to "Wank, wank like the naughty child you need to be." With that said, she lowered her tush onto my face all but smothering me.

"Don't rush, my darling," she crooned as I furiously jerked my dick. "Make it last or I may tire of you sooner than we both would like." She now held my wrists in her frighteningly strong grip and moved them away from my twitching dick. Her bottom cleft was inches out of reach of my tongue causing me to struggle to bring my mouth to that new focus of my desire.

"Go ahead, my lover," she whispered while slowly easing her bottom closer to my hungry mouth. "Taste me; enter me with your tongue."

Didi moaned as my tongue tentatively circled her sphincter before plunging into her. All my senses became absorbed in my first anal/oral experience as Didi lowered her cheeks onto my face half asphyxiating me for moments at a time, something which heightened this new form of sex.

Rolling forward, Didi put took every inch of my cock into her mouth sending wave after wave of relentless vibrations through every part of me until I screamed in ec-

stasy at the instant my bizarre lover shrieked at the apex of our mutual orgasm.



The intensity of the unreal sex along with the strength of our shared culmination left us both lying exhausted on the floor. Didi soon sat on her haunches looking down at me with an inscrutable expression. She pursed her lips, kissed her finger tips and placed them against my lips. Gently sucking the first joint of her index finger into my mouth, I swirled my tongue over it as if it were a cockhead. A purring hum from Didi held promise of future trysts, hopefully more prolonged than the very brief, spontaneous session we just shared.

As she moved to a very deep squat alongside me, her widespread feet and knees afforded me liberal view of her panty girdle crotch which stirred new signs of life into my cock. I stared, studying the contours under the skintight black material but was couldn't begin to be certain of what was hidden beneath. Sighing as I rolled my head from side to side, I knew I would, given the opportunity, do anything to satisfy Didi if she would allow me to taste what was between her legs.

Something between a sigh and yelp came from my throat as Didi's fingers teased my tummy, ran through my pubic hair, and then skittered to my nipples. She repeatedly tormented and pleased me with her skillful fingers and her well manicured talons. My body arched as she slapped my balls!

Smiling down on me, she spoke calmly, authoritatively but with an erotic quality that enthralled me and willing to submit to her every whim.

"Paul, we are partners and I promise we will share equally in the proceeds just as we shared equally in the climax of our love making." She paused long enough to clutch my sore balls in her hand and slowly applied pressure. "But I will remain in control of everything." As I nodded submissively, Didi relaxed her grip stood and helped me to my feet.

We dressed slowly but with an underlying haste. A peck on the cheek from Didi as we left the office.

“Paul, I know the standard fantasy is for us to shower together and then fall asleep in each other’s arms but that isn’t going to happen just yet and may never happen. You are not so different from other men who have loved me; once you know what is in my panties, you will no longer be my willing lover ready to satisfy my every whim, fulfill my every need.”

Not that I would have talked to Lila in any detail, especially not then, but I was certain that not even she with all her training in psychiatry and her newly undertaken psycho-analytic program, could begin to explain Didi’s needs. Maybe somewhere down the road she could explain to me why I wasn’t ready to keep Didi out of my personal life and stick to the business relationship.

I sat on the porch steps, lit a cigarette and watched the moon as the concealing clouds dissolved into wisps. I swore to myself to avoid further intimacy with Didi for fear of letting her extend the authoritarian control she had imposed on our spontaneous and very kinky tryst to every facet of our relationships. As I sat contemplating what had transpired since dinner glaring inconsistencies struck me. The sex was certainly anything but spontaneous since Didi’s panty girdle couldn’t have been more suited to conceal whatever she had between her legs while revealing and enhancing her tush. The timing was right, too. She had deftly taken my mind off locating Basrov’s scattered treasure trove.

Where had all the documentation Didi showed me come from if, as she implied, everything was in the frame

of the icon? Do I confront her now or wait until we have the so-called merchandise in hand? *To hell with it! Let me just shower and get to bed. Let it play out for now and see where it goes. In any case we stand to make a bundle on this venture; almost any case.*

Foot steps on the gravel walk drew my attention to Leigh and Bobbi walking hand in hand. They faced each other, kissed and, went their separate ways. Leigh was startled seeing me sitting on the porch steps.

"Mind if I join you, Paul? A cigarette would be great about now."

She sat next to me, rested her hand against mine. Something was on her mind that wasn't there before dinner. Leah needed to talk but I sensed she would clam up if I prompted her.

"Things aren't always what they seem to be...Wow, was I fooled!"

"You talking about Bobbi?"

"Bobbi and Sandy, the other girl."

"But you knew they're really..." Leigh cut me off before I could tell her what she already knew.

"That's just it, Paul. Bobbi and I started petting. Maybe I started it. You already know I was getting wet thinking about sex with a girl with dick.

Then Sandy just happens to come along so Bobbie and I come up for air just until Sandy leaves. Trouble was she's not about to leave so we end up kidding around about all three of us having some fun together. Bobbi sounds really scared, scared of Didi for some reason. Goes on about how Didi will kill her if anything comes out. It's as if she wants to play around but she's afraid to on account of what Didi might do.

"Paul, you're not going to believe this; she's a real girl! I

know that Didi runs this school so why does she have a real girl here?"

I shook my head to convey that I was as puzzled as Leah was. There was only one plausible explanation since Didi and her staff certainly trained new candidates to conceal their male parts in what was best suited to their individual endowments. That meant Didi and company had to have seen every candidate nude before they were accepted. Bobbi was there because Didi was expanding her line of merchandise to include real girls trained as very creative courtesans! Or was she?

"Leigh, why do you think Bobbi is a real girl?"

Leigh was breathing hard now and paced back on the path in front of the porch. She took a deep breath, looked at the ground and spoke slowly.

"Sandy was enjoying how Bobbi squirmed and stared when she became upset over whatever it was that Didi would do 'if anything comes out' as she put it. Then Sandy acted sweet to Bobbi, too sweet if you ask me. Then she gets ready to leave, gives Bobbi a kiss and feels her up. She says to both of us 'I'll leave you two to finish what you started. And Bobbi, no need to worry you'll do just fine.'

"Bobbi takes my hand and we walk to a really hidden spot. Then I see there's a glider there, like on someone's porch. Before long we're petting again, really heavy petting. Bobbi's leaning back with her skirt hiked up all the way to her hips. I'm leaning over her. She's got on this white panty girdle that really stands out in the moonlight. He lets one of her legs fall over the edge of the glider. I can't take my eyes off her crotch. She puts her hand behind my head and pulls my face to hers for a really long slow kiss. I come up and lean on my hands while she fingers my slit through my panties, which, needless to say, are sopping wet. Bobbi runs her tongue over lips and

teeth. I swear she mouthed 'eat me' so I figure why not and drop to knees. She arches her back and pulls down her panty girdle while I stare, waiting for her cock to pop up. The waist band of her girdle is now down to the bottom of her pubic hair but no cock in sight!

"She starts laughing at me, shoves me away and pulls her girdle up. She stands up, calls me a fool and throws a slap at my face but I block it and hang one on her, a punch I mean. That shit will have a shiner and I hope it lasts.

"She got panicky, jabbered about how I killed everything for her. She turned her back to me, started bawling, took a few steps, looked back at me and muttered how sorry she really was about hurting my feelings and finally said she couldn't help it, she had to.

"Poor Bobbi was really breaking down so I reached out to give her a hug to comfort her but she shook me off like a little kid would. I walked with her part way back to the other wing and then she promised she was all right and that was it."

Leigh seemed comforted as I pressed her hand in mine and held it.

"Thanks for listening to me, Boss. I don't I feel more angry or the least bit horny, at least not for nay of the girls in Didi's weird school. One thing that hasn't passed, though; I want to fuck you so much but I'm not sure this is the right time to if there ever will be a right time."

"Leah, I think we were both taken in tonight." I told her what happened between Didi and me.

"Boss, are you thinking what I'm thinking? It's a good bet Bobbi was being tested on how convincingly she could expose herself without showing her dick. Didi was probably doing the same kind of thing with you to keep in practice. I think Bobbi was being trained to convince

some unsuspecting victim that she a real girl and then she would take out her dick so the guy would panic or else someone takes some pictures of the poor bastard in a compromising position with a cross-dressed male. Plenty of blackmail money to made on that scheme."

"Leigh, the way you sometimes think makes me glad you're on my side. But where do we go from here?"

"It's late, Paul, time to give this a rest. Maybe we ought to rive into New Hope first thing in the morning, have breakfast by ourselves and try to come up with something."

"Good thinking but I can't risk losing Didi's confidence, not unless I have a set of copies of the details of Basrov's cache. There's too much to be gained to end my working relationship with Didi at this late date."

Didi grinned like the Cheshire cat as she reached into the pocket of skirt where she had her cigarette case and lighter. She pulled out a Minox camera (a tiny high capacity microfilm camera considered state of the art in the fifties). She held it aloft and started giggling. "Now what were you saying about how my mind works? Bet you're even happier that we're on the same side."

We were both startled by the sound of the porch door being slammed open. We got to our feet to see Didi framed in the doorway. She was wearing a velour robe that she hadn't taken the time to close. Nude underneath except for bra, panties, garter belt and hose, she certainly had my attention as well as Leah's.

"Leigh," Didi demanded, "where did you last see that double dealing Bobbi. Sandy said she left her with you."

I slipped Leigh's arm through mine in a protective gesture. Didi calmed down.

“Forgive me, Paul, for coming out here half naked and carrying on like a drunken peasant. Come into the office. There is some bad news I must share with you. Leigh, you come too.”

Once in the office, the still raging Didi, having abandoned all sense of propriety sat in her chair in a most unladylike but very sexy posture.

“I accepted Bobbi on Freddie’s say so who somehow realized why you were here. Bobbi was meant to spy on me, to give Freddie information to either steal my clients, blackmail them or both This was nothing new since I learned she had been asking for cover-up money from families of the girls being trained here. I was on to her so she left me but not before planting Bobbi in hopes to expand her blackmail schemes. The long and the short of it is that Bobbi was inspired to steal the Basrov papers from my desk.”

“Then we’re wasting time,” Leigh offered. “It’s a sure thing that Freddie wouldn’t drive onto the grounds here to pickup Bobbi. That means Bobbi’s going to be picked up on the road and soon.”

We were interrupted by screams from the old canal that paralleled the river. Bobbi had become disoriented on the dark paths and had slipped into the weed choked canal. We got there too late. Bobbi had panicked. She was face down in the water having drowned in water that was only chest high!

The state police arrived quickly, took our statements and removed the body for autopsy.

Didi was ghostly pale with the shock of both Bobbi’s sudden death and of losing all the Basrov papers.

I tried to console her by reminding her that we still had the icon and its frame which likely held all the secrets

relating to Basrov's ill gotten wealth, wealth which could still end up ours.

"Paul, forgive my pessimism but how can you be so sure that the icon hides all we hope it holds?"

Leigh reached into her skirt pocket and took out the Minox. She held it under Didi's nose.

"You photographed all the papers! I knew there was a reason I asked Paul to bring you along." Leigh's dramatic gesture with the Minox spy camera elevated Didi's mood. Now that she was relaxed whatever few inhibitions Didi had left disappeared. She took Leigh in her arms, hugged her and kissed repeatedly until finally covering the girls' mouth in a long, probing kiss.

Didi then turned her attention to me with an even deeper, longer kiss as she ground her tummy against my crotch. I wondered whether Didi enjoyed thanking me or thanking Leigh more and which of us responded more intensely to Didi's very personal thanks.

Didi sent Leigh off to bed but signaled for me to remain. Her mood was once again somber and sad. Her hands shook as she took a cigarette from the case on her desk and lit it.

"Thank you for staying with me, Paul. That poor child, that poor victimized child. She had so much to offer and dead so young. And to have died so frightened."

It was a side of Didi I wouldn't have guessed existed. But there were more immediate concerns that we had to consider.

"Didi, I know this isn't easy to think about right now, but in few hours Bobbi's body will be undressed and everything will be photographed and recorded as the first step in her autopsy. What then?"

“There’s nothing to worry about. Too many bigwigs are quite familiar with the academy so nothing will be made public except that a girl died by what they like to call ‘misadventure.’ I try to never leave anything to chance.”

Didi began to shiver uncontrollably. I held her in my arms as she began to sob. After carrying her upstairs to her bedroom, I tucked her in. Looking down at the exhausted but still beautiful woman, I thought it might be an opportune time to undress myself, join her under the covers just to keep her warm and maybe, just maybe if we woke up in a romantic mood find out what she had in her panties. But that would be taking advantage of this distraught woman who had suffered so much under the Nazis. Then again, Didi come out of it pretty well-off. I wondered, not for the first time, how she managed that neat trick. She could be a hardnosed bitch and that may be what got her through. As I studied the sleeping woman, it occurred to me how dangerous and controlling she might be. *Time for bed, I thought, my own bed at that.*”

Leigh was standing in front of me as I woke up. She handed me a cup of coffee. She lit one of my cigarettes as I took my first sip of coffee and then handed me the cigarette.

“Rise and shine. Paul. We’re wanted for an interview with state police and someone from the county prosecutor. They’re waiting downstairs. Seems Bobbi was injected with something that made it easy for her to fall into the canal or to be pushed in. Sandy’s among the missing. The police have already searched her room and found a vial of some drug.

“No need to worry much. We’re not suspects and besides, Didi is on the phone with lawyer right now.”

It turned out that Freddie was likely at the bottom of the whole scheme. Sandy and Bobbie were in her employ as was Allie.

Freddie had picked up Sandy at the end of the academy’s driveway in the early hours of the morning. Sandy described Freddie as going from sad to being almost elated and finally calm as they drove back to the apartment south of New Hope. Sandy description of the last few hours went like this:

We got back to the apartment and Freddie offers me a shot of whisky. I tell her I don’t like whisky so she says that’s okay. She’ll drink alone if I don’t mind. She fills an old fashioned glass, takes a couple of pills and we chat for a while.

Freddie was sometimes very intimidating; scary is a better word so I didn’t say anything to her when she took those pills. Then Freddie shows me her files and tells me what to do if anything happens to her.

She’s more than a little groggy so she excuses herself to take a bath. I go to the guest room, start to undress and fall sleep in my undies.

I wake up to pee a few hours later and I see the door to her bathroom is open and the light is on. She was in the tub with her wrists slashed. I never saw anything so horrible.

First thing I did was call the police emergency number. No, that’s not quite the way it was. I ran down the hall and didn’t call you cops until I stopped puking.

Freddie's family made sure that nothing about this episode got into the papers. Sandy, who had injected Bobbie and shoved her into the canal, was saved by Didi's lawyers. The kid started seeing Lila to get through some of the residual stuff from finding Freddie's corpse in the bathtub. She is now a nursing student in Boston. I wonder if our paths will ever cross again. Allie became Lila's secretary and receptionist. This time she's doing it honestly.

Lila and I are still contemplating marriage together. We don't exactly live together but spend several nights a week in each other's bed. I keep thinking Leah is hoping we break up. I wonder if Allie tempts me more. She does have something to offer, a thing which is lacking in Leigh.

Didi and I did pretty well disposing of Basrov's loot. Some was returned to the rightful owners. We sold the rest over a long period of time. No sense flooding the market.

Didi closed the academy and planned to build up the dance enterprises. Her car skidded on black ice, rolled over, hit a tree and burst into flames. I never did find out what she had in her panties.

A week or so ago, I got a call from Penny, my photographer friend.

"Paul, this is just short of bizarre. I was on my way north of Boston for a shoot and took some time to explore Cambridge. I discovered this wonderfully eclectic restaurant run by a Eurasian looking woman. Her daughter, a really exotic beauty, oversees the jewelry and clothing store next door. They're in the process of restoring an old mansion near Salem and converting it to an inn.

"I'm going to go back up there to try to do a photo session the daughter. Mom would make a great model, too, but for a specialized market."

I was intrigued by the similarity between the mother and daughter Penny has stumbled on and Yvonne and Lynne.

"Why are you telling me all this right now?"

"I noticed that the daughter's shop has a small inventory of Russian art and decorative objects; not the usual cheap copies but nothing terribly rare. You might want to place a few things with her on consignment since she obviously has a market for some of the things you deal in. If it goes well you might want to open a branch in Boston. It's worth exploring."

"Penny, you're a real pal. Definitely, this idea of yours is worth exploring. Say, you didn't happen to catch their names?"

"Not their last name but the mother's first name is Yvonne or something like that."

We ended our phone conversation on a high note and then I thought that *beside all those reasons for contacting them, I have something that should really be returned to Yvonne. And maybe, just maybe Didi was right all those months ago when she said was looking at me like she was hungry for me. It'll be interesting if I catch up to them. Will it be worth the time and effort?*

I poured myself a generous shot of bourbon as I laughed inwardly at my silliness in thinking that I could catch up to Yvonne and Lynne. Even it turned out to be that elusive pair, what would accrue to me other than a chance to return the icon to the woman who posed for it? Would Yvonne even want it considering the pain and degradation she suffered during that period of her life?

Leave matters as they are would be the easiest thing to do; perhaps the kindest, too.

“Leigh,” I said as soon as she picked up the phone. “Pack an overnight bag if you’re willing to drive up to Cambridge with me for a couple of nights?”

“Gee, that’s a swell offer but isn’t Cambridge in England?”

“Sorry, I keep forgetting you grew up in a restrictive, sorry, a different culture. No, this Cambridge is just across the Charles River from Boston.”

“Super! Driving with you to new places is really neat. I hope it’ll be half as exciting as that trip to Pennsylvania.”

-TO BE CONTINUED-