

You'll Never Walk Alone
Italian Honeymoon



William Kincaid



An "Adult Tv" Novel



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You'll Never Walk Alone

Italian

Honeymoon

By William Kincaid

Jennifer hugged Cindy at the airport and cried, "You have only been my mommy for seventeen hours and forty minutes but I am going to miss you."

Cindy smiled and embraced Jennifer in her arms. "I am going to miss you too, little one. I am very happy to be your mom. I'll be back for good after your dad has taken me to wherever we are going to go on our honeymoon. My only guess is it's not the desert or the Arctic based on his wardrobe recommendations."

"You'll find out soon enough."

Daniel looked like he was about ready to burst into tears when Cindy hugged him. "Now Daniel, you are now the man of the house and in charge, but let me tell you a little secret about being in charge. Always ask Jennifer or Miss Heather what to do before you make a decision. A good man always seeks the advice of a woman before he does anything important. When you do that, you will almost always be right. Can you do that, young man?"

"I can."

"I love you, Daniel and I'm so proud of you."

"I love you, Mommy."

While Cindy was saying her tearful good-byes to her children, John was obtaining the boarding passes.

"You and your wife are checked through to Rome sir," the attendant smiled. "Have a safe trip."

"Well, since Rome, Georgia is less than a day's drive, I take it we are going to Italy on our honeymoon."

"Could I have taken you anywhere else? So a man should always listen to his woman?"

"Yep. Can you imagine what Hitler would have done if he hadn't hung around with that ditz, Eva Braun? Just consider ourselves lucky that he made bad choices in the fairer sex."

"Well you definitely are the fairer sex."

"I am now," Cindy laughed out of earshot of the children. "How's that for choices?"

"Perfect."

Cindy loved Audrey Hepburn and Gregory Peck in Roman Holiday and was watching it on her tablet on the airplane. She especially loved the confident, calm masculinity of Gregory Peck when he walked away from the

princess even though he loved her, as it was the right and honorable thing to do. She looked intently at her new husband, who became uncomfortable at her staring.

“You are him, Joe Bradley. It’s you. You have that same basic goodness and quiet masculinity. No wonder I married you. You know, back in the day, I thought if I could be half the man Gregory Peck’s character was in this movie, I would be all right. Look how that worked out.”

“From where I sit, it worked out better than anything else could have.”

John leaned back in the seat and closed his eyes, attempting to sleep while Cindy stared at the fast fading light over the Atlantic Ocean. As an international escort, she had flown across the Atlantic many times, but now life was completely different. Snoring next to her was John Kincaid, and now she was Mrs. John Kincaid, and the mother of his two darling children since his sister and her husband were killed by a drunk driver. Ever since she had started dating Kevin, a minor league baseball player, her life had moved forward at breakneck speed, like when she and Kaitlyn took the Ferrari out for a drive to California from New York. Could she really have been a guy named Tim less than two years ago?

Since then she and her best friend Kaitlyn had amassed a small fortune selling their bodies to the highest bidders around the world, then walked away from that vocation. Both of the partners of C-K Entertainment were now happily married to wonderful men; Kaitlyn to the baseball player Cindy had once dated and Cindy to the strong, intelligent man sitting next to her on their honeymoon flight to Italy. In the whirlwind of her existence, Cindy had never looked to the future, but lay firmly grounded in the present. Now in the fading light aboard

the eastbound flight she felt confronted by the future and was deeply frightened.

How would she measure up as a wife, especially as a shemale? Would she be a good mom for Jennifer and Daniel? What would she do to make a living now that prostitution was behind her? She had risen to great heights of excitement but sooner or later the crash would come. She didn't want to hurt anybody when it did, not herself, and certainly not her new family.

Feigning sleep, John sensed his wife's uneasiness and read her mind. She was guileless and as transparent as the finest crystal. Cindy's brilliant trajectory from international escort to devoted wife would soon come crashing down on her emotionally, but like the loving husband he was, he would cushion the impending fall with firm but gentle kindness. He reached out from under his blanket and took her hand in his. Cindy didn't let go of her husband's hand for the rest of the flight until the attendant announced that they were on their final approach into Rome.

"I may be sleep deprived, but please tell me in my addled state that we didn't just rent a Fiat. This is the land where they make Ferraris, you know."

"Try getting a Ferrari up to speed on any of these Italian roads. You are not tearing along I-80 with Kaitlyn."

"You know we never got a ticket doing that."

"I can't imagine why."

The Fiat nimbly worked its way through the Roman traffic until the two were at their hotel. Cindy looked chagrined as the busboy struggled with her luggage.

"If you told me where we were going, I wouldn't have needed to pack so much."

"If I told you we were coming to Italy, would you have taken any less?"

"Maybe left a couple lipsticks at home."

"Exactly. Now let's get some sleep, darling. You look exhausted."

Recovered from their jet lag, the couple sat at a restaurant near their hotel. "A toast to my very own Joe Bradley. I love you, John Kincaid."

John grinned like a sixteen-year-old, "I love you too, Cindy Kincaid. Very much, I have never been happier than when I look into your eyes."

"For real?"

"Yes."

The dinner was superb, followed by dessert and an after-dinner liqueur.

"Darling, now that I am your happily married wife, what am I supposed to do? I don't want to become a candidate for Real Housewives."

John knew this was coming, and smiled to himself. He also knew what the eventual answer would be, but this had to be played out before it was to be revealed.

"You need to follow your heart."

"But the only thing I was really good at was running patrol boats. That and fishing and being a whore. I don't see myself becoming a smelly ass fishing guide in Alaska babysitting rich assholes. I did that enough as a lady of the evening."

"Why not?"

"I would be gone all summer, what about Jennifer and Daniel?"

“They could come with you. You said you would love to take them there.”

For once, Cindy was at a loss for words; her husband was willing to support her on any venture, regardless of its practicality.

“What did you do with all my lingerie?” Cindy shouted from the bedroom of their honeymoon suite. “You have replaced all my favorite ensembles with white, pure-as-the-driven-snow, baby duck innocent kind of stuff.”

“You will look fabulous in it.”

“That’s not the point. I wanted to look hot and sexy for you, now that I have your name and we are together for eternity.”

“I think you would be hot and sexy in anything except maybe in a burlap sack, that’s not the issue. Besides, your stuff is in good hands.”

“Who, Heather?”

“Yep.”

“So what is the issue?”

“You have been a ramped-up sex machine ever since you put on a dress and went public. Now is the time you are going to learn about lovemaking.”

“Well, I could have read a book.”

“Cute. In a year’s time, Heather will release all your stuff. In the meantime it’s white, pure-as-the-driven-snow baby duck innocent for you, darling.”

“What about off-white?”

“Fine, two years. You can wear off-white the second year.”

“I guess I should shut the f up.”

“It’s about time you learned to do that.”

An hour later, Cindy emerged from the bathroom, looking sweet, demure, and baby duck innocent, staring blissfully at her husband. She had on a pure white bustier with garters, lace stocking, gloves, and a Victorian choker. Accessorizing the ensemble even further, she wore a crystal studded headband with her hair back and pearl earrings. She shyly pranced to her husband like a fawn leaving the protection of her mother for the first time and seeing the outside world. Cindy knew intimately well how the clothes made the mood; they had brought her to this point in less than two years’ time.

John smiled and gave his wife a warm embrace. She suddenly knelt before him, looked up and returned the smile, gazing soulfully into his eyes. The headband gave him an unencumbered look into his wife’s angelically composed face.

“What are you doing?”

“You’re a big boy, you know exactly what I am about to do.”

“I think you missed the point of toning it down.”

“Al contrario, mi amore. I got the point exactly about lovemaking instead of just sex. Sex with you is always transcendent and a woman like me could never better express her love unselfishly to her lover and husband than what I am about to do.”

At that point the conversation ended as it would have been entirely one-sided. John wasn’t complaining at all. He quickly took control and all thoughts of moderation fled as he surrendered himself.

“You know, other than fish, I try not to hurt anything and eat only animals that die of natural causes. I would hate to have seen gladiatorial combat back in the day, es-

pecially with animals. Do you know that the Colosseum led to the extinction of the lions north of the Sahara?"

"Nope, didn't know that, but I'm not surprised."

"I would be such a pushover when the gladiators asked for mercy."

"I can see you as an Imperial princess. 'Daddy, please let this man live. He looks kind of cute.'"

"Hey, if you were laying in the sands of the Colosseum bleeding out, I would be the first person you would want to make eye contact with, all pitiful and forlorn. The gladiators would all pass the word around, plead for mercy from the princess. I would have an awful reputation among them as I would seek them out for favors once they heal up."

"Tramp."

"An Imperial Princess is not a tramp, she just has an untamed spirit. Did you know that Caesar Augustus' daughter, Julia, was like that? Legend has it that she had sex on the Rostra where Augustus made his proclamations and that once she took on all comers as a one day only prostitute by a statue of a satyr in the Forum. How cool is that? That must have been f'in epic."

"A woman after your own heart."

"F'in A-right she was, a true kindred spirit from two thousand years ago. She was also reported to be genuinely nice to everybody, a sweetheart and a smart ass. Her dad, Augustus supposedly wondered aloud, 'Has anybody in Rome not slept with my daughter?' We are so alike in a lot of ways; she slept with all of Rome, I slept with the world's elite. I still have the same sex drive, now it's just focused on a wonderful man that I love with all my heart."

"Julia probably vexed Augustus more than Arminius did at the Teutoberg forest."

"Probably so. You can always replace three massacred legions, but you can't replace your beloved, nymphomaniac, sweetheart of a daughter. I would have dug being a princess with you as my handsome, dashing Roman tribune on the Rhine frontier. Of course I would pine for you in my lonely vigil in the palace day and night while you would be whoring with the local tribal girls. Do you know that a woman could be put to death in Ancient Rome for adultery if she slept with anybody but her husband whereas a man could sleep around with prostitutes, concubines, slave girls and barnyard animals and that was okay."

"Hey, once you have barbarian, you never go back. Your daddy would probably have offered you to a barbarian king to keep the peace. Of course he would return you to him within a week and invade and slaughter thousands all the way to the gates of Rome."

"Yeah, but Dad would eventually have my ex-husband strangled at the conclusion of the triumph where he was led in chains, then crucified his army. Have you ever thought of going back in the military? I'm here now to take care of Jennifer and Daniel, and I could keep my lonely vigil in our condo in Manhattan. I know that's what you would have wanted to continue to do if you could."

John was taken aback; he had never even considered it, but now it was back on the table. "I would be so worried that something would happen to me, now that I have a family."

"You don't have to do what you did before. You could be one of those general's staff types that looks good in a

uniform and can dazzle with BS and Power Point presentations.”

“As lame as that is, I might as well do what I have been doing, working in New York and coming home to you at night.”

John, however, felt incredibly lucky that his wife had peered deep inside him and discerned what he really wanted. He really had to think about his options now that Cindy opened his horizons once more. He took her hand in his as they strolled through the ruins of the Colosseum, then looked in her eyes. “I love you, darling.”

“I love you too, that’s why I brought it up.”

John’s scheme to tone down Cindy’s white-hot sex drive unexpectedly faltered. He had never had a plan fail before but this was failing miserably because of an unintended consequence, it made Cindy love her husband even more.

Primed with thoughts of wanton Imperial princesses and feeling incredibly alluring in her white lingerie, she threw herself at him with reckless abandon, like Julia at the Forum two millennia ago. She danced before him to ‘Rollin’ in the Deep’, then laid him down onto the bed and impaled herself on his spear. Cindy’s eyes burned as hot as the lava deep within Vesuvius and for a moment, John thought he was inside a goddess. He was human, and a man, however, and he gave himself over to frenzied lust, filling his wife with his seed. Within thirty minutes he recovered, maneuvered Cindy onto all fours, and brutally started again where he had let off, like a Barbarian ravaging a Roman captive. John battered away at his wife until her nerves fired throughout her body and she collapsed in a mindless stupor with her husband still thrusting into her limp body. In the consuming passion driving him into

his wife, John failed to realize that a light burns brightest just before it burns out.

“Are you okay?” John asked his wife at dinner the next evening.

“I’m fine.” Cindy faked a smile.

“I don’t think so.”

Cindy had been quiet and sullen since they went to the Vatican. Confronted with the majesties of Renaissance sculpture and painting, she seemed to barely register that she was there. She didn’t say a word to John and appeared completely detached. It was as if her eyes didn’t see anything, or had lost connection to her brain. A history nerd like Cindy should have been awe inspired being in front of the altar at Saint Peter, but, again, nothing. Similarly, standing in Saint Peter’s Square would usually have been thrilling for Cindy, who although not Catholic, would have been caught up in the spectacle and the joy of the crowd. She looked down for the most part and did not even see the Pope at his balcony bless the crowd.

At dinner she toyed with her food and drank four glasses of wine. Cindy was a lightweight and John had to guide her as she staggered to the room and collapsed on the bed. The next morning he noticed that her pillow was wet and stained with mascara.

“Damn. Why do I have to be right about this stuff? I just have to soldier on about this one and pray. I hate just soldiering on, I wish I could do something. Maybe get her to therapy, and soon.”

Seeing corpses preserved in plaster at the archaeological excavations of Pompeii certainly didn’t lift Cindy’s spirits. She remained mesmerized in front of a group that was obviously a family; there were several children present, lying in their death throes from almost two thousand years ago. Those children would have been just like

Jennifer and Daniel, smiling, happy, with bright futures snuffed out by the poisonous cloud. Their parents couldn't protect them and they died horribly. How could she be expected to protect Jennifer and Daniel? She wasn't even a real woman, definitely no longer a real man.

John observed his wife for almost ten minutes and saw tears form at the corner of her eye. Well, that's an improvement. At least she is showing some emotion."

Lying in bed that night, John tried to comfort his wife, who pushed him away, then got up, grabbed the comforter, and slept on the couch. John's heart started to ache; he was watching someone very beautiful destroy herself and he was powerless to do anything other than ride the torrent.

The following day, Cindy and John walked through the endless rows of white marble crosses of the American soldiers killed at Anzio. Cindy's mood darkened. Lying under the pristine crosses were the shattered mortal remains of the Greatest Generation, men, real men, who were killed fighting the Germans in one of the most desperate battles of the war. The Germans hit these troops harder than they hit almost anywhere in a fanatical effort to destroy the beachhead and make the Allies think twice about their invasion of Normandy, scheduled for the upcoming summer. These soldiers under the crosses would not have gone home, taken hormones, and become shemales. They would have got a great laugh at the expense of Christine Jorgensen. If they had lived, they would have married their high school sweetheart and had two kids, an older boy and a younger girl, a dog named Spot, a cat named Fluffy, and led a Leave it to Beaver lifestyle. She hated herself at that moment and started to feel herself slipping into an emotional breakdown.

"Are you, OK, darling?" John was sincerely worried as he looked at the anguished face of his beloved.

Cindy's internal loathing found a new target. "Why do you call me darling? Why the fuck did you marry me anyway, when you could have any woman in Manhattan not taken by Derek Jeter? Why do you waste your time cumming in my ass when you can have kids of your own someday, from a real woman? Why don't you go find some accomplished, intelligent lawyer or something and sweep her off her feet rather than hang around with somebody like me? Do you really think Jennifer and Daniel are going to embrace me as their mother when they find out what a prostitute really is? You fell in love with me in two days, how could you? I certainly don't deserve you."

John went to embrace his wife and try to comfort her but she savagely tore herself from his grasp. She ripped off her engagement and wedding rings, flung them into the grass, and sprinted out of the cemetery towards the coast.

John knew this was coming; he had tried to prepare himself mentally for the crash that would occur when Cindy's life finally hit the ground again. He even suspected that the cemetery at Nettuno would be the stimulus that caused the crash, as he sensed a demon deep within her working its way to the surface like a parasite. Now she was expelling it in all its vile existence and he had taken the slime full in the face. He was, however, former Major John Kincaid, and the real life version of Joe Bradley. This time Joe would get the princess.

Cindy had run on him twice and he was used to the routine. John had also witnessed Cindy orchestrate the catching of seven beautiful salmon in a Lake Ontario tributary in the midst of a downpour and was astounded by the strength and speed of their run. Cindy was running now but he would catch her, just like they did the salmon. He spent twenty minutes on his hands and knees pawing

through the well-manicured grass before he found what he was searching, then started to walk for the Tyrrhenian.

John searched for hours in the seaside resort town, going into bars, restaurants, walking the beach, yelling "Cindy!" at the top of his lungs. He continued to search long after night had fallen and he started to feel an aching in his heart. Cindy was nowhere to be found. She might really be gone, seducing the first man she met out of self-loathing and running off with him. Cindy had the looks, the talent, and spoke fluent Italian. She could be on her way to Rome right now with her face buried in a man's groin.

John felt a twinge of jealousy that he tried to fight down. He had only felt that way once before, after their first date to Lake Ontario when she returned to her job as an international whore. In the evenings he thought of her with some stranger, giving herself over when he wanted so much to have her in his arms. He fought down those feelings of jealousy knowing she didn't love any of those guys, and he now fought back these irrational feelings.

Exasperated with the search, he sat on a bench overlooking the harbor where once the U.S. Navy had frantically tried to keep the troops supplied on the beachhead during continuous air raids and shelling from monstrously sized railroad guns that positioned miles inland.

John smiled; the former naval officer and now shemale wife hadn't run off with some guy. She had run home.

With renewed confidence, John walked out onto a darkened breakwater, barely illuminated by the background lights of the town and the occasional flash of the navigational light on its end. The weather had taken a turn for the worse and was rapidly deteriorating into a full blown storm. The wind howled like a thousand lost souls and heavy waves ominously rolled against the

breakwater. Wind-driven spray lashed over the bulkhead and soon the Tyrrhenian Sea itself would wash over it as well. When he was two-thirds of the way out, John saw a human figure sitting on the concrete, staring at the dark sea. He quietly and slowly walked towards his wife. When he arrived, he saw mascara streaks down her face, indicating a prolonged sobbing.

“I am nothing to them now. Even with everything I did to make them proud, they hate me because I became a woman. They should have been at our wedding. My Dad hates me and my Mom is too fucking chicken shit to do anything about it. I destroyed my family. Your talk in Miami got me this far but there is nothing you can say now.”

John didn't say a word but took Cindy's hand in his own, extended her well-manicured index and middle fingers and put it over her jugular vein.

“What are you doing?”

“Feel it?”

“Yeah, so?”

“That's coming from the exact same heart you had before you became Cindy, from the same heart that loved salmon fishing and guarded harbors and made your parents proud. Hormones and surgery didn't change that one bit. If anything, it's purer now than it ever was. They may hate you, but not because of what's in your heart.”

Cindy bit her lip and tried to regain control of herself. Then John placed her hand under his shirt and over his own heart.

“It beats for you, stupid. It's not like I didn't have options. You are the most transparent woman, and I do mean woman, I have ever met. I fell in love with you because I could see everything right from the beginning. I knew this was going to happen and kind of figured it

would happen here. Now let's get you inside the car and warm you up, darling. This place is going to be underwater in half an hour."



“I would like to oblige you, but I fucked up my ankle really bad. I can’t f’in walk. I have been walking on breakwaters all my life and I f’in twist it up on this one, wouldn’t you f’in know?”

John laughed. “Just lean on me, sailor. I got you.”

Not quite a year earlier, on a late summer’s day, Cindy drove the partnership’s Ferrari, which she later gave to Kaitlyn as a wedding gift, to her father’s university campus. She stopped at the campus bookstore and purchased several woman’s t-shirts emblazoned with the school’s mascot which she would twist into a provocative knot, then sat on the steps of the library in short shorts, sunglasses, and sandals impersonating a student while she kept her vigil and reading Robert Graves. Cindy had to repeatedly fend off advances from the guys, knowing that once they found out her secret, she would be beaten to a pulp and left for dead behind the dormitories. Nevertheless, you couldn’t keep a good girl down, and she had given a few of the cuter, nicer guys blow jobs in the classical antiquities section of the undergraduate library stacks, Cindy being certain that nobody would disturb them there.

She thoroughly enjoyed playing the campus slut while basking in the late summer sun, and considered enrolling in a master’s program. She could be a whore by night and a slut by day, and somewhere find the time to study.

Finally, late on the second day, her vigil paid off and she saw what she was waiting for. Her father left his building and walked towards the cafeteria, not recognizing the person who had once been his son sitting on the steps not ten feet from where he passed. Cindy’s heart wrenched as she saw the distraught expression on her father’s face. He looked like someone close to him had just died and that expression had haunted her since then.

Tears streamed down her face for the entire drive back to New York.

Thankfully, her ankle wasn't broken, but it was seriously sprained and swelled to twice its size. The doctor in the hospital in Nettuno joked about no high heels for her and she scornfully looked at him. Finally, early the next morning, the couple returned to their hotel in Rome with Cindy's ankle heavily bandaged and her walking with crutches. The hotel manager expressed his sincere concern for the honeymooners. Their Italian trip would be ruined if she couldn't get around in Florence and Genoa as they had planned. John, however, was used to contingency planning.

"Do you know an inexpensive place in either Lombardy or Tuscany where my wife can just have some quiet time recuperating? Her life has been a whirlwind for a long time and she needs some quiet time for reflection."

"I have a sister who runs a small inn, the Bella Donna, in a town named San Luca in the Tuscan hills near Ortona. It's beautiful, and it's before high season so she is probably not booked. I will call her right away and convince her to have you stay for a very modest price. Signore, it has been a true pleasure having you and your wife stay here. She brightens up the day with her smile."

"Thank you. It has been a pleasure staying here as well. Hopefully some day we can return with our children when they are ready to appreciate Rome." John held out his smart phone to show a wedding picture of himself, Cindy, Jennifer and Daniel.

"You have a lovely family, now let me make the call. I will ask my sister to give you the best possible price."

Ten minutes later, the manager called Cindy and John's room. "Wonderful news, my sister has an opening and will let you stay two weeks for your wife to recuper-

ate. Her inn is lovely. You would like it even more than Genoa or Florence. It's in wine country and the views are spectacular."

"Thank you, you have been most gracious."

"As have you and your wife. I look forward to your family coming to Rome."

John helped a limping Cindy into the car and she smiled her sincere gratitude. The Fiat fought its way through the Rome traffic on the way to the inn in Tuscany. An hour after leaving Rome, Cindy noticed a sign for Viterbo and asked her husband if they could head into the small city.

"Please, I know it's off our route, but I would really like to go there."

Entering the outskirts of the city, they stopped at a gas station. Cindy hobbled over to the proprietor and conversed in rapid fire Italian. Ten minutes later the car stopped in front of a small, Romanesque Church, the Chiesa Di San Silvestro.

"Do you know that Guy de Montfort, son of Simon de Montfort who led the Baron's Revolt, was consigned by Dante to one of the lowest levels of hell for murdering a friend in front of the altar of this church? This altar, right here."

"Do you know," John thought to himself. "She is coming back around."

"Nope, didn't know that."

"And do you know that my great great whatever fought for Simon De Montfort and was in charge of the defense of Kenilworth Castle, the longest siege in English history? I don't approve of him cutting off the hand of Prince Edward's messenger asking them to surrender,

though, I think just the medieval version of 'Nuts' would have worked."

"Is that the same Edward who had Mel Gibson drawn and quartered?"

"I wish. Somebody should have done that to Mel Gibson a long time ago. To think, I actually loved him in Gallipoli."

A few hours later they left the main highway and were driving through a pastoral landscape on the back roads of Tuscany.

"You are an amazing woman, Cindy Kincaid, considering all that has passed in your life these past couple of years and what you have done."

"I'm sorry, it all piled up at once; being married, a new mother, trying to decide what I wanted to do with my life, worrying that you would tire of me and look for a real woman."

"That's a lot on anybody's plate, becoming a woman full-time, being a lady of the evening, then walking away from it all to becoming a loving wife and mother. Please don't take this as patronizing or condescending, but I am incredibly proud of you, darling, and I am proud to be your husband. I figured you were going to crash, but what at Nettuno set you off, as if I couldn't guess?"

"My opprobrium before dead heroes. They would all look on me with disgust, or as a joke. As a shemale who has spent the greater amount of her time as a prostitute, I felt unworthy standing there, and all my demons came back in an instant to haunt me."

"You don't know what those soldiers would say if they could rise again. Maybe in Heaven they learned a better understanding of the human condition. I will tell you one thing, the quality you admire about the men un-

der those crosses, you have plenty of. It takes an incredible amount of bravery to do what you did. I know you were never in combat and I was, but I know courage when I see it. I could sense your fear the moment I laid eyes on you when you were rigging the rods for salmon fishing up at the lake. I saw it the next day on our abbreviated date and again at Heather's wedding. But you overcame those fears. You looked so incredibly confident and strong in the Bahamas and beneath your bridal veil.

Bravery isn't the absence of fear, it's overcoming it. You are just going to have to do it again. We all wish we didn't have to be brave, but we have to on a daily basis. Show those guys buried at Nettuno that you have a real heart and they would have respected you. It's like my Dad. He will never like you and there is nothing you can do about it, but you earned his respect. Maybe you should use that as a model for your own parents."

Cindy just looked at her husband and said nothing, finding some measure of peace in her soul. She was truly a lucky woman to have found John.

An increased measure of peace would be impossible to avoid than at the Bella Donna at San Luca. The sun had started to set behind the hills and smoke from the chimney greeted the couple. An elderly man greeted John and Cindy and moved to take their luggage, but John insisted on carrying Cindy's carload inside.

"Next time we get a moving van."

Cindy would typically have smarted off to her husband, but she stood on her crutches and laughed at herself.

Mrs. Pontelandolfo, the sister of the hotel proprietor in Rome, greeted the newlyweds, giving Cindy an embrace like she was a long lost daughter which nearly toppled her. She insisted that the two have a seat for dinner as it

was ready, bringing out a huge bowl of wild boar stew and uncorking a bottle of red from a local vineyard.

The exhausted couple retired to their room with John helping his lame wife up the steep stairs. Exhausted, she just took off her jeans and shirt and crawled under the covers and comforter in her bra and panties. John took a shower down the hall as there was no shower in the room, then, refreshed, crawled into bed next to his wife.

“This inn was built in 1505 and renovated since then over the years? Imagine all the loving couples who slept in this room. I may be the first shemale, so I guess I am kind of a pioneer,” Cindy observed before falling into a deep sleep.

John woke up early while Cindy slept soundly, had a breakfast of fresh fruit and farina, then went to explore the surroundings. The town had a traditional farmers’ market where he bought a block of parmesan, some bread and prosciutto, plus strawberries. He also purchased a bouquet of flowers, then silently crept up the ancient wooden stairs and placed the flowers on the night stand. Remembering Cindy’s unrealized wish that she could wear a flower in her hair every day, he plucked a flower from its stem and delicately placed it behind his sleeping wife’s right ear.

Embarrassed at sleeping into the afternoon, Cindy limped down the stairs and sheepishly looked at her husband and Mrs. Pontelandolfo who was setting the table for lunch. She had placed the flower back in her hair after her bath and proudly wore it at the table. Cindy and Mrs. Pontelandolfo engaged in a vigorous conversation in Italian in which Cindy gushed about the wonderfully historic inn and her hostess’ superlative cuisine. Observing the interchange, John just smiled. His wife was becoming a true lady right before his eyes. The sprained ankle had apparently been a godsend.

That evening, still wearing the flower and walking with crutches, Cindy accompanied John on a walk through the village.

"I can't believe I slept so late. I haven't done that since I was a ho," she smiled.

"You looked so peaceful that I couldn't disturb you. I think it will be very good for you to relax here until your swelling goes down."

"I heard birds outside our window. It was wonderful. You never hear that in New York, other than pigeons. I don't subscribe to the 'rats with wings' school of thought, but they sure don't have a singing voice, not even for back-up."

Back in New York tuning out the sounds of pigeons, Heather sat in her office room in her home looking at spreadsheets on her computer indicating production and sales of particular lines of fashions when Jennifer came to her door looking like she had seen a ghost.

"What's the matter, little one? Are you OK?"

"No."

"Why? Are you sick?"

"Yes."

"Well, let me take your temperature."

"It's not that kind of sick," Jennifer sobbed.

"What is it then?"

"I was missing Mommy so much I googled her and found out she used to be a boy named Tim."

Heather paused for what seemed an eternity, took a deep breath, then waded in.

"Yes, that's true. Cindy used to be a nice boy named Tim. But you know about the soul right?"

"Your inner part that can't die and goes to Heaven, like Mommy and Daddy's souls?"

"Yes, well Tim had the soul and heart of a woman, his inner part. He lived that way for a long time from when he was not much older than you, knowing that he wasn't complete. It made him very lonely and hurt. Finally he became brave and allowed himself to be turned into Cindy."

"Did he wish upon a star and have his fairy godmother turn him into a princess with a potion like in Shrek?"

"Pretty much. Now when you look at Cindy do you see a woman?"

"Yes."

"Does she act like a woman?"

"Yes, when she is not acting like those girls in high school."

Heather couldn't help but laugh at that one.

"Look, Jennifer, I am one of Cindy's closest and most trusted friends. She is like a sister to me and she wouldn't be like a sister if she wasn't a woman in body and soul. As far as I'm concerned, Cindy is a woman just like she appears to be and can at times very much be a lady. If she can be my sister, she can be your Mommy. I know she loves you and Daniel very much, and loves your daddy."

"I love her too."

"See, you said you love her, not him."

"Yes, I did."

"Darling, it will take time for you to understand this, but I know Cindy will be a very good mother to you."

"Can we write an e-mail to Cindy and say that I know and still love her as my Mom."

"Yes, we can."

To: CinKinc@yahoo.com

From: Geekprincess@yahoo.com

Subj: Love You, Mom

Mom, I find out about you once being a boy but having the heart and soul of a girl and how your fairy godmother granted your wish with a magic potion like in Shrek. Heather says you were very brave when you did that and I believe her. I am so happy your wish was granted and that you are now my Mom. I love you and so does Daniel. I hope you and Daddy are enjoying Italy. Don't worry about getting me anything, all I want is for you and Daddy to have a good time.

Your loving daughter;

Jennifer Courtney Miller, Age 11

"You way underestimated our daughter and her inquisitiveness. She knows about me but apparently Heather defused the situation."

"That woman is your guardian angel."

"More like a sister, like she says."

"What did our daughter say?"

"That she loves me and she is happy my fairy godmother used her magic potion to turn me into a woman.

"Well, there you have it."

Cindy couldn't say anything more, but instead embraced her husband and cried.

"We are a family now, darling. Just like it should be."

"Yes, but I'm her mother now. It should have been me talking to her about this shit."

"It's not about shit, it's who you are. Evidently Jennifer knows and still loves you as her Mom."

"I need to talk to her."

The hours passed slowly before Cindy could call New York because of the six-hour time difference. She paced back and forth in front of the hotel on her crutches, then had three glasses of red wine to fortify herself. Jennifer was truly a remarkable little girl and Heather an incredible friend. Did she really deserve either one of them?

Finally, one o'clock came and Cindy dialed Heather's cell phone. After six rings, Heather answered, but Cindy could not utter a sound for twenty seconds.

"It's OK, sister," Heather finally reassured Cindy.

"I should have been there to tell her. You shouldn't have to be the one picking up my shit."

"It's not your shit, it's who you are. Like I said before, we're sisters. You would do the same for me."

"Yes, but you're perfect."

"We are all perfect in our own way. Your way is just being a smart ass ex-whore, loving wife and mother. Would you like to speak to your daughter?"

"Please."

"Just a minute. She's still in bed. I think she was surfing the internet half the night in her bedroom."

Hello," a groggy Jennifer said into the phone.

"Hello, Jennifer, it's Cindy."

"Hi, Mommy, did you get my e-mail?"

"Yes and I'm very sorry if you were hurt. I just want to say that I love you as my daughter."

"Well, I was hurt, I thought I would barf, like when I had the flu, or when Brutus eats stuff off the street. But I

feel OK now. I love you Mommy, and I think it's cool that I have a princess for a mother."

"But I'm not a princess. I told you that. I'm not even a real woman." Cindy could barely get the words out without crying.

"You weren't one but you are now. I see you as one, so does Heather, so Does daddy, so does Daniel, and I think Brutus does too. And Mommy, if you need any help learning to be a woman, just ask me."

"I will, little one. I will, I promise." Cindy had started to recover.

"Cross your heart."

"Cross my heart."

"Mommy, I know you can't give me a baby sister but I looked on the internet last night. You and Daddy can adopt a baby sister from China."

"Maybe someday, little one, maybe someday. But I have two wonderful children already. You give Heather and Daniel a big hug for me. We got you and Daniel lots of nice things."

"Give Daddy a kiss, I see he loves that from you."

John smiled and looked into his wife's gleaming blue eyes as she backed away from a tender kiss that she had just planted on his lips.

"Well, are you satisfied?"

Overcome with emotion, Cindy couldn't say anything, but nodded her head in agreement.

John then picked up his lame wife, carried her up the ancient flagstone stairs, and gently lay her on the bed. He then pulled back the blankets and sheets and undressed her, while she mutely sat and watched. Naked except for her panties and bra, Cindy let John lead her under the

covers and tuck her in. He then went to the bathroom, rustled round in his shaving kit for a minute and reappeared, carrying a small clump of tissue in his hand. He took Cindy's left hand in his own, gave it a gentle kiss, unwrapped the tissue, and returned the engagement and wedding rings to their rightful place.

"Sleep all day if you have to," John said, but his wife was already gone, looking like an angel, completely at peace. John smiled and walked out of the room into a beautiful afternoon.

Several hours later, John returned at dusk to find the table set for him. Cindy remained in her room, sleeping through the afternoon and dusk, finally recuperating from the emotional cascade that her life had so suddenly become.

Offering John a glass of wine, Mrs. Pontelandolfo stated, "She is still sleeping, Signore Kincaid. You are very lucky to have a wife like her. Please tell me, if I may be so bold, is your wife a transsexual?"

"She is," John said without blinking. "How did you figure it out? Just curious."

"She is very pretty and she has learned to move very naturally, but her voice in Italian cracks. She has learned to speak English like a woman, but not yet Italian. My brother and I grew up in Milano and were familiar with the transsexual prostitutes. Sometimes, their voices crack like your wife's does when she is speaking Italian."

John laughed.

"I said you are lucky to have a wife like her. She is even luckier that you found her. If I may as a personal question, is there something the matter between you two? Your wife looked lost when she came here."

“She was, she had lost herself. For the first time since she became a woman, she had something to lose and it overwhelmed her. She didn’t think she deserved happiness with me or my children.”

“It must be very hard doing what she did. I can only imagine. I have a friend who knows somebody in Milano that your wife could talk to; she knows more about men becoming women than anyone in Italy, maybe anywhere.”

“Who is this expert?”

“She is the madam of La Rosa, a brothel of transsexual prostitutes. She is actually very respected in Milano as a true lady, even though she is a transsexual. My friend is well-acquainted with her, he is a police detective in Milano. I will call if you think your wife would like to meet her.”

“Meet her? Three years ago it was my wife’s dream to work for her.”

The next day, Cindy woke up late, took a walk with John on her crutches into town, and arrived at the local produce market. Cindy loved the market, it had all the really awful parts of the pig that tasted so good, an incredible array of sausages and cheeses, and homemade pasta and sauces. The couple quickly filled up their picnic basket when Cindy spied a grizzled older farmer selling potatoes and radishes.

“John doesn’t throw down the gauntlet like he did that night in Rome without major retaliation,” she joked to herself.

John started to move along and look at fresh oranges while Cindy engaged the old man in Italian. He took her to the back shed where Cindy found what she was looking for. She offered him some Euros but he declined.

“Just one kiss from an angel.”

Cindy smiled and gave him a chaste kiss on the cheek and a delicate hug, leaving the man grinning from ear to ear and waving as she ran to catch up with her husband.

“What was that about?”

“Nothing. Just returning to my bad girl ways. I gave him a blow job. He said it was a long time since he had one. He is an incognito millionaire with a resort on Capri. We are invited there anytime, provided I put out.”

“Yeah and what is that you were stuffing into the picnic basket?”

“Oh, nothing.”

“You have always been the world’s worst liar.”

That night Cindy spent an hour in the bathroom running the tub and making cleaning noises.

John couldn’t understand what was getting into his wife, but she was acting more or less normal, which for Cindy was way off the reservation.

The next day, Cindy called Kaitlyn who had accompanied her new husband, Red Sox shortstop, Kevin McDaniel, Heather’s brother, to spring training in Fort Myers.

“Wassup, ho?”

“Former ho, Mrs. Kincaid. Now I’m Mrs. Kevin McDaniel, happily married Red Sox WAG. Why are you calling me so early, it’s barely daylight, bitch.”

“It’s afternoon here, bitch. So how is life in the fast lane?”

“We get all dressed up and sit around at bars drinking cocktails like we own Fort Myers or hang out at the beach. Sometimes we go shopping or get our nails done. Real high speed stuff.”

"Have they suspected your previous occupation?"

"Well, the Ferrari is hard to explain as well as the Laboutin heels so I just pull out the dumb blonde act and most don't push it any farther. Most are just friggin' jealous, especially because Kevin is only in his second year in the majors and hasn't got a free agent contract. Some think that it was a gift from an admirer."

"In a way, it was, a lot of paying admirers from New York to Brunei."

"I am making a few friends. Some of the girls I like ride with me out along the Alligator Highway. You can sprint very well in places as long as you look out for gators. They are tasty, though. "

"Oh, gator bites. Love them."

"Gator bites, frog legs, catfish, and fried green tomatoes with a Mason jar of Wild Turkey. We went to a restaurant back in the swamp and the girls were very snooty until I dove right in to the creepy crawlies. They came around after a few jars of Kentucky's finest and we had a great time. Plus we never miss a game. Kevin asked about you and hoped you were doing well."

"So speaking of Kevin, how's marital sex?"

"None of your damn business," Kaitlyn laughed.

"Why? You made my marital sex life your business when you were an accomplice to bogarting my lingerie."

"Yes, guilty as charged, and Heather, Shannon and I picked out all the new stuff, baby doll. I'm sure you look adorable."

"Thanks."

"Anytime."

"You know I completely lost it one day with John, I just felt so overwhelmed and scared. I think I came close to a nervous breakdown."

"Saw that coming a mile off. I'm sorry it had to happen, though."

"Why didn't you warn me?"

"You wouldn't have listened. I hope things are better now. I was very worried that you would go off the deep end and hurt yourself and John."

"Couldn't be any better. Luckily, I only hurt myself like a dumbass. I sprained my ankle when I stormed off and now we are chilling in a 500-year-old inn in the countryside. I am even going to help the owner with dinner this afternoon."

"You needed that rest. You were on the verge of running off the rails."

"Yes, I did. Jennifer knows about me."

"Oh?"

"Heather smoothed it over. Apparently I have a fairy godmother who administered a potion that turned me into a woman."

"We should all have a fairy godmother. How did Jennifer take it?"

"Very well, all things considered. It's a very tough thing to deal with. She is quite the little lady. It's a good thing Heather is there. I talked to her as soon as I could and she still calls me Mommy and wants me to adopt a baby sister from China."

"Yes, she is quite the little lady. And you will be quite the mother. I'm proud of you, you've come a long way, baby. I gotta go, though. I'm drag racing David in his

Lamborghini. We have a steak dinner riding on it for the two of us, his wife and Kevin.”

“You’ll smoke him easy. He’s not half the driver you are. It should be like taking candy from a baby. Enjoy your gratis steak dinner. Love you, former ho.”

“Love you, former ho.”

Cindy sweated in front of the brick oven that had been blackened by half a millennia of culinary masterpieces. Her hair was knotted behind her head and her face was whitened by flour. She still stood uneasily on her crutches, raising her right leg like a flamingo, but she wanted to help Mrs. Pontelandolfo with the preparation of the evening meal. She had limped to the market while John was away on a hike in the hills and bought fresh vegetables, mushrooms, a whole chicken, sausage, and the fixings for homemade pasta. If Kaitlyn could see her now, actually cooking a meal rather than calling delivery. The delivery boys in Manhattan loved to take meals to Cindy and Kaitlyn’s Central Park apartment. The girls made it a point to flirt with the really nice, shy ones and give them a tip to remember.

Cindy thrust her hands into a mixing bowl to knead dough for homemade bread and set it on the shelf to rise like a mini Mt. Vesuvius. Earlier she had carved up the chicken, helped lay out long strings of pasta, and mix a tomato sauce that now sat simmering on the ancient oven. Cindy laughed, “Before, I would just get this in a jar.”

Late in the afternoon John returned from his hike into the hills. He loved the region and felt exhilarated by its soft welcoming climate and simple lifestyle. He would love to purchase a villa here and settle down with his wife and children.

His wife. He smiled. How did he get so fortunate? With great risks come great rewards and he felt he had found a wordly treasure.

He passed through the main dining room on his way upstairs to take a shower, but found his wordly treasure smiling at him, still covered profusely in flour, while sitting in a chair with her ankle propped up.

"Dinner is in twenty minutes, darling. I hope you like," Cindy sounded hopeful.

"You made it?" John asked incredulously.

"I helped Mrs. Pontelandolfo and actually had fun doing it. She is an incredible cook. I hope I don't bring her dishes down a notch or three."

"I'm sure it will be more than fine."

Cindy gingerly lifted her foot off the chair, gathered her crutches, and limped off into the kitchen to help Mrs. Pontelandolfo with bringing in the dishes for her husband.

She first brought him a bottle of wine and offered it to him to read the label. When he was satisfied, she set the corkscrew and pulled out the cork, the force of the ejection causing her to lose balance on her crutches.

"Why don't you sit down and let Mrs. Pontelandolfo finish bringing out the food?"

Cindy sat down across from her husband, and smiled broadly. John thought she had never looked more beautiful than with her hair tousled and her face dusted in flour, even in the Bahamas or on her wedding day where she positively glowed. The two ate a heaping dinner, then sat and looked quietly across the candle-lit table at each other for over an hour. John then carried his wife up into the room, holding Cindy like she was made of delicate crystal.

The two made love until the dawn, when she softly surrendered her body to her wonderful husband. She opened her heart that night as she felt true mutual love-making for the first time in her life rather than wanton sex and gave warmly and deeply back to her man. This fire was not an inferno that incinerated her in the flash of a second, but the deep, warm red embers of a campfire that would glow within her for a lifetime. Imperial Princess Julia looking across two thousand years of time would have been joyful that her legatee had learned about the ways of true love.

After enjoying a gratis steak dinner, Kaitlyn called her sister-in-law, Heather. "Wassup, ho?"

"I never was a whore, not like some people I know. All my tips from my bachelorette party went to the children's hospital, remember, sis?"

"I so wanted to turn you to the dark side and form a three-way partnership, C-H-K Entertainment. Pretty snappy, huh? I even had sample business cards printed up."

"C-H-K, I love it. You don't know how close I was to actually being corrupted to the dark side, Darth Kaitlyn. I spent many nights alone in bed wishing I could be like you two."

"Wishing?"

"With a vibrator and a bottle of Rush," Heather laughed. "It was so embarrassing going to the bookstore in Times Square; the cashier would see me and immediately pull out a bottle, just like a bartender for a drunk. That is why I wanted the type of bachelorette party we had. I wanted to feel the fire once. I was totally sinful on Saturday nights and would go to church the next morning and pray at the early service. If I was only praying for myself, I would have become a fallen angel soon enough, but

I prayed for both of you too, much harder. I remembered the tears coming out of Cindy the day she broke up with Kevin. My heart went out to her, the same as it did for you when I heard about your fiancée. You two taught me what religion is truly about, the power and joy that comes from loving another. It gave me the strength to help you.”

“Cindy lost it with John and apparently came close to a nervous breakdown. I feel so bad, it was me that said she should go all the way and the next day she made appointments for hormones and electrolysis.”

“Don’t feel bad, you have been her best friend and she will emerge so much stronger as a woman because of it. Consider it growing pains. She has a lot of stuff in her past and it must be extremely hard to do what she has done and be where she is now. She had to come off the fence and you helped her make the right decision. Being a whore was a glamorous escape for her and an introduction to her new existence, but now she is confronted with being a wife and mother. Cindy is delicate and fragile, like a flower that needs a lot of nurturing. Robert once got me an orchid, a beautiful one that bloomed profusely, like it was on steroids. Then one day I brushed up against it ever so slightly and it broke from its own weight. That’s what just happened to our best friend. But with tender care from all of us, she will sprout new blooms. She is in incredible fertile soil to do just that.”

“Yes she is. So how was the talk with Jennifer?”

“Luckily I had to do the same talk with myself when I found out Kevin was dating a tran. I thought it was perverted and wrong and against God’s will, but I read all I could and figured out that people like Cindy are here for a reason, the same as any of us. We should take Cindy fishing, like to Alaska or British Columbia when she gets back. She’ll love that”

"Don't even need to go that far. She always wanted to go to Oregon, we can take Daniel and Jennifer too. So how is Shannon?"

"That girl is positively wicked with her fiancée."

Both girls laughed and vowed to meet when the baseball season started and the team was back in Boston and to start planning the getaway.

"Where are we going today, Darling?" Cindy asked, giving her husband a playful kiss.

"We are going out to eat with some locals that have mutual friends with Mrs. Pontelandolfo. I think you would like them. I told them we were coming to Milan to see them for dinner."

"Milan?"

"Yes, darling."

"For real?"

"Yes, it's about time you got out and rejoined the universe. Mrs. Pontelandolfo thinks you would like the people we are having dinner with."

'Hey, if they can point out some other great restaurants or art galleries, I will meet anybody, including Mussolini, but he would have to get the tab."

"I have the tab for tonight, now come darling, our chariot awaits."

"Just because we are in Italy does not mean we have to refer to our rental Fiat as a chariot," Cindy laughed while hobbling on her crutches.

In the soft sun of a late Lombard spring the two drove towards Milan, until they joined the hustle of traffic announcing their proximity to the city. Fighting through the crush of cars, they drove to a restaurant near the cathedral, with Cindy softly caressing John's leg.

“To think that I could have lived and worked in this city. I would have loved it.”

“Yes, I am sure you would have.”

“Not to say that I am much happier now being Mrs. William Kincaid, the wife of my one and only.”

“Yes, darling, I know,” John smiled. His wife was coming back to him as fast as she could on her sprained ankle and she was starting to emerge as a true lady, for the most part.

The two arrived at an older, traditional Italian restaurant and were greeted politely by the host who sat them at their table. Cindy smiled and said thanks, engaging him in fluent Italian, which changed his countenance from polite to warmhearted. He advised her that the restaurant had reserve Tuscan wines that were not on the list, to which she smiled and ordered from the reserves.

After smelling the cork, Cindy held up her glass to her husband.

“A second toast to a wonderful husband and a spectacular trip so far. I am so sorry about Anzio. I must have hurt you terribly.”

“I’m a big boy, it hurt the most seeing you tear yourself up inside and not being able to help.”

“You gave me more help than you can ever imagine. Plus we have two wonderful children.”

John reached out and took Cindy’s hand on his own and smiled. “You make me feel incredibly lucky. Now tell me what you are hiding from me, love, spending all the time in the bathroom that night.”

“Oh, nothing. Just shaving my legs.”

“Like I keep saying, you are the world’s worst liar. You proved that when I first met you.”

“Hmmm, this prosciutto looks good, so does the penne with chicken.”

“I will find out.”

“Yes my husband, you will, all in good time.”

Fifteen minutes later a middle-aged woman entered the restaurant accompanied by a younger girl, about twenty-four, provocatively dressed, with brown curly hair and a shy, engaging smile. Cindy sized herself up against that girl, and comfortably felt that she was in her league, although she was dressed more demurely, and had the wedding ring of a wonderful man on her finger.

The lady talked to the host, who then escorted the two to Cindy and John’s table.

“Ms Giovanni, pleased to meet you. May I introduce you to my wife, Cindy San Claire Kincaid.” Smiling, Cindy gave Ms. Giovanni a warm greeting and shook her hand. Then she offered her own hand the younger woman, who briefly hesitated, then smiled and offered her hand in return, stating that her name was Roxy.

“Please let us take our seats. We have just opened a bottle of wine from the restaurant’s reserve and we would be honored to share it with you. Cindy, Ms Giovanni is the madam at La Rosa, and I know you have heard of it.”

“Cindy nearly choked on her bread and olive oil, then acted like a seven-year-old boy meeting his baseball hero for the first time. In rapid fire Italian, she said, “What? Really? I always wanted to be one of your girls. I thought it would be so exciting working for you and be all alluring and sexy, like Roxy here. You run an incredible operation and I would have been proud to say I was one of yours. This is incredible. I did work as an escort in Manhattan, but John and I are now married and I couldn’t be happier. Wow, my husband really did it tonight. Thank you so much for coming.”

Ms. Giovanni's heart melted when she heard the young lady's effusive and sincere admiration and smiled. She had become very philosophical in her line of work and said in excellent American accented English, "You would have been a treasure like Roxy here, but God sometimes has different plans for us. I can see that he has done very well for you, Mrs. Kincaid."



“Please, call me Cindy.”

“That will be fine, Cindy, and you can call me Mother, the same as all of my girls do.”

Cindy caught herself from giving a “Fuckin’ A” response and politely said, “Thank you, Mother.” She then smiled at John and gave his hand a vigorous pump.

The group ordered and had a delicious five course meal. Ms Giovanni suggested to John that the two of them retire to the bar while Roxy and Cindy talked.

Ms Giovanni told John about herself. Her father was an American sailor assigned to the U.S. Sixth Fleet in Naples and her mother was a prostitute. From age twelve Marco felt he should have been a woman and began turning tricks shortly thereafter. A few years later, Marco, now living entirely as Sofia, in honor of the Italian bombshell, was taken in by a much older man in Rome who in return for getting her on hormones and paying for implants kept her like a teenage sex slave and pimped her out to his friends. The practice of slavery enjoyed by overweight Roman patricians was not dead after all the centuries. Sofia one day, however, ran away from this man, all the way to Milano and started to earn decent money for herself as a transsexual escort.

She soon had a nice apartment and a lengthy client list but knew in her heart of hearts that none of those men would ever truly love her. Armed with that knowledge, she went back to school in the daytime, graduated, and learned accounting. A few years later she purchased a run-down house near the city center which became a haven for girls like herself.

The reputation of La Rosa grew and flourished under her management and the ardor of herself and the girls until men from all over Europe with a taste for transsexual ass would show up at its doorstep. Ms Giovanni’s reputa-

tion as a maternal figure and word of her girls' glamour spread as well to the shemales of Europe and South America who dreamed of becoming one of her girls. Her reputation spread even to a quiet, shy young man evolving into a transgendered party girl in Philadelphia.

"You have truly found yourself an angel, Mr. Kincaid, so graceful, yet so innocent, even after all she has done. Please, tell me, a man like yourself could find many women, why did you choose a girl like Cindy? Most American men I know are immediately ashamed after sleeping with a girl like your wife."

"I'm not most American men. I was a counter-intelligence officer and saw enough combat to know what the ugly side of the world looks like, and know that I prefer to avoid it if possible. I was never into girls like Cindy until the fiancée of a good friend of mine suggested that I meet her on a fishing trip. She showed me some pictures of her and I was immediately impressed. Heather told me that Cindy was a transsexual and I was shocked. So was her fiancée who had spent a weekend with her and Heather boating and fishing in upstate New York. He didn't suspect a thing although he wasn't looking for any clues. I told Heather no thanks and left it at that, although she insisted that Cindy was a real sweetheart. The thing was, I couldn't get her eyes out of my mind, that penetrating fire of hers."

"Yes, the fire within the sapphire. I saw it too. Very powerful. Mesmerizing, actually."

"So I thought about it a lot and finally said to myself, 'I'm man enough to date a girl like her.' Once I made that decision, falling in love was easy with Cindy. The rest is history."

"Those two are acting like long lost sisters," Ms. Giovanni said, gesturing to Cindy and Roxy who were

laughing uncontrollably at the table over another bottle of wine.

“What are those two talking about?”

“What all girls like that talk and laugh about; men they have known.”

“Yeah,” Cindy cheerfully stated, “there was this one guy who dressed like a mobster out of a Dick Tracy cartoon; turquoise blue socks and a matching tie. Plus his hair had this weird texture, moussed to the point it felt like a cleaning pad, I hated even touching it. I figured he was laundering money as we went from Manhattan to the back of a restaurant in Jersey and he got this briefcase from another seedy-looking guy. What kind of legitimate business transaction is carried out in a restaurant parking lot? I was actually starting to get scared until Mr. Romantic mentioned all sexy-like that there was a Motel 7 at the next exit.”

“Motel 7?”

“A cheap hotel where they change the sheets once a week. It’s supposedly gotten better nowadays, but then it was just plain nasty.”

“Yuck.”

“It gets yuckier. So I figure the best way to end this date is to go along with it, please him, then get taken home to Manhattan. I figured the longer I hung with this guy, the sooner I would be collateral damage either in a drive-by or floating in the Hudson River. So we go to the hotel room, He strips and he has the build of an adult baby, no muscle, just all baby fat on an adult of about fifty.”

“Yuck.”

“Like I said.”

“So I am in the groove, moving like a jungle cat on my heels, the smoothest I ever moved, I guess because I was really afraid. I start to massage him and he cums in a minute on the sheets. Score. Done. He is embarrassed, drives me home and I never hear from him again.”

“They all act the same, like children,” Ms Giovanni observed. “It is truly part of their charm.”

John laughed, knowing her words were accurate.

“But you must understand, Signore Kincaid, in all truthfulness, they are children. Your wife how long has she lived as a woman, a few years maybe? Roxy not much longer. She came to Milan from a small town when she was eighteen. She was flat as a board as you Americans say, a shy girl who had left the life she knew for the first time to pursue her dream of becoming a woman. Neither your wife or Roxy or almost any of my girls ever had the opportunity to live the life of a normal girl. That’s why they have to push themselves to prove their femininity at every instance. They prove it by being with men. It’s backwards, proving they are women through sex, when for every other girl, it’s understood. I understand their drives and take care of them. They treat me as a mother, and I don’t say that lightly. There are plenty of people who would mistreat them horribly because they think they are less than human. I have seen it many times. It’s terrible. You might think I am no better than those men but I know otherwise and have nothing to prove.”

“My wife has been tearing herself up about her parent’s disapproval. It was destroying her, making her think she didn’t deserve me or to be the mother of my children.”

“And why wouldn’t she? It’s obvious she is an intelligent, gentle, caring person. Those types of girls have it the worst. Some of my girls, if I am totally honest, are too stu-

pid or uncaring to be really troubled by their decision to become a woman. I could have picked other girls to come tonight. Some prettier, more mature, but I wanted Roxy to meet the two of you. I would have loved your wife to be one of my girls. She would have been magnificent and not even have known it. Your wife would not have played the Alpha Girl game that long. She would have known other girls were more gorgeous, some more aggressive, but she would have been a source of joy and laughter and strength in our home. She would have quickly learned that my place was her home and she would have been comfortable with that fact and thrived."

"I want her to be comfortable as my wife and the mother of my children."

"Signore Kincaid, you are an extremely intelligent and unique man. Who is her role model for that, a happily married transsexual and mother? Where is this person? Does she exist?"

"Bravo."

"Why don't you two come to Milano and stay for a few days? Cindy will still have the effect on my girls that I described, even though she will not be working for me. Even on crutches, she carries herself like a queen."

"And talks like a sailor at times, or a foul-mouthed Imperial Princess."

"A few days with me and she will be a queen," Ms Giovanni grinned like the she-wolf from the seven hills that had raised Romulus and Remus. "I guarantee it."

Roxy and Cindy sat at the same dinner table the next evening while Ms Giovanni and John continued their discussion.

"So tell me about your husband."

“He knew what I did for a living and loved me even then. Wasn’t just looking for an easy lay, true classy guy. I told him and I will say it to you, he is everything to me.”

“Your wife is corrupting Roxy. She is telling you what a wonderful man you are and how much she loves you. Soon enough she will be seeking love and will learn that she can’t find it working at La Rosa.”

“I guess I should apologize.”

“Don’t. Like I said, I truly love those girls as I would my own daughters, especially Roxy. I would be very happy if she found a man to love and who loves her back. Cindy is very lucky to have found you.”

“I will toast to that. Remember, whenever you come to New York, you two are always welcome at our house.”

Cindy was also welcome at the house of La Rosa the next day. Ms. Giovanni introduced her to the talent, who almost universally liked her with her smile, laugh, and the fact that she was not competition. Ms. Giovanni then took Cindy to lunch so she could talk to her alone.

“You are very pretty and often way too intelligent for your own good, so you use it to hide your deep insecurity by being, as you Americans say, a major league smart ass.”

Cindy never felt more naked even when she was naked with a group of horny businessmen back in her past life. She could not utter a word.

“Good, no sarcastic comeback. You know I’m right and for once you shut up. Let me tell you this, some of which I told your husband. You would have been magnificent as one of my girls, not because you are the prettiest or the most gorgeous. You’re not. You are very, very good, but not the best. To your credit you understand that already and are fine with it. You wouldn’t have been the

sluttiest either, you are too much of a sweetheart to be really bad, despite what you think. You haven't seen or known bad. I have. You wouldn't have been my best money maker either as your smart ass intellect would have scared off some of the men.

"You would have been magnificent because you were once a man with real substance, again despite what you think of yourself. You are one of the people who grew up with one foot over the fence as a man and one foot over the other side as a woman, not like some who knew they were women from birth. Eventually you had to come down off the fence. I like what I see and I have seen a lot. You came off the fence when you already had a life. But because of that, you have experiences my girls couldn't dream of; college, the military. We might as well be talking of them being angels. Too often I have clients complain that sleeping with some of my girls is like being with a ghost; they have no feeling and absolutely no substance behind them. They are as wispy as a phantom. Their whole lives centered around becoming women, and now that they are women, their hands are empty." Ms Giovanni then held her palms up. "I can't get through to those girls and it pains me deeply.

"But you," she looked on Cindy sternly, "you have fire in your eyes that comes from deep within. It's frightening, your intensity, when the lights gleam and almost nothing frightens me anymore.

"But you," her harshness had become white hot fury, "you are frightened and hateful towards yourself that you don't deserve happiness as the woman you are. Most of the time, you don't get what you deserve in life, you get what you can take. If you can't take John as your husband and those two adorable children as your own, then who in the Lord Above's name can? If you can't live that life then you, me, and all my girls are lost souls who are good

for nothing but being whores. You know your dreams, now hold onto them, cherish them, and be happy or be damned and damn the rest of us."

Under the assault, Cindy's mascara began to glisten and a dark stained tear streaked down her face, bringing forth a kind smile from Ms Giovanni. She gently took Cindy's hand in her own. "You listened to me because deep down you care and you have the strength to hear the truth. Go to your husband, love him, make him laugh and smile like you always have done, but remember who you are and be proud of yourself. Not because you look hot in a dress, but because you have an inner flame that burns bright with the proper care. I must go to work now, but I will see you for breakfast tomorrow, then you and I will go shopping. It will be fun. Maybe Roxy will join us as well. She already considers you a friend and an inspiration. Cindy, I would have so loved to have you as one of my girls, in three months' time you would have become my right hand."

Ever since adolescence, Tim teared up at the song Climb Every Mountain from the Sound of Music which always called forth a feeling of inner strength and love. Now, living as Mrs. Cindy Kincaid, she had participated in that scene and felt her heart in her throat and tears run down her face. This time, the inspiration was not, however, the Mother Superior of a convent in Salzburg, Austria, but the transsexual madame of an internationally renowned brothel in Milan, Italy.

A half world away, Jennifer approached Heather who was again working in her office. "Miss Heather, was the reason Cindy's parents didn't show up at her wedding was because they are mad at her for becoming a woman?"

"Yes, she hasn't talked to them in years."

"Well, they are my grandparents and I want to talk to them. Would you help me with a letter?"

"But I don't know where to send it."

"I do. I found them on the internet and I have the address right here."

Dear Mr. and Mrs. Hartwick.

My name is Jennifer Courtney Miller and I am your granddaughter now. My parents were killed in a car wreck by a drunk driver almost four years ago and our new Daddy just married Cindy, your daughter. I know you are very mad, but if Cindy can be my Mother I hope you can love her the same way my brother and I do.

I would like to tell you something about myself. I am almost twelve and I go to PS 311 in Manhattan. I love math and science but also love reading books. I get straight A's and some people call me a nerd or teacher's pet. We have a golden retriever named Brutus who is a nice dog and loves to run, but I have a hard time walking him, so usually Daddy does. I have an eight-year-old brother named Daniel who is nice. He likes water rides at amusement parks and plays softball. Cindy said she would teach him to fish, too. Cindy said she would teach me to dance and I want to learn very much. She is a beautiful dancer.

I am staying with Miss Heather and you can reach her at 212-555-1111.

I would like to talk to you.

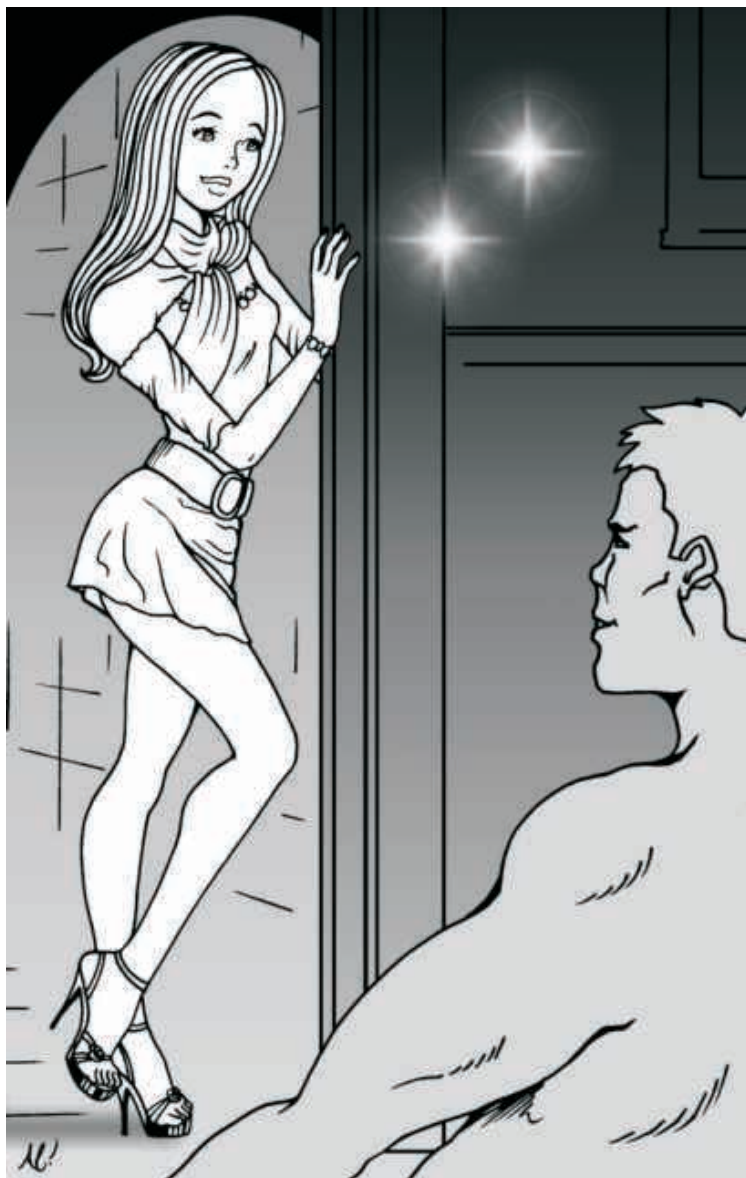
Sincerely;

Jennifer Courtney Miller

Your Granddaughter, Age 11

"Regal," was all Ms Giovanni could say as Cindy emerged from the dressing room at a clothing boutique in

Milan, where the three went shopping the next day. Cindy was shopping for something special to wear in Venice and Ms Giovanni's approval thrilled her. She then let them in on her scheme that she had been hiding from John since the farmer's market in San Luca.



Ms. Giovanni laughed wholeheartedly. "I love it. I can't wait to hear his reaction. You do have a way of accepting challenges." They left the boutique with Cindy's purchases, leaving her crutches forgotten, propped up by the dressing room.

The three searched for hours for the right items for Cindy's scheme. They then went to her hotel room and helped make her plan a reality.

Upon John's arrival back at the hotel room, Cindy locked herself in the bathroom and was not taking any calls. She even told John to go back downstairs and use the hotel lobby bathroom while she occupied her sanctuary. He lay on the bed in frustration and tried to watch TV, at which point she helpfully called out, "Read a book. You don't even understand what they are saying."

"Would you come out?"

"Fine, coming out."

Cindy emerged with bare legs, high-heeled sandals, a scarf and belt that she had bought that day with Ms. Giovanni and Roxy, along with jewelry, all meant to complement and accessorize the burlap sack she had obtained from the old man in San Luca. Roxy sewed hems in the arm and head holes, and cut away a corner for a sexy off-the-shoulder look.

"In Rome you said that I would not look good in a burlap sack. I was mega insulted. Look at me now straight in my eyes and tell me I don't look hot and sexy."

"I can't. You do look great advertising San Luca potatoes. That old farmer should be paying you."

"Nothing that accessorizing can't do, darling. You like the off-the-shoulder look? I think it's smoking hot. It was Roxy's idea. Most of it was her idea actually, other than the burlap sack. That was yours, darling. That girl has a

talent for fashion. I would love to see what she could really do.”

“You never cease to amaze me.”

“That’s what being a good wife is all about, husband.”

Early the next morning, Cindy got up, took a shower, and emerged from the bathroom in nothing but a towel wrapped around her breasts and a solemn look on her face.

“Darling, I have important news for you.”

“What?” John sounded concerned.

“I’m late.”

“Late for what? It’s like 6:30 in the morning.”

“Late late.”

What?”

“You know, late, as in your-male-dreams-have-been-realized-and-you-tear-up-and-give-me-a-heartfelt-hug-and-say-you-are-proud-of-me late.”

“Oh. You mean defying-the-laws-of-nature late.”

“Just once I would like to see you cry. Just once. Must you always be the uber-cool Joe Bradley?”

John embraced Cindy with a heartfelt hug.

“How can I cry when you keep me laughing?”

Then something completely uncharacteristic happened to John. Moisture began to form at the corner of his eyes, like the slowly accumulating morning dew on blades of grass, until a tiny rivulet formed that became a spring of joy. His wife was back, better than ever.

Cindy sat in the pew at the Duomo Di Milano, waiting for the service to start.

“Do you know,” she asked her husband, “that this is the fifth largest cathedral in Europe? It was built on top of the Fourth Century baptistery right under our feet which is one of the oldest Christian buildings surviving today.” She looked down at her stiletto pumps. “Right under our feet, imagine that.”

Ms Giovanni smiled, while John took his wife’s hand in his own and gave it a gentle caress.

Not being able to understand the Latin of the Catholic service, Cindy quietly mused about her past, remembering the church service from almost a year ago that had started her inexorably on a path that led directly to this spot, sitting next to her beloved husband. Her friend Heather had been appalled at Cindy and Kaitlyn’s decision to become escorts but had remained a devoted friend. Upon the announcement of her engagement, she requested that the two escorts start accompanying her to church on Sundays as they were slated to be a maid of honor and a bridesmaid. Heather had lied to her mother that Cindy and Kaitlyn, ladies of the evening, were actually good Christian girls.

Cindy laughed to herself. She and Kaitlyn had appeared at the church door in the finest Milanese fashions, completely out of place. Here she was, wearing the exact same thing and wasn’t far off the mark from some of the worshippers. At that earlier service, a sermon on Mary Magdalene penetrated the two girls’ scar tissue and opened up a wound that demanded to be healed through love and devotion. Well, she had found that love and devotion and here he was sitting right next to her, holding her hand. Kaitlyn likewise found love and devotion with Heather’s brother and was now a happily married WAG in Florida for her husband’s spring training. The miracle had come to pass, with a lot of help from Heather’s determined machinations.

After the service the group strolled over to a café on a beautiful Lombard spring morning for lunch. The four were seated, glasses of wine poured, then John stood up at his seat. "Ms Giovanni, I would love to thank you for the hospitality you have shown my wife and me. You are very gracious. I just got word last night of something very important and I would like to announce it to my wife and the two of you. I just got word from the general I used to work with. I'm going back into the military as an intelligence officer in two months. I shouldn't see much combat or danger as I will be on staff but I will be going to Afghanistan often frequently. I have a devoted wife and two wonderful children and I will do everything in my power to come home safely to you."

Not understanding English, Roxy smiled until Ms Giovanni translated for her, and her face changed to fright and sincere concern. She adored Signore John and did not want to see any harm befall him.

Cindy quietly looked upon her husband with immense pride. Maybe the guys buried at Nettuno had been speaking to him as well as to her. A man's got to do what a man's got to do and John needed to do this.

"You know the army won't approve of a transsexual wife. Once they find out, you won't get promoted."

"I know and I don't give a damn. I'm not doing this for them. I'm doing this for me, and you. When they find out, they find out."

"I love you, soldier."

The day after leaving Milano, Cindy lovingly leaned against her husband, staring at the bearded face on an ancient Byzantine mosaic in the Basilica Di San Vitale in Ravenna, the former capital of the western Roman Empire and later the Ostrogothic Kingdom.

“Do you know that Belisarius is believed by some, including me, to be the greatest general that ever lived?”

“No, I didn’t know that. Even better than Robert E. Lee or Erich Manstein?”

“Yep. He had almost no troops but re-conquered Italy from the Ostrogoths and was crowned in this very city. He could have ruled the entire old Western Empire, but he renewed his loyalty to Justinian, his boss. And did you know, that his wife, Antonina, was once a ho, just like yours truly? Isn’t that cool? She was BFFs with Theodora, the empress wife of Justinian the Great, also a former ho.”

“Do you always most closely identify with the whores, harlots, and royal nymphomaniacs of antiquity?”

“History has never given us enough recognition.”

“I love you.”

“I love you too, soldier, you are very much my Belisarius. He was supposed to be a man of incredible character, just like you, so much so that he was called the last of the Romans.”

“I thought I was Joe Bradley.”

“He was an ex-G.I., living in Rome, working as a newspaper reporter. You are now heading back into the military, so the Belisarius analogy is much more apt. I promise, though, I won’t be unfaithful like Antonina, I love you way too much and I will make your returns from Afghanistan worthy of being sung in epics thousands of years from now once people read my posthumous memoirs.”

“You still have the stricture on wearing all white.”

“Didn’t stop me then, definitely won’t stop me now from the way I feel or the way I act.”

In the morning light rising above the Venetian lagoon, Cindy and John relaxed on the steps in the Piazza di San Marco before going into the basilica. The two had arisen early to enjoy the jewel of the city before it was overrun by tourists who didn't even know what they were even looking at but insisted on taking pictures anyway. Cindy sat on the step in front of John, between his legs that straddled her and occasionally leaned back to feel his comforting presence and warmth. He gently caressed her back and the back of her head and neck. She sparingly fed crumbs of bread to the pigeons to prevent them from flocking to her en masse.

"Do you know that probably the best travel book ever written about this city was by one of the first transsexuals, just after Christine Jorgensen? The book you gave me to read while we were laid up at the Bella Donna."

"Do you know that you are beautiful in the morning light?"

"I'm being serious."

"So am I."

"It's true, it's a beautiful book that gets to the very heart of this city. That's what makes this time together extra special."

John leaned over and gave his wife a tender kiss on the cheek.

"Sometimes I don't think you take me seriously."

"This is coming from a woman who wore a burlap bag to bed one night, then attempted to fake a pregnancy the next day, despite the sheer impossibility. You don't take yourself seriously, part of your endearing charm. I took you seriously enough to fall deeply in love with you."

"Must you always win?"

"Yep, just surrender now."

The two laughed as they passed under the full-sized horses stolen by the crusaders in Constantinople and entered into the Basilica di San Marco. They came to the sarcophagus where the saint's remains were re-interred after their reputed emergence from one of the church's interior pillars.

"Do you know that the body of St. Mark was wrapped in bacon when the Venetians stole it from the muslims in Alexandria? They needed a patron Saint and St. Mark wasn't doing much holy good now that the archdiocese of Alexandria was under muslim rule."

"Hmmm, bacon. Nope, I didn't know that, but this talk of bacon reminds me that we haven't had breakfast yet."

"And do you know that a lot of what we have here, like the bronze horses, was looted by the Fourth Crusade, which was probably a good thing, as the janissaries pretty much destroyed the interior of the Haggia Sofia when they took Constantinople in 1453 and ransacked the city?"

"Do you know you should teach? You would be awesome. You have given me a beautiful, albeit slut-centric, narrative of history all the way from Rome to Venice."

"You really think so? You really think I would be a good teacher?"

"You would never have any trouble with a single male student. That's for damn sure."

The two walked through the Basilica di San Marco for over an hour, silently holding hands, mesmerized by the golden splendor before emerging from the darkened basilica into the golden light of the Venetian spring morning.

"I will go back to school and become a teacher," Cindy proclaimed.

"You made your decision just like that?"

"Just like that. It came from you, so it had to be the right one. But I am not going to go back to school right away. My first duty and obligation is to be a good mother to Jennifer and Daniel. They have so longed for and needed a mother to replace your sister. That is my priority, especially now with you going back in the army. School will wait until Jennifer can dance and Daniel can fish."

"Does this dress make me look fat?" Cindy asked her husband later that evening.

"I'm not answering that."

"I always wanted to ask that, it's the indicator that we are truly a happily married couple."

Cindy wore a beautiful black sequined cocktail dress, black stockings and pumps, and a black velvet cape with a deep purple lining to ward off the evening chill. Matching her dress, she wore dramatic eyeshadow, deep maroon lipstick, and a deep maroon headband. Ms. Giovanni and Roxy had helped her choose the ensemble at the boutique in Milano and tonight she looked truly regal. This would be an evening to treasure for eternity.

The couple had dinner at a restaurant overlooking the Grand Canal, then slowly strolled to the gondolas, holding hands. Cindy's ankle had completely recovered and she walked with confidence and grace. Ms Giovanni would be proud of her. John helped Cindy board the craft in her heels until she was comfortably seated. The gondolier, Stefano, smiled at the charming woman and her dashing husband. He was thoroughly impressed that Cindy spoke fluent Italian and translated for her man, who appeared mesmerized by her commentary and enthusiasm. He usually found Americans to be insufferably condescending but Cindy's warm, childlike wonder made

this a pleasurable night's work. He opened up about life in Venice and its history to the rapt attention of Cindy, who felt like she had crossed over into a fairy tale, the evening was so perfect.

John had paid handsomely so that the voyage through the Grand Canal and the lagoon would be leisurely and extend well into the evening. Cindy huddled close to John for warmth and gripped him with her gloved hands. The light at sunset was soft and kind and the city became hauntingly beautiful at night. Cindy thought of all the lovers who had gone before her, then looked entranced into her husband's eyes, seeing a deeply held love. She teared up and gave John a delicate kiss, barely brushing his lips, while lightly embracing him behind the head.

"I love you. You are everything to me."

John never found himself at a loss for words, but the kiss and her declaration was so perfect as to be Heaven sent. All he could do was return a similarly beautiful kiss to his beloved. The two sat quietly listening to the steady stroke of the paddle and watching the lights of the city dance on the water.

The slight bump of the gondola against its mooring finally called an end to the reverie, although neither Cindy nor John, nor even Stefano wanted the trip to end. They were such a beautiful couple, deeply in love. Reluctantly, John led his wife from the boat but caught a glimpse into her deep blue eyes, now almost as dark as the waters of the Grand Canal in the night. He loved his wife immensely and was so proud of her in this moment.

The two began a loving stroll back to their hotel overlooking the Grand Canal when out of the small crowd along the wharf, a woman appeared, frantically searching for help. She spoke Italian, but Cindy and John immediately discerned she was an American of about thirty. She

beseechingly sought help from the people passing by on their way to a late supper but none would stop and help her. Unfortunately, the locals were callous to American tourists in distress. Cindy and John approached the woman and soon saw the cause of her alarm. It wasn't a local pickpocket; instead it was what appeared to be her husband face down on the sidewalk, spewing vomit.

Cindy laughed, "It figures. Come to Venice for purpose of getting plastered. It's not like he couldn't have done that in Alafuckinbama and saved a lot of money."

Cindy and John helped the drunk get righted just in time for him to vomit all over Cindy's cape. She didn't bat a heavily mascara'd eyelash but held his head down so he wouldn't choke on his own wine-scented puke heavily laden with pasta and tomato sauce. Together, they held the man for ten minutes before they could verify he was clear to move. The woman had calmed down and looked grateful to the couple.

Cindy then stood up, addressing the woman in English, "I'll get us a cab and we will ride wherever you need to go."

"Thank you."

"My name is Cindy, Cindy Kincaid, and this is my new husband, John. We are from New York but we are honeymooning here and loving every minute of it."

"I'm so sorry, I'm so embarrassed."

"No problemo, you didn't put the wine and pasta in him, he did. And you are?"

"Martha, Martha Thomas of Richmond, Virginia, and that dashing figure of a man laying on the cement is my husband, James Robert Thomas, also of Richmond."

"It's a nice city, kind of like Venice, don't you think, but without gondolas on the canals," Cindy joked to put the woman at ease.

"Yes, the similarities between Richmond and Venice are remarkable," the woman laughed.

"We will accompany you back to your hotel. You don't need to carry a beached whale through the lobby and the busboys wouldn't touch him with a gondola paddle."

Just then, a wet spot grew outward from James Robert Thomas of Richmond's groin.

"He doesn't go halfway. When he wants to be a pathetic drunk, he goes all out," Cindy laughed as she and John hustled him into the cab.

The three arrived at the couple's hotel, carried him up to their room and deposited James on the bed. Cindy then went into the bathroom to wash the vomit off her cape. As John and Cindy turned to depart, Cindy said to a relieved Martha, "I'm sure you would like to prefer to meet under more auspicious circumstances. Why don't you meet us for dinner tomorrow night? There is a lovely restaurant that I am sure you will enjoy, the Trattoria da Bepi. See you at eight, no arguing."

When John and Cindy arrived back at the hotel room, she stepped out of her dress, revealing a black lace bra, panties, and garter belt.

"We don't have to let that debacle ruin our truly wonderful evening if we choose not to, my love."

The couple chose not to.

At dinner the following night, Cindy teased the now sober James, "Oh, the puker. You actually don't look bad vertical and without your eyes glazed over."

James cast his face down as he and Martha joined Cindy and John at the dinner table.

The four of them ordered, but Cindy caught James up short.

“No wine for you there, Ace. Venice has fresh spring water coming down from the hills. Consider yourself truly fortunate.”

Martha smiled. The woman bore them no malice.

“Now look, you owe your wife big time for the spectacle of last night. The way I figure it, accompanying us to a night at the opera would be payback. I’m sure she has always wanted to go but never had the courage to say it because it would be an affront to your manhood. But now that you need a gesture to bring yourself back in her good graces, that would be a start, wouldn’t you agree? Tickets are available for tomorrow night at La Fenice. We will see you then. I’m sure you came to Italy with just such an occasion in mind.”

Martha looked thrilled at the thought of watching the opera with her husband. She smiled as the two couples relaxed and talked the remainder of the Venetian night away.

Cindy glowed as she emerged from the bathroom. She had on a deep burgundy sequined gown with an inviting slit up the side which mimicked the off-the-shoulder look of Roxy’s burlap bag masterpiece. Complimenting the dress was a gold chain necklace with a crucifix pendant and gold teardrop earrings. But what truly made her look regal was her broad sincere smile and the sparkle in her eyes.

Gazing on this image, John teared up for the second time since his sister died four years ago. Ms Giovanni had taken the raw energy, unfocused intellect, and deep insecurities of his wife and transformed her into a queen as

she had promised. She stood before him, quiet, confident, and deeply in love.

“You still act like a major league smartass at times, but you look divine, and you acted like a queen when you helped James.”

“Thank you. Shall we be on our way?”

John took her by the arm and led her to the La Fenice.

“I love you, darling,” she softly said.

“I love you beyond words.”

When the couple arrived at the entrance to the opera, Cindy laconically addressed James. “Congratulations sir, you are now participating in the big leagues of romance. Your wife will treasure this occasion for time immemorial. You should be proud taking your wife out the way you are doing.”

The four took their seats and let the opera embrace them with its majesty and beauty. Even James was impressed and held his wife’s hand lovingly throughout the performance. Martha relaxed and enjoyed the feeling of her husband sharing something she truly treasured. Cindy’s words were prophetic and she would remember this evening for rest of her life and smile.

Afterwards the two couples sat at a café, sipping wine, with the exception of James, who stuck with the Venetian water. Feeling redemption, James invited John and Cindy to their house at the mouth of the York River in Virginia.

“Maybe I could even teach you to fish. We have a 25-foot Boston Whaler.”

“That is very kind of you. I would love it if you taught me to fish and my children as well. We will definitely come down there. We would love to have some crabs and clams too. The kids would have a blast going to Williamsburg and Jamestown.”

“The more the merrier,” Martha confirmed. “We look forward to it.”

John had Cindy’s dress off in the staircase leading up to their room and carefully peeked around the corner to ensure the coast was clear. She followed him in nothing but panties and stockings; she could not wear a bra with the tight-fitting evening gown that had a bare back. She laughed as they furtively ran to their room but she boldly hesitated in the door, giving John a loving embrace and passionate kiss until he yanked her inside. He picked her up in his strong arms and carried her to the side of the bed. Placing her ass just before the edge, he tugged Cindy’s panties, off leaving her naked except for her stockings and heels.

In deep ardor and anticipation, Cindy’s eyes rolled back and she imploringly said, “Take me. Take me, my husband. I’m your woman and your wife. Please, I’m all yours.”

Well-lubricated, John held Cindy’s legs up and ground into his wife, feeling her shudder and gasp with delight until he was deep inside her.

“Ooooh, my darling. Yesss.”

John backed out almost to the tip, then rammed to the hilt.

“Aaaahh,” Cindy shrieked.

John did it again, going even deeper, bringing another scream from his wife. “God yes, fuck me.”

He savagely thrust into his wife’s ass until he could sense she was completely lost in blissful oblivion, screaming uncontrollably and pushing back against the cock that impaled her. He then went berserk and mercilessly rode her until their bodies shuddered in concert and his warm,

thick seed flooded her, claiming her as his own, for now, and forever.

Late the next morning, John blissfully lay in bed, half asleep. He was married to an enchanting woman and he felt more power than he ever had, even when calling in air strikes. Then in his somnolent state, he heard it, coming from the shower. His wife was singing the plaintive 1960s love song by Mercy. Her voice and the lyrics bewitched him like the song of the sirens had bewitched Odysseus four thousand years earlier, not far away from where he was sleeping. He rose from the bed and, led by the voice, lurched uncontrollably to the bathroom under its haunting spell. He entered the shower, gave Cindy a passionate kiss, then embraced her with all his heart. When he let her go, he could distinguish tears from water from the shower head.

“I never had the body that could have shared a shower with a man before. Now I do and I have you.”

A day later, Cindy walked arm-in-arm with her husband through the arrival terminal at Newark. She no longer had a limp and carried herself with intense pride and a strong sense of her place in the world. Emerging into the waiting area, she heard her children before she saw them.

“Mommy!” Daniel cried out.

Cindy looked towards the sound of her son’s voice and saw the children standing with Heather and her husband, Robert. She also saw the last people on earth she expected to see in the Newark International Airport arrival terminal and confidently marched up to them.

“Mom, Dad, I see you have met your grandchildren. This is my husband, John Kincaid. Why don’t you meet us all for bul-gogi tonight on Korean Way like we used to. These kids eat far too much pizza for my liking.”

Cindy then turned and headed to claim her baggage with Daniel and Jennifer in tow, telling her how happy they were to have her as a mother.

In two years, Roxy took John and Cindy up on their standing invitation and showed up in New York with a warm hello from Ms Giovanni. The two got her an internship working for Heather who appreciated a young talented woman who had her finger on the pulse of the Milan fashion industry. Cindy called her old boss who arranged for her a part-time job in the company's Manhattan store, selling clothing. Roxy then enrolled in school and married a shy NYU law student she met while on a walk in Central Park. Cindy was once again a maid of honor and Heather and Kaitlyn were two of the bridesmaids. The star of the show, however, was a fifteen-year-old Jennifer Courtney Miller, who had blossomed into a vibrant and beautiful young lady.

The bachelorette party was a very quiet relaxed affair with an eclectic mixture of former Manhattan escorts, one of which was transgendered, now devoted wives and mothers; two currently active employees of La Rosa; the venerable madam of La Rosa herself; a fashion industry executive; and four awkward fashion school students, who felt like guppies swimming with the sharks. They rented a beach house at Chatham on Cape Cod, drank margaritas and ate lobster rolls while listening to Marley and watching the sea birds. The sharks, however, were not feeding and after a few margaritas, they welcomed the guppies into their school like younger sisters

Ms Giovanni approached Cindy, standing happily at the rail enjoying the evening and the company of the women.

“Do you know that Chatham was originally founded as a fishing and whaling port back in the seventeenth century?”

Ms Giovanni laughed and hugged the lady who never worked for her.

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