



SUMMARY: Three guys having a night-on-the-town, find themselves the prisoners of a group of witches who have plans to transform them and use them to help spread evil in the world.

### **TRIUMVIRATE, Part One**

**by Valerie Hope**

THERE WAS A CERTAIN SOMETHING about the bar we walked into that night - a sense of something not quite right. But we were men, and we ignored our instincts to favor the more macho sense of ourselves, trying to force down the distinct sense of unease which pervaded everything around us. Maybe it was the strange looks we were getting, or the way the room kind of got quiet in a perimeter around us.

I wasn't really sure what the fuck we were doing there anyway. Once again, we appeared to be the hapless victims of one of Don Kendall's harebrained schemes, just as it had been in college and in the wild, unsettled years after. Don was convinced that all the fun to be had was to be had in the bars on the rough side of town, all the easy women and the free-flowing cheap booze, the best music and food. The tall, tanned car salesman was quite the hedonist, seeking out bigger and bigger pleasure-center "highs" and dragging us, his stooges, along in every pursuit. We were usually the ones who wound up bailing his ass out and getting him home in one piece. I suppose that was why he kept us around. Don raked a hand through his lank, shiny blond hair and flashed me one of his "seal-the-deal" smiles as we bellied up to the bar.

The bartender was a huge, tattooed neo-Nazi in leather, with a long scraggly goatee and no other hair on his head except his eyebrows. He fixed us with a stern stare - one eye was marled and white by a long, angry scar down the left side of his face - to size us up, and addressed us in a voice like gravel being poured on a tin roof:

"Whaddaya want?"

"Three shots of Jack, three drafts," Don said, slapping a twenty on the bar. He hadn't even asked us - I didn't feel much like hard liquor, but what I wanted didn't seem to matter much to Don.

Brooks Butler, our resident Irishman, turned his pale face on the scary denizens of the bar. He would have been quite the impressive specimen - six foot four, built like the Great Wall of China - if he hadn't had the baby face, milk-white skin, freckles and carrot-top hair. He looked entirely too much like the sidekick in the *Harry Potter* movies to be taken seriously. Which, I suppose, he used to his great advantage in the countless scrapes that Don had gotten us into. He shot his whiskey in a single pull and kept a weather eye on the goings-on.

"Tonight is going to be great," Don said. "I tell you, this is the place to be for action."

"I dunno," I said. "Haven't you read about all the disappearances down here lately, in the paper? This place may be too rough even for us."

"My God, Gene, you are such an old lady sometimes," Don shot back, fishing one of my Marlboros out of the pack in my breast pocket. He lit it and blew a long billow of smoke towards the dark ceiling. Shrugging, I lit one myself and passed the pack to Brooks. Of the three, little Gene Pickett was the odd man out. I was short, only about five eight, and pigeon-chested to boot. I'd scraped by in this crowd by pure wits, managing to think and bullshit my way out of trouble instead of dropping my shoulder and charging headlong like my two giant companions. I think they actually counted on me for that.

"Well, excuse the fuck out of me for caring whether or not I live or die," I snorted. "This place is *rough*, okay? I don't wanna end up some biker's fuck-toy."

"Relax," Don said. "This is gonna be great."

I sipped my beer and didn't relax. A lot of our more colorful adventures at State University had started this way, and more than a few of them had ended up in a fight or in jail. Of the two, in this place, I infinitely preferred jail.

"Y'all lookin' for a good time?" the bartender asked, one eyebrow raised.

"You know where we can find one?" Don shot back.

"Depends," the bartender replied, smearing the gunk on the bar-top around with a greasy rag and trying not to look expectant.

Don slid a twenty across the bar to him and waited.

The bartender pocketed the bill and leaned forward. "This ain't the right place to be cruising," he admitted. "There's a place down on Decatur, over an old cotton warehouse. That's where y'all need t'be lookin'!"

"Anything else we need to know?" Brooks pressed.

"Nah," the grizzly bartender replied. "Jus' tell 'em that Oscar sent ya, they'll let ya in."

"Cool. Thanks, man," Don said, dropping more bills on the bar to pay his tab. With a smile of anticipation, he downed his beer at a single pull and stood, clapping us both on the shoulder.

"The party's waiting," he announced, half-dragging me out of my seat.

"You say so," I grunted, stumbling after.

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We wandered for a while, through a part of town that even the cops didn't patrol. It had the dark, deadly appearance of an action-movie slum, all grey and reflected, with the steam from the manholes just adding to the slasher-flick ambience. The hair on the back of my neck was at stiff attention as we got out of Don's rental car - even the headstrong Don wasn't fool enough to park his precious Jaguar in this part of town - and I had to beat down all of my fight-or-flight instincts just to put one foot in front of the other. Something about this place was just *wrong* - I couldn't put a finger on exactly what, but my instincts were screaming at me for every second we remained. I cursed myself for a follower; there was nothing wrong with getting plastered in a bar somewhere in a nicer, safer section of town. Damn me for having thrill-seeking friends.

The dilapidated cotton warehouse was a fire inspector's nightmare, crumbling wood and decaying brick fronts. The smell of mildew assaulted my nose as we found a creaky wooden staircase in the alley and ascended to the peeling paint of a door on the upper story. Faint sounds of music and voices filtered through the wood.

"This must be the place," Brooks stated. Hail, prince of the obvious.

The door opened slightly to the sound of Don's loud knock. A hulking shadow-shape stood beyond. "Yeah?" it grunted in a guttural basso.

"Oscar sent us," Don said smoothly.

The door opened a bit wider, and the biggest shambling man-mountain of an ogre I'd ever seen gave us the once-over. He was covered with tattoos and scars and dressed in ripped but serviceable biker leathers. There wasn't a single outgrowth of his head that wasn't pierced and his scraggly salt-and-pepper beard was trimmed to demonic spikes which trailed down his chest. He gave us a sardonic half-smile, and we could see that his teeth had been filed down to vicious points.

He took us in - the chinos, the button-down shirts and the loafers - and chuckled. "Oscar sent ya?" he repeated in a booming grunt.

"Yeah," Don said, flashing another twenty between his fingers.

The ogre plucked the bill out of Don's hand and pocketed it. With a wry grin and a disbelieving shake of his head, he opened the door and clomped gracelessly out of our way. We still had to squeeze tightly against one side of the moldy passageway to fit around the man's enormous bulk. The door shut behind us with a boom of finality. The man-mountain was still chuckling as we headed down the malodorous passage towards the flashing lights and music of the celebration.

We stopped at the top of a long stairwell of welded steel, descending into a scene from a hedonist's wet dream. A wild party surged below us on the floor of the warehouse, lit garishly from colored lights suspended on long steel poles which switched on and off in time to the pumping, bass-heavy, almost otherworldly music. Bodies writhed in abandon below and the air above was a heavy incense of any of a dozen smoked intoxicants, stale sweat and the heavy, dewy musk of sex.

"Hell, yeah," Don said over the crashing din. "This is what I was talking about!"

We descended the staircase in a hypnotic haze, watching the wild gyrations of the dancers. As I reached the floor level, a beautiful blonde girl of no more than fifteen years smiled at me, a crack pipe in one hand as she bent over the handrail, pumping in rhythm to the thrusts of the enormous black man who took her from behind. She offered me the pipe in friendly invitation, which I politely declined. She never heard as she lost herself in a screaming, bucking orgasm.

A tall, statuesque Latina sidled up beside me and squeezed my crotch none too gently, giving me a snail-tongued kiss on the cheek as she placed a drink in my hand. I jumped a little, still not numb enough to the spectacle to not be surprised. The Latina favored me with a glittering smile.

"You'll get used to it, honey," she said in a man's baritone. My eyes gaped as she was swallowed by the crowd.

I tried to stay close to my friends as they threaded through the bedlam, shouting encouragement at the various sexual encounters they neared. A midget woman with remarkably young eyes was turning in a slow circle, blowing each of the dozen penises which bobbed around her in turn. Two redheaded twin, no more than teenage boys, grunted and groaned while silver-haired dominatrixes fucked them mercilessly with oversized strap-on cocks. A young woman who looked entirely too much like Don's secretary walked by, glistening with what looked like quarts of semen shot thick over every square inch of her body. She accepted a joint from a friend who began, with three other young women, to lick her clean.

My stomach turned a little. I'd expected some bar-fights and loose women, maybe even a little cocaine, not this scene from Larry Flynt's acid trip. I was filled with an overwhelming urge to leave, to abandon my friends and run screaming into the night, completely negligent of their safety. That sense of wrongness was even stronger here, like we were within an obscenity which the world itself didn't wish to continue.

The crowd almost seemed to part to reveal a row of seven plush leather wing-back chairs, arranged in a half-circle. Each was occupied by a stunningly beautiful woman, dark-haired and dark-eyed. I wondered briefly if they were related. All were clad in dark lace and black leather and looked at the scenes around them like queens on a throne, as if all the depravity around her was being performed for her benefit.

The one who sat at the exact center stood lithely and glided over the concrete floor to Don, Brooks and me. I swallowed hard. She was heavily made-up in the 'goth' style, white pancake makeup and dark eye shadow and lipstick. She set aside her fluted goblet of wine and extended a be-ringed hand towards Don.

"Why, aren't you beautiful," she commented without a trace of sarcasm.

Don, ever the gallant skirt-chaser, took her hand and kissed it chivalrously. "Don Kendall," he announced in his best car-salesman smooth.

"Lilith," she purred, running amused eyes over us all. "And who are your adorable friends, Don?"

Don didn't miss a beat, playing into her 'aristocrat' act like it was his idea.

"My dear friends, Brooks Butler and Gene Pickett," he said, gesturing to each of us in turn. Lilith favored us with satisfied smiles and nodded at our names.

"Tell me, my delicious Don, how did you find out about our little - gathering?" she asked in a voice that all but blatantly promised sex.

"Oscar sent us," Don said.

"Did he?" Lilith said, her eyes twinkling. "I shall have to remember to thank him for sending such interesting specimens to visit our little family."

She turned to the other seated women. "Sisters, our offering is complete."

They all stood smoothly and looked at us as if we were something good to eat. I started to back up a step, but bumped up against a chest which was much broader and stronger than my own. Don's smile was one of total gratification.

"Brooks?" I asked in a very small voice.

"Shut up, Gene," he said, taking one of the dark-clad women's hands in his and leaning close for a sensuous kiss.

"Oh, poor baby," the black-clad woman in front of me half-sang, running a sharp nail along the angle of my stubbly jaw. "Nervous, are we?"

"Look, this was a mistake. I should go," I stammered.

"So soon?" she asked, feigning a little pout. "But the fun has just started, sweetie."

"Sorry, I don't mean to be rude, but I really should be -"

I never got to finish my thought. She unfurled a long-nailed hand, palm upwards, right at the level of my chin. I barely had the chance to focus on the small pile of bluish-white powder in her palm when she blew through pursed lips. I smelled something which reminded me vaguely of cinnamon, and then the swirling lights and bodies coalesced into a thunderstorm of color and noise which claimed my mind utterly.

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I awoke an indeterminate time later, my face pressed roughly between two rusty bars of iron. My swimming vision finally settled and focused on a floor, several yards below me. I took quick stock. I was naked, in a cage suspended on a creaky chain above a concrete floor, in some lost part of the warehouse. Don and Brooks were crammed in the tiny, egg-shaped cage with me, their elbows and knees forced painfully into my kidneys.

As my vision cleared further, I could see six other cages suspended from the ceiling, each holding three naked men, only a few of them conspicuous.

A door opened on creaking hinges, throwing a garish square of light across the floor, and echoing footsteps sounded loudly. Lilith and her six 'sisters' entered, followed by a stream of bent-backed male attendants, who brought in several steamer trunks mounted on furniture dollies. They made several trips before they brought in the last, the seven leather wing-back chairs from the party, and arranged them in the exact same semi-circle as before. They retreated, bowing, without a word.

The women seated themselves, staring up at the cages with open amusement.

"You! You there! What the fuck is going on!" I shouted, hoping the desperation I was feeling didn't show through in my tone. I really needed to sound forceful and menacing right now.

"Ah, Mr. Pickett," Lilith said, smiling. "You're awake."

"No shit, bitch," I spat. "And you're going to let me and my friends - fuck that, you're gonna let *everybody* go right now, you understand me?"

"Or what, Mr. Pickett? You'll shout louder? No one even knows you're here. But please - continue to threaten us. It's very funny to hear you do it," one of the others said.

"Where the fuck are we?" a prisoner in one of the other cages demanded.

"Don't you recognize it, Mr. Pulaski?" Lilith answered. "You seemed to enjoy the party that was here."

"Bullshit," the other one - Pulaski - shot back. "There were people everywhere. Fires. There would be cigarette butts and empty glasses everywhere, and passed out people all over the place. No way were we out long enough for you to wind that party down and clean everything up."

"You're very perceptive," another of the 'sisters' commented. "And, of course, all of that would be true, if there had actually been a party."

"What the hell do you mean, if there had actually been a party?" another prisoner demanded, his cage shaking on jangling chains as he gesticulated wildly.

"Oh, come now, Mr. Reeves," Lilith answered, chuckling. "Weren't you surprised by the amount of people at this party that you recognized? Your sister's maid of honor, for example, the one being gang-banged by seven men in the tire swing. Your next door neighbor from when you were a boy on Upton Avenue? Your sixth-grade teacher?"

I stopped dead. That girl hadn't just looked like Don's secretary. It was Don's secretary. And the girl with the crack-pipe had been Stacey Kramer, my eighth-grade crush. The teenage boys in the circle-jerk with the dwarf woman, my Boy Scout troupe.

"It was a very complicated glamor," one of the 'sisters' admitted. "Very taxing. But the rewards, they will be worth every ounce of energy we expended."

"What the hell is going on here?" I asked, my voice cracking a little.

"It's very simple, Mr. Pickett," Lilith said. "You're to be sacrificed."

"Get the fuck out of here," I said before I could stop myself.

Lilith laughed, a musical chiming arpeggio. "Oh, Mr. Pickett, you're priceless. But if you haven't quite noticed, we're witches. Not these mealy-mouthed Wiccan frauds who haunt your New Age stores selling crystals and dancing naked in the woods. I mean real, old fashioned, Salem trials, devil-worshipping witches."

"Devil-worshipping?" an older man said in a voice that sounded if it would be noisily sick any moment. I couldn't say I didn't feel exactly the same.

"Don't worry your sainted head about it, Father Johannson," one of the witches told him. "I'm sure your soul is in no danger, so long as you kept your bugging of altar boys to the bare minimum. Believe it or not, our Master has no interest in your souls. Dead weight, to him. But he cannot create new life, and he does have need of your bodies and your consciousnesses."

"You see, gentlemen, a great time of change is upon this world," Lilith continued. "A time when our Master's influence can expand to heights only held when the world was peopled with senseless barbarians. You will be the means to that end."

"What are you going to do to us?" one of the original voices - Pulaski - said, whining a little. The fear was starting to get to them all.

"Don't be scared, Mr. Pulaski. Your brave sacrifices will be rewarded by the master. You'll have wealth, influence, power, and no more conscience to hold you back from getting everything you want in this world. And all you have to do in response is garner converts to his cause. Believe it or not, you'll actually enjoy the task once you have your rebirth in the Master's image."

"You're talking shit," I said. "Riddles and horror-movie crap. I want a straight answer, bitch. Are you going to kill us?"

"Oh, no, quite the contrary," one of the witches said, smiling. "We intend to make you more alive than you've ever dreamed of being."

"The Master will like this one," another witch commented. "He has a wonderful depth of spirit. A mystery why he followed his friends, the dim ones, so blindly."

"Every man has his weakness," Lilith commented.

"Sisters, the hour is almost upon us," one of the other witches said. "The new moon will rise soon, when our Master's touch on this world is strongest."

Lilith clapped her hands, the sound echoing through the darkened warehouse like gunshots. Torches and candles sprang to life of their own accord - I wouldn't use the word *magic*, I swore to myself, there had to be an explanation for this. A circular stone altar was set on the floor below us, with three sets of manacles and three sets of leg-irons set into it with thick iron staples. The witches were setting out mystical-looking instruments - among them a whole lot of wicked-looking knives - and books in seven stations around the altar, each marked with a tall candle in an ornate brass stand.

Lilith gestured with one hand and a loud clacking sound echoed through the empty room. One of the cages, farthest from the one I sat in, began to lower towards the floor. Pulaski was one of the ones it held, identified by his voice coming from the mouth of the man who struggled helplessly and spewed obscenities at the gathered women.

The man-mountain from the door guided the cage to the floor in meaty hands and unscrewed the top. With a creak of protesting hinges, the top swung loose and he scooped up the first of the men. Two other men, equally as huge, waited to gather up the others, including the squirming, swearing Pulaski. They were fastened to the altar by wrists and ankles in short order. A small fire was lit at the head of the altar, right in front of Lilith's feet, and she tossed foul-smelling herbs into it, releasing a cloying cloud of thick, black smoke.

There was no paeon to dark gods, no chanting or singing or strange, stilted words from dusty tomes. Lilith simply swirled her hands around in the smoke, eyes closed, and smiled as she said in a clear voice:

"I summon the first of my Master's touches upon the world. I summon Avarice."

Without warning, the flames flared upwards brightly and there was a sense of something - *else* - in the room. A shadow seemed to fall over the altar, something composed of dark mist and smelling like decay and burnt flesh. It made my eyes water.

As I watched, the mist seemed to separate into three thick tendrils, each forcing its way into the nose and mouth of the restrained men on the altar. As they breathed it in, they trembled. I watched as Pulaski, a short, beak-nosed man with Coke-bottle glasses and a pronounced overbite, shook uncontrollably. Almost imperceptibly, his body lengthened and became smoother, dimpled and bulged with trim, tanned muscle. His uneven skin became a rich, even tone and his face became a quintessence of smooth, patrician beauty. Scraggly, curly black hair gave way to shiny, wavy salt-and-pepper and the bald spot covered over. The overbite disappeared into a too-slick smile of straight, chalk-white teeth.

Wordlessly, the three giants stepped to the altar and released the three changed men from the altar as the witches stepped back, taking small sips of wine and smiling at their Master's handiwork. The witch at the position farthest from Lilith blew out her candle with a self-satisfied smirk.

"You will find everything you need over there," Lilith said, pointing towards the steamer trunks in the corner. The naked men walked over, portraits of blue-blooded athleticism, and opened the trunks Lilith had indicated. Wordlessly, they dressed in the garb they found there. Long moments of silence passed before they came back.

None of them was dressed in a suit which cost a penny less than a thousand dollars, custom-tailored and silk. The loafers were Italian and scandalously expensive - minimum four hundred dollars, and that was being conservative. Class rings sparkled from manicured fingers.

"Mr. Leland Brigham, Mr. John Eric Stoles, Senator Martin Pulaski," Lilith said charmingly, offering her hand to be kissed by each of the well-groomed men in turn. "As the CEOs of a major oil company, a major pharmaceutical company, and a Republican senator with significant interests in the tobacco industry, you have become our Master's hand of Avarice on this earth. Gather converts for our Master, infecting the people of this world with insatiable desire for wealth and privilege. Your kindred born of this ceremony will contact you soon. Go and do his good work."

The men smiled. "We will," they said as one, bowing, and turning towards the door. Somehow, I was sure, stretch limos waited outside to pick them up.

A short respite, while the fire was restoked, and they began lowering down another cage, this time the one beside ours. I didn't see anybody awake in that one, but that didn't mean anything. I was too scared to notice much of anything. The giants pulled them out of the cage and shackled them to the altar as before, and Lilith swirled her hands in the fire.

"I summon the second of my Master's touches upon the world. I summon Envy."

Again, the dark shadow filled the room, resolved into a mist - this one tinged green in some kind of poetic irony - and forced itself deep into the lungs of the unconscious men. They trembled as the ones before, as changes began to wrack their bodies.

My eyes sank, and I tried again to silently rouse Don and Brooks. It didn't do any good - whatever the hell Lilith had dosed them with had them in la-la land indefinitely. It was up to me to do something, and hanging naked in a cage sixteen feet above a hard concrete floor, I was fresh out of ideas. It looked so easy in all the ninja movies.

Dimly, I wondered what the women would have in store for me and my friends. Seven witches, seven candles, seven cages, seven Deadly Sins. I tried to remember something of catechism, but in panic I drew a blank past Gluttony.

The tall, healthy men who had been shackled to the altar seemed smaller, now, darker, with a haunted and animal look around their hooded eyes. The giants released them from the table and led them to the steamer trunks as the next candle in line was snuffed. When the men returned, they were dressed in nondescript clothing and looked like nothing special. As a matter of fact, they were so nondescript that I guessed I couldn't describe them at all past meeting them. One was putting a thick pair of glasses on and another stuffed his nervous hands into the pockets of his hooded green windbreaker.

"Kevin Hollister, Michael Beck, Jeff Donley, you are now the foremost celebrity stalkers in the country and our Master's hand of Envy on this world. Gather converts as you go, inspiring all with obsessive desire for that which does not belong to them. Your kindred born of this ceremony will contact you soon. Go and do his good work."

"We will," they said, bowing, and left.

Another break, and another cage was lowered down.

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The call of the witches to Gluttony had produced three fast-food restaurateurs, bidden to ply their wares to the public and convert them to slaves to appetites, and Wrath had produced three street vigilantes whose work in the dark places of the major cities would stir the need for vengeance in the populace. Now only three cages of sweating, aching men were left. The two other men in the cage with me had regained a mumbling form of consciousness, but they were still far from aware of their situation and in no position to help me figure a way out of this crazy, demented dream I'd found myself trapped in.

I watched helplessly, trying to shift my weight so that my numb extremities could feel the flow of blood. I figured I only had a few moments to fight before the giants grabbed me, and I was trying to prepare my abused body for the task ahead. Another cage was lowered and three more men restrained on the altar. One of the men I knew from quiet, disbelieving conversations whispered between the cages as Hale Holland, a hapless cop from the bad side of this town, whisked into the nightmare world on a routine traffic stop. Apparently, the witches had begun gathering their sacrifices for this unholy rite for months - he'd lost track of how long he'd been in their captivity. Strange that I'd not seen any notices in the papers detailing a missing police officer. Perhaps the witches had a way of erasing memories of their captives from the collective consciousness. Or maybe the world had grown so jaded that they just didn't care any more.

Hale gave me a desperate, hunted look as the witches intoned:

"I summon the fifth of my Master's touches upon the world. I summon Pride."

The shadow coalesced again, and the tendrils of mist forced their way into Hale's clenched jaw. He gasped and inhaled deeply, and instead of the customary twitch, his body spasmed in an arch that left only the back of his head and his heels touching the cold stone of the altar. Strange undulations, like huge worms burrowing beneath the police officer's skin, traced paths along his naked body. As they passed, the hard covering of corded muscles on his body seemed to soften and shrink, tightening into smooth curves and swells. The worms passed scarred and misused skin, leaving behind them a wake of silky, glowing softness. Coarse, wiry black hair fell out and drifted to the altar where they dissolved into puffs of foul, acrid smoke.

The worms seemed to gravitate together and merge, until only three remained - one to swirl and eddy around the base of the shrunken man's penis and two around the pink nubs of his nipples. As they swirled, the penis shrank and retracted between the tightening folds of the scrotum as they formed into pouty pink lips framing a soft pink cleft. The nipples swelled enormously, forcing the nipples out, as generous swells gathered beneath them to rest against the prominent but shrunken ribcage. A thick spill of lustrous sable hair spilled out of his head to pool on the stone and the strangled cry rose in pitch and timbre from an agonized baritone to a silky contralto. The body sagged against the bonds as tears leaked from beneath long,

thick eyelashes onto unblemished hairless cheeks and small, perfectly white teeth bit breathlessly into full, kissable lips.

The giants unshackled the three victims and led them to the steamer trunks. This interlude seemed to take a little longer as, well as I could see through the gloom, the ex-cop turned petite brunette sat on a low stool and applied makeup after dressing. When they walked back into the pool of light surrounding the altar, less the light of one more candle, the two men who remained men were dressed in simple khakis and patterned sweaters, with perfectly coiffed hair and easy smiles. Hale Holland stood without discomfort in a maroon skirt and matching blazer, a tight t-shirt barely constraining luscious breasts, smoke hose and three-inch patent leather stiletto heels. He - *she* - touched up an elaborately windblown style to the shining sable hair with long-nailed fingers and flashed a perfect, Miss America smile enhanced by the subtle application of makeup which made the wide brown eyes seem even larger and the kissable lips glossier and fuller still through their thick coat of lustrous red. Gold hoop earrings and a diamond pendant sparkled against amber tanned skin.

"Ken Wright, Alan Hegemeyer, Hayley Holland," Lilith intoned. The ex-cop didn't bat a long, mascaraed eyelash at the use of his - *her* - new name. "You are now highly successful touring self-help authors and gurus and our Master's hand of Pride in this world. Gather your converts into the Cult of Self which you shall establish, encouraging them to act only for their selfish ends and deflect any attempts to garner compassion or empathy out of them. Your kindred born of this ceremony will contact you soon. Go and do his good work."

"We will," they said, bowing. I watched as Hale Holland - now Hayley - set out with a self-assured, sexy gait which set off the girlish wiggle in her hips and jiggle in her breasts to perfection. No trace of the man I'd met a moment ago seemed to remain, other than a tightness around the eyes which only someone who knew her secret could detect. My heart stilled in my chest as the witches retired to their wine, waiting for their servants to clear up the area around the trunks of the empty clutter and make the altar ready for the next batch of sacrifices. I was almost ready for it to be my turn, just to have it over and done with. Most seductive was the freedom with which the sacrifices walked from the warehouse. I thought, if only I could get my freedom, then I would be able to figure a way out of this mess. A large part of my brain still refused to believe this was actually happening - magic wasn't real, this couldn't actually be occurring. But my eyes had seen it, my nose had smelled it, my ears had heard it. I shot a look of purest hatred at Lilith, which she ignored. Bitch was probably used to it, but I made an oath to what little I considered sacred that I would find a way to make her pay for this. Hell, maybe one of the Wrath dudes could help me out.

The giants once again manned the metal capstan which lowered the cages and started twisting. The cage across from mine began to lower, and two of the men I'd come to know throughout this ordeal gave me a look of panicked desperation. I lowered my eyes - there was nothing I could do. I was as helpless as they were. Sinking into a pit of grief and self-pity, I said an awkward little prayer for the two men - Mario LaCosta and Sumir Ragajapolan - to a god I wasn't at all assured was even allowed in this dark room. Never a devout man, I'd never felt exactly close to the divine. Now, I'd never felt further away.

They were taken in struggling bundles from the cages to the altar and secured. The best they'd had to offer - some resounding kicks and elbows - hadn't even fazed the giants. No telling what drugs they were on to dull their pain. I sighed heavily as I realized that no matter how I

tried to prepare myself, fighting against these behemoths would gain me nothing. I tried not to watch as I racked my overwrought brain for a new plan.

Lilith regained her post in front of the fire. Swirling her hands in the noxious smoke, she took a deep breath and intoned:

"I summon the sixth of my Master's touches upon the world. I summon Sloth."

The smoke yawned upwards into the sinister shadow that fell across the altar. The men's eyes were wide enough to show white all around their irises and their mouths opened in silent screams, their pleas for mercy choked back as the thick tendrils of unholy mist forced their teeth apart and fought their way into the men's lungs.

Mario's dark eyes rolled in unutterable horror as he spasmed, the worms underneath his skin beginning their fast and unstoppable track underneath his skin. The coarse, matted hair all over his chest, crotch and legs fell away to puffs of smoke as his skin softened and lightened. To my horror, his impressive size - six foot four and built like a linebacker - dwindled away to a slender, almost waif-like five foot four. The lips plumped and the cheekbones raised, the skin evening to a soft, burnished olive with deep, dark eyes. Pert, insolent breasts rose in spite of gravity on the shrunken chest and erect nipples the size of pencil erasers poked proudly into the chilly air of the warehouse. With a sickening wet crunch, the bones finished rearranging themselves and she sagged to the stone, her innocent-little-girl face framed by a dense cascade of lush, shiny dark curls. High, thick arched eyebrows rose across an unmarred forehead as she sagged in exhaustion.

Beside her, Sumir was undergoing something similar. His lanky height had shrunk with jerking, sickening crunching noises to a petite five-six, and the sun-darkened brown of his hide had softened to a sun-kissed mocha, softer than silk and positively glowing with health. Full, lush hips and a flat belly fluted gracefully into a tiny ribcage, crowned with two perfectly formed breasts - too perfect, with the look of being 'done' - topped with dark brown, erect nipples. Narrow shoulders and a long slender neck supported a heart-shaped face of surprising beauty, the big-eyed innocence framed by a sheet of lustrously shiny black hair, the kind so black that it had blue highlights. The second-to-last witch extinguished her candle as the silent giants set them free, directing them almost gently towards the steamer trunks. The last of the sacrifices, a skinny little med student whose name I hadn't caught, was now a polished and tanned blonde with a strong, self-assured stride.

The interlude was long as the new-formed women applied makeup after dressing and touched up their long, beautiful hair. They returned to the circle of light surrounding the altar and stood expectantly.

The striking woman who had once been Mario LaCosta wore a scandalously expensive cream silk blouse and a black leather mini-skirt which showed off her delicious expanse of long, dark-stockinged leg to perfection. The high-dollar, spike-heeled Manolo Blaniks she wore twisted her legs into feminine perfection. Everything about her oozed money - the black-and-gold Movado watch and the eighteen karat ring on her right hand, the designer black leather bolero jacket which was tucked under the arm holding her Gucci handbag and her six-hundred-dollar attaché case, the two-hundred dollar French manicure and the three-hundred-dollar hairstyle, even the rimless Donna Karan designed eyeglasses which bestrode her long, aqualine nose.

The man was in a tailored Hugo Boss silk suit, the latest fashion, with scandalously expensive accessories and Italian wingtips. He stood in such a way as to show himself off to best effect, but it was eclipsed by the dark-haired beauty who stood next to him in a designer charcoal silk suit with a very short skirt. She was wearing more platinum and diamonds than I'd seen in one place outside a jewelry store, and she regarded the assembled witches with an air of superiority that somehow made her sexier. Long lashes brushed her cheeks when she blinked and she touched up her perfect coiffure with expertly manicured nails painted a deep, cherry red.

Lilith looked exceptionally pleased as she addressed them. "Kevin Collins, Maria LaCosta, Summer Ragajapolan, you are now executives at the major television networks, in charge of programming for prime time, and our Master's hand of Sloth upon this world. Gather converts to our Master by leaving them inert and motionless in front of their televisions, their minds and bodies turning slowly to mush before the entertainment that has become their god. Your kindred born of this ceremony will contact you soon. Go and do his good work."

"We will," they intoned, even their voices slick and polished. Somehow I knew that flashy, expensive cars waited for them outside, and before they'd gone a block they would be on cellphones and Blackberries, already engaged in the business that they had been engineered to run. I began to see the perfect symmetry of the witches' plan. Six of the seven deadly sins were released into the world, wrapped in packages so incredibly attractive that the people of this anesthetized country would not be able to resist unwrapping. They'd play right into the hands of these evil women, and their infernal Master would have his way. Dimly, I wondered how good would ever prevail against a plan this insidious. I regretted not believing more strongly in God, but then I stopped myself, even managing a chuckle over my dad's veteran humor: *There are no atheists in a foxhole*. I guess he was right, but if I was going to the chopping block like this, then I wasn't going to be a hypocrite about it. God hadn't done shit for me, and I wasn't about to wuss out and start turning to him for guidance now. I got myself into this - actually *Don* and *Brooks* had gotten me into this, I corrected myself - and it was up to me to get myself out. A hard knot of resolved solidified in my chest. They could force shadowy mists down my throat and change my body all they wanted. Lilith had said that our souls were ours to keep. I intended to guard mine very closely.

*We'll see, you bitch*, I thought angrily, narrowing my eyes at her. *We'll see if the soul is as powerless as you seem to think it is. When I beat you and your cronies, then we'll see. But until then, you just go on thinking that you've won. It'll make it that much sweeter when I screw you over in front of all your devil-worshipping friends.*

They sipped their wine and recovered their poise in their pompous, flowery way - living the pretentious goth dream, I supposed - ignoring the helpless men swinging above them on the creaking, rusty chain. Idly, I wondered which football player hadn't asked them to the prom in high school and been the one who committed them to this service.

I felt fear vanish. It was the first deep breath I'd taken in a while. It was replaced with a sour, hard, burning core of anger which sent new life and fire down my limbs. I was about to face the Devil himself, and I was bound and determined to spit right in the nasty motherfucker's eye. I could barely restrain a challenging smile.

Refreshed and renewed, the witches resumed their places. The cage began to lower in jerking motions, banging my sore and abused body against the rusty bars as we made our stuttering way to the floor. The giants surrounded us instantly, unscrewing the clever latch at the top and

swinging it away on protesting hinges. Surprisingly warm and gentle hands grabbed me under the arms and lifted me out in a haze of screaming, cramped muscles. I forced down the panic. I needed to focus right now. Going limp, I didn't fight as the giant dragged me out of the cage and slung me like a sack of meal over one shoulder and began his plodding path towards the altar. Behind me, the semiconscious forms of Don and Brooks hardly stirred at the shift in position. Lucky bastards, they wouldn't even be awake for this. Sadly, I wrote them off. They'd wake up and have no idea what had happened, and I seriously doubted that they'd be of much help to me.

Not that I had all that much faith in them, even if they'd been conscious and focused. My time in the cage had forced me to reassess what I'd considered my closest friendships, and had made the determination that I'd never been more to them than just a tagalong. I was the convenient butt of their jokes, their scapegoat and their hapless assistant. They kept me around so they could have someone to bully, and neither of them had ever held any love for me beyond that of convenience. Their deaths were a shame because they meant I'd be alone in this, but the anger generated at their lifelong betrayal was giving me energy, fire to use in the fight against what was about to happen.

Cold stone bit into my back as the giant laid me across the altar. I fought weakly, more reflex than anything else, as he restrained my wrists and ankles in the icy-cold iron shackles. I closed my eyes and marshalled my strength. I had no idea what was about to happen inside me, only the external changes that I'd viewed from my vantage point high above. I had no way to judge what attacks would occur on my mind and heart, so I just dug in. Whatever it was, I intended to survive it. Survive it, and live to exact my revenge on Lilith and her pasty-faced sisters. It was more than enough to keep me alive through this. I took a deep breath as the witches resumed their places by the candles, Lilith's the only one left burning, bathing her white face in a sick yellow glow. They looked upside down from my vantage point, and elongated like some strange modern art portrait.

Lilith steadied herself - evidently the rite was taking a toll on her - and drew a deep breath as she intoned, swirling her hands in complicated patterns in the billowing, noisome smoke issuing from the fire.

"I summon the seventh and most powerful of my Master's touches upon the world. I summon Lust."

I closed my eyes as the shadow fell across the altar, finding that hard core of myself deep inside and holding to it as tight as I was able. I was buckled in. Now it was just waiting for the ride to start.

A gentle but insistent nudge at my lips, like a strangely questing finger, was my cue.

Holding tightly to who and what I was, I opened my mouth. Cold, wet half-solidity slid past my teeth and over my tongue, stretching my throat and burning into my lungs.

I don't know if I kept my grip on myself or not. I only knew pain.



SUMMARY: Three guys having a night-on-the-town, find themselves the prisoners of a group of witches who have plans to transform them and use them to help spread evil in the world. part two

## **TRIUMVIRATE, Part Two**

**by Valerie Hope**

THE SMOKE FORCED MY JAW open wide, and it felt like a cold, semi-solid boa constrictor was flowing unimpeded down my open throat and burning its way into my lungs. Agony like a million diamond razor splinters flowed down my blood vessels and under my skin.

*You're Gene Pickett! You're stronger than this!* I told myself frantically, like a mantra.

Deep, murky darkness seemed to congeal inside me, in my heart and lungs, and spread slowly down my arms and legs, up my neck and into my eyes and brain. I felt my memories being rearranged none-too-gently. Every time one of the smoky fingers rummaging inside my brain strayed too close to the hard core of resolute anger inside me, thought, I slapped out at it, crying *I am me! You're not welcome here!* and it seemed to withdraw. I only defended the parts that seemed the most important. So what if it erased my understanding of tax law for small corporations, or my first bike. When this was all over, I was determined that Gene Pickett would *not* be dead.

The agony was incredible, worse than anything I could ever hope to describe in the paltry medium of words. It was like every living cell, every particle of my body was being ripped apart one at a time, burned and melted down, re-cast and reassembled in an agonizingly slow process. Alternating waves of searing heat and numbing cold passed down the length of my body.

I could feel the tendril inside my body, branching into the intricate tree of my bronchi and bronchioles deep within my chest. Then, with a ripping sensation that sent tears leaking from my clenched eyes where I thought no tears were left, the branches separated and began to roam my body at will, crossing in paths of burning fire.

My body bucked like a wild thing as bones cracked and joints separated. I tried to scream around the pulsating gag of the demon mist in my throat, but no sound escaped past a muffled 'oh' which was lost in the symphony of cracks, crunches and wet slurps as my joints dislocated one by one. My arms and legs flowed like liquid as the worms tracked their lava trails under my skin. The wiry hair on my arms didn't fall out, it was more like it was plucked out one by one to fall onto the unforgiving stone and vanish in puffs of brimstone smoke. The skin in the trail of the worms was tanned and glowing, silk-smooth and sensitive, the flesh pebbling in the chilly air of the warehouse.

*I'm me! I'm me! I'm me!* I howled inside my fragmenting mind.

Something seemed to be growing inside me, in fiery tentacles around my heart and throat, something dark and malevolent that was assuming control over my abused body. It settled

into me, pulsing and growing like a cancer, testing abused muscles and seeming altogether pleased as the jerking limbs responded to its commands.

I pushed my mind between this cancer and my body, prying them apart, screaming wordlessly inside my head. The thing stuck fast in parts, but it did fall away in others.

My memories dissolved and reformed to some strange pattern that I couldn't discern. The agony of the crawling worms was slowly abating, and a warm feeling was replacing the torment, something I couldn't exactly identify. I looked at the smooth, silk-soft amber skin which sheathed my narrow, denuded arms and felt something I hadn't expected - a stab of fierce pride at its unblemished softness. And something darker, more sinister, like a strange addiction that I couldn't put my finger on. I clung tight to that kernel of anger, half in rage and half in desperation, and repeated my mantras of identity until they seemed a part of the agony. But I didn't relent. A dark chasm of nothingness stretched underneath me, and I knew that if I stopped for a moment in my desperate clutch to my innermost self, that nothingness would claim me and I would be no more.

That outcome was unacceptable.

The worms seemed to be fusing together, joining and congregating in the areas of my nipples, my groin, and the nape of my neck. In burning paths, the worms burrowed their burning acid way up the back of my skull and over my scalp, digging into the sensitive flesh of my face. My face shattered with a teeth-jarring crack and the bony planes of my skull swam underneath my skin, rearranging themselves as a screaming pull at my scalp seemed to drag my head backwards, into the stone.

There was a pulling in my middle, a horrible indrawing as the worm there circled slowly, tracing its fiery trail around my penis. I felt my testicles ascend into my body, pushing their way past tissues and organs to embed themselves in my belly. The scrotum elongated, drawing backwards towards the anus, and a soft cleft formed between the pink-brown lips that had once housed my sex glands. There was a tearing sensation as my body tore itself an opening into the re-formed organs in my midsection and a burning bud of pure sensation that had once been the head of my penis settled into the soft embrace of the lips. More than that, other burning points of pure sensation were making themselves known elsewhere - just within the puckered ring of my rectum, along my lips and the tip of my tongue, deep in my throat and just beneath my nipples.

The last burning embers of the worms spun dizzily around my nipples, pushing them past their normal boundaries to proud points standing from brown areolae, somewhere near the size of mini-marshmallows. As I looked down through long, gossamer eyelashes which brushed my cheeks when I blinked, I saw the flesh over my shrunken ribcage begin to swell upwards beneath my nipples, ballooning out into perfect spheres on my chest which stood perkily despite the pull of gravity. The unmistakable look of 'done' tits filled them out to a little-too-perfect proportion, incredibly large to my eyes, somewhere, I guessed, near the size of my head.

The carnage inside my mind was even worse than the ravages of my body. Memories were erased and amended and placed back, out of sequence. My speech no longer mirrored my thoughts, and strange images became associated with words and sensations. The tendrils of the cancerous thing wrapped around my heart were growing inside there, and I kept the hard kernel of my self-awareness well insulated from that part of my mind. I couldn't fight that

awful growth, so I endeavored to protect that which was essentially me from the embrace of the sick, evil tentacles which were spreading up my spinal column and into my brain.

Breathing deeply at last, the thick tendril withdrew itself from my mouth and I moaned, a silky and husky soprano which still, even after everything else that had happened, managed to surprise me as it came from my new, more slender throat. The last vestiges of the worms evaporated out of my fingertips, and I felt them pull my fingernails out to a long, feminine length as they dissipated, working one last deprivation on my ravaged body. I slumped against my bonds, trying not to cry. The dark, cancerous part wanted me to be exultant, but I wouldn't surrender control to it. I just tried to look happy, and hoped my time-tested lying abilities wouldn't fail me.

I turned my head to my left, shocked for a moment at the silken pillow of curly dark hair which cushioned my head. It shone in the firelight, well cared-for and lustrous, the hair of a woman who spent a great deal of time and money on her appearance. The pride flashed again. *Damn right I look good*, it seemed to say, and a fierce new part of my mind seemed to find a burning joy in the thought. I didn't fight it.

Next to me was my friend Don. Gone was the polished car salesman, with the tanned skin and the well-tended blonde mop which drove the bar girls wild. The broad, muscular chest and arms were willowy and supple, the big 'done' breasts standing proudly against the pull of gravity and the nipples hard and erect in the chilly air. The skin had the burnished golden look of time spent in a tanning salon, with pale untanned triangles of a bikini over her massive breasts and neatly trimmed pubis. Long eyelashes framed bright blue, guileless eyes and a lustrous cascade of pale honey hair flowed in a silken river around the heart-shaped face. The narrow, apple-cheeked face with the full, pouty lips looked at me without recognition for a moment, then smiled a little.

I turned my head in the silky embrace of my dark curls and looked over at Brooks. My friend, the towering muscular tower now looked to be a few inches shorter than myself, skin like pale cream with only a light dusting of freckles across the pert button nose. Wide, seductive green eyes regarded me through thick auburn lashes and lips formed into a permanent moué sucked breath silently in the wake of the agony. Again, the narrow chest was crowned by over-large, perfectly 'done' breasts with pink nipples. A lush curtain of straight red-blond hair, shining yellow in the firelight but seeming to glow all on its own, framed the girlish, heart-shaped face with the large green eyes, the porcelain skin and the high, arched auburn brows.

Methodical, gentle fingers tugged at my wrists and ankles, releasing my restraints as Lilith blew out the last candle, exhorting the room in praise to her master. Silently, as they had been throughout the whole long process, the giants lifted me and my companions to our dainty feet, giving us a moment to adjust to the new proportions and weight distribution. My ass felt huge, but I knew it to be as rounded and perfect as that of Don or Brooks, nipping in to a tiny little waist and a stomach smooth and dimpled by the soft swells of abdominal muscle. We set off across the room at a languid pace, our walks more of a slinky glide which sent our bare buttocks in a delicious figure-eight through the air behind us, the hair trailing behind us like a bridal train in the air.

The giants motioned towards a set of three low stools and two open steamer trunks. The cancerous thing inside me pulled me towards them, and I wasn't able to fight it - it had claimed a part of my mind which I hadn't defended at all. I pawed through the clothes in the

trunk, discarding and selecting items with a speed and a calculation borne of the part of my mind where the cancer had grown.

Finally surrendering my place at the trunk to Don, I gathered my selections and walked to an empty space near one of the stools. I paused briefly to turn on a set of hot rollers and the light over a little makeup mirror set up on one of the empty trunks, forming a little island of light in the gloom around me.

I started with a black lacy patch of wispy cloth which turned out to be a barely-there thong. I slid it up my hairless legs and over my perfectly rounded bubble-butt with a delicious little shimmy which set my enormous breasts jiggling. The thin strip of cloth settled between the lush cheeks of my ass as I settled the waist strap and made sure the lips of my dewy pussy were covered. Not that there was much cloth available for that job. Next came a matching black lace strapless bra, the little tag announcing that I wore a 36DD. I slid it over my shoulders and hooked it behind my back like I'd been doing it all my life, making sure the partially padded cups pushed my tits together in an eye-riveting display of cleavage. Once the cups were set, I slid a pink sequined tube top over my head and stuck my arms through, sliding it down my torso until the stretchy lycra hugged every delicious curve of my upper body, leaving my bellybutton bared. Then it was a second-skin black vinyl skirt that barely covered my crotch and left the waistband of my thong showing temptingly above the waistband. Sitting, I took a moment to thread a navel ring with a dangling crystal strawberry through the hole that had appeared in the flesh over my navel and screwed the top ball on expertly, even though my French-manicured nails lapped the ends of my fingers by a good three-quarters of an inch. I didn't know how I could do anything with these talons, but the cancerous thing in my head seemed to guide me expertly. Fine by me. I didn't want to spend weeks trying to learn how to function with these long nails, or how to walk with a butt that seemed the size of a crosstown bus. I could deal with the sexy slink. I focused through the gloom towards the reclining figure of Lilith. I could put up with every damn thing, so long as I got my chance with her. Whatever magic was keeping me from screaming like a madman at the change in gender and habit was fine, it just brought me one step closer to the reckoning.

Without downshifting, I took up a tail-comb and began separating my hair into sections which got wound around the oversized rollers which had just reached their heat. It took a remarkably short time to have my whole head crusted with the over-large rollers, considering the huge mass of thick, soft hair I had. I sprayed my hair liberally and took up foundation and an applicator sponge as it set.

My hands working independently, I stared at my flawless face in the makeup mirror. I had deep, unfathomable brown eyes, so dark they were almost black, framed by thick, long eyelashes and a soft broken curve of dark browline which gave me a very seductive, intense look. My cheekbones were high and smooth, and the skin of my cheeks was only a little lighter than the rest of my face, giving the illusion of being well-lit or wearing concealer even when I wasn't. Sexiest of all were my lips, pouty and puffy and begging to be kissed, or to wrap themselves lovingly around a stiff cock.

*Now where in the hell did that thought come from?* I thought in alarm. But then, knowing that I had been transformed into the living embodiment of Lust, released to be a plague on the earth and harvest unsuspecting souls for the Prince of Darkness, I suppose I would have been an idiot to believe otherwise. The dark, cancerous part of my mind danced with wild images of sexual abandon, of me on my back underneath a huge-dicked man with no discernable face or

with my soft chin buried in the folds of a woman's pussy, and every connotation and combination of men and women that I could fit into. It was when the image of me, lying atop a man with his cock pumping in and out of my ass, while another knelt between my spread legs spearing my hungry pussy, a hard shaft in each slender hand, one pumping wildly down my throat and yet another sliding in the soft cleft between my pushed-together breasts began to give me a heavy, damp sensation in my middle and the fiery points of my clitoris - God, it was my clitoris, and it wasn't only the one between my legs, but also the ones that Lilith's unholy spell had put in my rectum, my nipples, my lips, my throat and the last deep inside my vagina - began to spread undeniable tendrils of pure pleasure through my body that I forced my mind away from the images, lest I lose myself and what tenuous control I had.

I looked down into the mirror to check my progress and was amazed. I put my makeup on heavily, and my eyelids were dark with smoky black shadow that gave me a very sultry, sleepy and glamorous look. Dark, thick liquid liner rimmed my eyes above and below, making my eyes into striking dark pools in the coppery perfection of my face. A barest hint of silvery glitter sparkled just under my eyebrows, making my eyes hypnotic and almost impossible to look away from. A dust of rose on my high cheekbones, and several thick, glossy coats of earthy pink on my sexy lips completed the tableau. I was just brushing the third coat of mascara on my already incredibly thick and lush lashes when the stab of pure pride, the fierce love of my sex appeal and perfect appearance, cut through my mind. I *did* look good, and sexy, and perfect.

And I fucking *loved* it.

Quickly, I took the now-cooled rollers from my hair and let it fall, fingercombing it to fluff it out a little. Then I sprayed each section freed from the roller with a generous coating of heat-activated spray, turned my head upside down and teased and backcombed the roots until they stood up. I did this with every section, then sat up and fingercombed again until the spirals loosened, giving me a teased-out, glamorous appearance, windblown, looking for all the world like I'd just been masterfully fucked in the back of a car or in a motel room somewhere, but still ready for the cover of *Vogue*. I blew myself a heartfelt kiss in the mirror. I then fastened a seven-row rhinestone choker around my slender neck, hung my ears with enormous hoops which brushed the tops of my shoulders. I'd teased my hair out to such an extent that my head actually looked unnaturally small, and the effect made me look young, innocent and ripe for the picking. I couldn't suppress the wonderful flow of fierce pride. I loved the way I looked. A part of me not entirely given over to the cancer of the spell couldn't wait to wash it all off and start over with something new, something different.

I settled a mass of jingling silver bracelets around both wrists, a platinum cuff around my left bicep set with an enormous pink topaz, and put platinum and gold rings either plain or encrusted with diamonds on all the fingers of each hand, including the thumbs. Giving my hair one last cursory look, I took up the little clutch purse beside the makeup I'd been given and opened it, dropping in this day's shade of lipstick and a powder compact in anticipation of any touch-ups the day might require. Inside the tiny purse I saw a pack of cigarettes, a gold-and-silver ladies' butane lighter, a pair of pink wraparound sunglasses, some gum and a wad of cash bigger than a drug dealer's. I snapped the catch and turned to wait for my friends.

Don was just finishing up, tugging up the tighter-than-sin red vinyl tube-dress to show off his magnificent tits to best advantage. He - *she*, now - wore a red mesh top over the bodice of the dress, its long sleeves encasing the creamy flesh of her arms and upper body in teasing scarlet

fishnet, serving to excite the imagination rather than diminish it. Red silk stockings clung to her peerless legs and the tops of a scarlet garter just peeked under the short-short hem of the minidress. Her lips and nails were of a matching red to the dress, which stood out on the nearly colorless effect of the pale foundation and pale honey-gold hair which was teased up into a glamorous cascade similar to my own. She slung a tiny little black clutch over one shoulder, and rubies sparkled on her fingers. She, too, wore dangling hoops which almost brushed her shoulders.

Brooks stepped up and threaded a slender arm through my own. His was a sweater-dress, again barely covering his crotch, in a black rib-knit with keyholes on both shoulders and baring the tops of his pale porcelain breasts. Burnished red-gold hair spilled in straight, shiny waves over his narrow shoulders. His - *her* - eyes were made up in violets and pinks, dramatic and overdone in a way that made them almost impossible to look away from. Dangling strands of rhinestones nestled in the rabbit-soft expanse of her hair from where they swung from her ears. She shifted a gold lamé clutch from one hand to the other, showing off her diamonds and one enormous sapphire on her right index finger. Her silk-clad toes made little fists on the cold concrete, and I could see that her toes were painted to match her pale pink finernails and glossy lips.

Smiling without really meaning to, feeling a stab of pride that my friends were so hot as well as myself, I slid into a pair of skyscraper-heeled lucite 'stripper shoes' which had a seven-and-a-half inch heel and a three-inch platform. They looked perfect with the outfit - apparently the cancer infecting my mind had a keen fashion sense - and I walked in them effortlessly, as if I was born wearing them. The only thing they served to do was shorten my steps a little and make my slinky walk even sexier. As my girlfriends slipped into similar tall platform heels, we made our way back to the firelit circle of light around the altar where we'd been destroyed and subsequently remade.

Lilith and her 'sisters' were standing at one end of the altar, viewing their creations with blatant pride and satisfaction. All of them looked tired and drained from their efforts, but sated and proud of their handiwork.

We stopped at the edge of the light and struck runway-model poses. I was, at least, gratified to see that even without the platform heels, I was now the tallest of the group. After years of craning my neck to talk to Don and Brooks, we'd see how they liked it with the seven-inch heel on the other foot.

Lilith drew a deep breath and intoned, "Dawn Kendall, Brooke Butler, Gina Pickett, you are now the highest-paid adult film stars and feature dancers in the country, and our Master's hand of Lust in this world. Gather converts to our Master by displaying your bodies and inspring mindless sex among all that see you. Your kindred born of this ceremony will contact you soon. Go and do his good work."

I bowed with the others, and hoped the blatant insincerity of my mumbled "We will" wasn't caught by the self-satisfied witches. We made a catwalk turn as one and stepped away, towards the doors and our freedom.

\* \* \*

I settled some stylish wraparound shades on my slender nose as I stepped out into the mid-morning sun, my skirt swishing around my hairless legs. The street was largely deserted and

the smell of awakening city was all around. Waving a good-bye to my two companions, I walked immediately towards a silver Mazda RX-8 convertible with vanity plates reading 'HLZBLZ 1,' knowing instinctually that it was mine. Don - now and forever Dawn, even my memories were edited to have me believe that my friends had always been female and always been named Dawn Michelle Kendall and Brooke Lysette Butler, if the core that I'd clung to during the storm of pain and rebirth hadn't remained whole. Those memories came from the cancer, the same memories that told me I was born female, and my name had always been Gina Elizabeth Pickett. It told me I'd been a cheerleader in high school and had gotten my associate's degree in accounting at a community college by stripping at a local tit bar. It told me I lost my virginity to Mike Rhodes when I was 14 in the backseat of a Ford LTD and that my favorite color was bubblegum pink. I knew, somehow, that none of these things were true, but I had no idea what the original truth had been. The cancerous memories were all I really had to go on, and life was very confusing. Still, I slid into the car with my knees together, smoothing my skirt underneath me, and rotated myself behind the wheel, like I'd been born to these feminine mannerisms, the same as I could function in the skyscraper heels and with the long, square-cut fingernails.

Dawn had plopped herself into a white BMW Z4 roadster convertible and was roaring away, blonde hair flying behind her, pantomiming a 'call me' to me and Brooke as she headed north towards downtown. I noticed that her vanity plates read 'HLZBLZ 2' to Brooke's 'HLZBLZ 3.' A false memory told me that we'd all gotten our vanity plates at the same time and had consulted each other before naming them after our stage act, 'Hell's Belles.' A part of me even remained a little petulant that I hadn't been able to get 'SXYBTCH' as mine.

I was snapped away from my musings as Brooke called my name and blew me a kiss as she pulled away from the curb in her blue Jaguar XJS convertible and gunned the powerful motor. She was gone around the block while I was still fishing for my keys.

Vague memories told me that I lived to the east, in the ritzy Belle Isle district to the west of the city. Shrugging to myself, not really knowing what to do or what infernal purpose Lilith and the others had set me on, I decided that I could probably use a shower and some rest before I wasted a whole lot of time figuring a way out of this. I stuffed the key in the ignition and took stock of where I was - my sense of direction seemed way off, but there was a part of my mind that knew exactly which lefts, rights and exits I needed to take in order to make my way home. And there was always the rhinestone-encrusted pink-and-white swirl cellphone sitting in the console behind the gearshift.

I scanned through the phone book quickly, paging through with repeated presses from my long, shiny thumbnail. In it were all the personal numbers from every one of the people who'd been converted on the altar in Lilith's dark ceremony. I guess that was what she meant when she told us that our kindred would be in contact. Dawn and Brooke were on my speed dial, as was Lilith - whose last name turned out to be Kraft. One of the cancerous memories surfaced, telling me that those who knew her in the 'actual' world called her Lily, only those who knew her secret called her Lilith.

I sat back against the leather interior and fluffed out my hair with my fingers, then fished out a cigarette - a long, slender Capri 120 which looked like a little straw to that part of me that was still Gene Pickett, even though my mind told me I'd always smoked this brand, since I'd picked up the habit behind the band hall in junior high. I lit it with a scandalously expensive gold-and-silver butane lighter, took a deep drag and blew the smoke over my shoulder as I threw the car

into gear. I hardly even noticed the perfumy taste of the makeup or the glossy pink stain on the filter tip of the cigarette - something about the cancer was keeping me from freaking out, which I supposed was kind of a blessing. The stereo kicked on as I brought the engine to life - apparently, I really dug Christina Aguilera, since the thick beats of a dance remix reverberated off the crumbling building fronts. Letting the clutch out all at once - not an easy thing to do in platform heels - I peeled out, heading down the street in a squeal of tires and a roar of rotary engine and the thumping dance beats from the stereo.

Men on the sidewalks stopped and smiled, gesturing and calling out their appreciation for my huge breasts and perfect face, my flowing dark hair and my flashy clothes and car. I tried to ignore it, but every comment, every wide-eyed look, seemed to settle into me and I discovered I loved the attention. It was almost like I was feeding on it - the more I had, the stronger I felt, and the stabs of fierce pride I'd felt about my appearance seemed to blend into a continuous high which made me feel light, airy and free. I put the hammer down a little as I roared onto the freeway, barely cutting off an SUV who blared its horn at me angrily as I ducked in front. I didn't even look back, flipping a \$200 manicured bird over my shoulder without even turning my head. Apparently, I was a Class A bitch on top of everything else, and there was an alarming self-satisfied smugness that radiated from inside at the thought of that. I groaned. I'd hated women like me when I was a guy, so smug and self-important, arrogant and unconcerned with the feelings of others. That was going to be a hard fight to win. But I'd held on to compassion through the storm of fire and filth that had torn my body and mind apart and reassembled them. I got the feeling that if anything could help find me a way through this, it would be that compassion for others.

I gunned the little sports car through the thickening freeway traffic like a pro, ducking it into tiny little spaces and pissing off any of a number of people in the process - those that weren't goggling at my beauty open-mouthed, of course. I was certainly worth goggling at, I was able to surmise. A body absolutely built to be adored and and worshipped, designed for sin and pleasure. I found myself doing things just to increase my sexuality, like smoking the long, slender cigarettes one after the other, adjusting my tube top in ways that pushed my cleavage out and made my big fake tits jiggle deliciously, sucking on my bottom lip as if in concentration, even something so simple and brushing my hair behind my ear with one hand was all carefully calculated by the evil malignancy in my brain to make me more and more desirable.

I'd pulled onto the busy boulevard that my altered mind told me was the street where my condo was. Now it was time to see if I could take control of things. Internally, I braced myself - a part of me was terrified that if I showed myself within my own mind, that this cancerous evil in my heart and brain would attack me and I'd be no more. But it was all for nothing, all the pain and grief and terror I endured, if I didn't learn to take control from the cancer. Reaching out with my concentration, I seized control of the long, tapered legs and the slender wrists. Like waking up out of general anesthesia, I felt a deeper and somehow more real sensation of the feelings, the soft hair against the back of my neck, the sunglasses on my nose and the wind in my smooth face, the perfume of my lipstick, the hard tap of my long fingernails against the gearshift as I waited at a traffic light, the soft whisper of linen against my thighs. It was like my senses faded in, like the beginning of a movie. My vision had even improved, it seemed, the slight blurriness over distance gone.

I only had a moment of savoring these new sensations, particularly the strange-beyond-strange feeling of vacancy between my thighs, before my senses fogged over with a burning,

pink-hazed fire which seemed to suffuse every square inch of my smooth, silken flesh. I trembled a little, blinking my eyes rapidly and shaking my head to clear it a little, but the sensation didn't abate. I dimly became aware of a hungry, gnawing ache in my belly that spread like fire to my extremities.

Unsure what was happening to me, I tried to focus on other things. The yellow stripe on the street, the streetlights, the billboards. One particular billboard caught my immediate attention, a skinny young man and woman posing together provocatively, advertising a new fragrance. Both favored the audience with intense, smoldering looks. My mind immediately supplied a steamy, torrid fantasy of being on my hands and knees on a bed made with pink satin sheets, candles all around. The man pumped me from behind at a rapid, deep pace while my tongue worked frantically on the young girl's pink pussy. Her screams sounded like beautiful music to me as an uncontrollable building began deep inside me, pulsing with the rhythm of the man's hard thrusts...

The burning, pink-edged hunger seemed pleased with the image, and I realized what I was feeling - a pure, distilled form of lust, a painful need for sexual release and gratification that was maddening in its scope and urgency. I honestly didn't know if I could contain it - I suspected that was what the cancer was designed to do. I thought my head was going to split as my lips parted and I began to pant a little. I seemed to be losing control of my body a little as the need took up more and more of my attention, and the car swerved out of the lane a little, towards the shoulder. The right-hand tire bit into the rumble strips on the side of the road, put there to keep drivers awake, but they set a delicious vibration through the seat. Unthinkingly, I ground my crotch into the seat cushion and accelerated, making the vibrations more intense.

I don't know if it took seconds, minutes, hours or months, but the inexorable feeling of a cup filling and brimming over inside my belly poured molten joy through every cell in my body, down to the tips of my manicured nails and every strand of my dark, silky hair. I bit my lip to keep from screaming aloud. My hands shook and my heels drummed against the floorboard of the car.

And miraculously, the hunger inside me seemed to abate a little bit. Not much - I still felt like I was on fire inside - but enough to focus my thoughts a little. I lit a trembling cigarette and pulled my convertible into a nearby parking lot to settle my nerves. On unsteady legs, I stood up - knees still femininely pressed together - on the pavement and walked into the convenience store to buy a cup of coffee and a paper.

The bored-looking attendant perked up immediately as I walked in, giving me an unashamed stare of appraisal. I rewarded him with a sultry smile, feeling the 'pride high' kick back in, now tinged with small fantasies of blowing him behind the counter, just to slake the thirst of lust which coursed through my nearly-perfect body. My walk became just a trace sexier and slinkier, my hips swaying just a little bit more, in response to the needful feelings that almost ripped me apart before.

Browsing in a half-stupor, I picked up random things to justify my presence in the store - a bottle of Sobe tea, an *Allure* magazine, a newspaper and a small bottle of aspirin. I was just starting to walk towards the register and the drooling cashier, who was already composing his clever pick-up line in his head, I could see, when a couple came in. I could sense by the tense whispering and the body language that they had been fighting. The man was working his hardest to salvage his pride, remaining stiff and straight and maintaining an aura of hurt

dignity, while the woman shied away and separated from him as quickly as she was able. She made a beeline for the magazine stand while the man went to the cooler to pick up a soda.

I felt the cancer inside me shift a little, almost like it was sniffing the wind. I fought with uncertainty, but couldn't stop the pull towards the woman, which made me edge closer to her and give her a look of heartfelt sympathy.

"Are you okay, sweetie?" I whispered.

She started, then sniffed and wiped her eyes quickly to blur her tears. "I'm fine."

"I know it's none of my business, but you don't look fine," I countered.

She sighed. "I guess it's obvious," she said. "It's nothing. I just had a fight with my husband."

"I'm sorry," I said, patting her hand gently. "Have you been together long?"

"Seven years," she said. "He just gets so pig-headed sometimes."

"Believe me, I know, honey," I said conspirationally. "I get the feeling you'll work it out. Seven years, that's a long time to learn how to stay together. Kids?"

"Three," she answered. "Eight, ten and thirteen."

"I'm impressed," I said, smiling.

She gave me a pained smile. "Thanks," she said. I offered her a Kleenex to wipe her nose, which she accepted gratefully. I watched her as she scanned the racks of magazines, my dark eyes looking her over as I wondered why I felt this pull towards her, why the blackness inside me was forcing me closer. A strange, urgent fire was spreading in my chest as I examined her.

"I'm going to go get some ice," the man announced without looking at his wife, and she nodded meekly. He brushed past me, giving me a very admiring look, and walked outside.

The wife choked back a sob and wiped her eyes again. "I hate it when he gets all cold like that. I could just strangle him."

"You'll be fine, honey," I said. "As a matter of fact, I might have something that will help, if you wanted."

"What's that?" the woman asked, looking at me innocently.

The cancer rose up in tremendous power and I felt my eyes flash. The woman stared at me, transfixed, as I pulled down the tube-top and one cup of my bra to expose my swollen nipple. Threading my fingers through the woman's soft, limp hair, I pulled her face towards my breast. She didn't resist, totally under my spell. Her soft lips - puffy from crying - fastened around the nipple automatically and began to suck.

With a feeling equal parts agony and exultation, I felt the fire which had built in my chest free itself and flow, down the perfect sphere of my breast and out my nipple in a torrent. The woman suckled and swallowed reflexively, drinking deeply of the fire that flowed out of me. My eyes closed in ecstasy as she sucked my essence. My fingers tightened in her hair and my chin thrust upwards. It was all I could do to suppress a loud moan.

Finally, sadly, the fire drained out of me and I looked down. The woman unfastened herself from my breast and looked up at me. The formerly hurt but friendly eyes were hard now, all

mercy and compassion covered by a limitless appetite, a need for self-gratification that took the life and sparkle out of her face. I noticed that her hair was now teased and styled more elaborately and she wore heavy makeup now, where she'd only had a little eyeliner before. Even her baggy jeans and t-shirt seemed tighter, clinging suggestively to curves. Her smile had an edge.

"You're right," she said. "I *do* feel better."

The bell over the door jingled merrily as another customer entered, this one a tall black man with his head shaved bald. He wore a baggy white tee and a dew-rag, looking like the quintessential suburban gangsta, but his body was certainly worth a second look.

The housewife gave him an openly desirous look and turned back to me. "S'cuse me, sweetie, I have something I need to do."

I only nodded as she made her way through the aisles towards the newcomer. A brief conversation, whispered and beneath my hearing, ensued, and it ended with her leading him by the hand towards the back. The man looked excited as the housewife caressed the growing bulge in his baggy shorts and licked her lips in anticipation. They ducked through a door labelled 'Employees Only,' looking around surreptitiously before it closed on their tryst.

The husband came back in, looking around the store in annoyance. He said something to the cashier, who pointed noncommittally towards the back of the store to the door they'd disappeared behind. The man began to walk that way as I brought my purchases to the register, shocked and sickened. Somehow I knew that there would be a vicious fight, and a divorce, and three children who would be without a family now. And a woman who could never quite fill the desperate hole inside herself, and would drive herself into more and more self-destructive pursuits in search of that fullness that she would die, alone and hopeless, without achieving.

And dimly, I knew the Master was pleased.

I ignored the stumbling attempts at flattery from the cashier as he passed me my change and hurried out the door as quickly as I could. It wasn't fast enough. I could still hear the shouting and the fistfight that ensued.

I turned on the car and boosted the music up loud to drown out the sounds of the chaos I'd wrought. If the cancer had let me cry, I would have, but I could only manage a kind of numb detachment as I lit another cigarette and pulled into traffic. But I now knew how strong the urge to do the Master's work was, and hopefully that would give me a head start on how to beat it. It was all the blessing I could wring from the afternoon's curse.

\* \* \*

My condo was huge - decorated tastefully with very contemporary furniture. The entire living room was gleaming white tile, with a black-tiled fireplace at one end. Wispy, gauzy curtains hung over the immense windows which formed the entire south wall of the room. A white, enameled bar overlooked the room, separated by a low wall of glass blocks. Bottles of expensive wine hung in a chrome rack and 20-year-old scotch stood on a glass shelf. The furniture was pristine and brilliant white, dotted here and there with a red or purple throw pillow that riveted the eye. A recessed shelf across from the fireplace held rows and rows of erotica, everything from D. H. Lawrence to the Marquis de Sade to Anaïs Nin. Erotic art prints

hung in chrome frames, lit beautifully from chrome track-lights that snaked across the ceiling. I tossed my purse on the little enameled table beside the glass front door and strode purposefully across the tiles, my heels beating a *click-clack* as I breezed past the white overstuffed couch towards the kitchen.

That room was very contemporary as well, following the black-and-white color scheme of the front room. White cabinets with black granite tops lined the walls and the generous island in the middle of the tiled floor. Vertical blinds threw interesting shadows across the room as the sun set outside the enormous windows that overlooked my kidney-shaped pool and redwood deck outside. The redwood chaise-lounges and the calm water looked very inviting after the stresses of the last day and night, but I took control of myself and fought back, forcing myself to focus. Without consciously thinking, I scooped up a remote from the countertop and clicked a button. An unseen but obviously very expensive sound system kicked on seamlessly, filling the room with the soft and sexy backbeats of Portishead.

I ducked a little beneath the gleaming chrome pots and pans that hung on a rack overhead and grabbed a bottle of water from the massive obelisk of the refrigerator. It was filled with fresh fruits and vegetables, some chilled wine and champagne, and some leftover fried rice and what looked like baked chicken.

Forcing myself into control fully, having to work to ignore the gnawing desire between my legs, I walked out of the kitchen and into the back of the house. There was an office, with a massive glass-topped multi-level desk with an obscenely expensive computer and shelves of technical books, dominated by enormous four-foot-high art prints of myself wearing nothing but platform heels and a string of pearls. Across the hall there was a dark-panelled room that served as a well-appointed dungeon, with cages and wooden stands strung with shackles. Whips, floggers, paddles, violet wands, dildos, every manner of sex equipment hung neatly from the walls. The ache in my pussy flared higher - apparently I wasn't just into BDSM, I was *very* into BDSM. I shut the door quickly, trying desperately to get myself under control.

The bedroom was like something out of the Playboy mansion, a huge black enamel console bed big enough for four people easily. Pink satin sheets and candles decorated the headboard, as well as an antique alarm clock, very modern-looking cordless telephone, various lubricants and massage oils, and pictures of me, Dawn and Brooke at various events, the Adult Video News awards in Las Vegas, on location in Antigua, on the Hollywood Walk of Fame, among countless others. Large, framed posters of Hell's Belles dance events were evenly spaced on one wall.

The bathroom was in two parts - an anteroom with a sink and a Hollywood dressing room vanity, a huge countertop and oversized mirror ringed with lights. A truly baffling display of cosmetics and hair care products were strewn across the top, pots and tubes and compacts holding every color and type of powder and paint I could imagine. At one end, plugged into an industrial outlet, were a salon-quality hair dryer, hot rollers, curling and straightening iron and spiral curling iron. A small shelf unit which held no less than sixteen large jewelry boxes sat beside the luxurious chair. Instinctually, I just *knew* how much time I spent in front of that mirror.

Beyond the antechamber was a huge bathroom, completely appointed in beige tile with azure blue accents. A huge jacuzzi tub rose on a platform in the center of the room, with a marble eight-head shower set in one wall and a sink, toilet and bidet opposite.

Letting the 'auto-pilot' that Lilith had installed guide me, I turned towards the double doors which took up the wall behind the vanity and pulled the doors apart. Lights inside clicked on automatically, exposing the largest walk-in closet I'd ever seen, larger than the living room of the apartment I'd kept as Gene. Tiers and glass-fronted shelves rose from floor to ceiling, and racks upon racks of dresses. A mammoth chest of drawers stood directly across from me.

The 'auto-pilot' seemed to know its way around better than I did, so I let it do the driving as it slipped out of the skyscraper heels. The world seemed much larger as I stepped down to my new five foot eight. I shucked my tubetop and skirt, leaving me only in the black lacy bra and thong and my jewelry. I gathered up the clothes and dumped them in a net hamper next to the doors. I stepped out of the underwear and dumped them in a different hamper for the hand-washable items and stood there naked, looking around my closet kingdom like a queen on her throne. Again, the pride was providing a continuous, euphoric high which couldn't be ignored.

I selected a drawer and pulled out a pair of black silk thigh-high stockings, lace-topped with the stay-up tape, and rolled them over my smooth legs and settled them, checking to make sure lace tops were level on both legs. Then a black satin corset with a shelf bra that barely covered my nipples and nipped my waist in to a breathless twenty-one inches. I didn't bother with panties, only a wispy black lace robe which hid absolutely nothing. I fluffed my pubic hair after the day's confinement, touched up my hair in one of the many full-sized stand mirrors in the closet, slipped on a pair of black mules with marabou feathers on the uppers with a four-inch heel. Stepping back into the bedroom, I opened a humidior at the foot of the bed and selected out a cigarette, lighting it with an ornamental lighter shaped like the Venus de Milo. I took off my rhinestone choker and laid it with my other jewelry, opting instead for a wide length of black satin ribbon for my neck. I took a while admiring myself. I even turned myself on.

I sat in the front room, luxuriating on my couch and sipping white wine from a fluted goblet, smoking cigarette after cigarette as I tried to think of a way out of this predicament. I didn't waste much time wondering about getting my old body back - this didn't strike me as something that was reversible, and with the spell numbing my sense of panic and distress over my sex-change, I figured the new bod wasn't so bad. But I made the mistake of letting my mind wander, as I made plan after plan and discarded, tabled or amended them in my head. So by the time the doorbell rang, the cancer had taken over, and I slinked to the front door. Through the glass doors I could see a pair of Girl Scouts with cookies, their mother waiting in an idling Volvo at the base of my driveway.

I smiled, and opened the door, bubbling merrily, "Cookie time again?"

"Yes, ma'am," they chorused, their fresh-scrubbed twelve-year-old faces gleaming.

"Three boxes of Thin Mints and three Peanut Butter Sandwiches," I said, motioning them inside. "Come in out of the sun while I get my money."

They stepped in, looking around awestruck at the richly-appointed condo and the statuesque, beautiful woman wearing next to nothing who fished a twenty-dollar bill out of a four-hundred-dollar Gucci purse. She handed them the money, and before they could even reach for the merchandise, my eyes flashed hot and soon a twelve-year-old girl was suckling hungrily on each burning nipple as I groaned in ecstasy.

I watched the little Britney and Christina clones, with their low-rise jeans and too-tight belly tees, their hair teased out and their makeup far too heavy for girls their age. They were giggling,

trying to hide the tongue studs they'd developed from the disapproving adult that waited for them. Dimly, I knew they'd both be pregnant by fifteen, their lives destroyed. They'd spend their college years twirling around poles for men's money, getting bad boob jobs to keep the money flowing. Both would wind up sucking dick for grocery money by their thirty-fifth birthdays.

And the Master was *very* pleased. I had the sense that I was fast becoming one of his favorites. With a narrowing of my eyes in pure outrage and hatred, I vowed revenge anew.

I spun on my eight-inch heel and turned back to my living room, my mind whirling with plots and plans to end this horrible plague I was visiting on the world.

To Be Continued....



SUMMARY: Three guys having a night-on-the-town, find themselves the prisoners of a group of witches who have plans to transform them and use them to help spread evil in the world. part three

TRIUMVIRATE, Part Three

by Valerie Hope

I SPENT A ROUGH NIGHT, tossing and turning in my huge bed, surrounded by the best comforts that money could buy, tormented by horrible dreams of perversions enough to make the Internet swear off sex. The powerful waves of desire that rose up in me occasionally could be taken care of by the truly massive dildo I'd found in a bedside table. Glad of the relief from the constant nagging ache in my middle, I named it Otto and fondly declared that it was my new best friend.

The antique alarm clock had just clicked to 7 a.m. when my cellphone rang, chiming out with the real-audio tone of Britney Spears' *Toxic*. Given what I'd become, I figured that was a fitting theme for my new life. The readout told me that my caller was Brooke. I sat on the edge of my bed, the laces of the satin corset I'd fallen asleep in biting into the tender flesh of my back a little. I ruffled my thick dark hair with one hand while I tossed my dark brown mane to one side of my shoulders with a girlish toss of my head and put the phone to my ear with a tiny little *click* against my earring.

"Hey, baby girl," I said, infinitely happier than I felt.

"Whaddup, bitch," my friend's voice answered, "what you got going on today?"

"Oh, I dunno," I shot back, deliberately evading her question. "Hang by the pool, work on my tan, probably go get my nails done. I need a fill." I checked the hard acrylic of my French manicure for imperfections and found enough to merit a trip to see my manicurist.

"Me and Dawn are gonna hit the beach and party," Brooke announced. "You in?"

"Sorry, baby," I said with a twinge of regret - singleminded sex machines that they'd become, they were still my best friends and the only people I knew in this new life. I chewed the pillowy softness of my glossy bottom lip with consternation. "I got way too much to do to hit the beach."

"Aw, bummer," Brooke shot back, genuine disappointment in her husky voice. "We were gonna hook up with these two guys we met outside the club last night. You shoulda been there, baby girl, it was so cool. They were these square-ass Mormon guys bitching at everybody about how they were all goin' to hell an' stuff, and then they sucked on Dawn's and my titties for a while and now they're totally cool. They told us that there were about seventeen or eighteen other guys and girls just like them staying at this camp down by the ocean. We're gonna head down there and see if they turn out as cool as the other two. Sean, the guy I hooked up with, has this huge dick."

"Cool," I said, but inside I was sick. An entire missionary camp turned into oversexed, self-destructive zombies by the evil inside us. The housewife and the two Girl Scouts whose lives I'd destroyed yesterday paled in comparison. This had to be stopped. If the others who'd been transformed had anywhere near the power I had, they could turn this world into a living hell in a very short amount of time.

"You gonna hook up with anybody?" Brooke asked.

"Probably," I said, trying to keep my cover. I had to swallow my bile as I told my friend, "I totally got these two prissy-assed Girl Scouts yesterday and they're a hell of a lot more fun now."

"Right on," Brooke said in congratulations. "Did you hear? Jeffy Donley got this guy yesterday who actually went and killed a basketball player last night. It's on all the news channels. We're totally gonna have to book to keep up with that."

Jeff Donley, one of the hands of Envy, a celebrity stalker who could awaken the deepest feelings of possessiveness and jealousy in a person. I dimly remembered his face from where I'd seen it suspended in a cage over a dark altar.

"Whatever," I said. "It's not like anybody gets a prize or nothing for the most converts, Brooke. I'm just gonna do what I do."

"Yeah, you're probably right," Brooks chimed back, her shortened attention span already on to different things. "Anyway, baby, I gotta motor. Love ya, ciao!"

The line went dead and I pressed my palms into my stomach, trying to fight back nausea. I wondered, dimly, if any of the others felt as sickened by what they were forced to do. Brooke and Dawn certainly didn't seem too concerned about their actions. Maybe it was because I was awake.

Seizing on a theory, I lit a cigarette and dialed my phone.

"Senator Pulaski's office," a melodious soprano answered.

"Is the Senator available?" I asked. "It's Gina Pickett."

Expecting the run-around, I was surprised when the secretary said, "He'll call you back in a few moments, Ms. Pickett."

The line went dead again, and I jumped a little when the phone rang not ten seconds later. I *clicked* it against my earring again, sucking on my cigarette as I answered. The Hand of Avarice on the world spoke in a ringing, political-rally voice.

"Gina, Martin Pulaski here. How are you?" The booming bass voice was so very different from the whining, terrified voice of the man who'd hung in the cage beside me.

"I'm good, baby, and you?"

"Quite well. What can I do for you?" he asked.

"I was wondering if I could see you," I said.

There was a long pause. "I don't know if that's a very good idea, Gina - a United States Senator, meeting a porno star? If the papers got a hold of that..."

"Martin, do... do you remember anything?" I asked, uncertain of how to proceed. A wrong step here, and Pulaski could be on the phone to Lilith the next second, and maybe I'd wind up on another altar, coming out a mindless fuck-bunny like Dawn and Brooke if I was *lucky*. My breathing quickened and my heart raced with fear.

"I remember lots of things," he said, laughing richly. "Now, if you don't have anything else, I have a meeting at the White House in thirty minutes."

"Martin, you know what I mean. Are you there?" the last in a frightened whisper. "Is it still you?"

There was a very long pause, and I could hear the sound of a door being shut. Finally, a very subdued voice answered, "You can fight it, too?"

"Oh, God," I said, tears leaking out of my eyes in relief. "Oh, God."

"How did you know I was still..."

"We were awake, Martin. Everybody else was a zombie, and the only reason I could think of that I wasn't was because I was awake. Then I remembered talking to you. Maybe some of the others?"

"I think you might be right, but we have to be careful," Pulaski said.

"I know, but I have to stop," I half-bawled. "Marty, I keep hurting people. I can only fight it for a while, but if I relax for a second, then this *thing* inside me takes over and I start hurting people. I ruin their lives, Marty, I have to stop myself."

"I know, I know," Martin answered, not responding to my enforced nickname. "Yesterday I let my concentration lapse and made a man sign over seventeen thousand acres of pristine forest in Oregon to a logging consortium. Another one is stealing from his employees' retirement fund as we speak because I got distracted by the phone ringing. God only knows what the others are doing."

"We have to contact the other ones who were awake," I said.

"I can't remember many," he told me. "There was you, and that priest..."

"Father Johannson," I supplied. "Hayley Holland is another."

"And Dave Reeves, who owns the Burger Heaven chain now," Pulaski said. "And the two TV executive, the sexy Indian girl. I can't remember her name."

"Summer," I told him. "That's all I have."

"Me, too," he replied, at a loss for words.

"Think it will be enough?"

"Enough for what?"

"To stop this," I told him. "We have to contact them, to let them know they're not alone. Maybe we can compare notes, to see if somebody else is better at controlling this evil thing inside ourselves than we are. There's bound to be some tricks, y'know?"

"Right," Pulaski said. "You contact Summer and Hayley Holland, and I'll get in touch with Dave Reeves and Father Johannson. And Gina, be careful. If Lilith gets wind of this..."

"I don't even want to think about it," I said.

"Neither do I. Look, call me back at this number. It's a secure line to my personal cellphone. I don't think anybody can listen to our conversations, unless - aw, hell, if they're using magic we're screwed anyway. Everybody else, talk to them in person."

"Right," I said. "And try not to hurt anybody else, baby. Maybe we can control some of the damage."

"I'll try," he said. "It's hard. Already I feel it - that need for more, more, more, like nothing will ever be enough."

"Look on the bright side, Senator," I told him, "at least you're not so desperate for a big thick cock in your pussy that you're about ready to start picking up homeless guys."

He laughed, and it was genuine. It made me feel better, and my first real smile in days blossomed across my near-perfect face.

"We have to go, now, Gina," Pulaski said. "I'll contact you soon."

"Okay," I said, a little breathless.

"Be careful. None of us can afford to lose each other right now," he cautioned.

"You know it, Marty," I said, the ditzy, flighty personality taking over as my shaking, distraught relief broke my concentration. "Talk to you soon, sweetheart. Ciao."

I broke the connection with a long white thumbnail and took another drag from my cigarette. I rose to dress, stretching languorously, and start my day.

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The skin-tight low-rise jeans I was wearing made sitting in the car difficult. The long slits up the fronts of the flared legs, trimmed with sequins and embroidery, showed my shins and a tempting curve of calf as I sat behind the wheel, lifting my platform heels into the car and shutting the door. The black lycra belly shirt, proudly displaying 'High Maintenance Bitch' in glitter and rhinestones over the lush curves of my breasts, barely constrained my massive rack as I stuck my key in the ignition. Pushing the black cat's-eye sunglasses up my slender nose and letting the Capri 120 cigarette dangle from one pouty, red-glossed lip, I tossed my sexy-as-hell dark curly pigtails over my shoulders, setting my dangling three-strand rhinestone earrings swaying and sparkling in the morning sun. I revved the engine as Kelis' "Milkshake" blasted out of the speakers, and I was able to lose myself in the freedom of the open road for a little while.

The downtown commute was thick and bumper-to-bumper, so I slid into the HOV lane against all the rules of drive-time. I gunned it, pushing the high-performance Mazda up to about eighty. Red-and-blue lights behind me caused me to look in the rear-view and swear bitterly. I pulled to the side, protected from the flow of traffic by concrete rails, as the patrol cop started his slow swagger towards my car.

He stood next to the door and tried gallantly not to stare at the jiggling perfection of my breasts. I pulled my glasses down my nose and favored him with a guileless look, and asked in my best bubblehead voice, "Was I speeding, officer?"

He took a moment to regain his poise. "Ma'am, I clocked you doing eight-five in a fifty-five," he told me, trying to sound stern. "In addition, you are in a single-occupant vehicle in a high-occupancy lane. License and registration, please."

My lower lip trembled a little as it set into my sexiest pout. "Officer, isn't there anything I can do about this? Pretty please? I can't have another ticket."

He was trained well - he didn't break. "I'm sorry, ma'am, but you're in clear violation."

I leaned over way too far to get my purse, letting him get a long look at my curvaceous ass and the straps of my thong peeking above the denim. I caught him looking and he blushed bright red, averting his eyes.

I giggled, handing him my license. "Don't be embarrassed, honey. I like it when guys look."

I noticed the slight swelling behind the razor-sharp crease of his trousers. "Looks like you liked what you saw, too."

Opening the door, I tossed my cigarette - a clear littering violation that the officer never caught - and stepped unnervingly close to him, shutting the door behind him. My long-nailed fingers played idly with his collar, badge and nameplate as I traced elaborate patterns across his chest.

"Ma'am, I need to ask you to return to your vehicle," he said around the growing lump in his throat.

I smiled, looking down suggestively at my tits as my hand traced around his belt buckle and then on to points south. He cleared his throat loudly.

"Don't be so tense, baby," I cooed in his ear.

"Ma'am, please..."

"Can't help it," I told him, sinking slowly to my knees. "I can't resist a man in uniform."

My soul ached as my lips closed over the firm, musky shaft I withdrew from his fly. His head rolled back and he moaned, knowing as I did that his entire career was over - dozens of witnesses in passing cars, and the dashboard camera of his patrol cruiser was rolling the entire time. I sucked like the porn star I was, cherishing every groan that escaped his lips, expertly rolling my tongue and using my fingertips and nails to excite him. If I had to destroy this man's life, at least he'd have the best blowjob of his existence to remember. It seemed the only thing left that I could do for the poor man.

He pumped into my face, the swollen purple head banging rhythmically against the clitoris embedded in the back of my throat and dragging deliciously across the ones in my lips. I came twice, squealing wildly around the thick cock stuffing my mouth, before he stiffened. I jerked him off into my open mouth, tongue teasing the underside of his head, swallowing jet after jet of his hot cum while I gazed up at him adoringly.

With the relief of my own oral orgasms, my head cleared a little. I stood, trailing my fingers across his abdomen and chest as I rose to give him a friendly peck on the cheek. Taking my

license and proof of insurance, I took his forgotten citation book, signed the ticket and took my copy. He looked at me strangely.

"You still want the ticket? I thought..."

I caressed his cheek. "Oh, sweetie, you're *precious*! I did that because you're cute, not to get out of a ticket. You totally caught me speeding, honey. Of course I'm going to pay the fine."

He slumped a little, fussing with his fly a little. I reached down and zipped it for him, giving him a seductive and knowing smile. "Check that ticket again, baby."

He looked down at it, uncomprehending.

I whispered in his ear. "Not everybody knows Gina Pickett, tiger, but a lot of people know Gina Foxx."

"Gina Foxx?" he said, eyes wide. "From Hell's Belles?"

"Right," I said, tapping the end of his nose with a long fingernail. "So here's what you're going to do, honey. You're going to get back into your car and you're going to get on your radio and tell your dispatcher that some crazy fools are out shooting a porno on the HOV lane in the freeway. Right out in the open, with traffic going by. Tell them you've finished with your traffic stop and you're going to drive up the road to investigate."

"You mean, I should..."

I grabbed his shoulder tightly. "You have to, baby."

He looked a little hunted.

"Hurry, sweetheart, or another car is going to come to investigate. You have to get there first, to tell everybody that they ran as soon as they saw you," I told him urgently.

"But the evidence camera..."

I stepped away from him. "It's not a perfect plan, sweetie, you're going to have to improvise a little, y'know? But you do have a tape of Gina Foxx blowing a guy in a cop uniform with his back to your car. Maybe you'll lose your job, or maybe you can figure a way to bullshit it so your supervisor doesn't ask too many questions."

I got back in my car. "Ciao, baby," I told him.

"Wait," he said, now mindful of the camera rolling on the traffic stop, keeping his face averted. "Why? Why did you do it?"

I gave him a sexy but unreadable look. "I blew you because I'm a horny little bitch who doesn't care who the hell she fucks over to get what she wants," I told him cryptically, lighting a cigarette. "And I helped you because I want to be more than that."

\* \* \*

The network building was one of the glass-and-concrete postmodern monstrosities that dominated the skylines of nearly every major city in the United States. I roared into a handicapped space and strutted up the sidewalk, watching the heads turn with satisfaction, swinging my handbag over my shoulder on its strap.

The shady lobby was a welcome relief from the bright sunshine outside, and I set my sunglasses atop my head to nestle in my feather-soft, high volume bangs. I *clicked* my platform heels across the marble floor to the security desk, this time ignoring the looks of frank appraisal I got from the two guards.

"Gina Pickett for Hayley Holland," I said.

"Is she expecting you, ma'am?" the guard asked, cradling the phone in the crook of his neck and setting a sign-in clipboard on the desktop in front of me. I signed - my handwriting looked like the bubbly, circular script of every cheerleader who signed my high-school yearbook. I even dotted my "i"'s with hearts, and it had the quick practiced ease of having been signed many times on autographed 8x10's.

"She'll make time for me, honey," I told him. Shrugging slightly, he asked on the phone about my unannounced arrival, everything on his face saying he was thinking I was an arrogant bitch and how he'd like to fuck me into submission, to show me what a man really was. God, everything I did elicited lust in the people around me. Lilith had done her work to perfection.

Looking a little surprised, the guard told me, "Ms. Holland asked us to send you up, Ms. Pickett. Thirty-fifth floor."

I slinked to the elevators, arriving just as the security guards began their appraisal of me: "My God, did you see the tits on that bitch?"

The doors closed and I missed the rest, but the pride-high spiked in response. I pushed the button on the panel and leaned against the mirror-bright back of the elevator, hoping that I could manage to keep my hands off of the next person who got on - the cancerous evil in my chest was starting to get restless. I began to think of it as a separate consciousness, like some demon that lived twisted around my heart, like the demons who supposedly inhabited the dead bodies of vampires in *Buffy the Vampire Slayer*. Maybe I was on to something. But the fiery heat collecting in my breasts cut that line of thinking short. I was going to have to be careful, or someone else was going to lose everything to the scope of the blackness I had been created to spread.

\* \* \*

I tried to make my stride fast and purposeful as I crossed through the crowded call center floor, even managing to ignore the covetous looks which followed me down the wide aisle towards the office at the end. Hayley Holland, still the lusciously-curved, was pacing in her office, her shining sable hair glowing in the slanting morning sunlight through the vertical blinds. On the walls I saw giant blow-ups of the covers of her books - *Just 'Me' is Plenty*, *Loving Ourselves*, *Defending Our Life Choices* and *Making No Excuses* - all dedicated to the deep-seated, hurtful self-centeredness which made her the Hand of Pride upon the world. She waved me inside, still on her headset phone.

"...it's no good without a book tour, Evan," she was saying. "If the country doesn't see me, then the country doesn't buy the book. Even with the infomercial, Leno, Letterman, Oprah, don't you see, none of it matters unless I go door to door! Now get on the damn phone and start booking the lectures."

She looked at my impatient stance and returned to her conversation briefly: "Evan, Evan, I have to go. Somebody just walked in my office. I'll call you back tonight, and I want to hear about our dates, understand? Gotta go, bye."

She stabbed the hook of her phone and stripped the headset off of her ear, crossing around the front of her enormous desk and wrapping me in a friendly hug.

"Gina, baby, you look *fantastic*," she told me.

"So do you, Hayley," I returned. "I love those earrings."

She swelled with the vice she embodied. "Thanks. Twelve karats apiece, from the Sultan of Brunai." She touched the enormous diamonds in her ears and they sparkled invitingly.

She gestured me to a seat and offered me coffee, which I gratefully accepted.

"What brings you around here, Gina?" she asked, putting her designer heels up on the polished mahogany of her desk.

"I need to know something," I said, sipping a truly excellent espresso. "It's personal."

She gave me an unreadable look, then stabbed at her intercom. "Gloria, hold my calls," she said, then stood and closed the door. She returned to her Aeron chair and regarded me intently over steepled fingers.

"What's up?" she asked.

"I need to know, Hayley," I said, leaning forward. "I need to know if it's still really you."

She gave me a smile that didn't quite mask her shock. "What do you mean? Why, of course I'm still really me. What kind of question is that?"

"Hayley, if you don't know what I mean then we have nothing more to discuss," I said, rising smoothly and putting my empty cup down on her desk. I turned, and just as my manicured fingers wrapped around the doorknob, I was interrupted by a loud sob.

I turned to see fat tears glistening in her long eyelashes. I saw the debate - over whether or not I was actually real - play across her face.

"It's me, Hayley. We were awake while it happened, and that's why we're still inside. There are others," I said in a stage whisper, trying to feed hope into the fire I saw building inside her eyes.

"They... they've made me do..." she stammered.

"I know," I said, placing my hand atop hers. "I've had to do them, too."

"What do we do?" she asked, her voice barely audible.

"I don't know, yet. We're still figuring all that out," I said. "My next stop is the television station, to talk to Summer Ragajapalan, to see if she's still with us. Senator Pulaski, Father Johannson, Dave Reeves, me and you - we're trying to remember anybody who was actually awake and in their right mind when we were changed."

"I can't think of anybody," Hayley said. "But all these people, they're like us?"

"I think so," I said. "Here's what you have to do, Hayley. Try and control yourself, try not to hurt people if you can help it. It's hard - it's what we were created to do - and if anybody else

contacts you, act the part. We can't let on that we can fight this, or word could get back to Lilith. Who knows what could happen if she got wind of this."

Hayley gave a large, theatrical shudder. "Anything else?"

"Yeah," I said. "On your way home tonight, buy a cellphone and an account. We don't know if the phones we have are bugged, or if Lilith and her sisters can listen in some other way. Buy a new phone with a new number and don't tell anybody about it. Call me at this number and no other." I slid a slip of pink paper across her desk.

"What if they're listening now?" Hayley said, looking around her office like she was trapped there. I squeezed her hand tighter, trying to reassure her.

"We're being as careful as we can, sweetie," I told her. "We can only do what we're doing. But I've already talked to Senator Pulaski, and nothing has happened yet. I think we can assume that Lilith didn't hear what we said."

Hayley seemed to breathe for the first time since I'd shut the door.

"It's gonna be okay, honey," I said. "We just have to keep quiet for a little while and try not to hurt anybody. Then we'll start talking about finding a way out of this mess."

"Okay," she said, still trembling a little. "Oh, God, I thought I was alone."

"So did I. But we were wrong. Just give it a little more time."

She steadied herself and a look of renewed purpose settled on her beautiful face. "Let me call Summer," she said. "I need to do *something*, Gina. Please."

"Fine," I said, shrugging. "Just be careful, okay? If she isn't what we hope she is, then she could narc on us to Lilith. Talk around it, like I did."

"Honey, I'm a self-help author," Hayley explained. "I can talk my way around anything."

I smiled. "I better go. I'll be in touch soon."

She held on to my hand for a moment longer, just glad of the contact with someone who understood her private hell. I gave her a reassuring smile and blew her a kiss.

"Stay strong, baby girl," I said. "We'll figure something out."

"What are you going to do now?" she asked me.

"Research," I said.

"What kind of research?" Hayley asked.

"Well, the Devil did this to us," I explained. "So maybe God has a way out."

\* \* \*

I braced my hands against the polished oak desk and the wooden chair, thrusting backwards in time to the thrusts driving the respectably large cock deep into my asshole, brushing my ass-clit and driving me on towards my sixth shuddering orgasm. The squeaks of the old, polished wood beat a driving counterpoint to our demanding, almost angry push towards

release. I was standing on one high-heeled foot, the other on his desk while he sawed into me with sweaty abandon from behind.

"Yeah, do it, baby," I urged. "Fuck that ass. Fuck me like a little boy."

The Catholic priest, Father Monroe, I'd gone to consult, drove into me with renewed energy at my inflammatory dirty talk. I had a sinking feeling that no altar boy in this parish would be safe after my little visit. But at least I'd managed the trick of not hating myself for the damage I was causing, but transferring that hate onto Lilith and her goth-girl 'sisters' who'd started this whole thing.

The rising pitch of the priest's grunts heralded his climax. The cancer inside me was contented and happy, to cause the downfall of a holy man in his very own rectory. I grunted and began to squeal my final orgasm of the encounter - although all of them were equally as powerful, I found that my anal orgasms had a different 'flavor' to them that I couldn't explain, and they were starting to become my favorites.

"Give me that cum, Father. Give it to me," I begged.

He thrust faster, any tenderness gone out of him as he struggled for his guilt-racked release. The demon cancer inside me drove him even further.

"I want you to say 'bless you, my child' when you cum," I panted, before my teeth gritted together as he grabbed my hips painfully and began to slam into me. Even the pain was delicious.

"Unh... unh... unh... Oh, God... Oh, God... unh... unh... *unh...*," he panted, and finally shouted, "Bless you, my child" as he forced himself into me as deeply as he could and his body bucked with the strong hot jets of his release.

I moaned and threaded my fingers into his sweat-damp hair, kissing him and staring into his eyes, not letting him look away and hide within himself from his grief and guilt. Slowly, the hold of the cancer lessened with the satisfaction and I was able to wrest control away. Try as I might, I had no way to absolve this priest of the depravity he'd just performed on me. All I could do was try and let him salvage as much dignity as he could. I pulled my jeans up over my ass in a back-and-forth shimmy, pulled my shirt down over my breasts and hustled out of there.

If only the son of a bitch hadn't talked in those cryptic riddles that priests enjoyed so much. Every question I'd posed about the nature of evil, about the Devil and his servants, he deflected with some hocus-pocus answer about faith and divine mystery. I took that to assume that he didn't have any clue about what I was talking about but didn't want to sound stupid. It wasn't until he told me some weird parable and asked me to think about it that my concentration - focused on the parable - slipped and the cancer took over. By the time he was bugging me as hard as he could, it was too late to stop and there was no way to control the damage.

Frustrated and angry, I stomped out of the church towards my car. I paused only to blow the gardener behind the bushes - not to steal his soul. Just to make me feel better.

\* \* \*

I'd spent the entire day in various churches, mosques, temples and synagogues, asking everyone there I met about their views on the devil and the nature of evil. I managed to keep the souls I destroyed down to that first priest, but it had taken several bouts of masturbation in the ladies' room over the course of the day to keep my malevolent urges under control. My slender fingers weren't quite enough, either. It seemed like my infernal appetite grew the more I put it off. I only hoped I had the resources to hold it at bay for just a little while longer.

Rabbi Ari Rabinowicz was a kind-eyed man, with face gone a little bit to paunch but still enough of the chiseled, fine-boned mid-East Jewish bone structure left to render him completely striking. His yarmulke sat over fine, silver hair and his dark brown eyes regarded me with more tenderness than want, a first for me in this accursed body.

Beside him, Mohammed ibn Mohammed Khalil, the Imam of the biggest downtown mosque, regarded me similarly. Khalil was a very old man, his face a map of deep creases and wrinkles wrought by a long life of happiness, grief, storm, wind and rain. His dark eyes sparkled with a life as yet undiminished by the length it had burned.

The Interreligious Ministerial Council had been the last of the religious places on my list, a place where Jews, Christians, Muslims, Hindu, Buddhist and any other faith could come together and learn about their fellow humans, no matter what god they prayed to. Something about these people caused the sickness in my chest to recoil in what almost felt like fear. I rejoiced inside, knowing that anything that caused that black cancer inside me to recoil would be an ally I desperately needed.

"Now, tell me, child, what is it that troubles you?" Rabbi Rabinowicz said softly, remembering the edge of panic in my tone as I'd begged for his last appointment of the day. He didn't seem to be upset that I was keeping him from his dinner.

"I'm kinda, like, lost, Rabbi," I said. "I don't know who to turn to, so I thought maybe I could turn to all of you."

"Wise," the Imam, Khalil, replied. "What weighs down your heart so?"

"Do you - I mean, do your faiths - do they believe in evil? Devils? Possession?"

The Rabbi shook his head. "Judaism believes that men carry their own evil inside them, it doesn't come from any outside source."

"Islam does believe in devils," the Imam amended, "but they cannot affect us unless we turn our eyes from Allah. Only those do not keep perfect faith with God can be affected by the devils and ills of the world of men."

"Can a devil, or any evil, take someone over, do you believe?" I asked.

"No, child," Rabinowicz said. "Not if you mean it can take them against their will. Evil grows from man's weakness. We commit no evil unless, first, we wanted to commit that evil."

"It is the way that devils act on men," Khalil said, nodding. "They cannot force our hands, so they must seduce them. Draw them in, make us choose to embrace them."

I thought for a moment. It was true. Don, Brooks and I *had* followed our dicks into that bar, letting our lusts rule us, and it was Lust that claimed us in the end. Hale Holland, the cop, had felt so self-confident and assured that his badge, his gun, his training and his standing as a

police officer would protect him. Now Pride had him utterly. Our vices had seduced us, and Lilith and her cronies had somehow amplified that.

"How do you save yourself, then?" I asked, eyes wide. The evil inside me was ricocheting around my ribcage, angry and panicked, making my heart beat faster and my extremities go numb.

"Every person is different," Khalil said. "The first step is repentance. You must hate the sin inside yourself."

"That's always been the case with me," I told him.

The Rabbi patted my hand. "Then you must turn outside yourself. Sin - a difficult concept, and we could argue for days about what it actually is - or any evil, it claims us, as you say, because it is stronger than we are. We must look elsewhere for the strength to defeat it within ourselves."

"God has that strength," Khalil said, and the Rabbi nodded assent.

"God and I have never really gotten along," I confessed. "In truth, I don't know if he wants anything to do with me right now."

Khalil shook his head. "God always loves us, no matter what we do," he said. "Any one of us will tell you that, whether we call God Allah, Yahweh, Christ - it doesn't matter. The nature of God is love. Perhaps you have saddened Him, or disappointed Him, but never enough to make Him turn His face away from you completely."

"Understand that ours is a most progressive view," the Rabbi said. "Many Jews, Muslims, Christians, they would disagree and tell you that God does *not* love certain people for what they've done. I think that might be the greatest evil that the religions of this world have perpetrated. But every conversation I have with Mohammed, here, that ends in deeper understanding and renewed friendship, every time I see my children playing with Pastor Ricker's in the park, I think we have atoned for one of the car-bombs or mortar attacks."

"We each fight evil in our own way," Khalil said, smiling.

"Evil cannot touch you, child, if your faith is strong," the Rabbi concluded. "The greater the evil, the stronger the faith must be. You say that God wants nothing to do with you. Perhaps just my saying so isn't enough to convince you otherwise, but you have to have faith in something. Anything. Everyone has to."

"Find what you have faith in," the Imam said, "and strengthen that faith. Then, the evil you fear, no matter what it is, will not control you."

I smiled in relief, feeling as if I might cry. This was the first real lead I'd had since this thing had happened to me and my friends. But I had to know if it was true. The joy I'd been feeling as I sat with these two wise men fluttered and died as I knew what needed to be done to test this new, promising theory. Dead inside, I leaned forward to give a more teasing glimpse of lush cleavage as I touched up my windblown hair.

And I released my tenuous hold on the squirming blackness in my chest. It leapt forward in a surge of anger and pent-up frustration, and I felt my eyes burn, the signal that the blackness

was reaching out to seize the wills of these two gentle, faithful men. I mourned for them in that part of my heart that was still my own.

The Rabbi began tweaking the end of his nose, a little distraught. "Why are you staring?" he asked. "Do I have something on my face?"

"Is everything all right, Ms. Pickett?" the Imam said at the same time.

My eyes went wide with shock. The evil didn't draw them in! Normally, the people who saw my eyes burn and flash with power were already disrobing, dicks hard and insistent and already probing towards the soft holes in my matchless body. But these men had barely stirred.

They had been right. They had faith in something stronger than my evil. And my evil couldn't touch them. Eyes bright with unshed tears, I thanked each of them profusely, shaking their hands as the cancer in my chest hammered against my heart and lungs in impotent rage. I could just hear them talking, softly, behind me as I used my most rapid sexy, slinky sway for my car in the parking lot.

"Pretty girl," said the Rabbi.

"Very," the Imam said. "But I can't say I approve of the clothes."

"Pfah," the Rabbi said in derision. "Don't start that old argument again."

"I'll start it again because we never finished it the first time! The Qu'ran *explicitly* says..."

I smiled widely, happily, relieved and unburdened as I turned the corner and lost track of their conversation. For them, I'd dress in a burqa from now on. They'd delivered the keys to beating this thing. I plopped into my car, very unladylike, slid my sunglasses from my hair and onto my nose, lit one of my everpresent cigarettes and took off, hoping that a long windy drive someplace sparsely populated would be just the thing for the soul-searching I needed to do, to find that thing that I had faith in and give it strength enough to beat the evil inside me, grown strong and demanding from Lilith's power.

I could beat this! It sang inside me like a song.

I could beat this.

To Be Continued...



SUMMARY: Three guys having a night-on-the-town, find themselves the prisoners of a group of witches who have plans to transform them and use them to help spread evil in the world. part four

TRIUMVIRATE, Part Four

by Valerie Hope

I'D NEVER CONSIDERED MYSELF A complicated person - even less so since I became Mega-Slut under Lilith's ceremony - but finding those things I had faith in was a lot harder than I'd anticipated. I confused faith with proof, all too often. I had proof of a lot of things, but I don't know what I had faith in, that belief without proof.

My own strength? Not hardly. When left to my own devices, people suffered when the powerful perversion of my own lust took them, the lust which Lilith had given the power to prey on the weaknesses of others. The problem wasn't entirely my lack of faith, but it was the lack of faith of my victims. I was the consummate predator - I sought out the weaknesses in others and exploited them.

Faith. Shit, I just barely knew what that was. My head was still reeling from waking up in a whole new life, with a high-dollar house and car and a woman's oh-so-sensitive body and appetites stronger than I'd ever known in my life. Now I had to find my core of faith, that thing that the evil couldn't touch?

But I suppose it had to be there. Else I'd be a mindless fuck-monster like my friends Dawn and Brooke. I did hope they could be saved as well, but I had my doubts. My mind had already labelled them 'Enemy' like Lilith and the others. They would have to be overcome and possibly destroyed with the rest.

What was it that carried me through the ordeal of my transformation and allowed me to remain, at least partially, whole? Not faith in my own strength. Not faith in my friends, or faith that a benevolent God was looking out for me.

Reluctantly, I tried to make myself remember the agonizing disassembly of every part of myself, chained helpless to an altar with no one to beg for mercy. I remembered the fire and the feeling of filth crawling under my skin, the heat and the ice, the screaming and the feeling of utter violation. But I remembered clinging to something, with all my strength. That sense of self, that core of things that remained essentially me, no matter what else happened.

A soul? I doubted it.

What, then, did I cling to? Identity wasn't it - I was completely different and didn't even seem alarmed that even my driver's license told me that I was, and always had been, Gina Elizabeth Pickett, eyes brown, hair brown, measurements 36-25-35, cup size double-D. Even though the events had never happened, I could clearly remember the night I'd gotten drunk with Michelle Pruett and gotten my bellybutton pierced, the first time I danced topless to make money for school, the first movie I ever shot. My shelves at home were filled with DVDs of myself in every

conceivable sexual encounter and position, with men, women, and every multiple and combination of both sexes, proof that I was one of the most popular adult film actresses in the world. I remembered buying the clothes in my closet. My memories were untrustworthy, so I continued to cling to that core of reality that had saved me from madness on the altar in the warehouse.

But what the hell was that thing?

I was twisting my hair around one finger as I thought, ever the consummate ditz. I lit another in a long line of cigarettes and smoked distractedly, staring off over the lights of the city from the overlook where I sat on the bumper of my car.

It had to be something that was common, or else Hayley and Marty and the others would be lost to the evil as well. It was something we all had in common. I thought about calling them, on our new private phone network, but it was an unnecessary risk. No, this was something I needed to figure out on my own.

Belief. It was the cornerstone of faith - faith couldn't exist without it. So what did I believe? That the earth was round, that my tits looked great in a push-up bra, that I liked my eggs scrambled instead of fried. That people died every day, and people would die every day, just as new people would be born to take their places. I believed that American motorcycles were much cooler than imports - with the possible exception of Ducati - and that college football was more fun to watch than professional. I believed that although I probably deserved what had happened to me - I was pretty much a dickhead in my old life - this was completely out of proportion. I believed the people whose lives I had destroyed - would destroy - might be weak, but that was no reason to destroy them. I believed that if I didn't stop this, then the world might suffer even more than it already was, and I couldn't let that happen.

Waitaminnit. *Why couldn't* I let that happen? What was the difference? What had the damned world ever done for me, anyway - saddled me with domineering friends who didn't care for me, a string of ball-breaking girlfriends who assaulted my own fragile sense of masculinity every chance they got, a dead-end job that sucked all the joy out of my weeks and a weak personality that didn't make the most of the hours the job didn't take, instead soaking them in cheap booze and skirt chasing in an endless, faceless succession of tawdry bars?

Why couldn't I just let the world suffer?

Because it wasn't right. Because it wasn't fair. The world had suffered enough, it didn't need any help from me. I wouldn't be a party to this.

I was a good person.

I blinked, looking up through the hazy glow of the city to where the stars pocked the dark blue velvet of the sky.

Was that it?

*I was a good person.*

I believed that. I always had. I'd been bitter - the world didn't deliver good things to good people the way my mother had said it would, and I was angry about not being rewarded for my goodness. I took the only measure I could to hide my hurt - I made a valiant stab at not

caring. But it had never really changed. I had a sense of fairness, of right and wrong, and *I believed I was a good person.*

I looked at the horrible night of my transformation in a new light. Somehow, I'd known what I was being changed into, and I fought it. I didn't want to be this person, because this person was corrupt and soulless and selfish. That couldn't be me, because *I believed I was a good person.*

I had it.

I looked down at my empty cigarette pack as I tossed the last of the long, super-skinny women's cigarettes over the guardrail. I needed another pack. Apparently, the evil inside me had decided that chainsmoking was the answer to something. Originally, I'd thought maybe I would get a horrible disease from it and die early, an escape from this pit of a life I'd been dropped into. The old addict's excuse popped into my head, but with my newfound faith, it took on a meaning and a depth that infused me with strength and purpose: I can quit anytime I want to.

Surprisingly, the need for another cigarette abated a little. It wasn't gone, by any means - and I was *definitely* getting another pack, even though my house was full of carton upon carton of the things, I wasn't making the forty-mile drive back to my condo without a smoke. But I did have control of this.

But a fresh pack of cigarettes meant a trip to the store.

The store meant people.

I sighed, getting back in my car. I took a moment to put the top up, the night was a little chilly. I believed that I was a good person, and that my faith in that had saved me, but I still wasn't sure that it was strong enough to beat the unholy urges in my chest. To find that out, I had to put it to the test and gamble an innocent soul to see if my hunch was correct.

I'd become very fatalistic since growing my tits.

If it didn't happen tonight, it would happen tomorrow. I was created to harvest souls for the Master, and it was either do it my way or corrupt another pair of Girl Scouts.

I put the car in gear, the booming beats of Trick Daddy's "Sugar" ringing out of the sound system, and pushed off for the highway.

Time to roll the dice.

\* \* \*

I pulled off in one of the overlit, garish convenience stores that dotted the suburbs of nearly every city in the country. My platform heels *clacked* loudly on the pavement as I pushed my way through the door. The place was almost deserted - my chic Movado watch told me it was past three in the morning - and I selected a *Vanity Fair* magazine from the rack and a Diet Coke from the cooler and walked to the counter.

A bored-looking girl of about eighteen was paging through a *National Enquirer* and snapping her gum loudly. She barely acknowledged me as I reached the counter.

"Gimme a pack of Capri 120's, filter," I said.

She pawed through the rack above her head for a while, obviously annoyed that I didn't choose to smoke a brand that was easier to find. With a put-upon sigh, she dropped the cigarettes on the counter and started ringing up my purchases, still not saying a word.

The thing inside me rose up, hungry, fierce to punish this over-entitled, smug young suburbanite who deigned to treat *me*, the Hand of Lust on the world, with disdain.

I closed my long-lashed eyes and pictured the outcome. The young girl - waiting on a college application to UCLA and hoping to become a psychology major - pimping herself out in a flea-bag brothel in Reno, mother of five children that didn't know her, so fast were they taken away from her by the state. Dying at thirty-six because of vitamin deficiencies and an untreated infection.

I recoiled inside. Good people didn't let stuff like that happen to people.

My eyes snapped open wide. The beast, the curling evil in my chest, it retreated and seemed to cower! I was stronger - the urge to take her soul and her future and her humanity away and give her over to her lusts and the lusts of others was still there, but it was subject to the greater power - the power which desired to protect her.

"Anything else?" the girl said with barely-disguised contempt.

"No, baby," I said. "You've given me quite enough."

"Whatever," she said, already ignoring me as she returned to her magazine.

On a wild impulse, fueled with the utter joy that was making me light enough to float away, I took her face between my hands and gave her a fierce but very tender kiss. Her eyes flew wide and indignant *mmph's* escaped the pressing together of soft lips, but I didn't care.

Even through the sense-fire of the clitorises inside my lips, I felt something different. A product of myself - like mother's milk, perhaps, something manufactured deep inside me that was meant to be given away - flowed from my lips and fingertips and into the girl. I saw her future unfold differently, now, and that her boring, unimaginative relationships of her short life were ended. She would come out as a lesbian within the month, joyous in her discovery, and her sense of malaise with the world around her would cease. Her life would surge forward in newfound joy and healthy, energetic sex with vibrant partners who loved her and cared about her feelings.

She broke away from me, awestruck.

"Wow," she breathed. "I've never kissed a girl before."

"Did you like it, sweetie?" I asked.

"I dunno," she said, touching her lips to feel the residual warmth there. "I... I mean, I don't..."

I caressed her cheek. "It's okay if you did, baby."

She looked me in the eye. "I think I did. I think I really did."

"I guess you have something to think about, then," I told her.

"Yeah," she said. "G'night."

"Good night," I said, breaking contact with her and nearly flying out of the store, into the car, and home, with pop music, cigarette smoke and unbridled happiness flowing out of the windows as I sped down the suburban roads.

\* \* \*

It had been hard to the point of impossibility to dress down. The ingrained purpose of my new life - to inspire lust - was too undeniable. So incognito was a word that no longer remained in my vocabulary. I couldn't leave my house without makeup, I discovered, and the best "low profile" outfit I'd been able to muster was a tailored dark grey business suit with a tight miniskirt, seamed stockings, a creamy white silk blouse with a cowl neck, and only six hundred dollars' worth of diamonds instead of my usual four or five thousand. I wore oversized dark glasses and pulled my hair back into a bun, with one long forelock hanging across my face in a teasing, heavily-sprayed tendril. I drew sexily on a cigarette and tried not to draw too much attention as I sipped a truly excellent Chablis.

But somebody like me couldn't *not* draw attention. I was getting furtive, openly desirous glances from every man in the upscale café and not a few of the women. I wished we'd picked a different place. I was crippled by my inability to not look like a walking wet dream. And Hayley's pride wouldn't let her go someplace that didn't let her flaunt her wealth and success.

I stood and gave her a warm kiss on the cheek as she arrived, taking both her hands in mine. She wore a designer pantsuit in airy yellow silk and dripped with pearls. Beside her, looking a bit nervous, was Summer Ragajapolan, her mocha skin shining, wearing a dark suit with a long skirt. She slumped into her chair and took a cigarette from my pack without asking. I lit it for her as we all took our seats.

"What was so important that we needed to risk meeting in public?" Summer asked in her husky alto. Her face looked tense, as if Lilith and her sisters would spring from the ornamental greenery around our table at any second. She was acutely beautiful, her dark skin and large eyes causing stabs of desire in my nipples as I looked at her, transfixed by the way her soft, pliable lips formed the words she spoke.

"I have something, something important," I told them. "I'm flying to Washington tomorrow to tell Marty."

"It must be serious," Hayley commented. She hadn't stopped clinging to my hand since she sat down, looking at me with open adoration, her only life-line in this nightmare.

"I beat it last night," I told them softly, sipping my wine. "I stopped it cold, and more."

"More?" Summer asked.

"I... *changed* it. The girl I kissed, I didn't destroy her. I think I may have healed her."

Summer and Hayley couldn't keep their voices from raising in surprised squawks as they said "Healed?" in unison, eyebrows risen to their scalps.

I settled them down, urging lowered voices. "Yeah," I said when they'd recovered their poise. "I'm not sure, but I think I helped her. And the thing inside me - girls, I swear I think it was *scared*."

The others leaned forward. "How?" Hayley asked.

"I talked to a Rabbi," I began, sitting back in a sexy pose with my cigarette, settling in for a very long recounting of my tale.

\* \* \*

Most of the afternoon had passed by the time I finished explaining how I'd found a way to subvert the evil which had forced me to do such horrible things. The others had interrupted a few times - sometimes for clarification of my points, other times to repair makeup or deal with the endless phone calls from their demanding, fast-paced jobs. I finished my recounting, setting down my eighth glass of wine, and waited for a reaction.

"You really think that would work for us?" Hayley asked in a very small voice.

"There's only one way to know for sure," I said. "You have to test it."

"But we could hurt somebody," Summer protested.

"And you feeling that way about it just tells me that you're a good person inside, too, and that you have faith in that. I know it's scary, but I believe you can do exactly what I did."

I turned to Hayley. "Sweetie, tell me exactly what happens when you take somebody."

She swallowed hard and couldn't meet my gaze. "I seem to just know when people are on the edge," she said in a very soft, ashamed tone. "Then, this thing inside me seems to move. My eyes burn, and the person I'm looking at reaches out and takes my hand. I don't know why, but they always do. And then the thing inside me seems to swell, like it's filling with water. And then I just know that this person is going to ruin their lives by being too prideful - one woman walked away convinced that she was too good for this guy she was dating, and determined to date his roommate. I knew, somehow, that she'd date the roommate and in three months he was going to beat her to death."

"It's the same for me," Summer told us, "except that I touch their faces. But it's the same thing, like the thing inside me is filling up with water. It feels like it's drinking something important out of these people. I take people who could go either way and I push them. Yesterday, I took a young man who was a little apprehensive about going to college and convinced him to stay home and live with his parents. I cost him a happy marriage, kids, a good job, and I somehow knew that he was going to die of a coronary when he was forty-one. Heart disease from lack of exercise and obesity."

I looked intently at each of them, in turn. "Are there people on the edge in this room?"

"Lots," Hayley said. "Can't you feel it, Gina?"

"Every second of every day," I said. "I've learned to tune it out. It gets the thing inside me too worked up, knowing it has so many targets."

"I'm the same way," Summer confessed.

"Hayley, Summer - you each have to pick one out. Choose a victim. I'll be with you every second, I promise. Just believe and have faith. I don't know if I can stop you before it's too late - I'll try - but it's either this or feel a little part of yourselves die every time you fuck up and let the evil take over. Innocent people are going to suffer anyway - we know we can't fight this thing twenty-four-and-seven. It might as well be in the cause of fighting this thing."

Hayley wiped suddenly tearful eyes. "I'm afraid."

"I know, honey," I reassured her. "That's a good thing to be feeling."

"It means we're still good people," Summer said, the realization hitting her at last.

"I'll go with you," I said. "Just get it over with."

Hayley's eyes took on a resolution I hadn't seen in her since her creation, that dark night. She stood, squeezing my hand one last time, and dropped two hundred-dollar bills on the table to pay our tab. She spun on her six-hundred-dollar alligator spike heels and strode out towards the parking lot with a heavy purpose. Summer and I grabbed our purses and hurried after.

A couple was waiting outside for the valet to bring their car around. Hayley's eyes narrowed and her chin raised, as if she were catching a scent on the air. She turned towards the young woman of the couple and squared her shoulders.

I grasped her forearm as I finally caught up to her. "You're a good person, Hayley."

She gave me a second's grateful look before she moved to the young woman. I felt a surging flash of power from her and the woman turned, putting her hands in Hayley's outstretched ones.

The look on my friend's face turned from iron determination to surprise to childlike delight. She let go of the woman's hands and took a step back as the young woman looked at her with a mixture of puzzlement and gratitude on her pretty face.

The young woman turned to her husband. "I love you, honey," she said, lacing her arm through his and squeezing her body against him.

He looked a little taken aback. "What brought that on?"

"I don't know. I just felt like saying it."

"I thought you said that love was for ignorant people," he said. "Intelligent people should crave understanding and acceptance, not love."

"There's that," she told him, "but I just - I don't know, it's a little embarrassing - I just felt it, all of a sudden. I do understand you, and I do accept you, but suddenly it hit me that there's more to it than that. Maybe all those silly storybooks are right."

He smiled at her as if he was seeing her for the first time. The valets returned with two Mercedes-Benz convertibles, one in silver and one in black. The man reached into his pocket and withdrew a generous tip for the valet.

"Young man, would it be okay if I left mine here? I think I'd rather go home with my wife," he said. "I can pick it up later this evening."

The valet pocketed the cash. "Of course, sir."

The husband opened the door for his wife and gave her a generous kiss after he slid behind the wheel on the other side. They held hands as they drove away.

Hayley's eyes were bright. "It worked. He was going back to work, and today was the day that he was going to start an affair with his coworker. I felt it happen, Gina - she was so proud of her intellect and how independent she was, and I just slid it over, to make her proud of her

marriage and her family. And I saved her! She would have killed herself if he'd left her in a few years. Taken a handful of pills and killed herself!"

I kissed her cheek. "You saved her," I whispered.

I turned to Summer. "Your turn," I told her.

She smiled and gave me a sexy wink. A man had just pulled up, looking harried and stressed out, yelling at some underling on a cellphone while he passed his keys to a valet. Summer walked to him with supreme self-confidence - seeing Hayley's victory had given her a sense of triumph - and caressed his cheek softly. He stared at her, his conversation and rush temporarily forgotten as he stared into the fathomless dark eyes. I felt the same surge of power I'd felt from Hayley.

Summer's tight smile became relaxed and satisfied. The man stepped away, a little dazed. Like he was waking from a dream, he suddenly remembered the cellphone hovering near his ear.

"Curtis? Listen. I need to take some time off. No, no, you can handle it. I just really need a few days. Tell Bob and Russell that I'll be back in on Friday for the meeting."

He paused, listening, then: "I *know* we have a deadline, Curt. But we've driven ourselves past the point of being productive. What we have is good enough."

He popped the little flip-phone shut and walked in, giving Summer one last puzzled glance.

Summer turned to me. "He was due for a heart attack in three months if he didn't slow down," she said. "I think I saved his life."

I hugged her. "I'll tell the others in Washington," I said.

"What should we do in the meantime?" Hayley asked.

"Keep doing what you're doing. Save people when you can," I said. "And carefully start trying to find out where the others are. If we can't save them, then we have to stop them."

"I can help with that," Hayley said. "I have a database. I was going to contact them when I went on my book tour. There are only two I couldn't locate."

"Lilith is bound to notice if people start disappearing," Summer added. "Either we have to take them out all at once - which I don't think we can do - or we have to think of something else."

I smiled, and for the first time since my rebirth, there was nothing sexy about it. "Let her notice," I said in a hiss like a snake through dry grass. "I *want* her to notice. I want her to come for me."

"Why?" Summer asked, a little shocked.

"Because she'll be this thing inside me's last meal," I said with finality.

\* \* \*

The nightclub was thumping and jumping, just the way I liked it - men and women, dressed to the nines, drinking and smoking and dancing in the flashing half-light to sensual, sexual

beats. I'd enjoyed this scene as a man, and now I enjoyed it even more - particularly because I never had to pay for a drink.

Beside me at the table, on a dance break, Brooke and Dawn were bopping to the music and scanning the crowd for likely victims. I'd been careful not to let them out of my sight since we'd arrived, and they'd caused some jealousy in the girlfriends of women whose men couldn't stop staring at them, but thankfully nothing more serious than that.

"I'm getting hungry," Brooke complained, raking fingers through her straight, shiny red-gold hair. "I need to find somebody to hook up."

I knew she was talking about the gnawing ache in her chest where the evil resided. "Don't you ever feel sad an' shit about hooking up with people?" I asked her.

"Oh, hell no, girlfriend," Brooke said, gesturing expansively with her cigarette. "They're so much cooler after I get done with 'em."

"Totally," Dawn added. "I mean, how can they be happy, living those boring-ass lives like that? We're totally helping them out."

"Don't you think you're not helping them?" I asked.

"Nope," Dawn said proudly.

"Don't you think you're a good person anymore?" I ventured.

"I'm *totally* a good person," Dawn protested. "I'm helping them, right?"

"Yeah," Brooke added.

I sighed, completely at a loss. I took a heavy puff from the Macanudo cigar I'd bought at the club's humidor, wrapping my soft lips around it like it was a dick and making all the guys stare in open desire. I ignored them. I'd loved cigars as a man, and I still did. So what if I looked sexy as hell smoking one.

Even though how sexy I looked mattered *desperately*, I still didn't have to admit it.

"So, I totally had an idea," I told my friends. Their lowered, flighty attention spans took a moment to focus through the overstimulating club back on me.

"What?" Brooke asked, smacking her gum loudly.

"How long has it been since we've had fun, just us?" I said.

Dawn stuck out her lower lip in thought, pulling one of her bangs taut and stretching it over the tip of her nose as her eyes examined the ceiling. "Not since, uh..."

Brooke jumped. "Ooh! I remember! It was when we shot *Three Little Maidens* two years ago! That was fun, baby."

"Totally," I said. "And we're all so fucking busy all the time, right? So why don't we bag this place and go back to a hotel and just have some girl fun? Like before?"

"You really wanna?" Brooke asked.

"But I really wanted some dick," Dawn pouted.

"I got one that buckles on, baby," I said, feeling her firm ass below the table. "Longer 'n' harder than anything you're gonna find in here."

"Oh, c'mon, Dawn, it sounds fun," Brooke begged, both hands on her friend's forearm.

"Whatever," Dawn said. "This place *is* kinda lame."

"Cool!" I chirped, bouncing up and down and clapping my hands. I led my astonishingly sexy friends by the hand through the crowd, towards the door.

\* \* \*

Dawn's thighs closed like a vise around my ears as she came under my frantic tongue, and the ten-inch strap-on Brooke was wearing sawed deliciously into my dripping pussy. I raised up, arching my back, and entwined my fingers in her soft hair, our pink tongues sticking lasciviously from our open, panting mouths to wrestle with one another, our sweaty cheeks pressed together.

"Oh, God, baby," I moaned. "That feels so good."

"Mmm," Brooke agreed, altering her thrusts in a more upward angle and making my breath catch.

"Take me, baby," I said, pulling her hair a little.

"I am," she said. "Duh."

"No," I said, giggling a little. "I mean *take* me. Like you with the other people."

"I can't do that," she said, slowing her rhythm. Dawn stopped her tongue-teasing of my erect nipples to look at us both curiously.

"Why not?" I asked.

"I dunno," Brooke said. "I don't think it would work."

"Try," I said. "I wanna feel what it's like."

I jumped a little in shock when she said "okay." I'd banked on her not wanting to hurt me, to maybe find some of her humanity that way. Her eyes flashed with a blur of power that added a little to the fierce lust I was already feeling. I pulled myself off the enormous dildo with a wet *pop* and turned around, bending to suck on her perfect, large breast, wondering whether I'd just doomed myself to an eternity of torment.

I sucked, and an acrid, bitter taste filled my mouth, snaking down my throat of its own accord whether I swallowed or not. It channeled into the dark thing which clustered around my heart, feeding it. It swelled and burned, burned horribly, but I couldn't scream. Fastening my hands on Brooke's slim shoulders, I sucked for all I was worth. She bit her lip in exertion, moaning loudly in a mix of pleasure and pain. I sucked, to the limit of what I thought I could hold, and beyond. The thing inside me roared and bucked, feeling as if it was in pain now, as well. Good. I hoped it hurt.

Finally, an eternity later, it seemed, the powerful flow of hot force that had filled me seemed to dwindle and peter out. Brooke squealed a high-pitched orgasm which hung in the air like crystal and then collapsed, backwards, to sprawl on the bed, breathing heavily.

I barely had time to draw a breath before Dawn's hands grabbed me on either side of the face and pulled me towards her own perfect breast.

"Oh, wow, that looked cool. Do me," she said.

I closed my eyes in agony as the burning flood of force forced its way through my jaws and down my throat from Dawn's engorged nipple. I sucked, choking a little, pulling the evil out of her and forcing it down the throat of my own. The thing inside my chest was flailing and would have been howling in rage and pain if it had a voice. For a moment, I wondered happily if I was killing it. Or possibly making it even stronger.

But mostly, I clung to the fact that I was trying to help my friends, because I was a good person. Dawn's fingers tightened in my sweat-damp hair and she screamed, baying at the ceiling, as I pulled the last of the burning stream of force out of her breast and down my throat. She collapsed beside the redhead, panting and moaning.

"Oh, my God," Brooke moaned. "That was incredible."

I stumbled off of the bed and to the bathroom, vomiting noisily into the sink. It was very little food, mostly wine and champagne and cocktails. My body didn't seem to want food anymore, just intoxicants. And I felt healthy and strong. Perhaps this body didn't need food any more. Perhaps it craved the harm that alcohol, drugs and cigarettes caused it.

I walked weakly into the front room and collapsed into a chair, trembling. I fished a cigarette out of Brooke's purse - a Virginia Slims 120 - and lit it with trembling fingers.

Dawn sat up, eyes still wide in wonder. "Wow. What did you do, baby?"

"Did you like it?" I asked weakly.

"Oh, my *God*. I feel incredible. Like I'm twenty pounds lighter," Dawn said.

"Me, too," Brooke said. "I always knew you were talented, baby girl, but *shit*."

I managed a half-hearted smile and sucked smoke into my lungs.

"I'm hungry," Dawn said.

My heart sank.

"Call room service," Brooke said. "I could eat, like, a whole lobster. And fries. I *totally* want some fries."

"You guys are ordering food?" I asked in amazement.

"Yeah!" Dawn chimed, phone in hand. "You want something?"

I just grinned. "Champagne," I said.

"I'm surprised you guys wouldn't rather eat the waiter that brings it," I remarked. "Y'know, make him cooler like you do the others, help him be more interesting."

Brooke looked at me, puzzlement on her porcelain-perfect face. "What the hell are you talking about, Gina?" she asked in all sincerity.

"Yeah, girl," Dawn said, dialing the front desk. "You're not making any sense."

"You don't remember?" I said, joy rising to replace the sick feeling in my gut. "How you used to help people?"

"You totally need to lay off the pills, baby," Brooke cautioned me, toying idly with the enormous strap-on cock she wore, making it bounce playfully. "You're remembering shit that never happened. I mean, I give money to the homeless an' shit, and for the environment, but I never wore, like, a Wonder Woman outfit and ran around saving nobody. I'm the same as you - a stripper, a porn star, and an all-around sexy-ass bitch."

"You don't feel anything?" I asked. "In your chest?"

"Implants," Dawn said proudly.

I smiled in shaking relief, and pawed through the discarded clothing on the floor.

"Whatcha lookin' for, baby?" Brooke asked, whirling the strap-on in big circles by rotating her hips, giggling and trying to get the distracted Dawn, who was ordering food enough for the Ecuadorian army, to notice.

"Cellphone," I said, finally finding my purse. "I have to call some people."

\* \* \*

I was actually surprised at how much simpler airport security was as a woman - wearing platform slides and carrying everything in a purse, I didn't have to go through unlacing my shoes and emptying my pockets at the magnetometer any more - I just dumped everything in the tray for the X-ray machine, slid out of my shoes, and walked through. The trade-off, I guessed, was the two immensely heavy suitcases I'd brought for the three-day trip, stuffed with clothes, shoes and makeup. Not that I'd had to carry them. There was no shortage of lust-struck men to help me with that.

I tapped my fingernails nervously on the ticket desk, already feeling the pinch of not being able to smoke or even carry a lighter. I chomped spiritedly on the Nicorette gum and was fairly certain that it wasn't working. I was ready to kill for a cigarette.

Finally, the call to board was announced on the intercom and I stepped forward, handing my boarding pass to the flight attendant and swaying sexily down the jetway. I took a seat near the front, stowed my little train-case of makeup and jewelry in the bin, sat back in the first-class seat and opened my romance novel. My eyes scanned the tawdry words, but my mind didn't interpret them - they were far, far away.

"Ladies and gentlemen, welcome to United Flight 2271 non-stop to Washington, D.C.," the attendant announced, beginning the rote recitation of the safety lecture. I tried to think about other things, particularly my nervous frittering desire for a cigarette.

I'd put Dawn and Brooke to the question until late last night, interspersed with sessions of very spirited and exciting sex. Unless they were the best mistresses of total deceit that I'd ever seen in this life or my previous one, they were now nothing but beautiful, happy, dumb women with promising careers in adult entertainment. I watched them with relief and envy as they ate a big dinner and then peed in the bathroom. Things I hadn't done since my conversion. As far as I could tell, I had pulled the demon influence, the dark angry sickness that had infected their minds and souls, out of their bodies and into my own. But the sickness in my own chest seemed no more powerful than before, and I could still effectively resist its attempts to control

me. The other women's powers hadn't been added to mine. Maybe there was some kind of a cancellation, or something. It was nothing I could figure out. Brooke and Dawn could remember all of their implanted memories, such as being in high school together, cheerleading, dance team, stripping together and going to community college, but they could not remember ever meeting a young goth woman named Lilith and had no recollection of any time spent chained on an altar or ever being two men named Don Kendall and Brooks Butler.

They were clean, and they were my friends. Better than before - I had only been a tagalong, a butt of jokes and a scapegoat for missed opportunities when we were men. Now Brooke and Dawn looked to me for leadership and genuinely seemed to care about my feelings regarding their decisions and behavior. Romantically - because, God, how hot were they? - as well as platonically, I loved them dearly. Summer, Hayley, Senator Pulaski, they were all close to me. But Brooke and Dawn were my best friends, in the most cloying, girlish sense of the term. And it was a wonderful feeling to have.

I buckled my seatbelt and thought about what sucking the evil from them might mean for me, staring out my window at the runway slipping by. The big 737 rocked back on its belly gear and left the ground with a screaming roar of jets, and the ground fell away behind us as the clouds swallowed the view through the window.

I leaned my head back in the pillow of my soft hair and closed my eyes. Maybe I could manage some sleep until the plane touched down. Strange that I wasn't looking forward to seeing Marty Pulaski again nearly as much as I was looking forward to my next cigarette.

*To Be Continued...*



SUMMARY:

## **TRIUMVIRATE, Part Five**

**by Valerie Hope**

THE WHEELS TOUCHED DOWN WITH a chirp as the pilot reversed his engines and we were dragged forward against our seatbelts with the rapid deceleration.

"Ladies and gentlemen, welcome to Ronald Reagan Airport in Washington, D.C. - local time is 3.20 p.m. and the weather is partly cloudy and 64 degrees. Please remain seated with your seatbelts fastened until the plane comes to a complete stop and the captain turns off the fasten seat belts sign."

I finger-combed my lush dark hair and tugged the tops of my bra cups up to better show off my tits as I waited for the plane to taxi towards the terminal. I was wearing clothes specifically designed to attract attention, a black lace push-up bra and a white cropped shirt tied in a knot below my breasts, a micro-mini plaid "schoolgirl" skirt, white knee socks and black patent Mary Janes with a three-inch platform and an eight-inch heel. I took my train-case and my purse - a jaunty little Betty Boop lunch-box, slung my cashmere blazer over one shoulder and made my way up the jetway and into the terminal. I passed through the airport to the admiration and turned heads I'd come to expect wherever I went. I was waiting by baggage claim when a tall, menacing-looking Hispanic man with sunglasses and a dark suit tapped my shoulder.

"Gina Pickett?" he asked.

"Yes," I answered.

"I'm from the Senator's office. He'd like you to come with me, if you don't mind."

My instincts weren't trying to warn me of danger, so I gave a quick nod. "Sure. There are my bags there, the matched leopard-print."

He hoisted the bags as if they weighed nothing and followed me out to the car, his eyes scanning the crowd around us. He led me to the curb and a stretch Lincoln pulled up as I was fussing through my checked baggage, looking for a lighter, the cigarette I'd been craving for 2,000 miles dangling from my red-glossed lips.

Another dark-suited man in sunglasses, this time a tall black man going a little bit to paunch in the middle, lit my cigarette for me. I looked up at him over the tops of my heart-shaped sunglasses with wide eyes.

"The Senator is waiting, ma'am," he said simply, holding the door for me. More than a little overwhelmed, I slid into the back of the limousine and poured myself a tall Scotch from the wet bar, smoking my cigarette and staring out the window.

We were on Interstate 66 for an indeterminate time. I watched the various stations on the Orange Line of the Metro sail by me, trying a few time to engage the two golems the Senator

had sent for me without success. Not even my most sultry and seductive smiles could break their façades of detached, dangerous watchfulness. I gave up trying, finally, and busied myself watching people and places go by out the window.

Eventually, the Interstate gave way to the city and became Constitution Avenue. Traffic closed around us. I managed a few short glimpses of Lincoln Memorial, and the imposing spike of the Washington Monument towering over the solemn, open tableau of the WWII Memorial with its sparkling, crystalline fountains. Then we were lost in turns and twists - I *thought* we were headed towards Union Station, but there was no way for me to be sure - as we delved deeper into the seat of U.S. governance.

We pulled under a stately portico and the car stopped. Marty had put me up at the Hay-Adams, right in the heart of downtown D.C., very close to the White House. I dropped my cigarette to the curb and walked towards the lobby - feeling terribly underdressed - while one of the golems led me and the other brought my luggage.

The first golem was talking to the concierge while the other stepped in front of me, shielding my luscious, oversexed form from the eyes of people in the lobby.

"... Ms. Grey is a guest of a very important policy-maker," the first one was telling the concierge, passing over a thick wad of bills. "She is not to be disturbed by *anyone*." The last word positively dripped with menace and promised violence.

"We'll be very discreet, sir," the concierge said smoothly.

"See that you do," the first golem replied. "If her picture winds up in any magazine, any tabloid, if I hear even the barest rumor that she's here, I'll be forced to come here and deal with the problem personally."

"I understand," the concierge said, a little shaken.

To emphasize his point, the first golem looked hard at the ceiling. "You know, these 1920's structures are deceiving. The architecture, I mean - it looks so solid, with all the marble and stone. But it's all held up with flammable structural materials. One little spark, the whole thing could come down. Kind of a daunting illusion, don't you think?"

The concierge went white. "I'll show Ms. Grey to her room."

The golem stuffed more money in the concierge's pocket. "Actually, *I'll* show Ms. Grey to her room. She's not to be disturbed for any reason."

"I understand, sir."

"Good."

They flanked me tight, keeping me shielded from casual view, while the visibly shaken-up concierge returned to his desk. They led me to the elevator and up to the top floor, down a luxuriously-appointed hallway to the door of a lavish suite, overlooking the Ellipse and the White House. It was a Lifestyles of the Rich and Famous room, with silk-upholstered furniture and tasteful art. I surveyed the luxury and found it satisfactory while the two golems scanned the room for tampering.

"Everything looks clean, ma'am," Golem #2 told me. "Senator Pulaski will be here about midnight to meet with you. Any trouble, press this." He handed me a black plastic cylinder, about the size of a lipstick tube, with a red button at one end.

"It's a panic button," Golem #2 went on. "We're only two doors away, we can be here in fifteen seconds."

"Feel free to order anything you want from room service, compliments of the Senator," Golem #1 told me, "but you are not under any circumstances to leave this room, ma'am."

"Right," I said, blowing smoke in a long plume towards the ornamented plaster ceiling. "Can't have the Hand of Lust set loose on an unsuspecting city. Hate to tell you guys, but I'm going to have to get laid at some point or I'm going to get twitchy. Bad things happen when I get twitchy."

"The Senator informed us of that particular eventuality," Golem #1 said. "We can provide any such services you might need. Call this number - " he passed me a business card, " - and we'll see that you are taken care of."

"Will there be anything else, ma'am?" Golem #2 asked.

I found myself getting a little angry at the stiff treatment I was getting from Marty's goons. In a clipped, impatient tone, I said, "Young, mid-20s male. Race isn't an issue so long as he's over six feet. I'll expect him in twenty minutes, along with a bottle of Cristal."

"Yes, ma'am," Golem #2 said, exiting and closing the door behind him.

I slumped into a chair and pouted. Not being able to bend men to my will was a little disconcerting.

And it was no fun at all.

\* \* \*

I lay back in the tub, letting the heat of the water soak into muscles delightfully abused by the six-foot-two Puerto Rican man they'd sent to me. He didn't have a very long pecker, but he fucked like a freight train and had a remarkably quick refractory period. He'd managed to deliver a championship fucking in all my holes, four times in three hours. My jaw still ached.

I smoothed a handful of bubbles over the sensitive tops of my breasts and sipped at my champagne, letting the scents of the lavender-scented bubble bath, the Cohiba Corona cigar I was enjoying, the delicate nose of the exquisite champagne and the piquant musk of satisfied woman mingle in my nose like a sensual symphony.

I'd managed to forget all about my frustrations with the two bodyguards Marty had sent and just enjoy myself in the moment. I'd found, over the last few days, that even if I could control the dark, evil lust inside myself, that I was infinitely more lustful than I'd ever been. If I didn't have sexual satisfaction regularly, I did get snappish and short. I found myself unable to dress in a way that didn't expose me sexually, or to go out in public with my makeup and hair suitable for a Playboy centerfold spread. I designed outfits from my wardrobe to cater to specific fetishes like other women would try new colors of cloth. Nothing I did, no amount of self-control I could generate, would let me stop that behavior, it was bred into my bones. I reacted normally to stimuli in the environment - I jumped when I was startled, I got choked up over Hallmark commercials, I laughed when something was funny - but my reaction to sexual

stimuli seemed to go all the way to eleven, and skipped two through ten as a general rule. My whole personality and physiology seemed geared for sexual gratification - as if having seven clitorises wasn't a pretty good indication before.

Still, it wasn't that bad a way to live. Because of the spell, I did have a luxury condominium and a seven-figure bank account, a flashy sports car and beautiful clothes and jewelry. And as soon as I was free to live my own life, a quick call to a financial advisor would have me living in luxury for the rest of my life. I planned to talk Brooke and Dawn into the same decision, since the poor dumb things would probably be taken in by any scam artist with a smooth line and - particularly - a pretty face and big dick. I had to look out for my buds, now that they looked to me for almost everything.

Standing up and wrapping a towel around my oily-soft skin, I stuck the half-smoked cigar between my teeth and took my hairbrush to the front room. I poured another glass of champagne - emptying the bottle - and flopped in front of the huge hi-def television, racking up yet another pay-per-view porno to the Senator's bill. This one actually had me in it, which I found incredibly amusing for some reason I couldn't put my finger on. I finished the Cohiba and the Cristal watching myself get nailed doggy style on the hood of a Mustang by a well-hung man with huge, defined muscles and a long, curly blond mullet.

I called down to the front desk for another bottle, this time 24-year-old Glenlivet, and chose my night's attire. I chose a body-hugging rib-knit black sweaterdress which barely covered the tops of my thigh-high stay-up stockings. I forewent panties - I didn't want to spoil the line of the dress, but I also loved the feeling of nudity under my clothes. There was no bra, either, the back of the dress plunged down to the small of my back. I'd just put on a bib choker of sapphires and diamonds worth as much as my car when the waiter arrived with the Scotch. I'm sure he enjoyed the spirited blow-job he got as a tip - I sure did. He left smiling and bumping into walls, stammering his thanks over and over.

Satisfied and licking the last of his cum from my bottom lip, I started on my makeup and hair, giving myself a very sultry evening look with heavy, almost overdone eyeliner and shadow and startlingly frosty pink lips which made my tanned amber skin look like it was airbrushed. The hair, I teased up and out into a huge flyaway reminiscent of 1980's "big hair," the kind of style that made my face look too small for my body and which fanned out as wide as my shoulders. I loved that look - maybe I was a sentimentalist. Selecting a huge pair of nested platinum hoops that hung nearly to the tops of my shoulders, I finished the look and gave myself a satisfied appraisal in the mirror.

The feeling that I was the most beautiful woman in the world gave me very good feelings. I found myself wishing that Brooke and Dawn were with me, dressed in their finest like this. Something about the matched set, the triumvirate of blonde, brunette and redhead, looking like the cover of a magazine or a porno DVD - it made me feel complete and powerful, completely in control of my world.

I sipped a crystal highball of extremely good Scotch, looking out over the glittering lights of the nation's capitol. There was a knock on the door at precisely midnight. I clicked off the television, lit a cigarette and slipped into my four-inch Stuart Weitzman pumps on my way to the door.

The face hadn't changed much from the last time I saw it - the portrait of tanned, patrician good health, lined in that way men had which made them all the more attractive without

making them look old. I kissed his cheek fondly as I took his hands and invited him inside. One of the everpresent Golems closed the door behind him, speaking softly into a microphone on his cuff. I suppressed a giggle - it always looked like they were talking into their thumbs, like kids singing along with the radio into a hairbrush or something. Marty Pulaski, in his two-thousand-dollar suit, pulled out my chair as I poured him a glass of Scotch. I sat down in an unintentionally sexy pose, cigarette held next to my face in long-nailed fingers and my long lashes giving my eyes a hooded, smoky look. He took his seat across from mine and sipped his Scotch.

"It's been difficult, Gina," he said after savoring his drink. "Being a Senator, it makes it hard for me to move in secret. I call someone, and all of a sudden the papers are covered with stories about which special interest I'm in bed with, which hooker I'm soliciting... it's almost impossible. I can't send one of my assistants, not to one of Lilith's Hands. Their souls would be forfeit."

"I know, baby," I said, patting his hand. "Did you manage?"

"With great difficulty, yes. Father Johansson was in Boston, exacting revenge on the priests who'd been molesting little boys."

"Good," I said. "Because I've been creating some of those."

Martin Pulaski hung his head. "We have to get him fast. He corrupts a lot of police, and armed men who've been touched by the Hand of Wrath wandering the streets... still, Johansson has a lot of remorse. He's been able to keep it to a minimum. He's supposed to meet you in Miami - I told him to hunt down the other two Hands of Wrath. He seemed rather keen on the idea."

"David Reeves is more difficult because he's more public," Pulaski went on. "God knows how many people are going to die from obesity-related illnesses because of what he's been doing. He's the one who I sent the aide to contact discreetly. Poor young man weighs nearly four hundred pounds now."

"It wasn't your fault, Marty," I said, caressing his hand. "It was that *bitch's* fault."

"God, Gina, I'm destroying people's lives. I can barely look at myself in the mirror. I wish I could just jump off a building, but everytime I even think about that the dark thing inside me takes over, and someone else loses their future. Jesus, I made a seventeen-year-old congressional page die in a shootout with police, trying to rob a bank."

"I know, baby, I know," I said comfortingly. "But there's a way to beat it."

"What, are you going to shoot me?" he asked, snickering darkly.

"No," I said. "I'm going to teach you. Now listen. I'm going to tell you something very simple, and you're going to remember it forever. You're a good person."

\* \* \*

We lay together a few hours later, sweaty and entangled in my satin sheets. I traced elaborate designs on his slick chest with a long fingernail, my head cradled in the crook of his neck.

"You figured that out by yourself," he mused, stroking my hair.

"Yeah," I said. "I guess I did."

He looked out the door, where he'd met the night manager a short while ago. The night manager who'd been squandering his money with online gambling and lotto tickets, the night manager who spent his paycheck on expensive electronics and frivolous gadgets every chance he got. Now, the night manager who felt a burning need to save, to keep some of his precious money back - particularly for the education of the young son he was going to conceive with his girlfriend in three weeks.

Martin had been so overjoyed with his ability to control the evil inside himself that he'd fallen into bed with me, raking into me with a joyous abandon until we both spent ourselves in ecstasy. Now we lay, sated and close, side by side in the mussed bedsheets, just listening to the sounds of one another's bodies.

"There's more," I said. "I don't know if you could do this like I did, but then I suppose there has to be a way. I had the other Hands of Lust - Brooke and Dawn - I had them try to take me with their evil. Like we do our victims. And I was able to suck it out of them. All of it."

His eyebrows rose. "You mean they're clean? Back to the way they were?"

"No," I said. "They're still girls, and they don't remember anything that happened before the ceremony, just the memories that Lilith gave them. They act just like they did, but they can't hurt anybody anymore."

He kissed my damp forehead, and I dimly realized that it would take me nearly an hour to repair my carefully styled hair and makeup. The thought made me smile.

"You're amazing," he told me.

"Look, we have to get word to David and Father Johannson. To let them know that they can beat this thing," I replied.

"Reeves is supposed to contact me tomorrow," I said. "He's having his fat ass transported across the country for some kind of symposium at the Food and Drug Administration. I'm supposed to meet with him at his hotel after my breakfast with the Majority Leader."

I kissed his chest. "Ooh, that sounds so important." I mocked his deep baritone. "My breakfast with the Majority Leader."

"Then I shouldn't tell you about cocktails with the Vice President," he said, smiling, "or my early meeting Thursday at the Pentagon."

I stretched my silken length along the hollow of his side. "I have an idea," I purred, nibbling his earlobe. "Say all that while you're nailing me."

\* \* \*

I checked my email - an untraceable Yahoo! account - on the slim Vaio laptop I'd purchased before my trip, to find that things were moving along according to our tenuous plans. My flight from Miami left in six hours, just long enough to communicate with my people, pack, bathe and fix my hair and makeup for the trip.

Summer had managed to drain the evil from the other Hands of Pride - Maria LaCosta and Kevin Collins. They were now just high-dollar TV executives. I'd dimly remembered talking to Maria LaCosta in the cages, but apparently one of Lilith's enormous ogre cronies had knocked her unconscious again before the ceremony had begun, robbing us of another potential

ally. Marty had talked to Dave Reeves and he was on board now. He expected that the two of them could nullify the other Hands of Avarice and Gluttony within the week. Even Hayley, with her utter lack of self-confidence in this endeavor, was angling in on the other Hands of Pride and planning to take their plague into her own soul.

I sat back, pulling on my cigarette with a satisfied grin on my face. Things were going very well - one might argue a little *too* well, but I wasn't about to jinx it. Father Johannson had put the last of his evil drive to use, indulging the black sickness inside him one last time by hunting down and killing the other Hands of Wrath and the three Hands of Envy with a sawed-off shotgun. After his time as a predator, his knowledge of the underworld - particularly its methods for finding people who didn't want to be found - was going to make the silver-haired priest one of our most potent tools. He'd been waiting for me at the rented beach house in Miami, and I'd quickly showed him my secret for conquering the sickness inside. I taught him quickly because he was a scary individual. His gratitude, afterwards, gave me a glimpse of the kindly priest who'd had the misfortune of going to the warehouse that night with wrath in his heart, full of self-important indignation at the stories of sex and drugs and parties in his parish. He'd intended to wave his Bible around and shake his fists at people. His life didn't turn out quite the way he'd intended. Of us all, I imagined he'd fallen the farthest - from benevolent spiritual leader to serial killer. My heart broke for him, so much so that I didn't even try to fuck him.

He'd risen from the stool where I'd sucked his dick - I wasn't *that* self-controlled, and it had been nearly twenty-four hours since I'd gotten any - with a look of grim determination on his face. He'd gotten control of himself, and sent a young woman who'd thought herself deserving of the beatings her husband had been administering to her for six years to a shelter and the police, ready to see the bastard swing at the end of a rope. The spirit of Wrath hadn't bled from him utterly, though. He still did thirst for vengeance. Already his mind was set around our most important task - finding Lilith and her sisters. We all had a number for her, but it could easily be a mobile or a service, and the warehouse where we'd been transformed was empty and condemned. We had to locate her and her six 'sisters' in order to finally face them.

I almost wished one of the Hands of Envy had survived - those assholes were geniuses at the art of finding people who wanted to hide. But I supposed that Father Johannson - now the consummate hunter - would have a better chance at it than somebody like me or Hayley, or even somebody as powerful as Marty. He left as he'd entered - through the back door, wordlessly, but favored me with a look of purest joyful thanks before he'd disappeared.

It felt good to give him his life back. I was very pleased with myself. Right up until the point where my pink cellphone rang. I picked it up, and my heart stopped dead in my ribcage, my cigarette dangling from suddenly numb lips.

The Caller ID display said "Lilith."

\* \* \*

I submerged myself as deeply into the ditzzy bubblehead persona as I could before keying "Send" on the trilling phone. I pressed it to my ear and said in a girlish lilt, "Hey, baby!"

"Gina. How are you?" the voice was calm, flat and evenly controlled. It brought back none too pleasant memories of the last time I'd heard it, raised in a hateful chant, and I shivered dramatically.

"I'm good, baby girl, how are you?"

"Well," she said. "Have you spoken with Brooke or Dawn lately?"

"Sure, hon, I talk to 'em, like, every day," I said. "They're good."

"I haven't heard from them in a long time," Lilith said. "Are they working?"

"They're set to go on feature tour next week," I said, "and then they shoot a movie over in San Fernando after that, so, yeah - they're working."

"That's not what I meant," Lilith said. "I meant, are they - *working*."

"Oh," I said. "*Working*. Yeah, totally! They've been hooking up right and left, you know how they are."

"The Master isn't pleased, Gina," she told me. "Not with any of your work. I'm calling everyone, to let them know that they need to make his good work their top priority."

"Uh-huh, so, like, you want us to hook up with more people?" I asked, feigning cluelessness.

"That's exactly what I want," Lilith said evenly. "I made certain promises to the Master, and I intend to see them kept, Gina. Now do what you were meant to do."

"Okay, baby, no prob. I'll, like, start hooking up more, like that?"

"Exactly," she said. "I'll totally tell Dawn and Brooke, too."

"Leave that to me," Lilith told me, and the line went dead.

Hands shaking, I pulled the other cellphone from my purse beside the laptop and dialed Senator Pulaski's private line.

"Marty? Gina. The bitch is on to us."

\* \* \*

Hayley and Summer were waiting for me by the baggage claim, not five minutes after my plain had landed. I fought jangling nerves and the utterly insistent pull to stop and change out of my travel-rumpled suit of ecru linen with my red scoop-neck t-shirt into something more presentable, or my demanding need for a cigarette.

"What are we going to do?" Hayley said, grabbing my hand with her trembling one.

"We have to act fast," I said. "Real fast. Hayley, we need to find the other Hands of Pride and get them taken care of. Today. There can't be any left except the ones we know are cured walking around. Marty's already moving on the last Hand of Gluttony. We either have to cure them or kill them."

"Kill them?" Hayley's voice was barely a whisper.

"It's that important," I said.

Summer nodded. "I think I can find somebody if Hayley's plan doesn't work."

"Good," I said, grabbing my leopard-print suitcases off of the conveyor - amazing how quickly people made room for me at the edge, and how many men stumbled over themselves to load

them on my SmarteCarte - and setting off at a brisk sway towards the entrance. "Hayley, you better get going. I'll move things forward once I hear from you."

I turned to Summer. "Can I smoke in your car?" I asked. She nodded.

"Excellent," I said. "I need you to take me by my house so I can change, and then you're probably going to have to eat my pussy so I can think straight. C'mon."

I grabbed her hand and she stumbled after me, more than a little dumbfounded.

\* \* \*

I gently brushed Summer's hair out of her face as it lay, panting, against my smooth inner thigh - she did pretty good for a straight girl. Smoking lazily, very sated, I speed-dialed my pink phone and summoned my negligible acting skills to feign something approximating distress.

"Lilith, it's Gina," I said breathlessly. "Something's wrong, baby. Brooke and Dawn - they're acting *weird*. Like they don't remember what they're supposed to be doing."

"Settle down," Lilith said. "I can hardly understand you. Slow down."

"They're all fucked up, right?" I stressed. "Like they don't know who they are. They're not hooking up with *anybody*. They say they ain't never heard of you, baby, and I'm all, like, 'you know, Lilith, that cool girl we met the night in the warehouse' and they go, like, 'who?' and I'm all like, 'Lilith! Don't you remember Lilith?' and they're all like, 'Seriously, Gina, who the fuck are you talking about?' and I started getting, like, really scared 'n' shit, okay? So that's why I'm calling, 'cause this is freaking me out, okay?"

"Calm down, Gina," Lilith said. "Just calm down - you're babbling. They acted like they didn't know me when I called them, either. You really think something's wrong?"

"Totally," I said. "They're, like, not even interested in hooking up anymore."

"Hooking up?"

"You know," I said, "hooking up. *Working*."

"I see," she said, her voice flat as a planed board.

"I'm really fuckin' freaked, all right? Look, I want to see you. People have been calling me all damn day - Hayley and Summer and Kenny and even that Senator dude, and they're all, like, 'what the fuck?' and I'm like 'like I *know*, as if! We gotta see you, baby, seriously."

There was a long, uncertain pause. "I suppose that would be wise," she said. "When?"

"Like, I can call everybody that called me 'n' shit," I said. "I don't know how long it will take everybody to get here, y'know? What do you think?"

"Tomorrow at sundown," Lilith said after another long pause. "At the warehouse where we first met. Have everyone meet there, and my sisters and I will come. Gina, don't contact anyone who didn't contact you first, do you understand me? No one else can be trusted until we figure out what's going on, not even Brooke and Dawn."

"But, they're, like, my best friends," I protested, hoping I wasn't laying it on too thick.

"I said *no one!*" she barked. "Do you understand me?"

"God!" I said in childish exasperation. "Yeah, I get it, okay? Don't yell at me." I added the last with a little-girl quaver in my voice, as if I was fighting back tears.

"I'm sorry," Lilith said in a more measured tone. "I didn't mean to hurt your feelings. You were right to call me, and I shouldn't have snapped at you. Just make sure everyone is there on time. Can you do that for me?"

"Yeah," I said in a trembling voice.

"Good," Lilith said, and the line went dead.

I grinned at Summer, who was looking at me in open astonishment.

"And they say porn stars can't act," I said proudly.

\* \* \*

Summer had burned up the airwaves getting in touch with the others and wiring the money to Johansson for a last-minute flight. They should all be in town by noon tomorrow, giving us plenty of time to get our shit together and make a plan before we had to be at the warehouse. For the first time in a long while, I felt the weight and filth of the cancerous darkness that resided in my chest. It was stirring, as if it sensed an opportunity to take me over at Lilith's will. I dismissed my fear - I was a good person - and set about dressing myself for an evening out - a red velvet dress sparkling with sequins and red vinyl thigh-high platform boots, with oversized red plastic jewelry because it felt good to look a little cheap. I left my house in a rush of clicking heels and cigarette smoke, my phone pressed to my ear as I got into my car, busily making hotel reservations all around town for my 'guests.'

Miracle of miracles, I was able to offset the burning, insistent itch in my pussy and stop myself from fucking the overweight biker-type in the pawn shop where I bought myself a dainty little .38 Lady Smith revolver and a matched pair of nickel-plated nine-millimeters for Father Johansson. Deep, informative views of cleavage and a little breathlessness and batted eyelashes allowed me to circumvent the three-day wait - men were so easy sometimes - and I walked with the pistols and several boxes of ammunition to my car, stowing them under the seat.

Then it was to a nightclub, a quick scan for likely candidates and an exciting, groping ass-fuck in the alley behind by a young divorce lawyer with cute dimples and a blue tie. He tried to give me his number, but I ignored him. Better to keep them circulating, to never wear the same one twice, or I might start to see what I'd become, and I still wasn't sure I liked what I'd become. At least I knew I was still a good person, but I didn't know if I could take too long a look at this point.

I shook my elaborately-coiffed head to clear it. Dangerous thoughts to be having, especially with what I was about to face. Better to leave it alone. Besides, fucking around was what I *did*. What I was designed to do. Was it wrong for a hammer to hit nails? That was what a hammer was for. I was the same way.

Strangely, it was in the midst of all of this that I thought of Marty Pulaski, unbidden and surprising. I thought of his smile and his laugh and how he had long fingers like a woman.

I shook my head again, harder, running the risk of disturbing my painstakingly-teased-and-sprayed-and-gelled-and-moussed hairdo. I had to focus, now, not be distracted by bullshit like

Marty Pulaski's fingers or divorce lawyers with blue ties. I downed my cosmopolitan in a single pull and walked towards the door, needing some fresh air and a rapid run of the local freeways to help me forget all this foolishness.

I had work to do.

\* \* \*

I rose at seven in the morning, kicking the college-boy bass player and his girlfriend out of my cavernous bed where they lay, exhausted from my athletic bed-play and the copious quantities of alcohol and weed we'd shared before the end of the evening. I'd saved them - a fitting celebration for my last night as the Hand of Lust, for better or for worse - from the vicious Baptist repression inflicted on them by their parents, and had presided over their first unencumbered lovemaking. Even as hung over and misused as they were, I smiled with satisfaction to see them get into the cab I'd called, holding hands and gazing at each other with unashamed love and adoration.

*At times like this*, I thought to myself, pulling on the day's first cigarette, *it's hard to think of what happened to me as a bad thing.*

My phone rang - the silver flip-phone that was my 'private' line. I answered it.

"It's Marty," he said, using that nickname that only I used. I melted a little at the sound of his voice. *What the hell?* I thought distractedly. *No way am I falling for him. I'm the Hand of Lust, for fuck's sake. Hands of Lust do not fall in love.*

"Good news?" I asked.

"Yeah," he said. "I'm boarding my flight right now. I land in four hours. David was able to nullify that last Hand of Gluttony. We're in the clear."

"Not yet, baby boy," I said. "I still haven't heard from Hayley."

"She's been the weak tit on this mama cat all along," he complained gruffly. "Do you think she's up to it?"

"We have a backup plan, sweetie," I said reassuringly. "There's a guy standing by."

"A guy standing by for what?" Pulaski asked.

"You're a Senator," I said. "Maybe you better not ask that question, just in case it gets traced back, okay?"

"What are you - oh. Oh, God," Marty said.

"Hopefully it won't come to that," I said. "I'm as worried about it as you are, baby."

"I know, Gina, I know," the Senator said. "Look, when all this is over... shit."

"What were you going to say?" I pressed.

"I was going to say, when all this is over, you and I should go somewhere. Just the two of us," he said, the normal strident confidence in his voice gone. "But you said it yourself - I'm a senator. It could never work - too many people to see, too many cameras and questions. Forget I said anything."

I smiled, puffing out my smoke. "Marty, honey?"

"Yeah," he said glumly.

"Have you ever considered maybe *not* running for re-election?"

\* \* \*

The morning had been spent in bathing and dressing - tight black leather low-rise jeans, platform boots, a black leather bustier and crushed pink straw cowboy hat, huge rhinestone hoops and a seven-row choker, jingling bracelets and rings on every finger and thumb. A pink denim cropped jacket which barely concealed the Lady Smith under my left armpit. I pitched my keys up in the air and caught them between freshly-manicured fingers, pushing a pair of Wayfarer sunglasses with rhinestones on the thick horned rims onto my nose.

After that, everything had happened so quickly that I barely had a chance to be nervous. One moment it was just me, driving along in my sexy RX-8 and jamming to Gwen Stefani, and it seemed like the next moment I was calling cabs for the people arriving and ferrying them across town to their various secret locations. I delivered the guns to Johansson at a Motel 8 on the Interstate near the airport, then ran by to check on Dave Reeves, whose four-hundred-plus-pound bulk might be a little distressed by the heat. Not even my overdriven desires could make me want to get any closer to the sweating lump of humanity that was the Hand of Gluttony on the earth. I fought the urge to see Marty - we were on a timetable and I couldn't risk spending the afternoon fucking him. Self-control wasn't exactly my forté to start with, and Marty had an even worse effect on me.

I was just finishing a light lunch of cigarettes and Irish coffee at an upscale downtown bistro when my private phone rang. It was Hayley.

"I did it," she said, sounding a little breathless.

"Oh, honey," I said. "Are you okay?"

"I think so," she said, her voice fuzzy. "There was so *much*."

"I know. I remember," I said soothingly. "Try not to think about it. Get up, move around, put it behind you - that's what helped me when I did it."

"I was so scared that I couldn't do it," she said in a small voice.

"I knew you could, baby. I knew it the whole time," I said.

"You're a lot stronger than me," she replied. "I had my doubts. But I couldn't let Summer's guy hurt Maria. She's my friend. I knew if I didn't do this, then Maria would get hurt."

"I know," I said. "But you pulled through."

"I just want this to be over," she said.

"Soon, baby girl," I said. "Real soon."

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The warehouse was lit eerily, long slanting shafts of milky sunlight through dirty windows high up on the walls, with drifting dust and insects flickering wildly inside. Crazy, ominous shadows

were everywhere as I walked in, my platform heels beating a loud *click-clack* that echoed booming through the stuffy air.

"Lilith?" I asked.

Seven shadows disengaged from the larger gloom and walked towards me, into harsh white light that bathed them in wicked monochrome contrast. Lilith - again in her goth makeup and black lace dress - stepped forward.

"Where are the others, Gina?" she asked in a flat, even voice.

"They're here," I said, tossing my cigarette to the floor and grinding it under my toe. Behind me, Marty, Johannson, Hayley, Summer, and the imposing bulk of Dave Reeves entered the warehouse, spreading out behind me.

"This is all of you?" Lilith said in disbelief. "What happened to the rest of you?"

"We happened to them," Pulaski said coldly. "We beat you, Lilith. We beat your goddamned Master, too."

"What are you talking about?" Lilith said. She gestured, and two of the other 'sisters' stepped forward, hands raised and lips moving in a silent paean to their Master. I felt icy fingers crawling along my flesh and a cold dread spreading through my chest, making it difficult to breathe.

I flinched and covered my ears as a deafening thunder crowded out everything else in my senses. Opening my eyes from their reflexive clench, I heard only the echoing chimes of the brass empties on the concrete floor. Johannson held a smoking pistol in either hand, and four of the witches lay twitching and bleeding on the floor.

My fury returned unabated, with the shock worn off. "Any other ideas?" I asked her.

"This can't be happening!" Lilith screamed, her composure broken. "The Master would never permit this abomination!"

"It wasn't up to the Master," I said coldly, advancing. I felt the now-unfamiliar heat of the flash of power in my eyes and Lilith went stock-still. I seized her head roughly and pulled it down, baring my breast with my free hand. With a howl, I released as much of the evil twisted *thing* in my chest as I could, into this sick woman's mouth, almost relishing the feeling of her soul twisting in my power. Around me, the other Hands had transfixed the two remaining witches and were releasing their evil into them.

My mind struggled to show me Lilith's bleak future, but I didn't care. All I cared about was whether or not it *hurt*.

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EPILOGUE: Two years later.

I sipped my mimosa and looked out over the sun-braided expanse of Miami's South Beach, openly appraising the men and women who strutted in the sun. I leaned back as Marty's strong arms wrapped around me and squeezed gently. He walked around me to take a seat at the patio table.

I looked at the drink in my hand and the overflowing ashtray. "I miss food," I commented. "The only thing I've had to eat in two years was that whipped cream on your cock two nights ago."

"Your figure shows it," the ex-Senator said appreciatively, leaning back and putting his sunglasses back on. "Our stock is up six points. We're going to make a *fortune*."

I smiled and looked at the enormous forty-karat rock my fiancé's enormous wealth had bought me for our engagement. Ours was a unique understanding - I didn't begrudge him his utter preoccupation with gathering more and more wealth and power in the corporate world, and he didn't bat an eye over my constant indiscretions and infidelities. We'd become quite the gossip item among the upper-crust, the Croesus-wealthy robber baron and his slutty, porn-star fiancée. We laughed over the society pages almost every night, after our spirited fuck sessions.

The black, sick thing in my chest was still there, would always be - but I could use it to help people instead of destroying them, just as any of the other Hands who walked away from the warehouse that afternoon so long ago. It was a burden we just had to carry, Lilith's last legacy. None of us knew what happened to her, and we didn't communicate much, just the occasional email - the murder investigation of the four dead witches was ongoing, and we couldn't have Father Johannson arrested, especially with the amazing progress the Hand of Wrath was making with inner-city gang children. I still kept up with Brooke and Dawn - they'd fucked my fiancé and me several times and gave me an enthusiastic approval of my choice - and still maintained a relatively close contact with Summer and Hayley. I suspected, given the lack of any lines or blemishes on my face, that the evil inside us would sustain us, just as we were, for quite some time, possibly even forever. Oddly, I wasn't too distressed about that, it occurred to me as I lit another cigarette and gazed over the water.

Forever was a lot of time to fuck people.

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